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*FIRST CHRONICLES*



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE TWO BOOKS OF THE CHRONICLES.

**THE BOOKS OF KINGS AND THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.**—The Jewish literature contained two historical books which virtually covered the same period. The two Books of Kings, and the two Books of Chronicles are in many respects alike, but the differences are more evident than the resemblances. All historical works that cover extensive periods oftentimes must, of necessity, be compilations. The writer of any national history may more precisely be designated an editor, or a compiler, than an author, because he does not create any new material, but puts into shape and order material that already exists, for which he may indeed elaborately and perseveringly search, but which is in no sense his own. The ruling purpose and prevailing bias of a writer are shown by what he selects from the facts at his command, and by the particular setting which he gives to the facts, and his annotations upon them.

The compilers of the Books of Kings and Books of Chronicles were certainly not the same person. Their points of view and historical purpose were distinctly different. But they had the same literary materials at their command, and we can reasonably infer what those materials are likely to have been. Every civilised and organised nation is careful to preserve authentic and official historical records, and we may be sure that the Jewish national records were anxiously preserved when the people were carried into captivity. These would be available for the later historian. It also appears that the keeping of genealogical tables and family and official lists was the business of that priestly class, which included the scribes. They were exceedingly jealous of the safety and correctness of their tables. It was their special duty, because certain religious privileges and offices were reserved for those whose pedigree could be traced.

And in every nation, in every age, men have been raised up who were endowed with the literary historical genius; and such men will, in various forms, make their records of the events of their time. But all such independent and unofficial work is sure to be written with a personal political or religious bias, of which the later reader, or the later compiler, has to take due account.

The later editor of any extensive and varied series of earlier records, covering long periods, has a very anxious and difficult work. And it is all the more difficult if he himself has a strong personal bias, from which he can never get himself wholly free. And this appears to have been the case with the compiler of the Books of Chronicles. He evidently had an ethical, we might have said, a sectional purpose, which guided and determined his selections and settings.

**HISTORICAL MATERIAL AT THE COMMAND OF THE COMPILER.**—We know some of the public and private historical materials which were at the command of this com-

piler, because he makes reference to them in the course of his work. They were the Books of Samuel and Kings, and the various writings of the prophets Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, Shemaiah, Je-edo, Iddo, Isaiah, Hozai, &c. These, we may infer, were partly of historical and partly of prophetic character.

CONTENTS OF THE BOOKS.—Comparing the contents of the Books of Kings with those of the Books of Chronicles, we may notice that “Kings” begins with the accession of Solomon and ends with the fate of the last king of Judah; but “Chronicles” begins with a genealogy from Adam, and ends with the decree of Cyrus, which was carried out in the “Return” under Zerubbabel and Joshua. The “Kings” deal with the national affairs of both the sections into which the nation of Israel was divided, but the “Chronicles” deal only with the one kingdom of Judah, treating this as the real and all-inclusive nation of Israel, and introducing the affairs of the northern kingdom only when these bore direct relation to the affairs of Judah. The “Kings” give historical facts with a fair measure of completeness, the compiler being concerned to secure historical accuracy. But the “Chronicles” are written with a definite purpose in view, and there is a distinct reserve, such matters as the moral lapses of David being purposely omitted. From the selected contents, the style, and the tone of “Chronicles” we naturally infer that its compiler must have been either a priest or one who was very closely connected with the priesthood, and supremely interested in upholding the authority of the priestly class, and fully restoring that authority and the elaborate worship over which they presided under the new conditions of the nation.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOKS.—If we would form a sound opinion concerning the date of this composition and concerning its compiler or author, we should give some heed to Jewish traditions. There seems to have been a virtually unanimous belief that Ezra was the author; that the two Books of Chronicles and the Book of Ezra originally formed one historical work, compiled and arranged by one author, and to this work the Book of Nehemiah formed a supplement, the same author's editing work being evident in its arrangement. The Talmud says that Ezra wrote both his own book and the Book of Chronicles.

It appears to be certain that the compilers of the Septuagint divided the book into two portions, and that Jerome accepted the division for the Vulgate. The ordinary reader clearly recognises that the work is made up of separate sections, and this would be even more evident if the unfortunate cutting up into verses had not obscured the natural divisions. The Jews called the work “Diaries,” or “The Book of the Events of the Times.” The Septuagint authors or translators regarded the entire work as historically supplementary, and called it “Omitted Things.” It may be said to be very generally admitted by both older and newer critics that the Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form one work, composed on one uniform plan and by one author. These three works resemble each other in the manner in which the original authorities are handled, and the sacred law expressly cited; in the marked preference for general and statistical registers, descriptions of religious rites and festivals, detailed accounts of the sacerdotal classes and their various functions, the music of the temple, and matters connected with public worship.

There is certainly nothing in the least unreasonable in claiming the authorship for Ezra. So far as we know his character, his prejudices, his gifts, his mission, and his circumstances, we may say that he was the very man to do this work. His genius for compiling and editing will quite explain his inserting in their entirety pieces relating his own doings, and pieces which Nehemiah wrote, giving an account of his doings.

The only difficulty worth taking serious account of is the fact that the genealogy from David is continued long beyond the time of Ezra, even to what has been reckoned the eleventh descendant from Zerubbabel. It is manifest that Ezra could not have recorded a genealogy reaching beyond his own age. But it may be freely admitted that when the Old Testament Canon was settled the books that were admitted to it must have been subjected to a final revision, and this may very well have included the completion of the genealogy up to date—more especially the genealogical line in which Messiah was expected. Probably the literary work undertaken by the Great Synagogue needs to be more fully studied, with a view to discovering whether in that literary “renaissance” any original works were produced or only re-editing undertaken.



It is not altogether easy to recognise the conditions of society in the later Persian and early Grecian periods, so as to provide at that time so suitable an occasion for the compilation of "Chronicles" as we do find in the age of Ezra. The drastic reformation, on the strictest legal line, which Ezra promoted needed just such a background of historical authority as Ezra provides in these Books.

There does not appear to be sufficient ground for shifting the authorship on to 300-250 B.C., as the modern critics propose to do. We may confidently affirm that there is reasonable ground for continuing to accept as altogether most probable the authorship of Ezra, the date between 459 and 430 B.C., and the object as the confirmation of the authority of the Jewish priesthood in demanding a national reformation.

The aim of the work is not history, but edification. It has a distinctly didactic and hortatory purpose, eminently suitable in a priestly scribe or teacher such as Ezra was. The strong "hierarchical bias" may be freely admitted.



# THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

## I. CHRONICLES.

### CHAPTER I.

**Vers. 1-54. Adam, Sheth, Enosh.—Israelite descent:**—Israel was Jehovah's chosen people, His son, to whom special privileges were guaranteed by solemn covenant. A man's claim to share in this covenant depended on his genuine Israelite descent, and the proof of such descent was an authentic genealogy. In these chapters the chronicler has taken infinite pains to collect pedigrees from all available sources and to construct a complete set of genealogies exhibiting the lines of descent of the families of Israel. These chapters, which seem to us so dry and useless, were probably regarded by the chronicler's contemporaries as the most important part of his work. The preservation or discovery of a genealogy was almost a matter of life and death (Ezra ii. 61-63; Neh. vii. 63-65). (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) **Names:**—The first nine chapters contain the largest extant collection of Hebrew names. 1. These names have an individual significance. A mere parish register is not in itself attractive, but if we consider even such a list, the very names interest us and kindle our imaginations. It is almost impossible to linger in a country churchyard, reading the half-effaced inscriptions upon the headstones, without forming some dim picture of the character and history and even the outward semblance of the men and women who once bore the names. A name implies the existence of a distinct personality. In its lists of what are now mere names the Bible seems to recognise the dignity and sacredness of bare human life. 2. These names have also a collective significance. They are typical and representative—the names of kings and priests and captains; they sum up the tribes of Israel, both as a Church and a nation, down all the generations of its history. 3. The meanings of names reveal the ideas of the people who used them. "The Hebrew names bear important testimony to the peculiar vocation of this nation. No nation of antiquity has such a proportion of names of religious import." The Old Testament contains more than a hundred etymologies of personal names, most of which attach a religious meaning to the words explained. 4. How far do these names help us to understand the spiritual life of ancient Israel? The Israelites made constant use of El and Jehovah in their names, and we have no parallel practice. Were they then so much more religious than we are? Probably in a sense they were. Modern Englishmen have developed a habit of almost complete reticence and reserve on religious matters, and this habit is illustrated by our choice of proper names. 5. According to the testimony of names, the Israelites' favourite ideas about God were that He heard, and knew, and remembered; that He was gracious, and helped men and gave them gifts; they loved best to think of Him as God the Giver. This is a foreshadowing of the Christian doctrines of grace and of the Divine sovereignty. God hears and remembers and gives—what? All that we have to say to Him and all that we are capable of receiving from Him. (*Ibid.*) **The genealogies indicative of universal brotherhood:**—The existing races of the world are all traced back through Shem, Ham, and Japheth to Noah, and through him to Adam. The Israelites did not claim, like certain Greek clans, to be the descendants of a special god of their own, or, like the Athenians, to have sprung miraculously from sacred soil. Their genealogies testified that not merely Israelite

nature, but human nature, is moulded on a Divine pattern. These apparently barren lists of names enshrine the great principles of the universal brotherhood of man and the universal Fatherhood of God. The opening chapters of Genesis and Chronicles are among the foundations of the catholicity of the Church of Christ. (*Ibid.*) *The genealogies and heredity*:—Each nation rightly regards its religious ideas and life and literature as a precious inheritance peculiarly its own; and it should not be too severely blamed for being ignorant that other nations have their inheritance also. Such considerations largely justify the interest in heredity shown by the chronicler's genealogies. On the positive practical side religion is largely a matter of heredity, and ought to be. The Christian sacrament of baptism is a continued profession of this truth: our children are "clean"; they are within the covenant of grace; we claim for them the privileges of the Church to which we belong. This was also part of the meaning of the genealogies. (*Ibid.*) *The genealogies: what we owe to the past*:—We are the creatures and debtors of the past, though we are slow to own our obligations. We have nothing that we have not received; but we are apt to consider ourselves self-made men, the architects and builders of our own fortunes, who have the right to be self-satisfied, self-assertive, and selfish. The heir of all the ages, in the full vigour of youth, takes his place in the foremost ranks of time, and marches on in the happy consciousness of profound and multifarious wisdom, immense resources, and magnificent opportunity. He forgets, or even despises, the generations of labour and anguish that have built up for him his great inheritance. The genealogies are a silent protest against such insolent ingratitude. They remind us that in bygone days a man derived his gifts and received his opportunities from his ancestors; they show us men as the links in a chain, tenants for life, as it were, of our estate, called upon to pay back with interest to the future the debt which they have incurred to the past. (*Ibid.*) *Genealogies as symbols of the solidarity of our race*:—The genealogies that set forth family histories are the symbols of the brotherhood or solidarity of our race. The chart of converging lines of ancestors in Israel carried men's minds back from the separate families to their common ancestor. As far as they go, the chronicler's genealogies form a clear and instructive diagram of the mutual dependence of men on men and family on family. They are in any case a true symbol of the facts of family relations; but they are drawn, so to speak, in one dimension only, backwards and forwards in time. Yet the real family life exists in three dimensions. A man has not merely his male ancestors in the directly ascending line—father, grandfather, great-grandfather, &c.—but he has female ancestors as well. By going back three or four generations a man is connected with an immense number of cousins; and if the complete network of ten or fifteen generations could be worked out, it would probably show some blood bond throughout a whole nation. The further we go back the larger is the element of ancestry common to the different individuals of the same community. The chronicler's genealogies only show us individuals as links in a set of chains. The more complete genealogical scheme would be better illustrated by the ganglia of the nervous system, each of which is connected by numerous fibres with the other ganglia. Patriotism and humanity are instincts as natural and as binding as those of the family; and the genealogies express or symbolise the wider family ties, that they may commend the virtues and enforce the duties that arise out of these ties. (*Ibid.*) *The antiquity and unity of man*:—Other nations have had more or less imperfect visions of ancient history and of the unity of the race, but in the Bible alone do we find an authoritative declaration made concerning the antiquity and unity of man and the ultimate destiny of the human race. The Chaldeans had a tradition of ten antediluvian patriarchs or kings. They made the duration of this first period of human history four hundred and thirty-two thousand years. All other chronicles have been bewildered by their polytheism, whereas in the Hebrew history we have all the sublime unity which would seem to be necessitated by the monotheism of the writers. They who believed in one God were likely to believe in one humanity. Monotheism accounts for the two commandments which relate first to God, and then to man. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. Because in his days the earth was divided.—*The division of the earth*:—The chief value of the genealogical records consists—1. In enabling us to view the origin of nations historically. 2. In enabling us to trace out the various tribes of the sons of Jacob. 3. In enabling us to prove the lineal descent of Christ to have been of the house and lineage of David; and that He was the fulfiller of

the promise to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed." 4. Independently of all this we meet with a sentence or a paragraph suggestive of the deepest thought, or illuminating a principle expressed in another part of the Scriptures with light as clear and bright as it is beautiful and enchanting. Such an instance we have in the text. I. CONSIDER THE DIVISION OF THE EARTH AS ORDAINED WITHOUT SIN. Sin alters and affects everything. There is not a duty you perform or matter you can engage in, in which you do not find sin exerting a pernicious influence. And here it is, I think, that many persons make great error when seeking to interpret to themselves the trials and calamities which come upon them. "Providence ordained it," is the common philosophy on the matter, when I humbly think the truer account of every calamity would be, "Providence ordained and desired my happiness, but sin has deformed it, and for a time blasted the intended joys and filled me with anxieties." The division which God intended would be but a repetition in every case of what He had done at the beginning; there would have been allotted to the sons of men certain portions of this fair earth to govern and to till, and every child of Adam would be taught, in the beautiful homilies of nature, the first principles at least of homage to the Creator, and of confidence, and of love. The division Jehovah ordained was division without disunion. Distinction, but not discord. Partition, but still perfect peace. This first inquiry, then, is of much value, and will prove, ere many years, of vast importance in refuting the errors of the sceptical writers which abound. Nor will it perhaps be without its use, to have noticed the character of that division which God intended among the sons of men, one which should have promoted the equal comfort of all, amidst the blessings of universal peace and brotherhood. It may be, that when grace shall have triumphed in our sin-stained earth even but a little more, you may see a disposition to revert to these very principles of division which the Eternal desired to be followed, but which (as we shall notice directly) have been marvellously distorted ever since the day of which it is recorded in the text—"Unto Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg; because in his days the earth was divided." II. NOW LET US INQUIRE INTO THE DIVISION OF THE EARTH AMONG NATIONS AS IT DOES EXIST, UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SIN. Now you notice, by referring to the text (Gen. x. 25), that the division took place before the building of Babel, and according to some persons, some considerable period before that epoch. At all events, the narrative implies that this division preceded the dispersion, and must therefore have occurred when all men spoke but one language. Remember, then, that God's will was that men should divide (though without discord) and replenish all the earth. Recollect, too, that from the text we learn that the first step in this had been taken, even as Eber names his child Peleg (division) in memory of the event. Observe, then, what we are told immediately after the division in the days of Peleg. You read in the eleventh chapter of Genesis that the whole earth was of one language and of one speech; but that in their journeyings from the east, instead of dividing (as probably was the intention when they started), finding a large and inviting plain in Shinar, they counsel each other: "Let us build a city and tower whose top may reach to heaven, and let us make us a name lest" (mark) "we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth." So that sin at once interrupted the beneficent designs of God, and interposing its corrupting leaven, sought to change His ordinances by promising greater benefits than He, but which have ever been found productive of evil. And now, that which was ordained for a blessing in every age, forthwith becomes a curse while it is yet obeyed; for God coming down, and seeing the injurious moral effect which would follow from this congregating together, disperses them by a division wholly unlooked for. God confounded their speech, made them talk in different languages, and they are obliged in consequence to disperse, and the division is accomplished. But how? Not in peace and harmony, and with a "God be with you." But brother utters jargon to brother, and words of blessing and adieu are impossible, and now it is no more division with love, but confusion, and disunion, and discord, and ill-will. For I ask you what is the history of nations, but a continuation of this story? Nations for the most part are distinguished from one another by their difference of speech. But this is not the only difference. Scarcely a nation in the world but has at one time or another, been at war with other nations, and almost every kingdom of importance has, in its turn, encountered the armies of all other kingdoms in the dread attack of war and slaughter, at some period of their history. And this is the place for observing another very striking result of sin in the division of the earth. God, we saw, intended it so to be conducted as to subserve the

advantage of all ; but man decreed in his pride of intellect and reasoning that he would live in the dense vastness of a thickly populated city. And though God indeed dispersed them from Babel, the tendency of our nature seems to be far from eradicated. Still mankind crowd into cities, until they are so closely populated, that disease and death are fearfully increased. So you may notice how the retributive hand of judgment has followed these transactions. Man is a social being, and intended by God to congregate, but intended not so to congregate as we find he has done, and will still persist in doing, until by a strange anomaly his next-door neighbour is the veriest stranger to him. God ordered earth to be divided ; and the plan by which thousands are huddled in close, dark, narrow alleys and areas is only sin's development of its influences, as it reverses God's intended method of division, and says with towering vanity, "Go to, let us build rather a city that we may not be scattered." It is a known fact, that there is less religion in large towns than small ones, and far less where the poor are obliged to pack together as I have described. The reason is also plain. The cause is, that since the days of Peleg, the earth has been divided according to sin, and the dispersion of nations is the result of God's anger, in confounding their speech. But the reason is, because the human mind, cut off from the beauties of nature, and those countless sources which it possesses for preparing the mind for religion, becomes prejudiced in its fearfully artificial state of town life, and by the evil customs and habits which surround it, against every sense of real godliness, which it thus learns to regard as belonging only to the rich. III. BUT THOUGH YOU SEE SIN SO PLAINLY OPERATING, YOU ARE ASSURED THAT CHRIST WILL CONQUER, AND GRACE FINALLY PREVAIL. In the day of glory which awaits you (described in the last two chapters of the Revelation), it is very interesting to observe that the city of the new Jerusalem described there bears a peculiar likeness to those which would have existed if the division of the world had been such as God ordained, and which began in the days of Peleg. In Christ's kingdom there will be division without discord, that is, every person in his right place, in perfect love, and unity with all the rest. (*G. Venables.*)

Ver. 44. **Johab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead.**—*Successors* :—Never let it be supposed that Providence is limited to any one man in the matter of kingship and dominion. Men who are reigning should lay to heart the reflection that their reign is to come to an end. Every man is bound to consider his successor ; it is not enough to vacate office ; every man should leave behind him a character worthy of imitation, an example that will stimulate in all highest directions. Let every man prepare himself to succeed the king—in the family, in the state, in the social circle : we should always be preparing ourselves for some higher office, and the best way of so preparing is to fill with faithfulness the office which we have at present assigned to us. There is only one King who shall have no successor, and that King's name is Jesus Christ. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 48. **And when Samlah was dead, Shaul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead.**—*The race and the individual* :—"The king is dead. Long live the king!" After the Saxon comes the Norman ; after George the First George the Second, and then George the Third. So is history written with wearying monotony. These chapters have their lessons, and not the least significant is contained in the words "reigned in his stead." We hear the tramp of many generations as we read these verses. The march of the human family has been always towards a grave. That is the end of every life. "And so death passed on all men ; for all have sinned." Who were Bela, and Jobad, and Husham, and Hadad, Samlah, and Shaul ? They were kings once, but who cares anything about them now ? They are dead, and their deeds are forgotten. Another man shall fill my pulpit ; another man shall attend to your business ; another man shall sit in your chair. Our text suggests the thought of the death of the individual and the perpetuation of the race. Instead of father comes the son. Whether we like it or not, our children will soon be pushing us out of our places. The world demands strong hands and nimble intellects. The cry is for young men. It is pathetic, it is sometimes heart-breaking, to see how cavalierly the world treats the aged. With rude hands it pushes them aside to make way for their successors. The moral suggestiveness of the genealogical chapters is great. The Bible has a wonderful method of epitomising. It informs us of the creation of the world, the sun, moon, and stars, earth, heaven, and sea in a single chapter. It tells the whole story of Redemption in one verse (John iii. 16). The very brevity

is significant. What importance we poor mortals attach to very trifling things! Our pleasures, our troubles, our work, our family, its marriages, its funerals; and we sometimes feel aggrieved that these things have not a deeper interest for others. Here are many generations of men all crammed into one chapter. "Behold God is very great." And so He tells of many generations of men in a few verses. It is such a small thing to Him. The individual passes away, but the race continues. Men die, but man endures. "One generation cometh and another goeth." The earth is very beautiful, but it is, after all, one vast cemetery, in which repose the ashes of our forefathers. It is a lovely garden full of flowers and singing birds, but in the garden there is always a new tomb. The dead outnumber the living. We pride ourselves on our possessions. A few years ago they were not ours, they belonged to the departed; in a few years to come they will not be ours, they will be held by our successors. God lends us a house to live in, clothes to wear, money to use, and we grow arrogant, and exclaim, "See how rich I am!" We shut our fists tight over our gold, and say, "This is mine; I will keep it. Nobody else shall have it." And Death comes, and says, "Give it up. Thou mayest retain it no longer." Twenty—thirty generations of men. What solemn thoughts the words suggest! But who could not weep over this vast host who have all felt the joy and beauty of life, but are now dead? Where are the ancient seers and prophets whose eagle vision peered through the mists of time and read with unerring certainty the fate of great nations and the purposes of God? Gone! Prepare thyself! Thou shalt die and another reign in thy stead. Our text suggests the solidarity of our race. We are all children of one earthly father, as we are all the children of one Heavenly Father. All the fountains of history have their rise in the solitary pair who were driven from the gates of Paradise by the flaming sword of the angel sentinel of God. We are all descendants of a gardener, and the proudest crest might well have upon it a spade. The common brotherhood of the race is, I trust, soon to receive practical recognition by statesmen. Long enough have poets sung of equal rights and preachers repeated stale platitudes about "all men being as one in God's sight"; and yet the nations have gone on murdering one another, and, under the plea of extending civilisation, have extirpated many a tribe whose only crime was that they would not give up the land of their fathers to satisfy the territorial greed of the white man. Our text reminds us of our indebtedness to the past. Every man is an epitome of the race. In him history has its reflection and development. He is the incarnation of the past and the prophecy of the future. No man can isolate himself. Where did this man get that imagination which transforms the commonplace of life, and gives to the veriest mudbank hues of iridescent beauty? Where did that other get his logical faculty, his mathematical accuracy, or his genius for construction? You would have to trace his ancestry back through centuries to answer those questions. Some of us, alas! have inherited from the past other qualities which are the bane and cross of our life. But there is another way in which we are indebted to the past. We have come into a heritage of noble deeds and splendid thoughts. We are heirs of all the ages. For us the thinkers of past ages burned the midnight oil, for us the workers toiled when Nature bade them sleep. For a shilling I can purchase the plays it took Shakespeare a lifetime to write. A few coppers will make Milton my life companion. We are indebted to the nameless dead, as well as to those favoured few who have snatched immortality from the hand of fate. The world is better for their unrecorded heroism, their quiet, patient suffering, as the atmosphere is sweeter for the fragrance of the violet. The civil liberties we enjoy, the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience, have been bought for us by the rich blood of brave men and women. Let us hand to our sons unimpaired the holy legacy of our sires. Our text also suggests the debt we owe to the future. Posterity has a claim upon us as well as the past. Let it be ours to make the bounds of freedom wider yet; to leave at least one evil less than when we were born. It is glorious, and yet it is awful to think that in writing our own history we are also determining the character of generations to come. To the young I say, Prepare yourselves to take our places. We mean to make it as easy for you to reign in our stead as we can by removing out of the way some of the difficulties and dangers that have beset our own lives. We mean to make it as hard for you to succeed us as we can by living so well that it shall only be by the most strenuous efforts that you shall surpass us in moral effort, in high purpose, in brave deeds, and aspiring thoughts. Get ready, I say, for the larger duties and greater responsibilities the future has in store for you: The business of the world, its philanthropies and its religion, will soon be in your hands.

Another lesson of these chapters is that of our own insignificance. They tend to correct our overwhelming self-esteem. Men come and pass away, but the old world goes on. There is no place but what can be filled; no man is indispensable. Who will succeed you? Who will lift the sword that you lay down, who will wear your mantle, who will fill your office? Can anybody do it? Yes; but you have nothing to do with that. It is yours to make it difficult for any man to succeed you by doing your work so well that it cannot be done better. We are all apt to magnify our own importance. Our place may not be so hard to fill as we imagine. Some ruddy country lad may come with his sling and stone, and in simple faith hurl a pebble in the name of God at the giants before whom we have trembled and fled. At the weaver's loom may be another David Livingstone, in the market garden a Robert Moffat, at the cobbler's bench a William Carey, in the school a Charles Haddon Spurgeon. One closing thought comes to us, and that is, in the common aspirations, longings, and desires of men; in their common origin and destiny, we find an argument for a common redemption. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Generation after generation of men and not one absolutely holy save Him who bore all our sins on the Cross, but had no sin of His own. In due time Christ died for the ungodly. The cry of all ages has been a cry for deliverance from the curse of sin. That cry found its answer at Calvary. Jesus is the only King of whom the text will never be true. He sits on an eternal throne. His crown will never lose its lustre. We sinners cannot do without the Redeemer. The gospel we proclaim is a resurrection gospel. Because He lives we shall live also. (*S. Horton.*)

**VER. 54. These are the dukes of Edom.—A high order of names:—**The great lesson teaches the transitoriness of all human dignity and glory. Where are the dukes of Edom now? Who knows the names of Timnah, Aliah, Jetheth? How far are our own names known? What will be thought of them in the next century? Men are not to be estimated by their renown, but by their personal goodness and their local influence. In the Christian Church we have come to a higher order of names than was ever known in secular history. Men may now be called sons of God, saints, slaves of Jesus Christ, inheritors of the world of light: let us aspire after these higher titles, for they never perish. The titles which men give soon expire: the titles which God confers are vital with His own Eternity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER II.

**VER. 7. Achar, the troubler of Israel.—The troubler of Israel:—**I have read many biographies, but never met with any which hit off a man's character in a line as this word of inspiration does. The noble and the great used frequently to suspend the "achievement" over the tomb of their departed ancestor in memorial of his renown, bearing a motto, which described the leading characteristic of the ancient founder of the family. Here is the tomb of Achar, or Achan, and here is the motto for his achievement. The tomb consists of a large heap of stones, which an injured people by God's command piled upon his ashes after they had stoned him to death, and burned his dead body with fire. What is the motto? "The troubler of Israel." What a finale to a man's life! What a record to paint on his escutcheon!

**I. WHAT MADE ACHAN A TROUBLER OF ISRAEL?** Sin. All trouble may be traced to this. It led Achan to commit the threefold crime of disobedience, defiance of God's scrutiny, and sacrilege. His one sin brought trouble into all the camp. This is all the more remarkable when you remember how insignificant his position was among the tribes. We die all alone, but we cannot all sin alone. Even our secret sins are public calamities, and no transgression is without its malign influence upon the common weal.

**II. THE TROUBLES ACHAN BROUGHT UPON HIS PEOPLE.** 1. Defeat before a less powerful foe. 2. Depression of spirit, which unremedied, would be fatal to the very existence of the nation. 3. Anger from God, which would not be appeased even by the intercession of Joshua. 4. The threat of abandonment by God if they did not root out the evil from among them. (*George Venables.*) *Achan, the troubler of Israel:—*Why was the punishment of Achan so severe? 1. His was a terrible sin;



it was a wilful disobedience; it was high treason against God; it was sacrilege; it was stealing, lying, coveting, and practically murder. 2. This sin struck at the very life of the nation. If the people could disobey God with impunity, the nation would soon be ruined, and the hope of the world be put out. 3. The course Achan took would have degraded God in the eyes of Israel and of the Gentiles. The people and cities of Canaan were rich; the Israelites were poor. Canaan had the resources of a somewhat high civilisation—gold, silver, vessels of brass and of iron; goodly Babylonish garments. Now, suppose the Lord had given them free license to plunder, to steal and hide, and appropriate all they could lay hands on? This movement for the conquest of Canaan would have become a savage, plundering, marauding expedition. 4. These fascinating spoils—these glittering prizes of gold and silver, and these ornaments of the cultured Canaanites—were linked in on every hand with idolatry. Art and wealth in Canaan, as in every other heathen nation, lent their power to augment the attractions towards idol-worship. 5. But another consideration must have great weight. The Israelites had before them the task of conquering Palestine, a task which required the utmost discipline in the army. God was the Captain, directing, through Joshua, all the campaign. It was absolutely necessary, in the interests of military discipline, to check the first buddings of that cupidity which so often characterised ancient warfare. (*Christian Age.*)

Ver. 34. Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters.—*Compensations*.—Men should always put down after a statement of their deficiencies a statement of their possessions; thus: had no money, but had mental power; had no external fame, but had great home repute; had no genius, but had great common sense; had no high connections of a social kind, but enjoyed easy access to heaven in prayer; had no earthly property, but was rich in ideas and impulses; was not at the head of a great circle of admirers, but was truly respected and trusted wherever known; had no health, but had great cheerfulness. Thus we must keep the two sides, so to say, parallel; if we have not one thing we have another. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The compensations of life*.—The disproportion in man's inheritances is far less than we are prone to think. If one hand of the Universal Giver be closed, the other is expanded; no one is left without his meed of compensation; only in our weakness and unthankfulness we look more at the darker side of our lot, and at what appears to us the brighter side of our neighbour's. Epictetus explains the mystery in part: "It is not fortune that is blind, but ourselves." Whatever be our lot, if man will but just concede that that must be best for him which the Best of Beings has ordained, life thenceforward has a solace which no fortune can wrest away. (*Leo H. Grindon.*)

Ver. 55. And the families of the Scribes which dwelt at Jabez.—*Scribes*.—I. A NOBLE CALLING. To study and expound sacred books, inform society, and spread the will of God. II. A FAMILY CALLING. "The families of the scribes." Hereditary pursuits in all communities. III. A NEEDFUL CALLING. A literary profession useful to society. A learned ministry the want of the times. (*James Wolfendale.*)

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### CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-9. Now these are the sons of David.—*A family record*.—As we read their names they convey no meaning to us, but as defined etymologically we may get a new aspect of part at least of the king's household. Ithar signifies "God chooseth"; Elishama, "God heareth"; Eliphelet, "God is deliverance"; Eliada, "God knoweth." Keeping in mind the well-established fact that in Oriental countries it was customary to mark family history by the names of the children, we can but be struck with the deep religiousness of the family record now before us. In every child David sees some new manifestation of God. Every son was an historical landmark. Every life was a new phase of providence. Blessed is the man who need not look beyond his own house for signs and proofs of the manifold and never-ceasing goodness of God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Significance of Hebrew names*.—A name is to us a matter of convenience; to the Hebrews it was a solemn

and sacred thing. Our names are short and simple, and generally meaningless. Bible names are thought-fossils, rich in memories of the past. We often designate our streets by the letters of the alphabet, we distinguish our houses by Arabic numerals, and in large bodies of men we distinguish one from another by placing numbers on their caps or badges. The number on the house has nothing to do with the size or location of the dwelling; the number on the cap or badge tells nothing of the brain or heart beneath. But the old Hebrews would have thought it sacrilegious to give names in such careless fashion. Their names of places were often given after solemn thought and prayer. Historical records were few. The name must contain the history of the past and embody the sublimest hopes of the future. The name Bethel, or "House of God," recalled to every Jew the night when Jacob slept on his stony pillow, and the word Meribah, or "bitterness," commemorated in the mind of every Jewish boy the murmuring and rebellion in the wilderness. (*W. P. Faunce.*)

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#### CHAPTER IV.

**VERS. 1-43. The sons of Judah.—Survey of the genealogy:—I. HOW GREAT THE OBSCURITY OF MOST MEN! II. WHAT FOLLY TO SEEK PLACE AND POWER ONLY HERE! III. HOW NEEDFUL TO SECURE RENOWN HEREAFTER!** "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven," said the dying Haller, when friends congratulated him on the honour of receiving a visit from the Emperor Joseph II. (*James Wolfendale.*)

**VERS. 9, 10. And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren.—Jabez:—**We know nothing whatsoever of the Jabez here commemorated beyond what we find in these two verses. But this is enough to mark him out as worthy, in no ordinary degree, of being admired and imitated. There is a depth and a comprehensiveness in the registered prayer of this unknown individual—unknown except from that prayer—which should suffice to make him a teacher of the righteous in every generation. Let us now take the several parts of the text in succession, commenting upon each and searching out the lessons which may be useful to ourselves. The first verse contains a short account of Jabez; the second is occupied by his prayer. Now there is no denying that we are short-sighted beings, so little able to look into the future that we constantly miscalculate as to what would be for our good, anticipating evil from what is working for benefit, and reckoning upon benefit from that which may prove fraught with nothing but evil. How frequently does that which we have baptized with our tears make the countenance sunny with smiles! how frequently, again, does that which we have welcomed with smiles wring from us tears! We do not know the particular reasons which influenced the mother of Jabez to call him by that name, a name which means "sorrowful." We are merely told, "His mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow." Whether it were that she brought forth this son with more than common anguish, or whether, as it may have been, the time of his birth were the time of her widowhood, the mother evidently felt but little of a mother's joy, and looked on her infant with forebodings and fears. Perhaps it could hardly have been her own bodily suffering which made her fasten on the boy a dark and gloomy appellation, for, the danger past, she would rather have given a name commemorative of deliverance, remembering "no more her anguish for joy that a man was born into the world." Indeed, when Rachel bare Benjamin she called his name Benoni, that is, "the son of my sorrow"; but then it was "as her soul was in departing, for she died." We may well, therefore, suppose that the mother of Jabez had deeper and more lasting sorrows to register in the name of her boy than those of the giving him birth. And whatsoever may have been the cause, whether domestic affliction or public calamity, we may consider the woman as having bent in bitterness over her new-born child, having only tears to give him as his welcome to the world, and feeling it impossible to associate with him even a hope of happiness. She had probably looked with different sentiments on her other children. She had clasped them to her breast with all a mother's gladness. But with Jabez it was all gloom; the mother felt as if she could never be happy again: this boy brought nothing but an accession of care. And yet the history of the family is gathered into the brief

sentence, "Jabez was more honourable than his brethren." Nothing is told us of his brethren, except that they were less honourable than himself; they, too, may have been excellent, and perhaps as much is implied, but Jabez took the lead, and whether or not the youngest in years, surpassed every other in piety and renown. Oh, if the mother lived to see the manhood of her sons, how strangely must the name Jabez, a name probably given in a moment of despondency and faithlessness, have fallen on her ear! She may then have regretted the gloomy and ominous name, feeling as though it reproached her for having yielded to her grief, and allowed herself to give way to dreary forebodings. It may have seemed to her as a standing memorial of her want of confidence in God, and of the falseness of human calculations. And is not this brief notice of the mother of Jabez full of warning and admonition to ourselves? How ready are we to give the name Jabez to persons or things which, could we but look into God's purpose, or repose on His promise, we might regard as designed to minister permanently to our security and happiness. "All these things," said the patriarch Jacob, "are against me," as one trial after another fell to his lot. And yet, as you all know, it was by and through these gloomy dealings that a merciful God was providing for the sustenance of the patriarch and his household, for their support and aggrandisement in a season of extraordinary pressure. Thus it continually happens in regard of ourselves. We give the sorrowful title to that which is designed for the beneficent end. Judging only by present appearances, allowing our fears and feelings, rather than our faith, to take the estimate or fix the character of occurrences, we look with gloom on our friends and with melancholy on our sources of good. Sickness, we call it Jabez, though it may be sent to minister to our spiritual health; poverty, we call it Jabez, though coming to help us to the possession of heavenly riches; bereavement, we call it Jabez, though designed to graft us more closely into the household of God. Oh for a better judgment! or rather, oh for a simpler faith! We cannot, indeed, see the end from the beginning, and therefore cannot be sure that what rises in cloud will set in vermilion and gold; but we need not take upon ourselves to give the dark name, as though we could not be deceived in regard of the nature. Let us derive this lesson from the concise but striking narrative in the first verse of our text. Let us neither look confidently on what promises best, nor despairingly on what wears the most threatening appearance. God often wraps up the withered leaf of disappointment in the bright purple bud, and as often unfolds the golden flower of enjoyment in the nipped and blighted shoot. Experience is full of evidence that there is no depending on appearances. If, in a spirit of repining or unbelief, you brand as Jabez what may be but a blessing in disguise, no marvel if sometimes, in just anger and judgment, He allow the title to prove correct, and suffer not this Jabez, this child born in sorrow, to become to you as otherwise it might, more honourable, more profitable than any of its brethren. But let us now turn to the prayer of Jabez. We ought not to examine the prayer without pausing to observe to whom it is addressed. It is not stated that Jabez called on God, but on "the God of Israel." There are few things more significant than the difference in the manner in which God is addressed by saints under the old and under the new dispensation. Patriarchs pray to God as the God of their fathers; apostles pray to Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In both forms of address there is an intimation of the same fact, that we need something to encourage us in approaching unto God; that exposed as we are to His just wrath for our sins, we can have no confidence in speaking to Him as to absolute Deity. There must be something to lean upon, some plea to urge, otherwise we can but shrink from the presence of One so awful in His gloriousness. We must, then, have some title with which to address God—some title which, interfering not with His majesty or His mysteriousness, may yet place Him under a character which shall give hope to the sinful as they prostrate themselves before Him. We need not say that under the gospel dispensation this title should be that which is used by St. Paul, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Having such a Mediator through whom to approach, there is no poor supplicant who may not come with boldness to the mercy-seat. But under earlier dispensations, when the mediatorial office was but imperfectly made known, men had to seize on other pleas and encouragements; and then it was a great thing that they could address God as you continually find Him addressed, as the God of Israel, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. The title assured them that God was ready to hear prayer and to answer it. They went before God, thronged, as it were, with remembrances of mercies bestowed, deliverances vouchsafed, evils averted: how could they fear that

God was too great to be addressed, too occupied to reply, or too stern to show kindness, when they bore in mind how He had shielded their parents, hearkened to their cry, and proved Himself unto them "a very present help" in all time of trouble? Ah, and though, under the new dispensation, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" be the great character under which God should be addressed by us in prayer, there is no need for our altogether dropping the title, the God of our fathers. It might often do much to cheer a sorrowful heart, and to encourage a timid, to address God as the God of our fathers—the God in whom my parents trusted. And what did Jabez pray for? for great things—great, if you suppose him to have spoken only as an heir of the temporal Canaan, greater if you ascribe to him acquaintance with the mercies of redemption. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." Lay the emphasis on that word "indeed." Many things pass for blessings which are not; to as many more we deny, though we ought to give the character. There is a blessing in appearance which is not also a blessing in reality; and conversely, the reality may exist where the appearance is wanting. The man in prosperity appears to have, the man in adversity to be without a blessing—yet how often does God bless by withholding! And Jabez goes on, "That Thou wouldest enlarge my coast." He probably speaks as one who had to win from the enemy his portion of the promised land. He knew that, as the Lord said to Joshua, "there remained yet very much land to be possessed"; it was not, then, necessarily as a man desirous of securing to himself a broader inheritance, it may have been as one who felt jealous that the idolater should still defile what God had set apart for His people, that he entreated the enlargement of his coast. And a Christian may use the same prayer; he, too, has to ask that his coast may be enlarged. Who amongst us has yet taken possession of one-half the territory assigned him by God? Our privileges as Christians, as members of an apostolical Church, as heirs of the kingdom of heaven, how are these practically under-valued, how little are they realised, how sluggishly appropriated! What districts of unpossessed territory are there in the Bible! how much of that blessed book has been comparatively unexamined by us! We have our favourite parts, and give only an occasional and cursory notice to the rest. How little practical use do we make of God's promises! What need, then, for the prayer, "Oh that Thou wouldest enlarge my coast"! I would not be circumscribed in spiritual things. I would not live always within these narrow bounds. There are bright and glorious tracts beyond. It is a righteous covetousness, this for an enlargement of coast; for he has done little, we might almost say nothing, in religion, who can be content with what he has done. It is a holy ambition, this which pants for an ampler territory. But are we only to pray? are we not also to struggle, for the enlargement of our coasts? Indeed we are: observe how Jabez proceeds, "And that Thine hand might be with me." He represents himself as arming for the enlargement of his coast, but as knowing all the while that "the battle is the Lord's." There is one more petition in the prayer of him who, named with a dark and inauspicious name, yet grew to be "more honourable than his brethren": "That Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Jabez prayed not for the being kept from evil, but kept from the being grieved by evil. And there is a vast difference between the being visited by evil and grieved by evil. He is grieved by evil who does not receive it meekly and submissively, as the chastisement of his heavenly Father. He is grieved by evil whom evil injures, in place of benefits—which latter is always God's purpose in His permission or appointment. He is grieved by evil whom it drives into sin, and to whom, therefore, it furnishes cause of bitter repentance. You see, then, that Jabez showed great spiritual discernment in casting his prayer into this particular form. We, too, should pray, not absolutely that God would keep us from evil, but that He would so keep it from us, or us from it, that it may not grieve us. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The prayer of Jabez*:—Many comparisons have at times been instituted, and I think not altogether without reason, between this book as the work of God and the world as the production of God; such, for instance, as that what is necessary and essential lies amply upon the surface of both. Analogies have sometimes been gathered from the mixture that there is in Scripture in the developments of the character of God; sometimes all that is awful, and sometimes all that is benignant. So in the material world there is the same mixture in the development and display of the Divine character and perfections. Sometimes, again, an analogy, not I think altogether fanciful, has been supposed to exist between this book and the world, in that there are some

parts of it that seem luxuriant and beautiful—some parts of the book in which every verse and every word is like a flower springing up under your feet, or like the shade of a beautiful vegetation around you, or like an exhibition of the magnificence and loveliness of vegetable nature, while other parts appear sterile and barren, with rocks on every side. When we look at this barren catalogue of names, when we look at what is here presented, we seem to have got into one of those parts of Scripture in which there is very little to delight the eye or to refresh the heart, just as sometimes we may be passing through some sterile part in the scenery of this world. What is suggested by what we see in some of these barren spots of nature? Why, just this—that we there get a view of the rocks, of the bands and the pillars of our earth, that bind it and keep it together, and make it what it is, and which are essential and necessary for the support of all the earth, and the soil by which is supported and displayed in other parts the beauty and sublimity of vegetation. So it is here; these parts of the Bible are just representations to us of some of those barren rocks, you may say, but still those rocks which run throughout Scripture, those genealogies which are connected with all that is important in the history of the Messiah and the fulfilment of prophecy. In looking at the passage we observe that with respect to this Jabez we really know nothing but what is combined in these two verses; there is no reference to him in any other part of Scripture. He was unquestionably, I suppose, from the position in which he stands, of the tribe of Judah; as this is the genealogy of Judah. We know not precisely from the passage who were his parents; what particular line in Judah he belonged to; nor can we exactly make out the precise time in which he lived; though it appears to me the passage gives us a little light on that subject. It is said generally of him that “he was more honourable than his brethren.” That may or may not imply censure against his brethren. He might be honourable among the honourable; he might be great among the great. The probability is, however, that it does rather convey the idea of imperfection and defect in the character of surrounding society, and hence it does mark more prominently the influence of principle and of piety in him. But men may be honourable on various accounts: generally at the time to which the Scripture refers, and now, men are estimated honourable for valour, for wisdom, and for piety. I think it is very probable that all these met in Jabez. 1. There are traditions among the Jews respecting him; and they make him to have been a man distinguished for wisdom as a teacher; distinguished as the founder of a school, and having around him a multitude of disciples. This opinion has upon it, perhaps, some air of probability from the last verse of the second chapter in this book, in which it is said, “And the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez,” or “with Jabez”; “the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab.” Now, “the families of the scribes which dwelt at Jabez,” supposing it to be the name of a place, refers to men who are devoted to study; if it be the name of the persons that dwelt with him, still the same idea seems suggested. So that I think it very probable that the idea of the Jews is right. They themselves take these words which are here used, and in which these different divisions of scribes are distinguished, as being significant, expressing certain qualities of these disciples with respect to the manner in which they received the instruction of the master, and the manner in which they were devoted to God. It is very probable, therefore, that he was distinguished and honourable for his mental acquisition and his wisdom. 2. It seems to me that he was honourable also for his enterprise and activity, and perhaps also for his valour, because he prays for the enlargement of his coast. Now it strikes me that this particular prayer of Jabez about the enlargement of his coast, and God being with him, seems to cast a little light on the time in which he lived. It strikes me that he lived soon after the settlement of the people in Canaan, and before they had taken complete and full possession of the different lots. And there was among many of the people a sort of reluctance to do this, a want of vigour and enterprise of mind and character. Joshua really had to reprove them for sitting down contented too soon, saying, “Why, a few of you have got possession; yet there remains a number of places that are not yet divided; why sit you here? Arise, take possession.” It strikes me, therefore, this prayer has relation to that, and that he was more honourable than his brethren because he entered into the mind of God. 3. Whatever may be thought of that, that he was honourable for his piety is, I think, manifest. “He was more honourable than his brethren”; and the sacred writer, after having stated that generally, in the next verse develops the

principle of this honourable character: "And Jabez called on the God of Israel," &c. (1) On looking at this prayer you observe the propriety of the feeling with which it is addressed to God. "Jabez called upon the God of Israel." He was neither lost in the vagueness of mere theism, nor led astray by the grossness of idolatry. He understood and felt the principle of the economy under which he lived; he rejoiced in the privileges and advantages which God in covenant had conferred on the people, and he rejoiced to look at God in that aspect, and presented his prayer to Him in that covenant relation. It is thus that you and I must come to God; it is thus that we must be prepared not to lose ourselves in the vagueness of sentimentalism and the generalities of religion, but to feel that there is a way by which we are to come, a specific view we are to have of God. (2) Then let us look at the comprehensiveness of the prayer; how much it includes with respect to the life that now is and the life that is to come. (3) Then I think you may observe the humility that marks the prayer; how completely he is emptied of self, how he goes out of self, feeling that all his resources must be in God. There is a feeling pervading every petition and every expression, marking the consciousness that he had of his own weakness and his own danger: that he needed to be held and sustained by God. (4) Then you may observe the intenseness, the fervour, and the earnestness which seem to mark his supplication: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" (5) Then observe the fulfilment of the prayer: "And God granted him that which he requested." Such is a brief illustration of what is here stated with respect to this distinguished man, and the prayer that is here recorded of him. Before I pass on to the more general lessons to be drawn from this prayer, I cannot help just observing how short this prayer is. And this is a characteristic of the prayers of Scripture—the prayers of Scripture are almost all brief, many of them are very brief. But I pass on to make one or two general observations arising from the subject. 1. I should think it very likely that Jabez owed a good deal of his religion to his mother. 2. We learn also, that piety towards God, the possession of the principles and the manifestation of Scriptural religion, is in the sight of God essential to the possession of a true and honourable character. The terms "honourable" and "honourable character" have very different senses among men. That which is highly approved among men in this respect is often an abomination in the sight of God. There is many a man distinguished by this epithet in society that is loathed in the society of heaven. A merely honourable character in society means often nothing but a man of integrity. He is honourable in the relations of common life. Under the influence of their principle men are led to pay debts which they have contracted by vice, but to starve and to crush the honest tradesman, and neglect to pay other debts which they have accumulated upon themselves. And yet they are "honourable men!" Such are the perversions abroad in the world and the absurdities in society. 3. Another thought is impressed upon us by the passage: the importance that God attaches to faith and piety, and the character that flows from it. The importance that God attaches to it is proved by the very circumstance of there being this abrupt introduction of the character of Jabez in the midst of this dry genealogical detail. It reminds one of a similar passage in Gen. v., "Enoch walked with God"; impressing a glory and distinction upon the character of the man, and making it stand out prominently from the midst of those with which it is connected. Now if your genealogies were made out would the scribe have to pause at your name? Is there anything about you of this character and these principles that in a similar scroll or writing to this there may be this reason to pause and to dwell upon you? 4. Another thing which you may draw from this subject is the possibility of the combination of secular enterprise and activity with eminent piety. I think these seem to be indicated as having met in the character of Jabez. This piety towards God; his faith, his devotion, the time that he gave for prayer, did not render it impossible with him to give time to active duty. Perhaps, so to speak, he had a sanctified ambition to combine both activity and enterprise with religion. And both these may be combined—diligence in business with fervour of spirit, activity in the fulfilment of the duties of everyday life, in connection with the cultivation of those principles and feelings which keep us near to God, and which sanctify the activity and direct it. Now I think it is likely that Jabez was a young man when this prayer was offered; that there was this formation of his character comparatively early; that he thus started in life, that he thus acted. 5. Another remark we make is this, that certainly one of the best ways to preserve your speculations, your pursuits, your secular activity and enterprise from being offensive to God and injurious to yourselves, is to enter upon

none, and to engage in none, but such as you can bring, like Jabez, and lay at the footstool of the throne of God, and ask God to bless. 6. In the last place, let us learn from this subject the gratitude that we ought to feel for the clear discovery that we have in Scripture of God's covenant relation to His children; that we can go to Him, not merely as the God of Israel, but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Him reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to men their trespasses. (*T. Binney.*) *Jabez*:—The very situation of this text is worth remarking. It stands in the very midst of genealogies. Why those names are so particularly put upon record, or why nothing more besides the names, is not very easy to discover. Perhaps it was to let us see that multitudes of persons live upon the earth of whom, when you have told the name, you have told all that is worth mentioning. Great men they might be in their generations, men of renown in an earthly point of view, and yet, in the sight of God, insignificant and worthless. But, however this may be, here is one person, at least, whom the Word of God is not content with barely mentioning. It is said of him that he was "more honourable than his brethren." In whatever other points he was so, in this especially, that, whereas the Holy Spirit barely runs over the names of others, and tells us nothing else of them, when He comes to Jabez He stops short. Something He relates concerning Jabez which He evidently holds forth to our praise and imitation. What is the fact in the history of Jabez which the Holy Ghost hath thought worthy of record? Is it any battle that he fought, or any exploit he performed? is it any proof he gave of earthly wisdom or of earthly policy? No; these are indeed the things which dazzle human eyes and which please the pens of human writers. But not so the great God. The events He dwells on in the history of Jabez is one which many earthly penmen would have scorned to write of. He takes us to this good man's closet, and tells us of a prayer he offered there. Ah! amidst the multitude of things which are going on upon this earth, amidst the manifold events which man calls great, there is nothing in God's sight half so considerable as the prayer of a poor humble soul for mercy and acceptance. The prayer of a Paul, of a Cornelius, of a Jabez—"What trifling matters," saith the world, "are these!" But look into God's Book and only see the notice which is taken of these prayers by Him who made us. Pray like Jabez. Pray, if not in his words, yet in his spirit, and you shall speed like him. 1. We are to consider the **IMPORT** of the prayer—the nature, I mean, of the petition it contains. There is no doubt but that it issued from the heart, and that it was offered up with holy fervency of spirit. "Jabez called upon the God of Israel," such is the expression used. Something more, you see, he did than merely say the words of prayer. He called or "cried" unto his God. He put his heart into his words, as one in deep and holy earnest. There is a holy vehemence, too, in the very form of his address. "Oh," says he, "that Thou wouldest do this thing!" And this should be your way of praying. But to come to the language of the prayer. 1. What is the first petition of this earnest suitor at the throne of grace? "Oh," says he, "that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" Now what sort of blessing does he mean? God hath many in His gift. Life itself is a blessing; health is a blessing; and so are food and raiment; so are the friends we mix with and the home which we inhabit. But it is clearly something beyond these which Jabez asks for. His language is emphatic: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" As much as to say, "Oh that Thou wouldest give me Thy best, Thy truest blessings!" And what are these? Not the short-lived blessings of the body, but the eternal blessings of the soul. The man is "blessed indeed," not who sits down to a full table and wears his purple and fine linen—but who can say with a good Scripture warrant, "Christ is mine and I am His." He is "blessed indeed" to whom the God of grace hath said, "I am thy salvation"—with whose spirit "the Spirit itself beareth witness that he is a child of God"—and "who is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." These are the choicest gifts of God. Other things are blessings; but they are the blessings of God's enemies as well as of His people. Other things are blessings, but they are temporal and transitory, and they "perish with the using." Grace to enjoy here and glory to expect hereafter—let a man have these and he hath all. Jabez wanted Jacob's blessing and not Esau's—the birthright, not the pottage. Sure I am, such is the choice of every poor awakened sinner. "Give me Christ and His Cross rather than the world and its crown!" 2. But what is the next thing in the prayer? what does the holy man next ask for? "That Thou wouldest enlarge my coast," says he. Perhaps this petition was of a temporal nature. Jabez, it is thought, was among those Israelites who went in with

Joshua to the holy land and had a portion there assigned to him. If so, it is not unlikely that he was pressed and straitened by the Canaanites around him, and that he begs in this part of his prayer that God would clear the ground for him and give him room enough to dwell in. "Oh, Lord," we may well ask, "enlarge the coast of my poor narrow heart. Give to my thoughts and my desires a wider range." He grieves over the narrowness, the selfishness of his desires. He feels himself, as it were, pent in and circumscribed by things of this world. He is sensible that there is not room enough within him for his God and for his brethren. He longs, therefore, in all these respects to be enlarged to "reach forth unto the things which are before"; to "comprehend with all saints what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and to be "filled with all the fulness of God." Again, here is another point of view in which the Christian seeks after enlargement. "Oh, Lord," he is ever ready to exclaim, "enlarge my usefulness. Make me a more active member of Christ's body; more abundant in the fruits of righteousness; more devoted to Thy work and service; more profitable to my brethren and fellow-creatures!" 3. But we pass on to the next petition in our text: "Oh," says Jabez, "that Thine hand might be with me!" And why does he ask this? Evidently because he was thoroughly persuaded that without the Lord he could do nothing. How exactly in this point do his feelings meet those of all real Christians in the present day! The worldly man goes out in his own strength and trusts in his own arm to help him. Seldom does he feel the need of looking higher than his own wisdom and sagacity and resolution. Whilst the believer thus "goes forth in the strength of the Lord" he can do wonders; but let him at any time forget thus to pray, he is soon made to feel that he is a "man who hath no strength." 4. To come now to the last petition of the prayer before us. How does the holy man conclude? Just as his Lord concludes in the prayer which He hath taught us to present to Him. "Deliver us from evil" is our last petition in that prayer. And what is the last request of Jabez? "That Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." There is safety neither for the soul nor for the body except under the shadow of His wings. Apply this to spiritual evil, and it expresses what is true, what is most eminently true, of every real servant of the Lord—that sin is a thing which grieves him. Natural evil is painful and unwelcome; but the evil of the soul—the evil to which Satan tempts—this is the thing of all others which believers dread. A great deal of sin goes with the world under the name of "pleasure." "But all this," says the believer, "is not pleasure to my soul—it is pain and grief to me." II. The ANSWER which this prayer received. Answered it was, and answered to the full. "The Lord granted him that which he requested"; not a part, you observe, but the whole. "That which he requested"—that is to say, all that he requested was bestowed upon him. Now do think over his request. It was a very large one. It comprehended much. He had not trespassed on the Divine bounty which says, "Ask, and you shall have." Let us, then, admire the bountifulness, the abundant mercy of the God whom Jabez called upon. Surely He is a God of faithfulness and truth and love. When has any humble soul ever cried to Him in vain? When hath He ever said to the praying "seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain"? To you who are really "calling on the God of Israel" my text is surely a comfortable and refreshing one. It affords a pledge; it gives, as it were, a promise and assurance—that you will speed in your petitions. The God of Jabez is unchanged, unchangeable—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (*A. Roberts.*) *Blessing and enlargement*:—We come upon this little history of Jabez with a kind of surprise, as one who, travelling through a rocky and mountainous country, comes all at once upon some little green dell, watered with streams and filled with beauty. Observe—**I. JABEZ CALLED UPON THE GOD OF ISRAEL.** He declared himself a religious man, a worshipper of the true God. It was the habit of his life. He was known by this. This still lies at the foundation of individual prosperity and goodness of the highest kind—personal religion, calling upon God. A man whose soul never "calls," never cries, never looks, never waits upon God, is not living to the end for which a man should live; he is not truly living at all. Man is raised above the brutes, in that he alone of all the creatures is so endowed that he stands consciously before the face of the personal God, to reverence, serve, worship, and adore the unseen Being. **II. Calling, WHAT DOES JABEZ SAY?** "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." This prayer is not very definite, but perhaps it is all the better, as expressive of many a condition of life, and especially the state of one who is just



beginning to pray. In conscious sin and guilt, in weakness, confusion, and fear, a man knows not what to say. Then, bethinking him that God is greater than his heart and knoweth all things, and will therefore give interpretation to all the misery, penitence, longing, love; that He will hear the groanings that cannot be uttered; that He will take dim thought for words; the man is content, and with a cry of relief, as well as earnestness, he says, "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!"

III. BUT THERE IS SOMETHING MORE DEFINITE IMMEDIATELY, "AND ENLARGE MY COAST." He prays for more territory to his people and himself, more power: more wealth. These are what we should call earthly and temporal blessings. The best men of the Old Testament did not distinguish between temporal and spiritual as we do. Life was a spiritual unity to these men. When a man's sins are pardoned, and his life rectified, when his soul is nourished by the blessing of God, one cannot but think the more that man has the better. Let him be enlarged. No doubt an expanding life multiplies dangers, but it also multiplies grace if it be expansion on the right principle. When a penurious man makes money, that is not enlargement in the grand sense at all. He is building a prison, and himself will be the prisoner. An old man in his last illness was received at one of the metropolitan hospitals. He was without relations or friends, and to all appearance without resources. But a bag of money was found round his neck. When death had apparently claimed him, a nurse gently unfastened the string and removed the bag. At the same moment the old man opened his eyes and felt instinctively for his treasure, which was no longer in its place. He uttered the word, "Gone!" and died. The money amounted to £174, the accumulation, no doubt, of many years. But was that man "enlarged" as the process went on? He was narrowed and crippled. Every golden piece he put into that bag was adding to the weight he carried, in more senses than one, until it became a millstone about his neck and drowned him in death. From many a death-bed there goes up that old man's sigh, "Gone!" money "gone;" houses "gone": broad acres "gone"; name and fame "gone." All that has been striven for through a lifetime "gone." Ah! poor fatal enlargement that ends in such collapse. The true enlargement is such, that such a catastrophe as that is quite impossible. The man with soul enlarged never sighs in life or death "Gone!" He has chosen the good part that shall not be taken away.

IV. THE SUMMING UP OF THE PRAYER. "And that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou mightest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." So let us seek preservation from evil inward and outward, by watchfulness, by prayer, by dependence on God, and we need never fear enlargement. Let it go on without limit and without fear, if it goes on thus banked in on either hand by Divine blessing and Divine care. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Jabez*:—In visiting a foreign land, and seeing nothing but strange forms and faces passing and repassing before us, it affords most exquisite enjoyment to catch at the moment the well-known countenance of some dear old friend or acquaintance. So it is with us here on wearily poring over these chapters of names; we feel as if we were in a wilderness, at sea, on some foreign strand; and what blessed relief do we experience as unawares we arrive at this rare character of Old Testament Scripture, ensconced, enshrined in this desert nook of names. We realise with double zest that proverb of Scripture—"That as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend." In considering *Jabez* let us look—

I. TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES CAST AROUND HIS BIRTH. He is here brought before us in connection with his mother. Mothers are often mentioned in Scripture as influencing their children for either good or evil—the mothers of the wicked kings of Israel on the one hand, the mothers of Moses, Samuel, Joseph, &c., on the other. The responsibility of mothers. The question was once proposed to Napoleon Bonaparte, "How was a better, a more moral class of young persons to be obtained in the country?" His answer was, "Let us have better mothers."

II. TO THE CHARACTER OF HIS LIFE. III. TO HIS PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER. (*John Gardiner.*) *The prayer of Jabez*:—I. Let us glance at the PARENTAL ANXIETY OF HIS MOTHER. Her fears and perplexities were not realised. The fears and dread of many a parent are never intended to be realised. The delicate little child may outgrow its frailty, and live to be your comfort and hope. The wild and unruly boy may become the staff of your old age.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THIS PRAYER. 1. There seems to be a pious reference to the prayer of Moses for the tribe to which *Jabez* belonged. *Jabez* belonged to the tribe of Judah. 2. It is a prayer for spiritual blessings. 3. It is a prayer expressive of a humble dependence upon Divine Providence for temporal blessings. 4. It is marked by a singular and holy distrust of himself—"keep me from evil." (1) Trouble is an evil. (2) Enemies are an evil.

(3) Sin is the evil of evils. Application: 1. God still waits to hear our humble prayers, and will grant all those things which are needful for us. 2. It may teach us the source of some of our misfortunes and mistakes; we have restrained prayer. 3. It teaches emphatically the value of religion. Godliness is profitable for the life that now is. (*W. J. Barrett.*) *Jabez—an unexpected biography*:—As in life we are being continually surprised by the unexpected turn which events often take, so the Bible sometimes surprises us with unlooked-for disclosures. All of a sudden in the very midst of surrounding dryness a beautiful biography appears, and in two verses a man's life is portrayed, beginning with birth, and containing a delineation of his character, a full report of one of his prayers, and references to his mother and brothers. I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A NAME. Jabez was born at a time when "names meant truths and words were the symbols of realities." Jabez means sorrow or trouble. The mother's grief, expressed in the name of her child, was probably the ungodliness of her other children, and there is no more fruitful source of sorrow to mothers than this. II. THE DISTINCTION OF A CHARACTER. More honourable. He had a good reputation. III. THE DEVOTION OF A LIFE. "Jabez called on the God of Israel." IV. THE DIVINE RECOGNITION OF TRUE PRAYER. (*Homilist.*) *The prayer of Jabez*:—I. THE PRAYER before us. Very striking is the ardour of expression contained in these words, "Bless me"; "Bless me"; "Bless me indeed"; Oh, that Thou wouldest bless me"; and "Oh! that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." II. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY THE SAME. "God granted Jabez that which he requested." This shows us—1. That God heareth prayer. 2. That God answereth prayer. 3. That God will grant us that which we request of Him. Address: 1. Any among you who may live prayerlessly. 2. Any of you who may pray formally. 3. Any of you who do truly pray. (*W. Mudge, B.A.*) *Jabez: his life and his prayer*:—It is not much that we know of Jabez, but I think that in this recorded history of that man there is suggested to us something of as solemn warning and of as blessed consolation as you will find within the range of God's holy book. I. THE LESSON OF THE NAME GIVEN TO HIM. Jabez—"sorrow." It was to her best and worthiest son that the mother of Jabez gave the name that implied how little hope of future happiness with him or through him remained in her weary, despairing heart. We can think of a contrasted picture: you remember the proud and hopeful name which the mother of our race gave to her firstborn son; you know how much of confident hope was expressed in the name of Cain. "Possession" she called him—a great thing gained from God—who was yet so sorely to wring her heart. Ever thus are human anticipations, whether of good or ill; the first murderer welcomed with the hopeful name of Cain, while this wise and good and happy man was to bear the desponding name of Jabez. How often we call by hard names dispensations of God's providence, which in reality are to prove great blessings. Probably in many cases those events in our history, those dealings of God with us, which we should call sorrowful at the time, stand us in more real stead, and do us more real good, than the brightest and happiest that ever come in our way. II. We shall next consider THE PRAYER WHICH JABEZ OFFERED AND WHICH GOD GRANTED HIM. What a wise and what a safe prayer! Send me that which Thou knowest is blessing, though it may not seem blessing to me; and deny me that which Thou knowest is not blessing, however ready I, in my ignorance, may be to think it so. 1. The spirit of this prayer is that of confidence in God and unqualified acquiescence in His appointment. This is a lesson of how we ought to pray. You know, generally, the direction in which to steer; but you cannot say what little movement of the helm may be expedient from time to time, to suit each passing gust of wind, or each crossing wave. And it is just because we do not know these things that it is so wise to leave the decision of 'the precise thing to be sent us, as Jabez did, to God; and to pray with him that God would bless us "indeed." 2. The next two petitions imply a great and sound principle—the duty of combining effort with prayer. When we are desirous to compass any new attainment, when we wish to enlarge our coast, as it were, by taking in greater fields of faith, of holiness, of patience, of humility, of all Christian grace—in regard to all which we may well take up Joshua's words, "that there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," let us do like Jabez; working like him as if we could do all, and praying as if we could do nothing. The wisdom of Jabez appeared in that he put prayer and effort together. 3. The last petition is for deliverance from true evil—and from the evil effects and influences of all evil. He does not ask that evil may never come; but that evil may not be suffered to really harm when it comes. Evil coming and trying us may do us great good; but Jabez prayed, and we may pray, that evil

should not grieve us. We may pray that evil may never be suffered to harden us; to stir us up to wrath against God; to make us fretful, rebellious, impatient; to tempt us to sin; in short, to do us harm when God intends it always to do us good. It was for this that Jabez prayed. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *Jabez* :—These words contain a life's history in a sentence. This brief epitome of human life appeals to universal experience. Its very brevity increases its suggestiveness. I. THE MOTHER'S FAITHLESS ANTICIPATION REMINDS US HOW THE PRESENT OFTEN COLOURS OUR THOUGHTS OF THE FUTURE. Our judgments are biassed, often warped by our circumstances. We interpret even the past by the present, and often fail therefore to make a just estimate of it. We can only form a right estimate of the past by transporting ourselves back into it. This is impossible with respect to the future. We may learn what has been yesterday, but we know not what shall be on the morrow. Hence the especial danger of letting our anticipations be coloured by our present circumstances. God's teaching is the very reverse of this. The thought of the future is to colour the present. As Mr. Canning, when he announced in Parliament the independence of South America, said "that he brought in the New World to redress the balance of the Old," so God gives us the bright inheritance of heaven as a counterbalance to the cares and sorrows of earth. It is only in the light of the future as revealed to us by God, that we can rightly estimate the present. When we reverse God's teaching we unfit ourselves for the future. We go forth to the duties and burdens of the morrow weakened by apprehension, instead of being strong with the courage of hope. II. THE PRAYER OF JABEZ COMBINES WISE RETICENCE AND ORDINARY AMBITION. These are the elements of true prayer—a sense of dependence, the expression of confidence, and unrestrained petition, pouring out the heart to God, leaving to Him the decision as to what is blessing indeed. III. THIS PRAYER ALSO REVEALS THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIAN LIFE. It is the outcome of practical piety. Perhaps like Caleb he had to conquer his own inheritance. His dependence upon God did not mean inaction. He had learned the great lesson that prayer and effort go hand in hand, the one inspiring and sanctifying the other. Our great need is to live more nearly as we pray. We can only ask that God's hand may be with us when our supreme desire is to do God's will. Such prayer is both a test and a safeguard. (*A. F. Joscelyne.*) *The prayer of Jabez* :—Remarkable is the honour which God puts upon prayer, and numberless are the instances recorded of its efficacy. I. THE IMPORT OF THE PRAYER OF JABEZ. II. ITS EXCELLENCE. It was so both in respect to sentiment and expression. It was—1. Humble. 2. Diffusive (*Phil. iv. 6*). We need to recite our wants in order to impress our own minds with a sense of our utter helplessness and unworthiness. 3. Importunate. 4. Believing. Petitions offered in faith, have as it were, the force of commands (*Isa. xiv. 1*). Application: 1 Let all now call to mind their several wants and necessities. 2. Let nothing be thought too small or too great to ask. 3. Let the pressure of our wants and the richness of our prospects stimulate us. 4. Let us expect the accomplishment of that glorious promise (*John xiv. 13, 14*). (*Skeletons of Sermons.*) *The prayer of Jabez* :—Like a star set in the darkness of midnight, more conspicuous because of the surrounding gloom, is the name of a great man in the chronicles of the trifling and the insignificant. How encouraging is the assurance, "If any man love God the same is known of Him," whoever he may be, wherever he may dwell. The name of Jabez stands in most emphatic isolation upon the sacred page. He is distinguished by his faith in God from his contemporaries, of whom it would seem that the most important record of their lives was this: "These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work" (*ver. 23*). They served an earthly monarch; he a heavenly. Their business was among things frail and perishing; his was with things unseen and eternal. Their arts and manufactures have long since crumbled into dust. This prayer abides to bless the Church of God until the end of time. I. A CONCISE MEMOIR—"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren," &c. The Scriptures are full of these comprehensive, brief, but weighty texts which Luther was wont to call "little Bibles." "A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." "Apelles approved in Christ." "He was a burning and a shining light." "Of whom the world was not worthy." The genealogy in which the name of Jabez occurs is that of the royal family of Judah. The compression of Scripture truth within its limited area is one of the great miracles which belong to the structure of God's Word. It is said of Jabez that "he was more honourable than his brethren," though with a less honourable name. His mother had anticipated the hour of anguish with unusual sadness, and she called him Jabez—that is "grief." "When

thou wast born," say the Easterns, "thou didst weep, and all about thee did rejoice; so live, that when thou diest thou mayest rejoice, and all about thee may weep." We may consider this epithet "honourable" as applied to Jabez, from either a secular or a spiritual point of view. In the former case it would mean that integrity and uprightness pervaded all his actions, that in the business of this world no impeachment could lie against his good name, that all his undertakings would bear the most rigid scrutiny. Nor is it a matter of small importance that those who profess to be the children of God should be recognised by the men of the world as actuated by unscrupulous integrity. The children in the marketplace very keenly scrutinise the conduct of those who avow themselves to be Christians, and they expect, and not without reason, that our code of morals should be superior to their own. But we may consider this title conferred on Jabez as issuing from the court of heaven, and bestowed upon him because of his eminence in the service of God. II. A COMPREHENSIVE PRAYER. "And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." He was a true prince in Israel, having power with God; and yet it is only one prayer of his which has been preserved. One prayer, doubtless one of many, for it reveals a mastery in the holy exercise only attained by much practice. One prayer has lifted a man out of the lowest depression to the loftiest summits of enjoyment. It has expelled the dark tides of sorrow from the soul, and brought in proofs of God's love dearer than life itself. It has widened the channels of enjoyment and filled them with inexhaustible supplies of delight. 1. He seeks the best blessings. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." He "covets earnestly the best gifts." God Himself is the only fountain and source of true blessedness. We should not, however, completely appreciate this prayer if we do not notice that temporal things may become blessings indeed. If we do not prefer the gift to the giver; if they are the means of drawing us nearer to Him, then "all things work together for good." It would seem to have been the desire of Jabez to see his Heavenly Father's smile through all earthly conditions and in all Divine bestowments. And it is indeed a true philosophy which determines respecting life and all its mutations that it matters not so much what we get for our earthly lot, as how we get it. The things which men most usually covet conspire to their hurt because they have not God's blessing. 2. He prays for an enlarged territory. "That Thou wouldest enlarge my coast." It appears probable that this Jabez was a younger son, and that he was born at a time when the patrimony was well-nigh exhausted. This would account for the maternal solicitude which had conferred on him so dolorous a name. An Israelite might indeed put up this prayer without misgiving, because every inch of territory which he gained would be rescued from heathenism, and brought within the confines of the Land of Promise. But we prefer to look at this petition as a supplication for spiritual good. Every graced man must sympathise with this cry for room. Too often fettered and environed by corruptions, cares, and infirmities, we feel the need of enlarged desires, expanding affections, and uncontracted views of Divine realities. "The world of the blind," says Mr. Prescott, the historian, speaking from painful experience, "is bounded by the length of the arm." A blind world revolves in the narrow orbit of things that can be touched. The gospel introduces its subjects into the vast regions of things unseen and eternal, and bestows upon them that "other sense" called faith, and confers the capacity of communion with the Eternal. When will the Church of Christ adopt this portion of the prayer of Jabez? "Oh that Thou wouldest enlarge my coast!" Too often we hear complaints of demands too numerous, and solicitations that are wearisome. 3. He prays that the hand of God may be with him. The hand that directs, supports, supplies, and chastens us. There can be nothing more delightful to the child of God than the constant recognition of the fact that his Father's hand is pointing out for him the path of life. 4. He would be kept from evil.—"And that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." Now we gain more light on the suggestive name of this man. He was called Jabez—"grief"—and it is evident that he was one of those who grieve over sin. That is the greatest trouble of all good men. Not only from the wiles of Satan and the snares of the world, but from our very selves we require the defence of the Almighty arm. III. THE COMPLETE ANSWER. "God granted him that which he requested." Throughout all Europe we have seen in the Churches the votive garlands and offerings hung by the

superstitious at the shrines from whose patrons their relief is supposed to have come. What a contrast between these tinselled trifles and the rich museum which the Church of God possesses of grateful recollection and adoring praise on the part of those who have prevailed at the throne of grace! He has a treasure of great worth who can rejoice in a distinct answer to prayer. (*W. G. Lewis.*) *The prayer of Jabez*:—We will without any formal divisions simply endeavour to travel through the petitions offered up in this prayer of Jabez. First petition: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me." 1. There are many apparent blessings that are real curses. (1) Health. Its tendency is to remove far away all thoughts of death and eternity; to make a man more or less satisfied with the things of the present; and to draw comfort from the creature instead of the Creator. (2) Money. It shuts up the heart; stiffens pride and becomes a temptation and a snare. (3) The good opinion and praise of men. 2. There are apparent curses which often are real blessings. (1) Ill-health. (2) Poverty. (3) The scourge of the tongue. 3. There are blessings which are both apparent and real. (1) The fear of the Lord. (2) Some intimation of God's favour. (3) The revelation of Christ to the soul. (4) Unreserved trust in God. (5) An appetite after God's Word. Second petition: "And enlarge my coast." A coast means a boundary line, such as divides one territory from another, or terminates a country, as the sea-coast is the boundary of our island. Every quickened soul has a coast—the territory of inward experience—which is limited and bounded by the line that the Holy Spirit has drawn in his conscience. I. Some have a narrow experience, they cannot get beyond doubts and fears, guilt and convictions, with at times earnest desires for mercy and pardon. 2. Others have their coast a little more extended. They are enabled to hope in God's mercy, and anchor in His promises. 3. Others can through faith rest in Christ's blood and righteousness, having received some intimation of favour, but not brought into the liberty of the gospel. 4. Others are brought into the life, light, liberty, joy and peace of the gospel. The living soul cannot but earnestly desire to have his coast enlarged. More light, more life, more liberty, more feeling, more knowledge of God in Christ, more faith, hope, and love. To have his heart enlarged in prayer—meditation—communion, in affection to the people of God. Third petition: "And that Thy hand might be with me." A living child wants to see and feel a fatherly hand with him and over him, going before him temporally, holding him up spiritually, clearing his path, and giving him testimonies that what is done in his fear shall terminate in his approbation. Fourth petition: "And that Thou wouldest keep me from evil." It is a base representation of the gospel of grace to say that it leads to licentiousness. Every child of God will be more or less frequently offering up this prayer. Shun as you would a pestilence any one who makes light of sin. Evil is a grief, a burden to every living soul. (*J. C. Philpot.*) *The prayer of the warrior Jew* (Sermon to children):—In speaking to you about Jabez, I would say these four things and ask you to remember them. I. He was a HUMBLE man. It is beautiful to be humble. All his trust is in God, he looks to Him alone. He reminds us of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 12). II. He was a GREAT man. It is well to be great. III. He was a KIND man. It is better to be kind. He was kind, I think, among other things, in that he loved his mother. IV. He was a GOOD man. It is best of all to be good. (*J. R. MacDuff, D.D.*) *The character and prayer of Jabez*:—I. HIS CHARACTER. "More honourable than his brethren." He was more pious. Piety is honourable. 1. For by "humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life." 2. As it engages us in the most glorious employments. 3. As it interests us in the most glorious privileges. 4. As it interests us in the most glorious rewards. II. HIS PRAYER. Notice—1. The object of his worship—"the God of Israel." He was not an idolater. He was grateful, he remembered God's kindness to Israel. He confided in God's sufficiency. 2. The contents of his prayer, or what he asked. We, like Jabez, ought to—(1) Implore God's covenant blessings—the pardon of sin and conformity of heart and life to God's laws (Heb. viii. 10, 12). These are blessings indeed (Psa. xxxiii. 1-2, lxxxix. 15, 16; James i. 25). (2) Implore enlargement of heart, by the entire subjugation and utter destruction of every evil propensity (Deut. xxxiii. 27; Psa. cxix. 32). (3) Implore God's hand with you, to direct and lead you in all your difficulties (Job xxvii. 11; Heb. viii. 9; Psa. cxxiii. 2); to supply all your wants (Psa. cxiv. 16); to support you under all your trials (Psa. xxxvii. 23-24); and to keep you in all your exercises (Isa. xli. 10). (4) Implore protection from all evil (Matt. vi. 13; Psa. xvii. 7, cxxi. 7; Prov. xix. 23). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Jabez, the "honourable"*:—Some analogies sug-

gested by the sea-coast may teach the following lessons. I. AN ENLARGED "COAST" SUGGESTS AN EXPANDED HORIZON. Our spiritual relations determine whether soul vision command outlook from a small bay, or toward broad ocean. II. AN ENLARGED "COAST" SUGGESTS A BROADER SURFACE. The glory of a coast is its wide sweep of the ocean. Such in figure is the human soul when possessed and enlarged by the Spirit of God. What sublime possibilities of Divine enlargement belongs to the heart of man! III. AN ENLARGED "COAST" SUGGESTS A MORE EXTENDED PATHWAY. Sometimes a narrow strip of land forms the only path when walking on the sea-coast. The enlarged pathway will secure—1. Safety. 2. Peace. (*The Study.*) *The prayer of Jabez*:—The text implies more than it expresses. I. THAT THERE IS A GREAT VARIETY AND DISTINCTION AMONG MEN; some are more and some less honourable. II. THE OFFSPRING OF SORROW MAY BECOME THE PARENT OF JOY. III. THE BEST AND HIGHEST HONOUR ATTACHES TO TRUE RELIGION. IV. Though Jabez (sorrow) is not the direct name of every one, yet sorrow is assuredly the lot of all. V. PRAYER IS THE APPOINTMENT OF GOD; He would have us pray always, and not faint. VI. A BLESSING INDEED WILL BE FOUND TO HAVE THREE PROPERTIES WHICH SERVE TO ENHANCE ITS VALUE. 1. It is given in covenant love. 2. It is well suited. 3. It is abiding. VII. PROTECTION BY THE POWER OF GOD AND PRESERVATION IN HIS WAY ARE MOMENTOUS BENEFITS. VIII. SIN EVER GRIEVES THE HEART OF A GOOD MAN. IX. In regard to property, it is lawful to seek addition and enlargement, if the will and glory of God be duly regarded. X. ANSWERS GRANTED TO PRAYER IN TIME PAST, SHOULD ENCOURAGE US TO RENEW OUR APPLICATION TO THE GOD OF OUR MERCIES. XI. THE HAND OF GOD WITH ANY MAN IS A CERTAIN PLEDGE OF PROSPERITY. XII. WHEN FAITH AND FERVOUR ACCOMPANY OUR PETITIONS, AN ANSWER OF PEACE IS NEAR AT HAND. (*Tract Magazine.*) *The lustre of a good man's character*:—The occurrence of this text in the Book of Chronicles says far more for Jabez than though it had appeared in a list of biographical sketches; as, for instance, in Heb. xi. We see as it were the ancient scribe penning down upon his manuscript one name after another in genealogical order, and with wonted precision; but arriving at this name he is so deeply impressed by the holiness of the man, and the peculiarly consistent character of his life, that when about to enrol his name in the annals of Israel he feels obliged to forget the stern prescriptions of form; and flinging aside under inspiration the proverbial stiffness of the genealogist, he becomes the recorder not merely of a name, but of a saintly character withal, and thus unwittingly confirms the important truth that the good man shines everywhere. (*George Venables.*) *What is God's blessing?*—In the midst of this wilderness of dry names, the dead leaves of a long-gone past, we stumble by chance on a beautiful flower, lovely in form and perfumed with precious and holy sentiment, a perfectly glad surprise amidst the barrenness of mere enumeration. 1. How many and various are the meanings we attach to the word "bless"! In the Bible we find God blessing men, and quite as frequently men blessing God; God blessing man by pouring out upon him physical happiness and physical prosperity; blessing him also by making him righteous and cleansing him from sin. Man, on the other hand, is spoken of as blessing God for His bounty and care, for His holy chastisement, for His merciful forgiveness. Again we have men blessing one another and blessing themselves in the way of self-congratulation. We find the word used likewise in a more formal and superstitious way as though the pronouncing of it would entail its fulfilment and become not only a prophecy but a pledge. Leaving Scripture we notice that the term bless is in common use among ourselves in more senses than one. We speak of persons as blessed with high talents, or with a noble position, blessed with a large family or with good fortune; especially do we regard health as a blessing and in most cases also long life. 2. The meaning of the word "bless" or "blessing" depends on the person who uses the term, depends on his native character, surroundings, training, his self-culture or his entire lack of it, his toilsome struggle after virtue or his shameful familiarity with vice. You may be so debased as to think that God's blessing consists in letting you do exactly as you please, however wicked it may be, without suffering the final consequences of detection, or you may have a nature so lofty as to regard as the best of God's blessings "a clean heart and a right spirit," without which all other of His good gifts would be but curses. 3. The prayer for increased prosperity is perfectly justifiable so long as a man cares most of all to be kept from evil and sin. There is no harm in praying for temporal prosperity, if we feel it to be any real relief to our care and so long as we are ready to take God's answer of "No" as willingly as to receive an answer of "Yes." God's blessing indeed is to be kept

from evil. 4. It is a grand test, ever ready at hand for deciding the most subtle case of conscience, to look whether we can deliberately ask for God's blessing to rest upon it. (*Charles Voysey, B.A.*) *Prayer of the son of sorrow*:—I. THE MATTER OF IT, OR THE THINGS ASKED FOR. 1. He begins by asking God to bless him. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." He would want that blessing on himself personally, on his house, and on all his avocations. He knew that the blessing of God maketh rich; and he knew quite as well that nothing could really and permanently prosper without that blessing. 2. He prays for enlargement. "And enlarge my coast." Both temporal and spiritual. Give me a larger heart; broader views of Thyself, of Thy ways, and of Thy purposes; and a wider sphere of sympathy, influence, and usefulness. "Thou hast enlarged me," says the Psalmist, "when I was in distress." And Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, as to his children, pleadingly entreats, "Be ye also enlarged." It is neither pleasant nor advantageous to be cooped up within narrow bounds. 3. He seeks Divine co-operation. "And that Thine hand may be with me." That Thy power may second and give effect to my poor energies. What can my hand do without Thee? But Thine is the hand that has created and sustains the universe. 4. He implores Divine protection. "And that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." II. THE MANNER OF THIS PRAYER. "And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying," &c. We altogether like the tone and spirit of this prayer. 1. There is the devout reverence of it. "Oh that Thou wouldest." The Divine name is not so much as mentioned. He knew he was coming to the God of Israel, and that He is a great and holy and terrible God. And we can recognise the cry of a heart too full of pious awe to allow His hallowed name to escape the lips of the suppliant. This reverence should characterise all our approaches to God. 2. There is the spiritual wisdom of it. Jabez puts things in their right places; and what was for him the most important thing, first. Nothing could, in his esteem, antedate the blessing of God; hence he will put that first. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed." And was he not perfectly right in this? Did it matter what God gave him if He withheld that blessing from him? 3. There are the speciality and comprehensiveness of it. It takes a wide sweep, and yet does not lose sight of what is most specific and particular. 4. At the same time there is the brevity of it. So specific, so comprehensive, and yet so brief. Assuredly Jabez recognised the solemn fact that God is in heaven, and man upon the earth, and therefore that his words should be few. 5. There is the earnestness of it. "Oh that," &c. It comes directly out of his heart, and breathes the very spirit of desire. 6. There is the faith which inspired it, and which runs through it like a living soul. This man in coming to God believes that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. III. THE SUCCESS OF THIS PRAYER. "And God granted him that which he requested." 1. That he has come to a God who is as ready to give as He is to ask. 2. That he has come to a God who is as comprehensive in His gifts as He is in His desires. 3. That he has come to a God who never forgets His promises to those that seek Him. 4. That he has come to a God who will honour those with His benefactions who honour Him with their confidence and trust. Allow me, then, to propose Jabez to you as an example, and Jabez's prayer as a model prayer. You have the same God to go to, and you have far greater light to guide you to Him than Jabez had. You have all gospel promises to encourage you. You have the new and living way thrown open to you. You have the Holy Spirit to teach and help you. You have the great Advocate to plead for you. (*The Church.*)

Vers. 14, 21, 23. For they were craftsmen . . . that wrought fine linen . . . those that dwelt among plants.—*Craftsmen, potters, &c.*:—If all men affected one and the same trade of life or pleasure or recreation, it were not possible they could live one by another; neither could there be any use of commerce, whereby life is maintained. It is good reason we should make a right use of this gracious dispensation of the Almighty, that we should improve our several dispositions and faculties to the advancing of the common stock, and that we should neither encroach upon each other's profession nor be apt to censure each other's recreation. (*Bishop Hall.*) *Origin and use of arts and inventions*:—I. Useful arts EMANATE FROM THE WISDOM AND GOODNESS OF GOD. II. Useful arts ARE BENEFICIAL IN THEIR TENDENCY. III. Therefore all engaged in useful arts PROMOTE THE WELFARE OF SOCIETY. (*James Wolfendale.*)

Ver. 22. And these are ancient things.—*Ancient things*:—The ancient is no use

except it be also modern. This is the true test of antiquity. Things are not valuable simply because they are ancient; they may be ancient and dead. We have nothing to do with that kind of antiquity—it is the antiquity of mythology, not of history. 1. All the greatest things are ancient. All you can do is to modernise their form. The telegraph is older than the garden of Eden—not under that name: nothing new has been invented, except combination, adaptation; all the elements and factors are as old as—God. 2. Where usefulness is proved antiquity becomes an argument and an illustration. This is the true root and the true use of history. Where usefulness has not been proved, to refer to antiquity is to invoke the sophistical assistance of superstition. We must insist on living usefulness. We must not prop up tottering walls because the copestones are covered with grey moss. This doctrine of the usefulness of antiquity must be applied ruthlessly: (1) To churches. (2) To men. Many men would like to live upon their reputation. It is poor living. You cannot live upon your old prayers; it is the prayer of this morning that fed your soul. Not the feast you had in childhood, but the bread you brake this very dawn is sustaining your frame. (3) To the Bible. Would you burn the Bible? Yes, if it has been superseded, if it has proved itself to be useless, if it can no longer direct men to God, if it has ceased to be the messenger of salvation; but if it contain the living God, if it reveal the living Saviour and breathe the eternal Holy Ghost, then it is not ancient in any sense of obsolescence, it is ancient in the sense of eternity. 3. Antiquity without Christianity dies. Any civilisation that has not in it the living spirit, the living God, dies. What is the proof? History is the elucidation and history is the evidence. Civilisation will be of no use to you when you lose the risen Christ. Non-spiritual civilisation is useless. Look at China—an infinite death—the hermit of the globe—a living extinction. China was printing from type five hundred years before Caxton was born; she had the mariner's compass before England was a nation. There was a time when our forefathers were clothed in sheepskins, when they dyed and painted their whole bodies; and at that time the Chinese were blasting their rocks with gunpowder. Before Daniel saw his visions China had a constitutional government. Then what makes China, this great cipher of the globe, a burden to civilisation? Because its civilisation is only ancient; she has not the Cross. Without that all things tend to decay. Greek—Roman—European civilisation have all gone down in the proportion in which they were not vitally connected with the Cross. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Ver. 23. There they dwelt with the king for his work.**—*With the King for His work*:—(A motto for Sunday school teachers.) Work done well, however common, is accounted worthy of its wage, but work done for royalty generally has some special attraction to commend it. Such a man is privileged by appointment to be purveyor of this or that to her Majesty the Queen; and he takes good care to let us know it. It is published in his shop window. It is painted on his sign over the door. He is, "By appointment to the Queen." Royalty seems to dignify him. Looking at my text I see three or four observations springing from it. I. **OUR KING HAS MANY KINDS OF SERVANTS.** 1. Soldiers. It is their duty to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. 2. Watchmen. 3. Heralds. 4. Scribes. 5. Musicians. 6. Potters. These may supply a very good emblem of Sunday school teachers. The potters take the clay while it is pliable and soft, and put it on the wheel and make the wheel revolve, and then with thumb and finger fashion the clay as it revolves before them. If ever at any time the human mind is plastic it is while the child is young. 7. Gardeners. This is just what a Sunday school teacher should be. He tries to get the plants out from the wild waste and bring them into the "garden walled around." He knows that the Church is the garden of the Lord and he longs to plant many little slips in it. II. **ALL WHO LIVE WITH OUR KING MUST WORK.** I have thought that some of our Church members imagined that the cause of Christ was a coach, and that they were to ride on it, and that they would prefer the box-seat, or else a very comfortable seat in the middle of the coach. But all who live with our King must work. 1. Because He works. 2. Because His company always inspires us with the desire to do something for Him. 3. Because there is so much to do that you cannot help doing something. III. **THOSE THAT WORK FOR OUR KING OUGHT TO LIVE WITH HIM.** 1. That they may gather strength. In the old fable, when Hercules fought with the giant he could not kill him. He flung him down with all his might, but every time the giant got up stronger than before. The old fable said that the earth was the



giant's mother, and every time that he fell he touched her and got new strength from her. So every time a Christian falls on his knees—draws near to God—he gets new strength. 2. To keep up their enthusiasm. 3. That they may be inspired with courage. 4. If they would cultivate the soft grace of patience.

IV. THAT WHICH SHOULD RECONCILE US TO ANY WORK IS, THAT WE ARE WORKING FOR THE KING. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Certain members of the royal household*:—It is a matter of very common occurrence in this world, in forming our estimates of men and things, to ignore altogether the real and constant contributors to success, and to look only at him or them who represent the success. The commander of an ocean steamer is the person whose name is printed, who meets the public eye, and possesses the public confidence; the men who sweat and pant down deep in the ship before the hot and roaring fires, the men who climb the icy rigging, who with stiffening limbs battle with the frozen sails, and watch hour after hour amid cold and darkness for danger, are never thought of. We see the victorious leader of armies surrounded in the hour of triumph by a brilliant staff, while multitudes shout and cheer. How few ever think at such a time of the thousands of silent graves where men lie who paid the costly price of *life* for this hour of their leader's triumph! Because the world judges usually in this way the strong contrast of the text strikes us. The royal household is not alone the king with his victorious generals and stately nobles, but the potters and the dwellers or workers among plants and hedges. Our text teaches us—

I. THAT NONE ARE IGNORED, DESPISED, OR FORGOTTEN IN THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD OF OUR KING BECAUSE OF THE APPARENT INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE POSITION THEY FILL. The work of the Church analogous to that of the potters and hedgers is not in favour. Only a few are willing to do the humble and necessary work of the Church.

II. THAT THE RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF LABOUR OF THE HUMBLE WORKERS IS JUST AS SURE, AND REWARD JUST AS CERTAIN, AS OF THAT WHICH IS MOST PROMINENT. In the service of the King of kings there is no respecting of persons. It is not the position but the work accomplished that obtains consideration from Him. The name of Luther, or even of Paul, is of no account before Him, nor the office of reformer or apostle, only as meaning mighty labour accomplished in and for the Church. The Hudson may be of far more importance to the country because of its deeper channel, broader bosom, than a little brook that meanders through the meadows of some country valley. One is a broad highway, bearing much of the commerce of great States; the other gives grass to the meadows, drink to cattle, and beauty to the landscape; but surely the Hudson is entitled to no more praise for being what it is than the brook for being what it is. No occupation that is right, however mean, can debar us from dwelling with our Lord. We see constantly earthen pots, of very little value in themselves, crowned with the sweetest, the most beautiful, the rarest flowers and plants. Cheap as the red clay is, it is about the only material that could be used. One great value is its cheapness; another is, that plants, with a singular want of taste, would refuse to flourish in pots of silver or gold; their very density and want of porosity render them nearly valueless for this purpose. Just so the very humbleness of work renders some peculiarly fitted to do it. Conclusion: 1. Here we have encouragement for all the Lord's workers, in (1) the satisfaction connected with the doing; (2) in the present beneficent results of the work; (3) in the certain future reward. 2. Here we may find reason for warm sympathy with all the workers of our King. (*Henry W. F. Jones.*) *Working for the King*:—I. HOW WORK LINKS MEN TO KINGS. There are many wrong ideas in the world about labour. Not a few people try to bring up their children without it, and you will see a man toil early and late to make money, getting no enjoyment out of it himself, and when you get at the reason it is that he may make his son a gentleman, which means, someone who can live without work. This is not according to the Divine idea: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It was not for nothing that Christ toiled at the carpenter's bench. If you were to take out of the Bible all the stories of men who worked for their living, you would rob it of its greatest beauty. The men and women who work, whether with brain or hand, or both, are the people who save a nation from ruin. What is a man's religion worth if it does not teach him to labour? Are we not to work out our own salvation, and that for the best of reasons, "It is God that worketh in us." The sunshine and the rain are useless to the fields that have not been tilled. He who has no plough needs not to trouble to sharpen his scythe. Bibles and sermons to the idle are not, cannot be, appreciated, and Sabbaths are but a weariness to the man who does no kind of Christian work. Do not mistake yourself for a Christian because you like some popular

preacher; it is on the same principle that wasps like honey, but they will rather starve than make it. You would not have heard of these men if they had not worked. Their toil has bound up their life with the king's life. Why should you not act so that the story of God cannot be fully told without your name being mentioned? II. **KINGS NEED DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORKERS.** There is a sense in which God needs us and cannot carry out His plans without us. Whatever your talent there is room for you. Not only genius, but dogged drudgery. We want the artist to paint the picture, and the workman to frame it; the author to write the book, and the printer to give it to the world. How true it is that no one man can do all that needs to be done, even with his own gifts. Does the gardener wish to send in a choice rose he has just cut? Does he wish his rose to stand on the king's table? Then he must have the help of the potter. He must have one of his vases. (*Thomas Champness.*)

## CHAPTER V.

**VERS. 1, 2. Now the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel.—Reuben's rights transferred to Joseph:—**This incident is worth dwelling upon, only because it elucidates a special phase of the Divine government. God is not bound by arbitrary laws. Primogeniture can be changed in the court of heaven. Conduct is the only absolute guarantee of real and enduring primogeniture. "Once in grace, always in grace," may be a glorious truth, but everything depends upon what is meant by being "in grace." They are not all Israel that are called Israel. We can only prove that we were once in grace by continually living in grace. Any vital breach in the continuance will throw discredit upon the supposed reality of the origin. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Ver. 2. And of him came the Chief Ruler.—The Chief Ruler:—**I read of "the rulers of the darkness of this world"; "the rulers of synagogues"; the rulers that "set themselves against the Lord and against His Anointed"; but none of them are "Chief." Christ is the "Chief Ruler." I. **HIS APPOINTMENT TO OFFICE** (Prov. viii. 22-31; Psa. ii. 6-9). 1. He rules in the Church. 2. He rules in the hearts of His people. II. **HIS ESSENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR THAT OFFICE.** 1. Infinite wisdom. 2. Invincible power. 3. Order. III. **THE MERCIES UNFOLDED IN IT.** 1. By it is maintained the truth of God. 2. His empire is secured through it. He must rule until every enemy submits (Psa. lxxii. 11; Isa. xi. 7). 3. Triumphs are secured to us and repeatedly realised by our Chief Ruler. (1) Over temptations (1 Cor. x. 13). (2) Over every difficulty in providence (Isa. xlii. 16). (*Joseph Irons.*)

**Ver. 20. And they were helped against them.—Helped:—**We are like William of Orange, with a few followers and an empty purse, making war against the master of half the world with the mines of Peru for a treasury. But like William, too, when questioned concerning our resources, we can reply, "Before we took up this cause we entered into close alliance with the King of kings." (*Sword and Trowel.*)

**Ver. 22. Because the war was of God.—God's war:—**When a man fights against himself, in his lusts, passions, and unauthorised aspirations, he fights a war approved of God, and if he fights that war in the name of God he shall be none other than a victor at the close. When a man fights for the poor, the oppressed, the helpless, he is engaged in a battle over which God holds the banner, and the holding of that banner is the guarantee of triumph. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The war is of God:—*In speaking on temperance principles and trying to help and encourage temperance workers, this story of Bible history will well illustrate our theme. Consider: I. **THE WARRIORS.** 1. They were courageous men—"valiant men," sons of valour as the original has it. 2. They were skilful. 3. They were united. II. **THE WEAPONS WHICH THESE WARRIORS USED.** 1. The buckler. This was a weapon of defence, a small hand shield that was fastened to the wrist or to the hand itself, with which the warriors parried the blows of their enemies. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." 2. The sword. If temperance workers would take the Bible as their sword, they would get on better than with

the wooden swords which so many are inclined to use. 3. Bows and arrows. The spiritual parallel is the "arrow of conviction." III. THEIR WARFARE. It was distinguished—1. By faith. (1) Personal. They trusted in God; we must also have a personal faith in Christ as our Saviour. (2) Also in the power of the gospel to change the hearts and lives of men. 2. By prayer. "They cried to God in the battle." IV. THE VICTORY. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 25. And they transgressed against the God of their fathers.—*The transgressions of the people*:—I. If we turn to the Book of Kings we shall be surprised to find how the fatal sin of Israel was often of an intellectual kind, as distinguished from the baser iniquities which corrupt and overthrow the soul. There were three instances in which the intellectual sins of the people were conspicuous—1. In the worship of the holy places. 2. In adoration of the heavenly bodies. 3. In the practice of magic and divination. There we find nothing of adultery, drunkenness, theft, or licentiousness of any kind. There are sins and sins. One man is simply a sinner of the coarse type, a criminal seen and known of all men and cast out by society; another man sins intellectually—that is to say he mentally deposes God, and more or less secretly endeavours to live without Him, never breaking any of the great social commandments, and thereby forfeiting social confidence, yet all the while committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. In this way men write their own bibles, invent their own deities, banish from the mind all the old orthodoxies, and in hidden vanity walk after the council of their own hearts. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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#### CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 31, 48. And these are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord.—*The ministry of song*:—I. SONG AN ELEMENT OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP. II. SONG AN EXPRESSION OF HUMAN FEELING. III. SONG A POWER FOR WHICH ITS POSSESSORS ARE RESPONSIBLE. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Religious worship*:—I. WORSHIP VARIED IN ITS FORMS. II. LIVELY IN ITS SPIRIT. III. ORDERLY IN ITS METHOD. IV. UNIVERSAL IN ITS PARTICIPATION. (*Ibid.*)

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#### CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1-11. Now the Sons of Issachar were, Tola, and Puah, Jashub, and Shimrom, four.—*Statistics*:—1. Statistics play an important part in Chronicles and in the Old Testament generally. (1) Genealogies and other lists of names. (2) Specifications of subscription lists for the Tabernacle and for Solomon's temple. (3) Census returns and statements as to the number of armies and of the divisions of which they were composed. 2. Biblical statistics are examples in accuracy and thoroughness of information, and recognitions of the more obscure and prosaic manifestations of the higher life. In these and other ways the Bible gives an anticipatory sanction to the exact sciences. 3. Statistics are the only form in which many acts of service can be recognised and recorded. The missionary report can only tell the story of a few striking conversions; it may give the history of the exceptional self-denial in one or two of its subscriptions; for the rest we must be content with tables and subscription-lists. 4. Our chronicler's interest in statistics lays healthy emphasis on the practical character of religion. There is a danger of identifying spiritual force with literary and rhetorical gifts; to recognise the religious value of statistics is the most forcible protest against such identification. The supreme service of the Church in any age is its influence on its own generation, by which it moulds the generation immediately following. That influence can only be estimated by a careful study of all possible information and especially of statistics. 5. The lists in Chronicles are few and meagre compared to the records of Greenwich Observatory or the volumes which contain the data of biology and sociology; but the chronicler becomes, in a certain sense, the forerunner of Darwin, Spencer, and Galton. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*)

Ver. 11. *Fit to go out for war and battle.*—*The need for preparation*:—"Fit to go" is an expression which points to the matter of qualification. Mere age does not make a man fit to sit in the council, or to go forth to battle, or to assume the position of dignity. We must undergo discipline, instruction, mortification. Do not go out until you are qualified. When you are truly qualified you will know the fact by the using of holy impulses, by the pressure as of an invisible hand urging you on in the right way, the way of Divine decree and destiny. To-day should always be a preparation for to-morrow; everything we learn should have in it something more than itself. When the gymnast undergoes his discipline, it is that he may use his acquired strength in other and better directions than mere amusement. Let all eating and drinking, all reading and study, all companionship and travel, have before it a high purpose, a purpose of preparation for battle and race, for conflict and suffering. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Fit for war*:—Genius, say some, is but a capacity for hard work. This is not a whole truth; there must be work in accordance with law. The miner who digs for gold on the seashore will never find it, though he dig ever so laboriously; but if he study gold and the geologic strata in which it lives, he has begun to put himself in harmony with law. Mere work, unless properly directed, is like riding a hobby-horse; there is energy and motion, but no progress. . . . For years Napoleon was living in miniature the battles he was to fight, analysing strategic moves and positions, and training his mind to thus grasp a new situation on the instant. Von Moltke studied the military topography of all Europe, and with marvellous foresight thought out how to win. His victory was no triumph of mere fortune or special inspiration. It was but the logical outcome of his trained mind, and a trained mind ever lights the torch of its own inspiration. Leonardo da Vinci always carried in his girdle his sketch-book in his walks in Florence, constantly looking for picturesque faces. "In the silence of the night," he would counsel himself, "recall the ideas of the things you have studied. Design in your spirit the contours and outlines of the figures you have seen during the day." (*New Science Review.*)

Vers. 21, 22. *Whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew.*—*The massacre of Ephraim's children*:—In the mines of Peru, there are veins of peculiar richness; but the very rubbish is valuable. In the Bible there are passages of peculiar importance, but there is nothing trifling, nothing useless. To be able to extract from the more barren portions of Scripture the instructions they were intended to communicate is a talent which every Christian should cultivate. This passage teaches us—I. THAT THERE IS NO INDIVIDUAL OR SOCIETY SECURE FROM SUDDEN AND SEVERE MISFORTUNE. Oh! it is natural for us, when we are happy, to cherish the thought that we shall continue to be happy. And we may be placed in circumstances in which such an anticipation seems not only natural but reasonable. Our worldly substance may be abundant; our bodily constitution may be sound and strong, promising us a long and healthy life; our children may be growing up around us, with every appearance of being the support and comfort of our declining years. We may enjoy the affection of our friends. Very few persons have ever been so prosperous, or had equal ground to presume on the permanence of their prosperity as Ephraim. We have reason to hope that Ephraim was a good man. He was certainly the son of a very good man. We cannot doubt that his father Joseph gave him a religious education. We know that Ephraim was a wealthy man. It was, indeed, his great wealth that excited the cupidity of these Philistine robbers. It is obvious that he had reached a good old age, and he had gathered around him children and children's children, and the children of children's children. You can easily suppose the good old man retiring to rest happy in his possessions, and happier still in his anticipations, for he had reason to anticipate coming prosperity. God had spoken good of all the descendants of Israel, but of none had He spoken so much good as of Ephraim. In his numerous descendants he probably pleased himself with the thought, that he saw the begun accomplishment of the promise that his seed should become a multitude of nations. But what a fearful and sudden reverse was he destined to experience! This affecting incident reads a lesson to us all. It tells those who are afflicted, "in patience to possess their souls"; and it bids those who are happy, "join trembling with their mirth." It tells those who are in affliction to give God thanks that they have not been afflicted as Ephraim was. We may have been bereaved of much, it may be, but where is any of us that can for a moment compare his bereavements with those of Ephraim? II. THAT THE DISPENSATIONS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE ARE OFTEN

APPARENTLY IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO THE DECLARATIONS OF THE DIVINE PROMISE. It is difficult to conceive a more striking illustration of this general principle than that furnished by the remarkable incident recorded in the passage before us. Ephraim, as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had an interest in all the promises made to his illustrious ancestors. "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth," said Jehovah to Abraham; "as the number of the stars, so shall thy seed be." Ephraim was one of the sons of Joseph, and of course Ephraim had his share in the remarkable blessing that was pronounced on his father. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall." Nor was this all; Ephraim had a share in that blessing which Jacob pronounced on himself, and on his brother Manasseh. When Joseph heard that his father was sick, apparently to death, he went to visit him, and he took along with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob having been told that his son Joseph was coming to see him, strengthened himself, and sat upon his bed. "And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said unto me, Behold I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people," &c. There was more even than this. There was a great peculiarity in the manner in which Jacob pronounced this blessing. He crossed his hands, and laid his right hand on Ephraim, the youngest, and his left hand on Manasseh, the eldest; and when Joseph attempted to alter the position of the old man's hands, he replied, "I know it, my son, I know it," &c. Such was the promise; and in the narrative before us, you see the providence. Can two things be more apparently in direct opposition? Here is a promise that Ephraim shall be more prosperous than all his brethren; and here is a providence that deprives Ephraim at once of all his property, and, as it would seem, of all his children also. Nor is this at all an unparalleled or even an uncommon case, so far as apparent contrariety between the providence and promise of God is concerned. Was it like a fulfilment of a promise made to Israel that Jehovah would give them a good and large land, flowing with milk and honey, to lead them directly into the depths of the Arabian wilderness and keep them wandering there for forty years? Was it like a fulfilment of the promise which God had made to David, that he would make him the ruler of his people, when he drove him from the court of Saul, and exposed him to imminent hazard of his life on the mountains of Israel from the persecutions of his infuriated enemy? I can appeal to the experience of every Christian. Is it not distinctly stated in God's Word that no evil shall happen to the righteous? Is it not distinctly said, what is good God will give His people? Now, I put it to every Christian, if he has not in the course of his life met with much which at the time he could not help thinking evil for him? The reason of this apparent inconsistency of the providence with the promises of God, is by no means that there is a real opposition between them. It is the same God who speaks in His Word that works in His providence—and He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. His Word and His work are really perfectly harmonious; and in many cases those dispensations, which are apparently frustrating the promise are, in reality, fulfilling it. The reason why the promise and the providence of God often seem to us to be at variance, is our ignorance of the extent and of the particular design of the Divine dispensations. If we could see the commencement, and progress, and issue of all God's dispensations, we would gladly say, He is doing all things well, as we shall by and by be constrained to say, He has done all things well. But in the present state this must be a matter of faith, not of sense. It is the Divine appointment, that here we must walk by faith. III. THAT THE DISSOLUTION OF THOSE CONNECTIONS THAT BIND US TOGETHER IN A VARIETY OF RELATIONS IN HUMAN LIFE, OCCASIONS TO ALL RIGHTLY CONSTITUTED MINDS SEVERE SUFFERING AND PERMANENT SORROW. It would be a miserable world—at least I am sure it would not be a happy one—if there were no husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters, relative and friends. That man must be deplorably selfish, who, on reflecting on the various sources of his happiness, does not find social relation and affection one of the most copious. In proportion to the happiness springing from these relations, is the pain that is occasioned when they are dissolved, especially when they are unexpectedly and violently dissolved. Not merely are our friends the proper objects of a much stronger kind of affection than any other species of property; but their loss is of all other earthly losses the most irreparable. Our property, our reputation, our health, may be lost and regained. But a friend whom we have lost by death, we never can bring back again from the grave. (J. Brown, D.D.) *Family sorrow* :—I. THE CAUSE OF SORROW. II. THE

SYMPATHY IN THE SORROW. III. THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE SORROW. 1. Perpetuated in joy. 2. Perpetuated in sorrow. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

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## CHAPTER VIII.

VERB. 1-40. Now Benjamin begat Bela his first-born.—*Readings between the lines*:—I. THAT ALLIANCES OFTEN END IN ENTANGLEMENTS AND ENTAIL UNCONSIDERED CONSEQUENCES. Shaharaim went into Moab and there married a Moabitess, having children of her (ver. 8). The names of his sons (ver. 9) were Moabitish—Mesha (see 2 Kings iii. 4), Malcham (an idol of Moab; see 1 Kings xi. 33 and Jer. xlix. 1, 2). This fact points clearly to the evil influence under which his children came through this matrimonial alliance. If we “make affinity” with those who are not of like mind and like principles with ourselves, we must be prepared for serious spiritual consequences. II. THAT HUMAN ACTIVITY MAY HAVE VERY LONG RESULTS. Shamed, the son of Elpaal, built two cities; one of them was Lod (ver. 12). This is identical with the Lydda of our New Testament (Acts ix. 32), and with the modern Ludd. Here we have an instance of the results of one man’s activity being witnessed more than thirty centuries after he has been gathered to his fathers. Who can say how far down the stream of time our influence will go? III. THAT VIOLENCE IS A BAD FOUNDATION OF REST AND POWER. In ver. 13 we learn that, by a noteworthy coincidence, Beriah with Shema “drove away the inhabitants of Gath.” In the previous chapter (ver. 21) we read that the inhabitants of Gath slew the sons of Ephraim. Truly “they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” Violence seizes on a neighbour’s land, and by violence is itself dispossessed. IV. THAT IT IS WISE TO STAMP BAD THINGS WITH AN EVIL NAME. Esh-baal (ver. 33) is the Ishbosheth of 2 Sam. xi. 21; while Merib-baal (ver. 34) is the Mephibosheth of 2 Sam. iv. 4. In these two cases Baal is turned into Bosheth, which signifies shame. Thus, by a simple name, the heathen deity was branded with public reprobation. The evil thing was made to seem the ugly and offensive thing it was. Nothing can be more perilous to the community than the wrapping up of a sin in some pleasant euphemism; e.g., if a daughter has been sinful she should not be called “unfortunate.” Vice does not lose half its evil by losing all its grossness. If we label sin with a name that passes current in society, we are co-workers with the tempter himself. V. THAT FAITHFUL REMEMBRANCE IN THE DAY OF POWER IS AN EXCELLENT GRACE. The line of Jonathan is traced to many generations (ver. 34, &c.). Is not the hand of David here? Is this not a sign that his vow (1 Sam. xx. 15) was honourably filled? What we promise as we are rising we should scrupulously discharge when we have attained the summit of our desires. It is the mark of a true man to carry out with generous fulness all that he undertook when he was a long way from the goal and the prize. VI. THAT THE THOUGHT OF A WORTHY ANCESTRY IS AN HONOURABLE INDUCEMENT TO WELL-DOING. “These dwelt in Jerusalem” (vers. 28-32). When the captives returned from Babylon there was a lack of men to populate the sacred city. In the country were inviting fields waiting for cultivation, while in the city was danger to be dared and civic duty to be discharged. So that “the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem” (Neh. xi. 2). The fact that their ancestors dwelt in the city would probably operate as a powerful inducement to lead many to offer themselves as citizens, and these would thus be led to serve their country in a very serious crisis. The knowledge of the honourable position taken by our ancestry is a very lawful motive to obedience and aspiration. (*W. Clarkson, B. A.*)

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## CHAPTER IX.

VER. 13. Very able men for the work of the service of the house of God.—*Religious ability*:—We are not called to ecclesiastical statesmanship in this verse; we are called to the kind of work we can do best. There are very able doorkeepers, as well as very able preachers; there are very able administrators, as well as very

able expositors: the one cannot do without the other. What we want in the house of God is ability—that is to say, faculty that can utilise all other men, penetrate into the meaning of all passing events, and tell exactly when work is to be done and when it is not to be attempted. Many are willing who are not able; many are able in nine particulars but fail in the tenth. Sometimes a whole number of talents is thrust away, because one talent—the talent of using the others—is wanting. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Obstructive forces*:—The era to which the statements of the text belong was, like every other era of the militant people of God, one that required men of ability—and it had them. In close connection with these statements, we read of them that they were “men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do”; that they “could order the battle array”; that they were mighty men of valour, “whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains”; and their deeds of personal prowess are stated in detail, showing that they were men of heroic blood and daring and achievement. Brawn and brain and blood stood in good stead in those ages of war and conquest, when the cleavage of swords and the thrust of spears and the might of muscle determined victory. Yet more than even this, does the Cause, in our day, call for. It calls, with profound beseeching, for the faith and the devotion of the majority, nay, of the whole body, of all who love it and love its Lord. After the battle of Solferino, one of the world’s decisive conflicts, when the line of battle extended for fifteen miles, Victor Emanuel concluded his “order of the day” in these words: “Soldiers! in former battles I have often had occasion to mention the names of many among you in the order of the day; this time I put the whole army on the order of the day!” The personal daring and deeds of every man made that battle the most memorable in modern warfare. When our Victor Emanuel can put the whole army in the order of the day the staid and suffering kingdom will come to victory. In our day there are patent obstructive forces to this end.

I. In the first place, we may notice that there is much UNCONSECRATED ABILITY which is due to Christ, but which is withheld from Him. His cause, as we have said, is committed to human instrumentality. He retains His own Divine efficiency in it, but He permits men to advance or to hinder it. Ordinarily, the power of the Church, in a given community, is in the ratio of the human influence and character which are allied to it. If the popular sentiment is decidedly in its favour, if the men and women who are able, intellectually, socially, pecuniarily, are unequivocally and spiritually Christian, the Church is easily progressive and controlling. But if the social leaders are divided in sentiment, and if the two parties are about equal in standing, in intelligence, in business and professional ability and in property, the kingdom is loaded with a serious disadvantage. Men form their opinions under the lead of other men. Social influence is powerful. The young look up to their seniors, to those who have had experience in affairs. The multitude are not independent thinkers and actors. And so, in this state of things, religion contends with odds against it. But human nature is not, of itself, in favour of religion. Human nature is not only unsanctified, but it is depraved. Men run downward naturally. So long as a moiety of those who have influence in the community are arrayed against personal religion, are even not practically and personally in its favour, the drift will be largely away from it. Religion needs the combined influence and example of all worthy people. Those who decline such support oppose an obstructive force to the progress and sway of the kingdom.

II. Not only have we a great amount of this concentrated ability, but that ABILITY which is nominally consecrated to Christ is to a large extent INEFFICIENT. If the Church, such as it is in numbers, in ability, in social standing, were a compact, disciplined, working, spiritual force; if they were individually and collectively, able men for the service of the house of God, there would be the certainty of victory. But plainly it is not so. The nominal body of Christ, taken as a whole, cannot be relied on. The battle array shows a long, thin line, and therefore a weak one. We may take any department of our Christian work, and the report will be the same from each and all. Even public worship has scant attendance. If we should take our measure by the systematic endeavour of the Church to evangelise the parish, the showing, in the aggregate, would be no better. Now this inefficiency of great Churches, strong in numbers and character and resources, is an obstructive force to the progress and acceptance of real religion: it has a depressing influence on the Christian body and a repulsive effect on the world. We can readily see how different the popular impression would be were the whole Church engaged, with interest, with devotion, with the fervour of a passion, in its Christian enterprises.

We are well aware that there are able and consecrated men and women who are faithful. The hope of the kingdom is in them; but the burdens of the kingdom are well-nigh insupportable by them. They need support; they need to-day the efficient aid of all those who are nominally consecrated to Christ. There is still another obstructive force. III. We have to contend with MISDIRECTED ABILITY. It may be consecrated and efficient, but it is unwisely used. It is of the guerilla order: "Self-constituted, or constituted by the call of a single individual; not according to the general law. It consists in its disconnection with the army; it is irregular as to permanence." The semi-secular cause which they have espoused is made supreme. For that public worship is abandoned. The holy sacraments are supplanted by it. The devotional services of the Church are obliged to give way before gatherings for it. Devotion to Christ ranks lower than devotion to the cause. Now, what the Church needs for its efficiency, and what the world needs for its salvation, is the right use of all the misdirected ability of the workers. They should be called in from their petty guerilla undertakings to co-operation with the combined and disciplined army. No obstructive force should hinder the great work or postpone its final triumph. The effort that is now wasted is enough to give success to the one cause. The zeal spent in predatory excursions would insure victory to the Lord's host. IV. Further, in obstructive force is the INFLUENCE OF INCONSISTENCY. The Christian profession is of a strict order. Christian character is definitely marked. Disciples of Christ are separate from sinners. They belong to another kingdom. They should stand in their right and righteousness. They should command the respect and confidence of all other men. They should surround Christ as nobles surround their king. (B. Hart.)

Ver. 22. **And Samuel the seer.**—*Samuel, the prophet of the Lord*:—Samuel was the last of the judges (1 Sam. viii. 4, 5). Samuel was the first of the prophets (Acts iii. 24). I. SAMUEL IN HIS CHILDHOOD. He had a praying mother (1 Sam. i. 26, 27). He had an early call to serve God (1 Sam. ii. 18). He had a special message from the Lord (1 Sam. iii. 8, 9). II. SAMUEL WHEN HE BECAME A MAN. He was the one by whom God spake to the people (1 Sam. iii. 19-21). He was the one by whom God defended the people (1 Sam. vii. 12, 13). He was the one by whom God instructed the people (1 Sam. xii. 23, 24). He was the one by whom God gave a king over the people (1 Sam. x. 24, 25). III. SAMUEL WHEN HE DREW NEAR HIS END. He appealed to the people (1 Sam. xii. 2, 3). He reasoned with the people (1 Sam. xii. 7). He died with the respect of the people (1 Sam. xxv. 1). Lessons: Begin to serve the Lord early. Determine to follow the Lord fully. Be ready to hear the Lord only. Be persuaded to trust the Lord entirely. Samuel as the last of the judges was great. Samuel as the first of the prophets was greater. But for the greatest honour which Samuel had, see Psa. xcix. 6. (*The Clergyman's Magazine*.)

Ver. 27. **And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them.**—*The dominence of duty*:—I. AS TO RECOGNISING THE IMPERATIVENESS OF DUTY. "The charge was upon them." Duty was the absolute and dominant thing to these gate-keepers. So should it be with us. Duty grows out of the relations in which we are placed. 1. Some of these relations are toward God. God puts us where we are. 2. Some of these relations, as with the Levite gate-keepers, are towards God's house. The charge is upon us as Church-members to attend upon, give to, and work for the advancement of the Church to which we belong. 3. Some of these relations are toward our fellow-men. Israel depended on these Levites for certain service. Our family, Church, city, State, nation—all have claims upon us for duty. II. CONCERNING THE IMPORTANCE OF ADJUSTING ONE'S LIFE SO AS TO BE ABLE TO DO DUTY. These Levites "lodged round about the house of God." That is, they so adjusted their arrangements of living that they could do the duty that devolved upon them. They planned for it, provided for its certain accomplishment. III. AS TO SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH DUTY IS PRESENTED TO US. 1. In ways of permanent obligation. In the case of these Levites we are told that the work "pertained" to them. It was a permanent thing, of unchanging obligation. One of the best ways for us to recognise the dominance of duty is by faithfulness in connection with those possibly prosaic, but unchanging and permanent, duties that "pertain" to us. 2. Others come in the way of regular recurrence. "The opening thereof every morning pertained to them." Most of our duties are of this everyday, regular, recurring



kind. 3. Duty is presented to us oftentimes in things apparently trivial. Theirs was the "opening and shutting of the gates." Not apparently a great thing; but it had as close and vital a relation to character as if it had been great. As they did their work, lowly though it seemed, well or ill, they were morally well or ill. To most of us the work God gives does not seem great. But little things can be greatly done. By doing little things faithfully many a life has been made great. (*G. B. F. Hallock, D.D.*)

Vers. 35-44. And in Gibeon dwelt the father of Gibeon.—*Pedigree of Saul*.—In the choice, anointing, and pedigree of Saul, which enter into the history of Israel, notice—1. The condescension of God. 2. The sovereignty of God. 3. The providence of God. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

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## CHAPTER X.

VER. 3. And the battle went sore against Saul.—*The death of Saul*.—Learn I. THAT A SPLENDID BEGINNING MAY HAVE AN AWFUL ENDING. II. THAT DIVINE JUDGMENTS OVERTAKE MEN'S SINS. III. THAT IN NATIONAL CALAMITIES THE GODLY SUFFER WITH THE UNGODLY. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The departure of God, the departure of strength*.—Why was the battle sore against the king of Israel? Saul believes himself to be forsaken of God, and therefore to have become the sport of man. Here we are reminded of the analogy of the vine and the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can the Church make vital and faithful progress, except by continual fellowship with God. Saul was muscular as ever, as ambitious as ever, and as energetic as ever; but he had lost the consciousness of the nearness of the Almighty. What are all church buildings, formularies, ceremonies, pecuniary resources, literary achievements, when the Spirit of God has been grieved or quenched? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *An unblest leader does not necessarily represent an unblest cause*.—Although the battle went sore against Saul, we must not suppose that Saul represented an unblest cause. The reason may be in Saul himself, rather than in the cause for which he fought. Sometimes leaders, captains, and commanders have to be overborne or displaced, in order that the great cause which they fail to grasp, and adequately to represent, may vindicate its own claim to a position of confidence and honour. It does not follow that because a man has been once a leader, that he must be always at the head of the army. Sometimes by the infirmity of old age the very princes of the Church are displaced and put behind. There are some trusts which we only keep as long as we keep our character. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Ver. 4. Draw thy sword, and thrust me through.—*Suicide as illustrated by the case of Saul*.—I. CAUSES.—1. Not merely accumulated misfortune, but long-continued wrongdoing. 2. Cowardly fear of suffering. 3. Caring more for disgrace than for sin. 4. Abandonment of trust of God as to this life and to the future life. II. EFFECTS.—1. Others led by the example into the same folly and sin. 2. Personal dishonour not really prevented. 3. A crowning and lasting reproach to the man's memory. (*J. P. Lange.*)

Vers. 8-10. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul.—*A good beginning with a bad ending*.—Many men begin with influential parentage, social station, ample education, pecuniary competence, yet they travel a downhill road, falling first into neglect and then into oblivion. Physical greatness, social security, public applause are being continually rebuked, humiliated, and put to shame. The proverb wisely says, "Call no man happy until he is dead." The meaning is that at the very best a man may make a slip which will bring his whole life into degradation in every sense of the term. There is but a step between man and death—not physical death only, but the death of character, reputation, and influence. It remains with each man to say whether a good beginning shall have a good ending. This is a question of personal discipline, holy fellowship with God, and an acceptance of all processes which have been divinely established for the training and sanctification of man.

The word comes with special urgency to young persons, to men of influence, to successful men, and to all who are plied by the temptations incident to high station and wide influence. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 13, 14. **So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord.**—*The doom of King Saul*:—We have no right to understand this account of Saul's death as referring to one act of his life. It speaks as well of his general transgression against the Lord. Saul consulted the witch the night before he died; and whether it was his worst offence or no, it was the immediate precursor of his destruction, the last drop which made the cup of vengeance overflow: there remained for him no other recorded act of sin before his self-murder. Look well to the next sin you are tempted to commit. It may be your last act. If indulged it may prove a step on the road to destruction from which there is no receding. Was Saul a man who lived and died without repentance? In one sense—the highest sense of repentance—he was; in another he was not. The repentance which God acknowledges is not momentary sorrow or good resolutions, soon repented of in the wrong direction; it is that thorough change of heart which works in us the steadiness of real Christian principle; which makes us, who have been baptized and reared as Christians, to love the Lord Jesus Christ above all things; to hold His favour dearer than life itself; and to have no stronger desire than that our thoughts, feelings, life may be conformed to His will. Such a change the history leads us to believe King Saul never knew. After his first interview with Samuel, we read that “God gave him another heart.” But his after-life shows that this change was not an abiding change. Sin springing up, reckless self-indulgence, blighted and destroyed feelings of good which gave such hopeful promise at first. The true change of heart must be abiding. Look at the recorded acts by which Saul grieved God's Spirit. 1. His sacrificing to the Lord (1 Sam. xiii. 9). Self-will was at the root of this act—that self-will which poisoned all Saul's after-life. 2. The rash vow by which he forbade the people to taste any food (1 Sam. xiv. 24). This showed the same unchecked impetuosity, reckless in its self-willed way of honouring God. 3. His sparing the Amalekites (1 Sam. xv. 9). These earlier acts of Saul's rebellion were but the precursors of what was worse. 4. His yielding himself up to the one master passion of envy (1 Sam. xviii. 7-9). The king obviously is lost now, and there is no compunction, for he cherishes his sin. 5. The atrocious massacre of the priests (1 Sam. xxii. 17, 18). And now his own life hurries to its miserable close. He feels that he is deserted of God, and that nothing prospers with him. Forsaken of God? Why? Because of unrepented sin. No wonder that the degraded king seeks death by his own hand, when life has become intolerable. Read here the melancholy end of the self-will and evil passions long indulged, till the soul becomes their slave, and all hope is gone, and God with it. The reckless self-willed life must lead to a death without hope. (*Bp. Archibald Campbell.*) **And also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit.**—*Saul inquiring of the enchantress*:—Thus perished one who entered with fair promise on an arduous office, and gave indications of capacities and dispositions which seemed to ensure a prosperous career. But “the root of the matter” was not in Saul; he had not been renewed in the spirit of his mind, and therefore was he unable to bear himself meekly in greatness, and gave way to an arrogant and impetuous temper, forgetting that “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” Thus was he turned into a wild and desperate man, sparing not in his rage the priests of God, and calling to his aid enchantments and sorcery. So that at length it came to pass that Saul died for his transgressions against the word of the Lord—for asking counsel of one who had a familiar spirit. There are many important lessons that might be drawn from the history thus briefly reviewed. I. You are carefully to observe THAT SAUL, WHO HERE HAD RECOURSE TO WITCHCRAFT, HAD BEFORE TAKEN MEASURES, VIGOROUS MEASURES, FOR EXTERMINATING WITCHCRAFT; and it was at once a proof that he was far gone in iniquity, and an evidence that his ruin came on apace, when he could thus become the patron of a sin of which he had before been the opponent. There is no greater moral peril than that which surrounds an individual who, after he has given up a sinful practice, again betakes himself to it. “The last state of that man is worse than the first.” We cannot doubt of numbers amongst you, that they have had, and still have, their seasons of spiritual disquietude, when, obeying a mighty impulse, which is not of this earth, they break away from associations and customs which they feel to be injurious, and become, if not

altogether, yet almost, Christians. Now our business with such is to announce to them their immeasurable peril, if, after being convinced of the sinfulness of a practice, and proving their conviction by temporary abstinence, they again indulge in what they profess to forsake. To resume a renounced habit is to give tenfold energy to the tyranny from which you broke loose. Are you then scared by the visit of Saul to the sorceress? do you marvel at the infatuation of the monarch as you mark him, under cover of the night, stealthily approaching the scene of foul arts and unhallowed incantations? are you ready with the sentence of stern condemnation, prepared to find Saul given over to destruction, now that you behold him tampering with witchcraft, and seeking to invade the repose of the dead? But what, after all, is the king of Israel doing, but that with which yourselves may be justly charged? He is only returning to that which he had forsaken; and the worst feature in his case (the worst, because it proves a seared conscience, and the absence of deep-wrought impressions) is just that with which your own conduct is marked—the seeking comfort where you had detected sin. If a man have felt the evil of covetousness, for example, and if he have set himself vigorously against the love of money, and if, after a while, he yield himself once more to the passion for gold, what is he, if he returns to the dominion of avarice, but Saul hurrying to the cave of the enchantress? He was originally beguiled by the witchery of money, and he escaped from the witchery; and now he is again giving himself up to that witchery. If a man have been the slave of his appetites, and if he have felt the degradation, and acted on the resolve of “keeping under the body,” and if he then plunge back into sensuality, what is he, if he allow his passions to re-assume the lost sovereignty, but Saul consorting with the wizard? He was originally under the spell of voluptuousness, and he broke that spell; and now is again weaving that spell. If a man have lived in utter carelessness with regard to another world, and if he have been stirred from his insensibility, so that he have set himself in good earnest to the making provision for death and for judgment; and if, after awhile, he relapse into moral apathy, what is he, as he goes back to his stupor, but Saul seeking out a woman with a familiar spirit? Observe, we entreat of you, that it was not until Saul had consulted God, and God had refused to answer him by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets, that he took the fatal resolve of applying to the necromancer. We fear for those of you on whose minds some serious impressions may have been wrought, and who have been made uneasy as to their spiritual condition, lest, not finding much comfort in religion, they should seek it once more in the world. Men are apt to forget, when roused to anxiety as to the soul, how long they have made God wait for them, and how justly, therefore, they might expect that the peace and happiness of the gospel will not be imparted at the first moment they are sought; and then there is great danger of their being quickly wearied, and turning to other and worthless sources of comfort. They have consulted God, and they have received no answer, “whether by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets”; and therefore they seek peace in earthly fascinations, and strive to lull the conscience by enchantments of the sorceress. Oh! if there be any amongst you who, in order to get rid of uneasy thoughts about their souls, would bury themselves in the occupations and pleasures of the world, we stand here to arrest them in their fatal determination. II. THERE IS SOMETHING VERY TOUCHING IN THE FACT THAT IT WAS SAMUEL WHOM SAUL DESIRED THE WITCH TO CALL UP. Samuel had boldly reproved Saul, and, as it would appear, offended him by his faithfulness. And yet Saul said, “Bring up Samuel.” And herein is an instance of what frequently occurs. How many who have despised the advice of a father or a mother, and grieved their parents by opposition and disobedience, long bitterly to bring them back, when they have gone down to the grave, that they may have the benefit of the counsel which they once slighted and scorned! If they could go to the necromancer in the hour of their distress, it would not be, “Bring me up the companion who cheered me in my gaieties, who was with me at the revel, and the dance, and the public show,” but “Bring me up the father, with his grey hairs, who solemnly told me that ‘the way of transgressors was hard’; or the mother who, with weeping eyes and broken voice, admonished me against sinful indulgences.” Yet if you neglect the Lord, and continue to resist the strivings of His Spirit, so that at length He departs from you as He departed from Saul, what would it avail that the grave should give up its inhabitants—that the parent, or the friend, or the minister should return at your bidding? The father or the mother could only say, “Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up? and wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord has

departed from thee, and become thine enemy?" And thus also is it with your minister. He has reprov'd and admonish'd you week by week, and year after year, and you have been either indifferent to his pleadings, or offended at their urgency. And then he dies; and you are, perhaps, almost pleas'd to be freed from his pointed remonstrances. But you may think of him again when you feel that this world is slipping from your grasp, and you have not laid hold on eternal life. You shall have your wish. "An old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle." But what can you expect to hear from his lips? Your wretchedness is of your own making. If you have no hope, it is because God hath call'd a thousand times and you would not answer. If you are oppress'd with terror, it is because Christ hath entreated you for many years to receive pardon through His blood; and you have set at nought the Mediator. What then, shall the minister say to you, when you exclaim with Saul, "I am sore distress'd, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams"? what shall he say to you if not what Samuel said to Saul—"Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up? Wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Saul's declension*:—I. THE POSSIBILITY THAT A MAN MAY FALL FROM SPIRITUAL COMMUNION WITH THE DIVINE AND INVISIBLE. II. THE RAPIDITY WITH WHICH A MAN MAY FALL FROM THE HIGHEST EMINENCE. III. THE CERTAINTY THAT ONE DAY THE IMPENITENT WILL WANT THEIR OLD TEACHERS. (*City Temple.*)

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## CHAPTER XI.

**VER. 9.** So David waxed greater and greater; for the Lord of hosts was with him.—*David's prosperity*:—I. GOD IS THE TRUE SOURCE OF PROSPERITY. II. GOD DETERMINES THE REAL NATURE OF PROSPERITY. III. GOD FIXES THE EXACT TIME OF PROSPERITY. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *God's favour helpful to prosperity*:—When I resided in a wooded part of Scotland, I used to notice that the trees nearest the light at the edge of a dense forest had larger branches than those in the interior, and that the same tree would throw out a long branch towards the light and a short one towards the dark recess of the forest. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*) *God's blessing is necessary to prosperity*:—If we turn to Him, and become recipients of His grace, then will our talents and faculties develop, and be used in the right direction.

**Vers. 15–19.** Now three of the thirty captains went down to the rock to David.—*The water of the well of Bethlehem*:—This incident, although it rests upon a basis of conspicuous bravery, evidently owes its cardinal importance to far deeper considerations. Some might be tempted to think that David's conduct in pouring out the water was fantastic and wasteful—an ill-timed intrusion of a poetic sentiment on the stern realities of life. On the contrary his conduct is penetrated with the sense of the value of life, with deep appreciation of heroism and with a high-minded shrinking from any mean appropriation of the unselfish devotion of his fellow-men. Some lives there are that whatever is done for them are never thrilled by any self-abasing surprise; no sacrifice is above their merit—their bottomless egotism could swallow worlds. I. THE BASE ACCEPTANCE OF THE INCALCULABLE RISKS AND TOILS AND SORROWS OF OTHER MEN is to be noted in—1. Those in whom is developed the undue love of command and the imperious appetite for personal distinction. The monarchs of the older world who remorselessly sacrificed blood and treasure to build themselves impregnable cities, or to erect stately sepulchres. The Eastern chieftain who bade his warrior take the needless death-leap. Napoleon Bonaparte. 2. In those simply selfish ones who have not yet risen high enough to afford themselves the luxury of tyranny. Their maxim is "Everybody for himself." I have heard of a farmer, whose parcel of ground one might ride round in a couple of hours, express an eager desire for a war between two great powers, since it would probably enrich him. Merchants and millowners have not been free from such wishes. All this is to batten on flesh and blood. 3. In the indifferent many of us are like the receivers of stolen property, only too satisfied to receive and to ask no questions. We expect all the machinery of our life to work with regularity, but are

coldly indifferent to the means. Let us learn from David a view of life diviner and therefore more humane. II. THINK OF THE HEROIC WATER-FETCHING THAT LIES BEHIND OUR OWN LIFE. 1. Historically. Whole civilisations lie behind us; the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman—each has contributed its quota and we inherit the best of each. Do we reflect, with sufficient gratitude to God and man, on that costly part of which we are—the result? 2. The present day. Our life is enriched by the multitudinous toil of those who remain unknown, and often scantily rewarded. David's words are not without meaning to us under existing social conditions. 3. Let us step on to more personal ground. (1) Some of us are where we are through the wonderful devotion of our parents. (2) Some of us, later on in life, have been saved by the generous resolve and clinging faithfulness of those whom it cost a great effort to befriend us. III. WHAT DOES DAVID'S VIEW LEAD US TO? 1. Solemn thoughtfulness. What are we that all this should have been done for us? We ought to learn reverence for that majesty of history which the children of the market-place deride. We ought to view our privileges with a more anxious sense of responsibility. 2. The acceptance of such services as have been referred to is inevitable, for we cannot unmake history or sever ourselves from the complex influences of the present order of society. But what *does* rest in every man's power is to form his own estimate of the value of such services and to decide what use their sacred splendour or gentle unselfishness urge him to put them to. 3. The impulse to self-abnegation which we see in David. This is the practical tendency of all such lives and deeds. The legend of Curtius, self-devoted that he might save the State, may have been simply a concrete personification of the general patriotism of early Rome; but it gave memorable impulses to later generations. It was not absent from the mind of Regulus; it helped to cheer the Roman legions in Parthia and Persia and amid the German swamps and forests. God has set our lives in a framework of noble and unceasing sacrifice. In this old Jewish story we have a significant though undesigned illustration of the transcendent sacrifice of Christ. He has brought us the true "living water." (*T. Rhys Evans.*) *Jashobeam, and courageous companions*:—It was just like David with his intense nature to speak and act in the way recorded in these verses. Just as an Italian in a northern region longs for the fruits and blue skies of his own land, so David longed for the water. We have here—I. A MANIFESTATION OF DEVOTED LOYALTY. What ought we to venture for our King Jesus? II. HIGH APPRECIATION OF SERVICE. David pours it out before the Lord as the only One who is worthy to receive so great a sacrifice. Some might blame him for appearing to throw a slight on the act of the brave men—judicious waste. Some had indignation when the woman broke the alabaster box of ointment over Christ's feet; but He looked at it in another light—He approved that loving, loyal, lavish "waste." Only selfish souls could be indifferent to the lives of others. His act was not like that of the Pasha in the Russo-Turkish war who, when English doctors went to him at a great cost, eager to help the wounded Turkish soldiers, repulsed them and firmly declined to receive their services. What ought to be our feeling towards our King who has broken through the ranks of evil, to gain for us the water of Life? (*F. Hastings.*) *Longing for the associations of childhood*:—There are times in life when our childhood comes up with new meaning and with new appeal. We long for the old homestead, for the mountains which girdled us round in early life, for the friends who heard our first speech and answered our first desires; we want to leave the far country and go home again, and, forgetting all the burden of the past, start life with all that is richest in experience. Any water would have quenched David's thirst, but there are times when mere necessities are not enough; we must have the subtle touch, the mysterious association, the romantic impulse, all the poetry of life. In our spiritual life we cannot be satisfied with great conceptions, brilliant thoughts, miracles of genius, words employed by the tongue of the master; we need a tone, a look, a touch, a peculiar and distinctive something which belongs to the very root and core of life, being charged with a poetry and a force all its own. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Water poured out as a libation*:—Some years ago in the State House of Georgia, at Atlanta, this scene occurred: A coloured minister, standing in the State House, said he was thirsty, and he was looking for something to drink. A white gentleman standing by, said, "I'll get you a drink," and departed from the room. As the white gentleman was coming back with a glass of water for this black clergyman some one said to the clergyman, "Do you know who that is who is bringing you a glass of water?" "No! who is it?" "That is Governor Colquitt." Then the black man took the glass of water and said, "Thank you, Governor, but I cannot drink this under such

circumstances," and he poured it on the floor, saying: "I pour this out as a libation on the altar of Christian feeling between the two races." Dramatic? Yes, but Christian. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) A modern hero:—A window in the chapel of the Lichfield Cathedral has a special meaning. It is one of several windows presented by the officers and men who had served in New Zealand during the Maori War, in token of their gratitude for Bishop Selwyn's attention to their welfare in that campaign. It is a medallion depicting David in the act of pouring out the longed-for "water of the well of Bethlehem," procured for him by "the three mighty men" at the risk of their lives. This medallion commemorates the similar heroic action of a Christian Maori who had been a pupil of Dr. Selwyn's when he was Bishop of New Zealand. This Maori, Henere Taratoa, when the war broke out, felt bound to join his tribe. He was placed in charge of a fortified village known as the formidable "Gate Pa." The British troops stormed the *pa*, and were repulsed with great slaughter. Several wounded officers were left inside the village, and one of them feebly moaned for water. There was no water to be had, the nearest being within the British lines. At night this young Christian Maori crept down, at the risk of his life, within the line of English sentries, filled a vessel with water, and carried it back to the *pa* to refresh his dying enemy's lips. The next day the British again stormed the place, and Henere was killed. On his person was found the text of Holy Scripture which had suggested the deed: "If thine enemy thirst, give him drink!" (*Sunday Companion.*) *Self-forgetfulness*:—That which especially distinguishes a high order of man from a low order of man—that which constitutes human goodness, human nobleness—is surely not the degree of enlightenment with which men pursue their own advantage; but it is self-forgetfulness, it is self-sacrifice, it is the disregard of personal pleasure and personal indulgence, personal advantages remote or present. (*A. Froude.*)

Ver. 22. The son of a valiant man of Kabzeel.—*Valiant men*:—If we are to expect the virtues of the fathers repeated in the sons, what wonderful progress the ages ought to have seen? It is a marvellous fact that whatever a father may be able to bequeath to his children he is unable to give them the information which he himself has acquired. Every man must learn the alphabet for himself. Some degree of mental force may be traceable to heredity, and unquestionably it is so; at the same time that mental force is to be exercised by its owner on quite independent grounds. We cannot live long on the reputation of our fathers. A curious law of recession seems to operate on the progress of mankind. The son of Aristotle is not Aristotle *plus*; he may indeed be Aristotle *minus* in an alarming degree, quite an indifferent figure, an incapable person, a living irony upon the greatness of the father to whom he belongs; yet in the next generation there may be a distinct advance, and even the original greatness may be transcended. We must never forget the responsibility of having a great father. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 23. And he slew an Egyptian.—*The spiritual slaughter*:—We too are called upon to slay, to destroy and to overthrow. Are we anxious to slay a lion? 1. There is a lion to be fought by every man—Satan (1 Pet. v. 8). We are called upon to fight against—2. Self-indulgence. 3. Worldly fashion. 4. Worldly ambition. Truly there is battle enough now to be done. Whosoever will set himself against the customs of his time, the popular policies of the circle in which he moves, the prejudices of the persons whose friendship he values, will find that he must have a sword in his right hand, and that even whilst he sleeps he must have his armour so near that at a moment's notice he can be once more in the fray. (*Ibid.*)

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## CHAPTER XII.

VER. 1. Now these are they that came to David to Ziklag.—*Good men centres of lawful activity*:—The good and the great draw others after them; they lighten and lift up all who are within reach of their influence. They are so many living centres of beneficent activity. Let a man of energetic and upright character be appointed to a position of trust and authority, and all who serve under him become, as it were, conscious of an increase of power. (*S. Smiles.*)

Vers. 8-15. **And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David.**—*David and his volunteers*:—David, compelled to flee from his own country, and to hide himself from the malice of Saul, was eminently a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the days when He dwelt here among men, was despised and rejected of men. All who would repair to Him must go forth likewise, bearing His reproach. These eleven Gadites—all of them remarkable men—espoused the cause of David when he was in his very worst condition; they left the ease and comfort, the honours and emoluments, of their own home to associate themselves with him when he was regarded as an outlaw under the ban of society. And to this day every Christian who is faithful to his profession must separate himself from his fellow-men to be a follower of the despised Jesus. I. **THE LEADER, WHOM WE REGARD AS A TYPE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,** was David, the son of Jesse; and in tracing out some points of analogy we begin by noticing—1. That, like David, our Lord was anointed of God to be the leader of His people. It is an honour to follow one who has the highest sanction of heaven in taking the command and exercising the authority that pertains to him. 2. Jesus was like David, too, in that He was personally fit to be a leader. David, alike by his character and his deeds of prowess, had become the foremost man of his times. So our blessed Lord, as to His person, is just such a King as one might desire to obey; and, as for His achievements, O tell what His arm hath done—what spoils from death His right hand won! Let His fame be spread over all the earth! He stood in the gap when there was none to help. He vanquished the foe who threatened our destruction. 3. But our Lord, though anointed of God and meriting the distinction which He gained, was, nevertheless, like David, rejected of men. So the seed of the serpent hates the seed of the woman. But notwithstanding the pains and penalties they incurred in those dark days, the really good and pious people in Israel rallied to the standard of David. I know it is said that those who were in debt and discontented came to David. That is quite true; and well it typifies the abject condition of those poor sinners who come to Christ for refuge; but many of those Israelites were reduced in circumstances and brought into debt through the bad government of Saul. There was with David, Abiathar the high priest. With David likewise there was Gad the prophet. Does not the like thing happen among those who ally themselves with the Son of David at this day? Although He whom we worship is despised and rejected of men, yet unto you who believe He is precious. We need not be ashamed to side with Jesus, for we shall be in good company. 4. Despised as David was among men, yet, being anointed of God, his cause in the end was successful. He did come to the throne; and so it is with our Lord Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding all the opposition that still rages against His cause, it must prosper and prevail. II. Having thus drawn your attention to the Leader, whom David the son of Jesse prefigured, let me turn now to speak a little of those who gathered round Him and enlisted in His service. The recruits who came to David were eleven in number. The first characteristic we read about them is that they were separated. “Of the Gadites, there separated themselves unto David” eleven persons. 1. They were separated. Observe that. They separated themselves. They seem to have been captains of the militia of their tribe. The very least among them was over a hundred, and the greatest over a thousand. But they separated themselves from their commands over their tribes—separated themselves from their brethren and their kinsfolk. I daresay many of their friends said to them, “Why, what fools you are! You must be mad to espouse the cause of a fellow like David!” and then they would call David all manner of foul, opprobrious names. In these times it is most important that every one who is a Christian should understand that he must separate himself from the world. Ye cannot serve Christ and the world too. You cannot be of the world and of Christ’s Church. It is in his intercourse with the world that the Christian shows the moral force of his character. There it comes out because it cannot be hid. If his trade has become used to tricks and stratagems which will not bear the light, he cannot conform to them; he will shrink from them with abhorrence: he must keep a clean conscience. 2. But observe that these people separated themselves unto David. You may separate yourself and not separate yourself unto Christ; and if not, you only change from one form of worldly-mindedness to another. We are not to separate ourselves unto self-righteousness, or unto affectation, or unto a sect, but unto Christ. These people got away from their friends that they might get to David. We are to get away from the world that we may get closer to Christ. 3. And then, as you read that they separated themselves unto David in the

wilderness, let me entreat you to ask yourselves if you are ready to take part with a rejected, crucified Christ. Tens of thousands would separate themselves to David if he were in Hebron on the throne of Israel. If the truth should lead us down into the hovel, where we could only associate with the very lowest of the low, if they were the Lord's people, they should be our delight. 4. Note, next, about these men that they were men of might. It is said of them that they were men of might, whose faces were like faces of lions, and they were as swift as the roes upon the mountains. All that came to David were not like that. David had some women and children to protect, but he was glad to receive others that were men of might. Now there came to Jesus, the greater David in His day, the weak ones of the flock, and He never rejected them. He was glad to receive even the feeblest; but there did come to our Lord and Master eleven men who, by His grace, were like these Gadites. Truly, I may say of His apostles, after our Divine Lord had filled them with His Spirit, that they had faces like lions and feet like hinds' feet, so swift were they for service and so strong for combat. The grace of God can make us brave as lions, so that wherever we are we can hold our own, or rather can hold our Lord's truth, and never blush nor be ashamed to speak a good word for Him at all times. 5. But it is worth noticing that they were men of war, inured to discipline—men fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler. Now there are some men of might who do not seem to be good men of war, because they cannot keep rank. What exploits they may do they must needs do alone, for they cannot march with the army. There are some brethren I know who are most excellent people as individuals, but they seem never to be meant to march in the ranks; they must every one of them lead, they cannot be second to anybody; neither can they be under any discipline or rule. 5. These Gadites likewise furnish us with a noble example of strong resolution. When the eleven men determined to join David they were living the other side of a deep river, which at that season of the year had overflowed its banks, so that it was extremely deep and broad. But they were not to be kept from joining David, when he wanted them, by the river. They swam through the river that they might come to David. Do you stand back and shrink from avowing your attachment to the standard of God's anointed because it would involve loss of reputation, displeasure of friends, the frowns of your associates in the world, or the heartbreaks of anguish of those you tenderly love? Know, then, that our Lord is worthy of all the troubles you incur, and all the risks you run; and be assured that the peace which a soul enjoys that once joins Christ in the hold, and abides with Him in the wilderness, well repays a man for all that he has to part with in getting to his Lord and Master. Now, it would appear that after they had got across the river they were attacked, but we are told that they put to flight all them of the valleys, both toward the east and toward the west. O ye that love the Lord and Master, I beseech you in this evil day, this day of blasphemy and rebuke, stand not back: be not craven. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Fitness for service*:—The secret of success religiously is precisely the same as the secret of success in ordinary things. Look at the splendid qualities that go to the making of a successful housebreaker. Audacity, resource, secrecy, promptitude, persistence, skill of hand, and a hundred others, are put into play before a man can break into your back kitchen and steal your goods. Look at the qualities that go to the making of a successful amuser of people. Men will spend endless time and pains, and devote concentration, persistence, self-denial, diligence to learning how to play upon some instrument, how to swing upon a trapeze, how to twist themselves into abnormal contortions. Jugglers and fiddlers, and circus-riders and dancers, and people of that sort, spend far more time upon efforts to perfect themselves in their profession than ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians do to make themselves true followers of Jesus Christ. They know that nothing is to be got without working for it, and there is nothing to be got in the Christian life without working for it any more than in any other. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Vers. 16, 18. **And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David.**—*Recruits for King Jesus*:—I want to run a parallel between the case of David and that of our Lord Jesus Christ. I. **HERE IS A VERY COMMENDABLE EXAMPLE.** Many of these men of Judah and Benjamin went to join themselves to David. 1. Because they had heard that he was the Lord's anointed. If Jesus be God's anointed, let Him be your beloved. 2. Because of his personal excellences. 3. Because he was so misrepresented and abused by his enemies. 4. Because they



believed that he had a great future before him. II. A CAUTIOUS INQUIRY. See what David said to them. 1. He set before them the right way. He said, "If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you." Here are three questions—(1) Do you come to Christ and accept Him? (2) Do you come with a desire to maintain peace among your Christian brethren? (3) Do you come with the intent of helping the Lord Jesus Christ to spread abroad His truth? 2. He set before them the wrong way: "But if ye be come to betray me to my enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it." Some betray the Lord Christ to His enemies—1. By giving up the doctrines of the gospel. 2. By their inconsistent lives. 3. By apostasy. III. A CORDIAL ENLISTMENT. "Thine are we, David, and on thy side," &c. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *David and his helpers*:—Man is not an independent being. He is dependent for his life, his thought, his feeling—dependent upon God his Creator and his Preserver. He is dependent for the comforts and conveniences of life—dependent upon his fellow-men. And he that seems perhaps to be the most independent amongst us, is after all the most dependent upon his fellows. Man was never made to be independent here. He was never made to be alone. Some such circumstances as these gave rise to the peculiar position of the son of Jesse, as we read of him in the text. David was then combating against a twofold enemy—Saul, the king, his predecessor in office, and the Philistines, the hereditary foes of Israel. Let us mark the concurrent circumstances of these times. David's cause was not the winning side when these secessions broke off from the strength of Saul and attached themselves to the cause of the son of Jesse. He was as yet in point of numbers and of strength in a very small minority. He was not in power; and, so far as human appearances went, he was very far from power. Every appearance was against him. He himself, though the captain of a band, was a fugitive. And Saul was in power, for Saul was king. David is possessed of but scanty resources, but Saul can command the ways and the means and the supplies of a kingdom. And yet these men come, and they volunteer their services to the son of Jesse. They came not to the throne of one that rules, but they came to the cave of one that hides himself. No marvel that David should have suspected their proper aim, and should have inquired, inquisitively, as to the motive of their coming, as to the object of their visit in this the day of his distress and of his darkness. And this accounts for his inquiry in the verse preceding my text. We would learn from this text the value and the estimate to be set upon Christian co-operation. The downcast and the down-trodden may be rallied by a sympathising word, and may be aroused; and thus arise to his work and to his labour from the very consciousness that he is not altogether alone. Christian co-operation was given to Elijah. The assurance that God one day gave the Tishbite, that there were still seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal, mightily reassured the prophet. And when we come to inquire into the circumstances of this case a little further, respecting David, we are enabled to find out what was the kind of help, the quality of the help that he obtained. This may be judged of by considering the time in which the help was vouchsafed. As I have said, it was not in the time of his prosperity, but it was some time anterior to that, and in the time of his greatest adversity. Now, it is a law, or axiom, a practical law, that those men are most to be trusted in prosperity that have stood the firmest in the day of adversity. And verily, in practice, these men receive the reward of their fidelity. These men came and chose not the winning side; but there was a mark about even that declining interest—"Thy God helpeth thee." That decided the question. If God be for David, what can Saul do against him? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" God is not forgetful of your work and labour of love which you have showed toward His name. Mark, for instance, His twelve—His chosen ones. They had attached themselves to the person of the lowly Jesus, when there was no mark of distinction, of royalty, of kingly power: at His call they obeyed. Never were there purer days in the Christian faith than when the Christian faith was persecuted. Thus was it with David's auxiliaries: they looked not to the present adversity, but to the future glory. "Thy God helpeth thee," was sufficient as an indication of what would be. These were powerful men. Their "faces were like the faces of lions"; bold as a lion; "and they were as swift as the roes upon the mountains." They were able to ford the depths of Jordan at its full, and in its overflowing, and to rout their enemies to the east and to the west. Truly, with such auxiliaries, David might well thank God, and take courage. **But this was not all.** His hopes begin to brighten, his prospects begin to look up.

Day after day added its gradual increase to his army, until by and by it became a mighty host like unto "the host of God." That is what the Scripture says. Each tribe sent its proportion. Thousands, tens of thousands, flocked to the standard of David, and enlisted in defence of the cause of the son of Jesse, until well-nigh half a million of men may be counted, from the enumeration of our context, as having resorted to his cause. This, from beginnings small, but good; this, from incipient stages scanty, yet hopeful. And all these men are well spoken of. They were "mighty men of valour"; they were "ready armed"; they were "famous throughout the house of their fathers"; they were no anonymous helpers, but it is said they were "expressed by name to come and make David king." And the value of that help was great because it was a right hearty help—such a help as we need, such a help as is indispensable if we are to be helped at all. We want no half-hearted men, but we want men of God—they are the best, they are the surest, they are the safest, they are the most and the longest to be depended upon. Our experience of human helpers has been a chequered experience. Some that began with us have not continued; some from whom we expected much, perhaps, have broken down midway, departed from us, and went not with us to the work; some that promised nothing, and from whom we expected nothing, have been the most ready, and have been the foremost to come and say, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers." (*R. Maquire, M.A.*) *Fitness for the service of the great King:—* I. INTELLIGENCE is required. II. COURAGE is required. III. UNITY is required. IV. ENTHUSIASM is required. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

**Ver. 22. Until it was a great host.—The accumulation of power:—**It seems quite possible in the presence of this incident to find an easy statement of the law of the accumulation of power. The law may be stated thus: Persistent action in one direction brings, after a time, surprisingly added power for further action in that direction. Consider this—1. In the accumulation of property. 2. As to the formation of habits. 3. As to increase in intellectual force. 4. As to advancing power in the spiritual life. Lessons: 1. Be careful of the day. Day by day, because he day by day had been the man he was, they gathered to David. Especially towards the accumulation of any sort of power do not lose time in youth. 2. Have courage. Front towards such right accumulation of power, and this great law of its accumulation is steadily working for you. 3. This great law works as steadily the other way; e.g., King Saul, fronting and choosing wrong, was losing righteous power day by day, until at last he came to the sad wreck he made. (*Wayland Hoyt, D.D.*)

**Ver. 32. Men that had understanding of the times.—Wants of the times:—**It is an important thing to understand the times in which we live, and to know what those times require (*Esther i. 13; Matt. xvi. 3; Luke xix. 44*). Next to our Bibles and our own hearts our Lord would have us study our own times. I. THE TIMES REQUIRE OF US A BOLD AND UNFLINCHING MAINTENANCE OF THE ENTIRE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY, AND THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE. Our lot is cast in an age of abounding unbelief, but when sceptics have said all they can, there are three broad facts which they have never explained away. 1. Jesus Christ Himself. How is it that there never has been one like Him, neither before nor after, since the beginning of historical times? 2. The Bible itself. How is it that this book stands entirely alone, for high views of God, true views of man, solemnity of thought, grandeur of doctrine, and purity of morality? 3. The effect which Christianity has produced on the world. II. THE TIMES REQUIRE AT OUR HANDS DISTINCT AND DECIDED VIEWS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology. Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. III. THE TIMES REQUIRE OF US AN AWAKENED AND LEVELLER SENSE OF THE UNSPIRITUAL AND SOUL-RUINING CHARACTER OF ROMANISM. IV. THE TIMES REQUIRE OF US A HIGHER STANDARD OF PERSONAL HOLINESS, AND AN INCREASED ATTENTION TO PRACTICAL RELIGION IN DAILY LIFE. V. THE TIMES REQUIRE OF US MORE REGULAR AND STEADY PERSEVERANCE IN THE OLD WAYS OF GETTING GOOD FOR OUR SOULS. 1. Private prayer. 2. Private Bible-reading. 3. Private meditation and communion with Christ. Conclusion: Consider what the times require in reference—1. To your own souls. 2. To the souls of others. 3. To the Church. (*Bp. Ryle.*) *The characteristics and duties of the times:—*Such was the character ascribed to the

children of Issachar, at a remarkably interesting crisis in the circumstances of the nation to which they belonged. The period was that, when, by the death of Saul and his more worthy son in battle, the minds of the Jewish people were divided on the question whether the royalty was to be continued in the family of the departed monarch, or was to be transferred to the hands of the anointed David. The historian enumerates the individuals and the classes who were induced to announce their adherence to the latter; and amongst them are mentioned the persons whose names are recorded in our text. It may be considered as the duty of men, as the subjects of civil government, always to cherish an accurate acquaintance with the characteristics of the times in which they live, in order accurately to fulfil their ordinary duties, and those duties of a more peculiar nature, which the occurrence of seasons of exigency may sometimes impose upon them. We propose—I. To STATE SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS BY WHICH THE PRESENT TIMES APPEAR TO BE PROMINENTLY DISTINGUISHED. 1. Flagrant indulgence of iniquity on the part of ungodly men. 2. A heavy and extended pressure of national distress and perplexity. 3. A wide diffusion of the influence of knowledge and of freedom. 4. Extraordinary and delightful facilities for the dissemination of the gospel of Christ. 5. An awakened and an increasing concern among the people of the Saviour as to the progress and final triumphs of His cause. II. THE DUTIES WHICH THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRESENT TIMES IMPOSE UPON PROFESSING CHRISTIANS. 1. Distinctly and always to recognise the providence of God. 2. To compare all that is apparent with the predictions of Divine truth. 3. To cultivate uncompromising decision in the exemplification of personal religion. 4. Diligently to labour in all the spheres of exertion by which they may advance the gospel of Christ. 5. To engage in fervent and continued prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (*James Parsons.*) *The men of Issachar, an example to British citizens* :—These were men who knew what it was best for the nation to carry out in the great crisis which had now arisen. It was important that Israel should wisely decide under what ruler to select; it is of equal importance that we as a country should decide under what ruler—whether that of strong drink, or that of unqualified temperance—we should abide. There are certain things that are needful in order to a good result in this matter. I. THERE SHOULD BE A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF OUR OWN TIMES. Our own times are—1. Times of much evil from strong drink. 2. Times of much good. (1) A spirit of investigation has gone abroad and done splendid service. We are much indebted to physiologists, moral philosophers, political economists, and statisticians, for the light they have thrown on this subject. (2) Our times are times of agitation for the application of remedial measures. (3) There has also been a great reformation resulting from all this. 3. Times of much hopefulness. II. A right understanding of our own times OUGHT TO LEAD TO PROPER ACTION. They understood the times, to know what Israel ought to do. Right action must—1. Be directed by intelligence. 2. Be inspired by Christian philanthropy. 3. Be embodied in practical forms. 4. Be animated by a self-denying enthusiasm. III. IN ORDER THAT THIS RIGHT ACTION MAY FULLY ACCOMPLISH ITS ENDS THERE ARE CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS. 1. Individualisation. God invites us one by one, saying to each of us, "Do the work I give thee to do." 2. Organisation. Combination multiplies force. In the moral world, one and one make a good deal more than two; they often make four, and three and three often make thirty. 3. Consecration. (*Dawson Burns, D.D.*) *The state of the times and the corresponding duties of the Church* :—The peculiar tribute which is thus paid to the tribe of Issachar—a tribute which distinguishes them most honourably from all the other classes of their countrymen, will appear the more remarkable when we look at the smallness of their number and the comparative seclusion in which they lived. In point of numerical strength they were by far the least considerable of all the tribes of Israel. While the rest could muster their hundreds of thousands, the children of Issachar, though "all their brethren were at their commandment," could only furnish a body of two hundred men. But their lack of numbers was more than counterbalanced by their pre-eminent zeal, sagacity, and discipline—qualities which rendered them the ablest advisers in the council, as well as the best soldiers in the camp. But how, it may be asked, did they come to acquire this superior wisdom and intelligence? Were they more favourably circumstanced for obtaining information, and for observing the signs and duties of the times, than the general body of their fellow-subjects? Had they access to the private circles of the capital, or to the secret conferences of the court? On the contrary, they lived remote from cities—buried amid the tranquil retreats of the rural provinces, away

from the sordid cares and the sickening crowds and the unquiet rumours of the metropolis, breathing the air of freshness and of freedom among their native mountains. From their peaceful solitudes they looked forth with a calm and dispassionate eye on the various movements that took place; and having leisure to reflect on the nature of these movements, to compare them with the past transactions of their history, and to test them by the principles of the Divine Word, they were in a better condition for forming a sound judgment regarding them than those who might have an opportunity of seeing them through a closer, but, for that very reason, a more contracted and clouded medium. In this matter the children of Issachar have left an example which is well worthy of our thoughtful regard. We are required, by the authority of our Lord Himself, "to mark the signs of the times"—to keep a wide and wakeful eye on the revolving events of Providence, with the view of discovering their bearing on the position and prospects of the Church. It is, no doubt, generally supposed that religious men are very incompetent judges of public affairs. Like the tribe spoken of in the text, they are, as a distinctive party, the smallest in the state; and like them, too, they live in comparative seclusion from the cabals and contentions of the world; and it is, therefore, presumed that they can have but little acquaintance with the movements which are going on around them. Let it be admitted that they are not, as a body, so conversant with the details of public transactions as those who are directly engaged about them, yet still we hesitate not to say that they may be, and that they generally are, even better fitted than these for apprehending the great moral principles which such transactions carry in their bosom, and the manner in which they are likely to affect the welfare of the community. We need not remind you that religious men are accustomed to view questions of this kind in a very different light from the men of the world. The latter look upon them as they stand related to the opinions and interests of their fellow-creatures. It is in this respect that religious men—men of enlarged and enlightened piety—have the advantage of mere worldly politicians. They form their estimate of passing events not as they influence the temporary interests either of one party or another, nor as they are reflected through the fluctuating medium of public opinion. They judge of them by a far higher and more comprehensive standard. They view them in connection with the great chain of Providence. They compare them with the fixed purposes of the Divine administration, and with the unalterable rules of the Divine Word; and, by examining them in the light of these clear and all-controlling principles, they are enabled to group in the disjointed and fragmentary measures of public men under distinct moral classifications, to analyse the impulses and the agencies from whence they proceed; and, by means of these testing and discriminating processes, they are led to an "understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do." It is important to mark the connection between the two separate members of the passage before us. It is stated, regarding the Children of Issachar, that they had "understanding of the times." They comprehended the circumstances in which their country was placed; they marked the spirit which prevailed among the people. It was not from any motives of mere curiosity that they studied the movements of the day, nor was it with the view of descanting upon them in private meetings or in popular assemblies; far less was it their object to busy themselves with public matters for personal ends or for party purposes. The welfare of their country was the subject of their concern and the source of their inquiries. For the same reason it is incumbent upon us, not merely as subjects of the State, but as office-bearers and members of the Church of Christ, to study the phenomena of the age in which we live—to watch the moral forces that are operating upon the mass of society, swaying the tide of public opinion, and influencing the measures of public men.

I. THE GRAND CAPITAL CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF THESE TIMES CONSISTS IN THE GENERAL PREVALENCE OF NATIONAL INDIFFERENTISM OR NEGATIVE INFIDELITY.—a general want of faith on all subjects, whether moral, political, or religious.

II. THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH REQUIRES—1. That she should maintain a clear and decided testimony on behalf of the great fundamental principles of Divine truth. 2. A determined effort to resuscitate the sinking power of principle, and also a vigorous and combined movement to repel the creeping invasions—the subtle but forceful and successful encroachments of error. (*Walter M'Gilveray*.)

*Understanding the times*:—Some of the chapters of this book look as though they were so many of the newspapers of the period, that had been preserved; and there would be no history like that of a collection of newspapers, supposing there had been such things, successively issued, day by day, by different parties, affording a general

view of events and transactions. We have here a very minute account of the political, military, and religious position of things at this time. We find different persons resorting to David, in larger or lesser numbers, and welcomed as they came. And among the rest there came a number of persons peculiar and distinct in character from all others. Instead of being told of their physical strength and vigour, their prowess and skill in using swords and spears, their incomparableness in war, we are told that they were "men who had understanding of the times, and knew what Israel ought to do"—men of political intelligence and sagacity, who could look about and see into things, who could interpret the prediction written upon a circumstance, who could tell what was the line marked out by such and such an event. They were not antiquarian men, who could tell you of the past; nor dreaming, poetical, prophetic men, talking about the future; but men who understood their own times—men who felt the great realities that were stirring about them. It was a great matter to have this understanding; for the consequence of having it was, they deduced "what Israel ought to do"—the movements that should be made, the things that the nation should determine upon. The accession of these men to David was, perhaps, of greater value than that of the thousands of fighting men; for wisdom and valour strengthen more than weapons of war. The wise man is strong. And these men, as a consequence of their understanding, ruled; "their brethren were at their commandment"; they had influence; other men and other minds recognised them as regal men, for, after all, I suppose, in the long run, it will always come to that—those that ought to rule, because they can do it, ultimately will do it. It is a blessed thing for a people, and for the world, when those who rule understand things, and really know what ought to be done, and every other body is at their command; for after all, the world wants guiding and ruling, and it is willing to be guided when it has confidence in the wisdom of those who are doing it, and knows it is being governed well. Well, we live in very stirring times; it is a great blessing to the world—though the world does not think of it or believe it—that God has an Israel in the world; an Israel mighty with God in prayer. And this Israel that is in the world ought always to remember that it is in the world; that it has not got to heaven yet. It belongs to earth, and to the movements of nations, political convulsions, and all things that are going on around it. The Israel of God has relations to them all, and is to look at them through that blessed atmosphere—the light of God's truth, and God's love—in which it lives. Let us, then, endeavour to understand our times, that we may know "what Israel ought to do."

**I. RELIGIOUS MEN NATURALLY LOOK—1.** At the religious movements. **2.** At the national and political movements of the times.

**II. WHAT ISRAEL OUGHT TO DO. 1.** It is the privilege of the Church to be making intercession and prayer, that God may guide and superintend the movements of politicians and the masses of men. **2.** They should observe the bearings upon the Church of all the movements of peoples and countries. **3.** They should remember that all times, of all sorts are hastening us on to eternity. Let us not forget that while it is very proper for us to have certain relations to the times that are passing over us, the great business of all times is, to save our souls, to be at peace with God through Christ, and be prepared for the everlasting glory of heaven. (Thomas Binney.)

*The propriety of considering times and circumstances:—*From the character given of the men of Issachar we shall show—**I. THAT OUR CONDUCT MUST OFTEN BE AFFECTED BY TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF WHATEVER NATURE. 1.** Civil. **2.** Social. **3.** Personal. **II. HOW FAR IT MAY BE PROPERLY AFFECTED BY THEM IN THE CONCERNS OF RELIGION. 1.** That we may attend to times, &c., is certain (example of Christ and apostles). **2.** But how far is not easy to determine. **III. WHAT THERE IS IN THE TIMES, &c., OF THE PRESENT DAY TO AFFECT OUR CONDUCT. Application: 1.** Guard against yielding to any corrupt bias. **2.** The future judgment will be according to motives. **3.** Seek for wisdom that is profitable to direct. (C. Simeon, M.A.)

*Adaptation to conditions:—*How important it is that men should study the times in which they live, and adapt their work to the conditions which constitute their opportunity. He is the wise man who considers all the features of a case and adapts the treasure of which he is possessed to meet new desires and new demands. There may be change without change; in other words, the change may be but superficial, whilst the immutable may be within, giving order and dignity and energy to all that is attempted from without. Love is eternal, but its expression consists of continual variety. Prayer never changes as to its spirit and intent, yet every day may find it laden with new expressions, because human history has revealed wants which had not before been

even suspected. He who understands every time but his own, will do no permanent work for society. He is like a man who knows every language but his own native tongue, and is therefore unable to speak to the person standing at his side. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 33. Fifty thousand which could keep rank.—*Keeping rank*:—I. OUR GREAT WANT IS MORE MEN WHO CAN KEEP RANK. II. TO KEEP RANK IMPLIES PRACTICE—DISCIPLINE. III. TO KEEP RANK IN ACTUAL CONFLICT REQUIRES OLD-FASHIONED VALOUR. The great trouble in the Church to-day is the cowards. They do splendidly on parade-day, but put them out in the great battle of life and they soon break rank. We confront the enemy, we open the battle against fraud, and lo! we find on our side a great many people that do not try to pay their debts. We open the battle against intemperance, and we find on our side a great many men who make hard speeches. Oh! for fifty thousand armed men, heroic men, self-denying men, who can go forth in the strength of the Lord God Almighty to do battle, able to keep rank! Men like Paul, who could say, "None of these things move me. Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." Men like John Bunyan, who, after lying years in a loathsome prison, said, "I am determined, God being my helper and shield, to stay here until the moss grows over my eyebrows, rather than surrender my faith and my principles." Men like Thomas Chalmers, who, notwithstanding all the jeering in high places at his theory of reform and elevation of the poor, went right on to do his whole work, until Thomas Carlyle, then a boy, wrote of him: "What a glorious old man Thomas Chalmers is!" (T. De Witt Talmage.)

Vers. 38-40. All these men of war.—*The joyous entertainment*.—I. THE CAUSE OF JOY. 1. United under one king. 2. A king chosen of God. 3. Universal loyalty to the chosen king. II. THE MANIFESTATION OF JOY. 1. In unity of purpose. 2. In sincerity of feeling. 3. In social fellowship. III. THE EXTENT OF THE JOY. (J. Wolfendale.) For there was joy in Israel.—*The manifestation of Christ a cause of great joy*:—The man who was the darling of the people, and from whose administration they had raised expectations, being now, by Divine appointment, made king over all the tribes, "there was joy in Israel." There is abundant reason for much greater joy in the spiritual Israel, on account of David's illustrious son, the King Messiah, the Saviour of His people (Zech. ix. 9; Isa. xxv. 9). I. THE CAUSE OF JOY OF ISRAEL, WITH RELATION TO THE KING MESSIAH, THE SON OF DAVID, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. 1. This coming in the flesh is a matter of joy, as He then appeared King of Israel, and the Saviour thereof. Salvation is the source, the foundation of spiritual joy in Israel. (1) This salvation is—(a) From sin; (b) From wrath to come; (c) From eternal death; (d) From every spiritual enemy. (2) It is to be had freely. (3) It is a great salvation. (4) It is a salvation in which the glory of God is greatly concerned. 2. The spiritual coming of Christ in the hearts of His people at conversion is another event that causes joy in Israel. 3. In the latter day, when Christ will be more manifest, and, like David, will be King over all the house of Israel, and over the whole world, then there will be joy and gladness. II. WHERE AND AMONG WHOM IS THIS JOY? Not only in Israel but in the whole world. Christ is not the God of the Jews only. III. THE NATURE OF THIS JOY. 1. It is spiritual. 2. It is the joy of our Lord. 3. It is the joy of faith. 4. It is a joy that the world knows nothing of. 5. It is unspeakable. 6. It is a joy to be continually exercised. 7. This joy will be at last full and complete. (J. Gill, D.D.) *What is essential to constitute a happy people*:—Professor Fairbairn says you cannot have a happy world without having happy men; you may have good health, good business, good children, good balance at the bank, life insured. So far so good, and yet if the soul be unadjusted there is no peace. You may place an organ that is out of tune in a magnificent cathedral, but you have no harmony, and the discord is the more striking because of its lofty nave, its painted windows, and chiselled arches. But you take that organ well tuned and richly toned into a plain Methodist chapel, with its brick walls and flat ceiling, and you shall have the sweetest harmony. There can be no peace till the soul is brought in harmony by the grace of God. Peace is the inner condition of the soul arising from reconciliation to God. (G. Turner.) *The highest joy*:—"I had lived," says the Countess Schimmelmänn, "as the spoiled child of the Court; so much so that the Crown Prince (afterwards the Emperor) Frederick

introduced me to a stranger as 'the most highly favoured young lady of Germany, and of several other kingdoms besides.' These worldly honours had never satisfied me, and the longing for something higher and better became increasingly stronger. My prayers at that time always culminated in the cry, 'O God, give me but a drop of the love of Christ and a spark of the fire of the Holy Ghost.' A short time after, in response to my prayer that I might love Jesus and Jesus only, I heard the Saviour say to me, 'My child, thy salvation does not depend upon thy love to Me, but upon My love to thee, just as thou art.' Then broke upon my heart a sun of joy, in the beams of which I still rejoice, and whose light will shine upon me eternally."

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CHAPTER XIII.

**VERS. 3-6. And let us bring again the ark of our God to us.—The ark in the royal city:**—A place of honour, influence, and right, as:—I. THE CENTRE OF UNITY. II. THE SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE. This act: 1. Purified religious life. 2. Unified religious life. 3. Organised religious life. III. THE SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The ark's progress to Mount Zion:*—One of the Psalms composed by David to be sung on the removing of the ark (*Psa. lxxviii.*) is quoted by Paul (*Eph. iv. 7, 8*) as having foretold what this procession itself foreshadowed, viz., the ascension of Christ, and the blessings which should flow therefrom upon every member of His Mystical Body. We see in all this great procession nothing less than the Universal Church of Christ, partaking with the Divine David in the glory of His ascension into the Heavenly Zion. From the narrative of which the text forms a part we may learn:—I. GENERAL LESSONS. 1. That periods of reformation, after past neglect, are those in which we need more than ordinary caution, lest we mar the work which is designed to promote God's glory. 2. That all religious reformation which is the work of man can scarcely fail to be blemished and disfigured more or less by human infirmities. 3. That the effects of those infirmities are not to be acquiesced in, but to be confessed and corrected, if ever we would hope to obtain the Divine approval, or even to escape the Divine chastisement. 4. Not to abandon our good intentions because we have been checked and hindered in our efforts after amendment, but still to hold on and persevere in our exertions; only taking heed to profit by the instruction which the experience of past failure was designed to give. 5. "God will be sanctified in all them that come nigh Him," by obedience to His holy laws (*Lev. x. 2*). 6. That ignorance and neglect, even when allowed to pass unchastised in others, may bring upon His ordained ministers the severest punishment. II. PARTICULAR LESSONS. 1. That every Christian has his place in that great procession, which is occupied in conveying the Ark of the Covenant (*Rev. xi. 19*) up to its final resting-place in Mount Zion; but every Christian has not the same place. 2. That it is not enough that we do, whatever we do, with a good intention unless what is done be also good, good in itself, and good in us. (*Bishop Chris. Wordsworth.*)

**VERS. 9-11. And when they came unto the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark. Perez-Uzza:**—Learn—I. IF GOD BE ABSENT FROM A PEOPLE AND THE ARK BE LONG IN OBSCURITY, THAT PEOPLE WILL LOSE A SENSE OF REVERENCE. II. THAT GOD, MINDFUL OF HIS HONOURS, OFTEN SINGLES OUT GUILTY MEN TO BE MONUMENTS OF HIS DISPLEASURE. III. THAT BY SUCH EXAMPLES OF TERROR GOD WARNS OTHERS. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Uzza's transgression:*—Consider—I. THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUAL AND POSITIVE INSTITUTIONS, WITH THE PUNCTUAL OBSERVANCE WHICH GOD EXPECTS TO THEM. Amongst all the trials which have been made of human nature, in the way of worshipping a superior power, there hath been no instance of a pure and holy worship without somewhat of institution to fix the forms of it. Even a state of innocence did not subsist without a positive law for trial of our first parents' obedience. The first recorded act of worship after the Fall was apparently of a ritual and positive nature; since human reason doth no more direct to those sacrifices which we find offered to God by Cain and Abel, than it directs us to baptism or the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The gross superstitions of the heathen world were manifestly owing to the want of an authorised

ceremonial in their worship. II. THE ENCLOSURE OF THE SACERDOTAL OR PRIESTLY FUNCTION, WITH THE DANGER OF INVADING OR THROWING IT OPEN. III. THE RESPECT WHICH IS DUE TO A RELATIVE HOLINESS. IV. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF A GOOD OR INNOCENT INTENTION TO WARRANT AN IRREGULAR OR FORBIDDEN ACTION. V. THE REVERENCE AND PREPARATION OF HEART WHEREWITH WE SHOULD APPROACH THE SOLEMN OFFICES OF DIVINE WORSHIP. VI. THE DANGER OF AN UNAUTHORISED, OFFICIOUS ZEAL. (N. Marshall, D.D.) *Touching the ark, and touching the Saviour* (ver. 10 with Matt. ix. 21):—How characteristic are these two incidents of the two dispensations under which they respectively occurred? What a comment upon the declaration, “The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.” I. I observe that the Old and New Testaments present many such instructive contrasts, serving to illustrate THE DIFFERENT SPIRIT OF THE LEGAL AS COMPARED WITH THE EVANGELICAL ECONOMY—the one being mostly miracles of judgment, the other almost exclusively miracles of mercy. For instance, there is the confusion of tongues at Babel—the gift of tongues at Pentecost; the water turned into blood in Egypt—the water turned into wine at Cana; the darkness of Egypt issuing in the death of the first-born—the darkness of Calvary bringing many sons to glory. And so in the text: the death of Uzza on touching the ark—the healing of the sufferer that touched our Lord. It was in either case a touch; but the one was fatal, the other a cure. The one was a case of presumption, if not of unbelief; the other a case of humility and of the deepest faith. The Lord, the heart-searcher, saw a difference in the intrinsic similarity of the acts which man saw not. It was not altogether the difference in the dispensations, but the difference in the persons. Uzza not only overlooked the law that prescribed the Kohathite as the ark-bearer, but sacrilegiously intruded his hand to support an emblem which had vindicated the sufficiency of its self-reliance by its superhuman inflections in the house of Dagon, and by its miraculous over-rulings of natural instincts in the leading of the kine from their calves when its mystic pilgrimage lay in an opposite direction; whereas the woman in the Gospels ascribed merit and virtue even to the hem of the Redeemer’s garment, and much more therefore to Himself. Hence the two, Uzza and the woman, enacted in type the Pharisee and the publican, whereof the one “went down to her house justified rather than the other.” Both intrinsically were slight, inconsiderable acts in themselves—a mere touch externally in either case; the one touching the sign, the other the thing signified. But the one brought his support to the covenant ark, the other drew her support from the Ark; the one approached in self-sufficiency, and was smitten for his presumption, the other drew nigh in self-abasement, and was healed for her faith. Upon the one, therefore, fell the terrible anathema of “the letter” that “killeth”; upon the other descended as the dew of heaven “the Spirit” that “giveth life.” II. In their contrast is presented THE LIGHT AND SHADE OF THE PROFESSION-LIFE IN THE CHURCH. It is more agreeable to our natural pride to feel our personal hand to be the stay of a declining Church, than to creep with a poor, dejected sinner to the hem of the garment, the lowest place, the door-keeper’s post in the house of our God. The pride of ecclesiastical office is in various shapes and degrees the besetting sin of clergy and laity. It leads the former to rest upon functional relations, those pretensions and reliances due only to the endowments of grace, to the conscientious cultivation of gifts, and to the exercise of personal influence. It tempts the priest alike to supersede the man and lose sight of God. Alas! for this thrusting the unbidden hand of the creature upon the ark of God! It displays itself among the laity, too, in the love of office in the Church, for the mere office sake, as a platform for self-parade. It escapes even in the mode and amount of contributions to the Church, in laying them like the corban on the altar, not for the glory of God, but as the price of redemption from some unpalatable duty. There are men who can be brought to church with the idea of playing the patron, to indulge the vanity of their sense of being necessary to her standing and well-doing, who thus lay unhallowed hands on her altar, like an Uzza, but who would disdain to be indebted to that lowly touch of her spiritual garment, for the feeling that it was that, and not their presumptuous handling of the ark of her strength, that made them whole. III. The doctrine of the contrast is twofold—NAMELY, THE PERIL OF THE LEAST SIN, AND THE PEACE OF THE LEAST ACT OF FAITH. As to the first: you are always in danger so long as you allow yourselves in any known sin under the plea of Lot, who, by the side of the enormities of Sodom, contended “is it not a little one?” The effect of that friction with the world into which men’s eagerness in business or pursuit of pleasure leads them, is to rub off the bloom from the fruits of the Spirit, and to rub off, though in minutest particles, the fine



gold, and turn it dim in lustre and less in substance. The little sin, as you imagine it, of putting your hand, say, upon a portion of the Sabbath, to do something in your business, or to spend it in recreation, or in reading the news, or in secular gossiping, leaving the sound of the service chimes to die away among the graves of the dead, who are no more insensible to its calling than yourselves—in these supposed little sins begins the course, that deceiving and being deceived, waxes worse and worse, until the man's life becomes at last a mere chapter of practical Atheism, without prayer, without faith, without obedience. Or suppose the little sin take another direction, confining its action to within the sanctuary, and the moral delinquent lays his hand upon the ark in another shape. Perhaps he does not realise Christ's sufficiency as to an atonement or a justifying righteousness, and must have a hand in the satisfaction of the one, and the completeness of the other, and therefore looks to a baptism, or a eucharist, or to his social charities, or moral duties, or evangelical sentiments, or enthusiastic feelings and sensations, or the suffrages of fellow-sinners, or even fellow-saints, if the phrase be more acceptable. If by these, by all of them or by any of them, the man looks to commend himself in the sight of God, and supplement that which was lacking, in his theory, in the finished work of Christ, his hand is on the ark, and unless it be removed betimes, the hand of an indignant God will be upon him, and he that "sinneth with a high hand," for whom neither law nor Gospel provided an atonement, "shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy." On the other hand, the contrast exhibits the peace and advantage of the least act of faith, even if the faith be so weak and feeble as to be likened to "a grain of mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds." Faith as little as that, like the woman's touch, has strength to remove mountains. A spark of Omnipotence is struck out of the rock by its feeblest blow. (*Joseph B. Owen, M.A.*)

**Ver. 13. But carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom.**—*The "asides" of God*:—How much we owe to the "asides" of God. Obed-edom owed the benediction which descended upon his house to this "aside." God's way through life is thus wondrous: always indeed one great line of progress, yet who can count the détours which He makes, the asides, the incidental variations, the small things which men regarded as unworthy of notice,—who can tell how all these are wrought up into a comprehensive revelation of wisdom and love. If we only took the things which came to us on the great main thoroughfares of life, some people would hardly be blessed at all. A study of the "asides" of life would confirm us in our general Christian faith. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Ver. 14. And the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.**—*The selection of the house of Obed-edom*:—Why was the house of Obed-edom selected for the three months' sojourn of the ark? The choice of the ark's resting-place was David's first-fruits of repentance. He was terrified at the judgment upon their act of disobedience to the law, which enjoined that none but the Levites of the family of Kohath should bear it, and that upon their shoulders, too; and they at once retraced their steps, so far as they could by conveying the sacred emblem to the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, that is of Gath. This city was distinguished from several other towns of the same name by the addition of Gath-rimmon (*Josh. xxiv. 21*). It was not only one of the cities of the Levites in general, but of the Kohathites in particular, the very family to whom was specially assigned the post of "bearing the ark upon their shoulders." From *1 Chron. xv. 38* we find that Obed-edom was actually one of the "porters" employed to bear upon their shoulders, instead of in a cart, after the manner of the idolatrous Philistines, the sacred symbol of the presence of the Lord of hosts on the occasion of its final translation to Jerusalem. (*Joseph B. Owen, M.A.*) *The house of Obed-edom*:—**I. THE SERVICE WHICH OBED-EDOM RENDERED. II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH HE PERFORMED THE SERVICE. III. THE REWARD WHICH HE GAINED.** 1. A personal blessing. 2. A social blessing. 3. An extensive blessing. None suffer whose guest is the ark of God. Piety is the best friend to prosperity. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Churches a blessing or a curse*:—**I. WHAT WAS THIS ARK OF GOD?** 1. It was a sign of the covenant God had made with His people. 2. It was a record of God's dealings with them under all their rebellions. 3. It was an instrument of communion between Him and them. **II. HOW WAS THIS ARK TO BE TREATED, AND WHAT WAS THE CONSEQUENCE OF ITS PRESENCE?** 1. See what it was amongst the heathen (*1 Sam. v. 4, 11*). 2. See what it was amongst God's own people, when they made

themselves like unto the Gentiles and learned their works (1 Sam. vi. 19, vii. 3). In the sight of these judgments we may plainly see that the mere having among them the appointed sign and instrument of God's presence was no blessing, but the having it for a lawful use, and the treating it after a godly manner. God's ark was a blessing where it was duly prized; its presence was a blessing or a curse according to the character of those it visited. III. THOSE CHURCHES WHICH ADORN OUR LAND ARE THE SIGNS OF GOD'S PRESENCE, AS THE ARK WAS OF OLD. WHAT BLESSES ANY DISTRICT AS THUS BRINGING HOME TO IT THE PRESENCE OF GOD? What is the effect on ungodly and irreverent men of seeing and attending churches? It brings down on them God's heavy judgments. (*Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.*) *The blessing of God upon those who honour His institutions.*—The ark was a small elegant chest, which contained the two tables of the law—the Hebrew Bible—written by the finger of God. This was probably the first alphabetical writing in the world. Though the Egyptians and other heathen nations used to employ hieroglyphics, to record past events, and denote the actions and intellectual and moral qualities of men, yet they were totally ignorant of letters which compose words and sentences by their particular sounds. Obed-edom knew that the ark contained the written Word of God, and esteemed it, as David did, "better unto him than thousands of gold and silver." The subject is that God will bless those families who treat His Word with proper respect. I shall show: I. THAT THEY OUGHT TO TREAT IT WITH PROPER RESPECT. Observe—1. That every family ought to have the Word of God in their house. 2. Parents should read it seriously every day in their families. 3. The Bible ought to be read in a family with a view to understand it. 4. The Bible is to be read and heard in a family with a sincere desire and intention to do whatsoever God has commanded. II. THAT IF THEY DO READ AND HEAR THE BIBLE WITH SUCH PROPER RESPECT GOD WILL BLESS THEM. 1. Because such pious families are the preservers of the Word of God. 2. Because they lay the greatest check and restraint upon every species of irreligion and impiety. No evil practices can be found in any family who daily read and love and obey the Bible. 3. God will bless pious families because they are the important instruments of promoting and transmitting pure religion from generation to generation. Improvement. 1. It is the wisdom as well as duty of every family to pay a cordial and sacred regard to the Bible. 2. Those families that neglect these duties have reason to expect the frowns of Heaven upon them. 3. If those families only are religious who pay proper respect to the Word of God, then there is ground to conclude that there are many families in this place who are not religious. 4. How important it is that heads of families should be truly religious. 5. The great criminality of irreligious children who have been religiously educated. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The house of Obed-edom.*—The ark was the symbol of God's presence. Every truly Christian household now has the blessing that so enriched the home of Obed-edom. The subject is—Religion in the home. I. IT IS A POWER OF FULFILMENT. Religion is the sole power of fulfilment in regard to the very purpose and idea of home. A house may be full of persons who are very dear to each other, very kind to each other; full of precious things—affections, hopes, living interests; but if God is not there as the Ruler and Father of the house, the original and true idea of home will not be realised; vacancy and need will still be at the heart of all. Good things will grow feebly and uncertainly, like flowers in winter, trying to peep out into the sunshine, yet shrinking from the blast. Evil things will grow with strange persistency. Little things will produce great distresses. It will be as when a man of ingenuity tries in vain to put together the separated parts of a complicated piece of mechanism. He tries it this way and that, puts the pieces into every conceivable mode of arrangement, then at last stops and says, "There must be a piece wanting." Home without the Divine presence is at best a moral structure with the central element wanting. II. IT IS A PRINCIPLE OF HARMONY. Religion is the only principle of harmony in the endeavour after this highest and best home life. It supplies the missing element which unites and quickens all the rest. It conducts its progress as a regulative force. It is not contended that the principle bears all its proper fruits, and that every Christian home is a scene of unbroken harmony. Some Christian homes are very peaceful. One enters them with the same kind of soothed and comforted feeling with which a traveller, after a toilsome walk over the breezy hills, comes down on a little placid lake, hardly ruffled by the breeze, and fringed with freshest green. Others again are more troubled. But we must not hastily conclude that the uniformly placid home is really further advanced in the harmonies of Christian living than some others which are less serene. It may be so; but it

may also be quite the reverse. Sometimes the jarrings are brought out just by the endeavours after the higher harmonies. Failures are more apparent if the efforts are high. The dearest harmonies in all the social life of men are sounding only in the Christian home; and those imperfections of which some make so much, and of which no one ought to make too little, are, after all, but like the flitting shadows of a sunny day—but like the chafing of the stream as it rushes against the rocky barrier on its passage to the peaceful plains which it will fertilise, or to the depths of ocean where it will rest. III. RELIGION IN THE HOUSE IS A SOURCE OF PROSPERITY. Life in the present day is more complex; it has greater interests, heavier tasks and higher prizes. The Lord still blesses the house of Obed-edom and all that he has. 1. Character. 2. Plans of usefulness. 3. Controversies with evil principles and with evil men. 4. Reverses. A thoughtful, earnest man now feels himself connected with politics—law—battles—civilisation—churches—religion—life in all its phases. He has some stake, some property in all these things, and in proportion to the earnestness and greatness of his mind, he will feel that these are the real interests of his life, for which he needs “blessing” from the Lord. IV. RELIGION IN THE HOUSE OF A GOOD MAN, IS LIKELY TO BE A LEGACY TO HIS CHILDREN. In the piety of the living, and in the laws of Christian family life, he makes provision for what we may call the transmission of religion to those who shall come after. In the rule of their house, and in the spirit of their life, godly parents are casting the forms which will be peopled and animated with the future “families of Israel.” (A. Raleigh, D.D.)

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

**Vers. 1, 2. Now Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David.**—*The building of the royal house*:—In Hiram’s conduct notice—I. AN INSTANCE OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP. 1. Genuine. 2. Lasting. II. AN ILLUSTRATION OF HUMAN AGENCY IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. III. A PROOF OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE. 1. In Hiram’s conduct. 2. In David’s accession to the throne. 3. In the honour and extension of David’s kingdom. (*J. Wolfendale*.) *Hiram and David*:—The treaty between these two kings illustrates—I. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE EXALTATION OF A GOOD MAN. II. THE INFLUENCE OF A GOOD MAN UPON OTHERS WHEN THUS EXALTED. Men pay homage to moral worth and holy life. This power every Christian may possess and wield. III. THE DESIGN FOR WHICH GOD EXALTS A GOOD MAN (2 Sam. v. 12). Not for themselves, but for others are men enriched and honoured. (*Ibid.*) *Lifted up*:—Man throws down. God lifts up: 1. Persons. 2. Societies. 3. Nations. Lifts up above: 1. Distress. 2. Opposition. 3. Danger. (*J. P. Lange*.)

**Ver. 10. And David inquired of God.**—*Inquiring of God*:—The Israelites usually asked counsel of God by the ephod, the Grecians by their oracles, the Persians by their magi, the Egyptians by their hierophants, the Indians by their gymnosophists, the ancient Gauls and Britons by their Druids, the Romans by their augures or soothsayers. It was not lawful to propose any matter of moment in the senate, *priusquam de celo observatum erat*, before their wizards had made observations from the heaven or sky. That which they did impiously and superstitiously, we may, nay we ought to do in another sense, piously, religiously, conscionably, i.e., not to embark ourselves into any action of great importance and consequence, *priusquam de Cælo observatum est*, before we have observed from Heaven, not the flight of birds, not the houses of planets, or their aspects or conjunctions, but the countenance of God, whether it shineth upon our enterprises or not, whether He approve of our projects and designs or not. (*J. Spencer*.)

**Vers. 14–17. And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees.**—*The sound in the mulberry trees*:—What this “sound of going” was exactly we cannot tell. It probably resembled the march of an army in the air. A host of unseen angels may have moved above the mulberry groves, striking terror into the hearts of the barbarians and sending them into precipitate retreat. As they retreated, they fell into the hands of the Israelites (who had swung around to their rear), and were routed with complete discomfiture.

I. THAT GOD SIGNALS TO HIS PEOPLE TO TAKE CERTAIN STEPS AT CERTAIN TIMES

Then it is their duty to bestir themselves. When the Deluge was about to descend upon a guilty world, Noah was commanded to bestir himself and prepare an ark for the saving of his household. When the fire-shower was coming upon Sodom, Lot was laid hold of by God's angels and urged to escape for his life. When the children of Israel were in peril of being overwhelmed by the Egyptians, God signalled to them the order to advance, and by a majestic pillar of cloud led them through the parted sea. All sacred history is studded with illustrations of this truth. Martin Luther, discovering the "open secret" in the convent Bible at Erfurth, and hammering his theses on the church door of Wittenburg; the young Wesleys, awakened at Oxford and sent out to awaken slumbering Britain, were simply God's agents bestirring themselves at the Divine signal. II. GOD HAS HIS "SET TIMES TO FAVOUR ZION." One of these was the memorable day of Pentecost. The faithful men and women in the upper room heard a sound as of a mighty rushing wind, and the baptism of fire descended. God moved, and His people were on their feet promptly. Each man, each woman obeys the signal. The Word of God grows mightily and prevails. The secret of this marvellous success is that Christians promptly and thoroughly co-operated with the Divine Spirit. III. A PERSONAL APPLICATION. There are times when each child of Jesus hears the "sound of the going in the mulberries." Let them be improved. Do not let us lose heaven's fair wind. When we get fresh insight into the Word, let us open it to others. When our hearts are stirred with sympathy for sinners, then is the time to "pull them out of the fire." If the Holy Spirit is striving with us, then is the time to strive with Him to save men from eternal death. As God moves in us, let us move for the salvation of those within our reach. IV. A TIME OF TRIAL IS OFTEN A TIME OF ESPECIAL BLESSING. I have read of a German baron who stretched between the towers of his castle a set of iron wires. In calm weather the wires were silent. But when the winds arose these metallic chords began to play, and in the height of the gale this hurricane-harp gave out glorious music. So is it with a child of God. In seasons of calm and quiet prosperity he may too often become silent, inactive, useless. But when the storms of trial strike him his soul-harp awakes to new melodies of love and faith, and his life becomes as a stringed instrument struck by the hand of Jesus. Open your heart to the voice and the influences of the Divine and Loving Spirit. Let the time of trial be the time for doing God's will, and at least one soul will taste the joys of a true revival! (*Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.*) *The repeated question:—*The word "again" contains the kernel of the special teaching here. I. HOW DAVID ACTED HERE. 1. A wise self-distrust. Self-distrust may be sinful, as it was in the case of Moses, who could not overcome his diffidence even when God had given him the greatest of all encouragements, saying "Certainly I will be with thee." But there is a distrust of self, which is healthy and which leads a man on to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might; and that was what David had now and what secured his success. 2. A full confidence in God. He confided all the circumstances of his case to God. 3. A spirit of obedience. He was ready to abide by the Divine directions. 4. A recognition of wisdom beyond his own. II. HOW DAVID MIGHT HAVE ACTED. 1. He might have said the means which I had before will be enough now; I have very recently defeated those Philistines; their resources I know are much impaired, mine are not; I will go out against them at once. Such reasoning would have been wrong. Means which we have had before, even though intact, are not of necessity enough for us in a new emergency. The same circumstances seldom happen with every incident precisely alike. We may not see where the differences lie, but they may exist nevertheless; and perhaps it is precisely one of those unseen differences which will defeat us. 2. He might have contented himself with thinking generally that God would be with him. For this particular enterprise David asked specific advice. Specific acts of recognition of God receive specific blessings. Lessons—1. The value of all close contacts with God. 2. We need not be afraid of wearying God with our frequent comings. 3. The value of new infusions of God's wisdom and strength into all old, well known, well tried and successful means. The means will never be any more to us than what God enables them to be. 4. Nothing need grow old with God to keep it fresh. III. WHAT CAME OF DAVID'S ACTING THUS? In all probability escape from defeat. The way which God pointed out in answer to David's inquiry, involved much from him. 1. Apparent cowardice. 2. Much self-restraint; but all these were but the preliminaries to triumph—the short time of waiting before God's plan was perfected in victory. Let us permit God's answers to work themselves out. They must

generally evolve. We cannot consult God with reverence, obedience and love, without His taking an interest in whatever we bring before Him. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*) *The battle of Gibeon*:—I. A SPECIAL CHANGE OF TACTICS. II. A SPECIAL SIGN BY WHICH THESE TACTICS ARE CARRIED OUT. 1. A supernatural sign. 2. A disciplinary sign. Requiring an upward look, an open eye to see, an attentive ear to hear. 3. A typical sign. In the setting up of Christ's kingdom, disciples waited to be equipped for work. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Signals for duty*:—I. GOD'S ANSWER TO MAN'S PRAYER. 1. Prayer for knowledge of duty. 2. Prayer for assurance of success. II. GOD'S HELP IN MAN'S CIRCUMSTANCES. III. GOD'S SIGNAL FOR MAN'S ACTION. We need not only to know, and strength to obey God's will, but the signal to "go" at the right time. A detachment on one occasion waited for orders, longed to join their comrades in battle, instead of standing in silence, exposed to danger. At length Wellington gave the command, and the attack was successful. "They serve who stand and wait." (*Ibid.*) *A wise tarrying*:—Xerxes, monarch of Persia, had invaded Greece with an army and a fleet. Against the latter the ships of the Greeks were drawn up, and were ready to sail down the bay to attack the Persians. But Themistocles, the commander, delayed. The men grew impatient and began to fret at the delay. Still he refused to give the order to advance. Discontent now became almost mutiny. Some said Themistocles was a coward; others declared that he had sold out to the enemy. But Themistocles was waiting for the land breeze. He knew that every morning, about nine o'clock, the breeze blew from the land, and by waiting for it to spring up, it would be possible to use the sails and it would be unnecessary to use the oars, and so every rower would become a fighter—thus his warriors would be increased in numbers. His delay meant success and victory as the sequel proved. In the spiritual work of to-day there is a wise tarrying and a foolish haste. Oh, if we could hear more said about the spiritual preparation, we are sure more would be accomplished in aggressive inroads upon the enemy! Let us insist that the Church be led to look for and expect the breath of the Holy Ghost, and then every man will be a soldier. *Before thee*:—1. A word of consolation in sore distress. 2. A word of encouragement amid inward conflict. 3. A word of exhortation to unconditional obedience of faith. 4. A word of assurance of the victory which the Lord gives. (*J. P. Lange.*) *The rustling of the Lord's approaching help*:—1. Dost thou wait for it at His bidding? 2. Dost thou hear it with the right heed? 3. Dost thou understand it in the right sense? 4. Dost thou follow it without delay? (*Ibid.*) *Victory comes from the Lord*:—1. When it is beforehand humbly asked for according to the Lord's will and word. 2. When the battle is undertaken in the Lord's name and for His cause. 3. When it is fought with obedient observation of the Lord's directions and guidance. (*Ibid.*)

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## CHAPTER XV.

**VERS. 1, 24.** And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God.—*Removal of the ark, or carrying on the work of God*:—I. PREPARATION FOR GOD'S WORK. 1. By personal sanctification. 2. By implicit obedience to God's command. II. HEARTY CO-OPERATION IN GOD'S WORK. 1. Gained by consultation. Teachers' Meetings, Ministers' Conferences, National Councils of great help in effective work. 2. Displayed in united ranks. 3. Expressed by individual effort. III. SUCCESS ACHIEVED IN GOD'S WORK. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The call to service*:—I. THE CALL. 1. Personal. 2. Pressing. 3. Worthy. II. THE RESPONSE. 1. Ready. 2. Universal. 3. Immediate. III. THE DIRECTIONS TO CARRY IT OUT. 1. Clear. 2. Right. 3. Safe. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 12.** Sanctify yourselves.—*Personal holiness essential to sacred service*:—I. PERSONAL HOLINESS REQUIRED IN THOSE WHO SERVE. 1. In heart. 2. In life. II. PERSONAL HOLINESS THE PATTERN ACCORDING TO WHICH WE MUST SERVE (Ephes. v. 1). III. PERSONAL HOLINESS IS THE ONLY CONDITION ON WHICH WE CAN SERVE. 1. By this we influence others. 2. By this we answer the end of our being. "He hath not called you to uncleanness, but unto holiness." *Ibid.*)

Ver. 13. For that ye sought Him not after the due order.—*Seeking the Lord*:—There are historical details connected with these words which we wish you carefully to consider. David had prepared a place for the ark of God, which had been retained by the Philistines from the days of Eli; and for a long period had been banished from the congregation of Israel. He now determined to go down to the house of Obed-edom, where the ark was, and bring up to Jerusalem with all due solemnity this precious emblem of the presence of the Lord. He exhorts the priests and Levites to sanctify themselves, to observe, that is, all the prescribed ceremonial purifications, in order that they might be fitted to carry the ark. This was not the first attempt at bringing back the ark of the Lord. The Philistines, finding that its presence only brought down judgments upon their land, carried the ark into the country of the Israelites, where it remained for many years with Abinadab, in Kirjath-jearim. But when David, after the decease of Saul, had placed himself on the throne, he went down to the house of Abinadab, that he might bring up thence the sacred deposit. The ark of God, you read, was put on a new cart, and Uzza and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the cart. After proceeding some distance the oxen stumbled; and Uzza put forth his hand and laid hold on the ark to prevent it from falling. Uzza was not a priest; and every other was expressly forbidden to touch the ark. Alarmed at so signal and unexpected an interference of God, David gave vent to his feelings in the exclamation of our text: "How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" and determined, that for the present at least, he would make no further endeavour to remove what it was so perilous to touch. In process, however, of time, when he had duly considered the causes of his failure, he set himself again to recovering the ark. Warned by the fate of Uzza he was a little more careful and cautious in the several arrangements. David goes on to address the Levites: "Because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order." We have a great lesson to derive from the facts thus briefly set before you. The lesson is, that God may be sought, and yet not be found, because the seeking is not in the way or "order" which He hath revealed as agreeable to Himself. It was not that David and his people were not sincere and hearty in their desire that the ark of God might be once more amongst them. We are told that while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. So that the seeking was not that of the hypocrite. The seeking God in a way of their own notion, and not in that of the Divine appointment; or, rather, the neglecting to observe rigidly what God had prescribed in respect of the manner in which He would be sought—this it was which had been offensive to the Lord. And if where there was sincerity of purpose, there might be this failure through want of exact conformity to the revealed will of God, we are bound to conclude that in our own day and generation it is not the mere striving for masteries; but, as St. Paul has expressed it, the "striving lawfully," which will be crowned with any measure of success. Now, we need hardly observe to you, that the right way of seeking God must be the way that God Himself has been pleased to reveal. But there is a twofold revelation—a revelation which God makes of Himself by and through conscience, and a revelation which is contained in the Bible. Let us look at both of these. There may be a "due order" prescribed by the one, as well as by the other. You will all be prepared to admit that the first step which conscience dictates, when it has roused a man to a sense of his moral condition is, that he break loose from those habits of evil which have been formed during years of carelessness and vice. There is a thorough harmony here between the two revelations. But if we would overcome a habit, we must carefully observe how habits are formed. A habit must be overcome through retracing step by step that very process by which the habit was formed; so that there is a "due order" to be observed, the neglecting of which will frustrate all our labours. A habit is not formed in a day, neither is a habit to be overcome in a day. Now, if this be the way in which a habit is formed; in what way may that habit be loosened and destroyed? We reply that, as it was formed step by step, so must it be destroyed step by step. And when you have determined that a habit is obnoxious, there will rise a desire, however faint, to pursue a course of conduct which is opposed to this habit. This desire, like the vicious one already considered, will at first be obeyed with difficulty; an effort will be needed, perhaps a painful, and in some cases a most intense effort. But this effort will diminish with every instance of success. This is the "due order" in dealing with habit, and thus labouring at the reforma-

tion which conscience demands. But there may be a neglect of this "due order," and then comes that failure which is our chief subject of discourse. If you withstand an evil habit, but take no pains to cultivate an opposite habit, you may produce an external reformation, and yet make no advance towards an internal reformation. The drunkard may force himself into a sober man, without undergoing any moral change. He may impose some powerful restraint upon the evil passion, and thus produce a suspension of the habit; but all the while the tendency remains unsubdued; and if the restraint be withdrawn, the tendency will resume all its power. The man is just what he was in all but the actual indulgence. But our chief attention should be given to the theology of the gospel, though what we have called the theology of conscience occupies a highly important place in reference to moral reformation. It is not unfrequent to find repentance described as a kind of condition to be performed on man's part, in order that he may be fitted to receive the blessings of the gospel. Repentance is spoken of as a preliminary to be accomplished by ourselves, so that when disciplined and penitent we may turn to Christ for forgiveness. But this is not the doctrine of the gospel. This is rather the inversion of the "due order" prescribed by the gospel. The doctrine of the New Testament is not "repentance," and then appeal to Christ. It is appeal at once to Christ in order that you may repent. We know that before the blood of the atonement can be applied to the conscience, and a man have reason to hope himself justified by God, there must be an earnest and hearty resolution to mortify those affections and desires whose indulgence has heretofore done despite unto God. But then we equally know that such a resolution as this is not to be made out of anything which man finds in himself, through the instrumentality of his unaided feelings whether mental or moral. We know that a determination to forsake sin, if it be anything better than a feeble purpose which will give way at the first onset of temptation, must be a determination which is based on hatred of sin as despite to a Benefactor; for such is the construction of our minds, at least in this the eclipse and degradation of man, that we cannot long avoid through mere dread of its consequences what commends itself as desirable to the appetites of our nature. And if it be essential to the resolution in question, that there be hatred of sin as despite to a Benefactor, there is little likelihood of its being fabricated and fastened on the soul, so long as a man is at a distance from Christ. It must be fabricated amid the scenes of crucifixion; it must be fastened by the agonies of the crucified; so that, we again say, that applying to Christ is the first step, and not the second in that "due order" which is prescribed by the gospel plan for seeking the Lord. The ark of the truth of God, in which is deposited the mysteries and the mercies of redemption—how, according to the question of our text—how shall this be brought into the human breast and shined in the recesses of the soul? Repentance and faith—these, so to speak, are the anointed priesthood who alone may handle, alone move the hallowed treasure. But if we would substitute for that repentance, which is the gift of the interceding Saviour, another, human in its origin, and produced by the workings of our unassisted feelings, what are we doing but placing an Uzza, one not sprung of the consecrated line, to assist in bringing back the sacred and magnificent treasure? The "due order" is that, stirred by the remonstrances of conscience, by the pleadings of God's Spirit, we flee straightway to Christ, and entreat of Him to make us penitent; and then to give us pardon. Let him try this method, and it may not be long ere the ark of the living God, weighty with the blessings of eternity, moves majestically into his soul. But we have yet some general remarks to advance upon what David calls seeking God after the "due order," or to speak more popularly, going the right way to work in the matter of moral endeavour. When God has once made known His will, the question is not whether there be sincerity of purpose, and earnestness of endeavour, but whether in striving for masteries man strives lawfully—strives in the way which has been revealed. If not, if there be any swerving from this way, it is not the amount of energy which he brings to the effort, nor the devotedness with which he follows out his course, which shall procure him favour with his Maker. He offends by substituting his own way for God's way; and, certainly, the zeal with which he prosecutes an offence can in no sense repair the offence. The decisions of the intellect are mightily swayed by the dictates of the inclination. An investigation may be carried on with all candour and honesty; yet the judgment has no fair play if there be a lurking wish that the verdict may confirm a preconceived theory. Therefore do we hold a man answerable for his faith, because we hold

him answerable for that state of moral feeling which he brings to the search after truth. If a man have himself destroyed or impaired the organ of vision, surely he is answerable for not seeing what God hath made plain. We unequivocally maintain that he who has revelation in his hand, and either rejects, or resists its sayings in regard of the alone mode of salvation, has nothing to expect but that as it was with David and his people, the Lord God will break in anger upon him, because in the matter of his endeavouring to "bring home to him the ark of the Lord," he has failed to proceed after the "due order." If God hath been pleased to make known a method in which the ark of His presence may be brought into the soul, we are answerable for conforming ourselves to that method with all possible exactness and all possible care. There can be nothing simpler than the directions which are given us in Holy Writ. We are to set ourselves at once to the resisting those known sins which we are sure must grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We are to pray for the influences of His Spirit, that we may be led to Christ for repentance and faith. Our whole dependence is to be placed on the sacrifice and righteousness of the Mediator. Many—vast multitudes—perish in utter indifference; they make no effort to be saved. Others make an effort, but not in the right way; not in the way the Bible prescribes; and they, too, perish—perish through planning for themselves, in place of submitting meekly to the revealed will of God. We are all naturally in the condition of Jerusalem at the time when the solitudes of its monarch were given to bringing the ark within its precincts. Created in the image of his Maker, the breast of man was designed as a sanctuary in which the Lord God might tabernacle; but the Philistine came down in his strength; the sanctuary was desecrated; and the Lord God withdrew from the polluted abode. And now the question which should interest us, and command our intense consideration—it is, How can the temple be rebuilt and cleansed, and habited again with the indwellings of Deity? The question of our text: "How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" is the question which presses hardest on every thinking man, conscious of the corruption which has been woven into his nature, conscious of the immortality to which that nature is heir. We thank God that we are not abandoned to our own conjecture and our own strivings! The ark is yet in the land, and though none but a priest can presume to touch the mysterious thing, we have a High Priest whose intercession is so rapid and so prevalent, that He can at once purify the temple, and fill it with the long lost treasure. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The danger of not waiting on God after the due order*:—God is highly displeased with persons who perform duties, but are careful not to perform them in a right manner. In discoursing which, I shall show—I. HOW IT COMES TO PASS THAT MEN PERFORM DUTIES, BUT ARE NOT CAREFUL TO PERFORM THEM IN A RIGHT MANNER. 1. Because to perform duty is the easiest part of religion, but to do it in a right manner is very difficult; and few people have a heart to manage the difficulties of religion. 2. Because the bare performance of duties is within the reach of all, the performing of them in a right manner is beyond the reach of the most part. Natural abilities will serve for the one, gracious abilities are necessary for the other (John xv. 5; Heb. xi. 4). Nature cannot carry a man above itself, more than the mouth of a river can be higher than the spring-head. 3. By the bare performance of duties, men attain the base and low ends which they propose to themselves in the service of God, viz., (1) Peace of mind, such as it is. (2) It gains a man credit in the world. 4. Because men may get duties done and keep their lusts too. To perform duties in a right manner is inconsistent with peace with our lusts (Psa. lxxvi. 18). 5. Because most men have low and mean thoughts of God (Mal. i. 6-8). II. HOW THE LORD TESTIFIES HIS DISPLEASURE AGAINST SUCH PERSONS. 1. By withdrawing from them in religious services. Ordinances are the trysting-places where Christ meets with His people; but if they be not gone about in a right manner, they will be but an empty sepulchre. The living God is not to be found in a dead worship. 2. By rejecting their services (Mal. i. 13; Isa. i. 11). 3. By spiritual strokes upon their souls (Jer. xlviii. 10; Mal. i. 14). 4. By strokes upon their bodies. III. WHY IS THE LORD SO HIGHLY DISPLEASED? 1. Because God commands His service to be done in a right manner, "With a perfect heart and a willing mind" (chap. xxviii. 9). 2. Because the doing of a duty in a wrong manner alters the nature of it and makes it sin. If a house be built of never so strong timber, and good stones, yet if it be not well founded and right built, the inhabitant may curse the day he came under the roof of it. 3. Because duties not performed according to the right order, are but the half of the service we owe to



God, and the worst half too. The Jews had it written about the doors of their synagogues, "Prayer without intention is as a body without a soul." 4. Because duties thus performed are very dishonourable to God. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Importance of small things in religion* :—You have before you now the picture. I shall want you to look at it—I. IN DETAIL. I observe—1. That God's judgment of sin must differ exceedingly from ours. 2. That all changes from the written revelation of God are wrong. 3. Whenever the practices of Christians differ from Scripture they are sure to incur inconvenience. 4. One innovation upon Sacred Writ leads to another. 5. A wrong thing done from right motives is not acceptable with God. II. AS A WHOLE. Here I have two pictures—1. One for the people of God. Let us be done with everything erroneous. Then will the ark be brought up out of its obscurity into the place of glory. This is what is necessary to bring the kingdom of Christ on earth. 2. The other for the ungodly. It was a right thing for David to wish to bring up the ark, but perhaps he was ignorant of the way to bring it, and see what inconvenience he had to suffer. If you are not clear as to the plan of salvation, you will have many joltings, much shaking, and you will suffer much inconvenience. The plan of salvation is "Trust in Jesus." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

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## CHAPTER XVI.

**VER. 3. And He dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman.**—*Individuality*.—I. THE GREAT EVENT ITSELF DOES NOT ABSORB ALL. We can easily understand how the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem would have absorbed all minor considerations, but it does not. Israel is not generalised into simply the male heads of the families; the bread and flesh are distributed to "both man and woman." God was being glorified, and simultaneously the people blessed. Diffusion is what God delights in; He connects the blessing of many with His own glory. II. THERE WAS A SPECIAL PROVISION HERE FOR PERSONAL ENJOYMENT. The placing of the ark in its tent of rest was not to be a mere historical fact, involving no personal enjoyments. It is not in bare abstractions that God delights, but in their bearing upon individuals. Perhaps one reason why the future glory of Christ is so unsubstantial to many, and operates so little on their feelings, and raises so few thoughts of joyousness in them, is the fact that they see so little of its bearing upon themselves. The beams of this glory are to light up every individual; every believer has actually a personal interest in them. Each man has his own independent existence with its longings and aspirations, and no generality will satisfy them. He must have for his own very self. This is not selfishness; it is a law grounded on the very constitution of our nature. No future lies before God's people in which God Himself absorbs everything. He will pervade all, which is a very different thing. III. WE ARE STRUCK WITH THE DISTINCT INDIVIDUALITY OF EACH. We cannot be too particular in preserving our individuality. It is the foundation of our responsibility, of His closest dealings with us, of all our capacity for happiness or sorrow in the time to come. Every man is to give account of himself to God; every man is to receive according to his works. IV. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF INDIVIDUAL LIFE IS THE FOUNDATION OF INDIVIDUAL EFFORT. Let us be encouraged, then, to have individual expectations. Let us link ourselves individually with the great events of God. Both man and woman triumphed in the bringing up of the ark; and both had the portion of bread and flesh and wine. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*)

**Vers. 4-7. And to record.**—*The recorders*.—These recorders were to take notes of what God had done; they were to be the chroniclers of the nation, and out of their chronicles they were to compose the psalms and songs. The original of the word "record" bears another meaning—"to bring to remembrance." We gather—I. THAT IF RECORDERS WERE APPOINTED, THERE IS SOME FAULT IN OUR MEMORY TOWARDS THE LORD. 1. Memory has been prejudiced by the fall. 2. Memory towards God's mercy has been very much impaired by neglect. 3. Memory touching God's mercy is often overloaded with other things. I think Aristotle used to call memory the stomach of the soul, in which it retains and digests what it gathers; but men cram it full of everything that it does not want—upon which

the soul cannot feed, and thus they ruin it for remembering the best things. 4. Memory has also suffered from its connection with the other faculties. (1) Darkened understandings. (2) Perverted affections. 5. Our memory of God's goodness is often crushed down by a sense of present pain. II. THAT WE OUGHT TO DO ALL WE CAN TO ASSIST OUR MEMORIES TOWARDS GOD. 1. It is a good thing to make an actual record of God's mercy. 2. Be sure to praise God thoroughly at the time you receive His goodness. 3. Set apart a little time for meditation. 4. Often rehearse His mercy in the ears of others. 5. Use everything about you as a memento. III. WE HAVE ALL HAD MERCIES TO REMEMBER. 1. Common mercies. 2. Special providence. 3. The long-suffering of God. IV. THAT ALL OUR MEMORIES SHOULD TEND TO MAKE US PRAISE AND BLESS GOD. Rowland Hill used to say that worldlings were like the hogs under the oak, which eat the acorns, but never think of the oak from which they fall, nor lift up their heads to grunt out a thanksgiving. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) And *Jelut with psalteries and with harps.*—*The meaning of song* :—The meaning of song goes deep. Who is there that in logical words can express the effect that music has on us? A kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that. (*T. Carlyle.*) *Musical talent dedicated to God* :—Jenny Lind believed that her art was the gift of God, and to be dedicated to His service. "I have always put Him first," said she, in her last illness. (*Church Worker.*)

Vers. 7-22. Then on that day David delivered first this psalm.—*A psalm of thanksgiving* :—This, a composite psalm, represents a form of service rather than a psalm. The whole of it, with slight variations, found in *Psa. xevi., cv. 1-15, cvi. 47, 48.* It celebrates redemption as unfolded in the history of Israel, proclaimed to the world, and triumphant in judgment. This part sets forth.—I. AN EXHORTATION TO THE NOBLEST WORK—praising God. In three ways, chiefly, is this duty recommended. 1. In giving thanks to God. (1) By singing psalms (ver. 9). (2) By social conversation. (3) By glorying in His name (ver. 10). 2. In seeking God. (1) Earnestly. (2) Joyfully. (3) Continually. 3. In commemorating God's works (ver. 12). II. MOTIVES TO INFLUENCE US IN THIS NOBLEST WORK. 1. God's great love. 2. God's great manifestations of love. 3. God's great dominion. 4. God's great claims. 5. God's vindication of these claims. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *A memorable day* :—Let us gather up a few of the lessons which Providence read out to humanity on that day. I. THAT RELIGION IS A SUBJECT IN WHICH THE LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO INTEREST THE MASSES. 1. Religion is suited to the common and primary instincts of human nature. 2. Religion provides for the fallen condition of human nature. II. THAT RELIGION DEVELOPS THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF MANKIND. Through it "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed." In the history of this "day" four states of mind are developed in relation to the Divine. 1. An enthusiastic interest in the Divine. Such was David's state. 2. A stolid unconsciousness of the Divine. This was revealed in Uzzah's conduct. To him the ark only appeared as a common chest. He was a type of those who engage in religious services without the religious spirit. 3. A calm confidence in the Divine. This was revealed in the conduct of Obed-edom. The terrible fate of Uzzah filled David with overwhelming excitement. The people were panic-stricken. But Obed-edom was calm. He took the ark into his own house for three months; he stands by a deserted cause. 4. A thoughtless contempt for the Divine. This was developed in Michal (chap. xv. 29). She is a type of a class who despise religious observances, religious people, and religious services. III. THAT RELIGION IS ALWAYS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHEERFUL AND THE GENEROUS. 1. Here is music. 2. Here is hospitality. True religion is evermore the parent of true philanthropy. IV. THAT RELIGION IS THE PATRON OF THE HIGHEST ART AS WELL AS THE INSPIRER OF THE HOLIEST FEELINGS (chap. xv. 16-24). (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 9. Sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works.—*Good conversation* :—I. THE SUBJECT HERE SUGGESTED FOR OUR COMMONPLACE TALK : "HIS WONDROUS WORKS." We ought to talk more about God's wondrous works. 1. As we find them in Holy Scripture. 2. As we find them in the history of our own country. 3. As we find them in our own individual history. II. THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS SUBJECT IS BOTH NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE. 1. Negative. Were we to talk more of God's wondrous works—(1) We should talk less about our own works. (2) We

should be free from talking of other people's works. (3) It would keep us from the ordinary frivolities of conversation. 2. Positive. The habit once acquired of talking more of God's wondrous works—(1) Would necessitate stricter habits of observation and of discrimination in watching the providence of God; (2) would be very ennobling; (3) would cause our gratitude to glow and would give an impulse to our entire life. III. LET ME URGE THIS TALKING ORDINARILY AND COMMONLY ABOUT GOD'S WONDRIOUS WORKS. Not only will it prevent much evil and do us much good, but it will be the means of doing much good to others. It will—1. Impress the sinner. 2. Enlighten the ignorant. 3. Comfort the desponding. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 11. **Seek the Lord and His strength.**—*The seeker encouraged*:—There are three reasons for this. I. BECAUSE IT IS AN EVIDENCE OF GRACE. II. BECAUSE THEIR SUCCESS IS SURE. III. BECAUSE, WHEN THEY HAVE FOUND, THEIR AIM AND WISH IN SEEKING ARE FULLY ANSWERED. (W. Jay.) *Threefold seeking*:—I. The Lord for MERCY. II. His strength for SERVICE. III. His face for HAPPINESS. (A. G. Brown.)

Vers. 15–22. **Be ye always mindful of His covenant.**—*The national covenant*:—Learn: I. THAT GOD'S METHOD OF INTERCOURSE WITH MEN HAS EVER BEEN IN THE FORM OF A COVENANT. Tayler Lewes says: "There is no religion without this idea of covenant with a personal God, and therefore all such views as those of Comte, Mill, and Spencer are, for all moral and religious purposes, wholly atheistical." II. THAT THIS COVENANT METHOD OF INTERCOURSE WITH MEN DISPLAYS THE SOVEREIGN WILL AND FREE GRACE OF GOD (Eph. i. 5). III. THAT THIS COVENANT METHOD OF INTERCOURSE PUTS MAN UNDER DEEP OBLIGATION TO GOD. 1. They are chosen to great favours. 2. They should render thanks for these favours. IV. THE OBLIGATIONS OF MEN TO GOD FOR HIS COVENANT MERCIES CAN NEVER CEASE. 1. It is of Divine authority. 2. It is confirmed from time to time. 3. It is "an everlasting covenant" (ver. 17), "made with man as an immortal being, and in itself an evidence of his designed immortality." (J. Wolfendale.)

Vers. 19–22. **He suffered no man to do them wrong.**—*Evil-doing restrained*:—I. HERE IS THE NEARNESS AND DEARNESS OF THE SAINTS UNTO GOD. II. HERE IS THE GREAT DANGER TO KINGS AND STATES TO DEAL WITH HIS SAINTS OTHERWISE THAN WELL. III. HERE IS THE CARE AND PROTECTION WHICH GOD HAD OVER THEM, SET AND AMPLIFIED. 1. By the number and condition of the persons whom He defended. 2. By what He did for them. (Thomas Goodwin.) **Touch not Mine anointed.**—*Touch not Mine anointed*:—I. THE PERSON WHOSE THE SPEECH IS. "He is the Lord our God" (ver. 14). II. THE PERSONS TO WHOM. In general to all; specially to some. III. THE PERSONS CONCERNING WHOM. His anointed. 1. The patriarchs, who were the rulers of their people. The name implies fatherhood and government. They were anointed before there was any material anointing at all. 2. The kings who were the successors of the patriarchs. (1) The Holy Ghost applies this term to Saul, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Cyrus (1 Sam. xii. 3, 4; 2 Sam. xix. 21; 2 Chron. vi. 42; Lam. iv. 20; Isa. xlv. 1). (2) This is affirmed by—(a) The third general Council of Ephesus. (b) The great Council of Toledo the Fourth. (c) The great Western Council of Francford. 3. The fathers use the term in the same way. 4. After the patriarchs, this term is appropriate to kings, and kings only, all the Bible through. It is used—(1) Four times by God, "Mine anointed." (2) Six times to God, "Thine anointed." (3) Ten times of God, "His anointed." (4) Twelve times it is "God's anointed." In the text and in Ps. cv. it is applied to the patriarchs; all the other instances refer either to Christ or to kings. (Bp. Andrewes.)

Vers. 23, 24. **Declare His glory among the heathen.**—*Declaring God's glory*:—I. Declare among the heathen the glory of GOD'S PERFECTIONS, that they may acknowledge Him as the true God. II. Declare the glory of HIS SALVATION, that they may accept Him as their only Redeemer. III. Declare the glory of HIS PROVIDENCE, that they may confide in Him as their faithful guardian. IV. Declare the glory of HIS WORD, that they may prize it as their chief treasure. V. Declare the glory of HIS SERVICE, that they may choose it as their chief occupation. VI. Declare the glory of HIS RESIDENCE, that they may seek it as their best home. (William Jackson.)

Ver. 25. He also is to be feared above all gods.—*The theology of the Old Testament*:—In the perusal of the Old Testament few sentiments more frequently meet our eye than comparisons between the great object of worship among the Jews and those imaginary deities to which the Gentiles in general paid adoration. This contrast pervades alike their doctrines of religion, their precepts of morality, and their hymns of thanks and praise. To the mind of a legislator, a judge, or a prophet of Israel, comparisons of this kind naturally and unavoidably arose, when he witnessed the ignorance, the polytheism, and the superstitions of the nations around him. As the religious sentiments of the Jews and Gentiles correspond with the objects of their faith and worship respectively, a concise comparison between the theology of the Bible and that of the heathen philosophers cannot fail to be interesting and instructive. I. The Greeks and Romans undoubtedly excelled the Jews, if not in the natural endowments of the mind, at least in EVERY ARTIFICIAL IMPROVEMENT. But in their doctrines respecting the Creator, and His providence and His laws, they can come in no competition with the nation whom they fancied they had reason to despise. II. The writers of Greece and Rome greatly exceeded those of Judea in THE VARIETY OF THEIR PUBLICATIONS: in the variety of the subjects to which their genius appears to have been adapted. In the authors of the Old Testament, when we again advert to the peculiar subject of their excellence, we find such poetical addresses of reverence or supplication to the supreme Being, and such descriptions of His proceedings and His providence, as the whole circle of human literature cannot elsewhere supply. III. Amongst the Greeks and Romans the most rational opinions entertained on these difficult and important subjects were CONFINED TO A SMALL NUMBER OF THE SUPERIOR CLASSES OF SOCIETY. From the unlearned populace those opinions were, for reasons of pride or policy, systematically and successfully concealed. Amongst the Jews, on the other hand, we find no traces of one creed for the learned and another for the ignorant. IV. The philosophers of Greece and Rome, if they did not themselves believe, permitted or taught the people in general to believe THAT A DIFFERENT DEITY PRESIDED OVER EVERY SEPARATE NATION and every separate city; over almost every different profession among men, and almost every different object of nature; that these various deities often disagreed in their interests and opinions, and opposed each other in their wishes and pursuits. The Jews believed and taught that there was One mighty Being, the Maker and Ruler of the world; to whose authority every other sentient being owed implicit obedience. V. The public worship of the Gentiles was ADDRESSED ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS TO AS VARIOUS OBJECTS THAT WERE NO GODS; and their rites and ceremonies were contaminated always by superstition, and not seldom by impiety. The worship of the Jew was addressed to one God, under one uniform character, as the only proper object of adoration; whose perfections no image could fitly represent, and to whom pure and spiritual worship was the most acceptable. To the one the Sabbath was a pious rest from his labours. With the other, religious festivals were seasons of intemperance, often immoral, and always licentious. (*W. Barrow, LL.D.*)

Vers. 27, 29. Glory and honour are in His presence.—*The beautiful place*:—Apply this to the sanctuary. I. BEAUTIFIED BY GOD'S PRESENCE. II. BEAUTIFIED BY ATTRACTIVE SERVICES. 1. Cheerful song. 2. Freewill offerings. 3. Spiritual fervour. III. BEAUTIFIED BY LOYAL ATTENDANTS. 1. Regular in attendance. 2. Mindful of its interests. 3. Obedient to its rules. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Religious worship*:—I. IT IS DUE TO GOD. 1. It is right. 2. It is acceptable. Though not enriching, yet well pleasing to Him. "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me." II. IT BEFITS OUR MORAL NATURE. 1. It meets our aspirations. 2. It satisfies our wants. 3. It dignifies our character. It detaches from earth and sin, gives beauty to contemplate, strength to imitate, and fear to humble and guide. "It is good for me to draw near to God." (*Ibid.*) *Strength and gladness are in His place.*—*Abiding strength and gladness*:—We all need enthusiasm and vigour in our work. It is, however, a rare thing to find these as an abiding, continuous experience. Youth, of course, has freshness and freedom. Its ardent hopefulness covers everything, just as we find when, looking at distant objects through a lens not perfectly achromatic, we see them fringed with prismatic tints—a rainbow brilliancy which does not belong to the objects themselves. There are objects in life that lose their illusive and enchanting brightness when viewed in the sober inspection of maturer age. Health, too, has its influence in imparting enthusiasm. On a bright and bracing day we walk the street with resounding foot.

The sunlit skies and the crisp air help to quicken and enliven our spirits. Contact with a friend we love warms our soul with new emotion, and pours the elixir of life into languid veins. A great thought, or the perusal of a delightful book, may stir our intellect to fresh activity. A new key to the mystery of life is given us by momentary contact with an illuminated mind. But society is complex. Cares are multiplied and minute in this our hurrying and exacting life. By no voluntary act of ours can we maintain this tension, any more than we can stretch a wire a hundred yards without a sag. With added years and with narrowing friendships we see less of pleasure ahead to anticipate. We come to feel the need of something to alleviate the weariness of life. Can we as Christian disciples find in our religion that ennobling and enlivening element which was found in the Hebrew? If not, ours is narrower and more limited than the Hebrew. Yes, we do not find strength and gladness here. We do not find a transient glow, an occasional enthusiasm, but an abiding joy, as we come under the power of the religion of Christ? Do you ask, How this is to be maintained? I. WE FIND IT IN THE ENTIRE RELIEF FROM SOLITUDE AS TO THE FUTURE WHICH THE GRACE OF CHRIST IMPARTS. II. WE REALISE THIS ABIDING STRENGTH AND GLADNESS AS WE REMEMBER THAT WE ARE WORKING OUT GOD'S WILL CONCERNING US IN ALL THAT IS DONE OR BORNE BY US. III. WE ARE EDUCATED BY WHAT WE DO. The thought of developed character and of virtues daily nourished within us is calculated to give abiding joyousness and strength to life. IV. LIFE ETERNAL IS THUS LINKED TO THIS. A light supernal cheers and lifts up our spirits as the swing of the sea lifts and carries forward the waves till they flood every inlet and beach along the winding shore. We are released from apprehension as to the future. We see all things working together for our good, around us and within us. We do not rightly estimate the believer's privilege. We go moaning and whining, instead of walking on the high places. We go with weights, and not with wings, over the bleak and barren paths of life. But if character have this abiding strength and gladness, freshness and exuberance; if each of us have this *shekinah* of glory within the soul, we shall show to men of the world that we have what they have not. We have more than a knowledge of the truth in its verbal exactness. We have Christ in us the hope of glory. We have an enthusiasm more continuous than the ardour of youth or the glow of health, or the inspiration of genius. This abiding power is what the world wants. Its fruits, seen in character, ennoble society and link earth with heaven. They make earth bright and vocal. Culture, art, science, mechanical skill cannot work this transformation. Wealth is powerless. (*Richard S. Storrs, D.D.*)

Vers. 28-29. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name.—*The claims of God to the worship and homage of His creatures* :—I. GOD IS ENTITLED TO AND CLAIMS THE HOMAGE OF HIS CREATURES. II. These claims are made upon us, HIS INTELLIGENT CREATURES. III. THE WORSHIP AND HOMAGE REQUIRED ELEVATES THE MAN WHO PAYS IT. (*J. Robinson.*) *The glory which is due to Jehovah* :—The whole preceptive part of the Bible is contained in this one command. Every being has a right and may justly claim to be regarded and treated by all who know him in a manner suitable to the nature and character which he possesses to the relations and offices which he sustains, and to the works which he performs. Consider what is due to Jehovah. I. AN ACCOUNT OF HIS NATURE. He is God alone. He deserves something which is due to no other being in the universe—religious worship and adoration. II. ON ACCOUNT OF THE CHARACTER HE POSSESSES. It is absolutely perfect. There is something in His character suited to excite every proper affection of which the human soul is capable. III. ON ACCOUNT OF THE RELATIONS AND OFFICES WHICH HE SUSTAINS. 1. Creator. 2. Preserver. These imply that God must necessarily be the universal Teacher, Master, Sovereign, and Judge. IV. ON ACCOUNT OF THE WORKS WHICH HE HAS PERFORMED. Conclusion: 1. How reasonable are God's requisitions! He merely requires the payment of a great debt. 2. How immeasurably great, then, is the debt which our world has contracted, and under the burden of which it now groans. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The claims of the Supreme Being to the worship and homage of His creatures* :—These claims are founded—I. ON OUR RELATION TO GOD AS HIS CREATURES. II. ON THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIVINE EXCELLENCE VISIBLE IN THE UNIVERSE AROUND US. III. IN THE CONSTITUTION AND SUSCEPTIBILITIES OF OUR MINDS. Worship is not only fit and proper as an act of the mind, but one to which it is naturally prone. IV. ON A CONSIDERATION OF WHAT IS MOST CONDUCTIVE TO THE

**WELL-BEING OF MEN.** The very act itself elevates the mind; it reminds us of our true position as the creatures and the servants of God. Conclusion: 1. These acts of worship divide the world into two great classes—those that fear God and those that fear Him not. 2. That as the public worship of God is one most important means of proclaiming the great facts of His existence and government, it demands the special and constant attention of all that fear God. 3. That as worship and homage are the requirements and the just rights of the Supreme Being, and as they are intimately connected with our well-being in this life and that which is to come, it is a serious and important inquiry how we may be able to present it most acceptably. (*J. Robinson.*) **Bring an offering.**—*Hearing and worshipping*:—I. WHAT DO WE COME TO CHURCH FOR? Not merely to get but to give. Not to take only but to offer. Not to hear simply, but to worship: “bring an offering,” “worship the Lord.” II. WHAT IS THE OFFERING THE BRINGING OF WHICH CONSTITUTES WORSHIP? It is the offering of ourselves. Spirit, soul, body, substance. Conclusion: 1. This true explanation of the object of our meeting in God’s house gives the clearest condemnation of those who absent themselves. “I can read my Bible at home” might be an answer if we be but “hearers”; none if we be “worshippers.” 2. How great is the honour of being allowed to honour God—as worshippers! 3. Our direct worship shall be the smoke of the incense; but our whole life shall be, as it were, a compound of sweet spices. (*J. R. Vernon, M.A.*) *The beauty of holiness*:—The religion of the gospel of Christ is “the beauty of holiness,” as it concerns—I. ITS AUTHOR. II. ITS PLAN. III. ITS FRUITS. (*Legh Richardson.*)

**Ver. 31. And let men say among the nations, the Lord reigneth.**—*Pessimism*:—I. NOW, WHAT IS THE PREVALENT TENDENCY OF OPINION, AS ILLUSTRATED IN OUR DAY, IN SCIENCE, IN ART, IN JOURNALISM, IN LITERATURE, IN SOCIAL SPECULATION? It may certainly be summed up in the one word “pessimism”—that is, unbelief and hopelessness. The illustrations of the tendency are manifold, they come from every side. If we turn to philosophy, we find, as a consequence of unbelief, the revival of the old doctrine that life is not worth living, that man is a failure, just as Pyrrho, the ancient sceptic, compared mankind to swine pent up in a foundering, wrecked, and rudderless vessel in the midst of a hurricane. “Since the human race,” says Schopenhauer, “always tends from bad to worse, there is no prospect but ever-deepening confusion and wretchedness.” “Existence,” says Von Hartmann, “is unspeakably wretched, and society will grow worse and worse.” “More dreary, barren, base and ugly,” said Carlyle, “seem to me the aspects of this poor, diminished, quack world, doomed to speedy death,” which he can only wish to be speedy. “A wave of doubt, desolation, and despondency has passed over the world,” says an English poet, Mr. Alfred Austin, in a lecture before the Royal Institution. “One by one all the fondly cherished theories of life, society, and empire have been abandoned; we no longer seem to know whither we are marching, and many appear to think that we are travelling to perdition.” This pessimistic spirit, he said, pervades all society and all thought. II. I will speak mainly of THE SUPPOSED CONNECTION OF SCIENCE WITH THIS PESSIMISTIC TENDENCY. To science many attribute its growth and its spread. “Science,” says M. Zola, the French novelist, in his speech, “hath emptied nations, and is incapable of re-peopleing them; it has ravished happiness from our human souls, and is incapable of restoring it; in proportion as science advances the ideal slips away.” Now I believe science to be beneficent, and I believe pessimism to be destructive, and, desiring to combat the predominant pessimism, I shall try to prove to you that science gives no ground for it at all. Science is part of revelation. Religion on one side is nothing but a knowledge of God, and science deepens our knowledge of God. Religion on the other side is nothing but morality. It is a good mind and a good life. There is not one law of morality which science does not reproduplicate and emphasise in thunders louder than those of Sinai. Science is one of the Bibles of God by which, as St. Paul boldly says, the invisible things of Him are rendered visible; it is God’s revelation to the mind of man through the works of Nature, and whatever may be the voice in which God speak to us, it is impossible for Him to lie. If we are faithless, He abideth faithful; He is not able to deny Himself. The supposed antagonism between science and religion is merely due to the passion and ignorance of men. And science has been to men a boon unspeakable, an archangel of beneficence as well as an archangel of power. She has prolonged life, she has mitigated disease, she has minimised torture, she has

exorcised superstitious terrors; she has given to feeble humanity the eyes of Argus and the arms of Briareus, she has opened to men's thoughts unimaginable realms of faërie, and has made fire, flood, and air the vassals of His will. III. DOES SCIENCE TEND TO UNBELIEF? And it is not true that science leads to unbelief. Whose name stands first in the modern era of science? The name of Sir Isaac Newton. Was he an unbeliever? He was one of the whitest, purest, simplest, most believing souls that ever lived. Whose name stands first in science in our own generation? The name of Michael Faraday. Was he an atheist? His friend found him one day bathed in tears, and asked if he was ill. "No," he said, "it is not that"; but pointing to his Bible, he said, "While men have this blessed book to teach them, why will they go astray?" It has been sometimes assumed that Charles Darwin was an unbeliever; yet he wrote in his book on the descent of man: "The question whether there is a Creator and Ruler of the Universe has been answered in the affirmative by the highest intellects that ever lived." There have been scientific atheists, but such men have not been atheists as a necessary consequence of their science, but because they have committed the very fault which they scorn so utterly in priests: it is because they have tried to soar into the secrets of the Deity on the waxen wings of the understanding; it is because they have pushed their science to untenable conclusions and mingled it with alien inquiries. If unbelief were a necessary result of science, no benefit which science could possibly bestow could equipoise its curse, for religion means that by which the spirit of man can live. The destruction of religion would be first the triumph of despair, and next the destruction of morality. Once persuade man that he is no better than the beasts that perish, and he will live like the beasts that perish; he will cease to recognise the intangible grandeur of the moral law, and will abandon himself to the struggles of mad selfishness. All religion is based on three primary convictions, of God, of righteousness, and of morality, and these convictions science strengthens and does not destroy. (*Dean Farrar.*) *God's rule the saint's comfort*:—John Wesley used to say, "I dare no more fret than curse and swear." A friend of his said, "I never saw him fretful or discontented under any of his trials, and to be in the company of persons of this spirit always occasioned him great trouble. He said one day, 'To have persons around me murmuring and fretting at anything that happens is like having the flesh torn from my bones. I know that God sits upon the throne ruling all things!'" (*R. Newton.*)

Ver. 34. O give thanks unto the Lord.—*Thanksgiving due to God for His goodness*:—I. INSTANCES OF THE LOVING-KINDNESS AND MERCY OF GOD. 1. The unfolding of a plan of salvation for sinners through His well-beloved Son. 2. The furnishing so fully of the means necessary to salvation. (1) Birth in a Christian land. (2) The Bible. (3) Preaching of the gospel. 3. Temporal blessings. II. THE THANKSGIVING THAT IS DUE. III. THIS GOODNESS OUGHT TO LEAD US TO REPENTANCE. We ought to improve both the temporal and spiritual privileges we enjoy to the promotion of His glory. (*Alex. Davidson.*)

Ver. 36. And all the people said, Amen.—*The people's amen*:—I. INDICATING—1. Attention. 2. Appreciation. 3. Interest in the service. II. A SOLEMN SEALING. III. A REAL DUTY. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Ver. 37. As every day's work required.—*Daily service*:—That was the law. Not as yesterday's work required, not as to-morrow's work might require, but as every day's work required within its own twelve hours or twenty-four. That was order. The men had been singing. A musical man cannot be disorderly; he would refute his own song, he would annihilate his own music. "As every day's work required"—morning by morning; now much, now more; now not quite so much; now a little variety; but every day had its duty; every morning had its opportunity. That is the secret of success. For want of knowing such a secret and applying it many men are without bread to-day. "As every day's work required." There is only one time—Now. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Now is God's great opportunity given to us all. Yesterday is gone, to-morrow is unborn, to-day is now, and the golden portal rolls back to let us into the larger liberty. Things are not to be done at any time. That is where so many people go into confusion. To so many people there is no regular time; that is the reason of failure, that is the leak. They were going to do this, but they forgot. What! a man forgetting? He was going to do this at ten o'clock, but he

was busy at that moment, and now he will do it in the afternoon. Never ask if you can do this to-morrow; no man has a right to promise you that liberty. The great secret of successful life is discipline, promptitude, military obedience—now! altogether! the best I can; as every day requires. That was the way that Jesus Christ lived. In that apparently coldly ethical doctrine there is a great evangelical gospel; the Son of God is hidden in that disciplinary prose: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me": are there not twelve hours in the day? I must work while the light lasts; the night cometh wherein no man can work: I must not postpone Monday's duties to be done in Tuesday's light." How is it possible for you to do so much? we say to this great king of labour, and that great leader of civilisation; and he makes answer, Only by doing the day's work within the day. There are a great many persons who have out-of-the-way places in which they store things to be attended to some time; the fact being that there is no peace in that household, no music, no deep content; there is always something tugging at the conscience and reminding the memory of the arrears. Never have any arrears. What does a well-spent day mean? It means Sabbath every night, satisfaction; it is finished, it is enough; I have told my tale, I have woven my thread, there is nothing more to be done to-day; then comes the sleep of the labouring man, and that is sweet. The lazy man cannot sleep, he can only snore. Only he who works, works for God, with God, in the spirit of Christ, can sleep, and God will make up all that is due to him whilst he is sleeping. Secondly, let us enlarge the meaning of the word "day." The term "day" is one of the most flexible terms in Holy Scripture, in poetry, and in general experience. "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth." I have no doubt of it; but I do not know what "day" means. We speak of "our day": does it mean from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock in the evening? Is the word "day" there a term of clock-time, or does it relate to centuries, eras, epochs? We say, "Our little systems have their day"; does that mean a chronometer day, or a larger and variable period? Evidently it means the latter. So the text may be expanded without a change of word. "As every day's work required"—as the time needed, as the exigency demanded, as the epoch called for, as the century required. You are fully aware that every day, in the larger sense of age, epoch, or era, has its own peculiar revelation and its own peculiar truth and special and even unique duty and obligation. We cannot go back upon the centuries and fit the expired aeons into the framework of the immediate day in which we are breathing. The apostle did not hesitate to speak of "the present truth," the truth of this particular day, with all its thrill and pulse and feverishness; the present truth, precisely adapted and suited to the immediate intellectual and spiritual condition of the times. We read of men who fell asleep after serving their generation—"and having served his generation, he fell on sleep." And he serves the next generation best who serves the present generation well. Your influence will not be cut off, it will run on when you are no longer visible; it will be a memory, an inspiration, an enthusiasm, an ever-recurring poem, lifting life's prose into nobler music. We must catch the very spirit and genius of the time; our question should be, What will the people hear? Not in any grovelling or degrading sense, but, What is the supreme necessity of the human heart just at this hot moment? What is it, then, that covers and sanctifies all days?—the little day of twenty-four hours or twelve, and the great day of long centuries and piled millenniums? That permanent and all-sovereign quantity or force is Jesus Christ. It is said of Him, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He describes Himself as He that is and was and is to come—Alpha, new as the dawn; Omega, venerable as the sunset of millenniums. He abides in the Church, He is ever on the throne, He gives the order of the day, He has a message for every morning. If we could lay hold of that great truth we should have a united Church at once. So much for working on the broader scale; so much for working within day, meaning century, age, epoch. We are not all working in the same way or all doing precisely the same kind of work. If the Church would but believe this she might have summer all the year round. We will compare one man with another; it would seem as if there were no escape from this lunacy. We think that unless a man shall begin where we expect him to begin, and continue as we expect him to continue, and conclude as we expect he will conclude, that such man is wrong. Never forget that that man could criticise you if he thought it worth while to stoop so low. Day—day—day—in its usual sense it means so short a space of time. Take short views of life. Mayhap I am speaking to some one who is worrying himself about the day after to-morrow.



Where is that day? Who has seen it? What will it be like? Who told you about it? What rights have you in it? To-day is thy limitation. He who works well to-day shall have holiday to-morrow—holiday in the sense of renewed strength, increased vigour, and power to deal with the problems and handle the difficulties of life. You are wondering who will live in your house two years after you are dead. Why should you trouble yourself about two years after? You will not be there to see, why trouble about it now? To-morrow is with God; to-morrow is lingering by the lakes of heaven; to-morrow has not yet left the eternal throne. Why fret and worry and tear thyself about to-morrow? It may be the brightest day that ever shone upon thee; and if thou wouldst make it so, to-day be up and doing, and to-morrow thou shalt have joy in thy Lord. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 41. **To give thanks to the Lord.**—*Praise in song* (for a Choir Service):—King David was the greatest innovator in worship of whom Scripture contains a record, for he introduced instrumental music to guide popular singing in worship, and he formed the whole tribe of Levi into a guild of various branches, one of which was employed in the musical services of religion. There had always been in Israel a tendency to song. At the digging of a well, at the winning of a victory, at the issue of a great deliverance the people sang, not men only, or priests only, but men and women. But music was not in the stated worship of God till David organised it. It was this organisation that Solomon found ready to his hand. The purpose of the music, the purport of the song, was praise for the mercy of the Lord: "to give thanks unto the Lord, because His mercy endureth for ever." "I am burdened with the sense of the mercies of God," said the dying Norman Macleod. That was the burden of Israel and Judah in the old time (2 Chron. xx. 21; Ezra iii. 11). That was the National Anthem of Israel. There is none like it yet, not even Luther's, though that comes next to it. It is a hymn we might sing in eternity. There is something to stir the heart in the mercy of God. There were many things that stirred the heart of Israel, but this one was always the chief. We know very little about the hymns or music of the early Church. Everything that was sung that was not a psalm seems to have been called a hymn. Paul enjoins "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" as a means of instruction and teaching. Thus it was at the German Reformation. Thus it was at the Scottish Reformation, when almost all the learning was of rhyme; psalms, beatitudes, creeds, and commandments—they rhymed and sang them all. The Gnostic heretics had, through their hymns, such hold on the heart, that he was the best champion of orthodoxy who could write a rival hymn. The Arians also swayed the mobs of the great cities of the East by their processions and their songs, and their catches sung at meal hours, so that Ambrose and Chrysostom had to counteract them with hymns that were charged with the very truth of God and Christ and the Holy Ghost. To you members of the choir I would say, "You sing not as pagans sang; your music is not a refined amusement, or a toy, but a consecration to God of a great gift with which the Lord of the talents has entrusted you. It is given you that by its use you may lead us up to God. It is not congregational worship if some one sings in the presence of the congregation. The heart of the people must go with the singer. There is not much more worship in hearing some one sing than there would be in seeing some one paint. But there is a strange power in music—above all in the music of the human voice—to awaken emotion. Some of the grandest preaching I have ever heard was the singing of a hymn with a purpose. It was not worship, but it was wonderful teaching, and it led to worship—worship of the highest kind. Now triumph will be in the music that moves us to noble deeds. When one Greek orator spoke, men said, 'What a noble speech!' but when the other spoke men looked on each other, grasped their swords and said, 'Let us march on Macedon.' And if you use your gift to the highest purpose it will have for its result that we will arise and go to our Father." Basil said the Holy Ghost was the author of Christian music. This lifts up the central purpose beyond mere notation; the Holy Ghost takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. (*Prof. Charteris, D.D.*)

Ver. 43. **And all the people departed, every man to his house.**—*On family worship*:—Public exercises of religion, when properly conducted, have a happy tendency to prepare the mind for those of a more private nature. Our text tells us that David returned to bless his house—that is, to present them to God in prayer and entreat His blessing upon them. This suggests the duty of family

prayer. I. THIS DUTY IS A PRACTICE BY WHICH GOOD MEN HAVE BEEN DISTINGUISHED IN EVERY AGE. II. FAMILY PRAYER IS A NATURAL AND NECESSARY ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE DEPENDENCE OF FAMILIES UPON GOD, and of the innumerable obligations they are under to His goodness. III. THIS DUTY IS ENFORCED BY ITS TENDENCY, UNDER THE BLESSING OF GOD, TO FORM THE MINDS OF CHILDREN AND SERVANTS TO THE LOVE AND PRACTICE OF RELIGION. IV. Family worship may be expected to have a MOST BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE ON THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF THE HEADS OF FAMILIES THEMSELVES. V. PROBABLE PLEAS WHICH WILL BE URGED FOR THE NEGLECT OF THIS DUTY. 1. Want of ability. Answer—(1) Forms of prayer may be used with advantage. (2) The plea of mental inability will not stand the test of examination, unless it include an incapacity to read. (3) It is more than probable that those who complain of this inability have never made the trial, and consequently never can form any accurate judgment of their qualifications. 2. Want of time. Consider on what principle this plea depends: that religion is not the grand concern; that there is something more important than the service of God; that the pleasing and glorifying our Maker is not the great end of human existence—a fatal delusion, a soul-destroying mistake. 3. It has been neglected so long that they know not how to begin. VI. HINTS ON THE PRACTICE. 1. Let it ever be joined with reading the Scriptures. 2. Let it be constant. 3. Attend with a full decision of mind, with the utmost seriousness. 4. Seek the aid of the Spirit. (*Robert Hall, M.A.*) *David's attention to his household*:—I. THE WORK IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN ENGAGED: the bringing up the ark to Jerusalem. A glorious work—1. In itself. 2. As typical of Christ's ascension into heaven (Psa. xxiv., xlvii., lxviii., cxxxii.). II. THE WORK TO WHICH HE RETURNED: "to bless his house." 1. To obtain blessings for them by his prayers. 2. To render himself a blessing to them by his conduct. Learn—1. How highly we are privileged. The ark, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, is present in the midst of us. 2. In what way we should improve our privileges. We should endeavour to communicate the benefit of them to others. (*Skeletons of Sermons.*) *Domestic duties*:—We cannot always live in public; it is true that we have tent-work to do, temple work &c., but when all that is external or public has been done, every man must bless his own home, make his own children glad, make his own hearthstone as bright as he possibly can, and fill his own house with music and gladness. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER XVII.

VERS. 1-10. Now it came to pass, as David sat in his house.—*The king's proposal*:—I. DAVID'S PROPOSAL. 1. A noble purpose. 2. A generous purpose. 3. A purpose commended by the prophet. II. GOD'S DISAPPROVAL OF DAVID'S PROPOSAL. 1. God knows all our purposes. 2. God often hinders the accomplishment of our purposes. III. REASONS FOR GOD'S DISAPPROVAL OF DAVID'S PROPOSAL. 1. It was something entirely new. 2. It was untimely in its beginning. 3. David was not the right man to build. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Our inspirations require to be revised*:—There are extemporaneous inspirations in life which have to be revised, amended, and in some instances discarded altogether. A judgment is not always right simply because it is sudden. There have been days upon which we have been perfectly sure that our duty lay along such and such lines; everything concurred to prove the providence of the situation; circumstances and impressions combined to show that a well-defined line of action had been actually described by the Divine finger. It is precisely where duty appears to be so plain that vigilance should be most on the alert. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *David forbidden to build the temple*:—Some men are great only in intentions. If words were deeds, and dreams realities, they would be the flower and crown of their generation. But life slips by unutilised. The future of hope never becomes the present of fact. They are no more than glorious idle dreamers. Not so with David. I. DAVID'S PIOUS EMPLOYMENT OF HIS LEISURE. He had long been like a pursued mountain-bird. And when Saul could pursue him no more, when he had come to the crown of Judah, it was an assailed crown. But at last there was rest for David. No tent of the warrior. It is "his house" he is in, his new mansion, his cedar palace. Therein he "sat." He has leisure. How does he use it? Seeking some excitement of pleasure wherein to escape the

oppression of self-consecration; the unwelcome voice of clamorous duty? When he went forth to conflict he said, "The battle is the Lord's." And now he felt, "My leisure is the Lord's." So as he sits in his beautiful mansion, the palace which the Tyrian builders had built, he was comparing its elegance and splendour with the meanness of the tabernacle in which he had placed the ark. The comparison pained him. He will build a temple for the Lord. With such thoughts as these he occupied his leisure. Leisure! It is the very thing that some seem never to get, and others getting, seek to escape. With some life is a long, seldom-pausing battle with want. With others, when the respite comes, they are eager soon, having no mental or spiritual resources, to get back again into the familiar toil wherein they find the only life they care to live. Few and brief may be our opportunities of leisure. All the more reason that they should be for our highest refreshing and renewing by being dedicated to God. How a man spends his leisure will tell much of the man. David's employment of his speaks well for him.

**II. GOD SHOULD BE HONOURED WITH OUR SUBSTANCE.** David felt God to be worthy of the best. He desired to build Him a house. The largest liberality would be only a poor acknowledgment, a slight expression of his affection. David had built a palace. He was not wrong in this. Comely symbols these of kingly power. Let the rich and great dwell in stately houses. Let the owners of wealth possess what only the wealthy can buy. As David did more for himself, he desired to do more for Him to whom he owed his all. That should be the rule of our conduct. Do our riches increase? There should be a proportionate increase of what we dedicate to God. A matter, this, little considered by many.

**III. GOOD WISHES ARE NEVER LOST.** David told Nathan the prophet his desire to rear a temple for the Lord. We are not surprised to find that the prophet, with prompt approbation, encouraged the king to the great undertaking. The work was good, but was David the man to undertake it? To Nathan at night came a Divine intimation that he was not. To war's rough, sad business he was Divinely bidden. But because of its connection with its inevitable horrors he was bidden back from the pious enterprise on which his sublime and earnest ambition was set. What a verdict is thus passed upon war! What then? Does David's pious intention count for nothing? It counts for much. Beside which he had his own important special work to do, to give his people rest from their foes and consolidate the kingdom of Israel. His good wish had not been in vain. He was forbidden to build the temple, but God would build him a family, and the world's needed glorious Deliverer was to be the "offspring of David." A greater honour than he sought came to him. God was pleased with his pious wish, and fulfilled it in a nobler way. Think not little, then, of good intentions that are hindered from becoming more than intentions. You may have desired to do some larger work for God; you may have intended to consecrate your whole life to some holy ministry—to the ministry of the Gospel in this land or far hence among the heathen; but you were hindered. In circumstances God said, "No, not in this way; in some other"; and, perhaps, you look back and say, "My life is so unlike what I had hoped. I drew the consecrated plan, and God's viewless, but undeniable, hand blotted it out. My wish was all in vain." No, say not that. The desire was good. It will be fulfilled; if not here, yet in higher service than otherwise had been yours—in that bright and holy city beyond death. Cherish large and holy desires. Precious seeds, you may be unable to sow them in any human heart, in any field of earth; but heaven shall receive them. There they shall come to richest harvest. You shall find them again—not baffled and scattered, as here, but in noblest service, in heaven's eternal praise. David was not to build the temple. But he knew it was to be built. The honour was reserved for his son. "He," said God, "shall build an house for My name." If hindered from an undertaking ourselves let us remember that our prayers and effort may help another to do it. (*G. T. Coster.*)

Vers. 7-11. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote.—*God in personal life* :—I. GOD ELEVATES MEN FROM THE LOWEST TO THE HIGHEST STATION IN LIFE. II. GOD HELPS MEN TO DO THE WORK FOR WHICH THEY ARE ELEVATED. 1. By His constant presence. 2. By continual victories. III. GOD HONOURS MEN FOR FAITHFUL PERFORMANCE OF THE WORK TO WHICH THEY ARE ELEVATED. 1. Honoured in reputed life. 2. Honoured in peaceful death. (*James Wolfendale.*) *From the sheepfold to the throne* :—David is thus presented to our thought as the type of youths rising from lowly to lofty positions, and rising by virtue of conditions and qualities essentially the same. What are these conditions and qualities? To

say that God chose David and put this high honour on him does not at all answer the question. Why did the Divine choice fall on him? God's choice of agents and bestowment of honours are not made capriciously, without ground of personal merit in the subject. Our task is to study the human elements, to estimate the subjective factors in this problem of growth and greatness. David was the man after "God's own heart," not absolutely, but because he was the best of his nation and age for the work he was called to do. I. There was in David a SUBSTANTIAL GROUND OF PERSONAL WORTH, of susceptibilities and tendencies upon which to build a life of greatness. II. HIS LIFE WAS SWAYED BY A GREAT PURPOSE. III. HE HAD GREAT COURAGE. 1. Physical. 2. Moral. IV. He exhibited, through all these years of preparation and development, GREAT FIDELITY TO TRUSTS IMPOSED. V. He had GREAT FAITH IN GOD. VI. All his estimable qualities were fed and fired by HABITUAL AND GENUINE RELIGIOUS DEVOTION. (C. H. Payne, D.D.) *The remembrance of our early history should be a stimulus to gratitude:—*While many Americans are looking up their remote ancestors to provide themselves with a crest and coat of arms, a few follow the example of early English families and adopt some emblem which suggests a noteworthy incident in their own history. One millionaire, not ashamed of the source of his wealth, has a derrick engraved on his seal. Another family enriched by the manufacture of furniture has adopted a tree as a crest. The most interesting of these modern symbols, perhaps, is found engraved on the plate and books of a family of Pennsylvania Friends, who would probably be unwilling to call it a crest. It is a cat carrying a rabbit in its mouth. There is a legend to explain it. The first of a family to emigrate to this country was the father of eleven children. He sailed in the same year as Penn, and died on the voyage, leaving his wife to land alone with her helpless flock. She had a grant of land, but no money. They took refuge, as did many of the first emigrants to America, in a cave dug out of the side of a hill. Winter came on. Provisions failed. The widow saw her children grow pale and weak for want of food. The day arrived at last when there was not a grain of meal in the barrel. She fell on her knees and prayed in an agony of supplication. When she arose she smiled, her children said afterwards, as if she had seen an angel coming with bread. Going out she saw no angel, but the cat with a freshly killed rabbit in its mouth. The rabbit made a good meal, of which pussy, we may be sure, had a full share. The family, which has been a prosperous and influential one, preserves this symbol of their early history to commemorate their gratitude to God. (*Daily Paper.*)

Ver. 14. **But I will settle him in Mine house and in My kingdom for ever.**—*The everlasting establishment:—*I. First of all, let us offer a word or two upon the KINGDOM. Much is written in Scripture about kingdoms and empires. 1. That the "house" or the "kingdom" which Jehovah claims as His own is a kingdom which originated with the Lord. It rose not up in the mind of mortals first. It grew not up of Nature's materials. It was not brought forth, and set up, and established, by the arm of man, or by the conquests of warriors, as many other kingdoms are. It originated in the wisdom, grace, and power of the Most High. Moreover, not only does this kingdom originate with Him, but it is so formed and constituted as to glorify the Lord. "My glory," saith Jehovah, "will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images." In the formation and constitution of the kingdom which God calls His own—"Mine house and My kingdom"—the subjects are a royal seed; of royal blood; of royal birth; "kings and priests unto God." My hearer, of what kingdom art thou? If thou art not of the kingdom of God's grace, thou art of the kingdom of darkness, a slave of Satan, and on the high-road to destruction. 2. Yet further observe, the laws are immutable. 3. Then further, I notice the privileges, the high spiritual privileges of the kingdom. Pardon, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost. II. I come to the INVESTITURE OF THE KING.—"I will settle him in Mine house and in My kingdom." Solomon was settled for a time, and reigned long and peacefully over Israel; but he is not reigning now. "A greater than Solomon is here." He is invested with sovereignty, absolute and universal: "I will settle Him in My kingdom." He is invested with sovereignty, absolute and universal. "I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord has said unto Me, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance and uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession." Moreover, if we speak of His absolute sovereignty for a moment, you know it is written expressly, that "none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" III. THIS

NATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT; for there is that word in my text—"establish." There is a great deal said in Scripture about establishment. Immutable decrees are the basis of the establishment. Oh! I could bring out some twenty or thirty instances under my own notice in which all the schemes and powers and efforts of men have passed by; and God, in a moment and by a word, through some of His sent servants, has accomplished it all. IV. THE GLORIOUS PERPETUITY—"I will settle Him in Mine house and in My kingdom for ever; and His throne shall be established for evermore." (*Joseph Irons.*)

Ver. 16. Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?—*The greatness of Divine favours*:—I. THEY INFINITELY SURPASS HUMAN DESERT. II. THEY FILL ALL TIMES FROM REMOTEST PAST TO DISTANT FUTURE. III. THEY SPRING FROM SOVEREIGN MERCY. IV. THEY ARE BEYOND ALL HUMAN COMPREHENSION. (*J. P. Lange.*)

Vers. 17-22. And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O Lord.—*A model of devout thanksgiving*:—I. OVER WHAT HE REJOICES. 1. Over great blessings received. 2. Over yet greater blessings promised. II. IN WHAT SPIRIT HE REGARDS THESE FAVOURS. 1. As utterly undeserved by himself. 2. As the gift of God's sovereign grace. (*J. P. Lange.*) *God's relation to His people*:—Consider I.—THE RELATION GOD BEARS TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. He has chosen them out of the world. 2. He has given Himself to them in a peculiar way. 3. He avows that relation to them before the whole universe. II. WHAT UNDER THAT RELATION WE MAY EXPECT AT HIS HANDS. 1. The care of His providence. 3. The communications of His grace. 3. The manifestations of His love. 4. The possession of His glory. III. WHAT UNDER THAT RELATION HE IS ENTITLED TO EXPECT FROM US. 1. That we be a people to Him. 2. That we give ourselves to Him. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*)

Vers. 23-27. Therefore now, Lord, let the thing that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant.—*True prayer*:—It is—I. GROUNDED ON GOD'S PROMISE. II. IT REGARDS GOD'S HONOUR SOLELY (ver. 24). III. IT ASCRIBES ALL TO GOD'S FREE GRACE. IV. IT APPEALS TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS. V. IT RECEIVES THE FULNESS OF GOD'S BLESSING. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *That Thou wilt build him an house.—Domestic piety*:—I. THEY WHO HAVE CHARGE OF FAMILIES SHOULD CHERISH AN EARNEST REGARD FOR THEIR WELFARE. II. Those who have the care of families should make it their chief anxiety to IMPART TO THEM RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION. Seeking their spiritual welfare we shall—1. Strive to be the means of their conversion to God. 2. This we should do because converted families are scenes of harmony and love. 3. This only can impart abiding consolation under bereaving providences. 4. It will be thus we shall provide the means in our religious households of future usefulness to the Church and the world. (*W. G. Barrett.*)

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

Vers. 1-12. Now after this it came to pass that David smote the Philistines.—*Spoils from Edom*:—If we have conquered an enemy we must hold the conquest as an illustration of the power of God rather than of the skill of our own might or hand. The idols which we bring away from the lands of darkness are to be set up in God's house, and are to mark points in the progress of Christian civilisation. They are to be regarded as indications of a universal conquest which Christ has yet to win over the nations of the whole world. If we have brought back spoils—such as art, music, or any form of pleasure by which the popular mind can be touched and moved in an upward direction—we are to remember that in all these spoils we are to see the Divine power, and not proofs of our own military genius. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. So David reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice.—I. THE VICTORIES OF PEACE ARE NOBLER AND MORE ENDURING THAN THOSE OF WAR. We are very familiar with David the warrior. His early triumph over Goliath put his name into the mouth and songs of Israel. It had been a little thing if he

had only vanquished the enemies of Israel. When this was done his truest, noblest works began. He encouraged the people to careful cultivation of their fields by carefully cultivating his own. He would have nothing lost. The waste land must be reclaimed. His stewards must give exact account of their stewardship. Commerce, with its increase of comforts, is quickened. Architecture is improved; huts give way to houses. Arrangements are made for due and prompt administration of justice in all parts of the country. The health and education of the people the king remembers and provides for. These were right royal undertakings, and "became" David "better than his crown." Wars fill a large and loud place in history. The works of peace are silent, unobtrusive. Picturesque pens may describe a battle in which thousands perish, but how little can they describe the battle waged by sanitary officers and medical men against disease and its causes by which thousands, ten thousands, are saved! II. THE BLESSING OF A WISE ADMINISTRATOR TO A NATION. David was a true ruler of men. Not only by possession of a personal charm which attached trusty friends to him, but also by devising those measures which were for the wider well-being of the people. He had eminently the faculty of government like many other great men of his nation—Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Hezekiah, Daniel. When rulers are wise, and, like David, know "what they ought to do," this, too, is one of God's gifts to men. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF PSALMODY IN DIVINE WORSHIP. Psalmody, as an institution, owes its origin to David. In chap. xxv. we can see with what care it was instituted. IV. THE BEAUTY OF FRIENDSHIP IS SEEN IN DAVID'S TREATMENT OF MEPHIBOSHETH.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

**VERS. 1-5. And David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father.**—*The message of condolence*:—I. THE GENEROUS MESSAGE OF DAVID. 1. In its accession. 2. In its form. II. THE DISGRACEFUL TREATMENT OF DAVID'S MESSENGERS. Shaving their beards and shortening their garments, a double insult in the East, where long beards and long garments are badges of honour. Many Orientals would rather die than lose their beards (signs of dignity and ornaments of freedom), and Turks used to regard beardless Europeans as runaway slaves. III. THE CONSIDERATE KINDNESS FOR THE DISGRACED MESSENGERS. (*J. Wolfendale*.) **Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father.**—*Suspicious*:—Don't be suspicious. Some people think they are very clever in finding out what is wrong where no one else sees anything amiss, and these often make themselves very ridiculous. Tennyson, when a young man, was walking through Wales, on his way back from the Continent, and turned into a little wayside inn, where an old man sat by the fire, and asked many questions in a very suspicious fashion. "Are you from the army? Not from the army? Then where do you come from?" he bluntly asked at last. "I am just come from the Pyrenees," said the poet. "Ah, I knew there was 'a something!'" was the knowing clincher of the old man. Could anything have been more ridiculous? Don't be suspicious; think the best, believe the best, love the best; remember that everybody finds just what he seeks. You will always find "a something" if it is "a something" you are seeking, but you will also always find what is good and beautiful if you are in search of that. (*J. Reid Howatt*.)

**Ver. 6-9. And when the children of Ammon. Avenging an insult**:—I. INSULT SPRINGING FROM SLIGHT PROVOCATION. 1. From a suspicious mind. 2. From advice of jealous princes. II. INSULT LEADING TO UNJUST WAR. This war might have been avoided by an honourable apology or better understanding. One evil leads to another. III. WAR TERMINATING IN DISGRACEFUL OVERTHROW. (*J. Wolfendale*.)

**Vers. 10-13. Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him.**—*The war-cry*:—I. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY FOUGHT. II. THE METHOD IN WHICH THEY FOUGHT. 1. A wise economy of forces. 2. A determination to render mutual help. III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THEY FOUGHT. 1. Of exalted courage. 2. Of true patriotism. 3. Of submission to God. (*Ibid.*)

## CHAPTER XX.

Vers. 1-3. And it came to pass, that after the year was expired.—*The capture of Rabbah* :—From its capture and punishment of its people we learn—I. THAT IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE THERE MUST BE NO CESSATION. Rest gives advantage to the enemy, and may delay or frustrate the end in view. "Forwards, children, forwards" urged Blucher, in meeting Wellington at Waterloo. 1. Make needful preparation. 2. Be ready for every advantage. "The time to go out" must be discovered and seized. II. THAT IN CONDUCTING SPIRITUAL WARFARE OPPORTUNITY IS GIVEN FOR THE DISPLAY OF VIRTUOUS QUALITIES (2 Sam. xii. 26-29). We must transfer the glory of our conquests to our gracious "Commander and Leader." III. THAT ALL THINGS IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE WILL BE SUBDUED UNDER GOD'S POWER. (*Ibid.*) And David took the crown of their king from off his head.—*The loss of a crown* :—The loss of a crown is much or nothing. The crown itself is a mere bauble, but it is full of significance as a token. Every office points in the direction of supremacy. The doorkeeper is on the road to the highest seat. Do not have a crown that any one can take from you. Men may steal your clothes, but they cannot steal your character. Start your son with fifty thousand golden pounds, and he may lose it all, and want fifty thousand more; start him with a fine sense of honour, with a sound practical education, with a love of wisdom, with a knowledge of things real, simple, practical, and of daily occurrence, and he will be rich all the time. Let no man take thy crown. When Carlyle was so poor as hardly to have a loaf, he was walking by the popular side of Hyde Park, and looking upon all that gay tumult he said to himself, with what in another man might have been conceit, but what in him was heroic audacity: "I am doing what none of you could do"; that is to say, he was writing one of his profoundest and most useful books. There he was rich. Have ideas, convictions, resolutions, ideals, and be faithful as a steward ought to be faithful, and it will never be written of thee that any man took thy crown. A man may throw away such a crown, a man may play the fool in old age; but the truth now to be inculcated is this, that no man, or combination of men, can take away the moral crown, the spiritual diadem, without the man's own consent. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. Where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty?—*Great giants and small* :—"A giant," "the son of a giant," "children of the giant," "a man of great stature." There were giants in those days; there are giants in our day. There is nothing in all history so great as the history of the present; there is no moment of time so pregnant with the meaning of eternity as the moment of our present breathing. You tremble when you read the names of these giants. There is no need to tremble; a deadlier giant is aiming at your heart to-day. The heroics have changed as to apparatus and nomenclature and environment, and all that sort of vanishing vapour; the great fight goes on, the tremendous rush of armies, Philistine and Israelite still meet face to face. And they can make no peace; they represent different worlds, different ideas, atmospheres, purposes, and they never can compromise. June cannot compromise with December. What giants have you been fighting? You have got through the first crude lot. I know it; so have we all. But it was a mere mob of blackguards; the hostility itself was vulgar, coarse, contemptible. The mischief is, lest having got through that mob of scoundrelism and villainy detestable and palpable, we think that therefore the fighting is done. The fighting never ends until the body is in the grave or is laid out on its last bed. You have killed the giant of Falsehood, you would not for the world be thought to be a liar. Long ago you killed the giant Untruth, the black-faced giant Lies. But it does not therefore follow that you are now a true man, that you have escaped the lap and the shame of another falsehood, deeper, subtler, deadlier. Take care! "Thou shalt not steal." What is stealing? What is a thief? In the old time the robber despised the thief. A great distinction is drawn in the New Testament between thieves and robbers. Thieves were little, contemptible, mean apers of gigantic, majestic robbery. There is another set of giants to be encountered. What about the giant of Unbelief? But we are rather proud of fighting with the giant Unbelief, and showing thus how extremely intellectual we are. That we have even known the very existence of the word unbelief may show what marvellous giants of might we are. Not until we distinguish between crime and sin can we make any real progress in gospel studies.

Have you fought down and conquered the giant of Ingratitude? Who thinks about the spiritual sins? Who is not horrified by crime and draws its garments round it in atestation of its shocked refinement? There may be more sin in ingratitude than in some murders. The murder may have been done in hot blood, in haste to be repented of evermore, through ages eternal to be regretted and deplored as a lasting bruise of the soul. Ingratitude is slow, mean, deliberate, calculating, cruel. The giant of Ingratitude takes a great deal of fighting. Have you overthrown the giant of your Ambition? that sordid, calculating ambition that always wishes to shoulder out some other man and get a foremost place in the race of life? The danger does not lie always along what may be called the line of giants. There are more difficult forces to contend with than the visibly and measurably gigantic. There is not a giant to fight every one of us, but there is a foe that every soul must know and confront and be thrown by or must overthrow. You could shoot an evil beast, but an army could not overtake the Colorado beetle. There would be plenty of people who at other people's expense would go to distant countries to shoot big game. Poor fools! If they would pay their own waybill I would think a little less harshly of them. So many people are prepared for giants who are not prepared for beetles and bacilli and the germs that sow the air with death. Many people would do heroic things who are only called upon to do little, simple, daily, domestic things. Are you fully aware that there are many assailants and enemies who are not giants by name, but are giants in influence, in obstinacy of purpose, in a cruel determination to ruin your soul? Have you calculated the force of little things? Read me the plagues of Egypt. Lions, tigers, elephants—is that how the story runs? Not a word of it. What were the plagues? Hardly anything bigger than a frog; the lice, the flies, the little things, these excited the alarms of Egypt, and brought Egypt to her knees. You and I are not called upon to fight the giant of Gath, or his son, or the monster referred to in the text, but we are called upon to fight many insects, bacilli, germs of poison, things that require a microscope to discover, so minute as to be to the naked eye actually invisible, and yet on the tip of your finger you may have as many of them as would people any city in Europe as to mere number. To that fight we are called—the fight of spirit with spirit, soul with influence. A tremendous battle is ours! Do you suppose that an eagle fears any foes? Think of those pinions of steel, those eyes of fire, that beak of brass. And yet the eagle is maddened to death by a humming-bird no bigger than the joint of a finger. We have often told of the insect in certain countries that eats away all the woodwork of the door and leaves nothing but a coat of paint, so that going to the door and endeavouring to open it, it falls to pieces under the slightest pressure. That is translated into the life of to-day and into the life of every day. The paint is right, the externalism is beyond criticism, all seems to be well; but take care, for the white ant has eaten up all the interior character, and nothing is left but some flake of paint. We have to fight these things in various forms, but principally I think to-day in the forms of books and tracts and publications.

*Ibid.*) *Hindering superfluities*:—The anxieties and annoyances of those whose estates have become plethoric can only be told by those who possess them. It will be a good thing when, through your industry and prosperity, you can own the house in which you live. But suppose you own fifty houses, and you have all those rents to collect, and all those tenants to please. Suppose you have branched out in business successes until in almost every direction you have investments. The fire-bell rings at night, you rush upstairs to look out of the window, to see if it is any of your mills. Epidemic of crime comes, and there are embezzlements and abscondings in all directions, and you wonder whether any of your book-keepers will prove recreant. A panic strikes the financial world, and you are like a hen under a sky full of hawks, and trying with anxious cluck to get your overgrown chicken safely under wing. After a certain stage of success has been reached, you have to trust so many important things to others that you are apt to become the prey of others, and you are swindled and defrauded, and the anxiety you had on your brow when you were earning your first thousand dollars is not equal to the anxiety on your brow now that you have won your three hundred thousand. The trouble with such a one is, he is spread out like the unfortunate one in my text. You have more fingers and toes than you know what to do with. Twenty were useful, twenty-four is a hindering superfluity. Disraeli says that a king of Poland abdicated his throne and joined the people, and became a porter to carry burdens. And some one asked him why he did so, and he replied: Upon my honour, gentlemen, the load which I cast off was by far heavier than the one



you see me carry. The weightiest is but a straw when compared to that weight under which I laboured. I have slept more in four nights than I have during all my reign. I begin to live and to be a king myself. Elect whom you choose. As for me, I am so well it would be madness to return to court. I am anxious that all who have only ordinary equipment be thankful for what they have and rightly employ it. I think you all have figuratively, as well as literally, fingers enough. Do not long for hindering superfluities. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The hand* :—Sir Charles Bell was so impressed with the wondrous construction of the human hand that when the Earl of Bridgewater gave forty thousand dollars for essays on the wisdom and goodness of God, and eight books were written, Sir Charles Bell wrote his entire book on the wisdom and goodness of God as displayed in the human hand. The twenty-seven bones in the hand and wrist with cartilages and ligaments and phalanges of the fingers all made just ready to knit, to sew, to build up, to pull down, to weave, to write, to plough, to pound, to wheel, to battle, to give friendly salutation. The tips of its fingers are so many telegraph offices by reason of their sensitiveness of touch. The bridges, the tunnels, the cities of the whole earth are the victories of the hand. The hands are not dumb, but often speak as distinctly as the lips. With our hands we invite, we repel, we invoke, we entreat, we wring them in grief, or clap them in joy, or spread them abroad in benediction. The malformation of the giant's hand in the text glorifies the usual hand. Fashioned of God more exquisitely and wondrously than any human mechanism that was ever contrived, I charge you use it for God and the lifting of the world out of its moral predicament. Employ it in the sublime work of gospel handshaking. (*Ibid.*) *The foot* :—Yea; the malformation of this fallen giant's foot glorifies the ordinary foot, for which I fear you have never once thanked God. The twenty-six bones of the foot are the admiration of the anatomist. The arch of the foot fashioned with a grace and a poise that Trajan's arch, or Constantine's arch, or any other arch could not equal. Those arches stand where they were planted, but this arch of the foot is an adjustable arch, a yielding arch, a flying arch, and ready for movements innumerable. The human foot so fashioned as to enable man to stand upright as no other creature, and leave the hand that would otherwise have to help in balancing the body free for anything it chooses. The foot of the camel fashioned for the sand, the foot of the bird fashioned for the tree-branch, the foot of the hind fashioned for the slippery rock, the foot of the lion fashioned to rend its prey, the foot of the horse fashioned for the solid earth, but the foot of man made to cross the desert, or climb the tree, or scale the cliff, or walk the earth, or go anywhere he needs to go. With that Divine triumph of anatomy in your possession where do you walk? In what path of righteousness or what path of sin have you set it down? Where have you left the mark of your footsteps? Amid the petrifications in the rocks have been found the mark of the feet of birds and beasts of thousands of years ago. And God can trace out all the footsteps of your lifetime, and those you made fifty years ago are as plain as those made in the last soft weather, all of them petrified for the Judgment Day. Oh, the foot! Give me the autobiography of your foot from the time you stepped out of the cradle until to-day, and I will tell you exact character now and what are your prospects for the world to come. (*Ibid.*) *The folly of underestimating our enemies* :—An easy accommodation of the text and an allowable one, will permit us to see several practical lessons here. Do not under-estimate the powers that are opposed to you; count their fingers, count their toes, measure their stature, take their weight, calculate them to a nicety as to what they can possibly do. He is a fool who calls a giant a dwarf. The powers of this world are not to be sneered at. Your adversary the devil goeth about—like a cripple? like a weakling? like a thing that may be despised? No—like a roaring lion; and no man has ever sneered at a lion. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER XXI.

**VERS. 1-30.** And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.—*Under a spell* (Compare 2 Peter i. 21) :—I. ALL THE WORLD SEEMS TO BE UNDER A SPELL OR CHARM; inward influences move men as steam moves a ship. There are three spells. 1. One is that of parentage. The spell of a virtuous

parentage influences its children's children, like a good charm, for thousands of generations; but, on the other hand, the wickedness of a parent generally ceases to influence his offspring at, as the Second Commandment says, "the third and fourth generation." 2. Another spell is the outward influence of our surroundings. Faithful parents, wise teachers, inspiring books, virtuous companions, healthy atmosphere, and suitable food will train up a child in the way God and men would have him go; but many a bright apprentice lad has been cursed by bad example. 3. The third spell is that of inward influences. One of these is said in the Bible to be the movement of the devil, and the other that of the holy God. 4. What can be greater than the spell which moves the human appetite to intoxicating drink? To obtain drink people will sometimes descend to the lowest degradation of meanness. Yes; the evil spell of the appetite for drink upon its victims is great and overpowering. Drink may be no temptation to you and me, but many people find it a spell which moves them as the tide and wind sometimes drives a feeble ship on the rocks. And what stronger spell can there be than the inclination to war between men, and churches, and nations? 5. Again, is there a stronger spell than the desire for money, the greed of gold? See how men under the spell of an insane ambition for wealth sometimes forget honour, and become actual thieves! II. Now, let us consider THE GOOD SPELL OVER MANKIND. One of these is the heaven-born spell of true love; it is a most powerful influence for good. Thus love will reform the prodigal life. There is no stronger spell than true love; God is love. It is by the wisdom of love that He converts mankind. God's object in winning men to love Him is that they may be prompted to self-denial in themselves and to do good works to others. (*W. Birch.*) *David's sin and repentance*.—I. DAVID'S SIN. 1. Its occasion: pride and vainglory—"that I may know it." 2. Its unseen but real source: Satan (1 Sam. xxiv. 1). II. THE LORD'S DISPLEASURE because of his sin (vers. 9-17). III. THE ATONEMENT for his sin, made on the site of the Lord's house (chap. xx. 1-2; 1 Kings 6-8); as the foundation of the spiritual house (2 Cor. vi. 16-17; 1 Pet. ii. 4-5; Ephes. ii. 21-22). The temple therefore rests as it were on—1. An atonement for sin (Rom. v. 11). 2. Sin put away, ver. 17 (Dan. ix. 24). 3. Wrath averted by sacrifice (ver. xvi. 26-27; 2 Sam. xxiv. 16; Isa. xxxiii. 21; 1 Pet. i. 18-19; ii. 24; Col. i. 20; ii. 14-15). (*Clergyman's Magazine.*) *David's self-confidence*.—I. The sin of David in numbering the people was SELF-CONFIDENCE, pride in his own strength, and forgetfulness of the source of all his strength, even of God. It was the greater sin in him because he had had such marvellous, such visible, witnesses of God's love, and care, and guidance. Past experience might and should have taught him that his strength was not in himself, but in his God. II. The sins of pride, and self-confidence, and forgetfulness of God are only too COMMON AMONGST OURSELVES. When men dwell securely, in full peace and health, they grow careless in religion. God is not much present with them; they seem sufficient of themselves to keep themselves and to make themselves happy. (*R. D. B. Rawnsley.*) *David numbering Israel*.—I. MAN, THROUGH THE DEVIL, BRINGING TREMENDOUS EVILS ON THE WORLD. "Satan stood up," &c. The existence and influence of this grand chief of evil agencies are here, and everywhere through the Bible, stated as facts too well authenticated to require argument. He tempted the progenitor of the race; he assailed the Redeemer of the world; and he leads humanity captive by his will. He now had access, by means not stated, to the mind of the monarch of Israel. One might have thought that age, which had cooled in him the fires of life, would also have extinguished all the fires of worldly ambition; but Satan can rekindle the smouldering embers of evil within us: he did so now. The ambitious feeling awakened was not one of those passing waves of emotion that rise from the depths of the soul and break upon the shore and are no more; it took the form of an obstinate purpose. 1. That Satan's influence on man, however successful, interferes not with man's personal responsibility. David was held responsible for the crime which the devil suggested to his mind. Great is the might of Satan, and great are the influences which he can bring to bear upon us; albeit he has no power to break down our wills by force, no power to coerce us into the wrong. We feel we are not mere engines in what we do, that our actions, good or bad, are our own. 2. That one man's sins may entail misery on thousands. It was so now: David's sin brought death on thousands and agony into the heart of the nation. 3. That the Eternal has agents ever at hand to execute His judgments. (*Homilist.*) *Sinful counting*.—It is easy for us to rise in petulant indignation against David, and to declare that he ought not to have counted his men; but let us beware, lest in so

doing we provoke the spirit of David to retort that it is possible for us to count our money so as to disclose the very motive and intention which in him we condemn as vicious. Yes there is an atheistical way of counting money. A man may go over coin by coin of his property, and look at it in a way which, being interpreted, signifies, this is my strength, this is my confidence; so long as I have all these coins it is impossible that I can get far wrong, or know much trouble, these will be my answer and defence in the day of accusation and adversity! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The impotence of numbers*.—Palestine fills a large place in history, but a very insignificant one on the map. David's enemies were on every side, and they were all mighty in war. He had the sea to his west but did not command the coast. That (with its harbours of Tyre and Sidon) belonged to the Phœnicians, who overlapped him also on the north. To the east were the barriers of Moab; to the south the plains, cities, and hosts of the Philistines. We do not wonder that he wished to know upon what swords he had to depend. And yet we are told that it was an ungodly thing for him to number Israel. I. WHAT MADE THIS DEED UNGODLY? The answer is that it was a departure from the place he held in the kingdom of God. He was losing the heart which could make him say, "I am small and of no reputation, yet do I not forget Thy commandments." Such a mood, such a ranging of himself with neighbouring powers, was a grievous departure from David's position as king of a chosen race. Think for a moment how unique that race was. Nothing is so wonderful in history as the survival of the Jews. They were set in the midst of mighty nations which far outnumbered them, but which all lost their place and power in the world while the Jews remained. And yet in the early days of this race they were in danger of being spoilt, and really degraded, by an attempt to set themselves on the level of the nations around. David's act was a forgetfulness of, a departure from, God's purpose. In seeking to realise his material resources, and count the swords which he could draw, he so far gave up that unseen vital force, which distinguished his people the most, and descended to the meaner level on which those around him took their stand. II. WHAT IS THE LESSON TO BE LEARNT FROM THIS INCIDENT? That in the conduct of society and of our lives, dependence on mere numbers may prove disastrous. 1. In national economy. The consent and unanimity of a thousand fools does not render the folly of one man harmless; it may arm it with the power to do a thousand-fold more harm. We should be specially cautious in finding our course by that weathercock public opinion. 2. On a small as well as a large social scale. A prominent tendency to-day is to uphold the value of company and co-operation. In many respects this is well. Union is strength. But along with this may grow up a new tyranny. In passing from a selfish individualism to the recognition of a righteous socialism, we are in danger of having our personal convictions overridden. In presence of all the associations, societies, and committees in the world, we must not forget that some of the greatest things the world owns and cherishes, have taken their beginning and drawn their power from solitary source, some half-hidden spring which the crowd would pass by or trample down. The Bible would point to Noah, Daniel, and Job, and above all to the "lonely cross." 3. In the religious life. No persuasion may be taken as true because it is accepted even by all. There was a time when the whole world believed that the sun moved round the earth. The great convictions and changes in history are irrespective of numbers. They come like little seeds which spread until they cover the land. Faith in numbers is a slavery worse than Egyptian, which shows itself in the discharge of our business and the profession of our faith. It is the deadly hindrance to which David exposed himself and his people. It is the temptation which besets us in the formation of our opinions and the doing of our work. We are all tempted to number the people. It is of the first importance that we should be true to the voice of our Father in heaven, who never leaves His children to walk alone if they will only take His hand. (*Harry Jones.*) *Census reflections*.—I. References to and reflections on two official numberings of the children of Israel (Numb. i., xxvi.). II. SOME GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON OUR NATIONAL CENSUS. 1. The number of inhabitants of England and Wales at this moment is definite. 2. The number of the living inhabitants at this moment on the earth is definite. 3. The number of individuals who compose the whole human race is definite. 4. The number of the elect, or of those who shall ultimately be saved is definite. Application: I would address—1. Those who were numbered at the last census. 2. I would call to your remembrance those who have appeared and again disappeared during this interval. 3. The object of numbering suggests:

consolation. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered," this is one of the sweetest pledges of our heavenly Father's personal care over us. 4. It also suggests warning. "Lord, let me know mine end and the number of my days." For what purpose? "That I may know how frail I am." (*W. Bramley Moore, M.A.*) *Man, through God, arresting the great evils that have come upon the world* :—1. Profound contrition for sin. "And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I beseech Thee, do away with the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." In Samuel it is said, "David's heart smote him." His conscience was aroused to a sense of his crime and became his chastiser. It allowed him to make no excuse; it prevented him from charging the crime even on the devil who tempted him. "I have sinned greatly," "I have done this thing," "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered?" "Even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed." Conscience, the deepest power within us, ever vindicates our personality, our freedom, our responsibility. An awakened conscience detaches us from the universe, from all, and places us as guilty personalities in conscious contact with Him who is the Eternal Judge of right and wrong. The first step to true prayer is this. 2. Unbounded trust in God. When Jehovah, through Gad, David's seer, proposed to the monarch the choice of one of three judgments—famine, war, or pestilence—what was David's reply? "I am in a great strait: let me fall into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man." His sin had consisted in some measure in placing trust in men; why else did he require a census? Was it not because he thought that numbers were power for defence and conquest? That confidence is gone now, and God appears to him as the only object of trust. Wonderful trust is this. When all things go well and fortune smiles, when providence showers its blessings upon our path, skirting our way with verdure and flowers, we may feel some trust in Him; but when all is dreary, dark, and tempestuous, when we see, as David saw, in the black heavens the destroying angel with a sword drawn in his hands about to smite us, then to trust Him is to have a trust of the highest sort. 3. An atoning self-sacrificing benevolence. (1) With a generosity rejoicing in sacrifice, he rears an altar. He was divinely commanded to rear an altar unto the Lord on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. (2) With a soul benevolently oblivious of all personal interest he pleads with heaven. 1. The solemnity of man's existence on this earth. Man here is the subject and organ of spiritual and invisible agents. The same man, as in the case of David, might be the organ of the devil and the organ of God. Under the influence of the devil, David became proud and rebellious, incurring the displeasure of his Maker and bringing ruin on his country; under the influence of God, he became profoundly contrite, trustful, and most benevolently prayerful; arresting the progress of evil and securing again for his country the mercy of Heaven. How terribly solemn is our life! 2. The ruinous and restorative dispositions in man. Selfish pride and self-sacrificing prayerfulness are the two grand dispositions which David displays in this portion of his history; the former was at once the product and instrument of the devil, bringing ruin upon his country; the latter was the product and instrument of God, counteracting the evils. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 11–15. Thus saith the Lord, choose thee.—*The awful judgments* :—**I. JUDGMENTS ENTAILED BY ONE MAN'S SIN.** **II. JUDGMENTS EASILY PREPARED FOR EXECUTION.** **III. JUDGMENTS SENT ACCORDING TO HUMAN PREFERENCE.** **IV. JUDGMENTS ARRESTED BY EARNEST PRAYER.** (*J. Wolfendale.*) *David's choice* :—AS THE RESULT OF AN AWAKENED CONSCIENCE. **II.** AS THE REVELATION OF A PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE. He left himself confidently with God. **III.** AS A PICTURE OF FUTURE DOOM TO ALL. (*Ibid.*) *David's choice of chastisements* : David's preference justified when we consider—**1.** The harsh judgments which men pronounce on each other. **2.** The harsh treatment of the guilty who are in men's power. **3.** The absence of sympathetic kindness in human warfare. **4.** That when God punishes He does so in righteousness. **5.** That in the treatment of the guilty God always shows mercy. Lessons: **1.** Submission to God. **2.** Hopeful trust. (*Ibid.*) *God an emblem of the true minister* :—Let us look at God as representing every true minister of Jesus Christ. **I. GOD'S MESSAGE WAS DIVINE.** The gospel is a message from God. This is attested—**1.** By the facts of history. **2.** By its congruity with the spiritual constitution of men. **3.** By the experience of thousands of every age who have felt it to be the power of God unto salvation. **II. GOD'S MESSAGE WAS AN APPEAL TO CHOICE.** "Advise thyself." Deliberate, choose for thyself. The gospel

message is submitted to your choice. 1. You can accept it. 2. You can reject it.

III. GOD'S MESSAGE WAS TO BE ACCOUNTED FOR. 1. He was responsible for its delivery. So with every gospel minister, and woe be to him if he declares not the whole counsel of God. 2. David was responsible for its results. So are also the hearers of the gospel. (*Homilist.*) *Religious lessons of pestilence*:—I. PESTILENCES ARE STRIKING WITNESSES TO THE MAJESTY OF GOD'S LAW. II. PESTILENCES ARE STRIKING ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE MORAL CONNECTION BETWEEN MEN. Epidemics run rapidly from one to another. No man can live alone to himself. Every one who comes near us is the better or the worse for our influence upon them. III. PESTILENCES MAY BE THE AGENCY FOR EXECUTING DIVINE JUDGMENTS. Nowadays men hesitate to believe that there can be any connection between a nation's sin and a nation's suffering. With eye fixed upon the natural and physical laws and conditions out of which disease comes, men fail to see Him who overrules all physical conditions, and controls all laws. What, then, is the attitude which Christians should take in relation to epidemic disease? (1) We ought to cherish a reverent awe of God, the spirit that is becoming in times of storm and tempest, awe of Him who is "Lord of the great things." (2) We should seek by prayer, and in the spirit of penitence, for the removal of the chastening hand. (3) We should ask for grace that we may be brave, brotherly, and self-denying, should disease come actually into our spheres. (4) We should, with calm seriousness, inquire whether we are prepared to face the risks of disease, prepared to die, prepared to "meet our God." (*R. Tuck, B.A.*) *Alternative judgments*:—The whole story is mysterious. We feel at each step that much is kept back from us. 1. The fault of the king is mysterious. It is not enough to say that there was pride and vain-glory in his heart. If this were all, it might have made the act sinful in the sight of God, but it would not account for the view taken of the act either by the minister or by the historian. There are many things in Scripture, as there are many things in life, which we must leave in the hands of God. 2. The mode of his punishment is full of mystery. A choice of punishments is offered him; but the punishments are all national. "Rulers sin and peoples suffer" has passed into a proverb. Scripture and Providence are at one in this matter. On a king's edict of passion or foolishness may hang a nation's misery or a nation's dishonour. A king's caprice or a king's miscalculation may hand over a nation to a bloody and ruinous war of which it may be the occupation of a century to bear or repair the consequences. 3. The peculiarity of David's penalty is the choice offered him. The day of Divine alternatives is not ended. Every example of a sin brought face to face with its suffering presents an aspect of choice as well as of compulsion. The mere question of confession or denial, with the consequences of either, is such an alternative in the case of individual wrongdoing. The adoption of this expedient rather than that, in the way of avoidance or mitigation of consequences, is an alternative. The way of bearing punishment, the language of regret or of hardness, the tone of submission or of defiance, most of all the spirit of repentance or of impenitence, is an alternative for the individual transgressor. The question of stopping or continuing a hopeless struggle, of accepting a defeat, of submitting to abduction, of "desiring conditions of peace," or on the contrary, of persisting in warfare for the chance of a turn of fortune—the question of renewing a struggle, years or generations afterwards, on the plea of a hereditary title or a popular invitation—is an alternative, real or responsible, on the stage of kings and nations.

4. How shall we read the words, "Let me now fall into the hand of the Lord"? Is it a choice made? or is it a choice referred back to the offerer? Is it, I choose pestilence? or is it, Let God choose? "So the Lord sent the pestilence upon Israel" indicates perhaps on the part of our translators a preference of the former. I choose that punishment which has no human inflicter. But, whatever the application, the principle stands steadfast. In everything let me be in God's hands. Anything which God inflicts is preferable to any suffering which comes through man. But if this be the force of David's words considered as a choice, there is at least an equal interest in them regarded as a refusal to choose. Yes, let us love to live these lives absolutely under God's direction. War, famine, pestilence—if He sees any one necessary, leave Him to choose. Let us not fall into the hands of man—our own, or any other's. We are ill judges—worst of all for ourselves. Our mercies to ourselves are not God's mercies. We are self-sparers as well as self-excusers. If we had our choice, no nerve would ever throb, no hair would ever turn grey. We should grow up, we should go to the grave, we should wake from the dust of the earth spoil children—with all the irregularities, and all

the selfishness, and all the unhappiness, which cling to and cluster round that name. What are we to one another? How does selfishness warp our judgments—selfish love first, then selfish fear. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *The choice of troubles:*—Who is there that has not wished that God would give him the choice of the evils which he had to suffer; and who is there that would not have been seriously embarrassed if that wish had been fulfilled? But, it may be said, the text does not support that view. Does it not? 1. David was very much troubled when the time for decision came: he was “in a great strait.” 2. His choice was more devout in form than in substance; for, had he chosen defeat in war, he would still have been “in the hand of God.” 3. It is highly probable that, after the choice was made, David was doubtful of its wisdom. We may consider—I. THE ELEMENT OF CHOICE IN THE EVILS OF LIFE.—Two things are open to us here. 1. One relates to the measure of trouble we experience. By healthy habits, by obedience to the laws of our spiritual and our physical nature, by keeping within the lines of wisdom and virtue, by commending ourselves to the approval of man and also of God, we may materially reduce the measure of evil which otherwise we should endure. 2. The other relates to the kind of trouble we are called to face. It is often left to our choice to decide whether we will meet the dangers, the difficulties, the temptations, the trials of our condition in life, or those of the opposite condition—whether those of ignorance or of learning, of loneliness or of society, of obscurity or of conspicuousness and responsibility. It may be timidity or cowardice that inclines us to the one, and high-minded courage that incites us to the other; or it may be modesty and wisdom that urge us to the one, and nothing better than an unhalloved ambition, or even an exaggerated sense of importance, that allures to the other. It behoves us, as we stand in front of the future, with our path in life before us, very earnestly to seek the guidance of God, that we may choose that course, the perils of which we may face with hope, the evils of which we shall endure with calmness and fortitude. II. THE WORKING OF THE DIVINE HAND IN THEM. The measure and the nature of our troubles is uncertain. That they will come is as certain as anything can be. No “good fortune,” no sagacity, no caution will exclude them from the experience of life. 1. Our preference in regard to their form. Like David, we prefer to feel ourselves in the hand of God rather than in the hand of men. We feel that our burden is heavier when it is due to human carelessness, and heavier still when due to human heartlessness and malignity. The severest aggravation of trouble is where the evil that has been wrought is the work of some near relative or some familiar friend, or some old colleague from whom we had a right to expect quite opposite treatment (see Psa. lv. 12–14). We feel that if we are to have suffering or sorrow we should much prefer the unaccountable sickness, or the unavoidable loss, or the inevitable bereavement which we can refer at once to the ordinary will of God. 2. The truth we recognise when we consider it. As we think on this subject we realise that all trouble is ultimately of God. (1) Much of it is penal, the just consequence of ill-doing, the outcome of those laws which originate in Divine holiness. (2) Much of it is disciplinary; it is the pruning, the refining process of Him who is seeking spiritual fruit; it is the ordering of the wise and faithful Father of spirits (Heb. xii. 1–12). (3) All of it is permissive. If the sparrow does not fall without the Divine permission, how much less does the obedient son or daughter suffer grief or pass through troublesome times or go down to death without the sanction of the present and watchful Lord. So that, whatever comes and whencesoever it comes, we are free to think and say, “Thy will be done, Lord”; the trial never comes to us when we are not “in the hand of the Lord.” 3. The attitude we should assume toward it. Even when we have to reproach ourselves, or even when we are obliged to condemn our neighbours or our ancestors as the immediate authors of our trouble, we may and we should accept it as that which comes in the providence of God. (1) We should bow submissively to His will who (to say the least) suffers us to be tried as we are. (2) We should seek from Him the sustaining strength which will empower us to bear all things unrepiningly and even cheerfully. (3) We should have an open mind to perceive, and an open heart to welcome the practical lessons which our heavenly Father is desiring to teach us. (*William Clarkson, B.A.*) **Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord.**—*Falling into the hand of the Lord:*—The doctrine is, that as sinners, as sinners before God, and as sinners towards each other, our highest hope is not in the incomplete and perverted mercy of men, but in the infinite mercy which is founded upon the infinite righteousness of God. We may perhaps help ourselves to a clearer understanding of this doctrine by first

considering that it is better to fall into the hands of the highest class of men than into the hands of the lowest. 1. Take a legal case. In the first instance it may be brought before the local magistracy; but very possibly the result may be considered unsatisfactory by one party or the other, hence the case may be moved to the court above; there again dissatisfaction may be the result, and an appeal may be carried to the highest court in the land. The result even then may not be satisfactory; still by so much as the case has been carried to the highest tribunal and pronounced upon by the highest wisdom, there is strong ground to rest upon. Not only so, but there is a point beyond this; for by so much as a man wishes that there were yet another superior court to which an appeal might be made does he show how deeply graven upon the heart is the law that it is better to fall into the hands of the highest than into the hands of the lowest; that it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. 2. What is true in the law is equally true in all criticism. 3. Take the case of the young speaker. It will be for the advantage of such a man to be judged by the greatest orators which the country can supply. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Why is it better that the sinner should fall into the hand of God rather than into the hands of men?*—Good use might be made of the many pleasing considerations which arise in connection with God's wisdom, God's righteousness, and God's perfect knowledge of facts; but we shall include all these in a higher answer, viz., because in His whole treatment of human sin God is constantly seeking not the destruction, but the salvation of the sinner. (*Ibid.*) *David falling into the hand of God:*—We shall look at David's exclamation here in three aspects. I. AS INDICATING WHAT IS A NATURAL TENDENCY IN ALL SOULS. There is a strong propensity in all men to "fall into the hand" of others, giving up their judgment, freedom, individuality to others. This shows itself in the exercise of unbounded trust. Man is essentially dependent. Hence his existence is one of trust in others. This trust is the very base and bond of social life. Trusting others within certain limits is right and necessary, but when the principle carries us to the entire subjection of ourselves to our fellow-men, we have gone wrongly and ruinously. II. AS REVEALING THE TRUE SPIRIT OF LIFE. David's tendency to trust took the right direction. 1. His preference was right. (1) God is our Owner. (2) God is all-powerful in His character. There is everything in His character to command our unbounded trust, our entire surrender. 2. This preference is expedient. It is far better to fall into the hand of God than man. (1) Unbounded trust in man must destroy your freedom. Such trust in God secures it. (2) Unbounded trust in man pollutes and degrades the character. Such trust in God purifies and elevates it. He whom we most trust exerts the most influence on our characters. (3) Unbounded trust in man must issue in the utmost disappointment and misery. Such trust in God leads to the highest blessedness. III. AS FORESHADOWING THE INEVITABLE DOOM OF ALL. In one of two ways every man must fall into the hand of God. 1. Voluntarily, by the influence of His grace. 2. Compulsorily, by the force of justice. (*Homilist.*) *The hand of God and the hands of men:*—I. DAVID'S STRAIT. II. THE GROUNDS OF HIS CHOICE. III. DIVINE PUNISHMENT AND HUMAN PUNISHMENT. Human punishment is necessarily to a great extent for self-protection, and therefore selfish. When the laws of society punish the crime of murder or of theft, it is primarily with the object of preventing the committal of more murders and more thefts. God's laws have penalties attached to them, but when God punishes He seeks not the destruction of the sinner, but his healing and reformation. While man's punishments are in principle revengeful, or at best for the defence of society, God's punishments are remedial and reformatory; and therefore it is better to fall into the hand of God than into the hands of men. Application; 1. God in human redemption. 2. Human legislation directed to the repression of wrong incomplete, because it can only reach the outward action. God's laws deal with motives, and are therefore complete and perfect (1 Sam. xvi. 7; Heb. iv. 12). (*Literary Churchman.*) *Man's inhumanity:*—There is more mercy in the fang of a rattlesnake and in the tooth of a wolf than in the heart of men and women for a poor soul who has gone astray; and if she try to swim ashore and finally come up to the rock and get the tips of her fingers on the rock and try to climb up, then you will come out and with your hard heels smash the tips of her fingers until she falls off. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 15. *And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it.*—*The destroying angel:*—Lessons: I. THAT IDLENESS IS THE PARENT OF SIN. It was when David was living as king in ease at Jerusalem that he was tempted of Satan. II. THAT ONE OF

THE BEST REMEDIES FOR WOE IS WORK. The angel of destruction stayed his steps at the threshing-floor of Ornan, even as the angel of salvation visited Gideon as he was threshing wheat. III. THAT PRAYER, EVEN AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR, MAY BE BY GOD'S GRACE EFFICACIOUS. When the sword was actually drawn in the hand of the destroyer it was kept from further execution when David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. IV. THAT OUR GIFTS TO GOD, AS TO MEN, SHOULD BE BESTOWED IN A GENEROUS SPIRIT. V. THAT WE SHOULD NOT OFFER TO GOD WHAT COSTS US NOTHING. VI. THAT GOD SANCTIFIES EFFORTS, HOWEVER WEAK THEY MAY BE, IF THEY BE SINCERELY MADE; ACCEPTS GIFTS, HOWEVER HUMBLE THEY MAY BE, IF BESTOWED FROM THE HEART. VII. THAT THE BEST PROOF THAT WE CAN HAVE THAT OUR OFFERING IS ACCEPTED BY GOD IS NOT THAT WE EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF INFLATED IMPORTANCE OR SELF-SATISFACTION, BUT THAT WE ARE FILLED WITH AN ABIDING SENSE OF PEACE. VIII. THAT THOUGH WE MAY WORSHIP GOD ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE, YET THAT IN HIS DULY CONSECRATED SANCTUARY, IT IS FITTEST TO DO HIM REVERENCE. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *Man, through the devil, bringing tremendous evils on the world*:—That men suffer for the sins of others is a fact written in every page of history, obvious in every circle of life, and recognised as a principle in the government of God. "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." That this principle is both just and beneficent, consider—1. That no man is made to suffer more than he deserves on account of his own personal sins. 2. The men of Israel now for their own sins deserved this stroke of justice. 3. That the evil which descends to us from others is not to be compared to that which we produce ourselves. 4. The sufferings that come to us from others can give us no remorse, which is the very sting of the judgment—our own sins do this. 5. That the knowledge that we can injure society by our own conduct has a strong tendency to restrain vice and stimulate virtue. (*Homilist.*) *David and Israel*:—I. THE PROGRESSIVE COURSE OF SIN. 1. Temptation. Satan the black fountain of all transgression. 2. Transgression (ver. 2). In face of warning (ver. 3). Its desperate folly seen by others (ver. 6). The deadening, hardening power of any lust. 3. Punishment (vers. 10–12). As soon will the magnet escape the influence of the pole, the sea the influence of the moon, an atom the binding force of gravitation, as the sinner escape punishment. "Be sure your sin," &c. II. THE PROGRESSIVE COURSE OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD. 1. The messenger, God's afflictive stroke (ver. 7). The prophet, Gad (ver. 9). Every person or circumstance that reproves is God's messenger. 2. Conviction (ver. 8). The true convict always confesses, never excuses. Not only owns the sin, but acknowledges its greatness. 3. Penitence (ver. 16). 4. Acceptance. 5. Grateful acknowledgment (ver. 24). III. UNDERLYING TRUTHS. 1. Though man be tempted, sin is his own act. 2. Our sins affect others. How many widows and orphans! 3. Though sin be pardoned, it leaves terrible scars behind. In David's memory. Gaps in the families and homes of the people. Avoidance of sin is infinitely better than pardon. Christ the only sin-healer. (*R. Berry.*) *The sin of one may involve the suffering of others*:—When the father of the house goes down in character he carries down with him, to a considerable extent, the character of his innocent children. The bad man is laying up a bad fortune for those whom he has brought into the world; long years afterwards they may be told how bad a man their father was, and because of his iniquity they may be made to suffer loss and pain. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Suffering through others*:—Our sin affects others as well as ourselves. A man whose garden was injured by a troublesome weed said it was due to a neighbour's neglect. He had let his garden run wild, and when the seeds of this particular weed were ripe, the wind blew them over the fence. So one sin may make many innocent people suffer.

**Vers. 22–24. Then David said to Ornan.—The cost and self-sacrifice of religion** :—Contemplate this subject—I. IN REFERENCE TO THE SPIRITUAL EXPANSION OF THE INTELLECTUAL POWERS. We may be Christians without much knowledge, but our honour, glory, and felicity to abound in knowledge—I. Of God. 2. Of Christ. 3. Of theology generally. The cost must be paid in the attainment. II. APPLY THE SUBJECT TO THE SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION OF THE MORAL NATURE. The soul before conversion like a barren heath or desert. It must be cultivated. Much labour needful. Evil habits to be abandoned. Holy habits to be formed. III. TO THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-DENIAL IN ADORNING THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION. Self-denial not merely the abandonment of sin. It involves the surrendering even of what might be lawfully retained. Our will must be sacrificed, that God's may be done.



IV. TO THE IMPORTANCE OF USEFULNESS IN THE CAUSE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. 1. The heart must be given to Christ. 2. Then life, talents, influence, time, wealth. (1) This cost must be paid in the right spirit. (2) This cost is not equal to the demands of sin. 3. To pay this cost grace is both necessary and provided. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *A cheap religion no religion at all.*—This incident teaches us—I. THAT TRUE RELIGION IS SPIRITUALITY IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO FORMALISM. The spirit of love which now inspired David was something distinct from all outward service, something that could not be expressed by the most valuable of offerings that cost him nothing. Personal sacrifice was required. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." "Circumcision or uncircumcision availeth nothing." II. THAT TRUE RELIGION IS ENTHUSIASM IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO PRUDENCE. David rejected the offer of Ornan. He repudiated the securing of the higher interests of the soul without any detraction from secular resources. It is ever so where love reigns—all personal interests are in the background; God is the one all-commanding, all-absorbing object of thought. III. THAT TRUE RELIGION IS NOBILITY IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO MEANNESS. IV. THAT TRUE RELIGION IS PROGRESS IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO STATIONARINESS. The man inspired with this spirit would never rest with present attainments. 1. There will be a delight in studying truth. The creed of a true religious man has cost him something. 2. There will be a delight in doing all that is commanded. V. THAT TRUE RELIGION IS REALITY IN CONTRADISTINCTION TO FALSENESS. That the spirit of David is the only true spirit of religion will appear if you consider—1. What God is. 2. What He has done for us. 3. That all we have and are are His. (*Homilist.*) *Sin and mercy as grounds of gratitude.*—Observe the laudable strife of two noble minds. I. ORNAN'S CONDUCT. Ornan, a Jebusite, and so by birth a heathen, but by choice a proselyte (see his prayer, 2 Sam. xxiv. 23). A pledge of the Gentiles coming in: the very site of the temple belonged to one. Thankful for his privileges, and therefore liberal in his gifts. II. DAVID'S CONDUCT. 1. His sense of sin (1 Tim. i. 12-15). 2. His sense of mercy. God's direction about the altar was an indication of forgiveness. David looked beyond this to the Redeemer. All he had was too little to express his gratitude. "Much forgiven, loving much." If religion be real it will be self-denying. Does your religion cost you anything? Has it led you to give up your own will; to sacrifice your own inclinations? to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts? What do you give to God of your time, your influence, your means? (*W. Pakenham Walsh, D.D.*) *The threshing-floor of Ornan.*—I. THAT EXTERNALLY THERE IS NOTHING IN ANY PLACE WHY GOD SHOULD THERE MEET WITH MEN. Why was the threshing-floor of Ornan to be the meeting-place of David with his God, and the spot where prayer was to be heard? 1. Certainly it was a very simple, unadorned place. Yet when the temple, with all its glory, crowned the spot, God was never more conspicuously present than on that bare, unadorned threshing-floor. A tasteful building may be a way of showing your pious regard for the Lord, but take care that you do not regard it as essential, or even important, or you will make an idol of it. 2. It was a place of ordinary toil. 3. It was, also, in possession of a Jebusite. The Jebusites were among the nations doomed for their iniquities. Herein the Lord showeth that He is no respecter of persons. The Jews wrapped themselves up within themselves, and said, "The temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord are we"; but the Lord seemed to rebuke their national pride by saying, "And your temple is built upon the threshing-floor of a Jebusite." If you happen to have been born of parents who did not train you in the fear of the Lord, yet do not despond; but say to thy soul, "The Lord shall have a dwelling within my heart, Jebusite though I be." 4. Before it could be used it had to be bought with money. In connection with all true worship of God in the olden time there was always the offertory. II. SPIRITUALLY THIS THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN WAS AN ADMIRABLE TYPE OF HOW GOD MEETS WITH MEN. 1. Its extreme simplicity enters into the essence of the type. 2. The threshing-floor is the exact type of affliction. The temple of glory is built on the threshing-floor of affliction. 3. This was the place where justice was most clearly manifest. Above this place, in mid-air, stood a dreadful apparition. Conviction of sin, wrought by the Spirit or God, is more powerful than argument. If some men had more fully felt that they were sinners, they would have made better saints. 4. It was the place where sin was confessed. 5. It was the place where sacrifice was offered and accepted. 6. It was where David beheld the sign of peace. III. I CLOSE BY HEARTILY EXHORTING YOU TO USE THIS PLACE. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The altar built and the plague stayed.*—

Observe—I. A FEARFUL EVIL. II. THE DIVINE REMEDY. III. A GENEROUS PROPOSAL. IV. A NOBLE AND SELF-SACRIFICING SPIRIT. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *The propitiation*:—The altar and sacrifice as means of propitiation illustrates the atonement of Christ. I. THE MORAL CONDITION WHICH IT IS DESIGNED TO MEET. II. THE PROVISION MADE FOR THIS CONDITION. III. THE RESULTS WHICH IT ACCOMPLISHED. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

## CHAPTER XXII.

**VER. 2. And David commanded to gather together the strangers.**—*What we cannot destroy may be usefully employed*:—Whom we are not able to destroy we may be able to employ in holy service, is a doctrine which is not applicable to persons only, but has a distinct reference to emotions, passions, impulses, and sympathies. We are to hold ourselves in bondage, and often we are to drive ourselves to forced labour, and to become hewers of wood and stone, bearers of burdens, and indeed slaves to our higher manhood. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Ver. 3. And David prepared iron in abundance.**—*Builders*:—It sometimes becomes difficult to say who really did build the temple, so little was left for Solomon to do. Is it not so with all the temples of civilisation? Who built the temple of literature? Who erected the temple of science? Who is the architect, and who the builder of the temple of discovery? The last man is so immediately behind us, that we dare not take credit to ourselves for aught we do; so much has been done in preparation that when we speak of the temple we say it was built by the age, or the generation, or the spirit of the times. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 5. And David said, Solomon my son is young.**—*The ideal temple*:—**I. THE MOTIVE WHICH SET DAVID TO WORK IN PREPARING FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE.** This motive was thankfulness for a great mercy—God's mercy in arresting the pestilence. God sends us deliverances from earthly calamities, not merely, not chiefly, that we may be delivered, but that our hearts may rise in thankfulness to Him. The soul gains more by the effort of thankfulness than the body has gained by deliverance from the physical mischief. The deliverance without the thankfulness is a sheer failure, baulking the providential purposes of God. Life would be brighter and stronger if each mercy were the occasion of a resolution to do some piece of good work for God. **II. THE HIGH ESTIMATE DAVID HAD FORMED OF WHAT HE HAD SET HIMSELF TO DO:** "Exceeding magnificent," &c. He felt that a great effort was due, first of all to God Himself, as being what He is, and next, for the sake of those who did not know Him—the surrounding heathen peoples, who must not think meanly of what God's servants thought to be due to His service. If anything is fatal to greatness in human endeavour, in act, in work, in character, it is a stunted estimate of what we have to do. The artist who has no ideal before him, or only a poor and meagre ideal, cannot hope to succeed. It is so with all forms of external enterprise. It is so with the formation of character. If we set out by saying that it is impossible to attain to anything great or noble, most certainly we never shall attain to it. We must make up our minds that the house of the Lord, whether it be material or spiritual, must be exceeding magnificent. No honest student of David's Psalms can maintain that he was ignorant of the true meaning of spiritual worship; or that he thought more of the things of sense than of the action of the soul in its approach to the Holy One; but his spirituality was not of that unwise kind which imperils the very existence of religion among men by doing away with all the outward symbols of its presence. Worship will not be the less spiritual when man has done his very uttermost in his poor way to express in outward and material structure his sense of the unapproachable magnificence of God. **III. THE GREAT DISTINCTION OF DAVID'S WORK OF PREPARATION FOR THE TEMPLE IS ITS UNSELFISHNESS.** One of the sternest lessons a man learns with advancing life is the disabling power of sin. Long after we have sincerely repented of sin it haunts us with its double legacy of a dimmed moral eyesight and of an enfeebled will; and even where these effects do not follow, as in David's case they did not follow, sin remains with us as a memory which tells us when we would attempt something beyond the work of

other men, something heroic, something sublime, something that belongs to the career of the saints, that, other matters apart, we are not the men to do it. The discovery that he would not be allowed to express his devotion in one supreme effort must have caused David a shock which we may not easily take measure of. But David did not think of the temple as having to be built either for his own glory or for Solomon's glory, but for the glory of God. And so David prepared for it with all his heart. IV. DAVID'S PREPARATION POINTS TO A GREAT TRUTH—THE PRECIOUSNESS OF WORK UNRECOGNISED BY MAN. David does the work, Solomon is decorated with the reputation. Almost every discovery in science has been led up to by forgotten workers. The discoverer, who, after all, has only taken the last step in a long process, lives in history. A minister rises in his place in Parliament to make a statement which astonishes us by its familiarity with the details of a vast and intricate subject; but while the country is ringing with his praises the fact is that the knowledge which so astonishes England has been brought together by the patient toil of the permanent staff of the department, the toil of clerks whose names are, perhaps, unknown beyond their own families. Much more is this the case with the best work in the Church of Jesus Christ. (*Canon Liddon.*)

*The inspiration of a lofty ideal*.—We expend our strength according to the ideals which it is our purpose to realise. The man who has not a high ideal of his work will be content with indifference, and with doing as little as possible. How profitable it would be if every young life could say at the beginning of its career, "My life is to be exceeding magnificent: it is to be a life of intelligence, purity, beneficence, holy activity in all blessed service: I will now make preparation for it." What school-going we should then have! What attentive reading of initial books! What an eager sympathy with the purpose of every tutor! How little we should then make of difficulties! The work of preparation would be done under the consciousness that the temple was already built. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*David and the temple*.—A fine and delicate sense of the becoming hindered David from building the temple. A voice within him had whispered, "No: however right and praiseworthy the idea, you are hardly the man to carry it out. Your hands are too stained with blood." When the Divine word came, simply interdicting, it awoke in him at once a Divine perception of the reason and reasonableness of it; and the God-taught, God-chastened spirit within him made him see at once why the work of enshrining the ark, the ark of the holy and awful presence, must not be his. I. Consider THE REMARKABLE SELF-RESTRAINT DISPLAYED BY DAVID. He who had lived much in camps and on the battlefield, whose will was law through the length and breadth of the land—he could stay himself from prosecuting his daring scheme with the thought of incongruity. II. The self-restraint of David REVEALS THE INTENSE REALITY WHICH GOD WAS TO HIM, as well as the impression which he had of the character of God. How pure and lofty would be his conception of the almighty Ruler when it struck him as altogether inappropriate and inconsistent that a shrine should be built for Him by one who had been engaged, however patriotically and for the interests of his country, in shedding much human blood. 1. The picture indicates that, although a man of war from his youth, David had never been proud of fighting. He had had dreams perhaps in his father's fields of quite another sort of career for himself, and could see something far more attractive and desirable; it was not his ideal life; but it was what his lot had rendered inevitable for him and incumbent on him; it was what he had to do, and he did it. 2. Then, once more, observe revealed here the remarkable preservation of David's higher sensibilities. Neither the tumult and strife of years of warfare, nor the elation of successes gained by bow and spear, had prevailed to coarsen him, to render him gross and dull of soul. He emerges from it all, on the contrary, sensitive enough to answer readily to the whispered suggestions of seemliness, to be restrained and turned back upon the threshold of a coveted enterprise by a sense of the becoming. 3. Although precluded from doing what he had purposed and wished to do, he did not, as is the case with many, make that an excuse for doing nothing; did not, therefore, sulkily fold his hands, and decline to see what there was that he might do. 4. Then see how his true thought and noble aim survived him, and survived him to be ultimately realised. The temple grew and rose at last in all its wonderful splendour, though he was not there to behold it. (*S. A. Tipple.*)

*Working up to death*.—We should work up to the very moment of our death. Our last breath should, if possible, help some other man to pray better, or to work more, or suffer with a firmer constancy. Let no man suppose that the world stands still because he dies.

God has always a temple to build, and He will always raise up the builders of it, and yet it pleases Him in His condescension to receive our assistance in preparation. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 6-19. Then he called for Solomon his son.—*David's charge to Solomon*.—**I. A FATHER'S PRIVILEGE.** 1. To cherish a lofty ideal for his son. This does not require that the father should undertake to decide the particulars of his son's career. This would involve the danger of weakening his will, of lessening his power of independent judgment and free choice. I have seen an apricot tree trained to a wall, trunk and branch fastened to it by nails and bands. It made a vine of what was meant to be a tree. If it had been taken from the wall it would have lain limp on the ground. 2. To make the example of his own daily living one which will help and stimulate his son. A wise father will recognise the fact that he commends to his boy, not that which he praises, but that which he pursues. It is not by telling our children what we wish them to become that we mould them most effectually; it is by the evidence which they get from our daily living, as to our main desire and hope for them. The unintended influence of the home is that which will move them most. The atmospheric influence is more pervasive than that which comes from medicine. 3. He may provide means by which his son may carry out his purpose and friends to help him in it. **II. A SON'S ADVANTAGE.** From all that a good father thus can do a son has no small advantage. 1. By the law of heredity. 2. By this harmonious environment a wise father can largely shape the influences under which his son grows up. 3. By the improved opportunity which comes to him as his father's son and heir. Solomon has but to keep with care what David has acquired with hard work. The son stands naturally upon the platform to reach which the father has come by climbing the steep ladder. Many a son to-day has grand opportunity for noble living which has been gained for him by the toils of those who have gone before him. But only opportunity. There is a sermon in the word opportunity. It is that which is *ob portus*, over against the harbour; but there your fleet may rot at anchor as readily as it may be submerged at sea. The skilful master must raise the anchor, set the sail, take advantage of the favouring breeze, steer his craft to port, or all the shipbuilder's skill has been for naught. All the advantages of the most favoured son will amount to nothing unless he will himself arise and build. Honour is not in what is inherited, but in what is accomplished. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *David's charge to Solomon*.—Learn—**I. THAT SOME ORIGINATE A GOOD WORK, BUT ARE NOT PERMITTED TO EXECUTE IT.** **II. THAT OTHERS MAY BE CALLED TO EXECUTE WORK WHICH THEY NEVER ORIGINATED.** **III. THAT WHEN CALLED, THEY SHOULD FINISH THE WORK GIVEN THEM TO DO.** (*J. Wolfendale.*) But the word of the Lord came to me, saying.—*God's word to David*.—How the word of the Lord came to David we do not know. In what way soever the communication was made to David, the communication itself is of singular moral value. 1. Say that the Lord delivered the message immediately in audible words, we have then the doctrine that God will not permit men of blood to end their career as if they had been guiltless of blood-shedding. 2. Say that David uttered these words out of the depths of his own consciousness, then we have the doctrine that there is a moral fitness of things that hands stained with blood should not be put forth in the erection of a house of prayer. The house of God is to be a house of peace, the sanctuary of rest, a Sabbath building, calm with the tranquillity of heaven, unstained by the vices and attachments of earth. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) Behold, a son shall be born to thee.—*A son predicted*.—**I. SON OF DAVID**; so was Christ. **II. A MAN OF REST**; so was Christ. **III. THE GIVER OF PEACE**; so was Christ. **IV. HE HAD A SIGNIFICANT NAME**; so has Jesus Christ. **V. HE WAS A GLORIOUS KING**; so is Christ. **VI. HIS GREAT WORK WAS THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE**; so is the work of Christ. (*Biblical Museum.*) *The prediction of Solomon's birth*.—This is a forecast which is full of moral instruction; it shows how God knows every man who is coming into the world, what his character will be, what function he will have to discharge, and what will be the effect of his ministry upon his day and generation. The Christian believes that every event is ordered from above, that every man is born at the right time, is permitted to live for a proper period if he be obedient to providence, and that the mission of every man is assigned, limited, and accentuated: all we have to do is to say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and to obey what we honestly believe to be the voice from heaven. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 11-13. Now, my son, the Lord be with thee.—*A father's prayer for his son*.—I. FOR THE POSSESSION OF MORAL QUALITIES. 1. Wisdom and understanding. 2. Strength and moral courage. II. FOR THE PRESENCE OF GOD. III. FOR SUCCESSFUL UNDERTAKING. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Conditions of successful effort*.—I. PERSONAL FITNESS. 1. Wisdom to direct. 2. Strength to work. II. GOD'S PRESENCE TO HELP IN ITS PROSECUTION. III. LOYAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD: "keep the law of the Lord." (*Ibid.*) *The qualifications needed*.—I. The source from whence they come. II. THE DESIGN for which they are given. (*Ibid.*) *Keeping God's law*.—I. GOD'S WILL IS A LAW. II. THIS LAW SHOULD BE KEPT. III. OBEDIENCE TO THIS LAW IS WISDOM. (*Ibid.*) *Right training*.—We have read that Solomon was young and tender, young and timid; it would seem as if David, recognising the timidity of his son, specially charged him to cultivate courage, bravery, fearlessness. This was training up a child in the way he should go. We are too fond of training our strongest faculties, and thus we are tempted to neglect the weaker side of our nature. Find out the weak side of a child's character, and address yourself assiduously to its cultivation. We should seek to fill the empty sack, not to overcrowd the full one. Bring into play the muscles that are most difficult to get at, and do not overtrain those which afford the fairest prospect of immediate results. When we complain of a weak memory, or a hesitant will, or a defective imagination, we should address ourselves to the cultivation of that which is in special need of culture. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord.—*Great enterprises for God*.—I. THAT GREAT THINGS DONE FOR GOD LOOK POOR IN THE SIGHT OF THE NOBLE SOULS BY WHOM THEY ARE DONE. "Now, behold in my trouble," or as rendered in the margin, "in my poverty," or as it is given in the margin of the Revised Version, "in my low estate," "have I prepared for the house of the Lord." Speaking after the manner of men, David had really made great preparations for his sacred design. It has been calculated that as much gold was used in the building of the temple as is usually stored in the vaults of the Bank of England, and toward this lavish expenditure David made a large contribution: "A thousand talents of silver." This is reckoned such an incredible quantity that some scholars suspect that an error has crept into the text. Brass and iron, timber and stone, were also prepared in abundance. Yet the king does not regard his gifts with complacency—there is no trace of pride or boasting; on the contrary, he feels that his offerings are poor and inadequate. It is ever thus with noble souls; however great in the sight of the multitude is their work or sacrifice, they mourn over it as over a mean and incommensurable thing. If any man thinks that his sacrifice for the cause of God is notable and adequate, there is something wrong with the size of that man's soul. 1. Whatever we are, we are poor by the side of what God is. The god in many an idol temple is a poor creature indeed when compared with the splendid fabric in which it is worshipped; it is a shock to turn from the gorgeous workmanship of the shrine to the stained, ugly, contemptible idol. Exactly the contrary of this was true in regard to Solomon's temple. However glorious the building, it was yet an unworthy footstool of the God whom Israel knew and worshipped. The God of Israel was the Eternal; the Creator of earth and heaven; the only wise God; the God of truth and without iniquity, just and right; glorious in holiness, delighting in mercy, doing wonders. When tempted to spiritual pride and vanity let us be humbled by "the beauty of the Lord." If you wish to gain a true estimate of yourself do not measure yourself by your neighbour; judge yourself in the sight of God, and your righteousness shall fade as a leaf. The sight of God makes the millionaire a penitent, and as penitents we must strive to build His house again. 2. Whatever we do is poor by the side of what God does. We must notice how both David and Solomon cast side-glances at the vastness and magnificence of the temple built without hands. "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less the house which I have builded." Whatever they might build was narrow and mean in comparison with heaven and the heaven of heavens. It is a fine discipline to compare our best workmanship with the work of His fingers. The chemist can produce an artificial rainbow, but nobody will mistake the stage rainbow for God Almighty's rainbow. It is well in a generation of intellectual power and artistic skill to put our creations by the side of God's marvellous doings so that we may not forget. "In my poverty have I done this," is the confession of every noble artist who criticises his work in

the light of nature's perfections and the glory of the world. 3. Whatever we give is poor by the side of what God gives. What a magnificent giver God is! We see that in the boundless, infinite outpouring of the riches of nature. And we see that supremely in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." If we take our richest gift and grandest sacrifice to Calvary they dwindle into nothing in sight of the Cross. Then it is that we pour contempt on all our pride. So in the sight of God's personal perfection, and in remembrance of His gifts and works, David felt his talents of gold, his ingots of silver, his forests of cedar, his quarries of marble, his abundance of iron and brass were trivial; they did not pay his debt to God, they simply acknowledged it. If, then, when at our best we are poor, let us not live below our best. David, at least, did his best; let us do ours. Let us not mock God by any paltriness of spirit. II. GREAT THINGS MUST BE ATTEMPTED FOR GOD IN THE FACE OF THE MOST DISCOURAGING CONDITIONS. David certainly proposed to do great things for God. He had set his heart upon building a house for God that should "be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries." Familiar as were the nations round about with wonderful architecture and splendid adornments, David proposed to build a sanctuary for the true God that should eclipse them all. But no sooner did he attempt to work out his pious design than he became conscious of the crippling disabilities of human life, of the narrowness and hostility of the human environment. We have a fine time of it whilst we dream and design; the imagination and emotions know nothing of narrowness, difficulty, or defeat. I should like to see the temples you never build; I should like you to hear the sermons I never preach. But as soon as we essay to turn thought into fact our troubles begin. It is always a critical moment when we proceed from idealism to action. It was so with David. He no sooner attempted to take the temple out of his heart and plant it on Mount Zion than he became conscious that he was poor, afflicted, and of low estate. But—and here is the lesson—all the great work of the world has to be undertaken and carried out with the sense of disheartening difficulty and discouragement. Whenever we thoughtfully look at the splendid achievements of industry, science, literature, and art we feel that an infinite pathos enters into the contemplation. The angels "who excel in strength" may do splendid things with a touch, a breath, a look, but we mortals in poverty and weakness and suffering have built up the whole magnificent fabric of civilisation. And all the great work of the Christian world has been done in similar strenuousness and sacrifice. Not out of a superabundance of wealth, learning, leisure, and opportunity has the Church of Christ floated into power and universality, but in defiance of circumstance does it win its widening way. In what deep poverty Christianity had its origin! Christ is the supreme example of the fact that glorious work must be done in profound discouragement. If David built his golden house in poverty, did not his greater Son in a far deeper poverty build His Church which is becoming the refuge of men of all nations, languages, and tongues? The Cross is the grand symbol of His life and work and mission. Indeed, the primitive Church wrought out its great task of evangelisation and establishment amid unparalleled difficulties and a great fight of afflictions; and through successive generations the expansion of Christ's kingdom has been a series of victories over manifold limitations, oppositions, and persecutions. If you are prepared to do anything for God that is in the least degree worthy of Him, gird yourself and be ready to face almost overwhelming difficulty. If you mean only little things for God, you will have little trouble in doing them; and if you mean less things than that, you will have no trouble at all; but if God has put a great thought into your heart it will mean a sacrifice and a battle. You never do a really large thing easily. The work you passionately desire always looms impossible. Circumstances fetter you, but you must resolutely work in fetters. Physical weakness must not deter you. Do not excuse yourself because you have no leisure. Half the work of the world is done by men who have no time, and who therefore make it. Do not allow the gathering infirmities of age to quench your zeal and effort. Put into the narrowing range of work higher qualities of faith and devotion. Do not even allow private sorrows to deny or discount your public service. When a young Greek soldier complained that his sword was short, a veteran instantly answered him, "Then add a step to it." And I say to you who find yourselves short of time, short of money, short of strength, short of opportunity, "Add a step"; in other words, make up for the deficiencies of material, opportunity, and instrument by an intenser resolution, enthusiasm, and

sacrifice. "Well," you reply, "a man can do no more than he can do!" Now that sounds like a very deep philosophical saying that you must take slowly in, but in fact it means nothing. Men never know what they are, what they can give, what they can do, until their soul awakes. "Stir up the gift that is in thee." "Out of my trouble have I done this," might have been the confession of Tycho Brahe, who made his great discoveries without a telescope, showing that what an astronomer chiefly wants is not a big glass but a big eye. "Out of my trouble have I done this," might have been the confession of Christopher Columbus, who crossed the Atlantic in an old tub that we should hardly use to-day for a Newcastle collier. "Out of my poverty have I done this," might have been the plaint of Turner, who painted some of his masterpieces with colours mixed in broken teacups. "Out of my trouble have I done this," says John Milton, old, poor, and blind, as he enriches the world with "Paradise Lost." "Out of my low estate have I done this," says John Bunyan, when he gives you out of Bedford jail the Land of Beulah, the Palace Beautiful, the shining ones, the country that is green the year round, the city of gold and glass, which when we see we wish that we were there. Do not wait until you have "spare time," "spare cash," or "spare" anything else; do your best with things as they are, and faith, which is the genius of the heart, will surprise you and the world. However poor and inadequate our work may seem, God will prosper and multiply it in an extraordinary degree. David felt his poverty, but God brought the thought of his heart to the utmost fruition. "Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the Lord, and in his own house he prosperously effected." (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *One worker preparing for another*:—Let us notice—**I. THAT DAVID HAD ZEALOUSLY DONE HIS PART.** 1. He had gathered the materials. Many a man collects people together, and yet he has not the fashioning of them—he does not see many conversions. 2. He fashioned some of the materials. 3. He prepared the way for Solomon's temple. 4. He found the site for the temple. We do not always remember the men who prepare the sites for the Lord's temples. Luther is remembered, but there were reformers before Luther. 5. It was David who received the plans from God. 6. He gave a solemn charge to others. 7. Have you done your part? **II. DAVID HAD DONE HIS PART IN TROUBLE.** 1. David thought little of what he had prepared. It is those who do little for the Lord who are like a hen with one chick—they think a great deal of it. 2. It was a proof of his sincerity. David in the day of his trouble, when his heart was ready to break, still went on with his great work of providing for the house of the Lord. 3. It was an incentive to service. 4. It must have given an elevation to David's whole life. **III. DAVID'S WORK FITS ON TO THE WORK OF ANOTHER.** 1. This is the order of God's providence in His Church. I am told that my venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, used often, in his pulpit to pray for somebody, of whom he knew nothing, who would follow him in the ministry of the Church, and greatly increase it. He died and passed to heaven about the time I was born. Older members of the Church have told me that they have read the answer to Dr. Rippon's prayers in the blessing that has been given to us these many years. 2. But this is a terrible blow at self. Self says, "I like to begin something of my own, and I like to carry it out; I do not want any interference." There are some who do not want any help; they are quite up to the mark; they are like a waggon and four horses, and a dog under the waggon as well. 3. I believe that it is good for the work to have a change of workers. 4. This creates unity in the Church of God. 5. This leaves a place for those who come after. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *And thou mayest add thereto.—Limited liability*:—So David encourages Solomon to arise and build the temple. The king had done his best to facilitate the building, and now he urges the young prince to come forth and do his part. It may be appropriate to reflect a little upon the fellowship of service, to remember our mutual limitations and responsibilities, and to encourage one another in service. **I.** Let us observe the **CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS** of human service. David could not take in hand the whole business, and build the temple independently of Solomon and everybody else. He soon discovered his limitations, and knew that if the great enterprise were to be carried out he would have to take Solomon into partnership, and Solomon would have to take the nation into partnership. **1.** We are subject to personal, constitutional circumscriptions from which we cannot escape. We have a certain gift and susceptibility, and within the lines prescribed by our special endowment we can work happily and effectively, but we make sorry work when we attempt anything beyond those lines.

We have all heard of the mathematician who, on hearing "Paradise Lost" read, wished to know what it proved. Well, it proved that a cell was wanting in his brain, and that he soon gave himself away when he got off his own proper ground. We talk of "all-round" men, but strictly speaking such men do not exist. All have the defects of their qualities with strange work. We may easily get into a place that we do not fit; easily attempt work for which we have no faculty.

2. We are subject to circumscriptions of circumstance. We see this in the case of David. He had gifts and aspirations which the trend of events did not permit him to exercise and develop. The sword was thrust into his hand when he would have preferred the harp; he was condemned to deal with politics when he longed to write poetry; he was shut up to empire-building when he felt the passion strong to temple-building. We possess faculties that our life does not permit us to cultivate, aspirations that we may not gratify. Some birds have little or no song in the wild state, although they have highly developed song muscles which they can turn to excellent account in other and favourable circumstances. Our environment is often too strong for us, and we must coerce ourselves into the performance of duties for which we have little or no inclination.

3. And then we all suffer from the circumscription of time. "David prepared before his death." We have only life's little day for our large, manifold, and strenuous speculations. "We are strangers and pilgrims, as all our fathers were." And this is just as true of the higher service of the race as it is true of intellectual, political, and material service. We are restricted to narrow bounds, and can do only here a little and there a little.

II. Let us, however, observe to our encouragement the CONTINUITY of human service. What David could do he did, and what he could not do he passed on with confidence to Solomon. There is wonderful continuity and coherence in the action of man. Leo Grindon says: "Nothing so plainly distinguishes between man and brutes as the absolute nothingness of effect in the work of the latter. Unless the coral isles be esteemed an exception, of all the past labours of all the animals that ever existed, there is not a trace extant." No; the irrational creatures have been sagacious in an extreme degree, they have been active and energetic from the beginning, powerful, clever, but there is no conservation of their work, no perpetuation, no accumulation. It ceases with the life of the individual or with the existence of the special community. Myriads of bees, birds, ants, and beavers, curious, restless workers, but nothing of their creations and fabrications survive. But it is strangely different with man. Frail and fugitive as the individual may be, we have the ability to bequeath our small personal contribution to the general and increasing wealth of the race. There is a physical law in the animal world which economises the experience of the individual for the benefit of the species, but we have the immense advantage of a social law which preserves and perpetuates in an extraordinary degree the services and sacrifices of the humblest individual. We see this in the intellectual world. Our glorious things in literature and art are the legacies of our gifted ancestors. The architecture of Assyria, the astronomy of Chaldea, the pottery of Etruria, the science of Egypt, the art of Greece, the jurisprudence of Rome, the moral science of Palestine, have come down to us corrected, enlarged, perfected by successive generations. Bees have been making comb for ages, and yet there is nothing to show for it to-day; but swarms of golden bees from Homer to Tennyson have filled a million cells in the British Museum with immortal sweetness. No phonograph has caught and preserved the music of the birds, although they have piped from the morning of time; but the songs and symphonies of ancient minstrels stir our souls with deep thoughts and passions. And once again we see this continuity of service in the national life. Our fathers bequeathed us this great empire. Your toils and sacrifices will be conserved, they will be added to the general stock, they will survive for ages. Here is our grand comfort and encouragement. Real work is wealth that moth and rust do not corrupt.

III. Observe, lastly, to your encouragement, the COMPLEMENTARINESS of human service. What David could not do Solomon could do. What is missing in one man is found in another; what is lacking in one man's service is supplied by the service of another. We see at a glance that men are wonderfully different from each other. Living things and creatures have always an individuality more or less sharp. Artificial things are uniform. The roses on my drawing-room paper are surprisingly alike—exactly the same size, the same colour, the same number of leaves, the flowers grow at precisely the same distance from each other, grow at the same angle, are identical in form and colour whether they grow at the top of the room or the bottom,



whether they get the sun or the shade, and they never vary with the seasons; but the garden outside has no uniformity. The roses are all sizes and colours, grow at all angles, and not the roses only but other flowers of a thousand shapes and dyes and perfumes. So in society. David has a character of his own, so has Solomon. And this individuality becomes the sharper with education. Culture intensifies individuality, civilisation spells differentiation, godliness means individual distinction. And because we are different we often think severely of one another. The multitude of teachers utterly unlike each other unconsciously conspire to bring out the whole truth. "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas," and yet the threefold, the thousandfold, ministry is necessary to bring out the infinite truth. Amongst the great company of preachers, each with his singular appreciation of truth and righteousness and grace, the world gets the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. And so the multitude of workers, utterly unlike each other, cover the whole field of service. As geologists, astronomers, chemists, and many other workers in nature complete the circle of the sciences, so the various servants of Christ and humanity, guided by the sovereign, universal Spirit, take up all kinds of gracious work so that all needs may be ministered unto and the whole race be visited and blessed. "Moreover there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work." "Thou mayest add thereto." It is a matter of obligation. Are we to receive all and do nothing? Some people add very little to anything. But we all feel how ignoble are such parasitic souls. Solomon felt that it was an obligation to build, and we are awfully guilty if we shirk the work which God has so manifestly committed to us. "Thou mayest add thereto." It is a privilege to do so. When God built the world He did it altogether without our intervention. We were not there when He laid the foundations of the earth. We had no hand in piling the Alps. We did not dig a trench for the Atlantic. We did not adorn the firmament with golden star and silver crescent and crimson cloud. We did not plant the oaks of Bashan or the cedars of Lebanon. The rainbow owes nothing to our paint-pot. God did it all. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands." But God has granted to us the glorious privilege of being His fellow-workers in building up a regenerated humanity. Our thoughts, gifts, sympathies, prayers, tears may go into this new creation whose glory shall eclipse that of sun or star. "See that no man take thy crown"—that is, see that no man does thy work. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

**Ver. 16. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee.**—*David's charge to Solomon.*—This charge has respect to and gathers force from—**I. THE PAST.** Upon the life and conscience of Solomon were concentrated the considerations and responsibilities which arise out of—**1.** The relations of the family covenant. Solomon was a son of promise. **2.** The influence of parental example. **3.** The Divine faithfulness. **II. THE PRESENT.** From the present several motives and encouragements are drawn. **1.** Problems have been solved, paths of duty have been made clear, and avenues of effort and usefulness have been opened up. **2.** The present was made rich in material which had been prepared and laid up in the past. **3.** These preparations brought within the reach of Solomon opportunities such as had been enjoyed by no one before him. The preparation of means and material create opportunities. Providence has created for every Christian greater spiritual opportunities than Solomon enjoyed, and the responsibilities arising out of these opportunities are solemn and urgent. **4.** All these motives, arguments, and considerations, drawn from the past and present, unite in a resistless appeal for action: "Arise and be doing." **III. THE CHARGE HAS RESPECT TO THE FUTURE.** **1.** Encouragement in his undertaking. Solomon had the promise of the Divine presence and blessing. **2.** He was also encouraged in his undertaking by the fact that in the accomplishment of it the desires, hopes, and prayers of pious ancestors would be fulfilled. **3.** By thus fulfilling the pious desires of godly ancestors, Solomon set in operation spiritual agencies which carry down to future ages blessings in ever widening streams of diffusive beneficence. Application: **1.** In our work we use materials and agencies which have been prepared by kings, prophets, apostles, and martyrs. All the achievements and improvements of modern science and civilisation are available in Christian work. **2.** In the kingdom of God there is a place and a sphere for talents and service of all kinds. (*S. J. Wilson, D.D.*) *Christian activity and its reward*:—**I. EVERY GOOD MAN HAS AN IMPORTANT WORK TO DO IN**

**HIS DAY AND GENERATION.** 1. We have much to do for ourselves in the cultivation of our own minds, the improvement of our hearts, and the faithful application of our various talents. 2. We have much to do for the conversion of others. 3. We have much to do for God. II. **IT BEHOVES US TO ADDRESS OURSELVES TO THIS WORK WITH ACTIVITY, ZEAL, AND ENERGY.** 1. Reason dictates this. 2. Gratitude impels it. 3. The brevity of life calls for this. 4. The solemn account we shall have to give should further stimulate us to zeal, activity, and energy. 5. The example of Christ tells us to "Arise and be doing." III. **WHEN OCCUPYING OUR TALENTS IN THE EXERCISE OF OUR BEST EFFORTS WE MAY CONFIDENTLY LOOK FOR THE PRESENCE AND BLESSING OF GOD.** "And the Lord be with thee." This might be rendered, "The Lord shall be with thee." 1. There is a general presence of God with His people, which they enjoy in common with all mankind. 2. There is an especial presence of God with His people, which is the promise of His covenant. Reflections: This subject will—1. Reprove the idler. 2. Admonish those who are attempting to work without due dependence upon God. 3. Heaven is a place of ceaseless activity. (*George Clayton.*) *A new year's exhortation:*—I. **THE SPHERE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE.** II. **THE MANNER OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE.** 1. Be ready and on the look-out for something to do. 2. Let us find something to do. 3. When you've finished one job, set about another. "Be doing." III. **THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE.** "The Lord with thee." 1. His presence will quicken our energy. 2. Will lighten our labour. (*R. S. Latimer.*) *Inactivity the "dry-rot" of young men:*—Inactivity is the "dry-rot" of thousands of Christian young men. You will never gain a good appetite for God's Word, or a flush of joy on your countenance, until you lay hold of some earnest, self-denying work and keep at it. Nothing will impart such a holy vehemence to your prayers as to spend an hour by a sick-bed, or in close labour with an impenitent heart. Nothing will stiffen your muscle more than tough up-hill work in behalf of some unpopular cause or moral reform. The only cure for indolence is honest work; the only cure for selfishness is self-sacrifice; the only cure for timidity is to plunge into duty before the shiver benumbs you; the only cure for unbelief is to put Christ to the test every day. Prayer must kill unbelief, or else unbelief will kill prayer. The Christian warfare is not a single pitched battle; it is a campaign for life. You may often imagine that you have attended the funeral of some besetting sin—and lo! it is on its feet again next morning! You won't fire the last shot until the gates of glory welcome you in among the crowned conquerors. (*T. C. Cuyler.*)

**Ver. 19. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.**—*Seeking after God:*—I. **THE OCCASION ON WHICH THIS INJUNCTION WAS GIVEN.** II. **THE INJUNCTION ITSELF.** 1. The great object of our life. 2. In what way we are to prosecute it. (1) Avail yourselves of the opportunities afforded for public usefulness. (2) Begin with the surrender of your whole souls to God. (*C. Simcon, M.A.*) *The important search:*—I. **THE OBJECT SEARCHED.** II. **THE METHOD OF SEARCH.** 1. Earnestly. 2. Resolutely. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Building the temple:*—The great aim of missionary work, at home and abroad, is the same. This great work may be illustrated by the text. We have—I. **THE HEART SET UPON GOD.** 1. All work for God must begin with ourselves (Acts xxii. 28; 1 Tim. iv. 16). 2. It must be heart-work, not merely duty, custom, or sympathy. 3. There must be a deliberate setting of the heart and soul upon God as our God, reconciled in Christ, fixedly His (Psa. lvii. 7; Deut. x. 12). 4. There must be continued seeking God, in prayer, meditation, holy living. II. **THE BUILDING-WORK GOING ON.** The living Church is God's sanctuary. He dwells in the hearts of His people (John xiv. 23; 2 Cor. vi. 16; 1 Cor. iii. 16). The work of Christ's followers is to build the sanctuary. 1. By gathering souls out of the world around to Christ. 2. By gathering souls into the Church, uniting in one body in Christ. III. **THE SANCTUARY USED FOR GOD.** Union in the Church must be—1. For consecration. The temple is not for ornament, nor for the admiration of the world, but for God. 2. For worship: "Bring the ark," &c. The ark shadows forth the great propitiation (Rom. iii. 25). This must hold the first position in the Church, heart, ministry (1 Cor. ii. 2). 3. For service: "Bring the holy vessels," &c. Each vessel has its use. (*J. E. Sampson.*) *"Set your heart":*—Let us take this exhortation—I. **IN ITS REFERENCE TO GOD'S OWN PEOPLE.** 1. What are they to seek? "The Lord your God." (1) By endeavouring to obey Him in everything. (2) In building up His temple. It should be the main object of our life to seek the Lord by building up His Church. (3) By doing everything to God's glory. 2. How are they to seek? "Set your

heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God." (1) With fixity of purpose: "Set." (2) Have an intense affection towards God's service and glory. (3) With an energetic use of the intellect. We ought as much to speculate and scheme to glorify God as we meditate how to advance our business. (4) By the union and concentration of all our faculties. 3. When are we to seek the Lord? "Now." Now is the only time worth having, because it is indeed the only time we have. When did David mean by his "now"? (1) Now that they had an efficient leader—Solomon. (2) When God is with you. (3) When God gives rest. "Hath He not given you rest on every side?" II. IN ITS REFERENCE TO THOSE WHO ARE CONVERTED. 1. Set your heart on true religion, and be not content with the outward form of it. 2. Seek the Lord Himself. 3. Seek Him at once with all your heart. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Seeking God*:—In the struggle of life many men and women are hampered and depressed by the memory of past weaknesses, errors, and sins. The hours of their real spiritual prosperity are overshadowed and embittered by the recollection of their spiritual adversities. It is one of the wise and helpful laws of our nature that in freeing ourselves from weakness and sin we do not free ourselves from the memory of them. The value of the experience lies in the lesson we learn from it, and the truest repentance is often witnessed by the poignancy of the sorrow, and both the lesson and the sorrow have their roots in memory. But, while we are not to forget that we have sometimes fallen, we are not always to carry the mud with us; the slough is behind, but the clean, clearly-defined road stretches ahead of us, skies are clear, and God is beyond. We were made for purity, truth, and fidelity, and the very abhorrence of the opposites of these qualities, which grows and deepens within us, bears testimony that our aspirations are becoming our attainments. The really noble thing about any man or woman is not freedom from all stains of the lower life, but the deathless aspiration which for ever drives us forward and will not let us rest in any past, whether good or bad. That which makes us respect ourselves is not what men call a blameless career, but the hunger and thirst after God which makes all our doing unsatisfying and inadequate to us. Better a thousand times the eager and passionate fleeing to God from a past of faults and weaknesses, with an irresistible longing for rest in the everlasting verities, than the most respectable career which misses this profound impulse. The past remains with us to remind us of our perils and our constant need of help, but it ought not to haunt and oppress us. The real life of an aspiring soul is always ahead. We are not fleeing from the devil, but seeking God. (*Lyman Abbott.*)

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

**VER. 1. So when David was old and full of days.—I. AN INSTRUCTIVE VIEW OF LIFE. II. A TOUCHING PICTURE OF OLD AGE. III. A SOLEMN WARNING TO ALL.** (*J. Wolfendale.*) *How to employ old age*:—The pathos of David's action will be more clearly recognised if we remember that the literal translation is, "Now David had become satisfied with days." Satisfied with days, but not satisfied with labour. David had seen all the contents of time, in poverty, persecution, honour, and majesty, and yet he was anxious for the consolidation of his empire and the construction of the temple. When the heathen poet described the death of a philosopher it was under the image of a guest who had to the full enjoyed the feast. David as a guest of the Lord had himself sat long enough at the table of time, and now he was desirous that his son should take up the service and enjoyment of the empire, whilst he himself went forth to the mysteries of another state. Old age can do for the future what mere youth is not permitted to attempt. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Ver. 5. And four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments which I made.—Music and religion**:—I. THE OBJECT OF MUSIC. "To praise therewith" well expresses the attitude of the Bible towards music. Plutarch says: "The chiefest and sublimest end of music is the graceful return of our thanks to the gods." In these words the wisdom of the Bible representation is vindicated. A worthy conception of God is the only thing which can give the true inspiration of music, and keep it pure and noble through all its strains. Thus music and religion ought never to be divorced. II. SOME OF THE FEATURES OF THE REVELATION OF GOD WHICH

THE BIBLE GIVES, AND SEE HOW THEY AGREE WITH THE BEST FEATURES OF MUSICAL LIFE AND GROWTH. 1. The Bible reveals God to man, and man to himself; it opens up depths of meaning which ordinary life cannot sound; it calls man the son of God; it bases itself upon the love of God, which passeth knowledge; it speaks of things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. If we allow music any rights of its own, they must be based upon its claim to give expression which is beyond the power of words, and to utter conceptions which thought cannot formulate. It has the power to take them out of the surroundings even of the deepest thoughts, to lift their aspirations where nothing else can go, to carry them into the presence of a power of harmony and order more fundamental than the skill of the hand or the logic of the mind can represent. 2. Then there is the universality of religion. It is meant for all men: there are all grades and kinds of reception of it. The gospel of Christ is for all men; it has truths for the simple, and doctrines for the wise; it meets all nations of men, each according to its nature and its needs. So music in one way or another affects the simplest and the most cultured, appeals to the joyful and to the sorrowing, defies lines of nationality and of language, and is appropriated by all according to the needs of each. 3. The object of religion is harmony—harmony between heaven and earth, between man and man, harmony in the life of the individual, with its varying experiences. The power of man to appreciate harmony finds a response in the growing resources of the musical art; and the yearnings of man for a better existence, where life shall not clash with death, joy with sorrow, and love with hate, finds an answer in a revelation which destroys death, comforts sorrow, and makes love seen everywhere. There could be no better expression for heaven, as the place where such a revelation finds its completion, than as the place of music. (*Arthur Brooks, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **Moses the man of God.**—*The man of God*.—1. A beautiful description of any man. 2. A possible description of every man. 3. A needful description of each man if he is to abide in his Father's house for ever. Some men have attained eminence in godliness. No renown is to be compared with this, no influence is equal to that which arises from such recognition. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *When is a man a "man of God"?*—1. When he believes in God's existence. 2. When he is assured of God's providence. 3. When he has sunk his will in the Divine purpose. 4. When he lives and moves and has his being in God. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 25. **For David said, The Lord God of Israel hath given rest unto His people.**—*The rest of the people of God*.—I. IN THE MYSTERIOUS POLITY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL BLESSINGS WERE SO CLOSELY ALLIED THAT THE SAME LANGUAGE MIGHT NATURALLY BE EMPLOYED TO SIGNIFY EITHER. II. It is not unwarrantable for us to conjecture that in the joyous utterance contained in the text David insinuated PROFOUND TRUTHS THAN LIE ON THE SURFACE OF HIS WORDS. III. If "there remaineth a rest to the people of God," IT BECOMES US TO SECURE THIS GREAT BLESSING AS THE SOLE OR CHIEF OBJECT OF EXISTENCE. IV. REST AND PEACE MUST FALL UPON A CHRISTIAN SPIRIT. 1. From its devotion to Christ Himself, and its devoted imitation of His pure and perfect example. 2. By the elevating tendency of the singleness of the object of his hope. Those who have many debts often feel it a relief to exchange them all for a single creditor; he whose whole heart is bent on reaching a single point leaves all around him on his way in equal and complete indifference. God is one; let our affections but partake of the unity of that object, and we shall have reached the pathway of real and imperishable rest. 3. From the very nature of the Christian affections. 4. From its hope being anchored in a future world. To support, still more to exalt us, heaven must mingle with earth. To direct a vessel upon the ocean there must be two elements at work, the air must modify the agency of the water; to set a vessel at rest there must be more elements than one employed, and the earth must afford the means of resisting the breezes and the sea. Such is the position in the voyage of this life. The earthly and the heavenly elements must combine, or we are powerless. Confined to the single element of our corrupted nature, we are the sport of every accident, we have no rules for our navigation. But they who join to the human nature the higher element, they have a power that guides them to the everlasting haven. To have the great object of our thoughts placed beyond the chances of human life is to place ourselves beyond them. (*W. A. Butler.*)

## CHAPTER XXIV.

VER. 2. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father.—*The death of Nadab and Abihu*:—LEARN: I. THAT SIN INVERTS THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS. "They died before their father." II. THAT SIN DEPRIVES OF BLESSINGS WHICH GOD CAN BESTOW. They "had no children." III. THAT SIN OFTEN OVERWHELMS WITH FEARFUL RUIN. IV. THAT SIN IS OFTEN MENTIONED IN HISTORY TO WARN OF ITS CONSEQUENCES. (*J. Wolfendale*.) *Sad deaths*:—I. The sins which caused them. 1. Disobedience to Divine injunction. 2. Gross inconsistency. 3. Rashness in approaching God. 4. Presumptuous in act. II. The PUNISHMENT which followed the sins. 1. A dishonourable death. 2. A sudden death. 3. An overwhelming death. 4. A retributive death. (*ibid.*)

## CHAPTER XXV.

VER. 7. That were instructed in the songs of the Lord.—*Music and worship*:—In the services of the Jewish temple all is devout, exalted, appropriate, devotional, impressive, and soul-subduing, because the musicians themselves are close to the heart of the great Jehovah; the worshipping congregation hears His voice with awe, "as the sound of many waters," and the priests of the temple lift their reverent thoughts to the great "I Am," with every cloud of incense that floats above the altar. I. THE MORAL PURPOSE OF MUSIC. All other aspects of music in religious service, that merely show off voices, and entertain the jaded senses of the crowd, without a devotional spirit and moral purpose behind them, may be theatrical and imposing, and to a certain extent moving, but they do not rise higher than the altitude of a passing mood. Musical effect is one thing—musical sincerity another. Words may be eloquent; they are useless when they do not touch the soul. Church music may be charming; it is but an idle breath when no message of spiritual power goes from the singer to him who listens. The Puritans and Spartans were both agreed that luxury of sound was sometimes mischievous. The Puritan said, "Sweet music at first delighteth the ears, but afterward corrupteth and depraveth the mind." Timotheus, the Milesian, added a twelfth string to his harp, for which he was severely punished by the Spartans. They feared this luxury of sound would effeminate the people. Music is not only closely related to mind, but to morals as well; and, Church-wise, this moral quality makes its swift appeal to the emotional sense; the exact relation of music to the emotions and the effect of melody upon the listener are truly and eloquently described by Mr. Hawsis: "Like the sound of bells at night breaking the silence, only to lead the spirit into deeper peace; like a leaden cloud at morn, rising in grey twilight, to hang as a golden mist before the furnace of the sun; like the dull, deep pain of one who sits in an empty room watching the shadows of the firelight full of memories; like the plaint of souls that are wasted with sighing; like pæans of exalted praise; like sudden songs from the open gates of paradise—is music. Like one who stands in the midst of hot and terrible battle, drunk with the fiery smoke and hearing the roar of cannon in a trance; like one who finds himself in a long cathedral aisle, and hears the pealing organ, and sees a kneeling crowd smitten with fringes of coloured light; like one who, from a precipice, leaps out upon the warm mid-summer air, toward the peaceful valleys below, and feeling himself buoyed up with wings that suddenly fail him, wakens in great despair from his wild dream—so is he who can listen and understand." Such is the mission of music, which George Eliot characterises as love in search of a word. II. There can be no sort of question THAT THE RELIGIOUS BODIES WHICH GIVE THE PEOPLE MOST TO DO IN THE SERVICE, AND EXACT FROM THE CHOIR MUSIC OF THE MOST DEVOTIONAL TYPE, ARE GAINING THE LARGEST NUMBER OF WORSHIPPERS. In the first particular the Roman Catholic Church is seriously defective; but in the second particular it must be conceded that Protestants have absolutely nothing "approaching the grandeur of the Roman Catholic masses, where we have a mind like that of Mozart or Beethoven steadily working out, in strains of incomparable depth and pathos, a great connected series of thoughts, embodying all the varied phases of religious emotion."

What man, capable of profoundest feeling, has not been thrilled to his heart's depth by the great cathedral music of the Romish Church? Presbyterian and Congregational churches have been absolutely forced into warmer, more varied, and more worshipful forms of service by the hunger of the people and by the pressure of competition from without. On this point allow me to quote the strong language of Professor Waldo S. Pratt, of Hartford Theological Seminary, one of the most rigid and orthodox of Congregational institutions. He writes: "American Dissenting churches have begun to see that in their protest against the Episcopacy of the eighteenth century they went to the extreme in many matters. They have not only fallen into bald and irregular habits of worship, but in their exaltation of the teaching office of the pulpit they have almost forgotten the worshipping office of the pew. Accordingly, throughout the land arises a cry for the enrichment of public worship. Hence the growing use of responsive reading, of formulæ of prayer and confession, of singing in which all the people may join." Barren worship is productive of no such blessed inspirations and emotions as follow what is truly congregational worship. III. I am ready to grant THE EXISTENCE OF CERTAIN DANGERS. 1. One is, that the music may be simply an entertainment. When Archbishop Stephens, of New York, was dying, he took the hand of a friend and whispered, almost with his last breath, "Come to the funeral. The music will be splendid." 2. Another danger is that the service, largely ritualistic, may be emptied of all feeling of true devotion. Dr. Lyman Abbott notes a great absence of seriousness in the cathedral services of Antwerp, Cologne, and Paris. And upon this phase of the subject I will only remark that three principles must be duly observed in the construction of a satisfactory ritual—(1) The sentiment of reverence must be increased, and not diminished. All tendencies toward trivialness in the treatment of the great realities symbolised by worship must be sternly reprovèd. (2) There should be entire fitness of parts. Music, responses, prayers, must not be permitted to overweight each other. Proportion is as necessary in service as it is in architecture. (3) Concentration of effects. The aim of all worship should be to bring God nearer, and to lift the soul in adoration. Whatever contributes to these results—though it be an innovation—ought at least to receive a respectful hearing in the court of reason. (*F. Stanley Root, M.A.*)

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#### CHAPTER XXVI.

**VER. 5. For God blessed him.**—*The blessing of Obed-edom*:—Learn—I. THAT GOD WILL HONOUR SIGNAL SERVICE. II. THAT SIGNAL SERVICE THUS REWARDED IS COMMENDED TO OUR NOTICE. 1. That we may discern the goodness of God. 2. That we may imitate the example. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The blessing of Obed-edom*:—I. WHAT IT CONSISTS OF. 1. Family increase. 2. Family honour. 3. Family reputation. II. HOW IT IS GAINED. 1. By a right mind. 2. By right action. (*Ibid.*)

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#### CHAPTER XXVII.

**VERS. 1-34. Now the children of Israel.**—*Wisdom, kindness, and folly*:—In reading this chapter we are struck with three features of David's rule. 1. The presence of royal wisdom in—1. Securing the safety of his kingdom by a sufficient militia without sustaining a burdensome standing army. One month's practice in the year would suffice to maintain their soldierly qualities without seriously interfering with their civil pursuits (ver. 1). 2. Adopting the system of promotion by merit. In the list of captains (vers. 2-15) we meet with names of men that had distinguished themselves by their courage and capacity, and who had "earned their promotion." Favouritism is a ruinous policy, and fatal to kings and ministers. 3. Limiting his own personal requirements to a moderate demand. David lived as became such a king as he was, but he did not indulge in a costly and oppressive "civil list" (see vers. 25-31). 4. Choosing so sagacious a counsellor as Ahithophel

(2 Sam. xvii. 1-3, 14), and so true and brave a friend as Hushai (2 Sam. xvii. 7-14). 2. The presence of personal kindness. Although David acted, most wisely, on the principle that the highest posts should be reserved for the most capable men and those who "deserved well of their country," yet he did not neglect his own kindred in the hour of his opportunity. We find, amongst others of the foremost men, the names of his relatives, Asahel (ver. 7); Jonathan, his uncle (ver. 32); Joab (ver. 34). 3. The presence of royal folly. We are reminded here of the grievous error, the disastrous departure from rectitude, when, notwithstanding the wise counsel and somewhat strenuous opposition of Joab, he insisted on numbering the people (vers. 23, 24). Regarding the folly of the king, we learn—I. THAT HUMAN NATURE, EVEN AT ITS BEST, BEARS THE STAIN OF IMPERFECTION. Therefore—1. Let us conclude that there is certain to be something in ourselves which needs to be corrected. 2. Let us not be hasty in estimating the character of others. Regarding David's kindness we learn—II. THAT WE DO WELL TO USE OUR OWN ELEVATION TO SERVE OUR KINDRED. Nepotism is a crime as well as a sin, but, when other things are equal, and when opportunity offers, we should surely remember those whom, by the ties of affinity, God commends to our kindness, and those whom, by profession of friendship in earlier and humbler days, we promised to assist. And in view of the king's wisdom, we may learn—III. THAT GOODNESS AND WISDOM TOGETHER ARE A SOURCE OF INCALCULABLE BENEFIT. David without his devoutness would have been nothing to his country or his kind; without his wisdom he would have been little more. Piety and prudence together are a power for God and man. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*)

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

VERS. 1-8. And David assembled all the princes of Israel.—*David's address to the princes*:—I. THE ATTITUDE which David assumed. II. THE SPIRIT which David manifested. III. THE AMBITION which David cherished. IV. THE CONFESSION which David makes. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The testimony of a noble life*:—I. IN HIS CHOICE TO THE THRONE GOD DISPLAYS HIS SOVEREIGNTY. II. IN HIS ACQUISITION OF THE KINGDOM GOD MANIFESTS HIS PROVIDENCE. III. IN HIS SON'S SUCCESSION TO THE THRONE GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISE. (*Ibid.*) *He shall build My house.—The material and the spiritual temple*:—I. THE JEWISH DISPENSATION MAINLY EXTERNAL. 1. Sacrifices. 2. Types. 3. Observances. 4. Priestly caste. 5. Sacred buildings. II. REASONS FOR THIS. 1. Early age of the world, revelation, and human thought. 2. Necessity of strong stamps to impress the nation in its youth, and keep it separate from heathendom. 3. Consequent necessity of indulging it in manifold visible symbols. 4. The repetition and induration of signs prepared the way for the purely mental reign of the Messiah. III. HENCE THE FUNCTION OF THE TABERNACLE AND THE TEMPLE. 1. As the place where God had demonstrably set His name. 2. Where the visible glory had been and could be seen at a due crisis. 3. Where the embodied signs of the covenant were stored. 4. As the house of sacrifice (2 Chron. vii. 12). 5. As the house of prayer (Isa. lvi. 7). 6. As the symbol of unity in worship (2 Chron. xxxii. 12). 7. As God's own dwelling-place (1 Kings vi. 12, 13). IV. AFTER ITS POLLUTION AND PILLAGE. 1. By Shishak (1 Kings xiv. 25, 26). 2. Under Jehoash (2 Kings xii. 17). 3. Under Ahaz (2 Kings xvi. 14). 4. Under Hezekiah (2 Kings xviii. 13). Its sanctity had been impaired through the defections of the people. Spiritual religion began afterwards to grow, so that Isaiah was able to proclaim before the captivity (lxvi. 1, 2), "Heaven is My throne . . . what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord"; Malachi was able decisively to prophesy (i. 11), "In every place incense shall be offered to My name." The old worship was gradually ceasing to fulfil its function; the new dispensation of the law of the Spirit and of liberty was coming in; and at last the Messiah declared irrevocably that old things were passed away, and that the hour was coming when neither in Gerizim nor in Jerusalem the Father should be worshipped, no more for ever, locally or visibly, but only truly with the inner worship of spirit and of truth. This was a great point with St. Stephen (Acts vii. 48) and St. Paul (Acts xvii. 24). V. WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE BY WHICH CHRIST REPLACED THE OLD HONoured VISIBLE SIGN? 1. The whole invisible

company of those who are righteous through faith (1 Pet. ii. 4; Isa. lviii. 15; 1 Cor. iii. 16). 2. The body of every true son of God (1 Cor. vi. 19; John xiv. 13). 3. In heaven, the special pervading presence of the Almighty (Rev. xxi. 22; Acts xvii. 28). VI. WHAT, THEN, ARE CHRISTIAN PLACES OF WORSHIP? 1. Not representatives of the temple, but of the synagogue. 2. In all places where Christians meet for meditation and prayer Christ is equally present (Matt. xviii. 20). 3. Venerable and solemn merely from association, intention, and consent. 4. All adornment of them a question of edification for the congregation. 5. No one part of them more holy than another except by association. VII. MORAL REASONS OF THIS IN THE CHRISTIAN ECONOMY. 1. Danger of putting trust in anything short of God Himself in His own immediate moral relations to the soul. 2. Temptation to set our affection on things below instead of things above, and making our worship one of act instead of disposition and the intelligence. 3. Tendency of all religious bodies to idolatrise their symbols. VIII. LESSON: TO AVOID SUPERSTITIO. (*W. M. Sinclair, M.A.*) **And leave it for an inheritance.**—*The Christian inheritance*:—Good and great men have always been jealous for the cause of God in the world, and when about to die, that feeling has sometimes been intensified. Moses, Eli, &c. I. THE ESTATE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH IS AN INHERITANCE. It consists of the knowledge of the triune God, our relations to Him and our obligations as revealed to us in His Word. II. THIS INHERITANCE IS YOURS. III. THE FORCES WHICH WOULD BRING WRECK AND RUIN TO THIS INHERITANCE. Sacerdotalism on the one hand, rationalism on the other. (*By Baker.*)

Vers. 9, 21. **And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father.**—*God's relation to human life*:—Learn—I. THAT OUR LIFE IS EXPOSED TO GOD'S INSPECTION. II. THAT OUR SERVICE TO GOD SHOULD SPRING FROM SINCERE MOTIVES. III. THAT OUR WELFARE DEPENDS UPON OUR CONDUCT TOWARDS GOD. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The God of thy father*:—1. The rich experience behind these words. 2. The force of parental affection in giving that experience. 3. The susceptibility of youth to profit by the teaching. (*Ibid.*) *Fathers and children*:—We see here one generation—1. Transmitting the knowledge of God to its successor. 2. Enjoining the service of God upon its successors. 3. Indicating God's method of dealing with its successor. 4. Bequeathing its unfulfilled intentions to its successor. (*M. Braithwaite.*) *The knowledge of God the first principle of religion*:—I. WHAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IMPLIES. 1. A firm belief of His existence. 2. Just and regular sentiments concerning the perfections of His nature. Whatever argues a real imperfection or frailty in men ought not in the most distant resemblance to be ascribed to God. 3. A reverent contemplation of Him, according to the discoveries He hath been pleased to make of His perfections in His Word, works, and the ways of providence. Let us frequently contemplate—(1) His almighty power. (2) His holiness. (3) His wisdom. (4) His veracity. (5) His infinite mercy. II. THE EFFICACY AND INFLUENCE THIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD OUGHT TO HAVE UPON US. The design and end of knowledge is not only to enlarge and enlighten the mind, but to direct the practice and mend the heart. The true knowledge of God should produce in us—1. Reverence. 2. Holiness. 3. Dependence upon Him for wisdom (Jas. i. 5). 4. Confidence in His promises. 5. Fear. 6. Gratitude. (*J. Mason, M.A.*) *Solomon succeeding David*:—No better advice could have been given to the young sovereign of Israel. No better advice can to-day be given to the young sovereigns who fill our churches and Sunday-schools. So far as Solomon followed this advice he was prosperous beyond any that went before him; as soon as he forgot this advice the terrible warning with which the verse ends was fulfilled, and the disappointed misanthrope in the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us of the sorrows of a man whom God has forsaken. As God chose Solomon, so does He choose every young man and woman for some special work, which they alone can best accomplish. There are four things to be noticed in this charge. I. KNOW THOU GOD. 1. Through the Bible. 2. Providence. 3. Through the communings of our own heart. II. Know thou thy FATHER'S GOD. Every generation need not begin at the beginning, as though the fathers knew nothing about God. There is much foolish talk about thinking these great truths concerning God and religion through for ourselves. That our fathers served God is a reason why we should not discard Him. III. SERVE HIM WITH A PERFECT HEART. IV. SERVE HIM WITH A WILLING MIND. It is said that when the Princess Victoria was called to the kingdom, the messengers, who were the highest dignitaries of State, arrived at her palace from the death-bed of the king very early in the



morning. They had great difficulty in arousing any one; but at length the princess's maid appeared, who said that her mistress was in such a sweet sleep that it was a pity to disturb her. "Tell her," said the Archbishop of Canterbury, "that we have come on business of importance to the queen, and even her slumbers must give way to that." Very soon the princess appeared, and was invested with royal robes and prerogatives. To every young person comes the messenger of God telling them of their Father's good pleasure that they should inherit the kingdom. No one can afford to neglect the summons. (*F. E. Clark.*) *David's charge to Solomon*.—These words contain—1. Advice given to a hopeful son. 2. By an excellent father. 3. Under most affecting circumstances. I. THE COURSE PRESCRIBED. 1. To know God. This implies—(1) That mankind by nature do not know God. (a) They do not understand God's relations to mankind, as their rightful Sovereign; their Guide in difficulties; their Redeemer from evil; their Friend in necessities (Psa. x. 4). (b) They do not acknowledge God in these relations. (c) They do not enjoy God in these relations (Eph. ii. 12). (2) That the knowledge of God must be sought to be enjoyed. 2. To serve God with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. (1) By preserving attention to His guidance (Acts iii. 22, 23; Heb. xii. 25). (2) By habitual dependence on Christ's mediation (Col. ii. 6). (3) By steadfastly resisting Satan (1 Pet. v. 8, 9). (4) By aspiring after spotless purity (2 Cor. vii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 14). (5) By doing good to mankind for God's sake (Gal. vi. 10; Rom. xiv. 17, 18). (6) Serve Him alone (Matt. iv. 10). (7) Seek to please Him in all things (Matt. vi. 22; 1 Cor. x. 33). (8) Serve Him from a principle of grateful affection (Rom. xii. 1). (9) And in cheerful hope (1 Pet. i. 13). 3. Thus to know and serve God must be justly denominated a course of acceptable piety. It is acceptable piety—(1) In opposition to the complimentary piety of the Antinomian; for it includes actual service. (2) To the affected piety of the hypocrite, for it includes sincerity of heart. (3) To the erroneous piety of the superstitious, for it includes piety directed by the knowledge of God. (4) To the servile piety of the Pharisee, for it includes service cheerfully rendered. (5) To the inconstant pious intervals of unstable professors (Hos. vi. 4). II. THE ARGUMENTS BY WHICH IT IS URGED. 1. From the knowledge of God as our Observer. 2. From His goodness as our Redeemer. 3. From His just severity as our Judge. (1) God cannot be imposed upon (1 Sam. ii. 3; Prov. xvi. 2; Eccles. xii. 14). (2) Forsaking God is highly resented by Him, as implying ingratitude, treachery, and folly (Jer. ii. 13, 19). (3) Apostasy from God is justly punished with eternal banishment from Him (Job. xxi. 14; Matt. xxv. 41). Application: 1. You must serve God on earth, or you cannot live with Him in heaven (Matt. vii. 21). 2. That you may serve God acceptably you must first know Him (Exod. v. 2). 3. The knowledge of God should be restlessly and confidently sought (Prov. ii. 3-5; Jer. xxxi. 31-34). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *David's instructions to Solomon*.—These words were not spoken from the death-bed, and yet behind them there is the background of death, judgment, and eternity. When dying men or women are speaking to us we know their words are few and well ordered. Especially so are the last utterances of parents to their children, if there is sufficient strength left of mind and body. In this instruction to Solomon we feel just as if the Spirit of God gave David inspiration. Just as if he looked into Solomon prophetically and saw both his weakness and his strength, words shaped themselves upon David's tongue that exactly fitted the best and worst in the youthful life that lay before him. 1. David felt, "I cannot offer the chart of my life to my own son when he is beginning his voyage and say, 'Just sail as I sailed,' for if so, he will run on reefs that I was nearly foundering upon, he will run on the quicksands that nearly ruined me." Those lights that lie around our dangerous rock-bound coast are all very fine, and our lighting system is one of the glories of our British commerce. How all our coasts are lighted up at dangerous places at the expense of millions of money spent in building lighthouses, fitting them with the best lights, and keeping efficient men to take charge of them! But take the best of them, and ask any sailor, and he will tell you that five minutes of the sun itself is worth them all together. So it is with the best human testimony, the best earthly wisdom, and the best human experience. What a blessing when we can lift our heads right above it all to the sun that never fails us! "Know thou the God of thy father." 2. See how David recommended his God to Solomon. In Old Testament days to name His name apart from any human qualification and attachment was then something too large, too vague, too profound. But when David speaks of "the God of thy father," how homely it makes God! 3. After all,

grace is not an heirloom. It cannot be bequeathed. Solomon had to know God for himself. Of the godly Eli's family it was said, "Eli's sons were sons of Belial."

4. What wonderful instruction in the philosophy of conduct is in religion, if we would only believe Him! Know Him, and let your knowledge be of the practical kind. I said this to my son the other day: "My lad if I were beginning just where you are, and only twelve years of age, if I knew about myself and about what a fool I am at bottom, about how bad I am by nature, and what sin and grace really mean, what the Word of God means, and what Christ means—oh, my lad, if I were back with you, I think I would make more of life than I have done." I think David is saying all that to young Solomon. "If I could begin all over again, Solomon, if I could stand where you are standing, I would make life to mean just one thing—God! God! God! God!" (*John McNeill.*) *The duty and advantage of knowing and serving the God of our fathers*:—I. THE NATURE OF THE DUTIES HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. You are to know the God of your fathers. This means such a practical acknowledgment of Him as engages a religious regard to Him as our chief good and highest end, that we may glorify Him here, and enjoy Him for ever, in the way of His own appointment. 2. You are to serve the God of your fathers. His ordinances and institutions are to be observed in all acts of religious worship, and His commands are to be obeyed in a departure from all iniquity and in a performance of all moral duties, with a professed subjection to the gospel of Christ. 3. You are to serve the God of your fathers with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. There is a sort of perfection which consists in integrity and uprightness, in opposition to prevailing hypocrisy, and which must be found in the heart if ever we serve God in an acceptable manner (1 Kings xv. 3, 14; 2 Chron. xxv. 2). II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THESE DUTIES ARE RECOMMENDED. 1. This important advice is directed to every one of you, as if you were mentioned by name. 2. It is the God of your fathers who is recommended to you. 3. It is the God whom your fathers themselves have recommended, and can recommend to you. 4. It is the God to whom your fathers have devoted you, and for whom they have trained you up. 5. It is the God of your fathers, who has encouraged you, by His covenant promise, to know and serve Him. 6. It is the God of your fathers, who has as much right to your knowing and serving Him as to theirs (Deut. xxix. 10–12). 7. It is the God who will so much the more resent your disregard of Him, because He was your father's God. 8. It is the God before whom you must appear, together with your fathers, in judgment at the last day. (*J. Guyse.*) *Godly parents concerned for the piety of their children*:—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN CHILDREN RECOGNISING GOD AS THE GOD OF THEIR FATHERS? 1. That they stand in a covenant relation to God through His promise to their fathers to be their God and the God of their seed. 2. When children are required to recognise God as their father's God they should recall to their minds the pious instructions which their parents have communicated to them. 3. When children are required to recognise God as their father's God, this should remind them of the many instances of God's faithfulness, and kindness, and mercy which their fathers have experienced at God's hand. II. THE EARNEST DESIRE OF GODLY PARENTS FOR ADVANCING THE SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL INTERESTS OF THEIR CHILDREN. 1. It is necessary that children should know the God of their fathers. 2. There is nothing on which the heart of a pious parent is more deeply fixed than the religious interests of his children. III. THE MOTIVES AND ARGUMENTS BY WHICH THIS DUTY OF CHILDREN IS ENFORCED. 1. Youth is the most advantageous period for entering on a religious life. In every science or profession early application is deemed necessary to future excellence. 2. The children of godly parents have pre-eminent advantages above other young persons for entering on a religious life. 3. The obstinacy of young persons who have been religiously educated, and after all forsake the God of their fathers, is especially criminal, and attended with great aggravation. 4. That those young persons who have been religiously educated, and forsake the God of their fathers, are in danger of greater punishment than other men. (*James Hux, D.D.*) *Christian education*:—I. WITHOUT SINCERITY AND SERIOUSNESS, OUR RELIGION CAN BE OF NO VALUE IN THE SIGHT OF THE OMNISCIENT GOD. II. IT IS IMPORTANT IN EVERY POINT OF VIEW THAT YOUNG PERSONS, EVEN FROM THEIR EARLIEST CHILDHOOD, SHOULD BE TAUGHT THIS HIGH AND HOLY LESSON—TO BE SINCERE AND SERIOUS IN THEIR RELIGION; that is, in their whole conduct. III. TO "SERVE GOD WITH A PERFECT HEART" IS THE SUM AND SUBSTANCE OF ALL PRACTICAL RELIGION. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the*

“*Tracts for the Times.*”) *David's charge to Solomon*:—I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE. 1. The knowledge of God (Jer. ix. 23, 24; John xvii. 3). This knowledge is not a mere abstract conception of God, but a burning memory of the Friend of the family. 2. A dedication of ourselves to His service. II. THE SAFEGUARDS OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE. 1. A consciousness of the Divine presence in the heart. 2. A consciousness of the Divine omniscience prevents evil thoughts. III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE. “If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee.” 1. In every department of life man is a seeker. 2. In the department of spiritual life our gain is the greatest. IV. THE WARNING OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE. (*Homilist.*) *Royal regard for the right training of children*:—Rev. Benjamin Smith, in his “*Gems Re-set*,” reminds us of an interesting circumstance concerning the royal family of England. A dignitary of the Established Church had been examining some of the royal children in the Catechism. The divine was thoroughly satisfied with the readiness and the correctness of the replies. Doubtless he would be pleased to be able with truthfulness to commend the children of the Queen. He manifested his good sense, however, by doing this in an indirect manner, praising the lady who was their ordinary instructress. He said, “Your governess deserves high commendation for teaching you the Catechism so accurately. I am delighted with your proficiency.” The young folk replied, “Our governess does take great pains with us in our other lessons, but it is mamma who teaches us the Catechism.” There is reason to believe that the Queen of England was deeply solicitous that her children should from their earliest years be well acquainted with God's truth. That truth had been commended to her when young by her mother's tuition and example. In her husband, Albert the Good, our Queen had one to counsel and aid her in the training of their children. Thus the highest lady in these realms, with cares of State constantly pressing on her attention, and with godly and learned men ever able and willing to impart Scriptural instruction to the royal children, deemed it her duty and privilege to teach the Catechism to her loved ones. **And serve Him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind.**—*To serve God the best way to prosper in the world*:—I. WHAT IT IS TO SERVE GOD. 1. To serve God is to sincerely practise all the duties of piety. (1) We must take heed to our private devotions—reading, meditation, prayer. (2) We must discharge the duties of public worship. 2. To serve God is to practise all those duties which we owe more immediately to our fellow-creatures and to ourselves. II. WHAT A TENDENCY THE SERVING GOD IN THIS MANNER HAS TO SECURE HIS FAVOUR AND BLESSING IN ALL OUR SECULAR CONCERNS. 1. This is evident from the promises God has made in His Word (1 Tim. iv. 8; Deut. viii. 18; Prov. x. 22; Psa. xxxiv. 10, lxxxiv. 2; Matt. v. 5; Rom. viii. 28; Eccles. ii. 26). 2. This is apparent from the very nature and connection of things. “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1) It secures a man the most durable peace, the most valuable possessions, and gives him much more satisfaction and comfort in that share of the world which providence hath allotted to him than the most affluent fortune ever afforded, which I take to be the meaning of the promise, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (2) It preserves a man from running into vicious habits and customs. (3) It obliges to the practice of that integrity, wisdom, and industry which have a natural tendency to improve our circumstances. 3. This is confirmed by constant experience and observation. Conclusion: How greatly mistaken are they who think to prosper in the world by stepping aside out of the path of duty, or who dare to violate the sacred obligations of virtue and religion for the sake of a temporal advantage. (*J. Mason, M.A.*) *In what manner we are to serve God*:—I. THE RULE OF WORSHIP LAID DOWN IN THE TEXT, which we should carefully observe in all our religious transactions with God. We must worship God—1. With a perfect heart. That is—(1) An upright heart: “in spirit and in truth” (John iv. 24). (2) A pure heart. This stands in opposition to all vile affections and corrupt ends in worship (1 Kings xv. 14; Psa. xxvi. 6). (3) A devout and engaged heart. This stands opposed to—(a) Worldly and wandering thoughts; (b) a dull and drowsy frame in worship. 2. With a willing mind. (1) We should always preserve an habitual readiness and disposition to the service of God, and oppose and break through every accidental reluctance of the mind thereunto. (2) Our minds should be excited to the service of God from a principle of gratitude and love. (3) With cheerfulness of heart in worship. II. WHAT IS ESSENTIAL AND PECULIAR TO CHRISTIAN WORSHIP? It must always be performed in the name of Christ (Col. iii. 17; John xiv. 13, 14, xvi. 23, 24, 26). To serve God in the name of

Christ implies—1. A dependence on His mediation for the acceptance of our services. 2. A dependence on His grace for our assistance (Phil. iv. 13). 3. A dependence on His merits for the atonement of our guilt (Rom. iii. 24, 25). 4. A thankful acknowledgment of this gracious constitution of His, in appointing His Son to be Mediator between Him and His apostate creatures. Application: 1. How vain it is to lay a great stress upon any particular place, or external forms and modes of worship. 2. This should lead us to inquire in what manner our worship hath been performed, and what hath been the ordinary frame of our mind therein. 3. This shows the need we have to prepare our hearts to serve Him, and to avoid everything that would unfit us for this service. 4. Hence likewise appears the necessity of keeping the heart with all diligence in the service of God. (*Ibid.*)

**Heart service:**—That which we do with the heart is done without grudging, or toil, or weariness. A willing heart goes all the day on its path of duty, an unwilling one soon tires. All is nimble and cheerful which is done by the heart. This is the only kind of service God accepts of His creatures. This is the only condition in which men can render true service to Him. If the heart is dull, our service will be inert and untoward. (*Homiletic Review.*)

**For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.—God the searcher of hearts, and found of them that seek Him:**—1. When God is said to search the heart, the meaning is He perfectly understands it. 2. The knowledge which God has of the human heart is universal: "Searcheth all hearts." 3. The hearts of men and the imaginations of the thoughts are mentioned here as distinct objects of the Divine knowledge, and the difference between them is—by the former we are to understand the passions and purposes of the mind; and by the latter, the paintings of fancy, or the mere casual roivings of thought. I proceed now—

**I. BRIEFLY TO PROVE THIS PROPOSITION, THE LORD SEARCHETH OR KNOWETH ALL HEARTS.**

1. This is evident from the reason of things. He that gave to man an understanding heart must understand the heart He gave (Psa. xciv. 9-11). 2. This may be further argued from His omniscience. 3. This is expressly ascribed to Him in the Scriptures (Jer. xvii. 9, 10, xx. 12; Acts i. 24). **II. TO SHOW HOW FITLY THIS CONSIDERATION IS URGED TO ENFORCE THE DUTY ENJOINED, OR HOW PROPER IT IS TO INDUCE US TO GUARD AND GOVERN OUR THOUGHTS AT ALL TIMES, ESPECIALLY IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.**

1. A total neglect of our thoughts and the frame of our spirits in the service of God shows a great contempt of His authority. 2. God, who knows our thoughts now, will call us to an account of them hereafter. 3. It is the turn and temper of the heart which forms the character of every one in the sight of God. 4. To keep a strict and constant guard over our hearts at all times, and especially in His worship, is the best evidence we can have of our sincerity.

**III. MOTIVES TO ATTEND TO THE EXHORTATION GIVEN.** "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee," &c. These words contain the most valuable promise and the most awful threatening that are to be found in the whole book of God. Notice particularly the promise. To seek the Lord is usually applied to the duty of prayer, but in the Bible it is often put to denote the whole of practical religion (Psa. xxxiv. 10; Isa. xlv. 6, ix. 13, vi. 5). If we seek we shall obtain—

**I. HIS FAVOUR.** It is a much easier thing to please God than some men. There is no such thing as pleasing these sometimes without the most servile compliance with their caprice, a conformity to their manners, and a connivance at their follies. 2. His help (Luke xiii. 24; Hos. v. 15; Jer. ii. 27; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12). 3. His direction (Jas. i. 5; Prov. ii. 6, iii. 5, 6). 4. His Holy Spirit (Matt. vii. 11; Luke xi. 13). The Holy Spirit is comprehensive of all the good things we can desire. 1. There are His renewing, sanctifying, supporting influences. 2. His preventing, quickening, assisting grace. He is our guide, teacher—earnest of the heavenly inheritance. (*J. Mason.*)

**The moral discipline of the imagination:**—The moral cultivation of the imagination is of the first importance to the young. **I. ITS NEGATIVE DISCIPLINE.** The imagination must be restrained—

1. Because our lower nature will master our higher. 2. We inherit a sinful nature, prone to evil imaginings from our youth up. 3. We may sin in thought as well as in deed. This raises the question—(1) Of literature. We must give heed to right reading. A few moments of tainted literature may impart a fever to the imagination which will blight its beauty for ever. (2) Of art. There is much pagan art in Europe. The value of Ruskin's art-criticisms lies not in its infallibility, but in its moral elevation. (3) Of pleasure. **II. ITS POSITIVE DISCIPLINE.** We must seek the things which stimulate and refine the imagination. 1. By means of noble literature. 2. By means of Christian

conceptions. A cultivated imagination is an aid to faith. Let it kindle over Christian truth, the nature of God, the incarnation, redemption, &c. Application: 1. Some think there is no harm in imagining evil, if it is not committed. Read Sermon on Mount. 2. This should convince the unconverted of sin. (*S. E. Keeble.*) If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee.—*Seeking the Lord*:—God is to be sought and found not merely by the intellect, not alone by processes of accurate logic, but by other faculties that have been bestowed upon us for this purpose. The moral sense, the consciousness of our high obligations, must be carefully and scrupulously nourished and cultured till we acquire an appetite for the noblest virtue—till, in fact, we hunger and thirst after righteousness and learn to satisfy our craving in communion with God and getting moral food and strength from Him. There must be a Divine discontent with our own righteousness in order to drive us to His footstool to ask for more. We must cherish our spiritual affections. We must put ourselves in the way of loving God. We must teach ourselves to pray or beseech Him to teach us. It is contrary to all common sense to expect feelings to arise in our heart spontaneously while we remain in conditions in which those feelings are all but impossible, and while we refuse to use the faculties which were given us for the express purpose of bringing us to love God. If the soul will not seek after God it cannot find Him. God will wait long enough, no one knows how long or how patiently; but it must germinate for itself and put forth its tender sprout and green leaves above the mouldy ground, and thus ask for God's air to breathe life into it, and His gracious rain to feed it, and His glorious sun to shine upon it, and give warmth and beauty and fertility to it in time to come. Neither sun nor rain nor air can do for that hidden seed what it must first do for itself. "Seek ye the Lord." (*Charles Voysey, B.A.*) *Seeking God*:—I. THE DUTY. 1. Whom are we to seek? God in Christ. 2. How must we seek Him? (1) Not in our own strength. (2) With an integrity of purpose and a singleness of determination. (3) By forsaking and standing aloof from the world; by putting down self and walking with a mortified spirit. 3. Where are we to seek Christ? (1) In the Scriptures. (2) In the sanctuary. (3) At the family altar. (4) In the secret exercises of prayer. 4. When are we to seek a God in Christ? Now. 5. Why are we to seek Christ? II. THE ASSURANCE. (*T. J. Judkin, M.A.*) *Seeking the Lord*:—I. YOU SHOULD SEEK HIM. 1. You cannot do without Him. 2. You have everything when you have found Him. The true light (John i. 9). The bread of life (John vi. 35). A refuge from the storm (Isa. xxv. 4). Your rock and fortress (Psa. xxxi. 3). A sure foundation (Isa. xxviii. 16). An advocate (1 John ii. 1). A surety (Heb. vii. 22). The truth (John xiv. 6). Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption (1 Cor. i. 30). 3. He has sought you, has come from heaven for you, is seeking you now. 4. You know you will find Him. II. THE MANNER OF SEEKING. 1. In His Word, by obeying it. 2. In thine heart, by confidently expecting Him to come and dwell in thee. When He knows that thou really desirest Him, He will be found. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *Decision in religion recommended*:—I. THE PROMISE. We must seek Him—1. Scripturally. (1) With penitence. (2) With faith. (3) As He is to be found in Christ. 2. Earnestly. 3. Early in life: "They that seek Me early shall find Me." II. THE WARNING. Those who forsake God, who turn towards God their back, and not their face; who forsake His house, Word, day, people. I once visited, upon his death-bed, a professional man who had evidently forsaken God all his life, and whom God forsook in the hour of death. He then sought God earnestly, but it was too late. He could not find Him. When I prayed with him, he tried to follow my petitions, but his mind—distracted and bewildered—would not allow him. He told me over and over again that he sought to pray, but he never could find words. He also told me that he endeavoured to write his prayer upon a slate, but that his fingers refused to move. And in that awful state of mind he went to his final account. Another whom I visited seemed to be actually amid the pains of hell, whilst his body was still upon earth. As the large drops of perspiration stood upon his agonised forehead he exclaimed, "There is nothing you can tell me. I know it all. I have heard these things from you and from others, and that is my misery. I am entering hell with my eyes wide open." These are no imaginary cases. "Cast off for ever." (*C. Clayton, M.A.*) *Spiritual aspects of man*:—We may look at these words as presenting man to us in three solemn aspects. I. AS INSPECTED BY THE EYE OF GOD. God knows each individual man thoroughly. He does not overlook the units in the millions. Thoughts, purposes,

feelings fall under His searching glance (Psa. cxxxix. 4). This should impress us—1. With the importance of our existence. 2. With the solemnity of our existence. II. AS INVITED TO THE FRIENDSHIP OF GOD. 1. This is worth seeking. 2. This requires seeking. III. AS THREATENED WITH THE DISPLEASURE OF GOD. "God," says an old author, "never casts men off until they first cast Him off." (*Homilist.*) *Genuine piety a search for God*:—I. IT IS A PERSONAL SEARCH FOR GOD. 1. It is a search for Him, not His. 2. It is a search for Him, not His presence. All men are in His presence. To have Him is to have His heart, His sympathies, His love. II. IT IS A VOLUNTARY SEARCH FOR GOD. All genuine religion is uncoerced and free: "Will ye also go away," &c. III. IT IS A SUCCESSFUL SEARCH FOR GOD: "He will be found of thee." This discovery is—1. Conditional. 2. Transcendent. Find Him. 3. Individual: "Thee." The man who has sought Him—no one else. (*Ibid.*) **But if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.**—*The nature, cause, and danger of the sin of apostasy*:—I. THE SIN AGAINST WHICH THIS THREATENING IS PRONOUNCED. 1. Apostasy is a total renunciation of the principles, the practice, and profession of true religion. It is attended with the greatest aggravations of which any crime is capable. (1) Other sins may be committed through the surprise of a sudden and violent temptation. This is a determined and deliberate act, the result of thought and choice; and a perverted and abused understanding approves the choice, so that the apostate goes astray with the full bent of his will. (2) It always carries in it a secret malignity against true religion. (3) Apostasy hardens the heart, sears the conscience, and renders it almost wholly incapable of any serious impressions, either from religion or reason. 2. The ordinary ways by which men are drawn into it. (1) A great zeal for little things is one remote cause. When a man is convinced that his zeal has abused his understanding, and led him wrong, he is for throwing it all off at once, and apt to degenerate into a total indifference about all religion. (2) A weak affectation of seeing further and appearing wiser than other men. (3) Some secret, predominant vice or unconquered lust which men care not to part with. If a man's religion does not make him averse to sin, sin will make him averse to religion. (4) An excessive love of the world—the pleasures, profits, or the preferments of it. (5) A partial backsliding in religion. This partial backsliding generally begins with light thoughts of sin, frequent neglects of duty, or a careless, irreverent performance of it. (6) Inconsideration, or a thoughtlessness of futurity. (7) Reading infidel or profane books. (8) Wicked company. Nothing more contagious than the breath of a profane man. The world is governed by examples. Bad examples are commonly most attractive, and especially when set by those whom in other respects we much esteem. II. THE THREATENING DENOUNCED AGAINST IT. 1. All obstinate and final apostates shall hereafter be totally rejected of their Maker. They shall never more be received into favour. (*J. Mason.*)

Ver. 11. **Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch.**—*Patterns*:—Some men can only give outlines, hints, suggestions, patterns. These men are of great consequence and value in the education of the human mind. A hint may be a stimulus. Let it not be supposed that men are doing nothing for the race who write its poems, outline its policies, or sketch new outlines of possible service. The builders could not proceed without the architect. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Counsels to ministers*:—1. "The pattern of the porch." Tell the sinner to come to Christ just as he is; do not begin setting up some fine porch of feelings or preparations. 2. "And the houses thereof." Get a clear view of the houses Christ gives His people to dwell in; how they dwell in Him, how they abide in Him, and go no more out for ever. 3. "And the treasures thereof." When you preach Christ pray to have written on your heart, as well as in this book, something about the treasures of God's house. Preach to others of the treasures of the temple of salvation. 4. "And of the upper chambers thereof." In these upper chambers you get a view of the glory yet to be revealed. 5. "And of the inner parlours thereof." There are sweet fellowships, there are communings which nobody knows but the man who has dwelt where Jesus is, and who continues to abide in Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 19. **The Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me.**—*The liberty of prophesying*:—David not only made preparation for the building of the temple by collecting material, but he gave to Solomon definite directions for com-

pleting the erection and constructing the sacred vessels, and in doing this he is careful to say that he did not follow his own ideas or adopt arbitrary plans, but that he was guided by Divine revelation. Is not this the essential thing with us in this ministry—that we should be authorised, led, energised by the self-same Spirit? Does not the Church demand that the preacher shall be an inspired man? I. The NATURE of this inspiration. "All this the Lord made me to understand by His hand upon me." Now, I am sure you will not at this moment expect from me any exact definition of the term inspiration. There are some words you cannot define. You cannot define such words as love, or life, or beauty. Neither will you expect me to distinguish between the inspiration of Isaiah and that of Shakespeare, or between the inspiration of David building the temple and that of Michael Angelo building St. Peter's; the singularity of the prophet and preacher is that they have to do not with the intellectual and material worlds, but with the spiritual universe, with the relation of man to the living God, and to that eternal universe of which He is the centre. 1. The true preacher is a man of faith. God revealed to David the patterns of the temple building and furniture. In vision he beheld the forms that he was to body forth in silver and gold and cedar. He did not follow his own vagrant fancy, but he made all the sacred things according to the patterns seen in his exalted mood. There is a faculty of sight which is more profound and penetrating than any power of sense. This is manifest in the intellectual world. The poet, the painter, and the musician possess a faculty that beggars sense; they look upon a world that is unseen by the natural eye. Now, just as these rare spirits of the intellectual realm possess an imaginative faculty that transcends the tangible and technical world, a faculty that beggars sense, so the true preacher has a faculty that beggars imagination, a faculty of faith that penetrates depths beyond space and worlds beyond reason. The true preacher possesses spiritual imagination by which he discerns everywhere the spiritual fact. In man he finds the image of God; behind this world he discerns the eternal world; within history he traces the working of a Divine plan and purpose; in the Church he is conscious of God's presence and love; and he feels the power of that immortal life of which this life is the germ, and for which this life is the preparation. This is the grand gift of the true preacher: in an eminent degree he possesses that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2. Again, the true preacher is a man of experience. David did not proceed by simply reduplicating the forms and arrangements of the tabernacle. God granted him an inward revelation, he had a vision that was inwrought into his very soul. "The Lord made me understand by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern." This means something more than a superficial knowledge, than a mere spectacle; it implies a vivid, profound, personal acquaintance with the things he was called upon to fashion and arrange. It means something more than a passing dream; the objective became the subjective; David realised God's purpose as an inward and joyful experience. His soul entered into the vision, the vision entered into his soul. And if the preacher is to be effective, the subjects of his preaching must be living facts to his own mind and heart. There is a whole world of difference between the mere intellectual perception of a doctrine and the realisation of that doctrine in our own conscience and feeling. Just think of the dweller in a city who knows the seasons only as they appear in the almanac! Spring quarter begins; bits of information and hints about summer gardening; stray allusions to harvest; and then the record closes with prognostications of winter's storms and snows. The almanac gives much information—varied, exact, useful information; you seem, indeed, to know all about the thing. Do you? Ah! it is a very different matter to know the seasons as they actually unfold in nature. And so it is one thing to know religion formally in a theological treatise, and another thing to know its power and sweetness and hope in your own soul. Notice—II. The *LETTERS* of this inspiration. "The Lord made me understand in writing." The question arises as to what is precisely to be understood by this writing. Some think it teaches that David simply followed the law of Moses. Moses, as we learn in the book of Exodus, received the measures and plans of the tabernacle from God Himself, and all that David did, these commentators think, was to follow severely these ancient specifications in the instructions which he gave to Solomon. David follows the writing from Jehovah's hand given to Moses. Other students think that this explanation of the passage is wholly mistaken. They hold that David affirms that he received an altogether special revelation. Just as the Lord had formerly shown to Moses the pattern of the tabernacle, so did the Lord also make known by revelation to David the pattern of

the temple and its furniture. It seems to me that neither interpretation expresses the real situation—a middle view seems the juster. The description given in Exodus of the sacred utensils evidently furnished the groundwork for the workmanship of David, but what he teaches here is that it was under the guidance of the Divine Spirit that he varied the sacred architecture and furniture to suit the changed conditions of the new temple. He did not work either independently or arbitrarily, but modified the structure and the vessels by the authority of the Spirit who first instituted them. The grand teaching of the whole situation being this, that in the entire work of the temple we must be governed by Divine revelation, but that at the same time we must be sensitive to the action of the Spirit of God, so that we may interpret the Scriptures and modify ecclesiastical organisations according to the changing needs of successive generations. Does not the preacher of to-day need to learn the lesson taught here? One of our great dangers is a literalism which denies all further revelation or inspiration. We must beware lest we doom ourselves to a barren literalism. But, on the other hand, there are others who assume entire independence of revelation. They affirm that men are still as fully inspired as Moses was, or Isaiah, or John, or Paul, and that it is an injustice to ourselves to yield exclusive reverence to the sacred oracles. What, then, is the true path here? We answer, the path followed by the King of Israel in our text. We must reverentially accept the fully-accredited revelation that God has secured to us, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit give that revelation new and fuller expression as the evolution of the race may require. We must be true to the Scriptures, and true also to the Spirit that gives to the written word concurrent adaptation. Only as we follow this delicate line shall we be truly orthodox and yet remain full of reality, power, and effectiveness. A great artist does not attempt to get rid of nature; if he were to yield to such licentiousness his images would become bizarre, his poetry unintelligible, and his music degenerate into a monstrous melody; the sincere artist is therefore profoundly true to the forms, the colours, and the sequences of nature, he gives place to no arbitrary ideas. But, at the same time, he is not literal, topographical, prosaic; he seizes the essential truth of the physical universe, and gives it free rendering and bold representation. It is much the same with the preacher. He is profoundly loyal to God's Word, but in the light and liberty of the Spirit he freely handles the eternal truth, and makes it speak to the heart of the congregation. It is God's message to this generation that is expected from you. Be able to say, "The Lord made me understand this by His hand upon me," and your word shall be in power and blessing. III. THE CONDITIONS OF THIS INSPIRATION. 1. We must watch against the temper of unbelief. We discern a thing only when we are in the mood to see it, to hear it, to know it. And it is entirely true that we apprehend the things of the higher world and the higher life just as we have a certain affinity with them. I deny altogether that the mood of doubt is the becoming mood of a theologian. The mood of the artist is the receptive mood. We are sometimes told how some grand melody, picture, or poem originated in a most trivial incident, but this only shows how exceedingly delicate was the susceptibility of the artist; he must have possessed a peculiar alertness and responsiveness of soul. A cold, critical temper would mean a poor artist. Did not Columbus expect to see America? Is America, therefore, a baseless fabric? Columbus saw America because he was prepared to see it, and the true attitude to unknown worlds is the expectant attitude of the astronomer looking for a star mathematically inferred, but not hitherto seen, of the chemist searching for an element indicated, but not yet demonstrated. We lose much by cherishing the spirit of doubt. Preachers are men who ought to live in the mood of meditation and susceptibility—waiting, listening, looking, hoping; and so does God whisper into their wakened ear great and gracious truths. 2. We must be on our guard against the spirit of worldliness. It has been noticed that the greatest naturalists, poets, and philosophers are singularly unworldly men. It seems as if they can see the rarer beauty of the world, hear the music of the spheres, catch the subtler suggestions of phenomena only as they are free from all secularity of spirit. The best and the highest of the things that are seen are discerned and appreciated only by men cleansed from the spirit of greed, and pride, and self. And this in a very high degree is true of the preacher. It is only when the eye is single that the whole body is full of light. 3. We must watch against sensuality. "Sensual, not having the Spirit," writes the apostle. Now sensual indulgence clouds the genius of the artist and the scholar. Hugh Miller tells us that when he was a young man he one day drank some liquor, and on turning to read Milton found himself



incapable of appreciating the great master. So any form of sensuality renders the spiritual man incapable of influentially realising the great discoveries of revelation. Sensual thought makes the higher perceptions impossible, the gross film blinds the eye of the soul. Purity of thought and feeling are essential to a really great preacher. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they see the best of everything, and they possess a wonderful faculty for making other people feel the power and charm of truth and goodness. We have spoken this morning of the patterns God showed to Moses and to David, but we must remember that He has shown to us another order of patterns, sublimer far than archetypes of architecture and upholstery. God who in times past spake unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these latter days spoken unto us by His Son. Our Lord Jesus Christ has taken us into the Mount and shown us patterns of things in the heavens. Study the New Testament and you will find set forth with clearness the ultimate moral ideals after which the ages have blindly striven. At Nazareth and Bethany you see the ideal home. You have seen the ideal Church when you have seen Christ dwelling with His disciples. And, more than all, comprehending all, you behold the supreme ideal of character, "We see Jesus." All the great ideals are in "this writing by His hand," not "the shadow of heavenly things," but "the very substance of the things." (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *God's handwriting upon David*:—The temple was to be a type, an eminent type of Christ, and also a type of His Church. No man knew what God meant to teach by that temple; and consequently if it had been left to human judgment, it would not have been a true type; for who can make a type if he knows not what it is to typify? God alone knew what He intended to teach by this building, and so that it might convey Divine teaching, it must be arranged according to Divine command. I call your attention—I. To the SINGULAR INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO DAVID. 1. David did not receive them by consultation with others. 2. David did not slavishly follow the former model. 3. God gave David instructions about the details of the work. 4. The directions given were extremely minute. 5. The innermost things were laid bare to David. 6. David not only knew the details; but he understood them. 7. The writing was written on David's own mind by God Himself. II. THE SPIRITUAL TUITION OF THE SAINTS IN THE TRUTH OF GOD. 1. God still writes upon the hearts of men. 2. Let me show you a little in detail how God writes the great truths of His Word on our hearts. III. THE DUTY OF THE TRANSMISSION TO OTHERS OF ANYTHING THAT GOD WRITES ON YOUR HEARTS. 1. David told Solomon about it. 2. We ought to talk about Christ to chosen companions. 3. David gathered all the people together and told them about the temple. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

**VERS. 1-10. Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation.—***Christian experience and Christian influence*:—I. THE NEARER A GOOD MAN APPROACHES HIS END, THE MORE SPIRITUALLY-MINDED HE BECOMES. II. THE MORE SPIRITUALLY-MINDED A GOOD MAN BECOMES, THE GREATER HIS INFLUENCE UPON OTHERS. III. THE GREATER INFLUENCE A GOOD MAN HAS UPON OTHERS, THE MORE CERTAINLY WILL GOD'S WORK BE ACCOMPLISHED. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The principles of Christian work*:—1. Personal consecration and example. 2. Willing co-operation by all. 3. Appropriateness of service and gifts. 4. Animated by a true spirit of enthusiasm and joy. (*Ibid.*) *A good example and the power of it*:—God is calling His people everywhere to undertake a work for His glory, which in importance and magnitude and grandeur infinitely transcends the work He laid upon Solomon—the evangelisation of the entire world—the building of that great spiritual temple which is to fill the earth and into which all nations and peoples are to be gathered. I. THE DIVINE CALL TO THIS WORK IS DIRECT, IMPERATIVE, AND LOUD. II. IT IS ATTESTED BY SIGNS AND WONDERS AS MARVELLOUS AND IMPRESSIVE TO THE SPIRITUALLY DISCERNING AS THE MIRACLES OF APOSTOLIC TIMES. III. THE CALL IN THIS INSTANCE IS TO THE ENTIRE CHURCH OF CHRIST, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY. The command, the obligation is universal and cannot be evaded. If you have not gold and silver to bestow, give yourself—heart, soul, mind, prayers, influence. If you cannot go to the heathen, send a substitute, give of your means, &c. IV. THE

TIMES DEMAND LARGE GIFTS, PRINCELY OFFERINGS. V. NEVER HAD THE POWER OF EXAMPLE SUCH POTENCY AS NOW. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Interest in God's work* :—It is always well for us to take a loving and deep interest in the work of God. We may have at heart some end which we desire to achieve for God's glory, and because we know that it springs from such a motive may proceed to carry it out without questioning whether we are to be the agents through which it is to be accomplished. But there may be others better fitted for the work than we are, whom God has in reserve. And what matters it whether we or others do the work, so long as it is done by men chosen of God? "The work goes on, though the workmen die," are the words which Dean Stanley most appropriately had inscribed on Wesley's memorial in Westminster Abbey. Other men labour, and we enter into their labours. The work they sought to accomplish God denied to them, but lays upon us. (*Dr. Egbert.*) *Power of example* :—Before us was a narrow bridge, and between us and the bridge were several thousand sheep. They would have taken a long time going over, and would effectually have checked our entrance into the town, but for a clever plan for getting the sheep quickly over. A few sheep are trained as a sort of decoy. They are at first pet lambs, and then in time become pet sheep. They are kept by the authorities who have control of the bridge, and are let to the sheep-drovers for so much, in order to effect a speedy passage of the bridge. The keepers of the pets go first, then follow the three or four pets, and then away after them the three or four thousand of the mob, as they are called here. (*H. T. Robjohns.*) *The house of the Lord* :—I. THE BUILDING IS FOR THE LORD GOD, BECAUSE IT IS FOR THE PRESENTATION OF GOD'S WORSHIP. God claims to be worshipped. He deserves to be worshipped for—(1) What he is in Himself. (2) What He is to us. Worship takes the forms of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, supplication, and intercession. By a very significant expression the Jews used to say when they went up to Jerusalem, that they were going "to appear before the Lord." The chief attraction of every place of worship ought to be that you are coming to meet with God. II. THE BUILDING IS FOR THE LORD BECAUSE IT IS BUILT FOR THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S TRUTH. III. THE BUILDING IS FOR THE LORD BECAUSE IT IS FOR THE PROMOTION OF GOD'S PURPOSES. God's purposes are that men should be saved, sanctified, enlightened, comforted, strengthened, stimulated, and helped on to glory. (*John Corbin.*) *The palace for God* :—These words are not to be pressed unduly, nor their spirit sacrificed to the letter, in forgetfulness of the idiom of the language in which they are recorded. The patriotic king no more forgot his nation's welfare in the sense of the sacredness of the work, than the prophet who first uttered the immortal words, "I love mercy and not sacrifice," dreamed of extinguishing the altar fires and abolishing the office of the priesthood seven centuries before the "fulness of time." Their principal meaning is obvious. An edifice was formed, a pattern was already, it is written, present to his mind's eye. It was to be no regal palace, however stately, no home for oriental splendour and magnificence; it was to be consecrated for ever to the Jehovah to whom he and his people were bound by everlasting covenant. Yet the truth that no house made with hands could in any literal sense hold Him whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, was already deep in the conscience, and finding expression in the words of God's truest servant. He who was revealed to the Psalmist, the Psalmist-king well knew, no roof of cedar, no walls of stone, no building however sacred, however sumptuous, could be His real home. It could be only so far His dwelling-place, when His unseen presence could be found and realised by those who sought Him—found best by those who could rise in spirit above that imageless temple, above that altar smoke, and all the machinery of ritual, to the Father of their spirits and the God of their salvation. There is a sense, therefore, in which we may, without irreverence, almost invert the words, and yet gain, rather than lose, their true significance. The palace is not for God, we might even say, as a literal dwelling-place. To Him, the marble, and the cedar, and the palm-tree, and the olive, and the brass, and the gold are as nothing. The palace in this sense is not for God, but it is for man—not for man as merely the foremost of creatures to draw the breath of life on the earth, but for man as the worshipper, as the servant, as the conscious and devout adorer of Him who has created him in His own image; for man as the place for worship which may reclaim, and purify, and uplift his fallen nature; which may bring him into communion with his Father and his God; a place where all that appeals to his highest earthly sense may enable him to forget the things of sense, and reach out to what eye hath not seen or ear heard. And for so bold an apparent

inversion of the letter, in order to bring home to our minds the inner spirit of the words, I may surely plead the example of Him who taught His people that the seventh day, which was proclaimed at Sinai to be the Sabbath of the Lord our God, was, for all that, made for man, and that the Son of Man was Lord also of the Sabbath. (Dean Bradley.) *The importance of Church extension* :—To realise the importance of the work of Church extension, consider—**I. THAT RELIGION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE WELFARE OF A NATION** (Psa. xxxiii. 12; Isa. lx. 12). **II. IT IS A WORK THAT SHALL REACH FORWARD THROUGH MANY GENERATIONS** (chap. xxviii. 8). **III. IT IS YOUR APPOINTED PRIVILEGE** (chap. xxviii. 10). **IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE WORD SANCTUARY?** (chap. xxviii. 10). A sanctuary is a place of refuge from impending evils. If a man erect a lighthouse, he is honoured for preventing a great loss of life. If he build a hospital he is revered as the benefactor of his race for the mitigation of pain. But he who builds a church, or assists in the work, does more. Under the Divine blessing he is instrumental in enlightening dark minds, comforting troubled consciences, and in saving immortal souls. **V. THE TEMPLE WAS A TYPE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH**. **VI. If David and Solomon were so zealous in providing means for having the type only, HOW MUCH MORE ANXIOUS SHOULD WE BE TO PUT OURSELVES AND OTHERS IN POSSESSION OF THE SUBSTANCE?** **VII. IT IS SELDOM THAT A GREAT WORK CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BY AN INDIVIDUAL** (ver. 1). **VIII. IT IS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD** (ver. 1). **IX. DAVID'S EXAMPLE** (ver. 2). **X. THE AFFECTION WE OUGHT TO BEAR TO GOD'S HOUSE** (ver. 3). (*H. Clissold, M.A.*) *David's desire to build a house for God* :—**I. THE GOD WHOM DAVID WORSHIPPED**. He worshipped God—**1. As the Supreme Being** (ver. 11). **2. As the God of his fathers** (ver. 10). **3. As personally appropriated**: "My God." **II. SOME OF THE REASONS WHICH LED DAVID TO DESIRE TO BUILD A HOUSE FOR HIS GOD**. **1. Jealousy for the honour of God**. **2. Love and gratitude to God**. **3. The thought that others besides himself should worship therein**. (*J. Shillito.*) *Attachment to the sanctuary* :—It is of one of the noble qualities of the religious life of the Jews I would speak—their love for the house of God. **I. THE HOUSE OF GOD**. The house of worship is the house of God. **II. BECAUSE THE ANCIENT JEWS LOVED THE LORD'S HOUSE THEY MADE IT BEAUTIFUL**. This was natural, lawful, and Divinely sanctioned. This impulse was recognised, called out, and approved by God. **III. IT WAS A GENERAL AFFECTION EXERCISED AND EXPRESSED BY ALL THE PEOPLE**. (*Henry J. Van Dyke.*) *Godly giving* :—**I. THE OBJECT**. "The work is great; for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." **1. In respect of the greatness of Him for whose use the palace is made**. **2. The value of what is wrought there to all mankind**. **3. The consequent expenditure**. **II. THE GIVING**. Circumstances of David's great collection and of ours are very different, but the principles are the same. **1. Definitely to the Lord**. The money went into the hands of treasurers, but it was given to God. **2. Voluntary**. "Who is willing?" "They offered willingly." **3. Hearty and gladsome**. "Because I have set my affection to the house of my God," is David's reason for giving (ver. 3). And of all the givers it is said, "The people rejoiced for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord" (ver. 9). **4. With preparation**. Mistake to give on sudden impulse only or to imagine that forethought, and method, and consideration are opposed to heartiness; intelligent, Christian love will lead to these in proportion as it is fervent. "I have prepared with all my might" (ver. 2). **5. With devout acknowledgement**. "Both riches and honour come of Thee." "All this store cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own" (vers. 11-16). **6. With fervent prayer** (vers. 18, 19). (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

**Ver. 5. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord.**—*Consecration* :—**I. SERVICE**. This demands—**1. A settled purpose**. **2. An active resolve**. **II. A WILLING SERVICE**. **1. A willing service is the only efficient service**. **2. The willingness of our service is the only part that is absolutely required**. **III. AN IMMEDIATE SERVICE**. **1. Seasons for service are never absent**. **2. Efficiency and pleasure ensue when service is performed in its own time**. **IV. THE HIGHEST SERVICE**. The service of the Lord implies—**1. That the mind is perpetually under the influence of Divine truth**. **2. That holy thoughts are actuated by the presence of the Spirit in them**. **3. Entire consecration**. (*Thos. Davies, D.D.*) *Self-dedication* :—It does the heart good to read over those closing chapters of this book and to note the spirit which animated the generation for which the first temple was built. As regards the cost and beauty of our churches there is this to be borne in mind, that whatever our present shortcomings may be, there is one great difference

between ourselves and the ancient people of God—that whereas all their gifts were offered for a single building, we have to maintain all the churches in the kingdom, which in number must be fast approaching twenty thousand. But large as are the sums which have been spent, and are daily being spent on church building and church restoration, there is one offering which God values more than any other gift, and which each of us, from highest to lowest, may offer if we will—a perfect heart. (*F. E. Paget.*)

*Consecration to God's service:*—I. THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE REQUIRED. The service of God is a phrase which amounts to much the same thing as the worship of God. 1. Servitude sometimes arises from—(1) Subjugation or conquest. (2) Hereditary succession. Some men are born servants or slaves. The servitude which God requires is a servitude which makes the servant free. 2. The service which God requires involves—(1) Divine illumination. (2) Pure and ardent love. (3) Continued and unceasing obedience. II. WHAT ARE THE OBLIGATIONS UNDER WHICH WE ARE ALL PLACED TO RENDER SUCH SERVICE TO THE ALMIGHTY? 1. It is the duty of man to obey and serve Him. 2. Such service is very profitable and beneficial to man. 3. It is a refuge to its subject in the day of trouble. 4. It is an antidote to the fear of death. III. THAT THE SERVICE OF GOD IS INDISPENSABLE. 1. Because it is the commandment of God. 2. The grand design of human life is the service of God. 3. The service of God is the only means of salvation. IV. I COME NOW TO PROPOSE THE INQUIRY, "Who then is willing?" &c. 1. The service of God is a willing service. 2. I address myself—(1) To the aged. (2) To those in the prime and activity of life. (3) More especially to the young. Look—(a) At the magnitude of the work. (b) The difficulty with which it may afterwards be accomplished. (c) The shortness and uncertainty of life. (d) The consequences that will follow from this early devotement of yourselves unto God. Objections: 1. Time enough yet. 2. I shall lose my friends if I embrace in my youth the religion of Jesus Christ. It was once said by an ancient philosopher, "Cæsar is my friend—I have nothing to fear"; and a greater than Cæsar is here. Jesus is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." 3. To embrace religion in youth will expose to obloquy and shame. Was it not said by one of the ancients that where God is there can be no exile—no banishment from His presence? 4. God is merciful, and we may get religion when we please. You may reckon on mercy until you are taken out of the world without it; and there is no mercy beyond the gates of death. (*W. Toase.*)

*Who is willing to serve God?*—I. THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE WHICH GOD DEMANDS. 1. It is spiritual. It is the homage and devotion of the heart. All the intellectual powers, the understanding, will, affections, conscience, memory are to be dedicated to the worship of God. Without this no service can be acceptable to God (*Isa. i. 11, 13; Matt. xv. 8, 9*). 2. It is to be constant and unremitting (*1 Cor. x. 31*). 3. It must be affectionate. It is impossible for us to offer any acceptable service to God which does not spring from this love in our heart (*1 John v. 3*). How is this to be obtained? The answer is very plain (*Eph. iv. 22-24*). Thus God will "create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you." 4. It must be practical (*Matt. v. 16; 1 Cor. ix. 27; 2 Cor. x. 5*). II. THE SERVICE WHICH GOD REQUIRES OF US SHOULD BE PERFORMED WITHOUT DELAY. 1. It is enjoined upon us by the Scriptures (*Heb. iii. 15; Josh. xxiv. 15; 2 Cor. vi. 2*). You have no certainty that any further opportunities will be afforded in which you may serve God (*Prov. xxvii. 1; Luke xiii. 25-27*). 3. The longer you defer entering into the service of God the more difficulties and obstacles will be thrown in your way. How absurd the notion that futurity will present more favourable opportunities for serving God than any with which we have yet been blessed. Suppose a sick man were to say, "As long as this disorder remains upon me, and the more deeply my constitution is affected by it, the more certainly shall I receive a speedy cure." Would you consider this person to be perfectly sane? Or should one of your debtors assure you that by your increasing his obligations to you some three or four fold he would be immediately able to cancel the whole, would you believe him? The longer you live in sin the more grievously do you provoke God. You "crucify to yourselves the Son of God afresh." It is awfully possible for men to outlive the day of grace (*Ps. xcvi. 11*). 4. Our services will be more acceptable now than they can possibly be at any future period. III. Let us now consider THE IMPORT OF THE QUESTION, "Who then is willing?" &c. 1. It carries with it the assumption that God is waiting to accept your service. 2. It implies also that every one possesses the ability to consecrate his service unto God. 3. We are taught by the text that there is a disinclination in the heart of man to submit himself to the will of God.

Conclusion: 1. This is the most honourable service in which you can engage 2. It is pleasant (Prov. iii. 17; Isa. xxxii. 17; Psa. xvi. 3; Isa. ii. 5). 3. It is reasonable (Acts xvii. 28). 4. It is the only service which secures a vast reward (1 Cor. ii. 9). (R. Treffry.)

*Consecration*:—The New Version reads, "Who then offereth willingly to consecrate himself this day unto the Lord." This preferable reading suggests the theme of self consecration to God. I. WHAT THIS CONSECRATION INVOLVES. A man may consecrate many things to God and yet not consecrate himself. God does not value a man's money, time, talents, if he withholds himself. Consecration of self involves—1. The heart. This is the seat of our affections, the love of our nature, and the fountain from which flows everything that constitutes the character. "Give me thine heart." 2. The body. The body as well as the soul is the temple of God (1 Cor. vi. 15, 19; Eph. v. 30). Self-consecration covers our whole being—body, soul, and spirit. It will also embrace our time, talents, wealth. II. THE CLAIM WHICH GOD HAS TO THIS SELF-CONSECRATION. His claim results—1. From His love. God loves us. The love of a father constitutes a claim to the love of a dutiful son, how much more to the love of a prodigal son. 2. From the way in which God has consecrated or sanctified Himself for us. "He gave Himself for me." 3. He asks our self-consecration to His service because it is the best thing we can do for ourselves. III. THIS SELF-CONSECRATION IS AN IMMEDIATE DUTY. 1. It is a great mistake for any to withhold self-consecration because they are too young. It is easier to be pure, and truthful, and loving, and diligent in the service of God when young than it will be to practise those virtues when old, if you have neglected them when young. The habits formed by a life of sin and neglect of God are like iron chains that you cannot easily break. Many who once said they were too young are now saying they are too old. 2. The sooner you commence to serve God the more you will be able to accomplish. 3. The present may be your only opportunity. We have been speaking specially to the young; but this is also a word for the aged. It is a delightful thing to see the young decide for Christ, but it is a sad thing to see the parents left behind. I was deeply impressed with this one day. I was on a visit close to the east coast where so many wrecks had recently taken place; among them was a vessel at the mouth of the Tyne. It was Christmas day, and on the pier among the crowd of spectators stood the son of the captain, watching and waiting for his father; for he was expected to be at home on that festive day. Probably as they gazed at each other a violent sea struck the vessel, and it sunk with all hands—wrecked within sight of port and within sight of friends. Parents, are there none of your children who have decided for Christ, and are standing on the Rock and looking out and expecting you home? Shall they see you wrecked within sight of port? (*Absalom Clarke*.)

*Service for God*:—Men make a great deal of to-morrow. God always and everywhere lays stress on to-day. Day by day God supplies, and day by day He asks us to serve. In reference to this service we want to try and answer three questions. I. WHO IS IT ASKS FOR IT? II. WHY DOES HE WANT IT? God wishes to use men, because by this means He can bestow richer blessing upon them than He could in any other way. III. HOW MAY WE RENDER IT? 1. By yielding your heart to Him. 2. By living an upright, consistent, unselfish life. 3. By earnest loving effort. 4. By helping and encouraging His people. (*J. D. Kilburn*.)

*Christian consecration*.—I. Christian consecration is a PERSONAL thing: "Who?" II. Christian consecration is a VOLUNTARY thing: "Who is willing?" III. Christian consecration is an ACTIVE thing: "His service." IV. Christian consecration is a REASONABLE thing: "Unto the Lord." V. Christian consecration is a PROMPT thing: "This day." VI. Christian consecration is a SYMPATHETIC thing: it prompts the consecrated to commend the grace of God to others and press the question, "Who is willing?" &c. (*Thos. Kelly, D.D.*)

*Consecration*:—A great disappointment in life is often a terrible experience. A picturesque writer compares the setting of a secret hope to the setting of the sun. The brightness of life seems gone. And such might well to some extent have been the experience of David. He had set his heart on erecting the temple on Mount Zion. We may judge, then, what a collapse fell on his intensest interest and expectation when the decree issued that the work was not to be done by him. Instead of sinking into sullen apathy, or the inertness of despair, he devoted himself with renewed and consecrated energy to gather the materials necessary for the work, and in the text he appeals to and seeks to stimulate the people. The consecration here required—I. MUST HAVE IN IT THE ELEMENT OF SPONTANEITY. We must know what love to God really is, and we must feel the spell of its sweet strength. As to the form in which our love is to manifest itself,

that is a question of inferior importance. We know that our love to our fellow-creatures is not conformed to any common or uniform law; it is sometimes radiant in a smile, flippant on the tongue; its speech bewrayeth itself; it asserts itself irrepressibly in a thousand ways. In other cases it is reticent, it is reserved, it is like the image of moon or star in a mountain tarn, it abideth alone; few ever see it; and yet in both cases it is deep and sincere, strong even as death. The great question is not as to how our love is to express itself, but as to whether it really exists at all, the supreme power of the soul, a living and present reality within us. One of our poets represents a wretched slave, in reply to the query of her master in respect to her affection for himself, as replying with a gladness-glamoured, "Yes," with her lips, when her heart, burned to say, "No." The sad, pathetic picture of the poet is the precise converse of what we are now insisting upon, namely, that the professed devotion of ourselves to God must be the gift of love, or can He do else than spurn the sacrifice altogether? II. MUST BE A WHOLE-HEARTED, UNDIVIDED THING—body as well as soul. The later representatives of the Gnostics held that the body was so wholly had as to be beyond redemption; that it did not matter what became of it; that it might be plunged into the blackest depths of vicious excess and that the spirit within would contract no defilement and suffer no detriment. Accordingly the primitive Christians were in imminent peril of being seduced into the immoralities which abounded around them. Hence the warnings which abound in apostolic Epistles against lasciviousness, revelling, banquetings, and such like. Why should we not feel respecting the body that it is as truly consecrated to God in the case of a Christian as the soul can be? III. THIS CONSECRATION IS NO CHEAP OR EASY THING. We must not offer unto God that which costs us nothing. 1. There is the cost of self-discipline. 2. The diligent and laborious use of the means of grace. (*Dean Forrest.*) *Consecration*:—I do not know a question in the sacred volume more full of import, or more adapted to press upon the heart. I. WE SHALL EXPLAIN WHAT WE REGARD AS THE CONSECRATION OF SERVICE TO GOD. 1. There must be correct views of the Divine character and claims, as they are revealed in the record of His Word. You must receive Him as He there appears. (1) The God of creation. (2) The God of providence. (3) The God of redemption. 2. A practical obedience to the will of God, whether expressly declared, or whether to be inferred from His revealed attributes. 3. The use of active exertion to promote the Divine glory in the world. Religion does not only direct our attention to duties which pertain exclusively to our own personal characters and interests; it also prompts a concern for the improvement and welfare of our fellow-men. It is not equivocal testimony that your own hearts are given to God in faith and true holiness when you desire to be instrumental in restoring the authority of His law over the minds and lives of others. II. WE SHALL PRESENT THE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH OUGHT TO URGЕ TO AN ENGAGEMENT IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. 1. We are placed under universal and imperative obligation to do so. 2. The influence His service has in preventing the degradation and promoting the dignity of our nature. The habits of men must always according to their moral nature tend to degrade or dignify. He who is truly devoted to God, whatever be his deficiencies and disadvantages in other respects, is placed on a far higher eminence than can ever be attained by the most arduous aspirations of the carnal mind. Must not that bestow transcendent dignity which writes the law of Jehovah on the heart, renders the body a living temple and an habitation of God, places the thoughts and employments of men in a sphere where they become associated with prophets and apostles and martyrs of the Redeemer and the Redeemer Himself, and where they are blended with the sublime realities of the invisible and eternal world? The service of God ennobles all that it comprehends; it is as the rose which gave its fragrance to the very clay; it is as the sunbeam which tints with a fresh hue of beauty and splendour the forms of earth, and causes them to reflect its own glory. 3. The true and solid pleasure His service communicates to the soul. Here is—(1) Peace with God. (2) Freedom from the dominion of sin. (3) Redemption from the terror of the curse. (4) The confidence of rectitude and pardon. (5) The inspiration which springs from a participation in the triumphs of pure benevolence and love. (6) The possession of privileges which, from the consolations of time, shall rise to the happiness of eternity. 4. The glorious recompence by which the engagements of His service are consummated. III. WE SHALL IMPRESS THE QUESTION BY WHICH, TO AN ENGAGEMENT IN THE SERVICE OF GOD, YOU ARE EMPHATICALLY CHALLENGED. Who is willing? What excuses can you propose to justify a negative. You are too young. "Suffer

little children to come unto Me." You are too poor. The Saviour came to "preach the gospel to the poor." You are too guilty. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." You are prevented by worldly attachments. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me," &c. You are deterred by threatening of persecution. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it," &c. (*James Parsons.*) *The true idea of the Christian life:—*

I. THIS IS GOD'S APPEAL FOR SERVICE. II. SERVICE IS THE TRUE IDEA OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. For religion is not a mere viaticum to carry the soul to glory; but a power and support required during life, and not in death only. III. SERVICE IMPLIES OBEDIENCE, SELF-DENIAL, AND ACTIVITY. Such a work requires generosity and earnestness, resembling the zeal of the Jews in building their temple. IV. THE SERVICE OF GOD REQUIRES A VOLUNTARY AND DISTINCT CONSECRATION. V. THE SERVICE OF GOD IS OF THE MOST PRESSING URGENCY. It should be "this day." (*L. H. Byrnes, B.A.*) *The act of the will:—*In making our choice there is a determined act of our own will. To be willing is one thing; to will is another thing. We may be entirely willing, for instance, to go to some other country—say America—and such willingness may continue for years; but unless you will to go, you will never reach there. Our choice involves a definite act of the will; we may think about religion; we may talk about religion; we may be kindly affected towards religion; but we are called to do more. We are called to make a determined act of our will and to make our choice. You have seen a grand vessel about to be launched. Everything was ready for her departure from dry land. Every impediment had been removed but one, and that was the one which prevented her from entering the element on which she was to sail. One single block bound her to earth. It was in itself a mere trifle. A blow of the hammer wielded by a vigorous arm would set her free; but let that block remain untouched, and no onward movement would be made by the gallant ship. The hammer swings in the air; the blow is struck; she rushes into the great deep, where she floats with ease and grace as one born to it as her own possession. That stroke of the hammer corresponds to the act of the will—the deliberate resolution taken and made to consecrate oneself to Christ and to God. It must be taken, or the journey will never be traversed. (*Cameron Lees, D.D.*) *Complete consecration:—*"I give Thee all—I keep back nothing for myself." Such was the motto engraved upon the ring and seals of the great Reformer Calvin. The words were deeply cut in what was solid, whether of metal or stone. They were ever carried about him, ever present with him. He meant them to be unchangeable by engraving them where he did. *Offered willingly:—*Rich men's presents are gold and silver, or other costly things. Mine must be recommended by the affectionate pleasure with which I give them. (*The Ven. Bede when dying.*)

Vers. 10-20. Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation.—*The last thanksgiving:—*Every sentence weighed and measured for the occasion.

I. THE INFINITE PERFECTIONS OF GOD. 1. God in His unspeakable grandeur. 2. God in His universal dominion. 3. God in His absolute ownership. 4. God in His covenant relation. 5. God in His goodness to men. II. THE PECULIAR RELATIONS OF MAN TO THE INFINITE GOD. 1. Man is a dependent creature. "Who am I?" (1) Dependent for substance to give. (2) Dependent for the disposition to give it. (3) Therefore indebted to God for all things. 2. Man is a short-lived creature. 3. Man's conduct is observed by God. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *David's thanksgiving:—*1. Its adoration of God. 2. Its acknowledgment of dependence upon Him. 3. Its recognition of the influence of His grace. 4. Its solemn appeal to conscious integrity. 5. Its earnest prayer for king and people. (*Ibid.*) *The reciprocal influence of mind upon mind in worship:—*In this address of the venerable King of Israel to the Omnipotent Sovereign of the world, the natural influence of one mind upon another, the secret but powerful sympathy of similar affections in the "devout congregation" combine with his own grateful dispositions to enlarge his conceptions and to bring forth the most affecting description of the excellences of the great object of their common homage. You cannot but have observed and felt an influence of this kind, and been moved by the affections of others, especially when they corresponded with the condition of your own hearts. You have felt anger, joy, or grief insinuate themselves into your minds from the expression of them in others; and you have seen these affections increased in them by the mutual sympathy of your feelings. How often has the rage of an individual, expressed by the fiery glance of his eye, the fierceness of his coun-

tenance, and the shrillness of his tones, with the force and quickness of lightning inflamed a multitude, and exasperated their headstrong passions. With what glowing delight has an assembly been filled by the joyful countenance, the cheerful glance, the eloquent tones of a happy friend. How often has the melancholy, downcast look, or the tender tear of an interesting mourner, covered the face of the beholder with like pensive sadness, and infused into your bosom sorrows not your own. This reciprocal impression of the affections of the heart must hold equally true in the worship of the Supreme, as in the intercourse of common life.

(Anon.) *Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power.—God's supreme dominion and universal authority*.—I. THE SUPREME AUTHORITY AND DOMINION OF THE EVER-BLESSED GOD. God, under every possible consideration, must be supreme. As, therefore, He must be supreme, so must He reign over all (Rom. ix. 5). God has an absolute right, not only to claim allegiance from all, but to dispose of all according to His own will and pleasure. Every part of God's Word teems with His glorious sovereign authority. 1. Witness a few confessions. Text. Solomon (1 Kings viii. 22-23; 2 Chron. vi. 14); Hezekiah (2 Kings xix. 14-19); Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 3-12); the Levites (Neh. ix. 4-6); the Lord's Prayer (Matt. vi. 13); Paul (Eph. i. 3-6; 1 Tim. i. 11-17); Jude (vers. 20-25). 2. How the Lord asserts and claims this glorious prerogative as peculiar to Himself (Deut. xxxii. 39-43; Isa. xl. 25, 26, xli. 14-16, xlii. 5-8, xliii. 15-17; Jer. v. 20-25; Dan. vii. 13-14). II. THE NATURE OF THIS SUPREME DOMINION AND SOVEREIGN AUTHORITY. Observe—1. Negatively. It is not—(1) A deputed and delegated authority. (2) An assumed or usurped authority. (3) An arbitrary authority. 2. Positively. (1) It is universal. (2) Equitable. (3) Irresistible. (4) Everlasting. III. THE ASPECT IN WHICH IT IS TO BE VIEWED BY US. 1. As a most glorious doctrine. 2. As a most humiliating doctrine. 3. As a most alarming doctrine. 4. As a most encouraging doctrine. 5. As a most invigorating and establishing doctrine. (R. Shittler.)

*The Divine greatness and beneficence*.—We have in these words a confession—I. OF THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY. II. OF THE DIVINE POWER. III. OF THE DIVINE BENEFICENCE. (J. Johnson Cort, M.A.) *David's thanksgiving*.—I. THE OCCASION. David, in a general assembly of his people, moves them to contribute towards the building of the temple, and encourages them by his own example. They contribute willingly and liberally. Reckoning a talent of silver at £375, and a talent of gold at £4,500, what they offered amounted to above twenty-six millions of pounds sterling (besides the ten thousand drams of gold, the other metals, and precious stones), which, with what David gave himself out of his private treasury, being above sixteen millions more, makes a vast sum. For this he and the people rejoice. He blesses and praises God, not because they had so much, but because they had hearts to lay out so much for God and His worship. To have much may be a curse and a snare, but to have a heart to employ it for God is a far more blessed thing than to keep it, or gain it, or any way to receive it (Acts xx. 25). II. THE MODE OR FORM OF HIS PRAISING GOD. It is an ascribing all excellences to Him. True praising or blessing of God consists in acknowledging that to be God's which is His. When Christ taught His disciples how to pray and how to praise God, this is the mode of praising Him (Matt. vii. 13): "Thine is," &c. After the same manner does David here praise Him. (D. Clarkson.)

*For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine.—The Lord is the owner of all things*.—I. WHAT EVIDENCE THERE IS IN SCRIPTURE FOR THE LORD'S TITLE TO ALL THINGS. 1. Those things are His which we have in common with others. (1) The world in general (Psa. l. 12); (2) heaven (Psa. lxxxix. 11); (3) the sea (Psa. xcv. 5); (4) the earth (Exod. xix. 5); (5) everything in the earth (Deut. x. 14). 2. Those things are His which we think to be properly ours. We may be proprietors in respect of men, so far as none of them may be able to produce any good title or lay any just claim to what we have; but we are no proprietors in reference to God. (1) Lands (Lev. xxv. 23); (2) the fruits of the land (Hos. ii. 9); and cattle (Psa. l. 10, 11); (3) money and clothes (Hag. ii. 8; 1 Chron. xxix. 14, 16); (4) our children (Ezek. xvi. 20, 21); (5) ourselves (1 Cor. vi. 19; Psa. c. 3); (6) our bodies (1 Cor. vi. 20); (7) our souls (Ezek. xviii. 4; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). II. WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE LORD'S TITLE TO A PROPRIETY IN ALL THINGS? He that gave to all their being is clearly the owner of all (Psa. lxxxix. 11, 12). 1. He made all for Himself, not for the pleasure of another, as the Israelites wrought for Pharaoh. 2. He made all things of nothing. 3. He made all without the help or concurrence of any other. 4. He upholds all things in the same manner as He



created. III. THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF THIS PROPRIETY. 1. He is the primary and original owner of all. His title and propriety is undervied. 2. He is the absolute owner of all, without any condition or limitation. 3. He is the principal owner. All others that have right to anything have it under Him, and in subordination to Him, and are tied to acknowledge it by doing Him service for whatever they have. 4. He is total owner of all. When David gave the possession mentioned (2 Sam. xix. 29) between Ziba and Mephibosheth, they had a joint interest therein, so Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah would have had in the navy and adventure if they had joined their ships according to the proposal (1 Kings xxii. 49). But none has a joint interest with God. 5. He is the perpetual owner of all. 6. He is transcendently the owner of all. He has the greatest right to them. He has more right to all than we have to anything. 7. He is the sole owner of all things. Use 1. Of information. (1) Herein we may discern the greatness of the Lord whom we serve and whose we are. (2) This may inform us that the Lord hath a right to deal with us or any creature as He will. Use 2. For exhortation. This truth suggests many duties of greatest moment and consequence. (1) Thankfulness. Whatsoever we have that is good is from Him, and not only the substance, but every degree of it. (2) Self-surrender. (3) Improving all we have for God. (4) Patience. (5) Humility. (6) Self-denial. If God be the owner of all things, He is the owner of us; if He be the owner of us, we are not to own ourselves, and not to own ourselves to deny ourselves. We must deny ourselves—(a) As to our judgments. We must give up ourselves to the conduct of that judgment which is laid down in Scripture, that which is called the mind of the Lord. (b) As to our wills. The will of the Lord must be our will. (c) As to our ends. The pleasing, and honouring, and enjoying God is the only end we should propose to ourselves, either in holy duties or worldly business. (d) As to our interests. If God be our owner, we ought to own and mind His interest and none else. (e) As to our business and employments. The example of Christ (Luke ii. 19; John iv. 34, ix. 4). (f) As to our possessions. We ought to look upon all we possess as the Lord's and not ours. Use 3. For encouragement. 1. This truth affords encouragement in those special cases which are most apt to trouble and deject you. He can supply all your need. (1) Want you wealth, or what you judge to be a competency? (ver. 12). All the riches of the world are in His hands, and He can dispose thereof to whom and in what proportion He sees good (2 Cor. ix. 8; Phil. iv. 19). (2) Want you authority to countenance and secure you? (ver. 11). He has the disposing of it all. (3) Want you victory over enemies, those that afflict and oppress your souls? The Lord can give it you; it is His own. (4) Want you strength, outward or inward, to do, or to suffer, or to resist? This He can also give you, for it is all His own (ver. 12). (5) Want you wisdom? (Jas. i. 5). (6) Want you gifts or other graces, or a greater measure of them? (Jas. i. 17). (7) Want you comfort? (2 Cor. i. 3). (8) Want you friends? All the friends in the world are but cyphers to Him. 2. There is encouragement to undergo or undertake anything for God which He calls you to. He is the owner of all things, and so has enough to requite you, to reward you, if all that is in heaven and in earth be enough to do it. (*Ibid.*) *Divine ownership*.—God's ownership is—1. Universal. 2. Absolute. 3. Eternal. From this ownership we infer—I. THE ABSOLUTE SUPREMACY OF GOD. He who owns all has a right—1. To bestow on any creature whatever He pleases. 2. To withdraw from any creature in any way or at any time whatever He thinks best. "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away." II. THE MORAL OBLIGATION OF MAN. What is that? 1. To obey His will in everything. 2. To be animated by supreme gratitude. (*Homilist.*) **Thine is the kingdom, O Lord.**—*The kingdom of God*.—I. THINE, O LORD, IS THE KINGDOM. What kingdom? 1. The kingdom of nature, with all its productions and materials. 2. The kingdom of providence. As He made all, so His care extends to all. 3. The kingdom of grace. This is a kingdom within the kingdom of nature and providence. It is a mediatorial, a spiritual empire, which is designed to establish the peculiar reign of God, not only over men, but in them. II. THE GLORY OF THIS KINGDOM. This is seen—1. In its Sovereign—the Lord Jesus. 2. In its universality. 3. In its prospect (Dan. ii. 44, vii. 13, 14). 4. In its subjects: "The excellent of the earth." 5. In its privileges: "Eye hath not seen," &c. (1) Peace. (2) Liberty: "The glorious liberty of the sons of God." (3) Plentitude: "The Lord of hosts makes unto all people a feast of fat things," &c. "My God shall supply all your need," &c. (*W. Jay, M.A.*) **And in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.**—*The*

*nature of true greatness.*—I. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF TRUE GREATNESS? The scriptural idea of greatness is essentially different from that which is formed by the world. 1. To a few names the world has by general consent appended the title of "the Great"—Alexander, Constantine, Napoleon. These were great men with little aims. Self was the beginning and end of all their plans and labours. Their greatness was like a tree of ample trunk and wide-extended foliage, not spreading a beneficent shade, but distilling a deadly poison on all beneath, and thus killing its own roots and insuring its own decay. 2. A higher order of worldly greatness is that which consists purely in exalted genius and great intellectual power, whatever be the form of its manifestation. This form of greatness has been generally beneficent in its influence. Still it is in itself incomplete and unfinished. 3. The greatness of the Bible is a holy greatness. The fear of God is the source of its wisdom; the love of God is the spring of its activity; the glory of God is the end of its enterprises and labours.

II. THIS GREATNESS IS A PROPER OBJECT OF ASPIRATION AND PURSUIT. 1. Man was made for this greatness. He is born great. Great powers, great duties, great expectancies, a great sphere of action, great hopes and promises, are his. If he becomes little, it is by his own fault and sin. 2. The Word of God exhorts us to it, "calls" us to "glory" as well as to "virtue." 3. We are taught that there will be a distinction in the rewards of eternity, graduated to the different degrees of merit and earnestness in the service of God in the present life. 4. The examples of Scripture are justifications of the highest aim. All history besides contains no such list of heroes as Hebrews xi. III. THE SOURCE OF THIS GREATNESS. All things are of God. Even the world's heroes have felt and acknowledged this. If it is in God's hands to make great—1. Then He is to be acknowledged and adored as the author of all the endowments of men. 2. What must be the guilt of those who have perverted and abused their talents to spread disorder, pollution, and misery among His moral subjects! 3. Their greatness is to be solicited and expected from Him. 4. From Him we must derive our idea of greatness. This He has revealed to us—(1) In His Word. (2) In the life of Christ. (*John Proudfit, D.D.*) *The agency of God in human greatness.*—

I. GOD MAKES MEN GREAT BY BESTOWING UPON THEM DISTINGUISHED GENIUS AND TALENTS. Some of the courtiers of the Emperor Sigismund, who had no taste for learning, inquired why he so honoured and respected men of low birth on account of their science. The emperor replied, "In one day I can confer knighthood or nobility on many; in many years I cannot bestow genius on one. Wise and learned men are created by God only." II. GOD MAKES MEN GREAT BY AN EDUCATION, AND BY EVENTS IN LIFE SUITED TO DISCOVER, TO EXCITE, TO ENCOURAGE, TO IMPROVE, AND TO DIRECT THEIR TALENTS. The most luxuriant soil, when uncultivated, often becomes wild and barren, while a soil less favourable richly recompenses the seed sown, and the labours of the husbandman. 1. Early instruction and discipline correct the blemishes, brighten the polish, and increase the excellences of genius. 2. The friends and companions of our early youth contribute not a little to the strengthening and improving our natural talents. 3. Favourable providences expand the faculties, call forth exertions, and discover the extent of talents, which otherwise might have lain dormant, or shone with less lustre. Erpinus the critic, was first stimulated to a proper improvement of his time and talents by looking into Fortius Ringelbergius's treatise on study; Franklin was similarly affected by an essay of Dr. Cotton Mather's, on doing good. Great occasions produce great talents. A Frederic and a Washington might have lived obscure, and died forgotten, had the time, place, and circumstances which called forth their abilities been different. III. IT IS GOD WHO IMPLANTS DISPOSITIONS, AND EXCITES TO CONDUCT, WHICH ENABLE MEN TO IMPROVE THEIR NATURAL ABILITIES, AND PROVIDENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ADVANTAGES FOR BECOMING GREAT. Exercise and activity marvellously improve and increase talents, comparatively small. God makes men great by influencing their tempers and enabling them to govern their spirits and conduct their lives by the rules of reason and religion. IV. GOD MAKES MEN GREAT BY BRINGING THEM INTO DIFFICULT AND TRYING SITUATIONS, WHICH EXERCISE AND MANIFEST THE GREATNESS OF THEIR DISPOSITION AND TALENTS. V. GOD MAKES MEN GREAT BY RENDERING THE EXERCISE OF THEIR TALENTS ACCEPTABLE AND USEFUL. VI. IT IS GOD WHO ASSIGNS TO THE GREAT THE SPHERE OF THEIR GREATNESS. VII. IN THE HAND OF GOD IT IS TO LIMIT THE DURATION OF HUMAN GREATNESS. Conclusion: Address—1. Those whom the hand of God hath made great. God made you great for the general good, and not merely for your own pleasure or profit. Distinguished talents were bestowed that, with success, you

might guide others to wisdom, to religion, and happiness. 2. Those whom a scanty measure of natural talents or acquired accomplishments confines to a lower and more ignoble and laborious line of life. Beware of envy and discontent. (*J. Erskine, D.D.*) *All strength is from God* :—All Christians, in themselves, are but vessels, poor fragile things, just like earthen pitchers. We should be worthless, only God puts His life into our hearts. And this becomes part of the good news of Christ. It brings the happy assurance to every heart who hears it that even a child may be a vessel to carry the power of God. Weak people, little people, fragile people, God uses them all. God can fill the weakest and most fragile with strength for His work. He asks also that the heart may receive His life. The outside may be no better than earthenware, but inside there will be an excellent light and power of God. (*D. Macleod.*)

Ver. 14. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly?—*The impossibility of creature-merit* :—No point in theology requires to be oftener stated, or more carefully established, than the impossibility that a creature should merit at the hands of the Creator. Each one of us, if he have ever probed his own heart, will confess himself prone to the persuasion, that the creature can lay the Creator under obligation. If one being merit of another, it must perform some action which it was not obliged to perform, and by which that other is advantaged. If either of these conditions fail, merit must vanish. I. We are, in the first place, to speak on the stated fact THAT ALL THINGS COME OF GOD. II. THE INFERENCE IS—THAT WE CAN GIVE TO GOD NOTHING WHICH IS NOT ALREADY HIS. If one creature give a thing to another, he ceases to have property in the gift, and cannot again claim it as his own. If a man make me a present he virtually cedes all title to the thing given; and if I were afterwards to restore him the whole, or a part, it would be of mine own that I gave him. But if I were reduced to utter poverty, with no means whatsoever of earning a livelihood, and if a generous individual came forward and gave me capital, and set me up in trade, and if, in mine after prosperity, I should bring my benefactor some offering expressive of gratitude, it is clear that I might, with the strictest truth say, "Of thine own do I give thee." I should be indebted to my benefactor for what I was able to give; and, of course, that for which I stood indebted to him might be declared to be his. But even this comes far short of the Creator and the creature. This will show that there is no merit in the commonly-preserved instances of human desert. 1. Repentance. 2. Faith. 3. Works. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *God acknowledged* :—One of his gifts to his native town consisted of twenty-four beautiful and commodious almshouses, which were built and endowed by Sir Francis, "as a testimony of his gratitude to Almighty God, and with a view of benefiting those of his fellow-townsmen who may be in need of assistance." Over the second-floor window of the central almshouse, along with the arms of Sir Francis, is the text, from 1 Chron. xxix. 14, "Of Thine own have we given Thee." Each of the inmates receives from the endowment of the founder a weekly allowance sufficient to keep him from want. (*Memoirs of Sir Francis Crossley.*) *All belongs to God* :—There is no portion of time that is our time, and the rest God's; there is no portion of money that is our money, and the rest God's money. It is all His; He owns it all, gives it all, and He has simply trusted it to us for His service. A servant has two purses, the master's and his own; but we have only one. (*A. Monod.*) *Our obligations to God* :—A merchant in America, whom the Lord had greatly prospered, was a member of a Church where the congregation was mainly composed of very poor people, and therefore he had the privilege of contributing very largely to the upkeep of the Church, and toward the minister's salary. One of the members of the Church was travelling, and in conversation with a clergyman whom he met, he mentioned the case of Mr. D—, and extolled his great liberality. The minister, without denying the praiseworthiness of the action, said, "Now, you are a merchant?" "Yes." "Well, I suppose you employ a clerk to serve your goods, and a schoolmaster to educate your children. Now, suppose the fees due to the schoolmaster had become due, and you give your clerk instructions to pay these, what would you think if that clerk were to receive great praise for having disbursed the money according to your instructions?" "I should think it very absurd." "Well, do you not see that the case of your liberal-hearted friend and that hypothetical case of mine are almost analogous? God employs him as His steward or clerk to trade for Him; and out of the money which God has given him he is commanded

to pay the schoolmaster of God's children. The merchant is quite as much under obligation to trade for God as is the preacher to preach for God." We should remember that all things should be done to the glory of God. (*J. King.*) *Christ, the author of blessings ministered through His servants*:—Florence Nightingale, having gone like an angel of mercy among the hospitals in the Crimea, until her name was enshrined in every soldier's heart, asked to be excused from having her picture taken, as thousands begged, that she might drop out and be forgotten, and that Christ alone might be remembered as the author of the blessings her hands had ministered. That is the true Christian spirit. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*) *No room for God*:—It is said of Hadrian VI. that, having built a stately college at Louvain, he set this inscription on the front in golden letters: "Trajectum plantavit, Lovanium rigavit, sed Cæsar dedit incrementum" ("Utrecht planted me, Louvain watered me, but Cæsar gave the increase"). A passenger, reproving his folly, underwrote: "Hic Deus nihil fecit" ("Here was no room for God to do anything.") (*Parens.*) *The building of the temple*:—I call your attention—I. TO THE HALLOWED WORK IN WHICH WE ARE ENGAGED; to build the temple, the Church of God, the house of prayer for all the people. 1. The temple was to be a house for the holy name of God. 2. The temple was the place of authorised and accepted sacrifice. 3. The temple was the place of united worship and of united blessing. 4. It was the place of actual communion between God and man. II. THE SENTIMENTS OF DEEP ABASEMENT WITH WHICH THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF BEING PERMITTED TO TAKE A PART IN IT IMPRESSED THE MIND OF DAVID. The honour of being employed in a work of God ought to be deeply abasing to man. "Who am I, and what is my people?" These questions suggest three views. 1. What are we with reference to our former selves? We are, at best, but pardoned criminals; and have a long and sad retrospect of ingratitude and disobedience. 2. What are we in reference to our associates in this work? 3. What are we in reference to our actual contributions to this work? III. TO A CONSIDERATION CALCULATED POWERFULLY TO QUICKEN OUR EXERTIONS IN EVERY DEPARTMENT OF THE WORK OF GOD, WHICH MAY BY HIS MERCY BE ASSIGNED TO US. "We are strangers before Thee," &c. This reminds us—1. That what we do we must do quickly. 2. That what we do for others we must do quickly. 3. That short and uncertain as life is, within its narrow space works of infinite importance may nevertheless be done. Apply this—(1) To your own personal conduct. (2) To the great work of building the temple of God in distant lands. IV. IN ALL WORKS UNDERTAKEN FOR GOD, WE ARE TAUGHT BY THE TEXT TO BE MINDFUL OF THE PRINCIPLE FROM WHICH THEY FLOW. "In the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things." To be upright in a moral sense signifies to be conformable to the will or law of God. That law, with reference to the exercises of religious charity, has various parts, and taken together, they constitute uprightness. There is—1. The law of sincere intention. 2. The law of grateful return. 3. The law of faithfulness. 4. The law of liberality. 5. The law of cheerful distribution. 6. The law of perseverance. V. THE JOYOUS AND BENEVOLENT FEELINGS OF THE AGED MONARCH WHEN HE SAW THE PEOPLE ASSEMBLED SO WILLINGLY TO OFFER IN SO BLESSED A WORK. It is a joyful night. 1. As a declaration of faith. 2. As a declaration of lofty and truly Christian benevolence. 3. As it opens the gate of the most splendid and delightful hopes. (*R. Watson.*) *Christian liberality in God's cause*:—I. LIBERALITY IN THE CAUSE OF GOD IS WORTHY OF ALL MEN. 1. Our infinite obligations demand it. (1) How royally He gives to us—(a) The protecting care of His providence; (b) the blessings of life. (2) The earth and all things in it are His. How He opens His hand and satisfies the wants of every living thing! (3) The gifts of His grace. (a) The unspeakable gift of His Son; (b) the promise of eternal glory. 2. Liberality in His cause is only the return to Him of part of that which He has given to us (ver. 12). (1) His gifts are trusts. (2) We are stewards, not absolute owners. (3) We are to occupy till He comes. 3. To withhold from Him is to lose His blessing on what we retain. To give to Him ever brings richer gifts, if only in the spiritual graces it calls forth. 4. Liberality in the cause of God is urged by our interest in the best welfare of our fellow-men. II. LIBERALITY IS NOT ONLY A DUTY, BUT A PRIVILEGE. 1. It is a grateful recognition of being so blessed as to be able to give. 2. The willingness to give is a ground of thankfulness. III. THE LIBERALITY OF DAVID AND HIS PEOPLE A LESSON. IV. REFLECTIONS. 1. We should cherish liberality for God, for the good it does our own souls. The gratitude, love, zeal, of which it is the expression, and which it directly fosters. 2. For the good it does our fellow-men. 3. We should measure our gifts by what we retain. (1) How much do we give to God in

comparison with what we give to ourselves? (2) Have we ever made any real sacrifice for Him? Matthew and the other apostles. 3. Have we only given of our superfluity? (*Cunningham Geikie, D.D.*) *God the bestower of all good gifts:*

—I. THE ABILITY and the disposition to give to God come alike from Himself. II. WE OUGHT TO BE MORE PROFOUNDLY THANKFUL FOR THE POSSESSION OF THE DISPOSITION THAN OF THE ABILITY TO GIVE. III. THE ABILITY AND THE DISPOSITION TO GIVE ARE NEVER MORE NOBLY EMPLOYED THAN IN ERECTING TEMPLES FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD. (*H. Stowell, A.M.*) *A voluntary gift under the law:*—I. THE NATURE OF THE GIFT. I do not dwell on the extent. I refer rather to its essential nature. It was a gift distinctly for the public good. What is called public spirit is surely one of the divinest things extant among men. God keeps alive this will to serve and sacrifice for the public as the great antidote to the innate selfishness of mankind. Public spirit rises in importance and dignity as man rises in intelligence, and is able to take wise counsel about the welfare of his fellows. If he is able to take heavenly counsel, to know what God is seeking for man and to supply it, there you have in the highest form the servant of his generation according to the will of God. This glory is theirs who take counsel and work for the religious culture and elevation of men. They are the men who key the arch of progress and make it firm and sure. II. THE SOURCE OF DAVID'S AND THE PEOPLE'S JOY. 1. Living under the constraint of love is the most joyful exercise of the human powers. Man's selfishness is not native. It is the devil's poison in his blood. Divine charity expels it. The soul is conscious of health again, and breaks out into praise. 2. The joy man takes in the accomplishment of a noble public object is the purest and loftiest of all human joys. 3. I suppose a vision passed before David's sight of what that work would be to man, and would do for man, through ages. 4. Concord in good works realises perhaps more than anything in our experience the angelic benediction, "Peace on earth and goodwill to men." III. THE REASON OF THE PRAISE. 1. It is God's inspiration. Of Thine own, of the strength and joy which Thine own hand has inspired, have we given Thee. 2. Praise and bless the Lord who inspires this spirit, for it commands an abounding blessing. (*Baldwin Brown, B.A.*)

Vers. 15, 16. *For we are strangers before Thee.—Human frailty and its lessons:*—Every solemn moment of human life discovers more or less its vanity. It is not only when we stand beside the grave and mourn the wreck of hopes and aspirations buried out of sight. The marriage festival also awakens a sense of insecurity, and the shadow of parting is thrown over the commencing union. The meetings of friends recall the thought of their separation, and the inauguration of great works of public ceremonial brings up the image of those changes which all end in dissolution. Thus was it with David, when on the last public ceremony of his kingly life he presented with his people the offerings for the temple to the God of Israel. It was a turn of thought poetical and yet natural to break away from that splendid throng, laden with gold and silver and other offerings for the house of God, and resonant with the sounds of music and the acclamations of joy, to dwell upon the shadows of vanished generations, and to anticipate the day when the living race should be one shadow more added to the crowd that had passed away. I. First, then, what are some of the lessons of HUMILIATION taught by the shadowy and vanishing character of human existence? 1. The insufficiency of man for his own happiness. If he is but a "stranger and sojourner upon the earth," if he is only one of a succession of vanishing ciphers, if his days be only as a "shadow that declineth," and which soon passes into darkness, is it possible for such a creature, if he have no higher resources, to be happy? At best we must say that happiness is only possible on one of two conditions. Either the nature of man must be capable of being satisfied with this transient existence, when it is prolonged to its greatest duration, or his nature must be capable of averting its view from all the risks and hazards which tend at any moment to bring it to a close. Could the longest life satisfy, man might have here some measure of true good; or could he forget the perils which threaten at any moment to shorten it, he might not be altogether miserable. But neither of these alternatives is possible. Take the longest and the most untroubled life, the most filled with worldly advantage and prosperity—can it satisfy the human soul upon the supposition that this is the whole of existence? No. The soul shrinks from annihilation. But if it be impossible to be happy even with an untroubled life that vanishes into nothing, how much less when the shadow of death is constantly

invading us and refusing to be put away! To forget the rapid flight of time and the certain descent to the grave is for us impossible. Our life is strewn with mementos of its speedy end. We have seen the summer flowers and the winter snows alike swept aside to prepare a grave. The insufficiency of man to be his own portion is thus only too visible. He cannot, because life does not contain sufficient scope for him, and because the little that it contains is checkered with the thread of death in all its texture. Man must learn that he is at best a frail and dying creature, and that if in this life only he have hope he is of all God's creatures most miserable.

2. The blindness of human nature to its own mortality. We cannot make ourselves happy either by resting in life as a whole, or by shutting out the shadows of death which cloud it; but we are perpetually attempting to do so, and thus are fighting against the nature of things and against God. What is the whole struggle of the ungodly man but an attempt to build his all upon a mortal foundation; to make a pilgrimage a home, a shadow a reality, the surface of a river a solid and lasting pavement?

3. The third and last lesson of humiliation which I notice is the evil of sin. Sin is the parent of death, the grand destroyer of life's joys, and the creator of its gloom, its shadow, and its insufficiency. Sin mows down all the generations of mankind with relentless sternness. The plague of sin has been in our bones, and therefore their strength has perished, and the beauty of man has consumed like a moth, and he has been altogether vanity.

II. Having thus spoken of lessons of humiliation, let me now mention some lessons of CONSOLATION that may be set over against the brevity and uncertainty of earthly existence. I confine myself to two drawn from the text.

1. We have for our consolation the knowledge of God's eternity. "We are," says the King of Israel, "strangers before Thee." This is the first ray of comfort. It is like a rock in the midst of the tossing ocean. Take away an everlasting God, and what an awful sadness covers all! If there be no living personal Being before whom our little life is led, by whom its moments are measured out and its destinies fixed; if all be under the dominion of a dark, stern fate that knows and feels nothing, or of a blind chance that orders nothing; if we are tossed and driven upon a waste and melancholy ocean, which at last engulfs our frail bark in its dull, unconscious surge, with no sun or star or eternal eye looking down upon our struggles and our extinction—then, oh how dreary, how unrelieved the picture of utter hopelessness and emptiness, making it good for us that we had never been born! The eternity of a living God was David's consolation, and that of all the fathers of Israel. It is not less ours; and from this high tower we look down with composure on all the waves of trouble, and feel that so long as we are not "without God" we can never be "without hope in the world."

2. But we have also, for our consolation, the knowledge of God's covenant love. David prays. The mutable and perishable addresses the Immutable and the Imperishable. He rests on the basis of a covenant. He is dealing with a God who has come near, who has His tabernacle with men, who is pacified towards them for their sins, who has compassion upon their sorrows and their death, and has delivered them from going down to the pit, having found a ransom. This is the inspiration of David's prayer. His confession is not the melancholy utterance of nature's despondency, which gives up all for lost. It is only the voice of pious humility, which renounces all creature trust, that it may recover all in God. We see more clearly than did David how God, the eternal Justice, is become the dying sinner's friend and portion; how the greatness of His attributes harmonised in Christ, becomes the measure of the greatness of our deliverance; how, united to Him, our life is no more the shadow, but our death, and that which marks our true nature is not the evanescent, but the abiding and the eternal. "Because I live, ye shall live also." Oh! be it ours to lay hold of this covenant of which Jesus is the Mediator; and then, in unison with the eternal God, we may defy death to leave on us the print of its corrupting finger, and to involve our existence in one permanent shadow, for He whose life is the light of men shall swallow up our death in victory, and neither things present nor things to come shall part us from His covenant love.

III. I now come, in the third and last place, to mention some lessons of EXHORTATION arising out of our mortality and decay.

1. The first lesson of exhortation is to diligence in God's work. David does not reason, as some do, "What can shadows like us accomplish in building up the temple of God?" This is an unworthy and an un-Christian despondency. As David served his generation, in spite of his keen perception of the evanescence of human life in general, so should we. The Church of God has been brought to its present state of advancement by such shadows. Each generation has helped it

forward, though by small degrees; and as the coral insects build the islands of the Pacific Ocean, so have these small and insignificant labourers of the human family, whose "foundation is in the dust and who are crushed before the moth," reared up the walls of Jerusalem, and given it its present strength and beauty in the eyes of all nations. Let us repel the idea that our life is of little worth and value in relation to the advancement of the kingdom of God. The treasure may be in earthen vessels, but the excellency of the power is all the more seen to be Divine. Life is ours as death is theirs; and so long as we are in the world let us labour like our blessed and Divine Lord to be the light of the world. 2. Our second lesson of exhortation is to acquiesce in God's appointments. David at this time felt himself on the edge of the grave, and was willing to hand over to Solomon the prosecution of the work on which his heart had so long been set. He felt that it belonged to God to choose His own instruments, and from a rapidly vanishing race to select such individuals for His work as to Him seemed best. We may apply this lesson in the way of teaching us to be willing to depart and leave the work of God to others, whenever He shall so ordain. But we may also apply it in another way, so as to teach us to be willing to remain, and do the work of God which has fallen into our hands, though others are withdrawn. 3. Our third lesson of exhortation is to prepare for our own departure. We must be strangely constituted if the removal of others awakens in us no foreboding of our own end. Are we, then, prepared? Preparation is of two kinds. The saint is prepared when he is doing with his might whatsoever his hand findeth to do; when he is steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; when his eye is constantly directed towards the Cross that so he may wash away the stains of daily sin, and not less towards the throne that he may receive his daily instructions from his unseen Lord, and run in the way of His commandments with enlarged heart. But there is also the preparation of the sinner, and this must begin at an earlier starting-point. Years have not repealed the law, "Ye must be born again"; nor has the multitude of feet smoothed an entrance into the Zion of God. (*John Cairns.*)

*The grandeur of human opportunity* :—I. THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE. II. THE GRANDEUR OF HUMAN OPPORTUNITY. 1. There is no sign of sadness in the scene before us. David's mind and heart are filled with the thought of God, and with the things of God. 2. This preparation for the building of the temple was an act of thanksgiving. 3. The splendour of the preparation is an evidence of David's zeal for the house of the Lord. Giving was regarded by David, not as a duty, but a privilege—a grand opportunity of turning the "mammon of unrighteousness" to eternal account. This zeal for the house of God is one of the marked features of the Psalter (Psa. xxvi., xxvii., lxxxiv., cxii., &c.). III. LESSONS. 1. The remembrance of the shortness of life (Psa. xxxix. 4), for the purpose of using time aright. 2. To take the measure of earthly things as we shall do when we look back over the day of life (Deut. xxxii. 29). 3. All that is done for the kingdom of God remains. Another generation may have to carry out what we only begin. (*The Thinker.*)

*The transitoriness of life* :—I. TO ILLUSTRATE THE ASSERTION, "No abiding." This may apply to—1. Human honours. 2. The pleasures of sense. 3. Worldly profits. 4. Particularly to man's life. To impress this truth, reflect—(1) That we have sinful souls, and that therefore we must die. "The wages of sin is death." (2) On the frailty of our bodies and their liability to disease. II. TO DIRECT TO A PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF THE TRUTH. 1. Immediately close with Christ the Saviour. 2. Diligently apply to your proper work. (1) In relation to God. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." (2) In relation to yourselves. Salvation is a matter of the last importance. (3) In relation to your neighbours. "As ye have opportunity do good unto all men." 3. Cleave not to earthly things. 4. Murmur not under crosses. 5. Labour for the conversion of sinners. Address—1. The aged. 2. The young. (*E. Brown.*)

*Strangers and sojourners* :—1. How short our stay is! The average life is less than thirty-five years. Multitudes die in infancy. No man can say that this is his home. He knows not how long he will remain. He is not even sure that he will be here to-morrow. He is a "sojourner." 2. He is a "stranger." He does not have time to become acquainted. "The proper study of mankind" may be "man," but life is too short to make much proficiency in it. The average man has no real knowledge of his fellow-men. Of their inner lives he knows nothing. 3. Nor have we a better knowledge of the world. Who knows the secrets of rocks and hills, or the laws of vegetable life? Who understands the mighty forces of nature, or the mysteries of the visible universe? Who can interpret for me the message of

the pebble beneath my feet? One of the wisest of mankind likened himself to a child playing on the shores of an unknown ocean. Sensible men no longer attempt to learn everything. Realising the shortness of the time, they select some particular branch of learning and count themselves fortunate if they succeed in mastering that ere death comes. 4. The brevity and uncertainty of man's sojourn make sad havoc with cherished plans and stamp his whole career with incompleteness. Man's tenure is feeble and precarious. 5. This solemn undertone of life's song is often referred to in the Bible. 6. Out of the ashes of despair hope springs. The very words "strangers and sojourners" are suggestive of a place where man will be at home. The very brevity and incompleteness of earthly life raise the question whether there is not some complementary life. Since the powers are not developed, the character not matured, the plans not executed here, the mind instinctively believes that there is a place where they will be. "What a waste," exclaims Burr, "if death ends all! What a host of abortive and abandoned undertakings! Whole cities of houses in the first stages of building, and lo, all work finally suspended; whole navies in the dockyards with great keels fairly laid, and then left to rot! Who does such things? Here and there a fickle, foolish, or impoverished man, but certainly not the all-wise and all-mighty and steadfast God." A dead man is "merely an evicted tenant." He has gone out of sight but not out of mind. 7. The Word of God sets this truth in the white light of revelation. Christ comforts His sorrowing disciples by reminding them of "the mansions" prepared for them. 8. This thought lends inspiration to endeavour and affords comfort under the troubles of life. Conclusion: 1. Take the right road. That road begins and ends in Christ. 2. Make spiritual use of temporal things. True riches are spiritual, and temporal riches are of value only as they are used for spiritual ends. God will require an account of our stewardship. 3. "Live by the faith of the Son of God." (*Arthur J. Brown, D.D.*)

*The real nature of human life*.—I. AS STRANGERS HERE WE OUGHT TO GUARD AGAINST AN EXCESSIVE AND UNRESTRAINED INDULGENCE OF OUR APPETITES AND PASSIONS. This objection will appear by reflecting—1. Upon the nature of our present situation, and what our proper employment ought to be while we sojourn here. We are placed here in order to prepare for the perfection of the heavenly state. Our course ought to be a continued and gradual progress from lesser to higher degrees of piety and virtue. Like a river enlarging as it runs, these ought to increase, and flow in a stream continually augmented. It is a sign of a base and ignoble spirit to linger on the road, or set up his rest in a strange country, fond of its foreign entertainments, and neglecting to move towards his home, where alone his chief occupation and his chief happiness are to be found. As a man cannot easily travel who is heavily burdened, neither can any one make any progress in a virtuous course when fettered by the pleasures and interests of this world. 2. Upon the nature of those things which excite our desires and solicit our indulgence. These are: wealth, outward honours, fame, pleasure, everything included in the term prosperity. These are—(1) Deceitful. (2) Unsatisfying. (3) Beyond our control. 3. That death will put a final period to them all. II. AS STRANGERS HERE WE OUGHT WITH FIRMNESS TO ENCOUNTER AND WITH PATIENCE TO ENDURE ITS DIFFICULTIES AND DISTRESSES. This is suggested—1. By the nature of our journey through this life. 2. By reflecting on the origin of our afflictions and for what end they are intended. They are appointed by God, and are intended to improve man in virtue and happiness. 3. By the fleeting and short-lived character of our troubles and misfortunes. To the present state they are confined, and with our bodies they shall die. (*J. Drysdale, D.D.*)

*Man-kind considered as strangers and sojourners on earth*.—This proposition is liable to many mistakes. It does not mean—1. That we are here in a place unsuited to us, for which we were not designed, or to which our Creator had either exiled us as a punishment or only placed us in for a certain period without having any particular view in so doing, till He could assign to us at some other time a different place in the territory of His dominion. 2. That we must be as indifferent to all the objects around us and take as little interest in them as travellers and strangers are wont to do in the several places of their short sojourn. 3. That we here are only obnoxious to toils, troubles, and sorrows, and incapable of real happiness, as though all that is so called existed nowhere but in the imagination, or as though we could here enjoy happiness merely in hope, in agreeable prospects of futurity. How, then, and in what sense are we strangers and sojourners on earth? I. SINCE WE HAVE HERE NO INHERITANCE IN THE STRICTEST IMPORT OF THE EXPRESSION, SINCE WE



possess nothing on the possession whereof we can rely. II. IN THAT WE CANNOT HERE ATTAIN THE WHOLE OF OUR DESTINATION, we cannot be and become all that our Creator designs. We here only begin to unfold our faculties. III. WE CANNOT HERE FIND ALL THAT WE WISH FOR AND REQUIRE, and what in itself may be good and desirable, but that alone which is proper for this station and for our present constitution. In the exercise of our faculties we frequently meet with insurmountable obstacles. Seldom can we do as much good and for so long a time as we could wish. We cannot here find happiness that fully satisfies, that is uninterrupted in its duration, and its enjoyment not subject to casualty or change. IV. WE ARE NOT APPOINTED IN PERPETUITY TO THIS TERRESTRIAL LIFE. V. WE HAVE A COUNTRY TO WHICH WE ARE HASTENING, and in which alone we shall reach our destination. Improvement: 1. Seek nothing here that is not here to be found. 2. Be not surprised nor troubled at anything which is a natural consequence of your present condition, which is inseparable from the pilgrim life which you lead. 3. Beware of rendering your pilgrimage still more laborious by avoidable deviations and mistakes. 4. Reckon your present state always for that which it really is, and use it always to the purposes for which it is designed. It is not the term, but the way to the term. It is not the most perfect mode of existence and of life whereof you are capable, but only the first, the lowest stage of it. 5. Never be unmindful of your better, celestial country. (*Anon.*) *Strangers and sojourners*:—This expression is remarkable, they are strangers "before the Lord." He knows them to be such, and it is by His wise and gracious appointment that they are so. I. ALL TRUE BELIEVERS ARE STRANGERS AND SOJOURNERS UPON EARTH, IN RESPECT TO THEIR ACTUAL STATE AND CONDITION. The saints in this world are like travellers in a foreign land, or like a merchant ship in a strange port; the day of return is set, and it only waits till the freight is ready. II. WITH RESPECT TO THEIR TEMPER AND DISPOSITION. 1. They manifest the disposition of strangers and sojourners by their comparative indifference to the things of the present world. 2. As strangers they intermeddle not with things that do not immediately concern them, and are not busybodies in other people's matters. 3. Strangers long to be at home, are often sending home, and will be grieved if they do not hear from thence. III. REAL CHRISTIANS ARE OFTEN TREATED LIKE STRANGERS BY THE MEN OF THE WORLD. The principles by which they are actuated, the inward conflicts, joys, and consolations which they experience, the hopes and prospects which they entertain, are all unknown to the unbelieving world, who regard them only as so many misguided enthusiasts. Men wonder at their zeal and fervency, their mortification and self-denial, their courage and resolution. They also wonder that they do not run with them to the same excess of riot (1 Pet. iv. 4). IV. CHRISTIANS ARE ONLY SOJOURNERS. A sojourner is one who dwells in a strange country, in which he has no possession, but takes up a temporary residence (Lev. xxv. 23; 1 Pet. i. 17). V. OUR BEING STRANGERS AND SOJOURNERS UPON THE EARTH IS SUFFICIENTLY ILLUSTRATED AND CONFIRMED BY OUR ACTUAL CONDITION, OR THE SHORTNESS OF TIME, AND THE MUTABILITY OF OUR STATE. Inferences: 1. Let us learn to be more indifferent about things present. 2. The brevity of our state should teach us to improve time while we have it. 3. Adore the mercy and forbearance which did not cut us off in our sins. 4. Learn to live in the constant expectation of death and judgment, as if every day were to be the last. 5. If true believers in every age have been strangers and sojourners upon the earth, let us carefully examine how far this character belongs to us. 6. If we really bear the character of a pilgrim in a strange land, let us be careful to act upon it. 7. Let us bear with meekness and patience the troubles we may meet with by the way. 8. Let us endeavour to lead others into the way we are going (Num. x. 29; Jer. vi. 16; John xiv. 6). 9. Learn to be kind-hearted to all who are travelling Zionward, to love as brethren and strengthen each other's hands in the Lord. 10. Consider what a hearty welcome awaits you when you reach your destination. (*B. Beadome, M.A.*) *Strangers and sojourners*:—This is the testimony of an old man, a wise man, a great man. I. We have here A DESCRIPTION OF HUMAN LIFE—a pilgrimage. Other Scriptural figures—an arrow flying through the air; a race; a flower. No figure more aptly describes human life than that of a journey, as it represents the whole world in all its distinctions, rich and poor, wise and foolish, young and old, all journeying to their everlasting home. II. AN INFERENCE OF CHRISTIAN DUTY. (*R. C. Dillon.*) *Earth not a place of rest*:—I have read in classic literature of men pursued by the avenging furies; and in American story of certain Indians who, driven out of their hunting-grounds by the pursuing flames, ran on and on until, half-dead, they came to a noble river, and swiftly fording it sat round their chief as

he struck his tent-pole into the ground and threw himself on the cool turf, crying, "Alabama! Alabama! here we may rest." But no, before sleep had refreshed their weary bodies their new home was claimed by hostile tribes. Earth has no resting-place for souls. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *Folly of presuming on life*:—The late Mayor of Chicago uttered the following boast: "I believe that I will live to see the day when Chicago will be the biggest city in America. I don't count the past. I have taken a new lease of life, and I intend to live more than half a century; and at the end of that half-century London will be trembling lest Chicago should surpass her." Within eight hours the bullet of the assassin had in ten brief minutes finished the earthly career of the author of the words I have quoted. (*The Christian.*) *All must be quitted*:—A fatal malady seized on Cardinal Mazarin, whilst engaged in affairs of State. He consulted Guenaud, the physician, who told him he had two months to live. Some days after, the Cardinal was seen in his night-cap and dressing-gown creeping along his picture-gallery and exclaiming, "Must I quit all these?" He saw a friend and held him: "Look at that Correggio! this Venus of Titian! that incomparable Deluge of Caracci! Ah! my friend, I must quit all these. Farewell, dear pictures, that I love so dearly, and that cost me so much!"

**Ver. 18. Keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people.**—*What must Christians do, that the influences of the ordinances may abide upon them?*—The course to be taken for this purpose lies—I. **IN THE PRACTICE OF SOME THINGS.** 1. Get new hearts, and get them daily more and more renewed. A heart thoroughly sanctified is to the ordinances like tinder, which soon takes fire and is apt to keep it till it be forced out; whereas a carnal, unmortified heart is like green wood, which is not soon kindled and will soon go out, if it be not well looked to. Holiness makes the soul both receptive and retentive of holy impressions. 2. Labour to be much affected with the ordinances while you are employed in them. If the ordinances pierce no further than the surface of the soul, the efficacy of them is not likely to continue. Prepare your hearts before you draw near to God. The heart is prepared when it is made—(a) Tender (*Jer. iv. 3; Hos. x. 12*). That which can make no impression at all upon a flint will sink deeply into softened wax. (b) Sensible; apprehensive of your spiritual wants and necessities. (c) Open. A quick sense of your spiritual condition will open your hearts. Desire opens the heart (*Matt. v. 6; Psa. cvii. 9*). We come to the ordinances too like the Egyptian dog, which laps a little as he runs by the side of Nilus, but stays not to drink. Christ invites us to eat and drink abundantly (*Cant. v. 1*). 3. Mind the ordinances after you use them. Be much in meditation. Much of heaven and holiness is engraved on these ordinances; and the seal is, as it were, set upon the heart, while you are under them; but after-consideration lays more weight on it and impresseth it deeper. The heart takes fire at the mind (*Psa. xxxix. 3*). 4. Let the efficacy of the ordinances be pursued presently into act (*Psa. cxix. 60*). When the blossoms of a fruit-tree are once knit, though the flourish thereof be gone, and you see nothing but the bare rudiment of the expected fruit, yet you think it more secured from the injury of frosts and winds than if it were still in the flower. Good motions, when they are once reduced into act, are thereby, as it were, knit, and brought to more consistency. 5. You must take much pains with your hearts if you would have them retain the virtue and efficacy of the ordinances. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting" (*Prov. xii. 27*). He loseth all his former labour because he will not take a little more pains. 6. Comply with the Spirit of God. 7. Be frequent in the use of ordinances. Good impressions do most usually wear off in the intervals of holy duties. It is observed that places under the line are not so hot as some climates at a further distance from it; and this reason is given for it: Those under the equinoctial, though they have the sun more vertical, and the beams, falling more perpendicularly, cause a more intense heat; yet the nights being of equal length with the days, the coolness of those long nights doth more allay the heat than where the nights are shorter. Long intermissions of holy duties are like long nights: you may find them by experience to be great coolers. Elijah in the wilderness had to eat more than once to be strengthened for his journey (*1 Kings xix. 6-8*). 8. Look up to God for the continuance of this influence. II. **IN THE AVOIDANCE OF OTHER THINGS.** 1. Take heed that you perform not your duties negligently (*Jer. xlviii. 10; Mal. i. 8, 14; Jer. xxx. 21; Deut. xxxii. 46, 47*). 2. Beware of the world. Meddle not with it more than needs must. Carry yourself amongst worldly objects and employments as though you were amongst cheats and thieves: they have the art to pick your

hearts slyly. When your hearts are warmed with holy duties, you should be as cautious and wary how you venture into the world as you are of going into the frosty air when you are all in a sweat. What is kindled by the Word or prayer requires as much care to keep it in as to keep a candle in when you would carry it through the open air in a rainy, blustering night. The further you are above the world, the longer may you retain any spiritual impressions. Geographers write of some mountains whose tops are above the middle region of the air; and there lines and figures being drawn in the dust have been found, say they, in the same form and order, untouched, undefaced, a long time after; and the reason is because they are above those winds and showers and storms, which soon wear out and efface any such draughts in this lower region. The lower your minds and hearts and conversations are, the less will anything that is heavenly and spiritual abide upon them. 3. Take heed of any inordinacy in affection, inclination, or design. The ministry of John the Baptist had some influence on Herod (Mark vi. 20); but sensuality being predominant, those better inclinations were quite overpowered. 4. Rest not in the best performance of any duty, nor in any assistances you find therein, though they be special and more than ordinary. It is observed that some professors have had the foulest falls, after they have been most elevated in holy employments. We are apt to take the most dangerous colds when we are in the greatest heats. 5. Make not the ordinances your end, but use them as the means to attain it. Application: If the efficacy of the ordinances abide not in you, you cannot be fruitful under them; at least you cannot "bring forth fruit to perfection." (*David Clarkson, B.D.*)

Ver. 20. Now bless the Lord your God.—*National and individual thanksgiving* :—

I. THE ABUNDANT ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAISE GOD AFFORDED US IN THE SCRIPTURES. II. THE MOST APPROPRIATE THEMES OF THANKSGIVING. III. THE BEST MEANS OF SHOWING GOD'S PRAISE. (*Richard Jones, B.A.*) *The duty of praise* :—I. WHY WE SHOULD PRAISE GOD. 1. It is acceptable to God Himself. 2. It confers a blessing on him who renders it. 3. It is the joyous occupation of the saints before the throne. II. WHAT SHOULD BE THE SUBJECTS OF OUR PRAISE? His mercies. 1. Creation. 2. Preservation. 3. Redemption. 4. The means of grace. 5. The hope of glory. III. IN WHAT WAY GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO PRAISE AND BLESS HIM. 1. With our lips. 2. In the life and conversation. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*)

Ver. 23. And prospered.—*A prosperous kingdom* :—I. For a king and a people to be happy, the king must have a right to his kingdom. II. THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SCEPTRE SHOULD BE AS WISE AS THE TENURE IS JUST AND ROYAL. III. THE PEOPLE MUST BE OBEDIENT. IV. NATIONAL FEAR OF THE LORD IS ESSENTIAL TO NATIONAL BLESSING. (*Bishop Francis Turner.*)

Vers. 29, 30. Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer.—*A pastoral retrospect* :—We are reminded—I. OF THE SUPREME PROVIDENCE OF GOD ORDERING ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL. Time passes over us like a mighty current, but as Andrew Fuller observed, we are like little fishes playing in the stream; we are borne along with the current, but we cannot control its direction nor alter its course. This illustrates the language of Scripture (Acts xvi. 26). II. HOW INSIGNIFICANT, IN ONE POINT OF VIEW, AND HOW IMPORTANT IN ANOTHER, IS A LIFE OF ORDINARY DURATION. III. THAT THOUGH TIMES PASS OVER US WITHOUT BEING SUBJECT TO OUR CONTROL, THOUGH WE HAVE BUT LITTLE INFLUENCE UPON THEM, THEY HAVE A GREAT INFLUENCE UPON US. By the character of the times that pass over us our moral condition is greatly affected. IV. THAT IN PROPORTION TO THE IMPORTANCE AND THE STIRRING CHARACTER OF THE TIMES THAT HAVE PASSED OVER US MUST BE OUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. (*Thomas Toller.*) *Life's vicissitudes* :—I. They are NUMEROUS. 1. There are personal vicissitudes. (1) Corporeal. (2) Intellectual. (3) Moral. 2. There are common vicissitudes. The earth is a theatre of perpetual change. II. They are MEMORABLE. The vicissitudes of life deserve a record; they are things to be remembered by man. Why? 1. Because they serve to unfold the preparatory character of our state. 2. Because they develop the agency of God. 3. Because they show the importance of confiding in the Immutable. 4. Because they tend to direct us to the true scene of rest. The vicissitudes of our history are hands on the face of life's chronometer; they measure the hours in our short days that are gone, and intimate the few that may yet remain. (*Homilist.*) And the times that went over him.—*The waves of time* :—The principle which dictated the selection by the chronicler of

this somewhat strange phrase is true about the life of every man. I. Note "THE TIMES" which make up each life. By "the times" the writer does not merely mean the succession of moments. Each life is made up of a series, not merely of successive moments, but of well-marked epochs, each of which has its own character, its own responsibilities, its own opportunities, in each of which there is some special work to be done, some grace to be cultivated, some lesson to be learned, some sacrifice to be made; and if it is let slip it never comes back any more. The old alchemists used to believe that there was what they called the "moment of projection" when, into the heaving molten mass in their crucible, if they dropped the magic powder, the whole would turn into gold; an instant later and there would be explosion and death; an instant earlier and there would be no effect. And so God's moments come to us, every one of them—a crisis. II. THE POWER THAT MOVES THE TIMES. How dreary a thing it is if all that we have to say about life is, "The times pass over us," like the blind rush of the stream, or the movement of the sea around our coasts, eating away here, and depositing its spoils there, sometimes taking and sometimes giving, but all the work of mere aimless and purposeless chance or of natural causes. There is nothing more dismal or paralyzing than the contemplation of the flow of the times over our heads, unless we see in their flow something far more than that. The passage of our epochs over us is not merely the aimless flow of a stream but the movement of a current which God directs. "My times are in Thy hand." III. HOW ELOQUENTLY THE TEXT SUGGESTS THE TRANSIENCY OF ALL THE "TIMES." They "passed over him" as the wind through an archway, that whistles and cometh not again. How blessed it is to cherish that wholesome sense of the transiency of things here below! The times roll over us, like the seas that break upon some isolated rock, and when the tide has fallen and the vain flood has subsided the rock is there. If the world helps us to God, we need not mind though it passes and the fashion thereof. IV. THE TRANSITORY "TIMES THAT WENT OVER" ISRAEL'S KING ARE ALL RECORDED IMPERISHABLY ON THE PAGES HERE. The record, though condensed, lives for ever. It takes a thousand rose-trees to make a vial full of essence of roses. The record and issues of life will be condensed into small compass, but the essence of it is eternal. We shall find it again, and have to drink as we have brewed, when we get yonder. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The times of individuals and nations*:—The word "times" does not convey here the idea of duration merely; the word in the plural includes also the events and circumstances which marked that period of duration, and in all their variety of complexion gave to it its distinguishing character. The expression reminds us that seasons of eventful importance are often occurring to individuals and peoples, and of the manner in which these succeed each other in frequent alternations, both in personal and national life. I. IN INDIVIDUAL LIFE. Each one has his own times—his own part in the events which transpire as the great wheel of providence revolves. How varied a scene does life for the most part present. We are like travellers who pass now through smiling vales, and now are shut in by mountains, and look up on steep cliffs and overhanging crags. We are mariners around whom the winds are ever shifting, and often dying into calm—now they spread their sails to the breeze, now again not a breath is astir and they can scarcely feel that they advance—now yet again they have to make way against a head-wind, and to tack hither and thither to make way at all—so variable are the scenes of our journey or of our life's navigation. Look at David; at Paul. See the great Tasso, at one time frequenting a palace, and wooing, as was thought, princesses with his song, but ere long immured in a prison. Think of Napoleon at Erfurt when on his way to Russia, with attendant kings waiting in his ante-chamber, and of the same man a few years afterwards at St. Helena—his visions of glory all gone—thrown back wholly on the memories of the past, the caged conqueror of the nations! These are marked cases illustrative of "the times" of human life. All these things constitute an important moral exercise. This discipline of life is in wise and beneficent co-operation with the voice of conscience and the calls of the Bible. It varies the tones of the appeal by which men are summoned to duty and to God. II. THE NATIONAL LIFE. Here we find the same variety in the complexion of events, the same aspect of vicissitude, as in the case of individuals. Look, for example, at Israel, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Venice, and our own country. In nature the wild play of the winds, and the drifting of the snow, and the seething of the lightning is all but part of a system. We might think that these agencies were running riot, controlled by no law, and tending to no issue but confusion and chaos. But it is not so. And in the times that go over the earth year by year, as summer passes into autumn, and the

temperature declines, and the days are shortened, and the trees are stripped of their foliage, and the discoloured leaves are seen falling to the ground, and rotting there, till there comes the rigour and the frost of winter—all, nevertheless, is not going to desolation. The falling leaves nourish the soil on which they are left to decay. Wild winds and storms, shortened days and lengthened nights, are just the discipline the earth needs, and winter becomes thus the necessary prelude to and preparation for the opening buds of spring and the fertility of summer. So it is in nature, and so it often is in the providence of God over nations and the world. (*E. T. Prust.*) *Life's changing current* :—I. Times make a deep mark upon the body. II. Equally marked is their effect as they pass over us upon our INTELLECTUAL NATURE. III. Not less striking or important is the stamp of time upon the HISTORY OF OUR SENSIBILITIES. IV. The most important change is the one that refers to our MORAL AND SPIRITUAL STATE. V. OUR SOCIAL AND RELATIVE CONDITION IS SUBJECT TO THE CONSTANT VARIATIONS OF TIME. (*S. T. Spear.*) *Times* :—Amongst rational beings that life is longest, whether brief or protracted its outward turn, into which the largest amount of mind, of mental and moral activity, is condensed. It is possible for the longest life to be really briefer than the shortest, and the child or youth may die older, with more of life crowded into its brief existence, than he whose dull and stagnant being drags on to an inglorious old age. (*J. Caird.*)



**THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.**

**II. CHRONICLES.**





# THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

OR

Anecdotes, Similes, Emblems, Illustrations;  
Expository, Scientific, Geographical, His-  
torical, and Homiletic, Gathered from  
a Wide Range of Home and Foreign  
Literature, on the Verses of the Bible

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, A. M.

*SECOND CHRONICLES*



NEW YORK      CHICAGO      TORONTO  
Fleming H. Revell Company  
Publishers of Evangelical Literature



## II. CHRONICLES.

### CHAPTER I.

**Vers. 1-12. And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom.—***The splendid beginning.*—I. SOLOMON'S SUCCESSION TO THE THRONE WAS PROVIDENTIALLY SECURED: "The Lord his God was with him." II. SOLOMON'S CLAIMS TO THE THRONE WERE SANCTIONED BY A REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY. III. SOLOMON'S ACCESSION TO THE THRONE WAS SIGNALISED BY SOLEMN ACTS OF WORSHIP. 1. In obedience to Divine law. 2. In appropriate magnificence. IV. SOLOMON'S ACCESSION TO THE THRONE WAS IN A SPIRIT OF DEVOUT SUPPLICATION. When Victoria learned that she was about to become Queen of England, her first words to the Archbishop of Canterbury were, "I beg your grace to pray for me." Together they knelt, and the new reign began with prayer. V. SOLOMON'S ACCESSION TO THE THRONE WAS UNEQUALLED IN SPLENDOUR (ver. 12). 1. Outward splendour: "Riches and wealth and honour." 2. Moral splendour: "Wisdom and knowledge." (*James Wolfendale.*)

**Vers. 7, 12. In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.—Solomon's choice:**—I. THE ADDRESS WHICH GOD MADE TO SOLOMON, "Ask," &c., He does in effect make to each of us, especially the young. II. THOUGH WE NEED NOT THE QUALIFICATION WHICH SOLOMON REQUIRED FOR HIS KINGLY OFFICE, YET WE ALL NEED SPIRITUAL WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, AND MAY THEREFORE IMITATE HIS EXAMPLE. III. GOD IS PLEASED WITH THOSE WHO MAKE THE CHOICE AND OFFER UP THE PRAYER OF SOLOMON. Because—1. It is the effect of His grace. 2. It indicates feelings and opinions similar to His own. 3. It indicates humility. 4. It shows a benevolent concern for His glory and for the happiness of their fellow-creatures. 5. It actually tends to promote His glory. IV. ALL WHO MAKE THIS CHOICE AND ADOPT THIS PRAYER SHALL CERTAINLY BE FAVOURED WITH A WISE AND UNDERSTANDING HEART. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *How to get the best blessing:*—For the acquiring the highest wealth, "asking"—1. Is the simplest method. 2. The Divinely appointed method (Matt. vii. 7; Mark xiv. 38). 3. The only method. Purchase is impossible. 4. The certain method. 5. The abundantly enforced method. Enforced by the whole Bible. 6. Has ever been the abundantly successful method. (*R. A. Griffin.*) *Solomon's opportunity:*—We speak chidingly and upbraidingly of men who have had what we call their chance and have not availed themselves of it. Should a man come to poverty, we review his life and say, "He had no opportunity of doing better; he has made the best of his circumstances, he deserves sympathy; let us extend our help to him." Or we say, "He has had his chance; he might have been as high as most of us; we remember the time when his life was crowned with a gracious opportunity; he was slothful, incapable; he was busy here and there, and the king passed by; and now we do not feel any kindling of real regard and interest in relation to him." God gives every man his opportunity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The prayer for wisdom:*—The pious prayer of the youthful Solomon at the beginning of his kingly life! There is in this narrative a blending of the natural and supernatural which surpasses all power of fabrication; in itself the high degree of fitness which marks the Divine manifestation here recorded, combined with its striking simplicity, reveals to us the personal intervention of Him "who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth." That the highly-lauded wisdom of Solomon had not originally the religious character which is ascribed to it in the text is

indeed easily asserted, but is far from proved, and is moreover at variance with a multitude of facts. It may even with reason be doubted whether a wisdom and knowledge such as this King of Israel must have possessed in his day can be explained upon purely natural grounds; assuredly it is somewhat simpler to find, with the sacred writer, in Solomon's own experience the ground of his utterance, "The Lord giveth wisdom, out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

I. "Come and see" A YOUTH WHO AT A CRITICAL MOMENT IS FOUND IN PRAYER. It is true every moment of this fleeting life has its own significance; but yet there are single hours which more than other cast a heavy weight into the trembling scale. What a difference between that which Solomon has hitherto been and that which he is henceforth to be; and how much depends, even for himself, upon the spirit in which the first step on the new path is taken! Until now child, boy, youth; nursed indeed in the bosom of luxury, but with a David as father, a Nathan as guide; beloved and happy among his brethren, but yet to a great extent on an equality with them. Now suddenly king, and—free; free from every bond. In a simple trait a whole difference of character and principle is sometimes made manifest. Thus it is in the conduct of Solomon at this hour, as compared with that of his brother Adonijah but a few short months ago. While the latter, even during David's lifetime, grasps at the throne, he prepares only a banquet: as though he would at once be able as from the table to ascend the princely throne. When Solomon, on the other hand, after David's death assumes the reins, there is prepared almost as the first act a religious festival of homage and coronation. With what hallowed emotion this day fills his heart will be felt by every one who perceives yet in his prayer by night the after-vibrating of the finest chords of his heart which had been touched by day! Not so attractive for him is the cedar palace in Jerusalem as this simple hill without, where the name of the God of his father is called upon. It is too little for him that his exaltation bears the stamp of human approval; he must consult the Lord in the palace of His holiness, and place himself with all his future under the gracious hand of the Holy One of Israel. Heart-gladdening sight—a king who feels himself God's subject; a youth who feels that his path cannot be pure unless he directs it according to Jehovah's Word! Is it not the case that sincere piety, however often derided and disowned, is yet something glorious and fair; the ornament of every condition, and most of all of the highest; but especially amiable and august in the young man who with whole and joyful heart has chosen the service of God? It is true, when an aged sinner bows his head in penitence before God, Satan loses his prey; but when in a youthful heart a voice is awakened which cries for the living God, then angels give thanks to God around the throne for their new-born brother on earth. Oh, they know not what they say who assert that early piety has about it something unnatural and narrow-minded. How many a youth is at this hour brought to the decisive turning-point in his life, but who begins his course altogether differently, and who therefore very soon makes a progress entirely unlike that of Solomon! How many a bark, lightly laden and fairly equipped, leaves the secure haven and dances over the rippling waves, and seems for awhile to distance others, but anon with the turn of fortune falls quickly behind, and entirely loses her course, until, become a plaything of the storm, she is dashed on yonder rocks and disappears in the gloomy abyss! What wonder, the inexperienced steersman had thought of everything except the indispensable compass; had taken counsel with every one except that One who says, "Mine is the counsel and the strength"; had counted beforehand on the haven, but not upon the storm and Him who alone can quell the storm. There is now a fable going its round in the world: unbelief has invented it, and scepticism now whispers it from the mouth of one schoolboy into the ears of others. It is this—that for the whole doctrine of childlike prayer there is no longer any place within the compass of the modern view of the world. Thus sounds the gospel of despair, hailed by many a child of this age as the highest wisdom—a gospel before which the angel of prayer within flees from the unhallowed sanctuary; while in his place the genius of passive subjection, with rigid gaze, takes his seat by the grave of departed hope. Poor man, poor youth especially, who have all that is needful for outward life, but have lost prayer! "In all thy ways acknowledge Him."

II. Come and see, in the second place, A KING'S SON WHO PRAYS EXCLUSIVELY FOR WISDOM. Assuredly, before the presence of the Infinite One the prince is no more than the beggar; but is not the former exposed to far greater temptations? "Ask what I shall give thee." What a word, and how great the concession contained in that word! All the treasure-chambers of God's infinite favour opened up before the

grasp of a single hand! "Ask of Me," says the Possessor of all things, "and choose thyself the blessing which thou desirest above all others. Shall the cedars of Lebanon fall that in thy capital there may arise an edifice of unrivalled splendour? Shall the laurel adorn thy brow, intertwined with the roses of love? Shall thy name be borne upon a thousand tongues, even to the Tigris and Euphrates? and a patriarchal age crown all these blessings?" Who does not involuntarily tremble at the sight of the hand in which such a decision is placed? "Give Thy servant an understanding heart" (1 Kings iii. 9); and the meaning of his prayer may be easily conjectured, especially when we remember the sense in which Solomon in the Book of Proverbs constantly makes mention of wisdom. He means by it no mere learning, which may be attained to in another way; and just as little that acuteness, versatility, polish, which frequently is almost entirely disconnected with the first principles of moral life. He desires on the other hand, that practical wisdom which qualifies in every case for the recognising, choosing, and accomplishing of the right, the true, and the good. If he has only wisdom, what does he need besides? Happy Solomon, who hast understood thy deepest need; but who at the same time knowest where satisfaction for this need is to be sought.

III. Come and see here a HUMBLE ONE, WHO PRAYS NOT IN VAIN. A humble one: upon that word I lay stress, because it is the key to the whole. How strikingly this humility expresses itself, especially in the words of the prayer as preserved in another place. First, thanksgiving for what is already bestowed or promised; and then, further, "And now, O Lord, my God"—the "my" of a humble faith—"Thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child, I know not how to go out or come in," as my position requires. Solomon, at least, has certainly experienced the truth of his own words, "With the lowly is wisdom," but also at the same time learnt that God will give grace to the humble. Immediately he receives the answer, "Because this was in thine heart . . . the wisdom and the knowledge is granted unto thee." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But"—the condition is equally simple as it is reasonable—"let him ask in faith, nothing doubting." How prayer is heard no one may be able fully to explain; but that it is heard is for the thoughtful faith raised above all doubt. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with Mine eye." Not that you are to look for inner light apart from God's written Word, and still less that this heavenly instruction is to release from the necessity for your own labour and exertion. In the realm of true wisdom no one is crowned who has not in childlike spirit bowed before God.

IV. Come and see here a FAVOURED ONE, WHO RECEIVES MUCH MORE THAN HE ASKS FOR. We have as yet listened to only half of the heavenly response: thus it continues, "Therefore will I give thee riches, and wealth, and honour," &c. No, He who gives that which is of the first necessity also refuses not that which is less so. Solomon had not even thought of temporal gifts; but his God forgets nothing of all that which may augment the lustre of His throne. "And Solomon awoke, and behold it was a dream." But what a dream; and what an awakening! The morning hour of a new life has dawned upon him, and while this master-dreamer descends at once from Gibeon's crest, it is only very soon to rise to a more glorious height before the eye of his own and neighbouring nations. That which the king has received rounds, spiritually and materially, to the good of the nation, which shares in the benefit. God in answer to prayer usually gives the indispensable first; but straightway also adds thereto the useful, the agreeable, the comparatively superfluous. The Lord gives grace, and in that one thing all things lie hid; yet He adds to grace also honour, and withholds no good thing from them that walk in uprightness. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. . . . She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that holdeth her fast." V. AN UNHAPPY ONE WHO BY HIS OWN FAULT HAS FORFEITED THE BLESSING OF HIS PRAYER. (*J. Van Oosterzee, D.D.*) *What shall I ask!*—It is an excellent discipline for such as would pray aright to begin by hearing God say to them, "Ask now what I should give you." Think with yourself before you kneel down to pray, "What shall I ask; what wish is upon my heart; is there anything distressing, vexing, paining me at this moment which I can ask God to alleviate or to remove; is there anything which I very much desire, anything which I think it would make me happy to have, anything which to be denied would embitter or desolate my life?" "Ask what I shall give thee," God says, and let Him not find silence, or find a double tongue in him to whom He says it. All this points to what Scripture

calls "the preparation of the heart" for prayer. How different would be the very step of the worshippers as they left their homes, how different would be the very look of the countenances as they came within these doors and took up their places, if each one felt that God was here, and that He was saying to each one, "What shall I give thee?" There is a moment in most lives when the question of the destination of the life is put to them, and must be answered. Even the destination of this life is very important. Often it has the destination of the other life in it. To a young man, the question takes the form of "What shall be your profession?" In proportion as the field of choice is wider and broader will be, of course, the difficulty and the gravity of the question, "What shall I make my life for the service of God and of my generation?" This is the most direct example to be found in our day, perhaps, of the young king in one of my texts. And what shall be the answer? Shall it be, "Give me wealth"? shall it be, "Give me honour"? shall it be, "Give me a front place in the ranks of fame, or of such repute and respectability as takes the place of fame among the lowly; give me success, give me applause, give me rapid progress towards a satisfactory position; or, give me a portion among them that know, that amass information, that write or make books, that are called men of literature, men of science, men of culture, men of education"? or, shall it be, "Lord, make me useful in my generation; let it not concern me whether I am great or small, may I but help a few others to know Thy comfort, may I but bring peace into a few unhappy souls or guide a few stray lives into the way of holiness"? If there were such a heart in us, how rich would be the reward! "The speech pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing." There are times when the question, "What shall I do, Lord?" comes very prominently into view. It is so with the young Churchman at the season of confirmation; it is so at the first and at each successive communion; it is so when the hand of God is laid heavily upon the life in sorrow; it is so when sickness comes, not unto death; it is so when the formation of new ties, or providential disruption of old ones, compels a man to stand still and settle with himself—what shall the tenor of my life be, what the course, and what the goal? Happy if he can cast himself believingly on Him who is "a very present help," and say, "Give me understanding, give me grace, give me a useful course and a blessed end." (*Dean Vaughan.*)

*Solomon's choice*.—Nowadays it is impossible to say that God never does speak to men in dreams, but it is not often that He does so. For one good reason—the Bible is now complete, and there His will may be learned, and there it is made known. Yet there are some dreams that certainly are remarkable. I. First let us talk a little about THE PERMISSION: "Ask what I shall give thee!" Suppose I were to put this question to each one here present, what a lot of singular requests would be heard. One old woman was once heard praying thus: "O Lord, give me plenty to eat and plenty to drink, and that's all I want." God wished Solomon to ask himself, "What do I really need most of all?" Of old the shopkeepers used to cry aloud, "What—do ye lack?" This is a good rule in prayer, to say, "What do I actually want at this very moment?" If you find out in what you are most deficient, you will learn your true character. Look around, and say now, "What do I really need? What ought a boy or girl just beginning life to possess? What—do I lack?" Perhaps you do not know how much you need some things, nor will you without inquiring. Tradesmen fill their shop-windows with toys, pictures, books, and dresses, so that people may feel inclined to want them, and come in and purchase. The Bible is full of descriptions of things that every one should require. Look at what it says, and you will find out what you want most, and first of all. II. God asked this question of Solomon for another reason; He desired to show us the TRUE WAY TO OBTAIN WHAT WE REQUIRE; THAT IS, BY PRAYER OR ASKING. Solomon had received great gifts from his father David without asking for them. God, too, had given him many most valuable blessings, many of them without asking. "Now," says God, "ask and you shall have." You cannot purchase some things with money; no rich man has sufficient wealth to buy health or happiness. And you cannot buy the blessings of the gospel; you must receive them as a gift from the Lord Jesus. (*N. Wiseman.*)

*The prayer of King Solomon for wisdom to govern his people*.—Whatever in later life may have been Solomon's deviations from duty and from the fear of the Lord, the early years of his reign evidence a mind keenly alive to all the necessities and responsibilities of his station, and a heart sincere in love and loyalty towards God. This prayer of Solomon displays the spirit proper for every young man—and especially for every Christian young man—in entering upon the responsibilities of life. There are

three prominent characteristics of the temper of his mind that are pre-eminently worthy of regard. I. HIS PREFERENCE OF THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE OVER WHOM HE RULED ABOVE ANY GRATIFICATION OR INTEREST OF HIS OWN. From the manner in which the Lord offered the king any gift that his heart might desire, it is evident that Solomon was at perfect liberty, if such had been his choice, to request the fulfilment of some purely personal or private end. If such an offer had been made to any of the mighty kings whose names are blazoned in history, what would his choice have been? What prayer would have expressed the heart's desire of Alexander, of Hannibal, of Cæsar, or of Napoleon? Alexander would have asked for another world to conquer; Hannibal would have sought satiety of vengeance in the extermination of the Italian foes; Cæsar would have demanded admittance among the gods and the perpetual worship of the citizens of Rome; Napoleon that his family should ever rule the destinies of France, and that France of all nations should ever be foremost and supreme. But the spirit of which the Lord approved in Solomon was free from all taint of ambitious or selfish or merciless desire. Would that all to whom the interests of others are committed were ever animated by the spirit of Solomon. II. THE HEARTY CONFORMITY TO THE DIVINE WILL OF HIS WISES IN REGARD TO HIS POSITION. When God promised any of the kings of Israel or of Judah the establishment of his throne and aid against his enemies, it was always provided that that king should diligently observe the statutes and commandments and ordinances of the Lord. When He rejected Saul from being king over His people, it was not because he had proved himself unfaithful to the nation's welfare, but because he had rejected the word of the Lord, and had not kept the commandments which the Lord had commanded him. And when David was raised to the throne of Israel, it was because of this testimony, given him of God: "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will." Hence in the lips of Solomon this prayer for wisdom had a most peculiar and comprehensive significance. Its spirit was not ambition to be the wisest monarch of his day, nor servile anxiety to secure the favour of a powerful friend; it was the desire to do the will of his gracious Father in heaven. This same spirit of loving and hearty conformity to the Divine will has controlled the prayers and the lives of God's true people in all generations—Abram; Moses; Joseph; Paul; the Redeemer Himself. Oh, what comfort in affliction, what support in trial, what delight in duty, spring from the thought, "It is the will of God"! III. HIS RECOGNITION OF HIMSELF AS WEAK AND LIABLE TO ERR, AND OF GOD AS THE GREAT SOURCE OF WISDOM AND STRENGTH FOR THE DISCHARGE OF DUTY. In the humility and diffidence of Solomon, we have an example of what seems to be commonly the case, that men of worth and of ability are the most deeply conscious of their deficiencies and faults. Utterly different from such a spirit was Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon on assuming the sceptre. Solomon evidenced his sense of weakness—not by shrinking from his duties, but by seeking God's help for the performance of them. Elisha, trembling to think how soon he should be called upon to wear the mantle of the greatest of the prophets, besought a double portion of his master's spirit. In a similar frame did Solomon pray for an understanding heart to judge the people of the Lord. (*E. I. Hamilton, D.D.*) *Wisdom*:—Wisdom consists chiefly in three things. 1. Knowledge to discern. 2. Skill to judge. 3. Activity to prosecute. (*T. Watson.*) *Solomon's wisdom*:—He showed his wisdom by asking for wisdom. (*Dean Stanley.*) *Divine wisdom needed*:—Every man needs Divine wisdom in order that he may do well his earthly work. You would light a lamp better if you first asked God to show you how to light it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The responsibility of a sovereign*:—"Now you are Queen of the mightiest land in Europe, in your hand lies the happiness of millions," said young Prince Albert to Victoria in his letter of congratulation. He was going to Italy, in the freedom of a life less burdened, less full of splendid care than hers, yet not without a thought that his very wanderings were some time to be of service to her. "May Heaven assist you," he adds, "and strengthen with its strength in that high and difficult task." *Solomon's desire for wisdom and the use he made of it*:—1. The practical wisdom by which we conduct the affairs of every-day life comes from God. Let us seek it, then, from its true source. If we seek to be wise without God, even our worldly wisdom will turn to folly. 2. We make a grand mistake in separating religious and every-day affairs. I do not mean merely to press the somewhat trite lesson that the morality which religion teaches must be practised in daily life. There are many who act up to this, yet still do not bring their religion enough into their daily work. Their trade or their business occupies them during the week. It

is put away at stated intervals, to make room for higher thoughts; and these higher thoughts again are laid aside when they return to business. They cannot understand doing all things to the glory of God. The effect of this is twofold. First, it makes religion very weak and puny; instead of doing all things to the glory of God, we do a few things only to His glory. Secondly, it will mar our work; for nothing is really well done unless it is done in a religious spirit. But if Solomon exercised his God-given wisdom on such matters as bringing up linen yarn from Egypt, why cannot we, too, understand that in our commerce, and other ordinary business, we are using God's gifts, and doing work which may and should be so done as to be to His glory? (*A. K. Cherrill, M.A.*)

*The best motives to action unselfish.*—In private life, and in all life, the best motives to action are those which lie outside of self and its supposed interests. To build the ship staunch and safe and the house firm and healthful for the sake of human lives that will be entrusted to them, to administer justice because of its equity, to heal disease and teach sanitary laws for the sake of suffering humanity, to cherish in every employment some glimpse of, and interest in, the good that it is to produce in the world, introduces a finer element into the labour and actually brings forth a better quality of work than can be deduced by the mere hope of personal benefit to the worker. (*Great Thoughts.*)

*The folly of relying on our own wisdom in the conduct of life.*—A few years ago a most painful sensation was created in the public mind by the intelligence of a distressing and fatal accident which had happened to a distinguished Archdeacon of the Established Church. This gentleman, eminent alike for his character and his writings, was spending a short time on the continent, and, having with some friends ascended a mountain, expressed a strong wish to return alone by a new route. His companions remonstrated, pointed out the danger of attempting to follow an unknown path, and urged that at least their friend would accept the services of a guide. Unhappily he would not be persuaded, and presently commenced his perilous descent. The rest of the party reluctantly pursued their course, and waited his arrival at the inn. As time passed on, and the Archdeacon did not appear, their fears were re-awakened, and search was ordered to be made. Soon they were horrified, yet not surprised, to hear that the lifeless body of their friend had been found beneath a precipice over which he had fallen in his attempt to reach the inn. How striking an illustration does this sad incident afford of the fatal obstinacy of those who persist in relying on their own wisdom and strength of purpose in the journey of life! What can await them but destruction if they refuse to accept guidance? Yet a guide is not enough at all times. Only recently a party of travellers on Mont Blanc, accompanied by skilful guides, were overtaken by an avalanche; and not only two of their number but one of the guides also perished in a moment. We need an unerring guide; and where shall it be found but in Him who is infinite Wisdom as well as infinite Love? (*Experience.*)

*The fruits of prayer.*—"Do you really think that God will hear your prayers?" said a sceptic to a poor Christian woman. "Yes," she replied, "you might as well tell me that that ship, just arrived from a foreign port, was never there at all because I was not there to see. You believe it was there because of the things it has brought, and so I do not think God hears my prayers, I know He both hears and answers them, for I have fruits of them in my possession." (*J. Nicoll.*)

*Importance of knowledge.*—The following words are from a letter written by Miss Willard's mother to her children when they were quite small: "The dearest wish of my heart, except that my children shall be Christians, is that they shall be well-educated. A good education will open the world to you as a knife opens an oyster. Riches will not do this, because riches have no power to brighten the intellect. An ox and a philosopher look out on the same world, and perhaps the ox has the stronger and handsomer eyes of the two, but the difference between the brains behind the eyes makes a difference between the two beings that is wider than all the seas. I want my children's brains to be full of the best thoughts that great minds have had in all centuries; I want stored away in your little heads the story of what the world was doing before you came—who were its poets, its painters and philosophers, its inventors and law-givers. I want you to know what is in its noblest books, and what its men of science say about their study of the earth, the ocean, and the stars. I want you taught to be careful, and exact by your knowledge of figures; and, most of all, I want you to learn how to speak and write your own noble English tongue, for without the power of expression you are like an æolian harp when there is no breeze." *God's overflowing gifts.*—When the ice breaks up in Russia, the Czar goes in state to drink of the river



Neva, and having drunk, it was long the custom for the Czar to return the cup to his attendants full of gold; but year by year it became so much larger that at length a stipulated sum was paid instead of the old penalty. But, however large the vessel we bring to God, and however much it increases in capacity with the discipline of years, God will make it to overflow with that peace and faith and love and joy which is better than much fine gold. (*Sunday Companion.*)

Vers. 13, 14.—And Solomon gathered chariots.—*Solomon's wealth*:—I. WEALTH DERIVED FROM TRADING SPECULATIONS. II. WEALTH ACQUIRED IN OPPOSITION TO GOD'S COMMANDS (Deut. xvii. 16, 17). He must trust in the Lord God, not in chariots and horses (Psa. xx. 7). III. WEALTH THEREFORE RISKY IN ITS POSSESSION. Prosperity of Solomon his great misfortune. The smallest departure from rectitude may lead to grievous errors and fearful miseries. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Ver. 16. The king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price.—*The king's merchants*:—I. THE ADVANTAGES OF COMMERCE. In softening manners and breaking down prejudices, in helping industry, promoting peace, and stimulating into Nature's resources. II. THE BLESSINGS OF THE NATION WHOSE SOVEREIGN TAKES AN INTEREST IN COMMERCE. (*Ibid.*)

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## CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1-16. And Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the Lord.—*Solomon's predestined work*:—Solomon was born to do this work. There is no need for the rose to say, "Now I am going to be beautiful and fragrant." There is no need for the nightingale to say, "Now I have fully made up my mind to be musical and tuneful, and to fill the air with richest expressions and melody." The flower was born to bloom, and to throw all its fragrance away in generous donation; the nightingale was made in every bone and feather of it for the sacred singing throat to sing to astonish the world with music. Solomon came into this work naturally, as it were by birth and education. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 5, 6. And this house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods.—*The house of God*:—1. The worship of God, the creator and governor of the world, commenced with the creation of man; but in the patriarchal ages it partook not of that formal and settled character which it afterwards, by God's direction, assumed. Nor, as far as we can learn from ancient history, does it appear that there were ever any regular buildings erected as temples before the Jewish tabernacle was set up. Noah, and the other patriarchs, appear simply to have erected altars for their sacrifices, and these often only for immediate and temporary use; or to have planted groves, as Abraham did in Beersheba, "and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." But when God had chosen a people to be called by His name, and had given them His law, and taught them to offer Him regular stated services, He further commanded that there should be a particular building set apart for the same. Now, the objects of all such buildings are twofold. They are to be built to the honour of Him who is to be worshipped therein, and they are to be used by those who are to meet there for the purpose of joining in that worship. 2. And this feeling which led Solomon to build "a great house because God was great above all gods" has had its proper influence in all ages and countries, and is based upon true and proper principles of religion, as well under the dispensation of the gospel as under that of law. History, no doubt, tells us that in the days of persecution the faithful were wont to meet for Divine worship amidst the tombs and burial-places of the dead, or in the secret caves of the earth. But, when persecutions cease, and days of prosperity come round, when, as David says, they themselves begin to "dwell in houses of cedar," then surely it is "no longer meet that the ark of the covenant of the Lord should remain under curtains." When mansions of costly price, and embellished

within and without with all the skill of experienced artists, grow up on every side—when the halls of justice, the palatial buildings of the money-changers, the market-places, and public works which denote and advance the worldly greatness and prosperity of our citizens, are multiplying around us, then too, surely, it is meet that the house which we build for the service of God should be great and, as nearly as we can make it, the chief glory of all; reminding us, by its beauty and magnificence, of the greatness of our God, who is above all gods. 3. It has been too much the custom, in the age in which we live, to endeavour in every way to serve God at as cheap a rate as possible, at the same time that men serve themselves willingly at the costliest sacrifice. While in your private lives luxury has been increasing, any expenditure in connection with the building of a church or the service of God is too often denounced, very much in the spirit of Judas, as a waste of that which might have been turned to better account in some other way. Now, for myself, I wish loudly to protest against such a system. 4. What use are we going to make of the house of God, now that we have built it? "If there is one thing more than another for which we have a perfect loathing," says an able lay member of the Church, "it is that most disgusting of all unrealities which attempts to make things external and earthly the substitute for what is internal and heavenly—which considers fine churches and complex services a sufficient compensation for general laxity of morals—the formalism of lip-worship an atonement for deadness of hearts and unrestrained luxurious living." All the outward acts of a religious life may be performed, where there is an established character, and yet every one of them be an offence to God. They hear sermons, join in a litany, join in Divine worship, come to the communion once a month—all like a decent garment: things outside, nothing within. God forbid that such should be our case: that we should allow any self-complacency on account of this house which God has permitted us to build for Him, or any admiration of the services to be offered therein, to blind us to the depths of our sad spiritual necessities, or make us indifferent about these necessities being supplied. And when we draw nigh to offer our own sacrifices, let us ever bear fresh in our stricken hearts the recollection of that One Great Sacrifice once offered up as a peace-offering for us all, and which alone gives any of us sinners the right of access to the throne of grace. (*Bp. Fulford.*)

*A great house:*—"The house is great, for great is our God"—that is the reason. That is the key of all Christian life. Our conception of God controls everything. A little God means a little life, a little morality, a little service, a little petty, miserable effort altogether; but a great conception of God is a great life—great loving, great service for others. I do not fear about God in the Church. God is great. We have dismissed Him from our thought. We are agnostics without the courage of our convictions. We say "God"; but do we mean it in all its light and music and beauty and moral necessity? Is not the Word of God a mere convenience in speech? We must put it in. Is it the ruling thought, the dominating idea, the sovereign force? Christ never ignored God. Christ lifted up the Father, the God, the Sovereign. When you get a real conception of God you will preach well. There will be no fear of man before you. Do not sit back and say, "We cannot know Him." That is intellectually true; it is sympathetically false—we cannot know God intellectually. No man's eyes can accommodate the whole sky, but we know God lovingly, pityingly, healingly, forgivingly; we know Him intuitively. The sun rules all things. Haste thou, take heed of that, O man! It is the sun that tells them what coat to put on; the sun tells them what to eat; the sun cures and smites, and rebukes thy poor botanics and minor sciences, showing them that the Kew Gardens of one nation are the weeds of another. The sun tells you when to go out and when to hasten home again. And as that teaches you, so the great Teacher of the mind, the Spirit of God, will teach them, control them, guide them! We "live and move and have our being" in God. The house is great, for great is our conception of God. God is greater than our conception—we struggle towards Him, and our struggle is victory. A great God means a great morality. Shall I tell you of the knaves that are trying to carve morality for the people? They have schedules and stipulations and social arrangements and indications and manifold endeavour and effort after something that is to be millennial and glorious. If that is morality, we can make it, shape it, manufacture it, sell it, appreciate it, prize it, barter it, nail it to the wall like a wooden idol. Talk they of morals? Oh, Thou bleeding Lamb, true morality is love of Thee! If that were morality which I have just described in my own words, it would be worthy of its own little etymology—an attitude, a manner, a posture, a trick.

Away! It is a soul, an inspiration, a flame, an incarnate holiness. "Mr. So-and-so is a good man, though he is not a Christian." No! he is not a good man. "My neighbour is an excellent man, though he does not believe anything about God." No! he is not an excellent man. There thou art in the little etymological morality, the manner, the attitude, the posture. All thou seest is silver, but the base metal is inside. To be silver-covered is not to be silver. He only is good who is the temple of God by consent, by honour, by daily worship, by continued trust in His name and service in His kingdom. A great God means a great service—not a little service written out on the paper as to what shall come first, and next, and last, but an enthusiasm that dares the sea, the wilderness, and the place of danger, the cannibal, the savage, the devil. "Why, missionary, dost thou so go forth? Remain at home." "I cannot." "Why not?" "God is great; my service for Him must be great also." Your house exists for one thing—you must find out what that one thing is. You shut the window for some one, you keep up the house for some one. It is always an impulse. We must find the motive and governing thought. Only let that be worthy, and all the rest will come. "Oh, my Father, the message preached was poor and feeble, but Thy broken-down old servant could not do better." He says, "That was the best discourse thou didst ever deliver; it shall be made mightier than the others on which thou hast lavished thy poor vanity. It was the best thou couldst do, and weakness may be strength, poverty may be wealth." Oh, to do the best you can! that is to do a great thing in the esteem of God. And that mumbling, stumbling prayer of thine at the family altar—only God knows what that prayer cost. Can you tell me the meaning of the word "great"? I will ask my young friends to tell me what great means, and to illustrate it in some general way. I hear the answer already—the mountains are great, the sky is great, the sun is great! There is the great mountain, and here at its base is a little child picking spring's first daisy. Which is great? The child! And a man standing on the great mountain says, "That is greatness. What am I, a poor little creature compared with that great rock?" Why, that great rock is insignificant, and thou art majestic. Thou canst tunnel it, bore it, climb it—that is greatness, not magnitude. Get the right definition of greatness, and all your troubles will subside and all your love will fall into its right prospective, and you shall say the Lord reigneth. Now I will tell you where greatness is to be found. It is to be found in compassion. You said great mountain; I say great pity—"And his father saw him whilst he was yet a great way off, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." All the consolidated planets never totalled up to that greatness. And thou canst be great in that way. I will tell you what is great—great patience, patience that sits up all night and says, "He will be here in the morning; he has been mistaken as to distance, but he will be here in the morning"—a patience that looks at the midnight clock as if by chance, as if it did not mean to look, but simply got its tearful eye on that significant dial. Patience says, "The child will do well by and by. He is poor at his learning now, but he is going to be a good scholar in a year or two." Ay, that is greatness; not the rocky mountains of the Alpine heights—not these, but heights of patience, depths of love, rivers of tears. "The house is great, for great is our God." This house will be famous for the deliverance of great messages. This house has no small message to deliver. The messages delivered here will deal with great subjects, with God, and blood, and sin, and pardon, and holiness, and destiny—themes that cannot be discussed anywhere else. They would be out of place in the Lyceum, in the political hall, in the House of Parliament. I speak of this house not in its locality, but in its typical relations. This house must be unique in its messages. Men must hasten to God's house to hear God's Word which they can hear nowhere else in the same sense, degree, and quality. My brother ministers, you are not hardly driven for subjects; the Cross still stands. You need not look up a paper to see what is the question of the day. The question of the day is, "How can a man be forgiven, how can a broken heart be healed, how can the lost be brought home?"—that is the question of the day. This house will be great in its welcomes. There will be as it were a genius, a spirit at all the doors, saying, "Come and welcome; O every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Great welcomes will make the house warm—people love welcomes. Speak God's welcomes to human hearts, and men will bless thee and mothers say there never was such a man. And this house will be known as great for its great remedies—the house of God treats nothing superficially. There be those in the world who cry "Peace, peace!" where there is no peace. There be those who say,

"There, that will do," when they have not touched the heart-sore, the devil-spot. The remedy declared here will be the old, old remedy of blood. And this house, though great, is not final. Nature hates all buildings. Nature hates everything that does not grow. We know Mother Nature is very gentle to a nettle, and gives a nettle room and says, "Let this nettle grow"; but Nature has already begun to take off your roof. Long before you have paid half of your £9,000 you will have a bill sent in for repairs. Nature will not let the place alone—she will take it down. Build thou in God, build thou the temple-life. Every man is the living temple of God that cannot be taken down—that is a house not made with hands. (*J. Parker, D.D.) Sermons in stones*.—So far as we are able to discover from archæological research and the details in Scripture, it seems beyond controversy that the temple of Solomon was the most splendid and magnificent building the world has ever seen. There have been larger buildings, but no building represented in itself so much splendour. The gold and silver and precious stones, besides the marble and timber and workmanship, amounted to about £100,000,000 sterling, equal to the annual revenue of this kingdom. And so far as we know, with all this luxurious outlay, there was no one in the congregation of Jerusalem who raised the Judas cry: "To what purpose is this waste?" Solomon said, "The house which I build is great," and he gave as a reason, "because great is our God above all gods." What did this temple mean to Solomon? I. The temple was great to Solomon BECAUSE IT STOOD FOR THE VISIBLE SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG THE PEOPLE. God had forbidden the children of Israel to make any image representing Himself. Yet there is an underlying spirit of worship that is inherent in all of us, a longing for some objective thing upon which we can cast our eye. Out of that desire, which seems to be a very part of our nature, and not a result of superstition, has grown, by the misdirection of it, all idolatry. God manifested Himself early in the garden of Eden with a flame of fire. When He spake with Moses He appeared in a burning bush. It was an objective sign of His presence. Consider how natural it is to build such signs as these in the land. We have on the Embankment a great Parliament House, a magnificent building, one of the finest in the world. That Parliament House is the visible sign of the sovereignty of the people. In the same way Buckingham Palace stands as the visible sign of royalty. The Courts of Justice in the Strand are a visible sign of the rights of man and the defence of man in his rights. So we might go all through the land and note that the great manor houses and castles are the embodiment of that subtle thing which we call nobility. Everything in this world has its concrete sign. We look upon the things that are seen, not as being the actual thing, but as the sign of the thing. II. When Solomon said, "The house I build is great," THE INADEQUACY OF HIS ABILITY TO EXPRESS HIS IDEA WAS ALSO PRESENT WITH HIM. How shall I build a house great enough for the great God? The only justification of the Infinite falling short of any house is that it shall be a place where we shall come into His presence and offer sacrifices to His great name. That purpose sanctifies the inadequate efforts we make to embody our ideal. God does not receive thanks from us because they are worthy of acceptance, but because they are responses to His grace. Little things become big, and sometimes great things become very small, just as their attitude is towards God. Bethlehem, for instance, was the least of all the cities, and yet it became great because it was sanctified and glorified by the birth of the Son of God. It was not the town, but what was associated with it. Nazareth was a despised, contemptible, mean little village; so contemptible that it came to be a byword, and yet Nazareth is one of the famous towns in the history of the world, and always will be. The things we offer to God are great, not because of the money they cost, not by the splendour of them that may meet the eye, but because they are given to God. God makes them great. III. The temple was great BECAUSE OF WHAT IT SYMBOLISED. It was the great type of the Incarnation. There is instinctively in man a spirit which craves for an objective representation of God. But for us Christ is the real Incarnation. Our churches stand as an embodiment of our thankful recognition of promises fulfilled. We meet for instruction, for prayer, for praise, for fellowship and goodwill, and to give forth our witness to God. It would be an irreparable loss to us if Westminster Abbey were rased to the ground; and so with all the old cathedrals of England. They are an embodiment of doctrine in a sense. A true cathedral is laid out on the plan of the Cross, the nave and the transepts making a cross. The spire tells of the aspirations of worship, and if we come into the choir we have an expression of praise. The old mediæval idea was to work out in stone and in building the foundations of our faith. I would fill the

land with buildings that should be in the highest sense great buildings, expressing the great inheritance which has come to us from God by Jesus Christ. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *Solomon's conception of God*:—By the sentence, the heaven and heaven of heavens, that is the heaven in its most extended compass, cannot contain God, Solomon strikes down all rationalistic assertions that the Israelites imagined Jehovah to be only a finite national God. The infinitude and supermundane exaltation of God cannot be more clearly and strongly expressed than it is in these words. That, however, Solomon was addicted to no abstract idealism is sufficiently apparent from this, that he unites this consciousness of the infinite exaltation of God with the firm belief of His real presence in the temple. The true God is not merely exalted above the world, has not only His throne in heaven (1 Kings viii. 34, 36, 39; Psa. ii. 4, xi. 4, ciii. 19; Isa. lxvi. 1; Amos, ix. 6). He is also present on the earth (Deut. iv. 39), has chosen the temple for the dwelling-place of His name in Israel, from which He hears the prayers of His people. (*C. F. Keil.*)

Vers. 7-16. **Send me now therefore a man cunning to work in gold.**—*Huram and Solomon*:—Learn from this intercourse—**I. THAT FRIENDSHIP IN LIFE IS HELPFUL. II. THAT CO-OPERATION AMONG MEN IS DESIRABLE. III. THAT MEN MAY KNOW GOD, YET NOT SERVE HIM. IV. THAT WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE CONSISTENT IN THEIR LIFE, THEIR INFLUENCE UPON OTHERS IS FOR GOOD.** (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Co-operation*:—No temple should be built by any one man. Blessed be God, everything that is worth doing is done by co-operation, by acknowledged reciprocity of labour. Your breakfast-table was not spread by yourself, although it could not have been spread without you. Sometimes we may almost bless God that we cannot identify the authorship of some books in the Bible. It is better that many hands should have written the book than that some brilliant author should have retired into immortality on the ground of his being the only genius that could have written so marvellous a volume. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **And Solomon numbered all the strangers that were in the land of Israel.**—*Naturalisation of foreigners*:—**I. A GOOD GOVERNMENT WILL TEND TO MAKE A COUNTRY ATTRACTIVE TO FOREIGNERS. II. FOREIGNERS THUS ATTRACTED ARE AMENABLE TO THE LAWS OF THE STATE. III. THUS PROTECTED, THEY MAY CONTRIBUTE MATERIALLY TO THE ENRICHMENT OF A STATE BY THE IMPORTATION OF FOREIGN INDUSTRIES. Silk-weavers of Spitalfields. V. BE KIND TO STRANGERS.** (*Biblical Museum.*) *Strangers in the city*:—**I. STRANGERS IN A CITY ARE IN DANGER FROM THE TEMPTATION TO EXPLORE THE UNDERGROUND LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY.** I believe that three-fourths of the young men of our cities are ruined for the simple reason that they went to look at iniquity. In 1794, during the Reign of Terror in Paris, there were people who, to hide from their persecutors, got into the sewers under the city, and went on mile after mile amid the stifling atmosphere, poisoned and exhausted, coming out after a while at the river Seine, where they washed and breathed again the pure air. But, alas! that so many men who attempt to explore underground New York life never come to a river Seine, where they can wash, and they die horribly in the sewers. I stand on a mountain of Colorado, six thousand feet high. There is a man standing beneath me who says, "I see a peculiar shelving to this rock," and he bends towards it. I say, "Stop, you will fall." He says, "No danger; I have a steady hand and foot, and see a peculiar kind of moss." I say, "Stand back"; but he says, "I am not afraid"; and he bends farther and farther, and after a while his head whirls and his feet slip—and the eagles know not that it is the macerated flesh of a man they are picking at, but it is. So I have seen men come to the very verge of the life of this city, and they look away down in it. They say, "Don't be cowardly. Let us go down." They look farther and farther. I warn them to stand back; but Satan comes behind them, and while they are swinging over the verge, pushes them off. People say they were naturally bad. They were not? They were engaged in exploration. No man can afford to sail so near the coast of eternal fire for the purpose of discovering how hot it is. Stand off from that exploration. If you are a good swimmer, and you see a man drowning, leap for him and bring him ashore; but if you are merely going to jump in to see him drown, stand back. **II. STRANGERS IN A CITY ARE IN DANGER FROM THE TEMPTATION TO DESECRATE THE SABBATH.** There is not one in ten who knows how to keep the Lord's day when he is away from home and absent from all Christian influences. **III. STRANGERS IN A CITY ARE NOT SAFE WITHOUT CHRISTIAN RESTRAINT.** (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

## CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-14. Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem.—*The surpassing beauty of the temple*:—I. THAT GOD DID NOT NEED THIS LAVISH EXPENDITURE OF GOLD AND GEMS AND RICH ORNAMENTS. II. YET DIVINE CONDESCENSION ACCEPTED THIS OFFERING OF HUMAN GRATITUDE. III. THE BEAUTY AND COSTLINESS OF THE TEMPLE SERVED TO IMPRESS THE MIND OF SURROUNDING NATIONS WITH THE FEELINGS OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL TOWARDS THEIR GREAT GOD. IV. THE ADORNMENT OF THE TEMPLE A REBUKE TO MERE UTILITARIAN VIEWS. (*Biblical Museum*.) And he began to build in the second day of the second month.—*Memorable days*:—Have we not all had memorable days? 1. The day when the boy left home. 2. The day when the young man finds his first friend in business, the hand that can direct him, the hand strong enough to give him assurance of protection, the voice all strength and music that charmed his fears away, and gave him consciousness of latent possibilities of his own. 3. The day when the young man got his first practical hold of life and business, how much he made in his first little profit, the very first sovereign he made by his own wits and energy. Do not let all days be alike; save yourselves from so running one day into another as to drop the dignity, the accent, the significance of special occasions. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God.—*Life-building*:—The building of the temple is a striking example of life-building. I. SOLOMON BEGAN WITH INSTRUCTION. “Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed”: literally, “Now this is the ground-plan.” So many people are building without a ground-plan. It would seem as if they were attempting to perform the impossibility of building from the top; they have no foundations, no great principles; there is a brick here, and a stone there, and a beam of wood yonder, but there is no grand scheme. “Solomon was instructed.” Then Solomon was not a born builder, that is to say, a man who needed no instruction, no hint, no apprenticeship, in these things. He was a man who began with instruction. A man is none the worse for having his little book of instructions in his pocket when he goes abroad. The book is not a large one in mere superficialities, but who can declare in arithmetical numbers its cubical contents? Every line is a volume; every sentence is a time-bill; every proposition is a philosophy. Even Solomon accepted instruction. It is never wise to be beyond a hint, beyond the counsel of experience. II. SOLOMON BEGAN WELL: WHAT WONDER IF HE CONTINUE WELL? He said he would start life with the dowry of wisdom. No accidents could happen to Solomon, because he started at the right point; accepted the true definition of life, and walked in the light of wisdom. If it happened that Solomon should ever trifle with that light, conceal it, modify it, despise it, he would go to the devil. No matter if he had built a thousand temples, he would land in perdition if he ceases to walk in the ways of wisdom. No man can build himself up to heaven, however many temples he may build; he must build up from within—in the matter of conviction, principles, life, character, he must blossom into purity, he must fructify into love. III. SOLOMON'S INSTRUCTIONS WERE SUFFICIENT. Sometimes we wish that we had a rehearsal of life, and that we might come back and begin at the beginning, and walk in the light of experience. There is something better than experience, and that is revelation. The Christian claims that the whole map or chart of life is to be found in the Book of God; and so it is. So there need be no pensive desire for a trial-trip in the ways of life. IV. SOLOMON HAD A DEFINITE PURPOSE IN VIEW: he was building a temple. Definiteness of purpose economises time, enables strength to issue in the noblest accomplishments. A man will have good reason to know what he is doing if he pay attention to Providence. There need not be so much darkness in the ways of life as is often supposed. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 6. And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty.—*Cost and beauty in Christian worship*:—The author of the history of the Jewish Church uses these words concerning the temple of Solomon: “As in the Grecian tragedies we see always in the background the gate of Mycenæ, so in the story of the people of Israel we have always in view the temple of Solomon. There is hardly any Jewish reign that is not in some way connected with its construction or its changes. In front of the great Church of the Escuriel in Spain—in the eyes of Spaniards itself a likeness of the temple—overlooking the court called by them the Court of the Kings are six

colossal statues of the kings of Judah who bore the chief part in the temple of Jerusalem—David, the proposer; Solomon, the founder; Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, Manasseh, the successive purifiers and restorers. The idea there so impressively graven in stone runs through all the subsequent history of the chosen people. Why was this temple built and what was the motive, especially of its enormous costliness and its unrivalled beauty? Solomon did not build and “garnish the house with precious stones and with gold of the gold of Parvaim” because he was ambitious as a king and a conqueror to outshine his neighbours or to immortalise himself, but because he was bidden to do so. The temple was not an exhibition of wealth or cleverness, or superiority on the part of man, its builder; it was man’s education in cost and sacrifice and unsparing labour on the part of God, its designer. There is just one principle that runs through all the teaching of the two Testaments concerning what men do for their Maker, and that is that God does not want, and cannot otherwise than lightly esteem, that which costs us nothing, and that the value of any service or sacrifice which we render for His sake is that, whatever may be its intrinsic meanness or meagreness, it is as from us our very best. This will let us see the insufficiency of the average explanations that are given of the motives that prompt to the enriching and beautifying of our sanctuaries to-day, such as—1. Such things are necessitated by the inevitable rivalries of the day. It would be said that this is a time, especially in England and on the continent of Europe, of restorations. And what one Church has done, another cannot afford to be behind in doing also. The spirit of the age is the spirit of competition, and competition which is the life of trade is the life of religion too. If this is a very pitiful motive to be alleged for any such work, it is not an altogether surprising one. That competitive temper has so much to do with explaining our personal and social expenditures that it is not unnatural to seek in it the clue to expenditures that are sacred. Think for a moment how much money is spent for dress, for the furnishing and decoration of houses. Now, then, what is it that is sad about all this? its cost? No, but what is too often and too plainly its motive. If our banquets were always the symbols of our eagerness to please, of our desire to give of our best to those whom we love and honour, then their cost and splendour would only so much the more ennoble them. But it is because, too often, our dress, our houses, our entertainments, our equipages, are only so many means by which we strive to outshine and eclipse our neighbour that such expenditure becomes so largely not only the wasteful, but the truly contemptible thing that it is. And yet it is no wonder that so long as we allow such motives to influence us in things secular, we should infer or impute them concerning things that are sacred. 2. When changes are made in our social customs, in our habits of expenditure, and even in our modes of worship, we are often told that they are necessitated because we must “keep up with the times,” and those who are wedded by very sacred associations to things ancient, are often wounded in their tenderest feelings by being told that they must give up the old in order not to be behind the age. Well, the spirit of the nineteenth century, whatever else may be said of it, is not an infallible spirit, and in many respects it would be better if some of us were behind the age rather than so eagerly and unthinkingly in accord with it. But however this may be, the “spirit of the age” can never be the guide for the principles of worship or the law of sacrifice. Such cost and beauty is helpful to the instinct of worship and devotion. This motive is a perfectly valid and intelligible one. But the one sufficient motive for cost, and beauty, and even lavish outlay in the building and adornment of the house of God, is the consecrating to Him the best and costliest that human hands can bring. This is the very essence of the Cross of Christ. The power of the Cross over men lies in this, that it is the gift to men, by God, of His very best—“His well-beloved Son.” (*Ep. H. C. Potter.*)

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#### CHAPTER IV.

**VERS. 1-10.** Moreover he made an altar of brass.—*The furniture of the holy court*:—1. The altar of brass. Larger than that in tabernacle. When God enlarges our borders and business we should increase our gifts. 2. The sea of brass. God requires sanctity in all that approach Him (*Jas. iv. 8*). 3. The ten lavers. Not only the priests, but the sacrifices, must be washed. We must purify

our persons and performances. Iniquity cleaves to our holy things. 4. The ten golden candlesticks. One in tabernacle. Light increases. 5. The ten tables. 6. The golden altar. Christ makes atonement and intercedes for ever in virtue of that atonement. (*J. Wolfendale.*) Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits.—*The molten sea* :—I. ITS USE. Suggests purification for God's service. II. ITS SIZE. Suggests abundant provision for purification. A type of the "fountain opened." III. ITS CONSTRUCTION. 1. The material precious and durable. 2. The oxen, sacrifices of priests, emblems of strength and patience—looking all ways. The blessings procured by a holy priesthood would be universally diffused. (*Homiletical Commentary.*)

Ver. 22. **And the entry of the house.**—*The entry of the house* :—This, central, conspicuous, and attractive, suggesting—I. ACCESS TO GOD IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP. II. ACCESS TO SYMBOLIC BEAUTY IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP. 1. Perfection of gold, or material prosperity given to God. 2. Palms—growth and fruitfulness in Christian life. 3. Flowers—beauty and fragrance in Christian character. 4. Cherubims—alacrity in God's service. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The worth of grandeur* :—A fine house cannot make a fine tenant; a first-class carriage cannot make a first-class traveller; a man might sit down on a monarch's throne, and not be a sovereign; he might even look like a king, and be only a clown. Decoration is useless, if it does not express something beyond itself, something spiritual, ideal, transcendental. The picture is nothing if it does not in reality speak, not indeed to the ear of the body, but to the attention of the soul. It is an amusing irony to see some people clothed in purple and fine linen, because there is really no connection between them and their clothes; we expect them to speak musically, and lo! their tones fill our mouths as with gravel-stones. We expect a man to be at least as elegant as his clothes, and when he is not we do not blame the garments; it is more their misfortune than their fault that they should be where they are. So when we read the specification of temples and palaces we say, "What does it amount to? What is this grandeur worth in helping and blessing the world? What is civilisation to end in?" (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

## CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. **Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the Lord was finished.**—*Dedicated things* :—I. DAVID BEFORE HIS DEATH DEDICATED CERTAIN TREASURES TO GOD. II. SOLOMON MOST SCRUPULOUS IN CARRYING OUT HIS FATHER'S WISH. III. SOLOMON'S EXAMPLE WORTHY OF OUR IMITATION. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The joy of the finished work* :—I. The accomplishment of finished work is the cause of joy. II. The power to accomplish this work should be ascribed to God. III. Hence in every undertaking we should ask for God's direction. (*Ibid.*) *Things that are never finished* :—There are some buildings that are never finished. We never finish our life-building; the life-temple goes up evermore—let every man take heed how he buildeth. Do not suppose that you can finish your education. In the higher education you only finish that you may begin; you close one book as a pledge of your qualification to open another. How, as boys at school, we used to be discouraged by this process of advancement! Having closed the arithmetic, who was willing with his whole heart to open his algebra? Many persons could have comfortably left school without beginning it at all. But there is always a higher aspect of things to apprehend and apply. The table ends at twelve times twelve, but not multiplication. So we can never finish reading the Word of God. Solomon could finish his temple, but he could not finish the written record; it never ends, or it ends as the days end. How do the days close? To begin again. Each day the sun says as he westers in the golden clouds, not "Farewell," but only "Goodbye: we meet again presently; meanwhile, sleep well!" So with the Bible; when we have read it we want to read it. You can never finish love. If you can finish it, you never began it. Love grows. There are some persons who have run out of that passion and sunk into earthliness and coldness. Then they never knew the inspiration of love. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 2-10. **To bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord.**—*The removal of the ark* :—I. THE TIME OF ITS REMOVAL. 1. Remarkable in itself. The building



finished in November was not dedicated until the October of the following year. Feast of Tabernacles most suitable time to dedicate temple. 2. Remarkable in its influence. "The magnitude of the event is marked by the fact that now for the first time since the Exodus we have the year and month recorded" (Stanley). II. THE METHOD OF ITS REMOVAL. Similar to the ceremony of removing from the house of Obad-edom. III. THE CEREMONIES WHICH ACCOMPANIED ITS REMOVAL. IV. THE SOLEMN DEPOSIT IN ITS RESTING-PLACE. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Vers. 12, 13. Also the Levites, which were the singers.—*The temple choir* :—  
**I. MUSIC AND REVELATION FROM GOD.** "There is no fuller revelation of God in Nature than is found in these laws of sound, by which He comes into the very heart of man, even to its inmost recesses of love and adoration; and it requires only a sensitive, child-like heart to interpret this speechless music locked within Nature as the voice of God pleading to be let out into music, and praise through the heart of man, for so only can His works praise Him." **II. MUSIC AS A SCIENCE TO CULTIVATE.** **III. MUSIC CONSECRATED TO ITS HIGHEST USE IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD.** (*Ibid.*) *Music in the churches* :—I propose to speak about sacred music. **I. ITS IMPORTANCE.** This is apparent—1. From the fact that God commanded it. Through Paul He tells us to admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and through David He cries out, "Sing ye to God, all ye kingdoms of the earth." I think there are more commands in the Bible to sing than there are to pray. 2. From the impressiveness of the exercise. You know something of what secular music has achieved. One inspiring national air is worth thirty thousand men as a standing army. In the earlier part of the late war the Government proposed to economise in bands of music, and many of them were sent home; but the generals in the army sent word to Washington: "You are making a great mistake. We are falling back and falling back. We have not enough music." Then the Government changed its mind: more bands of music were sent to the field, and the day of shameful defeat terminated. Many of you are illustrations of what sacred song can do. Through it you were brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. 3. From its power to soothe perturbation. 4. From its power to arouse to action. **II. SOME OF THE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF ITS ADVANCEMENT.** 1. It has been impressed into the service of superstition. 2. An inordinate fear of criticism. 3. There has been so much angry discussion on the subject. 4. The erroneous notion that this part of the service could be conducted by delegation. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *United praise as a means of grace* :—**I. THAT THE GLORY OF THE LORD BEGAN TO APPEAR WHEN THE ASSEMBLY WERE EMPLOYED IN PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.** Praise is the most acceptable service we can be engaged in: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me." Prayer is an expression of our indigence and weakness. Thanksgiving expresseth our relish of the sweetness of benefits received; but praise rises above all selfish regards, and directly terminates on the greatness and amiableness of God Himself. The habitations of the blessed continually resound with the high praises of God. Did we praise God more, He would give us greater cause to praise Him. It is suggestive that the Lord's Prayer both begins and ends with adoration. **II. THE SUBJECT OF PRAISE, WHICH GOD HONOURED WITH THIS TOKEN OF HIS ACCEPTANCE, WAS HIS OWN GOODNESS AND EVERLASTING MERCY.** God is best pleased with our praises when we adore and celebrate those perfections of His nature which dispose Him to pity the miserable and have the kindest aspect towards the children of men. **III. THE SERIOUSNESS AND FERVOUR OF THIS DEVOUT ASSEMBLY.** They devoted their whole strength and activity, as if they were ambitious to spend themselves in this heavenly employment. The devotion of the soul is the soul of devotion. **IV. THE HARMONY AND UNANIMITY OF THESE ANCIENT WORSHIPPERS.** "They were all as one, and made one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord" (Acts ii. 1-2; Psa. cxxxiii.; Matt. v. 23, 24). (*R. Walker.*) *On psalmody* :—**I. WHY OR FOR WHAT END MUSIC IS USED IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.** By the constitution of our nature music, by a mysterious and potent agency, awakens the heart, concentrates the thoughts, and elevates the soul, and the end of music in religious worship is to assist our devotions, by an application to our affections of that which has upon them a powerful action to excite and direct them; by engaging us in an exercise in which sympathy has large scope, and every one acts upon the rest, to enable us to animate each other; to pour forth our praises and adorations in a way that is significant and edifying, delightful and impressive. Hence—1. The absurdity of making music in our religious services a mere matter of entertainment. 2. All kinds of music which have no tendency to aid and gratify devotion ought to be

banished from the house of God. II. SOME OF THE EXAMPLES AND AUTHORITIES FOR MAKING MUSIC A HANDMAID TO RELIGION (Job. xxxviii. 7; Gen. iv. 21; Exod. xv. 20; Psa. xlvii. 6, xlviii. 7; Eph. v. 19; Matt. xxvi. 30). III. AFTER WHAT MANNER THE FIRST CHRISTIANS PERFORMED THIS SERVICE. The nearer we come to the model of the primitive Church in this, the nearer we shall approach to perfection. The psalmody of the first Christians was plain, simple, and solemn. Their tunes were, probably, easy and few, and the character of them such as expressed humility and love, and was calculated rather to melt than to capture the heart. Afterwards, as piety declined, it became necessary to re-excite and re-animate it by more striking music; and the whole congregation was divided into two parts, which sang responsive to each other. IV. SOME BRIEF SUGGESTIONS HOW WE MAY USE THIS PART OF DIVINE SERVICE TO OUR OWN BENEFIT AND THE GLORY OF GOD. (*Bp. Dehon.*) *Advantages of music in public worship*.—I. "THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE." Those whom nature has gifted with a voice ought to lift it up not only in making responses but also in singing the praises of their Creator and Redeemer. The choir should not be deputed by the congregation to praise God in their stead. Its office is rather to lead their united praises. II. In acceptable worship the praise of THE HEART MUST ACCOMPANY THE PRAISE OF THE LIPS: "They were as one to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord." Their hearts were all at one "with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music." Those who sing loudly the praises of God should let heart, lips, and life be a well-tuned instrument devoted to the service of the sanctuary. The man who sings beautiful words with an angel's tongue, and leads an unholy life, pronounces his own condemnation. III. THOSE WHO ARE ANXIOUS THAT THE PRAISE OF THE HEART SHOULD ACCOMPANY THE PRAISE OF THE LIPS WILL FIND THEMSELVES GREATLY AIDED BY INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC: "They lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music." Instrumental music unites voices which would otherwise be discordant, and removes the diffidence of those who might otherwise be silent in the service of the sanctuary. Instrumental music removes weariness from the mind, banishes wandering thoughts, and enables us to mount above the world and the things of the world, and to hold high converse with the adorable Trinity. It also conveys to us a lively image of the worship and services of the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. xiv. 2, 3). We must learn to distinguish between the natural effect of music on the senses and the spiritual effect of Divine truths on the soul. IV. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF PRAISE: God's goodness in creation and redemption. V. GOD'S TESTIMONY OF APPROBATION: the cloud filled the house. This was designed to impress their senses with an awful reverence of God. VI. THE TIME WHEN GOD GAVE THEM THIS REMARKABLE TOKEN OF HIS APPROBATION: "When they lifted up their voice." Conclusion: "So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud." These show that, when Christ should come, the priests should not minister in their former manner. We are now called upon to renounce every altar but the Cross, and every sacrifice but the Victim which bled on Calvary. As a spiritual priesthood we have "to present our bodies a living sacrifice." (*Canon Arthur R. Pennington.*) That then the house was filled with a cloud (with chap. vii. 1-3).—*Temple glories*.—The two passages of Scripture which I have read to you give you two pictures. In the first you have the cloud, in the second you have the fire; and in these two together you have the sacred mystic symbols of the presence of the Eternal God in the midst of His people. I. THE FIRST OF THESE PASSAGES affords me the first head of my discourse. Let us note—1. The occupation in which the people were engaged. They were praising God—(1) Unanimously. (2) Heartily. (3) Scripturally. They sung that old psalm, "His mercy endureth for ever." 2. While thus engaged the cloud filled the sacred places. 3. Then a solemn awe fell on all that were gathered that day. 4. The suppliants felt they might pray more earnestly because they prayed surely. II. The first text has had REFERENCE TO THE PAST. The next dwells specially upon the future. After praise, joined with solemn prayer and sacrifice, the fire came down. 1. How much the preacher wants this fire! Oh! I have heard a man preach a sermon to which an angel might have listened for its faultless truthfulness, but it lacked fire; but I have known another whose ministry was faulty in many respects, but yet he spoke like a man that meant what he said, with his heart boiling over at his eyes, and men were moved and many souls were saved. 2. But we need this fire upon the hearers too. How well people listen when they come to hear something! What a noble effect is produced when once the fire comes upon a congregation! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

## CHAPTER VI.

**VERS. 1-10. Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness.—God dwelling in darkness:—**His dwelling in darkness has a symbolical meaning. It tells us of the darkness in which Divine and spiritual things are enveloped. It conveys to us this truth—that only a certain portion of light is given us in anything, enough to guide the conduct but not enough to satisfy the reason; and it suggests, that if we will accept nothing until we satisfy the doubts that may be raised concerning it, we shall end in accepting nothing. I. IN REGARD TO GOD HIMSELF, ANY PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF HIM IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MAN. The smaller must comprehend the greater, before man can comprehend Deity as He is in His absolute nature. This secrecy of God is one of the attributes and perfections of the Almighty. He who sees all and is Himself unseen must be the Creator. The words of the inspired writer contain a literal truth, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." 1. Under this condition God has ever revealed Himself: to our first parents in the garden of Eden; to Moses in the bush and in the clouds of Sinai; to Elijah. He was present in each case, but could not be traced; revealed, but unseen. The answer of the old heathen philosopher respecting Him is the true one: "When I look for Him I find Him not, when I look not for Him I find Him everywhere." 2. Not otherwise was it in the Incarnation. A light in a dark place, and the darkness comprehended it not. "There standeth One among you whom ye know not." 3. It is the same with God's manifestation through the Holy Spirit. He has been, and is, a Presence and a Power in the earth, working wondrously but inscrutably. 4. As with the Person, so it has been with the Word of God; an obscure light, enough to try faith, not to gratify human speculation. Take, *e.g.*, prophecy. In its broad features the cast corresponds with the mould. But when we enter into details, the exact literal completion is difficult to trace. 5. It was the same with the parables of Christ. They were truth under a veil. 6. So it is in numberless instances of the deeper truths revealed in Scripture. II. PASS NOW TO THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD. It is a true idea that represents God as manifest in history, ruling the world in righteousness and justice. But immediately we leave this general truth and examine the case of particular nations or particular periods, what perplexity arises! Civilised nations falling back into darkness and degradation; eras of barbarism intervening; wars springing up and throwing a continent back fifty years in its progress; evil of all kinds permitted; wrong and injustice prevailing. "His way is in the sea, and His paths in the great waters." "His footsteps are not known." It would be easy to illustrate this in numberless other instances—in our individual lives; in moral science; in physical science. The lesson from all this is that all truth is beset with some obscurity, but must not be rejected on that account. "In this world there is little to be known but much to be done." It teaches us in matters of right and wrong, in matters of religion, to trust but little to our reason, but much to our inward consciousness, the instinct of conscience and the aspirations of faith. (*Archdeacon Grant, D.C.L.*)

**VERS. 4-11. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who hath with His hands fulfilled that which He spake.—The performance of God's promise:—**I. THAT GOD DEALS WITH HIS PEOPLE IN ALL AGES BY WAY OF PROMISE. Adam, Abraham, David. II. THAT THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS PROMISE IS A SOURCE OF JOY TO THEM. 1. IN REVEALING GOD TO THEM. 2. IN THE ACTUAL BESTOWMENT OF GOOD TO THEM. III. THAT THERE ARE SPECIAL SEASONS TO TESTIFY TO GOD'S GOODNESS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS PROMISE. 1. Conversion. 2. Restoration from sickness and danger. 3. Dedication of places of worship. 4. Times of special favour. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

**VERS. 6-9. Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel.—David's intention to build the temple:—**I. MAN'S PURPOSES ARE SOMETIMES GREATER THAN HIS POWER. Limitation of:—1. Character. 2. Body. 3. Culture. 4. Circumstances—want of means or liberty. 5. Destiny. 6. Life. II. THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF THESE GRACIOUS BUT UNFULFILLED INTENTIONS. Earnest purposes, sincere desires, are facts, and as facts will be recompensed. 1. They are facts to God. 2. They are facts to those who cherish them. 3. Unfulfilled intentions are not without their practical influence upon society. III. THE COMFORT WHICH THESE CONSIDERATIONS ARE CALCULATED TO AFFORD TO—1. The poor and uneducated. 2. The suffering

3. Those who are called to premature death. 4. All good men in the presence of their imperfect lives. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The rejected service, but approved motive*:—I. A REJECTED SERVICE. Here is a good man bent upon a service which he is not permitted to perform. It is an instance of a man's purposes outrunning the possibilities of his life. There are many reasons why a man should sometimes not be allowed to accomplish self-imposed tasks, although they may be the outcome of very fine motives. There were reasons in David's life. David had been a man of war, and as such had shed human blood (1 Chron. xxii. 8). There was an incongruity which God recognised, which had escaped David's attention, between shedding blood and building a sanctuary for God. Then, again, there may be some special hindrance in the age in which a man lives, or the circumstances by which he is surrounded, which makes the postponement of the work necessary. A man may live, as we say, before his age, he may project great purposes into human life, and yet God may say to him, "Stop, the motive is pure enough, and it is accepted as such, but the world is not yet ready; My providence must mature things, and we must wait." Again, there may be something in God's design—worldward: that design which includes time and eternity within the scope of its operation—which may put a veto upon any such scheme, his accomplishing tasks which are in themselves very praiseworthy, and which are prompted by pure and exalted motives. Now I have said that every man who has lived to a purpose must know some time or other what such a disappointment as this means. Why, this book tells us that God has put eternity into a man's heart. God has put eternity into a man's heart; therefore the impulses of eternity, or the aims and purposes which take in eternity, are there. Man is not a mere creature of time: he strikes great outlines, not as the mere creature of time, but as one who is to live for ever. Thus, as long as it is true that God has put eternity into a man's heart, and has only put seventy years, or at most eighty or ninety years, into his life, there must be an overlapping of purposes and designs in relation to attainments in this life. It is impossible, therefore, that he should fulfil all his designs, or fill up the outlines of these plans, in a brief life. David was bent upon building a house unto the Lord: he was denied that privilege: but who will say that his life was therefore a failure? David, after all, was permitted to do a nobler work than building a sanctuary for God, great as that privilege would have been. He sang out the hymns which were destined to become the inspired psalter for all ages. Now, there are some men who escape these disappointments; but at what cost! The men who never aim at high things, who never strike the outline of any noble work; men who never allow the immortal spirit which is within them to design immortal things, and therefore things which can never be accomplished in a mortal life, doubtless escape these disappointments, but at the cost of degrading that which is noblest and best in their natures. II. THE APPROVED MOTIVE: "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house for My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Many a man would have said, "Ah, poor David, all the inspiration of a great purpose, all the patient planning, and all the earnest endeavour to accomplish the task on his part, have been useless. The Divine veto has put an end to all." Nay, not so. David does not occupy the same position Godward or manward which he would have occupied if he had never designed so devout and exalted a scheme. 1. It was well for David himself—well for his own soul that this thought took possession of it. Remember the circumstances. David had built for himself a house with cedared roof, but was then shocked with the thought of his dwelling in a palace while his God dwelt in the old tattered tabernacle of the wilderness. Surely that recoil itself was ennobling. 2. It was well, too, for David's outward, as well as his inner, life. While engaged in gathering materials for the temple, he was saved from doing things less worthy of his calling and position as the anointed of the Lord. While engaged at this work he had less disposition to engage in conflict with his neighbours. 3. It was also well that this was in his heart, because by gathering the materials for the building of the temple he had furthered the object by preparing the way for some one else to finish the task. 4. It was well, too, because, now that he knew that he himself would never be permitted to build the house, he would have an opportunity of exercising a self-denial which he would not have done if his had been the privilege of completing the task. Thus there was a spiritual blessing, an enriching grace, an ennobling providence in this denial. Now, we see this often in life. It is a law of human life that some men originate a work, and others accomplish it. There is nothing final about man's work on earth; we pick up the thread where other hands dropped it, and soon will drop it into younger hands than ours. God's designs cover millenniums. Look

at daily life. There is a man who founds a house, or originates a business: a man who begins in a small room, and by dint of genius and perseverance, under God's blessing, so extends his business that it well-nigh takes up one side of a street. That man passes away. But he has had dreams greater than his accomplishment. Among his later thoughts was that something else might be done, but he was denied the privilege of giving embodiment to those thoughts. His son takes his place. Ah, and when the motive is never attained, still, if it be noble, it is not fruitless. There is that child overboard: a man leaps after it, but the storm rages and the ocean heaves and lounges terribly, so that the man at length fails to rescue the child. Who shall say that it was not well that he thought of it, and risked his own life in the noble endeavour? It is heaven that will supply the final solution, and it is the future that will crown the edifice of tasks unfinished in this our mortal life, although they were originated with high motives and far-reaching purposes. David entered eternity, not as a disappointed man, but as one who was inspired with an exalted aim that he bequeathed to a succeeding generation, whose noblest activities it set going. (*D. Davies.*) *Pious purposes frustrated but rewarded.*—I. THE LORD NOTICES THE PIOUS PURPOSES OF THE HEART. And here the following points require attention. 1. He is omniscient. "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." "I the Lord search the heart." We judge by external manifestations, and know the tree by its fruit; but He understands our thought afar off. 2. The omniscient Jehovah approves the godly purpose. It is acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ, as it springs from faith and love, as it means glory to God and goodwill toward man. The Lord knows and approves your desire to serve Him, whatever obstacles may arise to prevent the fulfilment. "The desire of a man is his kindness," and is accepted as such. 3. He sees the effect of His grace. "From Him all good things do come." And where is the believer who will not gratefully own, "Thou hast wrought all our works in us"? We have no purposes which, in the sight of God, are godly, until a good work is begun in us; for, as depraved creatures, we are all alienated from the life of God. Our purposes are worldly and sinful. II. IT MAY PLEASE THE LORD, IN THE EXERCISE OF INFINITE WISDOM AND GOODNESS, TO DISAPPOINT US WITH REGARD TO THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF OUR PURPOSES OF SERVING HIM. 1. To impress us with the conviction of His independence. He is the "Lord God Almighty," who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Such dispensations of Providence may be appointed to teach the Church of God that its great Head, when He thinks proper, can dispense with the instrumentality we expected Him to employ. 2. Another reason for the Divine conduct in the case in point is to induce the spirit of submission and resignation. And can you say, "Thy will, my God, Thy will be done"? We naturally like our own way. Our "purposes are broken off," even "the thoughts of our heart." God thwarts us, not to grieve, but to teach us deference to His will. 3. We may add another reason why God takes away the young and useful, to prevent idolatry. III. IF THE LORD THUS PREVENT THE FULFILMENT OF THE PIOUS PURPOSE, HE TENDERLY SAYS, "THOU HAST WELL DONE IN THAT IT WAS IN THINE HEART." IV. GOD GRACIOUSLY REWARDS THE INTENTION, EVEN AS MUCH AS IF IT HAD BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. It is our painful duty to charge the sinner to remember that God notices and takes account of his evil devices. (*S. Eldridge.*) *The unfulfilled ideal.*—A religious ideal may be defined as a product of sanctified imagination, and sanctified imagination may again be described as faith considered in its free, intellectual expression. An ideal is the outline picture of possible usefulness and success, conceived under the incitements of faith, hope, and love inherent in the new life. An ideal that is born of pure religious life, and not of mere worldly ambition, is a child of God's inspiration in the second degree of descent. Every Christian worker has his ideals. The ideals cherished by God's people vary with the requirements of the age. David's was to build a temple; ours probably concern the building of living stones into that peerless temple in which God shall be worshipped throughout all ages. The value of unfulfilled ideals is a lesson we all need to learn. Only a slight fraction of the zeal that promised so much at first ever seems to bear visible fruit. We see the ideals of fellow-labourers cut short by the act of God, almost before they have touched their coveted tasks. The achievements of the best lives do not equal the measure of ardent aspiration, and God rewards for aspiration as well as for perfected deed. There are also ideals the secret of whose frustration is to be found in our own hearts. We had, perhaps, miscalculated our strength, or pride mingled with our ideals, and God was holding us back from their realisation till pride had

been extinguished and faith and hope and humility had grown to proportions commensurate with the success He was about to give us. But we do not understand the meaning of God's delays, and so our ideals of work and obligation and evangelistic success have been relegated to the lumber-room and have been lying there in ignoble dust and dry-rot for years. A famous traveller has written a book to tell us how remunerative the abandoned goldfields of Midian may yet become. Some of the most productive silver mines of South America are mines that were worked by Spanish conquerors, forsaken for two and a half centuries, and are now being worked again. Boundless spiritual wealth and possibility lie hidden in the half-forgotten ideals of our youth and early manhood.

I. THE INFLUENCE EXERTED BY THE UNFULFILLED IDEA UPON THE PERSONAL CHARACTER. It is just conceivable that religious life may exist without the help and influence of ideals, but it will only be marked by feebleness and insipidity. It will find its appropriate emblem in the dead-level of the prairie rather than in the towering majesty of the forest. The moment you give up your large ideals you cease to feel the necessity for large sacrifice, large heroism, generous self-forgetting toil. An ideal occupies precisely the same relation to religious growth and power that the faculty of imagination in the child does to the character and success of the after-man. Students of social science tell us that the education provided in the parish workhouse supplies no element to stimulate the imagination of the child, and that the little ones placed under the régime grow up dull, sullen, void of interest in everything about them, and without a single ambition to improve themselves. In the course of time, after every potential interest and aspiration is battered down and deadened, the child is turned into the world; and it is almost invariably found, after a few years of indolence, stolidity, and mild crime, the child returns to the workhouse to shelter its incompetency and approaching age. Let imagination be denied its proper function in the religious life, and the result will be to limit that life to a very low and abject plane. The professor of religion who is without an inspiring ideal is spending the life of a creeping, torpid, spiritual pauper. All our religious virtues gain or lose as our ideals of religious work are grasped or abandoned. There is a logical impediment to the growth of faith in the heart of the man who has given up his ideals. All faith is twofold in its action, personal and vicarious, and the one type of action can no more go on without the other than the systole can be separated from diastole in the action of the heart. Decay in the faith you exercise on behalf of the world will bring decay in the faith exercised on your own behalf. Hence it is that in genuine revivals of religion the sanctification of believers and the conversion of the ungodly always proceed by equal paces. An ideal, if deferred in its fulfilment, or even unfulfilled in the precise form in which you first conceived it, will be a perpetual fountain of health and prosperity to your own soul. Doubtless the whole character of David was raised and ennobled by the ideal he had so long cherished within his heart. If you cannot see the worth of your unfulfilled ideals, God, who traces their influence upon character, can; and if the inward ear were not heavy with the world's distracting babel, you would hear the testimony of His favour and approval, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Never weigh against your moral and spiritual interests the temporal sacrifices you make for your ideals.

II. THESE IDEALS MOVE THE MIND OF ALMIGHTY GOD. The ideal touches with some lasting impression the unforgetting God, and passes into one of the abiding motive-forces of the universe He governs to redeem. There is a spiritual doctrine of the conservation of energy which is the heritage of all the true people of God. When Providence puts its arrest upon the progress of our ideals, every fraction of the force lives on. Blessed doctrine of the conservation of energy! David held some clue to it when he exclaimed, "Are not my tears in Thy book?" Christ was recognising it when He spoke the words that immortalised Mary's love: "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." The writer of the Hebrews felt it when he exclaimed, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love which ye have showed toward His name." There is a God-moving force in our own keeping. How is this power to be brought out and applied? It must be stimulated and increased by temporary delay. There is a danger of one-sidedness in the action of our ideals. They sometimes stimulate the power of work without stimulating at the same time the twin power of prayer. You thrust on this side, and smite on that, and accomplish nothing. God seems to confound you, and you are ready to give up all your ideals in your vexation and impatience. God wants you to drop the rude staff and take up the jewelled weapon of all-prayer. Again, when our ideals are postponed

in their accomplishment it is that faith may be made perfect, and that we may cast ourselves more fully upon God. What frightful infidels we should become if we saw our ideals leap up to immediate completion at our mere touch as by a process of rapid tropical growth! You lose power over the mind of God when you begin to throw away your ideals. III. THINK OF THE INFLUENCE OF DAVID'S IDEAL UPON THE ACTUAL WORK OF ERECTING THE TEMPLE. David's ideal became the accomplished work of his successor. Your towering ideals of to-day, if grasped with fidelity and followed up as far as God permits, shall be a secured platform for the action of the next generation. Conclusion: 1. You should pitch your ideals high enough to make sure they will be called extravagant by all those in whose hearts is the love of the world, and not the love of the Father. Never mind how daring they are, if the pure love of God and men enters into their deepest essence. 2. Above all things try to keep pride out of them. 3. Having once formed your ideals, hold them fast. Some men sneer at the ideals of their youth, as if they were a species of wild oats they had been sowing, and not God-begotten and immortal seed. Do not be satirist where God is admirer, and set your small, cynical sneers at yourself over against His word of approbation. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." (*Thomas G. Selby.*)

Vers. 12-15. **And he stood before the altar of the Lord.—David's charge to Solomon fulfilled:**—I. SOLOMON'S AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE OF HIS EARTHLY FATHER. II. HIS REVERENCE OF HIS HEAVENLY FATHER. What sublimity and yet what humility is there evinced in this prayer of the king! Had he been an outcast like Manasseh, praying to God for restoration to his lost throne, he could not have humbled himself deeper in the dust. Listen to his lowly words: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built!" &c. Who is this on bended knees and with bended heart that offers up these lowly petitions? A king? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a king. 'Tis "Solomon in all his glory." True greatness is ever founded on humility. As it is in the natural world, so is it in the moral world—the higher the structure, the deeper the foundation. The lofty Alps, upon whose snowy head the stars of heaven seem to rest, have their foundations deep in the heart of the earth. Never was Solomon so exalted, never was he nearer heaven, than when on bended knees we behold him a suppliant at the footstool of God's throne. The highest rank, the loftiest genius, the most splendid crown, receive a double splendour from the grace of humility. (*H. Cay.*) **Solomon's prayer:**—The great proof of the blessing given to Solomon is to be found in the prayer which he prayed at the dedication of the temple. No man could have prayed that prayer without help. This we should have said about it in all honesty if we had found it in Sanscrit; if we had exhumed it out of Indian libraries, it would have been due to the author to have said, "You never dreamed that dream; it was a vision of God." Probably there is no such prayer in all literary records. If ever that prayer be excelled, it will be by the Son of God alone, and His excelling of it will be by contrast rather than by comparison. There is not a selfish word in it. It is not a Jew's prayer; it is a man's prayer. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. **But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?—The condescending God:**—I. Let me call your attention to THE FACT OF THE DIVINE GREATNESS; because it is only in the view of that that we can be prepared to appreciate the Divine condescension. "Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee!" 1. What a view have we here of the immensity of God! We ourselves are among the stars, careering through space, myriads of miles distant now from where we were at the beginning of the service, but though perpetually changing our place in the universe, ever surrounded by His presence, and enclosed by His essence. 2. Equally awful is God's relation to duration, or His eternity. 3. Here is also a recognition of God's infinite supremacy. II. **AND WILL THIS UNCONTAINABLE BEING ACTUALLY MANIFEST HIMSELF TO MAN?** And here be it remarked there was but one religion in the ancient world that knew anything of a condescending God—but one—the Jewish. The so-called gods of Olympus could be mean, intriguing, self-debasing; but they had it not in their power to condescend. Morally, they had no height from which they could stoop. But the history of the Divine conduct, as recorded in the Bible, had been, from the first, a history of condescension. Look back to God's first act of condescension. Sin might have

produced eternal silence. Yet it was to man, the sinner, that He took the first step in His career of condescension by speaking to him. Time rolled on; and though the depravity and guilt of man went on increasing, there comes before us in the text another stage in the Divine regard. He appoints a place for the symbol of His presence to dwell in, and where man might be always welcome to approach and commune with Him. This was a vast advance in the condescension of God. All this, astonishing as it was, was only preliminary. What if He should take our nature and make a temple of that! This, indeed, was an act beyond human conception. What! will God in very deed dwell with man—as man—upon the earth? III. Who does not feel the WONDERFULNESS of the Divine condescension? And what part of His conduct is not condescending? and what part of His condescension is not a wonder? Ascend to the first act—creation—for here the wonder begins. But all this, a man might say—much as it enlarges my views of the Divine condescension—all this I can believe. It relates only to His natural greatness. Low and limited as His creatures may be, they are not as yet supposed to have revolted, sinned. What might have taken place we know; and it is that which makes what He has done so amazing. Here the real wonder begins. That He should have stooped to ask for a hearing in a world filled with noisy praises of itself and its idols. IV. But THIS WONDERFULNESS OF THE DIVINE CONDESCENSION IS NO VALID OBJECTION TO ITS REALITY AND TRUTH. This is the very gist of the text, that, amazing as the conception is, it is yet a fact. 1. Let us not be told by a pretended philosophy that such a Divine interposition is out of all proportion to man's importance in the universe. The objection rashly assumes that the incarnation of the Son of God can have no relation to any other part of the universe; for if it have, the objection fails. His relation to our world, indeed, will always be specific and unique. But we can conceive of no world to which His incarnation and death for the redemption of our fallen race can be made known, without having their views of God enlarged, and their motives to holiness increased. As an affair of moral government, it is fraught with interest for all the subjects of God's universal empire. The planetary insignificance of the earth, the very circumstance which man makes a reason for disbelieving it, may be an element investing it, in the eyes of other worlds, with transcendent interest. They may behold in it only a further illustration of the principle on which God uniformly acts, of "choosing the things which are not to bring to nought things that are." They may see in it a designed intimation that there is no world, however insignificant—no islet in space, however remote—which shall not be filled with His glory. 2. Neither let a mock humility pretend that such condescension is too great for man's belief. The right point of view is not from the dust in which man is lying, but from the throne on which God is sitting. The reason of the whole is in God. Do you not see, then, that, wanting in wonderfulness, the Divine manifestation would have been wanting in analogy with creation and providence—wanting in the very means of authentication as a Divine act? It only stands in a line with other wonders. But the end to be obtained by it is incomparably greater. Creation and providence are but introductory and preparatory to it. 3. Nor let the mere formalist limit the displays of Divine condescension to the past. The ordinances of religion are with him memorials of past rather than means of present grace—tombs rather than temples. True, God has been in the past, and will be in the future, as we do not look for Him in the present. Looking back, Shekinah and vision are there, miracle, prophecy, and inspiration, an incarnate Saviour and a descending Spirit. We expect not now a repetition of such scenes. Looking forwards, we regard the future as stored with supernatural events. "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." The history and the prophecy are only for limited times, the promise is for all time, large as the heart of God, and the fullest utterance of it. And is not every truly Christian Church a proof that the manifestation of God is still in process, and His condescension unabated? Wonderful as that condescension is, they can dispense with all formal proof of it. V. What, then, ARE THE MEANS OF SECURING THE DIVINE PRESENCE, AND THE EMOTIONS SUITABLE TO IT? (*J. Harris, D.D.*) *The condescension of God*:—The temple which Solomon built may be viewed as a type of the body of our Redeemer. It pleased Him to tabernacle amongst us. This is a truth that seems to enter into the very rudiments of our religious knowledge; and we are ready to give immediate assent to the truth that Jesus took our nature upon Him. The more we dwell on this great truth, the more inclined are we to exclaim with something like the astonishment of Solomon, "Is this true? Will God indeed



dwell with men on the earth?" In order that our examination may have its full weight on the mind, and lead to profitable thought and action, I appeal—I. To THE ANSWER THAT WOULD BE PROMPTED BY NATURAL FEAR. Think of the majesty of God—think of His holiness! The only thought which the fear of man's natural heart suggests when he hears of God visiting the earth is the thought of wrath and judgment. There can be no breathing freely in the presence of God when there is the sense of unpardoned sin on the conscience. II. To THE ANSWER BROUGHT TO THIS QUESTION BY THE GOSPEL OF GRACE AND SALVATION. III. To THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S BELIEVING PEOPLE. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Isa. lvii. 15-19; Psa. lxxviii. 18). IV. To THE HOPES OF CHRIST'S WAITING CHURCH. All that hath been manifested as yet of the Divine condescension and glory is but a sample of the manifestations which this world is destined to receive. V. PRACTICAL THOUGHTS SUGGESTED. 1. What would be our deserving if God were to visit us according to our iniquities? 2. Will you not seek to experience the wondrous grace of God our Saviour? (*W. Cadman, M.A.*) *God manifest in the flesh.*—1. The mightiest monarch of his time hesitates not to appear in the midst of his subjects in the attitude of supplication, to lead the devotions of his people and to put himself on a level with the humblest individual in the congregation of Israel. 2. That the exclamation of the text primarily referred to the permanent abode of the cloud of glory over the mercy-seat in the temple is evident from the circumstances in which it was uttered, but though the words had never been intended to be otherwise applied, there was enough of the Divine condescension manifested even in that dispensation to call forth the tribute of admiration here offered by the King of Israel. 3. Of the state of the heathen world, and of the propensities of his own subjects, Solomon could not be ignorant; and when he reflected how little the character both of one and the other corresponded with the forbearance which they had experienced, and the revelations of the Divine will by which they might have profited, he had good reason to stand astonished at the Divine condescension, and to say, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" 4. To what extent the mind of Solomon was enabled to foresee or understand the mystery of the Incarnation we do not venture to determine. But Christians cannot fail to perceive that if the whole scheme of redemption had been fully unfolded to him, he could not have more emphatically expressed the sentiments which that event was fitted to awaken than in the words which he has here applied to the appearance of the Divine glory in the temple. 5. Whatever might be the amount of the revelation granted to Solomon, we can be in no doubt about the practical application which it becomes us to make of the text. It was dictated by the Spirit of God, to be put on record as a portion of those Scriptures that testify of Christ. I would advert—I. To the simple fact THAT THE GLORIOUS EVENT CONTEMPLATED IN THE TEXT HAS ACTUALLY BEEN REALISED IN THE APPEARANCE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE LIKENESS OF OUR SINFUL FLESH; and that in His person "God has in very deed dwelt with men on the earth." The symbol by which God gave intimation of His presence in the Old Testament Church, though fitted to keep alive in their minds an habitual impression of His being and supremacy, and to furnish to them a permanent pledge of security and protection, so long as they adhered steadfastly to His covenant, yet did not immediately address itself to the sympathies and affections of their nature. They were reminded in every act of religious worship of the infinite distance at which they stood removed from the High and Holy One of Israel. But when He condescended to appear in the likeness of sinful flesh, the barriers which had formerly shut up the way of approach were broken down; mankind were permitted to hold intimate converse with Him in the same way, and through the same medium, by which they hold intercourse with one another. II. To THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH GOD WAS MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH. It was not only that, through the medium of human nature, He might convey to mankind a more distinct conception, and leave upon them a more vivid impression of the Divine character; but that He might take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (*R. Gordon, D.D.*) *Divine condescension.*—I. To THE CERTAINTY AND EVIDENCE OF THE FACT THAT GOD HAS DWELT, AND STILL DWELLS WITH MEN ON THE EARTH. We cannot doubt the fact when we reflect—1. On the essential omnipresence and universal agency of God. 2. That God has thus spiritually dwelt, and still does dwell with men on the earth. II. To THE GREATNESS OF HIS CONDESCENSION AND GRACE IN THIS RESPECT. (*D. Dickinson, D.D.*) *God dwelling with men* (for the opening of a place of worship):—We should make the erection of a house for God's worship, and our first services therein to invite His presence, an occasion for

contemplating the grandeur of His majesty, the wonders of His condescension, and bowing down our souls in profound abasement before Him. I. THE BENEVOLENT CONDESCENSION OF GOD. This is illustrated in the text, which suggests—1. The type: Solomon's temple. 2. The antitype: the body of Christ. 3. The consequence: God dwelling in the Church. What is a Church? "A congregation of faithful men." As if so many temples were placed together, window opening to window, and door to door; light answering to light, and warmth generating warmth, and the perfume of one apartment mingling with another, and songs responding to songs; so Christians, dwelling together, become one great temple, which we call a Church of the living God. Just as many single drops run into a mighty stream, so many believers, pardoned and regenerated and animated by the Spirit of God, become one glorious Church; and Christ is its Head, and He will dwell in it even while the world stands. II. THE PROSTRATION AND HUMILIATION OF SOUL WHICH SO BECOME US BEFORE THIS GLORIOUS GOD. When we contemplate the God whom we adore, we may justly ask—1. What can we think of this building? It is a place for prayer, praise, and the preaching of the gospel. 2. What of the worshippers? We ought to have an ardent desire to become more fit for His abode, more enlarged, more heavenly, more intellectual, more spiritual, more fervent, more consecrated to Him. 3. What of the worship? (*James Bennett, D.D.*) *God dwelling with men*:—The whole Jewish dispensation was typical. Everywhere throughout the system things seen and temporal were employed as premonitory emblems of things not seen and eternal. It thus foreshadowed coming revelations at once by events, by offices, and by rites. The offices of the high priest, prophets, judges, and kings, with the extraordinary powers attached to them, all foretold the supreme authority of that Saviour in whom they terminated. And, as regards, finally, prefigurative rites, I need point only to the countless sacrifices which exhibited, by anticipation, Jesus, our passover, sacrificed for us. I. WE ARE TO INQUIRE WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GOD DWELLING WITH MEN. 1. The language is expressive of loving fellowship. When we traverse a country, and amid the rivers, and forests, and mountains, of the landscape, descry a human dwelling, we spontaneously ascribe reciprocal affection to its inmates, a harmony far more beautiful than that of Nature's scenery by which it is surrounded. Besides, though one may dwell with another whom he disregards or even hates, because separation is not practicable or not convenient in the circumstances, it cannot be so with God, who is infinitely superior to all such restraints. When He takes up His abode with any, it must be in affection; for in all He does He consults exclusively His own good pleasure. The capacity in which He dwells with His people is that of a Father; and where He occupies this footing He will entertain its sympathies regarding those with whom He associates with more than the tenderness of paternal endearment. 2. This phraseology is expressive of intimate fellowship. Now, affection necessarily prompts to fellowship. The objects of complacent regard engage the outgoings of the loving mind, and heart unbosoms itself to heart with freedom and confidence. Unless, then, God revealed Himself graciously to us, and heard our supplications to Him, and all this not coldly and formally, but kindly and familiarly, the language of the text would be inappropriate, and He could not be said to dwell with men on the earth. 3. The language is expressive of prolonged fellowship. A passing interview does not constitute dwelling. The designation is not applied even to frequent visits. And so for God to dwell with us is to be with us not now and then merely, but always—in the day to direct our steps, in the night to guard our slumbers, in prosperity to dispel forgetfulness, and in distress to avert despair—when youth impels and manhood invigorates and age enfeebles. II. THE APPARENT UNLIKELIHOOD OF GOD THUS DWELLING WITH MEN. 1. Men are insignificant before God. Viewed relatively to fellow-creatures, the human race occupies an elevated position in the scale of being. But all this elevation vanishes when we think of God. If we were to compare God and men by comparing their works, we would not easily find any accomplishment more commendatory of human resources than this same temple of Solomon, in all its magnificence and splendour. And whence, then, were its materials drawn? They were brought from the storehouses of Jehovah. He furnished every stone and timber; and if He had not they might have sought for them in vain. All the elements of this edifice they received from God—and whence did He derive them? He called them out of nothingness. Again, how many were engaged in building this temple? We learn from Scripture that there were about a hundred and eighty three thousand six hundred men. But where were these when God laid the foundations of the earth? Once more,

how long was this temple in being built? After every stone was hewn and ready for its place seven years were still occupied, as we learn from Scripture, in rearing and finishing the sacred fabric. The period may have been requisite for the performance in the hands of feeble man; but, oh! how different from the achievements of Him whose mightiest deed follows instant on His word—"who says, and it is done—commands, and it stands fast"! But, finally, what were the dimensions of that erection on which the skill and toil of such vast multitudes were so long expended? Compared with the neighbouring dwellings of Jacob, it would, doubtless, appear vast and majestic. But measure the width of it, and say if it be as broad as the earth: stretch a line to its loftiest summit, and say if it be high as heaven. What proportion bears this capacious abode to the temple of the visible creation? As man enters its gates he seems, beside its massive pillars, and under its exalted canopy, to sink into less than his usual littleness. But think of placing God in it, and how diminutive it appears! 2. On the wickedness of men. And, after all, shall He love these persons? What can He love in them? III. That, unlikely as it may seem, in some views, GOD WILLS TO DWELL WITH MEN ON THE EARTH. 1. God has dwelt with men in the person of Christ. 2. God dwells with men by the mission of His Spirit. (*D. King.*) *The dwelling-place of God* :—The temple of King Solomon has sown its seeds all over the world; has reproduced itself in every latitude and zone. "But will God in every deed dwell with men upon the earth?" Do we want the temple now? There are many men living to-day who could with truth make answer, "As far as we ourselves and our spiritual life are concerned, "No! We have outgrown the Testament; Christ is our temple, our way to God. Through the great mercy and grace of God, and His perpetual help, we have risen to that constancy and closeness of fellowship with Him that every place is holy ground; and we often find, in our solitude, a sweetness and depth of joyful communing that we never find amid the distraction of a public assembly." To them God does indeed "dwell with men upon the earth," but not in temples made with hands; they walk in the Spirit, and live in the Spirit. But was it always so with them? Did they never want the temple? Was it always as easy to them to find God in the street as it is now? Who of us, that can rejoice in this as his portion to-day, can tell how much he owes of his present realisation of God at all times, and in all places, to those temple walls which now have vanished from his spiritual sight? As in learning our first lessons, our letters, and the like, we are learning things whose use we know not yet, though by and by the alphabet and spelling-book are laid aside, so in the beginning of our spiritual life this temple is our alphabet and primer, where we do things that are not always full of our spirit, nor of our intelligence; but in process of time we grow up to them; we rise up to the spirit and comprehension of our own deed; and by and by the temple is not necessary to us for our own sakes, save as the voice of truth shall sound within its walls, and we go on learning the things which are our life. But are these the men who forsake the assembling of themselves together, "as the manner of some is"? No! They know that the temple wants them, if they do not want the temple; that they are the spiritual material of which the temple is composed; and that their presence and part in its worship is essential to the fulfilment of its end. Their hearts make the atmosphere that infects all weaker souls; their songs are the wings on which the younger and feebler ones rise up to God. They, with their temple and service of song, and their lowly prayers, are mighty antidotes—how mighty, God only knows!—to that perilous movement of the world's life that would soon drag humanity down to the level of the dust, and blend our godless life with that of the beasts of the earth. (*G. W. Conder.*) *Will God dwell with men?*—The human soul in its better moments longs for the knowledge and the friendship of God; and to many a heart the question comes as it did to Solomon, "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" I understand this question to have its own answer, and that answer to be, "God will indeed, most assuredly, dwell with men on the earth." I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THE WORDS WERE SPOKEN ARE FULL OF INTEREST. II. IN THE WHOLE HISTORY OF REVELATION WE HAVE ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTION. 1. The context. 2. The Incarnation of Christ. 3. The effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. III. HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT GOD DWELLS WITH MEN? 1. We may know this, as a matter of reason, by what we perceive of wisdom and design in the material world. 2. We may know this from what we find in His Word, and in the events of history of the fulfilment of prophecy, showing that a governor must evidently be present carrying out His own great plans. 3. The consciousness of His spiritual presence with us as individuals. IV. GOD DWELLING

WITH US IS MARKED IN VARIOUS WAYS. 1. He who has God dwelling in him will manifest externally the Spirit of God. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. 2. We recognise God oftentimes in what we term special providences—the special care which He exercises over us. I know when I speak of a special providence there may be some who at once revert to the fact of universal and immutable law, and say, “May I expect the laws of nature to be changed for me?” I do not so understand the special providence of God. There is in this immutability of natural law a spiritual influence that is over and above and beyond all that law. The mountain may tremble; its fall is not suspended because I go by; but just before I come and the mountain is about to fall I may be led to think of gathering some beautiful flower, or turning aside to see some peculiar formation of rock, and I stop to examine, and the mountain falls. No violation of law, and yet I am saved. I am saved because God touches my heart, because the Spirit of God communicates with the heart of man. There is no conflict here, there need be none thought of. God’s hand guides me safely through, by an influence simply on this heart of mine. And yet I may not be conscious of this influence. He leads me simply because He has me in His heart; He is dwelling with me; He knows all things and governs all things, and He knows how to guide me safely. Man is acted on in every part of his nature by the unseen. He steps off the roof of a house, and he will be dashed to pieces. What is it? A strange something you call gravitation, that holds him to the earth. This earth, the moon, the planets, we know, are so held; and yet no man ever saw the chain that binds the earth to the sun. If God binds every particle of matter in my body to the sun, the great centre a hundred millions of miles away, can He not bind my spirit to Himself? If the sun attracts every particle of matter in my frame, may not God attract me? Is there anything unreasonable here? Then, again, I go to the sea. I put my family on board the vessel. I am not at all disturbed; I know there may be storms; but the ship is staunch, and then the pilot knows where he is going. He is not going on rocks; the ocean has been sounded. He is not going to the wrong port; there is a needle in the compass that guides him. And what is that needle? A little piece of steel, that has no thought and no power of any kind, but it has been touched with a magnet, and now it turns northward. And relying on that which no man has ever seen, it sends its company safely across the sea. What is that power? It is invisible. And if God can touch a piece of steel that can neither see nor feel nor think, and it responds to the influence, may He not touch my mind, my soul, my thought, by His Holy Spirit, and make it respond to His will? Is there anything unreasonable in it? V. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS THAT ARE TO FOLLOW FROM OUR RECOGNISING GOD AS DWELLING WITH MEN? The erection of churches. Public worship. Hearts divinely prepared to hear. Divinely inspired preachers. (*Dp. Matthew Simpson.*)

Vers. 26–31. When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain.—*Perils to agriculture*:—I. A REBUKE TO RATIONALISM IN NATURAL EVILS. All meteorological phenomena are under God’s control. In all afflictive events God speaks to cities and nations. II. A MORAL DESIGN IN THE INFLICTION OF NATURAL EVILS. 1. To requite justice. 2. To lead to God. III. A PLACE FOR PRAYER IN THE REMOVING NATURAL EVILS. This denied by many. Prayer may be necessary for man’s highest culture. We do not classify with powers in physical nature. It is not a natural but a moral power. The ordination of God leaves room for prayer. Prayer may be one of the laws of the universe as certain in its sphere as the laws of heat or of gravitation in their peculiar realms. Neither history, Scripture, nor experience forbid us to pray in times of national distress. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Pardon and punishment* (chap. vi. 27, with 2 Sam. vii. 14 and 1 Cor. xi. 32):—I take these passages in a group because they all set forth a similar view of a great subject. They all take a natural and what we may call an untechnical view of the subject of Divine forgiveness. The prophet Nathan and Solomon and the apostle Paul all saw that sin produced its natural consequences of pain and penalty in good men and bad men alike, and though all believed in the reality and triumph of mercy, and were quite sure of God’s readiness to forgive, yet they perceived that Divine forgiveness did not remove those consequences, at least in this life. Pardon does not mean immunity from punishment. I. WHAT IS PUNISHMENT? 1. “Behold,” says the apostle Paul, “the goodness and severity of God.” That there is an element of righteous indignation in God the whole frame of Nature testifies; the Scriptures frequently declare; and our own moral sense

demands that it should be so. We cannot conceive of a perfect Being without the capacity of such indignation. The very methods of the Divine rule absolutely involve pain. But there are things in the world more to be dreaded than pain. There are evils so great—so great in themselves—that it is worth while enduring all the pain we can conceive in order to get rid of them. Righteousness is the one ruling principle of all life. In the interests of righteousness the universe is governed. Character, now and always, owes all its moral worth to the acknowledgment of the supreme majesty of the law of righteousness. 2. Now perhaps we can understand something of the meaning of punishment. It is—(1) The expression of the indignation of a perfectly holy God. It is not an act of vengeance, nor anger which is excited by the thwarting of the Divine will. To God there is nothing so dear as justice, truth, love; and when men, from selfish love of pleasure, or equally selfish wilfulness, violate these, and become cruel, unjust, false, the holy indignation of the holiest of all beings springs forth in punishment, and God becomes a “consuming fire.” (2) Punishment is the very guardian of life. If a man takes poison, or if he thrusts his hand into the fire, he suffers pain. Pain is not the evil to be feared, but the effect of the act upon the whole frame. The poison saps the life—the pain is the mere symptom of the fact. The fire is destroying the tissues of the body—the pain is the evidence of it. Pain is like the beacon which warns the mariner of the dangerous reef or the sunken rock. (3) Punishment and pain are the means of healing. To any one ignorant of medical science, a surgeon performing an operation would seem cruel and unfeeling. But he cuts down into the living flesh with his keen knife and inflicts the sharpest pain because he knows that in no other way can the life be saved. In the hands of a benevolent God suffering is surgical. II. WHEN WE HAVE SOUGHT PARDON AND FOUND MERCY WE MAY STILL HAVE TO SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF PAST SIN. Pardon consists of two parts—1. The cessation of resentment. 2. The removal of consequences. These two parts are not always united in time. I may cease from anger, cease to feel resentment against my erring, disobedient child when he repents, and yet may allow him to suffer the natural consequences of his wrong doing. My love may be so deep and tender that I suffer in his suffering, and even more poignantly than he, but I let it go on. And God does so. Our duty is to bow submissively, to recognise Divine love, and to endure patiently the chastisement that seeks to cure us of our faults. (*Philip W. Darnton, B.A.*)

Vers. 34, 35. If Thy people go out to war.—*The lawfulness of war*:—I shall take these words as a political maxim and moral precept comprehending these two propositions. 1. THAT HERE IS COUCHED A SUPPOSITION, THAT UPON JUST GROUNDS AND LAWFUL CAUSES ANY NATION MAY DECLARE AND MAKE WAR UPON ANOTHER, implied in the expression, “If they go out to war against their enemies, by the way that God should send them.” The just grounds of war according to the Laws of Nations and Arms are—1. Those that concern the maintaining the public faith. 2. Those that respect the vindication of the honour of the Crown. 3. Those that relate to the prevention of the great and apparent dangers that threaten the general peace. II. THE POSITIVE DUTY AND OBLIGATION THAT ALL NATIONS LIE UNDER, IN CASE OF THE DECLARATION OF SUCH A WAR, TO SEEK GOD WITH A SOLEMN HUMILIATION AND REPENTANCE, FOR HIS ASSISTANCE AND SUCCOUR TO MAINTAIN THEIR CAUSE OR RIGHT. 1. Because war is an appeal to God for the justice of a national cause. 2. Because of the great dangers and uncertainties that attend war. How many armies have their designs and themselves ruined by the little advantage of ground, the pass of a river, a sudden surprise, an undermining stratagem, the alteration of the weather, the fall of snow or rain, the misunderstanding of a word given, the spreading a false rumour or alarm; nay, the start of a horse, the mere error of the eye, or the information of a deserter! Which has overturned all policy, made power impotent, and victory unexpected. How many fleets have been dissipated with a mist, broken and sunk with a storm, and blown up with a spark of fire! (Eccles. ix. 11; chap. xiv. 11; Lev. xxvi. 8). 3. Because it will engage God to be on our side, and to vindicate our cause. 4. Because this solemn invocation of the Divine assistance, joined with a public humiliation and repentance, will be a means to avert those judgments that were otherwise due to our sins, and which we should have reason to fear might prevent the success of our arms, and provoke God to give us up to the will of our enemies. 5. Because prayer is an absolutely necessary and conditional means to success in war. (*Henry Sacheverell, D.D.*) *The wise man's prayer for the warrior* (preached on a day of

general humiliation on account of war):—Under most of the ordinary occurrences of life, there is the strongest tendency to overlook the relationship subsisting between ourselves as human beings and the providence of God. In many instances it is only on extraordinary occasions that individuals are first led to a practical recognition of the supremacy of God. It is when sickness produces its enfeebling effects on the frame; or when the angel of death gains admittance to their dwellings; or when adversity demonstrates to them the vanity of centring their affections on earthly treasures; or when pestilence extends its ravages throughout the land, or when war, with its horrors, thins their armies at home or abroad; it is often under such circumstances that men are primarily led to think of their souls and their Maker. An occurrence which shall generate in the minds of any a fitting sense of their dependence for succour on the Lord of heaven and earth, in whatever way that occurrence may have originated, must at least be overruled by Providence for good. I. THAT WHEN A PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN THE CHASTISEMENT OF THEIR ENEMIES IT IS REQUIRED THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE RECOURSE TO UNITED SUPPLICATION, that their efforts might be crowned with victory. Men are as much bound as ever to make national entreaties for the bestowal of national mercies, and for the successful issue of legitimate national movements. II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH OUR UNITED SUPPLICATIONS SHOULD BE OFFERED. We should pray, as penitents for pardon; as sinners for salvation; as patriots for our country; and as followers of Him who has taught us to love our enemies, for those enemies themselves. (*H. B. Moffat, M.A.*)

Vers. 40, 41. Now, my God, let, I beseech Thee, Thine eyes be open, and let Thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.—*The dedication of the Temple* (a dedication sermon):—The text is a prayer to God—I. FOR THE NOTICE OF HIS EYE. “Let Thine eyes be open towards this house.” That you may worship under His approving eye. 1. Your worship must be spiritual. 2. Your worship must be that of faith. 3. You must come with purity. II. FOR THE ATTENTION OF HIS EAR. “Let Thine ear be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.” What prayers will be made here? 1. Personal prayers. 2. Prayers for ministers. 3. Prayers for the inhabitants of this town. 4. Prayers for our country. 5. Prayers for the extension of Christ’s kingdom. III. FOR THE INSTRUCTIONS OF HIS WORD. “Arise Thou and the ark of Thy strength.” We consider this part of the text a prayer for the administration of instruction; because the ark contained the tables of the ten commandments and a copy of the whole law, which the priests were appointed to teach. IV. FOR A HOLY AND SUCCESSFUL PRIESTHOOD. “Let Thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness.” 1. No minister can fully know the truth but by experience, and therefore cannot teach it. 2. No minister can conduct his office with a proper feeling, without experience, and that experience constant. 3. Success is promised to no unconverted man. (*R. Watson.*) *Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple*:—There are two things of which we are here reminded. I. OUR OWN SANCTUARY. “Let Thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.” We must carry a home-feeling with us into the sanctuary, if we wish it to be to us the house of God and the gate of heaven. There are some who are utter strangers to this home-feeling; they have no place of worship which they can call their own. A wandering spirit in religion is destructive to vital religion in the heart. II. OUR EARNEST SUPPLICATION. “Arise, O Lord God,” &c. This prayer is extremely suitable in the exercises of public worship, because it includes all that can be included both for minister and people. (*R. C. Dillon, A.M.*) *The dedication of the temple*:—I. AN UNEQUIVOCAL RECOGNITION OF THE NECESSITY OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN ORDER THAT A CHURCH MAY BE A SOURCE OF REAL BENEFIT TO THE PEOPLE. II. THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY THAT MINISTERS SHOULD HAVE A DIVINE COMMISSION AND SUITABLE PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS. III. THE PARAMOUNT OBJECT AS IDENTIFIED WITH THE GLORY OF GOD, WORTHY OF THE MIGHTY APPARATUS PROVIDED AND BROUGHT INTO ACTION—THE ETERNAL BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE. (*J. Davies, D.D.*) *God in His temple*:—I. A DESCRIPTION OF GOD’S HOUSE. “Thy resting place.” Rest is not used here in the sense of ceasing from labour, but in the sense of remaining or staying. Here we have the outward building for the worship of God represented. 1. As the heart of national life. 2. As the special place where God meets His people. II. A PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTERS. Some look upon a preacher as a social reformer. Some as a lecturer on morality. Some as a well-directed pattern of propriety to keep up appearance

and show. The true light in which to regard a preacher is that of a messenger of salvation. III. A PETITION FOR THE PEOPLE. "Let Thy saints rejoice," &c.

1. An important state. A condition of joy.
2. A necessary condition. The only true ground of rejoicing is goodness. (*Homilist.*) *Solomon's prayer for the sanctuary*:—I. EXPLAIN SOLOMON'S VIEWS OF THE SANCTUARY. He here represents it as the resting-place of God. Solomon was fully justified in this view by Psalm cxxxii., which was supposed to have been composed in reference to the erection of the temple. There his father prays, "Enter Thou into Thy rest," and affirms—"For the Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath desired it for His habitation: here will I dwell for ever, for I have desired it." And further than this, the Divine presence had dwelt in the cloud that overshadowed the mercy-seat in the tabernacle. The presence of God was manifested in the temple, differently from everywhere beside. In hell, it is displayed by His frown—in heaven, by the unveiling of His glory—throughout the earth, in the exuberance of His goodness; but in the sanctuary, by the manifestation of His grace and compassion. It is called His "resting-place," because He regards it with complacency and delight. This delight, however, did not arise from the splendour with which Solomon's temple was adorned, for the Infinite Mind, which from its own vast resources could call into existence the temple of the universe, must be far superior to delight in any mere material edifice. God does not now dwell visibly in the midst of His people, nor does He confine the manifestation of His presence to one temple, as in the times of Solomon; for the resting-place of God is wherever His people meet together, whether in the mountain, den, cave, cottage, cathedral.
1. The sanctuary is the scene of the manifestation of His character as a God of grace. In the temple this was taught by God appearing reconciled by the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy-seat. This appears more clearly in the Christian sanctuary, where God appears in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself by Jesus Christ, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.
2. The sanctuary is the scene of the worship of His people. The temple of old was thus distinguished.
3. The sanctuary is the sphere of the accomplishment of the purposes of Divine grace in reference to man. It was one great means of keeping alive the worship of the true God, and of preserving the existence of religion amongst them. Thus, on a limited scale, every Christian sanctuary is exerting a most salutary influence upon the present and eternal destinies of the children of men. These were reasons which induced so much delight in the mind of God in reference to the temple of Solomon, and in the scene of His people's assembling now. These are objects worthy of affording delight even to the mind of the eternal God. Is the sanctuary His resting-place? We see the propriety of our being anxious that this house of prayer should be distinguished by attention to its external appearance. Is the sanctuary His resting-place? It ought to be the object of our warm affection. Is the sanctuary His resting-place? Then it ought to be the scene of our constant resort.

II. SOLOMON'S DESIRES ON BEHALF OF THE SANCTUARY. The blessings which true religion required in the days of Solomon for its extension and perpetuity are essentially necessary at the present time and will be through every age.

1. Solomon implores the Divine presence. He desires that the ark should occupy its appointed place in the temple. This was the appointed medium of Divine manifestation, and therefore he desired the entrance of the ark. But he is also anxious for the Divine presence, without which all external symbols would be in vain. He desires His presence as a God of mercy, from off the mercy seat; for this only is suitable to us as fallen creatures. A God of pure justice and immaculate purity would fill us with terror and insure destruction. Under the Gospel, the mercy seat is more distinctly revealed than under the law, and the blood of atonement is more precious. The Divine presence as a God of grace and mercy is absolutely necessary. The temple of Solomon would have been as worthless as a heap of ruins, as to any moral power and influence, without the Divine presence. This is equally necessary now; for we may have every part of sanctuary worship complete—the ordinances, the ministry, the assembly—but without the presence of God totally inefficient. It is the altar, the wood, and the sacrifice, without the holy fire. It is the Bethesda, the house of mercy, without the descending angel to impart efficacy to the waters. While we seek it, let us remember, that though it is thus essential to the power and efficiency of ordinances, it is graciously promised. He says, "In all places where I record My name, I will come unto you and will bless you."
2. The efficiency of the ministry.
3. The benefit of the Church of God. One of the great designs of Christian ordinances is the advancing improvement of true believers as well as the conversion of sinners. In conclusion—1. Let us be

thankful for the institution and possession of Divine ordinances. The wisdom and grace of God has given existence to these ordinances, as the channel of His grace to the souls of men. "There is a river, the streams whereof" &c. 2. Let us learn our dependence upon the Divine blessing for the efficiency of ordinances. 3. Let us cultivate a deep anxiety for the Divine blessing. (C. Gilbert.) *The Divine presence entreated, for the efficiency of the ministry and the prosperity of the people of God*:—Throughout the inspired volume one uniform representation prevails touching the dignity, importance, and responsibility of the sacred ministry; Moses (Exod. xxxiii. 15); Elijah (1 Kings xix. 4-14); Paul (2 Cor. v. 18-20; 1 Tim. i. 11, 12; 2 Tim. i. 11); and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other "watchmen of Israel" were keenly alive to the weight of the "burden of the Lord" which was laid upon them. If we would be upheld in our work, and labour for the Divine glory and the welfare of the Church of Christ, let us enter into the prayer of Solomon at the consecration of the temple. I. THE INVOCATION OF THE LORD'S PRESENCE SUGGESTS HOW NECESSARY THAT PRESENCE IS FOR THE PROSPERITY OF HIS CHURCH. 1. It was manifested in those times by a visible symbol. 2. If the ark be regarded as typical of the Lord Jesus, as undoubtedly it is to be, then we may identify Christ with Jehovah and we may see in the entrance of the ark of God's strength into the temple and into its most holy place a prefiguration of the abode of Christ in His Church, and of His entrance as our Great High Priest into the most holy place in the heavens, from which He manifests Himself to His people by His Spirit (Psa. lxxviii. 18). 3. This is the presence of God for which we are to look in the present state of the Church. All our endeavours will be in vain, all our labours abortive, unless attended by the grace and influence of the Spirit. "It is necessary," says Augustine, "that the Holy Spirit should work inwardly, that the medicine that is applied from without may take effect. Unless He be present to the heart of the hearer, the word of the preacher is idle and vain." "I once," observes Cecil, "said to myself, in the foolishness of my heart, what sort of sermon must that have been which was preached by Peter when three thousand souls were converted at once? What sort of sermon? Such as other sermons. There is nothing to be found in it extraordinary. The effect was not produced by his eloquence, but by the mighty power of God present with His Word. II. IN CONNECTION WITH THIS BLESSING, AND DEPENDENT UPON IT, WE SHOULD PRAY FOR MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATION. "Let Thy priests be clothed with salvation," or "righteousness" (Psa. cxxxii. 9). 1. The beautiful garments of the sanctuary would not be sufficient without the inward endowment of truth and holiness. Still more should the ministers of the gospel be qualified for their office by an experimental knowledge of the great salvation and the adornment of a holy life (2 Cor. vi. 4-7; 1 John i. 3). It is a striking observation of Bishop Bull: "The priest who is not clothed with righteousness, though otherwise richly adorned with all the ornaments of human and Divine literature, and those gilded over with the rays of seraphic prudence, is yet but a naked, beggarly, despicable creature, of no authority, no use, no service in the Church of God." "I will be sure to live well," was the remark of G. Herbert when he entered upon his living at Bemerton, "because the virtuous life of a clergyman is the most persuasive eloquence to persuade all that see it to reverence and love." 2. To be thus "clothed with salvation" will most effectually fit the Christian minister for the various departments of labour and trial through which he will have to pass (2 Cor. iv. 1, 2, 5-7). 3. The habitual clothing of salvation and righteousness, for which we should pray, will indeed conduce to ministerial efficiency. Putting on Christ, arrayed in the garments of purity and truth, of meekness and love, we shall best "magnify our office." Cecil says: "The zeal of some men is of a haughty, unbending, ferocious character. They have the letter of truth, but they mount the pulpit like prize-fighters. It is with them a perpetual scold. This spirit is a reproach to the gospel; it is not the spirit of Jesus Christ. He seems to have laboured to win men. But there is an opposite extreme: the love of some men is all milk and mildness; there is so much delicacy and so much fastidiousness—they touch with so much tenderness; and, if the patient shrinks, they will touch no more. The times are too flagrant for such a disposition. The gospel is sometimes preached in this way till all the people agree with the preacher: he gives no offence; he does no good." In "speaking the truth" we should do it "in love," yet always maintaining its supremacy and never sparing the sin in our desire to spare the sinner. III. THE EFFICIENCY OF THE MINISTRY WILL CONDUCE TO THE PROSPERITY AND JOY OF THE CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF GOD. (J. T. Broad, M.A.)



CHAPTER VII.

**VERS. 1-10. Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven.—God among His people :—**I. PRAYER FOR GOD TO COME. This prayer was marked—1. By its publicity. (1) Public prayer, formally or virtually, has been the custom among all nations at all times. (2) It is a "reasonable service." (3) It is an impressive service. It evokes sympathy. 2. By its speciality. 3. By its success. II. GOD AMONG HIS PEOPLE. 1. By symbol. 2. Permanently. 3. A source of blessedness. If God be among His people—(1) He will help His ministers. (2) The preaching of Christ will be a glory, a blessing, a satisfaction, a source of refreshment to the soul. 3. His providence will wear a very different aspect; in the darkest day we shall feel that all is well. 4. The realisation of His presence will give the best idea of heaven—fits them for it and makes them desire it. III. PRAISE TO GOD. 1. The theme of their praise: God's mercy. 2. Its timeliness. 3. Its acceptableness. Conclusion: 1. Learn the value of public worship. 2. Make it a test of your character. 3. Learn the privilege of true worshippers. It is a delightful employment. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good," &c. 4. You may ask, "What can we do to benefit by public worship?" Come to meet with God. Come in a prayerful spirit. Come with a thankful heart. Take heed what you hear. Be not forgetful hearers. Follow all with prayer that "the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." 5. What can we do to promote it? (1) Attend it regularly, punctually, and solemnly. (2) Give your money abundantly and cheerfully to support it. (*T. Thoresby.*) *A dedication service:—*The light and fire, the "glory of the Lord," that came down were symbols. I. Something SUPERNATURAL. Solomon with all his wisdom, and Huram's artisans with all their skill, could not have invented that. The king was as impotent before it as the lowest slave from his provinces was before him. So there is an "unprogrammed" part of the service which is being conducted by the powers of another world. Strange forces have made the edifice their dwelling. II. That glory was not merely a supernatural phenomenon, something sent from God; it SYMBOLED GOD HIMSELF. Shekinah means dwelling. When our version reads, "I will dwell among Israel," the Hebrew says, "I will shekinah among them." God is here. III. THE DIVINE PRESENCE CAME IN RESPONSE TO A MAN'S CONSECRATION PRAYER; its great Amen. IV. THE SHEKINAH REMAINED IN THE TEMPLE. Though the outer glow of it was withdrawn, a gleam of it lingered within the Holy of Holies, illumining that windowless apartment, dropping its softened light upon the ark of the covenant, with its tables of the law, its golden mercy-seat, and the cherubim of life. So God will remain with us; and the sign of His presence will be that a light falls upon the Bible, our ark of covenant, making its laws of righteousness gleam into our consciences, its assurance of grace fill us with peace, and its promise of life glow in our hopes until we enter that temple where "the Lamb is the light thereof." (*Homiletic Review.*)

**Vers. 12-16. And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer.—The answer of God to the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple :—**1. How strikingly does the answer meet the prayer. Solomon anticipated days of sorrow. He asked of God, "If we call upon Thee, wilt Thou hear us?" "I will," says God, "I will." Solomon asks that God's eye and ear may be open to his house. God exceeds the prayer of the king. Not only shall Mine eyes and Mine ears be there, but My heart shall be there also. 2. God not only declares that He has heard the prayer of Solomon, He says something more encouraging: "I have chosen this house for Myself, for a house of sacrifice." 3. God affirms national judgments to be the work of His own hand. "If I shut up heaven," &c. 4. God supposes that always in national calamity the people will come running to Him. 5. God regards His house as pre-eminently a house of prayer. "Mine ears shall be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place." 6. God gives a promise of His perpetual presence in His house. Conclusion: What duty devolves upon us having such abundant mercies? 1. Personal religion. 2. Family religion. 3. Liberal offering to the Lord. (*T. Mortimer, B.D.*) **If I shut up heaven.—Pestilence God's retribution for sin :—**I. GOD CLAIMS TO HIMSELF THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE CALAMITY FOR WHOSE REMOVAL WE ENTREAT. II. THE DIRECT CONNECTION WHICH IS POINTED OUT BETWEEN THE

VISITATION OF THE PESTILENCE AND A PEOPLE'S IMPIETY AS THE PROVOCATION WHICH HAS CAUSED IT. III. THOUGH PESTILENCE BE OF GOD'S SENDING, YET WILL HE BE ENTREATED FOR ITS REMOVAL. (*Robert Bickersteth, M.A.*) *The cessation of the cholera*:—I. There is no one truth that is more universal in its application, or which more commends itself to every man's conscience, than that GUILT IS FOLLOWED BY PUNISHMENT, most certainly in the next world, and most probably in this. II. That as true repentance will always be accepted, for Christ's sake, for the putting away of sin, so WILL IT OFTEN AVOID, IN THE MERCY OF GOD, TO THE REMOVAL OF THE TEMPORAL CALAMITY which may have been the consequence and punishment of the sin. (*F. O. Morris.*) *The means and method of healing in the Church*:—I. THE SUPPOSITION OF JUDGMENTS. 1. Judgments light not on a people casually or by chance, but by the overruling command and commission of God (Job v. 6, 7). (1) Sometimes by way of dominion and absolute power. (2) Sometimes as a preparation unto intended mercy, as men plough the ground which they mean to enrich with precious seed, and carve the stone which they mean to put in the top of the building. As men put forth longest into wind and sun that great timber which must bear the greatest burden and stress of the building. (3) But most usually in a way of justice (Jer. xxx. 15; Neh. ix. 33; Ezek. xiv. 23). Personal chastisements may be for trial and exercise of faith and patience, but general and public judgments are ever in wrath and displeasure. Let us therefore labour to find out our sins by our sufferings. Chastisements never mend us till they teach us (Psa. xciv. 12; Mic. vi. 9). 2. The Lord hath variety of judgments whereby to reduce froward and stubborn sinners. God's method in these various judgments usually is—(1) He begins at the outward man, exercising a people many times with change of rods, which is ever a sign of anger in the father and stubbornness in the son. (2) He proceeds to the soul, revealing His wrath, causing guilt and fear to gripe and seize on the conscience (Psa. li. 8; Job. vi. 4; Prov. xviii. 14). (3) Towards obdurate sinners the Lord many times deals in a more fearful manner, sealing them up under hardness of heart, a spirit of slumber, a reprobate sense, a seared conscience, &c., till destruction unawares overtake them (Matt. xxiv. 39; Ezek. xxiv. 14; Hos. iv. 17; Rev. xxii. 11). II. A DIRECTION UNTO DUTIES. Consider—1. The quality of the persons who are to perform them: "My people that are called by My name." All men are His creatures, only a select and peculiar inheritance that bear His name and are in covenant with Him are called His people (Ezek. xvi. 8; Psa. iv. 3; Isa. xliii. 21, lxiii. 18; Acts xv. 14). To be called by His name noteth to be His adopted children. We are God's people—(1) By visible profession or sacramental separation from the world, as the whole nation of the Jews are called His people (Exod. xix. 5; Deut. iv. 7). (2) By spiritual sanctification and internal dispositions (John xvii. 6; Gal. vi. 16; Rom. ii. 29, ix. 8, xi. 5; Phil. iii. 3). 2. The duties required for the removal of judgments. (1) Humiliation. (2) Prayer. Without this humiliation is but a sinking under God, not a seeking unto Him. (a) By this we honour God in acknowledging Him the fountain of all our good, the inflicter of all evil. As a diamond is cut only by a diamond, so God is pacified only by Himself. (b) By this we ease ourselves. Prayer lighteneth affliction where it doth not remove it. The heart is meekened to accept the punishment of sin, as wool or mud deadens the force of a bullet. (3) Seeking the face of God. His favour to comfort us, and His counsel to direct us. (4) Reformation of life. III. A GRACIOUS PROMISE OF MERCY. 1. A promise—(1) Of gracious condescension: "from heaven." (2) Of gracious audience. (3) Of forgiveness. (4) Of healing. 2. Touching these promises, observe—(1) That when God comes down to deliver, and looks from heaven, He doth it by no other way than by the Incarnation of His Son, the efficacy of His Spirit, the operation of His providence, or the ministry of angels. (2) When He hears prayers, it is only by the intercession and mediation of Christ. (3) When He forgives sins, it is only by the merits and righteousness of Christ. (4) But when He heals a land, He often useth in that work the ministry of men. Magistrates are healers and repairers (Isa. iii. 7). Ministers are healers of the sick (Ezek. xxxiv. 4). (*Edward Reynolds, D.D.*) *Sin and judgments*:—1. The sins of God's own people may provoke and procure judgments. 2. Their sins have some aggravations in them that other men's have not. They are sins against—(1) Special light (1 Kings xi. 9). (2) Special love and experiences of Divine favour (2 Sam. xii. 7-9). (3) Special relations (Isa. i. 2). (4) Special grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit (Eph. iv. 30). (5) Special covenants and engagements, after avouching God for theirs (Psa. lxxviii. 34). (6) Special

deliverances from greatest dangers (Ezra ix. 13, 14). (7) Special hopes and more special promises which should have persuaded them to holiness (2 Cor. vii. 1; 1 John iii. 3). (8) Special peace and glorious comforts, as David sinned against the joy of God's salvation (Psa. li. 12). Peter denied Christ after he had seen His transfiguration. (*Ibid.*) **If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves.**—*Humiliation, its obligation and nature:*—I. IT IS A DUTY CALLED FOR BY PROPHETS AND APOSTLES AND SPECIALLY RESPECTED BY GOD (Mic. vi. 8; Jas. iv. 10; 1 Pet. v. 6; 2 Kings xxii. 19; Lev. xxvi. 41, 42). 1. It emptieth the heart of self-confidence and is the root of the fundamental duty of self-denial. 2. It fits for approach to God. 3. It disposeth to a confession of sin (Luke xv. 17-19, xviii. 13). 4. It prepares the heart for the entertainment of mercy. 5. It makes way for the forsaking of sin; the more a soul is humbled for it, the more it is fearful of it and watchful against it. II. IT IS TWOFOLD IN ITS NATURE. 1. Passive, when God breaks the heart by the hammer of His Word (Jer. xxiii. 29), or by some sore affliction. 2. Active, when the soul humbleth itself under sin and wrath. This may be—(1) Legal, proceeding from a spirit of bondage, when the heart roars on a rack, or melts in a furnace, is filled with consternation and anguish under the weight of sin and wrath, as in the case of Pharaoh, Ahab, Belshazzar, Felix, the jailor, and the murderers of Christ. (2) Evangelical. When the soul is not only broken and battered with the horror and dread of wrath (this it may be and remain hard, as every piece of a broken flint is hard still), but when it is kindly melted and softened with apprehensions of God's goodness and free-grace. A compounded duty made up of love and sorrow; Hezekiah, Josiah (Jer. xxvi. 19; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27). III. THIS IS A PERPETUAL DUTY. As long as sin remains there must be a sense of it, and sorrow for it. But in some times and cases it is to be specially renewed. In times—1. Of extraordinary sins and provocations. 2. Of public dangers and distresses. 3. Of great enterprises attempted. 4. Of successes and blessings desired (Ezra viii. 21). (*Ibid.*) *Helps to the performance of the duty of humiliation:*—I. TAKE A VIEW OF GOD. 1. In Himself. (1) His searching eye and mighty hand (Jas. iv. 10; 1 Pet. v. 6). (2) His majesty and glory (Isa. vi. 2; Psa. lxxxix. 6, 7). (3) His holiness (Exod. xv. 11; Josh. xxiv. 19). (4) His jealousy and justice (Nah. i. 2). (5) His mercy and goodness (Hos. iii. 5; Rom. ii. 4). (6) His omniscience. Such considerations have humbled the holiest of men. Moses (Exod. iii. 6); Job (Job xlii. 5); Elijah (1 Kings xix. 13); Isaiah (Isa. vi. 5); Ezra (Ezra ix. 15); Peter (Luke v. 8). 2. In His relations to us. He is our Maker, King, Judge, Father, Master. 3. In His dealings with us. (1) In His judgments and various providences. (2) In His mercies which have shined upon us through all our clouds. II. TAKE A VIEW OF YOURSELVES, OF YOUR OWN HEARTS AND LIVES. This is a duty of singular use and benefit. It enlargeth the heart in godly sorrow for sin past, upon the discoveries which this scrutiny maketh. (*Ibid.*) *Fruits and evidences of humiliation:*—1. A godly sorrow, so called because it sets the soul God-ward. Cain, Judas, Felix, all sorrowed, but they ran from God. As a ship in a tempest ventures not to any shore, but gets further into the sea, so the soul, when it is humbled by God, betakes not itself unto any carnal shore, but still runs closer unto Him. 2. A justifying of God, ascribing to Him the glory of His righteousness if He should condemn us; and of His mercy, that He absolves us (Psa. li. 4; Dan. ix. 7-9). 3. A self-judging and subscribing to our condemnation (Deut. xxvii. 15). As St. Austin saith of the poor publican, "He judged and accused himself, that God might deliver and defend him." Also Bernard, "This is a good judgment indeed which withdraws and hides me from the severe judgment of God." (*Ibid.*) *The Divine philosophy of revivals:*—This is a revival text. It contains the germs of the whole Divine philosophy of revivals. A revival implies religious declension, and is itself such a waking up of the spiritual life of the Church as leads to the conversion of sinners. I. AN EXPLICIT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPER METHOD FOR PROMOTING A REVIVAL. 1. The first duty of a people seeking a revival is humiliation before God. This state of mind is produced by our contemplating the purity and perfection and loving-kindness of the Lord, in contrast with our own sinfulness, unworthiness, and ingratitude. 2. Prayer is the next divinely prescribed means in promoting a revival of religion. Prayerfulness is one of the main characteristics of a godly life. But our prayers are sometimes prayerless. They are an unwritten liturgy, made up of hackneyed phrases in which there is hardly a spark of vitality. They lack the strong pinions of faith and ardent desire without which they cannot reach the third heaven. They lack the Divine electricity. When God's people

besech Him, as John Knox did when he prayed, "Lord, give me Scotland, or I die," then their prayers are effective. 3. We must seek God's face. He never intended that His people should pray to Him as strangers. He wants us to draw near to Him as children go to a loving father or mother. 4. There must be a forsaking of sin. II. SOME DEFINITE AND GOOD REASONS WHICH WE HAVE FOR EXPECTING A REVIVAL. 1. God's intimate relation to the Church. (1) He claims a special and unrivalled property in its members. He calls them His people. (2) He puts a special honour upon them. He calls them by His name. 2. God's explicit promise. (1) He will "hear from heaven." (2) "And will forgive their sins." (3) "And will heal their land. (*David Winters.*) *The duty of a people under Divine chastisements* :—I. There are THREE MODES IN WHICH IT HAS PLEASED ALMIGHTY GOD AT DIFFERENT PERIODS OF THE WORLD TO INFLICT HIS RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS ON NATIONAL DELINQUENCY: by the sword without, the famine and pestilence within. II. THE DUTIES ENJOINED UPON A PEOPLE UNDER THE AFFLICTIVE VISITATION OF A PESTILENCE. 1. Humiliation. 2. Prayer. 3. Reformation. III. THE ENCOURAGING ASSURANCE OF THE GOD OF MERCY TO A HUMBLED, PRAYING, AND CONVERTED PEOPLE. (*James Williams, M.A.*) *National chastisements* :—It seems to have been after an interval of thirteen years that the Lord signified in detail that He had listened to the solemn prayer that Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple. God notifies the possibility of His punishments falling on the land in the event of their sinning against Him, and then adds, "If the people shall humble themselves," &c. I. This passage is only one of many which point out HOW ENTIRELY NATURE IS RULED BY GOD. Take such examples as these: the flood; the destruction of Sodom; Elijah fed by ravens; the destiny of Jonah, &c. They all proclaim that the whole world is under the immediate control of a personal God who regulates it in reference to man. II. NATIONAL TROUBLE SHOULD CAUSE A PEOPLE TO CONSIDER THEIR WAYS, and to seriously reflect upon their national sins. III. A PROPER CONSCIOUSNESS OF NATIONAL SINS OUGHT TO BRING A PEOPLE TO THEIR KNEES IN humble submission, and lead them to acknowledge that national chastisements are of His appointment. In reply to the objection that might be urged against this teaching, "Why ascribe to God what may easily be traced to natural causes?" I observe, the more science the better. Trace out the causes as best you can: discover the laws of rain and sunshine, of temperature and weather. But, after all, these are not the first cause. They are only second in order. There is still the sphere in which God rules supreme. It is only too obvious in a case of personal sickness. A man may be laid upon a bed of affliction: the illness may upset his plans—deepen his reflections—bring him to a true repentance—and, in fact, alter his whole career for the better; in this the first cause is God, in His mercy and love to a wayward soul; the second cause is, perhaps, that one day he caught a chill. But then that chill does not exclude God. It is worthy of special remark, moreover, that our Lord's teachings and miracles were pointedly in this direction. He did not deny that the tower of Siloam was a judgment, though He repressed self-righteous inferences on the part of others. He adduced the flood and the destruction of Sodom as warnings to His own generation. IV. IT MAY BE OBJECTED THAT BETTER DAYS WILL COME WHETHER A PEOPLE WILL HUMBLE THEMSELVES AND PRAY OR NOT. It may be so. Just as a sick man may refuse to repent, and yet will in due time get well again. But the moral loss is well-nigh beyond recovery. It involves the blunting of the moral sense, the deadening of conscience, and the loss of the higher benefit which God willed to bestow. A nation which cannot recognise the correcting hand of God must be indeed estranged from Him. Conclusion: Our personal duty. 1. Repentance. 2. Intercession. God sets His mark of love and protection upon them who "sigh and cry for all the abominations." No one can tell how much he may do by himself returning to God. (*C. A. Raymond, M.A.*) *Biblical anthropomorphism* :—In anthropomorphic language "eyes" are ascribed to God; thus we read "that the eye of the Lord is on them that fear Him" (Psa. xxxviii. 18). Thus again, "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Psa. xxxii. 8). He is said to be of "purer eyes than to behold evil" (Heb. i. 13). A similar form of speech ascribes "ears" to God. Thus we have these words—"In Mine ears, saith the Lord of hosts" (Isa. v. 9); "The cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (Jas. v. 4.) What does this language mean? Why are eyes and ears ascribed to a Spirit that has no limits and no form? The language is used for two purposes. I. To express HIS COGNIZANCE OF MAN. Through the eye and the ear we derive our

knowledge of all outside of us. 1. He knows us directly. 2. He knows us thoroughly. (1) He knows what we are. (2) He knows what we have been. (3) He knows all that we ever shall be. "To him there is nothing old appears, to Him there is nothing new." A sense of His knowledge of us should make us frank, solemn, circumspect, devout. II. To express HIS INTEREST IN MAN. God's interest in us is shown—1. In the various capacities of enjoyment with which He has endowed us, and the provisions He has made for them. We have capacity for every species of enjoyment—sensuous, intellectual, social, religious. We can drink of all the rivers from the eternal ocean of joy. For the sensuous there is matter, for the intellectual there is truth, for the social there is society, for the religious there is Himself. 2. In the preservation of our existence, notwithstanding our sinfulness. We have transgressed His precepts, warred against His arrangements, yet He preserves us year after year. The patience of an Infinite Love is here. 3. In our redemption by Jesus Christ. "God so loved the world," &c. "He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up," &c. Conclusion: "Thou God seest me," we unite with the blessed fact, "Thou God lovest us." It is His interest in us that prompts Him to watch our movements and listen to our words. (*Homilist.*)

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## CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1-6. That the cities.—*Solomon's military enterprises.*—Chiefly in acquiring cities rebuilt and taken from the enemy. I. Cities for STORES (1 Kings ix. 19). II. Cities for COLONISATION. III. Cities for PLEASURE. IV. Cities for DEFENCE. Lessons: 1. That those who attend to the spiritual will not neglect the temporal interests of a nation. 2. That amidst the temporal interests of a nation great risks exist. Hence—(1) Lessons of prudence. (2) The danger of prosperity. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Ver. 11. And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh.—*Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter.*—We are to see in Solomon's action the working of a tender conscience; even though he may be appeasing his conscience by some trick or ceremony, yet he is showing us the working of the moral nature within the kingly breast. Yet there is a point to be noted here which is common to human experience: why should Solomon have married the daughter of Pharaoh? Why should he have, in the first instance, placed himself in so vital a relation to heathenism? Are there not men who first plunge into great mistakes, and then seek to rectify their position by zealous care about comparatively trifling details? Do not men make money by base means, and then zealously betake themselves to book-keeping, as if they would not spend money except in approved directions? Are there not those who have steeped their hearts in iniquity, and yet have washed their hands with soap and nitre? We are to beware of the creation of a false or a partial conscience, that makes up for sins of a larger kind by ostentatious devotion at the altar of detail and ceremony and petty ritual. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Solomon's marriage.*—Consider Solomon's marriage with an Egyptian princess—I. AS A MATTER OF POLICY. It sprang from—1. A desire to counteract the influence of Hadad (1 Kings xi. 14-20). 2. The wish to obtain support for his new dynasty and recognition from one of older fame and greater power. 3. Anxiety to strengthen himself by foreign alliances. II. AS A SOURCE OF MORAL PERPLEXITY. What must be done with her? Solomon felt that a broad distinction must be made between the worship of Jehovah and idolatry. III. AS THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE. The policy advantageous at first, but ultimately proved hollow and impolitic. The reign which began so gloriously ended in gross darkness and fetish worship. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Vers. 12, 13. Then Solomon offered burnt offerings unto the Lord.—*Solomon's burnt offerings.*—Solomon was great in burnt offerings. Do not men sometimes make up in burnt offerings what they lack in moral consistency? Is not an ostentatious religion sometimes the best proof of internal decay? It ought not to be so. The outward and inward should correspond. The action should be the incarnation of the thought. It is beautiful to look upon the Church engaged in

much church-building and in strenuous endeavours against public sin; yet we must never forget that all this may possibly coexist with internal loss, decay, corruption. All action does not spring from life. Sometimes we try to make up by complex mechanism what is wanting in real vitality. It is often easier to offer a burnt offering than to do some deed of moral heroism. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **As the duty of every day required.**—*Duty*:—To some Christians “the sense of duty” and kindred phrases sound unattractive and suspicious. Yet it is dangerous even to minimise the sense of duty. A man who makes no terms with conscience, but does what God commands, will find his love grow stronger. A Christian’s sense of duty is not the same as the sense of duty of one who has no faith. Natural religion would teach a man to be honest, sober, and industrious, but Christ’s teaching goes far beyond this. Religious duties; purity of heart; forgiveness of others, &c. But it is in the realm of supernatural help, prayer, and the sacraments that the greatest divergence is seen. “As the duty of every day required.” Words such as these suggest that unless we are living a life of prayer, unless we are partaking of the life of Christ in the means He left for us to use, we are undutiful. What we claim for our religion is this—1. The personal love of Christ will make us more severe with ourselves in performing “hard, unwelcome” duties of every day. 2. It will also claim from us earnest prayer, belief in the grace of the Holy Spirit, &c. (*W. R. Hutton, M.A.*)

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## CHAPTER IX.

**VERS. 1-12. And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon.**—*The Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon*:—I. **THE SPIRIT WHICH PROMPTED THE VISIT.** 1. A spirit of curiosity. 2. A spirit of inquiry. 3. A spirit of restlessness. 4. A spirit of self-sacrifice. She undertook a long and risky journey. A reproof, says Christ, to indifference and stupidity concerning Himself. II. **THE MUTUAL INTER-COURSE DURING THE VISIT.** 1. Solomon answered her questions. 2. Received her gifts. III. **THE IMPRESSIONS RECEIVED FROM THE VISIT.** 1. She was astonished at the magnificence of Solomon. 2. She was surprised at the wisdom of Solomon. 3. She was confirmed in her belief concerning Solomon. Faith exercised will be greatly strengthened. This just the result—1. Of honest search after truth. 2. Of personal intercourse with Christ. 3. Of engagement in God’s service. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Hard questions*:—This is what the Bible itself asks for; in effect the Bible says, “Prove me, put me to the test, under all circumstances of triumph, joy, need, fear, and see if I have not within me a better answer than can be found in any other book.” This is the criticism to which Jesus Christ is always willing to submit Himself. It is His complaint that we do not ask Him questions enough, the assumption of course being that all inquiries are put in a reverent and faithful spirit. There is a question-asking to which the Bible will pay no heed, and there is a question-asking which Christ will regard as impious and frivolous. Whatever we really want to know with our hearts, whatever is necessary for us to know, Jesus Christ is willing to answer. When we bring our riddles and enigmas to Christ, they must be riddles and enigmas that express the very agony of desire. To our speculation or curiosity Christ may have nothing to say, or if He condescend to speak to us it may be in tones of rebuke and repulse. Do not be afraid to put hard questions to Christ. The Queen of Sheba did not put any flippant questions to Solomon; she rather sought out the most difficult inquiries which it was possible to propound. The meaning of this is that we are to ask the very hardest questions which our soul wishes to have answered, always remembering that there are some questions which need not be answered in time, and which indeed could not be answered to our present incomplete or depraved capacity and power. Properly considered, it may be impossible to put any easy questions to Christ within the range of the scope which His mission fills. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon*:—I. **THE MEETING TOGETHER OF THESE REPRESENTATIVES OF TWO DIFFERENT NATIONS HAD THE HAPPY EFFECT OF DRAWING CLOSER THE BONDS OF UNITY.** II. **THE BENEFICIAL EFFECT WHICH THE EXHIBITION OF THE WORKS OF NATIONAL INDUSTRY MAY HAVE UPON THE THOUGHTFUL AND WELL-GOVERNED**

MIND. The things seen by the Queen of Sheba did much to correct and enlarge her mind; far more than all her previous intelligence and inquiry. III. THE SPECTACLE OF WORKS OF ART AND MAN'S DEVICE, VAST, MULTIFORM, AND BEAUTIFUL, REFLECTS AS IN A MIRROR THE WONDROUS POWERS OF MAN'S MIND. As we turn from the statue to the mind that sketched and the hand that chiselled out the wonderful design, so let us turn from man with all his wonderful skill and give to God the glory. The Queen of Sheba returned to her home with higher thoughts of God than she had before. IV. THE IMPRESSIVE SPECTACLE OF SOLOMON'S DEVOTION. The Queen admired "the ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord." Some understand these words of a magnificent communication which Solomon had prepared between his palace and the courts of the temple; while others explain them of the cheerful and fervent solemnity with which he worshipped, showing that his heart was deeply engaged in the hallowed and hallowing service. (*S. Bridge, M.A.*) *Heart communing*.—We have in Christ one greater than Solomon. I. WE OUGHT TO COMMUNICATE WITH HIM OF ALL THAT IS IN OUR HEART. Neglect of intercourse with Jesus—1. Is very unkind. 2. Betrays the sad fact of something wrong. 3. Shows a want of confidence in His love, sympathy, and wisdom. 4. Will be the cause of uneasiness in ourselves. 5. Will involve the loss of counsel and help. 6. Is greatly aggravated by eagerness to tell our troubles to others. II. WE NEED NOT CEASE COMMUNING FOR WANT OF TOPICS. 1. Our sorrows. 2. Our joys. 3. Our service. 4. Our plans. 5. Our success and failures. 6. Our desires. 7. Our fears. 8. Our lives. 9. Our mysteries. III. NOR SHALL WE CEASE COMMUNING FOR WANT OF REASONS. Intercourse with Christ—1. Is ennobling and elevating. 2. Consoling and encouraging. 3. Sanctifying and refining. 4. Safe and healthy. 5. Delightful and heavenly. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 8. Therefore made he thee king over them.—*The Divine appointment of kings*.—I. THAT PRINCES ARE OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT. II. THAT WISE AND GOOD RULERS ARE A SIGNAL MARK OF THE DIVINE LOVE AND FAVOUR TO ANY NATION. III. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE REGAL OFFICE AND DIGNITY, both in respect of God and of the people. IV. THAT ON THE ADVANCEMENT OF A PRINCE EMINENTLY QUALIFIED TO SERVE GOD AND HIS COUNTRY WE OUGHT TO BLESS GOD, that is, to return the tribute of praise due to Him. (*Abp. Potter.*) *The blessing of a Protestant king and royal family to the nation*.—I. THAT IT IS GOD WHO MAKETH KINGS, and setteth them on their thrones as His vicegerents to do justice and judgment upon earth. II. ALL KINGS SHOULD REMEMBER THAT THEY SIT UPON THE THRONE OF THE LORD THEIR GOD, of whom the Psalmist says, that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat. They must therefore be good and just, ruling in His fear, and after His example. (*John Donne, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. And of spices great abundance.—*The spicery of religion*.—Solomon had a great reputation for the conundrums and riddles that he made and guessed. The Solomonic navy visited all the world, and the sailors, of course, talked about the wealth of their king, and about the riddles and enigmas that he made and solved; and the news spread until Queen Balkis, away off south, heard of it, and sent messengers with a few riddles that she would like to have Solomon solve, and a few puzzles that she would like to have him find out: Queen Balkis was so pleased with the acuteness of Solomon, that she said: "I'll just go and see him for myself." Yonder it comes—the cavalcade—horses and dromedaries, chariots and charioteers, jingling harness and clattering hoofs, and blazing shields, and flying ensigns, and clapping cymbals. The place is saturated with the perfume. She brings cinnamon, and saffron, and calamus, and frankincense, and all manner of sweet spices. I shall take the responsibility of saying that all the spikenard and cassia and frankincense which the Queen of Sheba brought to Solomon is mightily suggestive of the sweet spices of our holy religion. I. MEN REQUIRE MORE OF THE SPICERY OF RELIGION TO BRIGHTEN THEIR LIFE AND SWEETEN THEIR DISPOSITION AMID THE CARES AND DUTIES OF LIFE. II. WE NEED TO PUT MORE SPICE AND ENLIVENMENT IN OUR RELIGIOUS TEACHING. III. WE WANT MORE LIFE AND SPICE IN OUR CHRISTIAN WORK. IV. WE NEED MORE SPICE AND ENLIVENMENT IN OUR CHURCH MUSIC. V. THE RELIGION OF CHRIST IS A PRESENT AND EVERLASTING REDEMPTION THAT COUNTERACTS ALL TROUBLE. It lifted Samuel Rutherford into a revelry of spiritual delight while he was in physical agonies. It helped Richard Baxter until, in the midst of such a complication of diseases as perhaps no other man ever suffered, he wrote "The Saint's Everlasting Rest." And it poured light on John Bunyan's dungeon—the

light of the shining gate of the shining city. Oh, you sin-parched and you trouble-pounded, here is comfort, here is satisfaction. I cannot tell you what the Lord offers you hereafter so well as I can tell you now. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." May God grant that through your own practical experience you may find that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are paths of peace—that it is perfume now and perfume for ever. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

*Spiced work*:—More than that, we want more life and spice in our Christian work. The poor do not want so much to be groaned over as sung to. With the bread, and medicines, and the garments you give them, let there be an accompaniment of smiles and brisk encouragement. Do not stand and talk to them about the wretchedness of their abode, and the hunger of their looks, and the hardness of their lot. Ah! they know it better than you can tell them. Show them the bright side of the thing, if there be any bright side. Tell them good times will come. Tell them that for the children of God there is immortal rescue. Wake them up out of their stolidity by an inspiring laugh, and while you send in practical help, like the Queen of Sheba, also send in the spices. There are two ways of meeting the poor. One is to come into their house with a nose elevated in disgust, as much as to say: "I don't see how you live here in this neighbourhood. It actually makes me sick. There is that bundle; take it, you poor miserable wretch, and make the most of it." Another way is to go into the abode of the poor in a manner which seems to say: "The blessed Lord sent me. He was poor Himself. It is not more for the good I am going to try to do you than it is for the good that you can do me." Coming in that spirit, the gift will be as aromatic as the spikenard on the feet of Christ, and all the hovels in that alley will be fragrant with the spice. (*Ibid.*)

*Spiced life*:—The fact is that the duties and cares of this life, coming to us from time to time, are stupid often, and inane and intolerable. Here are men who have been battering, climbing, pounding, hammering for twenty years, forty years, fifty years. One great, long drudgery has their life been. Their face anxious, their feelings numbened, their days monotonous. What is necessary to brighten up that man's life, and to sweeten that acid disposition, and to put sparkle into the man's spirits? The spicery of our holy religion. Why, if between the losses of life there dashed a gleam of an eternal gain; if between the betrayals of life there came the gleam of the undying friendship of Christ; if in dull times in business we found ministering spirits flying to and fro in our office, and store, and shop, every-day life, instead of being a stupid monotone, would be a glorious inspiration, penduluming between calm satisfaction and high rapture. How any woman keeps house without the religion of Christ to help her is a mystery to me. To have to spend the greater part of one's life, as many women do, in planning for the meals, and stitching garments that will soon be rent again, and deploring breakages, and supervising tardy subordinates, and driving off dust that soon again will settle, and doing the same thing day in and day out, and year in and year out, until the hair silvers, and the back stoops, and the spectacles crawl to the eyes, and the grave breaks open under the thin sole of the shoe—oh, it is a long monotony! But when Christ comes to the drawing-room, and comes to the kitchen, and comes to the nursery, and comes to the dwelling, then how cheery become all womanly duties! She is never alone now. Martha gets through fretting and joins Mary at the feet of Jesus. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 21. And apes, and peacocks.—*Apes and peacocks* (to children):—We learn from this passage—I. THAT A RICH MAN CAN GET, AS FAR AS WORLDLY GOODS ARE CONCERNED, ALMOST WHAT HE LIKES IN THIS WORLD. II. WHAT EVEN WISE MEN WILL DO, WHEN THEY HAVE MORE MONEY THAN THEY KNOW HOW TO USE. Such was Solomon's position; apes and peacocks were costly, and so he had a special desire to have a goodly number about him. (*D. Davies.*)

*Apes*:—I. THE APE IS SOMETHING LIKE US, AND YET HE IS VERY MUCH UNLIKE US. 1. He cannot speak. 2. He cannot learn. 3. He has no foresight or forethought. It is wonderful how deceptive appearances can be. II. THE APE IS ONLY A CARICATURE OF A MAN, AND DOES NOT IMITATE HIM IN HIS BETTER MOVEMENTS OR HABITS; SO YOU GENERALLY FIND THAT IF A CHILD OR MAN APES ANOTHER, HE APES HIM ONLY IN HIS FAILINGS. I saw a boy the other day, who could not have been more than eleven, vigorously puffing the end of a cigar that he had picked up somewhere. He evidently thought he looked like a man, but I need not tell you how disgusted I felt, and wished that he could imitate the man in a more manly way. He stupidly aped a gentleman whose failing was that he smoked at all. Learn to be natural. Let the one desire of your life be to be true. Never put



on a false look or try to live under false pretences. (*Ibid.*) *Peacocks* :—The peacock has a beautiful tail, and in this respect no bird can match him. But the more you know about him the less you think of his tail. He can only screech hideously when he tries to sing. He is also a very gluttonous and a very selfish and destructive character. The beautiful bird has nothing to commend it except its beautiful feathers. Its characteristic failing is vanity. I. I want you to remember that THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE IN THE WORLD LIKE THAT PEACOCK. Everything depends upon their dress, or their outward appearance. But if you get to know their disposition and their conduct, you will very often cease to be charmed with their dress. II. I want you to GUARD YOURSELVES AGAINST ATTACHING TOO MUCH IMPORTANCE TO APPEARANCES. God does not. Learn that the truest ornament is “a meek and gentle spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price.” (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 31. **And Solomon slept with his fathers.**—*The death of Solomon* :—Such is the sole record of the departure of the most magnificent king of the Israelitish nation. 1. Why is this? For it was not so with David, his father, whose last days, and almost last thoughts, last prayers and exhortations, are fully detailed. 2. Nothing on the first sight, in popular judgment, appears more excellent and full of hope than that petition of Solomon when, just called to the throne, he asked of God wisdom and knowledge, “that I may go out and come in before this people.” God granted him his request. His reign proved to be one of unexampled splendour. Prosperity almost to overflow poured in upon the nation. But as the monarch’s glory increased, his personal character declined. He sank morally and religiously. He became tyrannical and despotic, and grievously oppressed his subjects. Then intense sensuality set in. So deeply did he fall that his name has been connected with the practice of the magical arts and sorceries denounced in the law of Moses. 3. How shall we account for this? Was it that from the first his heart was not set upon God, but upon self? that when he asked at first for wisdom to rule God’s people, he only thought of the honour he would gain thereby? Or is it that we here witness in an individual the corrupting influences of a civilisation not merely luxurious, but high and cultivated, when it discards the faith in God? 4. Whichever it be, by both alternatives we are warned that wisdom, even high, intellectual, and varied, is not godliness, and cannot take its place; that where it is unsanctified, a worm lies at its root. 5. It is a solemn thought that the temple, the culminating point of Solomon’s glory, was the harbinger, and in a degree the cause, of the decline of his nation. The exactions and the oppressive burdens its extravagant cost entailed upon the people alienated them, made the monarchy hateful, and prepared the nation for revolt. 6. Twice since has the same thing been witnessed. The sale of indulgences to help the building of St. Peter’s led to the disruption of a large part of Christendom. So also the gorgeous palace of the French monarch, the memorial of his boundless luxury and consequent oppression, was the prelude of that great convulsion from which the nation has never recovered. Such is the logic of mere human splendour and luxury. 7. What was the end of this renowned monarch? What was the final stamp set upon his character? Scripture is silent on the point, and Christendom has always been divided in regard to it. Those who have thought and hoped the best of him have rested their hopes chiefly on the tenor of the Book of Ecclesiastes. But no tone of repentance pervades this solemn writing; no utterance of contrition or even personal remorse; not one such anguished cry for forgiveness as pervades several of David’s psalms; no humiliation appears in it, not even such as Ahab’s; no confession, even such as Saul’s. Solomon appears to pass away and “make no sign.” (*Archdeacon Grant, D.C.L.*)

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## CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1-19. **And Rehoboam went to Shechem.**—*Rehoboam* :—A cause so stated must succeed. There will be difficulty, but the end is assured. The reasonable always triumphs, due time being given for the elucidation of its purposes, and the manifestation of its real spirit. Violence can have but a short day; the tempest cries itself to rest. “Ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee.” They wanted ease

for service, for loyalty. Where there is no ease how can there be homage, thankfulness, devotion, or any of the high qualities of patriotism? How tempted men are, who are not themselves disquieted, to tell other people to bear their burdens uncomplainingly! The sufferers should sometimes be admitted to the witness-box. There is danger lest our personal comfortableness should disqualify us from judging the case of downtrodden men. Wherever there is weakness the Christian Church should be found; wherever there is reasonableness the Christian sanctuary should offer hospitality. Is there anything more detestable than that a man who has his own way seven days a week, whose footsteps are marked by prosperity, whose very breathing is a commercial success, should stand up and tell men who are bleeding at every pore to be quiet and contented, and not create disturbance in the body politic? If Jeroboam had come with a petition conceived in another tone it ought to have been rejected; it would have been irrational, violent, contemptuous; but the reasonableness of the request will ensure its victory in the long run. How easy it is to think of Rehoboam as the foolish son of a wise father! But are we not unjust to the son in so regarding him? Was Solomon the wise man he is often made out to be? The answer would be "Yes"—and "No." There was no greater fool than Solomon; and he attained his supremacy in folly because there was no man so wise. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" If he had not been son of the morning some shallow pit might have held him; but being son of the morning, and detaching himself from the gravitation of God, the pit into which he falls is bottomless. Pliny says no man can be always wise. That is true philosophically and experimentally; for all men have vulnerable heels, or are exposed to temptations to lightness of mind, amounting in some instances almost to frivolity; they are also the subjects of a singular rebound, which makes them appear the more frivolous because when we last saw them they were absorbed in the solemnity of prayer. Solomon himself is not wise in this matter of government. The history shows that the people were appealing, not against Rehoboam, who had yet had no opportunity of proving his quality as a king, but against his father: "Thy father made our yoke grievous." We are prone to copy the defects of our ancestors and their idols rather than their excellences. We are tempted in wrong directions. Folly has often more charms for us than wisdom. Rehoboam made a cautious reply, and therein he began well; he said to the petitioners, "Come again unto me after three days." This looked hopeful. King Rehoboam utilised the interval by taking "counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? And they spake unto him," as old men ought to speak. Rich is the king whose old men talk in such a strain! They were patriots and philanthropists and philosophers; they were Christians before the time. Marvellous is the power of kindness. They will do most in life who are most considerate. If when the people returned after three days Rehoboam had spoken so, the welkin would have rung with the resonant cheers of a delighted, thankful, because emancipated, people. We have opportunities of this kind: let every man know that in proportion to his kindness will be the quality and the durability of his influence. Kindness is not weakness. It takes Omnipotence to be merciful, in the largest degree and fullest quality of the term. He to whom power belongs holds in His other hand the angel whose name is Mercy. "But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him" (ver. 8)—showing that he understood the message of the people perfectly; he correctly represented the popular will, and therefore he increased his own responsibility, because he was not the victim of ignorance. "And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying" (vers. 10, 11). Woe to the nation whose young men talk so! A young oppressor is an infant devil. Young men talking so will ruin any occasion. This may appear to be a very advanced policy, a very spirited policy, home and foreign. It is a spirited policy: but what is the name of the spirit that inspires it? Does a controversy of this kind begin in a question, and end in an answer? Or is there a reply? Are there such things in history as retorts, reprisals, rebounds, consequences? Let it be known, and laid down as the basis-principle of all action, social, ecclesiastical, and imperial, that there is no right of tyranny. Oppression has no veritable and reputable credentials. Men are not at liberty to take counsel whether they shall be gentle or ungentle. The law is unwritten, because eternal, that even righteousness must be administered in mercy. It might be supposed that the king had taken a

most patriotic course in consulting the old and the young. He had done nothing of the kind: he had omitted to consult Him who had called his house to the royalty. Rehoboam should have consulted the King-maker whose throne is on the circle of the earth, and whose sceptre toucheth the horizon, and whose will is the law of monarchy and commonwealth. All human consultation is a species of under-counsel, valuable within proper limits, and right as recognising the education, the intelligence, and the political instinct of the times; but all consultation, to result in profoundest wisdom, must be intensely, almost exclusively, religious. Kings should talk to their King. The greater the man the nearer should he stand to God. The gospel never gives liberty to oppression. Employers may adopt this course if they please, but they will find it end in ruin. We must recognise the difference between employing cattle and employing men. A parent may adopt this course if he pleases, but his children will chastise him, sting him, with many a disappointment. The world has been educated by oppression. The Lord Himself has used it as an instrument in His hands. A curious expression occurs to this effect in the fifteenth verse—"for the cause was of God." Rehoboam had not taken Him into account, but the Lord took the matter into His own hand. The ministry of the universe is a ministry co-operative, and is not to be understood in parts and sections, but can only be understood by those who take in the whole circumference on which the Almighty operates; and that cannot be done here and now. The Saviour of the world was not murdered by the Jews, except in a secondary and transient sense; He was delivered up from before the foundation of the world that He might make on the universe an infinite impression and reveal to the universe the law of life and the law of sacrifice. If our movement is towards trust, liberty, leniency, philanthropy, beneficence, we are entitled to believe that this is the very logic of love, the rigorous reasoning of piety itself. This will apply to nations, to families, to employers, to all men to whom is remitted the question, Shall the policy be severe, or shall it be clement and hopeful? Rehoboam will be punished: have no fear of that. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." You can make your whips thongs of scorpions, but upon your own back shall the lacerating lash be laid; you can play the fantastic trick before high heaven and make the angels weep, but the bitterness shall be yours: the triumphing of such a policy is short, the end of it is everlasting punishment. What could we do without such laws as these? They are the very ribs of the universe, the very security of society, the corner-stone on which God's fabric rests. We are not the subjects of accidents, the changing whims of statesmen; we are not dependent upon general elections for the grand issue of things: the Lord reigneth. Let us be true and calm. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can get at the heart of things; deal with causes, fountains, origins, and purify the spring of all life. Here the Saviour is gentle in His might, mighty in His gentleness; He says, "Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again." When the soul is right the hands will take to the new policy with skill that might have been learned in heaven and that is inspired by the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*A political crisis and a fatal policy*:—I. We see here on the part of the ten tribes, THE EXPRESSION OF A REASONABLE POLITICAL ASPIRATION. II. THE EXAMPLE OF REHOBAM TEACHES BY CONTRAST WHAT OUR SPIRIT AND METHOD, AS CHRISTIAN MEN AND A CHRISTIAN NATION, OUGHT TO BE AT THIS TIME. III. AND THAT A GENEROUS CHRISTIAN POLICY ONLY WILL EFFECT THE PACIFICATION OF A DISCONTENTED PEOPLE THE EXAMPLE OF REHOBAM PROVES. (*W. Bishop.*)

*A wise prince will avoid overtaxing his people*:—The Chinese Emperor Tchou set out on a journey to visit the vast provinces of his empire, accompanied by his eldest son. One day he stopped his car in the midst of some fields where the people were hard at work. "I took you with me," said he to his son, "that you might be an eye-witness of the painful toils of the poor husbandmen, and that the feeling their laborious station should excite in your heart might prevent your burdening them with taxes!"

*The foolish ruler and the revolting tribes*:—I. THE GRIEVANCE STATED. 1. Reasonable demand. (1) Heavy taxes. (2) Forced service. (3) Long endured. 2. A national demand. II. THE CONSULTATION HELD. III. THE DECISION GIVEN. IV. THE RESULTS WHICH FOLLOWED. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

*Advice*:—Judge Buller, when in company of a young gentleman of sixteen, cautioned him against being led astray by the example or persuasion of others, and said: "If I had listened to the advice of some of those who called themselves my friends when I was young, instead of being a judge of the King's Bench, I should have died long ago a prisoner at the King's Bench."

*The experience of old men*:—I wonder why young

people don't make more use of old people than they do. I find it fascinating to hear old sailors talk, and to listen to their many stories of hair-breadth escapes. One of the privileges of old age is to be a guide to the young. Young men should take warning and instruction from old men, for they have been over the ground and know all the risks and dangers of life. (*George Dawson.*) *Two methods of treating men*:—I propose to use the incident to illustrate the two methods of treating men—the conciliatory and the unconciliatory—the principle applies to all men in some of the relations of life; and the question is, What is the true, and consequently the safe, basis of all government? 1. Social positions are graduated. The strong man will of necessity, sooner or later, go to the front and claim the influence which belongs of right to his powers; and the weak man will be left at the point that exhausts his strength. Democracy does not equalise men. 2. No elevation of rank gives one man the right to tyrannise over another. Tyranny is necessarily associated with littleness of nature, littleness somewhere; there may be many great qualities, but the nature as a whole is of a low type. 3. The whole tenor of the gospel is in favour of magnanimous conduct on the part of those who hold any degree of rulership. This is an incidental proof of the supernatural origin of the gospel, &c. 4. Pass in review a few of the cases in which the two methods of treating men come into operation. Kings, employers, parents, pastors, all have their choice as to which method they will adopt. 5. The maintenance of a conciliatory policy is quite consistent with—(1) Headship; (2) firmness; (3) justice. (*Pulpit Analyst.*) *Moderation in princes*:—The advice of an ancient French counsellor to his sovereign at his departure was good. Being wished to lay down some general rules for government, he took a paper, and wrote on the top of it "moderation," in the middle of it "moderation," and at the bottom "moderation." (*J. Trapp.*) *Taking counsel of the young*:—So did our King Richard II., to his utter ruin. So Xerxes despised the grave counsel of his uncle Artabanus, and was led wholly by the young Mardonius to the loss of all. The like is reported of Dionysius, king of Sicily; Cræsus, king of Lydia; Nero, emperor of Rome; James that reigned in Scotland in Edward IV.'s time; and Lantrer, of whom it is reported that he lost the kingdom of Naples from the French king, his master, and all that he had in Italy, because he would not ask nor follow the advice of those who were wiser than himself. (*Ibid.*) *Pampered in youth, ruined in prime*:—Many a bright scriptural character is set before us for our example; this man is set before us for our warning. There were two things that contributed to make his life a failure. I. HE WAS BROUGHT UP IN THE LAP OF LUXURY. His father lived in a style of magnificence that has never been equalled. In the midst of this was Rehoboam's youth and boyhood spent. Nothing could have been morally worse for him than that. I ask the head of some large academy, "What is the chief cause of the ruin of many lads belonging to respectable families?" and he whispers, "Too much money." The president of one of the largest educational institutions in America stated that he believed the surest protection to young men against the perils of opening life was poverty. The being free from the necessity of working for a living has been the worst thing in the lot of many a young man. I have personally known youths who were unfortunate enough to start life with a patrimony of £200 a year, and they never came to anything. In the life of Mr. Nasmyth he says: "I often observe in shop windows every detail of model ships and model steam-engines, supplied ready-made for those who are said to be of a mechanical turn. Thus the vital uses of resourcefulness are done away with and the sham exhibition of mechanical genius is paraded before you by the young impostors, the result, for the most part, of too free a supply of pocket-money. I have known too many instances of parents being led, by such false evidence of constructive skill, to apprentice their sons to some engineering firm and after paying vast sums, finding out that the pretender comes out of the engineering shop with no other practical accomplishment than that of glove-wearing and cigar-smoking." The connection between Rehoboam and kid gloves may not at first be apparent, and yet there is a good deal in it, for had he been brought up less luxuriously, had he known something in his early days of real hard work, he might have turned out a more sensible and successful man. II. HIS REFUSAL OF THE ADVICE OF MEN WHO WERE OLDER AND WISER THAN HIMSELF. Evil companionship proved his destruction. Well might he have said, "Save me from my friends." Their advice may have been meant for the best, yet like the bear which from friendly motives, tried his paw to remove a fly from his master's face, they did more harm than good. Nothing tells upon our life more distinctly than our early

choice of companions. We take the colour of the society we keep, as the frogs of Ceylon do that of the leaf on which they sit. Be slow to form your friendships. Have nothing to do with any one—no matter how smart and plausible he be—who jests at sacred things. Be certain you will get no good from one who wants to shake you out of what he calls your old-fashioned principles. Never make a friend of one who avows himself an unbeliever. The fear of God is the root of all true nobleness of character, said a French monarch, when once asked to give his consent to a dishonourable treaty. "The blood of Charlemagne is in my veins; and who dares to propose this thing to me?" Some of you young men have a pedigree still more worthy to glory in. We want no Rehoboams amongst us. We want the sons to be better than their fathers. (*J. T. Davidson.*) *The folly of self-will*:—Dr. Anderson, of the American Board, told me that a young man once came to the mission-house in Boston as a candidate for the foreign mission field. Dr. Anderson invited him to spend the night with him in Roxbury, and as they were walking together, the young man suddenly said, "I prefer to walk on the right side." Dr. Anderson said to him, "May I ask why you walk on the right side? Are you deaf in one ear?" "No," said the young man, "but I prefer to walk on the right side, and I always will walk on the right side." That young man was not sent abroad. It was evident that a man who was bent on having his own way, without giving reasons, would be likely to make mischief, and his right side would be pretty sure to be the wrong side. (*H. H. Jessup.*) *The mystery of Divine working*:—I. EVENTS OF HISTORY CONTROLLED AND DIRECTED TO ACCOMPLISH DIVINE PURPOSES. II. In the accomplishment of Divine purposes MEN ACT AS FREE AGENTS. III. Men thus acting as free agents ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Paroxysms in history*:—Nature has her paroxysms. Sir Roderick Murchison affirms that by no possible extension of gradual and insensible causes could huge masses of Tertiary rocks have been so thrown over as to pass under the older rocks of the Alps, out of which they were formed. That operation, he says, must have been paroxysmal, and no slow process could have accomplished it. The crust and outline of the earth are, in short, full of evidences that many of the ruptures and overthrows of the strata, as well as great denudations, could not even in millions of years have been produced by agencies like those of our times. (*Scientific Illustrations.*)

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## CHAPTER XI.

**VERS. 1-4. Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren.**—*The restraints of Divine providence*:—I. Restraints made UNMISTAKABLY CLEAR. II. Restraints MERCIFUL IN DESIGN. III. Restraints TIMELY MADE. IV. Restraints IMPLICITLY HEEDED. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Uninspired preparations*:—Pity it is that God seems to allow us to go to such costs and then stops us just at the last moment. "Ye shall not go up." There is pity in the arrangement, but it is not on the side of God. It is a pity that we did not consult God before we called the enemy together. He will be consulted at one end. He wishes to be consulted at the beginning, but if we will not consult Him there, we must consult Him at the end. Our preparations amount to nothing if they are not inspired. All our education comes to smoke and wind if it be not an education derived from the altar and enriched with the wisdom of God. Send out a hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men from academy and college and university, loaded with the blank cartridges of ten thousand certificates and testimonials; if the Lord is not in it He will send them all back again until He calls for their aid. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Ver. 17. For three years they walked in the way of David.**—*Experimental goodness*:—Three years of experimental goodness ought to be three years of personal consolidation. To get three years ahead of the enemy ought to be a great advantage. The doctors say that it takes three years to get drink really out of a man's system and no man is safe until he has quite passed the line of three years. These critical times in life are the making of life, when they are really seized aright as to their spirit and highest significance. (*Ibid.*)

## CHAPTER XII.

**VERS. 1, 2. He forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him.—Rehoboam, first king of Judah.**—Individual lives attract and reward attention; hence the interest and fascination of fiction and history. What others have experienced and done comes to us as a revelation of a life in which we share. **I. ITS WASTE OF OPPORTUNITIES EXCEPTIONALLY GRAND.** 1. He was the first king of Judah. Unless forfeited by misconduct, special honour and grateful appreciation are the inheritance of the founders of a dynasty. Conspicuous in time and relative position, they have an acknowledged leadership, though dead for centuries. 2. He inherited institutions and traditions of a prestige sacred and commanding. His was the city of David, with all its history, radiant with the Divine presence; his the temple, of which God was the architect and his father the master builder; his the unbroken priesthood, exalted to a genuine mediatorship between God and His people; his all the costly and sacred relics upon which the Queen of Sheba looked with amazement; about himself centred the hope of a coming prophet, ruler; his the sole honour of continuing the royal line. 3. He was of mature age and superior abilities. 4. He had the best material of all Israel as well. Jeroboam and his sons had cast off the Levites from executing the priest's office unto the Lord, and they emigrated to Jerusalem in a body, "and after them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers." Thus all the land of Canaan was sifted for his benefit. 5. The very smallness of Judah was an element of strength. He could and did intrench himself in his central fortress on Zion, and surround himself with a chain of fortresses mutually supporting from their proximity. His people were homogeneous, and not liable to the jealous rivalries which imperilled the ten divisions of Israel. But alas! the example of Rehoboam reveals the insufficiency of opportunities, however golden, to command a wise improvement. **II. HIS INABILITY TO BEAR PROSPERITY.** When strengthened in his little kingdom of Judah, he at once repeated the folly which had only recently dispossessed him of the grand unbroken empire left by Solomon. Like multitudes, before and since, he was willing to use God's help when in extremity, but when successful, when apparently sailing in smooth waters, he and all Israel forsook the law of the Lord. How inexplicable that blindness which increases with added light, that moral and spiritual weakness which grows when supplemented with all Divine help, that confidence in self built out of dependence and gracious gifts! Rehoboam and his numberless imitators in all time illustrate this. Left to himself, he mars and almost ruins the grandest schemes of infinite wisdom, and foils the gracious designs of a long-suffering God for his own rescue and elevation. **III. CHASTISEMENT BROUGHT PARTIAL REPENTANCE AND HUMILITY.** There is such a thing as "final permanence of character," upon which all Divine warnings or dealings are unavailing except to harden. All moral character is voluntary, but the absoluteness of moral inability is only the measure and result of obdurate wilfulness. We are inclined to credit the humility of Rehoboam, because it vindicated God in the midst of His judgments. He and his princes said, "The Lord is righteous." Their lips, and possibly their hearts, may have been free from murmuring when city after city crumbled before invading hosts. Repentance is safe to the degree in which it acknowledges and enthrones God. We cannot omit passing mention of the superior inheritance of those who submissively suffer. The tragedy of life comes from hopeless, helpless opposition to the irresistible. **IV. NEVERTHELESS, RELIGION WAS NOT ITS CONTROLLING INFLUENCE.** Though he never quite cast off God, he "did evil because he fixed not his heart to seek the Lord." When the service of God dominates affections, plans, and deeds, then, and not until then, is true and steady progress possible. There can be no harmony, no worthy enthusiasm, nor any noble elevation to life which enthrones self. We live in a time of special peril, because of its wealth of opportunity. Never were the resources of the world so placed at man's disposal. But this wealth of opportunity brings a corresponding peril. Nothing but a heart "fixed to seek the Lord" can withstand its temptations to indulgence, to pride of power, to high looks and vain imaginations. **V. A CHANGE OF MASTERS FOR THE WORSE.** This change of masters, and opportunity to compare their respective service, which was thus true of Rehoboam, has a perfect parallel in the lives of all wanderers from God. Man will have some master, and he cuts loose from glad allegiance to God—the only true liberty—only to give servile obedience to a tyrant. It is one of the reassuring signs

of progress to-day that man as an individual—his rights, his essential worth, and dignity—is valued and talked about more than the collective State or nation; but a danger lurks in the shadow of the gain. That individuality is in danger of becoming overweening and imperious. The *ego* may, and sometimes does, glory in a self-sufficiency that looks almost patronisingly upon the Divine existence, or denies it altogether. Virtue is a queen whose subjects note her faintest wish, but their service is perfect liberty. It springs from the gladness of pure hearts, and knows no compulsion but sweet willingness. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Established in life*:—An accursed word is that sometimes—“established” or “strengthened,” or prospered, or succeeded. It was the mark of the place where we turned hell-ward. We prayed when we were poor. We went to the sanctuary when we were weak. Who can stand fatness, sunshine, all the year round? Where are the rich? How delicate in health they became when their riches multiplied! How sensitive to cold when they rolled round in gorgeous chariot drawn by prancing and foaming steeds! How short-tempered when they became long-pursed! What a change in their public prayers when they became the victims of social status and reputation! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Because they had transgressed against the Lord.*—*Transgression against the Lord*:—See how religious the Bible is! We should now say that men are punished because they have transgressed the laws of nature; men are suffering because they have transgressed the laws of health; men are in great weakness because they have tempted debility, and brought it upon themselves by neglect or by indulgence. Even atheists have explanations. They cannot treat life as a piece of four-square wood, the whole of which can be seen at once; even they have laws, ministries, spectral actions, physiological explanations; it would seem as if the Bible gathered up all these and glorified them with a Divine name, and said, “This is the Lord’s doing.” (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 8. Nevertheless they shall be his servants.**—*Servitude or service—which?*  
 —I. THAT THERE ARE SOME WHO HAVE ALREADY CHOSEN THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOMS OF THE COUNTRIES. Some have chosen—1. To be the slaves of open sin. 2. To be the votaries of money-making. 3. To be lovers of fashion, lovers of society, admirers of the world. 4. To become the devotees of “culture.” 5. To be the seekers of self-righteousness. II. SOME SEEM TO BE PINING TO GIVE UP THE SERVICE OF GOD, AND TO GO TO THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOMS. Some want to change—1. Out of sheer love of change. 2. Because of the outward aspect of the new thing. 3. Because of their loss of joy in the service of God. 4. Because of the flagging of others. 5. Because religion now has brought them to a point where it entails some extra self-sacrifice. III. THERE IS A GREAT CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SERVICE OF GOD AND ANY OTHER SERVICE. The service of God is delightful. Remember, young man, if you are about to engage in the service of God—1. There is nothing demanded of you that will harm you. 2. There is nothing denied you, in the service of God, that would be a blessing to you. 3. That in the service of God strength will always be given according to your day. 4. That there is no threat made to hang upon it. 5. All the while that you are a servant of God, you have a sweet peace in reflecting upon what you have done. 6. There is, above all this, a hope of the eternal reward which is so soon to come. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Comparative service*:—It is an old failing of human nature not to know when it is well off, and the text furnishes an illustration of that failing. There is a great lesson here for to-day. Adam was discontented with Paradise, Israel with Canaan, and many now are despising the goodly inheritance we have in Christ. We are fond of comparing the service of God with alternative services, to the disparagement of the former. I. Compare THE FAITH OF CHRIST WITH THE FAITH OF SCEPTICISM. I say the faith of scepticism, for the sceptic has a creed just as truly as the Christian believer has. Many are greatly dissatisfied with the Christian revelation; they are anxious to set it aside, to find substitutes for it. The proverb says: “The cow in the meadow, knee-deep in clover, often looks over the hedge and longs for the common.” So, many are now looking over the hedge of revelation, and longing for the bare wastes and the wild growths of infidelity. 1. If we renounce revelation, shall we be better off intellectually? It must be remembered that if revelation is rejected, all the dark problems of nature, all the perplexing enigmas of human life, will still be left. Revelation has not created the confusions, the cruelties, the calamities of the world. You will not make a black sky blue by smashing the weather-glass; you will not turn cruel winter into glorious summer by throwing out the thermometer; neither will you get rid of sorrow and mystery and death by rejecting the Bible. Can you, having rejected

revelation, give that dark world any clearer or happier interpretation? 2. If we renounce revelation, shall we be better off as pertaining to the conscience? Take away the Bible, and conscience is left—an accusing conscience is left. To what terrible beliefs and deeds an accusing conscience drives men the history of paganism clearly shows. A guilty conscience built the wicker-basket of Druidism; it doomed the children to pass through the fire to Molech. "Yes," you reply, "but it is impossible for these tragedies of superstition to be repeated; Druidism, for instance, can never come back again." Who can say what may, or may not, come back again? Theosophy teaches that through endless reincarnations we must be purged from our sins. Our sorrows in this life are the results of the sins and errors of past incarnations, and before us is a dreary vista of fresh incarnations in which we are again to sin and suffer. It is terrible to think of the monstrous intellectual and religious systems which must arise when men no longer know the mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. The guilty conscience will not go to sleep; it will have blood and tears. 3. If we renounce revelation, shall we be better off touching character? If unbelief triumphed, and Christ were rejected as the pattern and perfecter of character, would anything be gained? The whole world of thoughtful men acknowledges the marvellous, the incomparable moral beauty of Jesus Christ.

II. Compare THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST WITH THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORLD. Thus many now are inclined to prefer the worldly life to the Christian life. It seems so much more free. Men feel that the Christian law retards their youth, cramps and foils their appetites and curiosities. But is this so? "The doctrine of Jesus is hard, men say. But how much harder," exclaims Tolstoi, "is the doctrine of the world!" Take its doctrine of glory. Cruel doctrine! What blood, groans, tears, it implies! And not only on the battlefield is the doctrine of glory seen to be merciless; it works woe in a thousand subtle ways in all spheres of human life and action. Take its doctrine of gain. How that principle of selfishness, which is the doctrine of the world, grinds men to powder! Take its doctrine of fashion. What a terrible price the world exacts for its empty shows, its vain titles, its purple and gold! Take its doctrine of pleasure. Millions have been ruined by following in its paths of roses and music and beauty. How cruel! Ah! the world has far more martyrs than the Church has. And what is the doctrine of Jesus that men call hard? Instead of the doctrine of glory, He teaches the doctrine of humility and service; for the doctrine of gain, the doctrine of equity and love; for the doctrine of fashion, the doctrine of simplicity and truth; for the doctrine of pleasure, the doctrine of purity and peace. Well may Jesus dare to say, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

III. Compare THE LAW OF CHRIST WITH THE SERVICE OF SELF-WILL. A man says: "I will not be restrained; I will determine my own path, choose my own pleasures, shape my own character, be the architect of my own fortune. It shall throughout be according to my own preferences and determinations." Is, then, the self-willed man happy? Is he happy as he sets himself against nature? You tell your boy not to play with fire; but he is self-willed, and takes the opportunity to sport with matches and gunpowder, and probably repents ever after. It does not pay to set up our will against the grand ordinances of nature. Is the self-willed man happy as he opposes himself to the laws and institutions of society? To outrage the judgments, the feelings, the rights of society is to be keenly miserable. Is the self-willed man happy within himself? You say proudly, "I am my own master." Could you have a worse? It is a terrible thing to set up our will against the Divine will as that will is expressed in the physical universe, in society, or as it seeks to fulfil itself in our personal nature and life. Self-will is captivity and ruin: loving obedience to the will of God in Christ, with its self-control and self-denial, is health and peace. To be His slaves is to be kings. Surrender yourselves to Him, and prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. "The service of the kingdoms of the countries." The Jews often heard delightful things about this foreign service. They remembered the fish which they did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. Nothing to do in Egypt but to regale themselves with piquant viands, and to stroll under the palms on the banks of the Nile. They heard of the attractions of Babylon, of its hanging gardens, its luxuries and delights. And the ambassadors of Sennacherib painted for them in glowing colours the life of Assyria: "A land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards." No more work, no more worry, no more worship. Getting away from Jerusalem, they were to get away from temple and law, from priest and prophet, and to taste the pleasures of an unfettered life. But did they find captivity so desirable? You who are



tempted to despise God's Word, beware. Young men, weary of the order and restraint of a godly home, and ever hankering after a looser life, be wise, and stay thankfully where you are. Discontented Englishmen, ever protesting against narrowness and austerity, against Protestantism, Puritanism, and bumbledom, and ever looking with longing eyes to laxer civilisations, be content; subdue your murmurings and wantonness, lest God spoil you of your rich inheritance. Discontented Christians, ever casting lingering glances at the life you have left, be content; see to it that there is in you no evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Vers. 9, 10. **Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass.**—*The downward grade*:—See how deterioration follows all character that goes down in its religious aspects. This deterioration marks the whole progress of human development. Is it not so with regard to all personal service? How ardent we once were! How devoted to the house of God, how punctual in attendance, how zealous in worship! How we longed for the hour of praise to double itself, that we might have long intercourse with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost! Now how soon we become uneasy, how we long to be released, how patience becomes sensitive, and yields in angry surrender because too much tried! You never bring gold for brass when you leave God. The prodigal never brings any treasure back with him. When men go away intellectually from the Bible they bring back brass for gold. When they leave the Bible morally they bring back brass for gold. When they leave sympathetically they bring back artifice for inspiration, mechanics for vital communion. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him.**—*Prosperity*:—I. THE PLACE IN WHICH THERE WAS THIS PROSPERITY. 1. Things will go on well in our own country—(1) When the intelligence of its inhabitants shall keep pace with their means of information. (2) When their conduct shall keep pace with their increasing knowledge. (3) When the Christian Church shall employ all those means for the salvation of the world which are placed within her power. 2. Things may be said to go on well in a Church when there is a unanimous desire to—(1) Understand; (2) practise; (3) and spread the gospel. II. THE TIME WHEN THERE WAS THIS PROSPERITY IN JUDAH. "And when he humbled himself," &c. When the Church shall humble herself for her sins, she will realise an amount of prosperity hitherto unknown. 1. Some of the sins which should induce this humiliation. (1) Ignorance. (2) Persecution. (3) The profanation of the Sabbath. (4) Drunkenness. (5) Covetousness. (6) Infidelity. 2. The character of that repentance which is necessary. It must be—(1) Deep. (2) Universal. (3) Daily. (*Zech. xii. 10-13*). III. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THIS PROSPERITY. LESSONS: We may learn—1. That one individual may be the source of incalculable good, or incalculable evil. 2. The importance of a knowledge of history, which illustrates the dealings of God with men. 3. The gratitude we owe to God for having given us the means of prosperity. (*H. Hollis.*)

Ver. 14. **He prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.**—*Rehoboam the unready*:—I. HE DID NOT BEGIN LIFE WITH SEEKING THE LORD. II. HE SHOWED NO HEART IN SEEKING THE LORD AFTERWARDS. III. HE WAS NOT FIXED AND PERSEVERING IN SEEKING THE LORD. IV. HE HAD NO CARE TO SEEK THE LORD THOROUGHLY. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Rehoboam*:—I. IMPLIED OBLIGATION. To seek the Lord is the obligation of all. This is suggestive—1. Of the loss sustained. How is God lost to man? He has lost—(1) The true knowledge of His character. (2) The conscious enjoyment of His favour. (3) The blessedness of communion with Him. 2. Of its retrievableness. For this purpose—(1) God has revealed Himself to man in His own nature. (2) The redemptive work of Christ is made known. (3) The Holy Spirit performs His beneficent functions. 3. Of the importance of its recovery. II. MENTAL CONVICTION. In Rehoboam we see mental conviction arising from knowledge of duty, promptings of conscience, consciousness of guilt. This is a mental state of frequent occurrence. It may be observed—1. As the effect of truth. The Word of God is "a discoverer of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Felix. There are many Felixes. 2. As intensified by circumstances. 3. As critical in its results. How much depends on moments of conviction! They are often the turning-points of destiny. It does not seem that Rehoboam ever paused in his downward career from this time forward. III. MORAL

**INFIRMITY.** There was want of decision in Rehoboam. He did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. This may be traced—1. To sensual habits (chap. xi. 18–23; 1 Kings xiv. 21–24). 2. To evil companionship. 3. To Satanic temptation. **IV. ACCUMULATED GUILT.** “He did evil because,” &c. This sin was parent of a host. He sinned in this neglect of known duty, and in what resulted from it. So do all who pursue a like course. They sin—1. In resisting their convictions. 2. In self-depravation. “Beware lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” 3. The depravation of others. Through his guilty conduct the people were corrupted. “One sinner destroyeth much good.” (*S. A. Browning.*) *A heart not fixed*:—The marginal reading is, “He fixed not his heart upon the Lord.” This was a favourite expression of David’s. “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.” “His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” Perhaps it was intended to draw a contrast between the character of Rehoboam and his far worthier ancestor. Religion is not a thing that can be taken up in a loose, careless manner. It claims the whole purpose and energy of the heart. In the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” Prudence wished to know from Christian how he was enabled to overcome his temptations and to persevere in the good and holy way. Christian’s reply was, “When I think of what I saw at the Cross, that will do it; when I look upon my brodered coat, that will do it; when I look into the roll that I carry in my bosom, that will do it; and when my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, that will do it.” I cannot do better than follow in the line of the great dreamer’s allegory. **I. THE FIRST CONDITION OF A FIXED HEART IS A SIGHT OF THE CROSS.** The world’s religion ends with forgiveness; God’s religion begins with it. There is nothing that imparts such solidity to character, and such strength and dignity to life, as conscious peace with Heaven. **II. The next thing is to LOOK UPON YOUR “BRODERED COAT”**—the righteousness that is “unto all and upon all them that believe.” **III. Bunyan’s pilgrim looked also oftentimes into the ROLL WHICH HE CARRIED IN HIS BOSOM.** Habitual study of the Bible is indispensable to a healthy condition of the soul. McCheyne would not speak to any one in the morning till he had first of all heard the voice of God. It gives a tone to the whole day, when we begin the day with Him. **IV. “WHEN HIS THOUGHTS WAXED WARM ABOUT WHITHER HE WAS GOING,” THAT GAVE FIXEDNESS TO CHRISTIAN’S HEART.** You may be none the less shrewd as to the interests of time because you are wise as to the concerns of eternity; like a trusty pilot, who, though his eyes are on the stars, keeps his hand upon the helm. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *True and false seeking*:—I. There is what one may call **NATURAL SEEKING.** Seeking is the language of human want. The cravings of life will always demand attention. All the industries of the world, with their ten thousand beneficent developments, are the products of human wisdom to supply human wants. Human life is but a seeking in so many ways, from the cradle to the grave. **II. SEEKING THE LORD.** This is not born of nature, but of grace. Seeking the Lord implies a conscious sense of weakness and insufficiency. **III. HEART PREPARATION.** All true and successful seeking of the Lord comes of prepared hearts. The heart is always the part that makes our hearing, believing, praying, and doing right or wrong. As soon as the sun rises in the morning the birds are ready to go forth from their nests to sing. So it is with all the moral forces or faculties of the soul when the heart is prepared to seek the Lord. The heart is to the whole man what the main-spring is to the watch—it sets all the other powers in motion. “But as the bowl,” says one, “runs as the bias inclines it, and as the ship moves as the rudder steers it,” so man seeks as the heart prompts him. A prepared heart is a loving heart, “believing true and clean.” It enters into the secret place of the Most High as a loving child enters into his father’s home. Whence cometh this preparation? There must be some efficient cause to account for the differences we see among men. The difference between the common field and the garden to-day has been brought about by the application of human thought and manual skill. It is even so with respect to differences among men. As the garden did not enclose itself, or of itself become more fertile than the field, neither have men become different among their fellows or before God except by different resolutions of will and energy of character. Those who exercise no forethought or natural sagacity become as the man who built his house upon the sand. **IV. THE EVIL OF NEGLECTING TO PREPARE THE HEART.** Men may do evil by failing to do well. Mere neglect is sufficient to ruin a man. A man need not be openly profane or wicked to be excluded from God’s presence; he has but to neglect the means of grace, or to prepare his heart to seek the Lord while He may be found, to call upon Him while He is near. (*John Kerr Campbell, D.D.*)

## CHAPTER XIII.

**VERS. 4-12. And Abijah stood up upon mount Zemaraim.—A great speech:—**ITS CLAIMS CONCERNING JUDAH. God recognised—1. In the gift of the kingdom. 2. In the worship and services of the temple. 3. In the warfare of life. II. IN ITS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL. III. ITS PASSIONATE APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE. 1. Religion is appealed to. 2. History is appealed to. 3. Humanity is appealed to. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Abijah's speech:—*Abijah's speech is unique. There have been other instances where commanders have tried to make oratory take the place of arms. Sennacherib's envoys. When Octavian was at war with his fellow-triumvir Lepidus he made a daring attempt to run over his enemy's army. Riding openly into the hostile camp, he appealed to the soldiers by motives as lofty as those urged by Abijah, and called upon them to save their country from civil war by deserting Lepidus. At the moment his appeal failed, and he only escaped with a wound in his breast; but after a while his enemy's soldiers came over to him in detachments, and eventually Lepidus was compelled to surrender to his rival. Another instance of a successful appeal to a hostile force is found in the history of the first Napoleon, when he was marching on Paris after his return from Elba. Near Grenoble he was met by a body of royal troops. He at once advanced to the front, and, exposing his breast, exclaimed to the opposing ranks, "Here is your emperor; if any one would kill me let him fire." The detachment, which had been sent to arrest his progress, at once deserted to their old commander. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) *The lessons of Abijah's speech:—*These are two. I. THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OFFICIAL AND DULY ACCREDITED MINISTRY. Every Church has in practice some official ministry, even those Churches that profess to owe their separate existence to the necessity of protesting against an official ministry. Men whose chief occupation is to denounce priestcraft may themselves be saturated with the sacerdotal spirit. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF A SUITABLE AND AUTHORITATIVE RITUAL. Every Church, too, has its ritual. The silence of a Friends' meeting is as much a rite as the most elaborate genuflexion before a highly ornamented altar. To regard either the absence or presence of rites as essential is equally ritualistic. The man who leaves his wonted place of worship because "Amen" is sung at the end of a hymn is as bigoted a ritualist as his brother who dare not pass an altar without crossing himself. (*Ibid.*)

**Vers. 12-17. And behold, God Himself is with us for our captain.—God with us:—**We have here—I. A MYSTERIOUS DOCTRINE. II. A COMFORTING TRUTH. III. A SOLEMN FACT. (*Bp. Montagu Villiers.*) *Man's extremity and God's power to help:—*I. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE OFTEN BROUGHT INTO EXTREMITIES. 1. By their own foolish enterprises. 2. By the temptations of their enemies. 3. By the providence of God leading them, to test and train them. II. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE DELIVERED BY HIM IN EXTREMITIES. 1. By prayer: "They cried unto the Lord." 2. By supernatural power. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The Holy War:—*It is not my intention to discuss the merits of the quarrel between Judah and Israel. That is interesting history; but I am now to speak to you concerning our work and warfare for Christ our King. That we are engaged in a fierce struggle, with a powerful foe, must be admitted. Oh, let us understand at the outset that our warfare is real, earnest, desperate; that we are not playing at soldiering. I. LET US RECONNOITRE THE ENEMY. It is a great mistake, all too frequently made, to ignore the strength of our opponents, to fail to investigate their position and their practices. No general would think of conducting a campaign without the due precaution of reconnoitring. We shall do well in our war against error and iniquity, and all that is not of our God, to make all investigations, to send some forth to spy out the country to discover, if possible, what the enemy is designing against us. 1. Turning to this chapter we shall find that the enemy in this case consisted of rebels against the God-appointed authority. They were, in fact, insurgents, of whom the children of Judah said truly, "We keep the charge of the Lord of God; but ye have forsaken Him." So the men of Judah had this to help them in their struggle—they knew that their position was one that God approved. They had not forsaken Him; they were by no means perfect, but they still held to David's throne and to his rightful successor. They had the strength that always comes of the consciousness of right. "Right is might," though some will have it that might is right. No, no! "He is thrice armed who hath his quarrel

just," and I want to encourage my own heart and yours by saying: We are by no means all we should be, but by the grace of God we are what we are. The enemy has rebelled against God. These things with which we do battle are doomed to destruction, and we are authorised to help to hasten the coming of that doom. 2. I find, further, that these men of Israel were idolaters. They worshipped golden calves, and almost any man who wished could become a priest to those that were no gods. Our struggle also is against idolatry. I am speaking on behalf of foreign missions. Believe me, there is idolatry both here and there. 3. I find here again, that the children of Israel are spoken of as vain men, and children of Belial. There had gathered in that north country men of no repute, ne'er-do-wells, and those who had come to grief, empty-headed men—for such is the real meaning of the word "vain." The children of Belial were utterly unprincipled, many of them were doubtless renegades, the castaways of society. We do not fight against those who have lost their reputation, who have sinned against the laws of our land, as well as against high heaven; we go out to try to save them, we do battle against unholiness, uncleanness, debauchery, and insobriety. 4. Further, if you look at this chapter, you will notice that the men of Israel were determined characters, of whom it is written that "they strengthened themselves." They were very numerous, but they did not trust to numbers, they took every precaution to ensure success. We may learn some lessons from our foes. How diligent they are, how active, how united. How earnestly they combine to defeat, if possible, the purposes of God, and our attempts to do His will. Oh, that we were as earnest as they! With a Master infinitely better, why should we not serve Him with twice as much zeal as they who serve the devil? 5. The numbers of Israel were very large, twice as many as Judah possessed; and oh, how many are the forces and principles of evil with which we have to contend! Ah! but let us remember that numbers are not everything. We shall have to remind one another presently that God is with us. How many count you Jehovah for? Yet we must not under-estimate the foe; they are numberless. Oh, that our forces were increased! 6. And, moreover, they are wily. Did you notice, as we read, how the king of Israel set an ambush against Abijah and his men? It was hardly a brave thing to do. Well, our enemy is not very particular how he goes to work. The serpent is still the most subtle of all the beasts of the field, but we are not ignorant of his devices. II. WHAT ABOUT OUR OWN FORCES? We must not sing our own praises, but to the glory of God, as we review our troops, we will declare, first, that we are His. 1. Moreover, we are well commanded. Did you notice what the king said in the 12th verse? "And behold God Himself is with us for our Captain." When Napoleon went up and down among his troops on the eve of battle, he used to assure them that he was himself directing their battalions. That it was which nerved them for the fray. I think I hear my blessed Master saying, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." We bow before Thee, glorious Captain! Lead Thou us on! For Thou alone canst lead to victory. 2. Moreover, the priestly service, with the people of Judah, had never ceased. Morning and evening the lamb was slain, and the lamp was lighted, and the incensed waved. This was a sign that God was still honoured and obeyed. Ah, think of it! We are going forth to battle day by day, but our great High Priest before the Throne still pleads. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." III. AND NOW ABOUT THE BATTLE. We must not wonder, if, when beginning to fight for God, we find ourselves in a difficulty. These men did. They had not got to the battlefield before they were caught in an ambushment. There were foes behind them as well as in front of them. It is not the easiest thing in the world to fight those who attack us from behind. I know some who go out to serve the Lord, either in the home or in the foreign field, who, as soon as they find the battle wax hot against them, or discover themselves caught in a trap, begin to imagine that the battle is lost already, that they have made a mistake in taking up arms for God, and are like to turn tail forthwith, only the enemy is behind them, and they cannot! Ah! what a mistake is this! If God brings us into a crisis, it is that we may trust Christ. What is the best thing to do when we get into such a state? Why, just what these did. "They cried unto the Lord." Was there time to pray, when there were enemies on either hand? Yes, yes, there is always time to pray. Praying time is not lost time. Let us cry unto the Lord of Hosts. 2. Then the priests sounded the trumpets to animate the people, to call them to their duty, to stir up within them their slumbering energies and dying courage. I warrant you they gave no uncertain sound. Those silver trumpets were made all of one piece, for God will have all His work united, symmetrical, and complete. Those silver

trumpets sounded out their sweetest and their loudest at this critical juncture. Be it ours, leaders of the hosts of God, so to sound forth the Word of God that there shall be no mistake as to the meaning, and by our brave demeanour to encourage all the people. 3. Did you notice, next, that the rank and file commenced to shout? "The men of Judah shouted." No, no! let us cry and shout, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of us. The cry of prayer should be attended with the shout of faith, and if we shout not audibly in our services and meetings, let there be shoutings in the soul which the Lord our God can hear. The secret and gist of it all is here. 4. "They relied upon the Lord." There was perfect confidence in heaven. Even in the midst of the clash of arms, even when they saw they had apparently been bested by this ambushment, they still trusted. Father, I will trust thee, for the work is Thine. 5. "They relied upon the Lord God of their fathers." Oh! I like that word. "The God of Abraham!" The history of the patriarch flashes through their minds at the mention of his name. "The God of Isaac, and of Jacob," and of David, with whom He had made a covenant of salt! This was the God they relied on, and this God is our God, the God of our fathers. Did He not treat our fathers well? Did He not glorify His name through them? Did He not make them pillars in the house of the Lord? What God has done, God can do. Let us trust Him. 6. As soon as they fully trusted Him, He began to work, and delivered Jeroboam into the hand of Abijah. Yes, the rule always holds good, "Them that honour Me I will honour." If you trust Him in that little work you have in hand for God, He will use you. 7. Then we must follow up the work that God does. Abijah and his people slew their routed adversaries. "Abijah pursued them." 8. And what about the spoils? When the work is done and the victory won, what about the booty? Ah! it belongs to Him who gave the power. All must be cast at Jesus' feet. Have we not been often mistaken just here? We asked Him for power to serve, and thank God we got it; but when the victory was ours, we wanted to share the honour with the King. (*T. Spurgeon.*)

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

**VERs. 1-4.** And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.—*Asa faithful to his God*.—We have watched the steady fall of the kingdom of Israel. Judah also began in shame and ended in disaster, but its shame was not so unmixed nor its disaster so complete. The reason for this better fate is suggested in our text: the saving influence of good men interposed to hold the people to God and prosperity. Our lesson presents Asa as the righteous leader of his people. 1. Asa reformed the religion of Judah. Like Gideon, he began his rule with a bold attack upon the popular idolatry. The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth had clung to the people ever since they met it when entering Canaan, in spite of God's warning that for this very sin the inhabitants were cast out before them. In recent years Solomon had patronised it, Rehoboam encouraged and Abijah confirmed it; and under these royal leaders Judah had become fascinated with its worship and debauched with its hideous vice. But the reformer's axe went crashing through the groves. He was well named Asa ("Physician," "Cure"), for he healed the hurt of his people. We hear of no resistance to his vigorous measures. The conscience of the nation yet answered to the conscience of the king: "the land was quiet before him." 2. Asa advanced the material prosperity of Judah. In the ten years of rest which God gave him "he built fenced cities, with walls and towers, gates and bars," to protect them from Israel on the north and Egypt on the south. 3. Passing now to determine the nature and the extent of Asa's influence, we find the cause of his success in his piety. He was a sound reformer, an able king, and a successful soldier, because he was faithful to his God. "He did that which was right, and commanded the people to serve the Lord." So, too, his best work for his subjects was upon their characters. Asa's influence was most important and enduring. He ascended the throne at a crisis in the nation's history. Israel was already twenty years along in its fatal transgression, and Judah was hastening after it. His father and grandfather had forsaken the righteousness of David and perpetuated the iniquity of Solomon, rather than his splendour or his wisdom. Had the succeeding reign of forty-one years followed the same course, we must believe

that the current toward wickedness would have been set past turning. Had Asa been like Jeroboam, Judah would have gone down like Israel. Through Asa's faithfulness the old man's dying blessing has come to pass: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy father's children shall bow down before thee, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler. The Jewish monarchy fell at last, but the real cause for which Asa struggled shall never perish. He who reads the story of Israel and Judah will mark with wonder the controlling power exercised by the king upon the religious faith of the nation. If it is written of one, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord," it is always true that "he made Israel to sin." If he worshipped Jehovah, his subjects worshipped with him. The character of the king decided the character of the people. The saving influence of righteous leaders. The power to lead others may come either from external circumstances or from personal qualities. 1. The influence given by external circumstances. (1) Official rank gives authority. Asa did, as king, what he could never have accomplished as a private citizen. He had direct control over his dependents. A devout centurion will have a devout soldier to wait upon him. The moral influence of those in high stations is wide and strong. Eminence makes example conspicuous. (2) Wealth brings influence. (3) Employers have large opportunity for good. 2. Besides the control given by external circumstances, we may notice the influence of personal qualities. Not what the man has, but what the man is, makes him a leader. Jeroboam is an instance in point. Beginning life as a common labourer, he died king of Israel. How continually have gifted, accomplished, and learned men brought saving help to the Church of God throughout her history! There is a subtle, mighty influence which should always be consecrated to holy uses—popularity, power to win the favour of others. Disciplined character has a peculiar mastery over others for good. Its control is quieter and deeper than any we have marked; it is the atmosphere of a soul refined to its highest uses. "All high beauty has a moral element in it. Gross and obscure natures, however decorated, seem impure shambles; but character gives splendour to youth, and awe to wrinkled skin and grey hairs." God has been at great pains to fit souls for this service. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 7. Therefore said he unto Judah, Let us build these cities . . . while the land is yet before us.—*The duty of improving present opportunity* (a Sunday-school sermon):—Consider—I. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LABOUR WITH WHICH WE ARE BLESSED. "The land is yet before us." 1. We have liberty to labour. 2. The facilities are great: multiplication of elementary books, circulation of Bibles, &c. 3. The encouragements are numerous. The prejudices of society are in our favour. God's command, &c. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF LABOURING WHILE WE HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY. 1. What is the work to which we are called? That of teaching the young the Word of God (Deut. vi. 6, 7; Psa. lxxviii. 5, 7; Prov. xxii. 6). 2. The duty of improving existing opportunities. Conclusion: Address children. If you had to pass through a long and dark passage where there were many deep pits, how anxious, at the beginning, would you feel for light. Such is the Word of God given to you at your entrance into life (Psa. cxix. 105). (*J. G. Breay, B.A.*)

Vers. 11, 12. And Asa cried unto the Lord his God.—*Victories over superior numbers*:—These victories over superior numbers may easily be paralleled or surpassed by numerous striking examples from secular history. The odds were greater at Agincourt, where at least sixty thousand French were defeated by not more than twenty thousand Englishmen; at Marathon the Greeks routed a Persian army ten times as numerous as their own; in India English generals have defeated innumerable hordes of native warriors. For the most part victorious generals have been ready to acknowledge the succouring arm of the God of battles. Shakespeare's Henry V., after Agincourt, speaks altogether in the spirit of Asa's prayer: "O God, Thy arm was here; and not to us, but to Thy arm alone, ascribe we all." When Elizabeth's fleet defeated the Spanish Armada, the grateful piety of Protestant England felt that its foes had been destroyed by the breath of the Lord: "Afflavit Deus et dissipantur." (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) *The superiority of moral to material force*:—Characteristic instances are to be found in the wider movements of international politics. Italy in the eighteenth century seemed as hopelessly divided as Israel under the judges, and Greece as completely enslaved to the "unspeakable

Turk" as the Jews to Nebuchadnezzar; and yet, destitute as they were of any material resources, these nations had at their disposal great moral forces: the memory of ancient greatness and the sentiment of nationality; and to-day Italy can count hundreds of thousands like the chronicler's Jewish kings, and Greece builds her fortresses by land and her ironclads to command the sea. The Lord has fought for Israel. But the principle has a wider application. The English and American pioneers of the movements for the abolition of slavery had to face what seemed an impenetrable phalanx of powerful interests and influences. It may be objected that if victory were to be secured by Divine intervention, there was no need to muster five hundred and eighty thousand men, or indeed any army at all. We have no right to look for Divine co-operation till we have done our best; we are to work out our own salvation, for it is God that worketh in us. (*Ibid.*) *King Asa's prayer on the eve of battle*:—I. OUR TEXT IS A PRAYER—the surest weapon in war as in all other emergencies. II. It is the prayer of a king on the eve of battle, and therefore partakes of a NATIONAL CHARACTER. III. IT IS A PRAYER OF FAITH, EXHIBITING RELIANCE ON THE DIVINE ARM FOR HELP, and therefore implying humiliation, together with a distinct conviction that no human force, however vast, can prevail, except under the recognised championship of the Almighty. (*The Penny Pulpit.*) *The all-sufficiency of God's help*:—I. ASA ACTED PROMPTLY AND ENERGETICALLY AS THE OCCASION REQUIRED. Only one purpose moved him, and that was to bring out all the military strength of his kingdom, and at once, with no unnecessary delay, strike the foe, every soldier realising that the crown of victory was the prize to be won or lost, according as he should be faithful or unfaithful in his particular duty. Having acted thus promptly and energetically, then—II. ASA CALLED ON GOD FOR HELP. He did not ask God to work a miracle on his behalf. Whoever calls upon God for help without first helping himself, without first putting forth his own efforts to secure that for which he invokes the Divine aid, will call upon God in vain. There are other elements of strength in war besides those which are merely physical. God is a moral and spiritual force which will make an army of inferior numbers more than adequate to encounter and overcome the mere physical force which inheres in superiority of numbers. Hence the wisdom and virtue of prayer. III. WHAT WAS THE ISSUE? "The Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa," &c. (*W. T. Tindley, D.D.*) *Asa's prayer*:—This King Asa, Rehoboam's grandson, had had a long reign of peace, which the writer of the Book of Chronicles traces to the fact that he had rooted out idolatry from Judah. "The land had rest, and he had no war . . . because the Lord had given him rest." But their came a time when the war-cloud began to roll threateningly over the land, and a great army came up against him. Like a wise man he made his military dispositions first, and prayed next. This prayer contains the very essence of what ought to be the Christian attitude in reference to all the conditions and threatening dangers and conflicts of life. I. THE WHOLESOME CONSCIOUSNESS OF OUR OWN IMPOTENCE. It did not take much to convince Asa that he had "no power." His army, according to the numbers given of the two hosts, was outnumbered two to one. If we look fairly in the face our duties, our tasks, our dangers, the possibilities of life and its certainties, the more humbly we think of our own capacity, the more wisely we shall think about God, and the more truly we shall estimate ourselves. The world says "Self-reliance is the conquering virtue." Jesus says to us, "Self-distrust is the condition of all victory." And that does not mean any mere shuffling off of responsibility from our own shoulders, but it means looking the facts of our lives, and of our own characters, in the face. And if we will do that, however apparently easy may be our course, and however richly endowed in mind, body, or estate we may be, we shall find that we each are like "the man with ten thousand" that has to meet "the King that comes against him with twenty thousand"; and we shall not "desire conditions of peace" with our enemy, for that is not what in this case we have to do, but we shall look about us, and not keep our eyes on the horizon, and on the levels of earth, but look up to see if there is not there an ally that we can bring into the field to redress the balance, and to make our ten as strong as the opposing twenty. Now all that is true about the disproportion between the foes we have to face and fight and our own strength. It is eminently true about us Christian people, if we are doing any work for our Master. You hear people say, "Look at the small number of professing Christians in this country, as compared with the numbers on the other side. What is the use of their trying to convert the world?" If the Christian Church had to undertake the task of Christianising the world with its own strength, we might well throw up the sponge and stop altogether. "We have no might." But we are not

only numerically weak. A multitude of non-effectives, mere camp-followers, loosely attached, nominal Christians have to be deducted from the muster-roll. So a profound self-distrust is our wisdom. But it is not to paralyse us, but to lead to something better, as it led Asa. II. SUMMONING GOD INTO THE WORLD SHOULD FOLLOW WHOLESOME SELF-DISTRUST. Asa uses a remarkable expression, which is, perhaps, scarcely reproduced adequately in another verse, "It is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power." It is a strange phrase, but it seems most probable that the suggested rendering in the Revised Version is nearer the writer's meaning, which says, "Lord! there is none beside Thee to help between the mighty and them that have no power," which to our ears is a somewhat cumbrous way of saying that God, and God only, can adjust the difference between the mighty and the weak. Asa turns to God and says, "Thou only canst trim the scales and make the heavy one the lighter of the two by casting Thy might into it. So help us, O Lord, our God." One man with God at his back is always in the majority. There is encouragement for people who have to fight unpopular causes in the world. The consciousness of weakness may unnerve a man; and that is why people in the world are always patting each other on the back and saying, "Be of good cheer, and rely upon yourself." But the self-distrust that turns to God becomes the parent of a far more reliable self-reliance than that which trusts to men. My consciousness of need is my opening the door for God to come in. Just as you always find the lakes in the hollows, so you will always find the grace of God coming into men's hearts to strengthen them and make them victorious, when there has been the preparation of the lowered estimate of one's self. Hollow out your heart by self-distrust, and God will fill it with the flashing waters of His strength bestowed. The way by which we summon God into the field: Asa prays, "Help us, O Lord, our God, for we rest on Thee"; and the word that he employs for "rest" is not a very frequent one. It carries with it a very striking picture. It is used in that tragical story of the death of Saul, when the man that saw the last of him came to David and drew in a sentence the pathetic picture of the wearied, wounded, broken-hearted, discrowned, desperate monarch leaning on his spear. You can understand how hard he leaned, with what a grip he held it, and how heavily his whole, languid, powerless weight pressed upon it. And that is the word that is used here. "We lean on Thee" as the wounded Saul leaned upon his spear. Is that a picture of your faith? III. COURAGEOUS ADVANCE SHOULD FOLLOW SELF-DISTRUST AND SUMMONING GOD BY FAITH. It is well when self-distrust leads to confidence. But that is not enough. It is better when self-distrust and confidence in God lead to courage. And as Asa goes on, "Help us, for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude." Never mind though it is two to one. What does that matter? Prudence and calculation are well enough, but there is a great deal of very rank cowardice and want of faith in Christian people, both in regard to their own lives and in regard to Christian work in the world, which goes masquerading under much too respectable a name, and calls itself "judicious caution" and "prudence." If we have God with us, let us be bold in fronting the dangers and difficulties that beset us, and be sure that He will help us. IV. THE ALL-POWERFUL PLEA WHICH GOD WILL ANSWER. "Thou art my God, let not man prevail against Thee." That prayer covers two things. You may be quite sure that if God is your God you will not be beaten; and you may be quite sure that if you have made God's cause yours He will make your cause His, and again you will not be beaten. "Thou art our God." "It takes two to make a bargain," and God and we have both to act before He is truly ours. He gives Himself to us, but there is an act of ours required, too, and you must take the God that is given to you, and make Him yours because you make yourselves His. And when I have taken Him for mine, and not unless I have, He is mine, to all intents of strength-giving and blessedness. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The name of God written in life*:—Our whole life ought to be filled with His name. You can write it anywhere. It does not need a gold plate to carve His name upon. It does not need to be set in jewels and diamonds. The poorest scrap of brown paper, and the bluntest little bit of pencil, and the shakiest hand will do to write the name of Christ; and all life, the trivialities as well as the crises, may be flashing and bright with the sacred syllables. Mohammedans decorate their palaces and mosques with no pictures, but with the name of Allah in gilded arabesques. Everywhere, on walls and roof, and windows and cornices, and pillars and furniture, the name is written. There is no such decoration for a life as that Christ's name should be inscribed thereon. (*Ibid.*)



## CHAPTER XV.

**VERS. 1-7. And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah.**—*Dark shadows on a bright day*:—We have here shown the necessary connection between God's service and human weal. **I. THE AWFUL APOSTASY.** Turning away. 1. Practical atheism. "Without the true God." 2. Deprived of priestly function. 3. Prevalence of moral disorder. **II. THE TERRIBLE JUDGMENTS WHICH FOLLOWED APOSTASY.** 1. Widespread anarchy. 2. Civil dissensions. 3. General calamity. **III. THE WAY OF ESCAPE FROM THESE JUDGMENTS.** "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him," &c. 1. There is a fact in Divine procedure. 2. This is a warning for the future. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Inspiration and duty*:—**I.** An inspired man is qualified to give a message. **II.** An inspired man will give his message fearlessly and successfully. **III.** Inspired men, men taught of God, not time-servers, required now. (*Ibid.*)

**Vers. 2. The Lord is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him.**—*When and how long the Lord is with His people*:—**I.** WHAT IT IS FOR THE LORD TO BE WITH HIS PEOPLE. 1. Not His general or essential presence. 2. Nor His being with His creatures in a providential way; for so He is with all men. 3. Nor His special presence in a providential way with His own dear children. 4. But it is God's gracious presence, which Moses so earnestly entreated: "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence"; and of which David deprecates the loss: "Cast me not away from Thy presence." To enjoy His presence in this sense means—(1) To have the light of His countenance. (2) For God to commune with them. (3) For God to manifest His early loving-kindness to their souls. **II. WHEN OR HOW LONG WILL GOD BE WITH HIS PEOPLE?** "While ye be with Him." 1. While you keep close to Him in a way of duty; while you are with Him in prayer particularly. 2. While we have communion with them that fear the Lord. God is with them that fear Him; and those who keep company with such persons may expect His presence. Spiritual conversation is like putting fuel to fire; and prayer is like the bellows which blows up the flame. 3. While ye be with Him in public worship and attend the ordinances of His house (Acts ii. 1-3). Inferences: 1. The presence of God with His people is a most amazing instance of Divine goodness. 2. There is nothing so desirable to a gracious soul as the presence of God. (*J. Gill, D.D.*) *When will the Lord be found by His people?*—**I.** GOD IS TO BE FOUND BY HIS PEOPLE—1. In conversion. 2. At the throne of grace. 3. In His public ordinances. **II. WHEN IS GOD TO BE FOUND BY HIS PEOPLE THUS?** When He is sought through the Lord Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life." (*Ibid.*) *Being with God*:—To be with God is—**I.** TO PRESERVE IN OUR MINDS A REVERENT SENSE OF HIS BEING, PRESENCE, AND GOVERNMENT. **II.** TO KEEP CLOSE TO HIS LAWS. **III.** TO STAND ON HIS SIDE AGAINST THE OPPOSITE POWER OF DARKNESS AND SIN. (*Abp. Secker.*) *God with us*:—**I.** WHAT IS MEANT BY GOD WITH A CHURCH? Luther used to say that there was a "great deal of divinity in prepositions." This word "with" has diversity as well as divinity in its meaning. It means—1. To be present. God present, seeing and hearing all that is said and done. 2. Blessing. A helping, gracious presence. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." 3. Divine protection. **II. WHAT IS MEANT BY A CHURCH WITH GOD?** 1. It is a Church faithful and fearless in proclaiming God's Word. "Strike, but hear!" said a philosopher to an angry disputant. "Laugh, strike, kill, but hear the Word of God!" is what the Church says to mockers and persecutors. 2. It is a holy Church. The Emperor of Rome issued a command that all houses, shops, and public institutions, ships or boats, named after members of the Royal Family, should be kept clean, or forego the right to the name. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 3. A Church with God does God's work. A Church tries to be to men all that Christ was, the earthly organ of His Spirit, the instrument of "the mind of Christ." 4. It means a Church in which every member lives in personal communion with God. (*J. M. Gibbon.*) *The happiness and condition of the presence of God*:—**I.** THE HAPPINESS OF THE JEWISH CHURCH AT THAT TIME. "The Lord is with you." God's presence as applied to all righteous people implies—1. An owning and acknowledging them to be His own peculiar people. God's love to His peculiar people includes in it all relations: that of a—(1) Father (2 Cor. vi. 18); (2) husband (Hos. ii. 19); (3) friend (John xv. 15; Jas.

ii. 23). 2. His assisting them and prospering all the works that they put their hands to (1 Chron. xi. 9). 3. His protection and defence of them against all their enemies (Gen. xv. 1; Zech. ii. 5; Isa. iv. 5, xlv. 7; Num. xxiii.; Rom. viii. 31). Inferences: 1. Let us notice what are the greatest mischiefs and who are the chief authors of all the evils which can possibly befall a kingdom, even they that would rob us of our God. 2. From hence we may learn the surest way to have our tranquillity and peace secured to us. 3. If we sincerely serve God, we may comfortably and securely rest upon Him to defend and protect us against all dangers (Prov. xviii. 10; Matt. x. 29; Num. xiv. 9). Luther tells a famous story of a Bishop of Magdeburg, against whom the Duke of Saxony was preparing to wage war; the bishop, having notice of it, betakes himself presently to his prayers and the reforming of his Church; and when one told him what mighty preparations were making against him, he replied, "I will take care of my Church, and then God will fight for and take care of me"; which, when the duke heard of, he disbanded his forces and acknowledged himself too weak to deal with that man who had engaged God on his side (Psa. iii. 6). II. THE CONDITION UPON WHICH THE HAPPINESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE IS TO BE ENJOYED, while we are with Him. To be with God is to be a holy people. Clemens Alexandrinus speaks of a temple upon which was written, "No unholy thing must come near this place"; and this is God's inscription (Heb. i. 13). Conclusion: 'Tis reported of the Prince of Orange at the Battle of Newport, that he said to his soldiers, when they had the sea on one side and the Spaniards on the other, "You must either eat up the Spaniards or drink up the sea"; so we must either conquer our lusts or drink down the devouring fire of God's wrath. Let us apply ourselves to the service of God sincerely, and then the "Lord will be with us." (E. Lake, D.D.)

*God's presence with His people the spring of their prosperity:*—I. GOD MAY BE SAID TO BE WITH MEN—1. In respect of the omnipresence of His essence (1 Kings viii. 27; Psa. cxxxix. 7-12). 2. In respect of personal union. "God was with him" (Acts x. 38). 3. In respect of the covenant of grace. 4. In respect of providential dispensations. This is twofold. (1) General; ordering, disposing, guiding, ruling all things, according to His own wisdom, by His own power, unto His own glory. (2) Special; attended with peculiar love, favour, goodwill, special care towards them with whom He is so present (Gen. xxi. 22; Josh. i. 5; Jer. xv. 20; Isa. xliii. 1, 2). This is the presence here intimated. II. A PEOPLE'S ABIDING WITH GOD IS TWOFOLD. 1. In personal obedience. 2. In national administrations. III. OBSERVATIONS. 1. All outward flourishing or prosperity of a people doth not always argue the special presence of God with them. The things required to make success and prosperity an evidence of the presence of God are—(1) That the people themselves prospered by His peculiar people. (2) That the whole work be good, and have a tendency to God's glory, wherein they are engaged. (3) Made useful and subservient to His glory. 2. Even great afflictions, eminent distresses, long perplexities, may have a consistency with God's special presence. (J. Owen, D.D.)

*The presence of God:*—I. Let our first use be TO INSTRUCT US PARTICULARLY. 1. What this special presence is, and wherein it doth consist. 2. What it is for us to abide with God, so as we may enjoy it. (1) We must have peace with Him in Jesus Christ. (2) To have His presence continued with us we must—(a) Ask counsel at His hand, look to Him for direction in all our affairs; (b) trust in Him for protection; (c) universally own God's concernments in the world. His presence with us is the owning of our concernments; and certainly He expects that we abide with Him in the owning of His. "The Lord's portion is His people." II. LOOK ON THIS PRESENCE OF GOD AS OUR MAIN CONCERNMENT (Psa. iv.). III. Whilst we have any pledge of the presence of God with us, LET US NOT BE GREATLY MOVED, NOR TROUBLED BY ANY DIFFICULTIES WE MAY MEET WITH. IV. LET US FIX OUR THOUGHTS ON THE THINGS WHICH LIE IN A TENDENCY TOWARDS THE CONFIRMING OF GOD'S SPECIAL PROVIDENTIAL PRESENCE WITH US. (Ibid.)

*The Divine protection promised only to an obedient people:*—I. A GRAND PROMISE. "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him." 1. God is said to be with any people—(1) When He upholds among them His true religion and worship. (2) When He causes His Word to be preached and His will to be declared to them. (3) When He watches over them and defends them against their enemies, maintaining in a nation peace and prosperity; in short, when He grants to them all spiritual and temporal blessings. 2. A nation is with God—(1) When true religion is seen upon the throne, when God is there served and honoured, with a spiritual and reasonable service. (2) When those who are in authority employ it to enforce the observance of God's laws. (3) When they themselves observe them. (4) When subjects obey the laws. (5) When each person in

his station concurs in promoting order, good morals, and piety. (6) When those who "minister at the altar" preach by their example; joining pure manners with sound doctrine. (7) When union reigns among those who are in authority, peace in the Church, and harmony in families, and when parents bestow their chief care upon making their children modest, humble lovers of truth and goodness. In short, when each person "sets God before his eyes," and renders to Him, in public and in private, love and obedience. II. AN AWFUL THREATENING. 1. There are several ways in which we may forsake God. But that against which it is most necessary to warn Christians is the forsaking of God by a wicked life, by dissolute manners, by living as if there were no God, or as if we were not to stand before Him in judgment. 2. God forsakes a people, thus unworthy of His presence, by the calamities and miseries with which He visits them. (*S. Partridge, M.A.*) *The prophet's maxim recommended and confirmed* (a missionary sermon):—I. IT MAY TEND TO RECOMMEND THIS DIVINE MAXIM IF WE CONSIDER—1. The effect it had on him to whom it was addressed. 2. The blessing it brought down on those who regarded it. II. LET US CONFIRM THE PROPHET'S AXIOM. The Lord is with them, and with them alone, who are with Him. Consider—1. The evils which would result from the blessing of God being on our labours while we are not with Him. (1) God's being with us is a proof of His approbation of our tempers and dispositions. When we are not with God we are not holy. If God were to convert the heathen by us while we are in such a state, those who were changed by our efforts would naturally infer that the tempers they see in us were those that please God. Thus God would be made to bear a false testimony to us. (2) Were God to be with us in this great work while we are not with Him, it would be to counteract His great design in calling us by His grace. God's grand design is to purify His people. (3) It would be the means of propagating a kind of religion totally different from the mind of Christ. The apostles illustrated their teaching by a holy life. (4) If God were to grant our missionaries success while they were not walking with Him, they would be totally incapable of nourishing up their converts when they had made them. 2. The pleasing results which would follow if God were to be with a people for so long a period as He was with this people. (1) Abundant means. (2) Aid to use these means aright. (*D. Marshman.*)

Vers. 3, 4. Now for a long season.—*The schism of the ten tribes*:—These words— I. SUGGEST A WARNING. A land "without teaching priests" soon realises the rest of the text by becoming "without the true God, and without law." II. GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT to send "teaching priests" on their holy mission to bring the people "to the law and to the testimony," so that they may hear "the whole counsel of God." (*Joseph B. Owen, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak.—*Religious resolution*:—I. THAT RESOLUTION IS NECESSARY IN PROMOTING THE CAUSE OF RELIGION. Resolution is the essence of that mental strength which gives energy to all the powers and faculties of body and mind. It is composed of love, zeal, and confidence. Such resolution has always had a principal influence in effecting all the great things which have ever been effected by the men of the world. Necessary in religion. The Scriptures inculcate it (2 Chron. xix. 11; Ezra x. 4). Examples of resolution: Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, John the Baptist, Peter and John, Paul, Luther, Calvin, &c. II. THAT THE FRIENDS OF GOD HAVE GOOD GROUND FOR SUCH UNSHAKEN RESOLUTION IN PROMOTING SUCH A GREAT AND GOOD DESIGN. 1. The friends of God have often been succeeded in their sincere attempts to promote His glory in the salvation of sinners. 2. The promotion of religion is such a noble and laudable design that it is even glorious to fail in the attempt. 3. Those who espouse the cause of religion have reason to expect the peculiar presence and assistance of God in their pious exertions. 4. They also have the approbation and prayers of all good men. 5. They are equally sure of the esteem and affection of all those whom they shall be instrumental in converting. 6. Their efforts shall finally meet a glorious recompense of reward. III. INFERENCES. 1. That the friends of God have been very negligent in promoting His cause in the world. 2. That none will ever do much to forward the work of spreading the gospel without a large share of Christian zeal and resolution. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Strong hands*:—In the Bible, the human hand is often used as a figure to express actions of life. As a symbol, Elisha poured water over the hands of Elijah; meaning that he would henceforth be his servant, and minister unto him in deeds of kindness.

The reason why the hand represents so many things is because of its manifold uses. What firmness in its grasp, and what delicacy in its touch! It can forge an anchor or make a needle; fell a tree or feel to read the Bible; and do a thousand things which would seem very wonderful if they were not so familiar. "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak." I. THAT MAN WILL HAVE STRONG HANDS WHO REGULARLY LIFTS THEM UP IN PRAYER. If you lift up your hands in prayer as the apostles did, you shall have strength to do great deeds for God. II. LET YOUR HANDS BE STRONG IN CLEAVING TO THE CROSS OF CHRIST. (*W. Birch.*) *Success the certain fruit of faithful labours*:—Applying these words to the work of Sabbath schools, consider—**I. THE WORK.** 1. Its object is the benefit of the rising generation. 2. Its tendencies as to the interests of society at large are beneficial. 3. It accords with the spirit of Christianity and the predictions of sacred writ (*Isa. xi. 9*). **II. THE EXHORTATION.** 1. To faith. 2. To union. 3. To perseverance. **III. THE REWARD.** This is to be found—1. In the satisfaction of your own minds. 2. In the success of your efforts. 3. In the approbation of your Lord. (*N. Hutchings.*)

**Vers. 12-15.** And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers.—*The covenant renewed*:—"Entering into a covenant" is what we name "a revival"; they made it a national act, we separate it entirely from political affairs. **I. THE PREPARATIONS FOR REVIVAL.** 1. The persons who led. A faithful prophet and an obedient king. Of Azariah we know nothing beyond the short record of this chapter. This suggests that a man is important to the world only for the work he does. The king was ready to learn from this obscure prophet and to lead the people to consecration. Happy the pastor who finds the wealth, authority, and zeal of his Church willing to receive the sacred message humbly from his lips and faithfully lead where he points the way. 2. The truths they used. The same that inspire every true revival (*ver. 2*). Divine faithfulness, human responsibility, mercy for the penitent, punishment for the hardened. **II. THE REVIVAL.** In this blessed work there was—1. Repentance. 2. Atonement (*ver. 11*). 3. Consecration. **III. THE JOY OF RECONCILIATION** (*ver. 15*). Lessons: 1. The reformer must begin at his own house. 2. Service for God may cost pain. 3. The true leader is called of God. 4. Every true leader is a rallying-point for others (*ver. 9*). (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *A revival*:—**I.** We see here that the heart of a revival lies in a RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT OF THE CHURCH WITH GOD. An awakened Church is the pioneer of an awakened world. **II.** A second feature in this ancient revival of religion was a PUBLIC PROCLAMATION OF A REVIVED FAITH BEFORE THE WORLD. Religious men are too much in earnest to be still about it. They are moved by a great power. It will express itself as becomes a great power. It is the instinct of religious faith to bear its witness to the world. **III.** The old Jewish revival was attended with a GREAT INFUX OF CONVERTS FROM WITHOUT. So commonly works a pure revival upon the world. Very rare is the exception in which the heart of the world does not respond to the heart of the Church. **IV.** A fourth feature of a true revival of religion is a THOROUGH REFORMATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MORALS. To put away idolatrous worship was what we should call a reformation in morals. Idolatry was immorality concentrated in its most hideous forms. No religious zeal could have been genuine in a monarch which did not sweep the land clean of them. **V.** SUCH AWAKENINGS ARE OFTEN FOLLOWED BY PERIODS OF TEMPORAL PROSPERITY. "The Lord gave them rest round about." No other civilising power equals that of true religion. It never hurts a man for any of the right uses of this world to make a Christian of him. (*A. Phelps.*) *A revival: an imperious necessity*:—The text gives an account of the ancient revival of religion under King Asa. Other revivals are portrayed by the sacred writers. From these we learn—**I.** THAT REVIVALS ARE BY NO MEANS NEW THINGS. Nor are they things of modern invention. **II.** THAT THE PROGRESS OF RELIGION IS NOT IN A UNIFORM STEADY LINE. **III.** THAT REVIVALS OF RELIGION ORDINARILY COMMENCE IN HUMBLE AND OBSCURE WAYS, AND ARE ORDINARILY HELPED ON BY THE HUMBLEST INSTRUMENTALITY. **IV.** THAT THEY ARE ORDINARILY ACCOMPANIED BY A GREAT DEAL OF WHAT PEOPLE ARE PLEASED TO TERM EXCITEMENT. **V.** THAT TRUE REVIVALS OF RELIGION ARE MARKED BY MARVELLOUS TRANSFORMATIONS OF CHARACTER AND REFORMATIONS IN THE LIFE. (*G. E. Reed.*) And all Judah rejoiced at the oath.—*Judah's solemn engagement*:—**I.** THE SOLEMN ENGAGEMENT INTO WHICH THEY ENTERED, AND THE TEMPER THEY MANIFESTED THEREIN. 1. They bound themselves to nothing new. It was to seek the Lord God of their fathers. 2. They swore to do this. 3. They entered into this engagement with great sincerity and with great cheerfulness. **II.** THE HAPPY

CONSEQUENCE OF JUDAH'S SOLEMN ENGAGEMENT. "The Lord was found of them." (*Job Orton.*) **And He was found of them.**—*The search that always finds:—*

I. THE SEEKING. The highest bliss is to find God, the next highest is to seek Him. 1. Our text lays emphasis on the whole-heartedness of the people's seeking after God. One reason why the great mass of professing Christians make so little of their religion is because they are only half-hearted in it. If you divide a river into two streams the force of each is less than half the power of the original current; and the chances are that you will make a stagnant marsh where there used to be a flowing stream. "All in all or not at all" is the rule for life in all departments. 2. "They sought Him with all their heart." That does not mean that there are to be no other desires, for it is a great mistake to pit religion against other things which are meant to be its instruments and its helps. 3. The one token of seeking God is casting out idols. There must be detachment if there is to be attachment. If some climbing plant, for instance, has twisted itself round the unprofitable thorns in the hedge, the gardener, before he can get it to go up the support that it is meant to encircle, has carefully to detach it from the stays to which it has wantonly clung, taking care that in the process he does not break its tendrils and destroy its power of growth. The heart must be emptied of base liquors if the new wine of the kingdom is to be poured into it. II. THE FINDING WHICH CROWNS SUCH SEEKING. 1. Anything is possible rather than that a whole-hearted search after God should be a vain search. For there are in that search two seekers—God is seeking for us more truly than we are seeking for Him. 2. This is the only direction for a man's desires and aims in which disappointment is an impossibility. 3. Our wisdom is to make this search. What would you think of a company of gold-seekers, hunting about in some exhausted claim for hypothetical grains—ragged, starving—and all the while in the next gully were lying lumps of gold for the picking up? And that figure fairly represents what people do and suffer who seek for good and do not seek after God. III. THE REST WHICH ENUES ON FINDING GOD. We have no immunity from toil and conflict, but disturbance around is a very small matter if there be a better thing—rest within. A vessel with an outer casing and a layer of air between may be kept at a temperature above that of the external atmosphere. So we may have conflict and strife, and yet a better rest than that of my text may be ours. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Happy earnestness:—*This verse represents well the happy combination of sacrament and life. It brings before us whole-heartedness for God, with special regard to two of its features. I. JOY. "And all Judah rejoiced at the oath," &c. A wholeness of devotedness to God is consistent with every department of activity and every form of interest which is not in itself sinful. It is as a soul to the body of all secular occupation, however absorbing. The wide onward lift of the tidal wave in mid-ocean does not more interfere with the commerce of the countries, the heightening sun of the spring-time does not more embarrass the progress of the land over which it smiles, than the full-hearted service of God breaks in upon the lawful interests of a man among the engagements of his every-day existence. This joy implies—1. Enthusiasm. This may be reckoned the atmosphere which surrounds the joy of whole-heartedness for God. 2. Willingness. A wide compliance with a competent and kindly force that presses on us from without. Predominant willingness contributes largely to a Christian man's joy. 3. Rightness. The approval of conscience. 4. Undividedness of affection. II. PROSPEROUSNESS. "And He was found of them: and Jehovah gave them rest round about." This signifies—1. That we find what we seek. There are neighbourhoods where the mists lie so often and so long upon the grand outlines of the landscape, that a clear day is in some sense a day of discovery, of "finding," though nothing is there then which was not there always. There have been those who for years have looked through a filmy dimness of eyesight upon those they loved, whose movements were to them like the movements of featureless shades; when the films were one day purged from the eyes was it not almost more than a figure of speech they spoke when they said they had "found" those loved faces and forms again? So this energising of the heart for God restores vision, and vision restores reality. God in Christ becomes near. 2. That we miss much that we had hitherto found. Hostile movements from around are comparatively allayed, and the hush that has fallen upon these reflects itself upon the soul in restfulness. (*J. A. Kerr Bain, M.A.*)

Ver. 17. Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was perfect all his days.—*Spiritual backsliding:—*We learn from the text that we cannot always infer the state of the

heart from external symptoms. I. YOU MAY HAVE THE APPEARANCE OF SOMETHING WRONG WHILE THE HEART IS SOUND. This was Asa's case. II. Conversely YOU MAY HAVE THE HEART UNSOUND WHILST AS YET THERE IS BUT LITTLE TRACE OF IT IN THE HEART AND LIFE. In tracing this disease, consider—1. Its working. (1) The heart's relapse towards positive evil. There is the presentation to the mind of something of some worldly, fleshly things as pleasant and desirable; and then there not having been an immediate curbing of the rising inclination, the thoughts come to dwell with more and more complacency upon the object; and the man begins to wish that it might be lawful to have it, and to cast about and contrive for the modes of possession. And when the inclination has thus been formed and strengthened, it proposes to the understanding whether the enjoyment may not be had without hazard to the soul; and then there will soon be devised something plausible in the shape of an apology or warrant, something that shall serve to put conscience off its guard, or even make it concur in the prosecution of the design. (2) The heart's decline from the love of godliness and of God. 2. Its symptoms. There was a time when you felt God to be your "chief good"—do you feel Him less so now? There was a time when you delighted in prayer—has it become more of a task now? Once you thought much of the work of Christ and longed to be with Him in heaven—are you now more contented with earth and more disposed to say, "It is good for us to be here"? Once you found sufficient scope for fervent affections in secret communion with God, in meditating on His perfections, and in admiring His love in the gift of His Son—now do your affections seem stifled unless you have some showy work on which to fasten them, some dazzling novelty with which to engage them? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Caution in judging others*:—How ready are we to condemn and find fault with our neighbour, if his conduct do not seem in every respect consistent with his Christian profession! How soon we think he may be nothing but a hypocrite if we observe certain things in which he fails to carry out the principles of the gospel, though perhaps we know little or nothing of his peculiar circumstances, dangers, and temptations! It is enough for us that the "high places" are not "taken away"; immediately we condemn Asa, and infer that his heart cannot be right with God. Let the text teach charity first; and while we are not to shut our eyes to what is wrong, or count it matter of indifference whether or not the "high places are removed," when the removing is that to which the Christian stands pledged, let us be cautious of judging our brethren, and delivering a verdict against them, when we are told, though "the high places were not taken away out of Israel, nevertheless, the heart of Asa was perfect all his days." (*Ibid.*) *Perfection limited by power*:—Some of you might, indeed, be ready to make a wrong use of our text. You may say, "If Asa's heart was perfect with God, though he did not remove the high places, so may ours be, though you may see things in our conduct which may not be wholly consistent with a Christian profession." Yet, before using the case of Asa to justify the assertion that your heart may be right whilst your conduct is wrong, it may be as well to observe how far Asa had gone in the extermination of idols. The text merely says that the "high places" were "not taken away out of Israel." Asa was king of Judah, but not of Israel; though he would seem to have possessed much influence in that kingdom. There was no reason to doubt that, where his power was clear, he had exerted it in restoring the worship of the true God; if he had not he would not have punished his nearest relations. You read that he removed Maachab, his mother, being queen, "because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron." You learn, in like manner, what was done with the idol of the high priest. So that, if he did not carry reform into Israel, he was vigorous in its application in his own family and household. When you can say as much—when you can say that, to the utmost of your power, you have laboured to serve God in your own family and household and neighbourhood, maintaining His cause among all those who come more immediately within the sphere of your influence—then you may hope that, as with Asa, the heart is perfect with God, though there are high places yet, in far distant lands, whose overthrow you have not attempted. (*Ibid.*) *Unsoundness of heart suspected on insufficient grounds*:—And yet, in speaking on the case of the backslider in heart, it becomes us to take heed that we make not those sad who may be disposed, without sufficient cause, to write bitter things against themselves. It is not every person who suspects himself of unsoundness of heart who is really a backslider. We must declare there is commonly much greater cause for fear with your forward, confident, bustling professors, who would be quite offended if suspected of spiritual decline, than with the timid,

scrupulous individual who is always ready to think worse of himself than others think of him. Tried by conscience—alas! what hardens conscience like contact with the world?—it may still make a man accuse himself of backsliding who is all the while “pressing toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ.” Bodily sickness may be regarded as the taking away of the quickenings of the Spirit; the clouding of the understanding, and the clogging of the affections, will often make a believer fearful of spiritual relapse; he mistakes the infirmity of the body for disease of the soul—a decay of memory for a decay of piety; as though there must be less of devotedness, of abhorrence of sin, of meek reliance upon Christ in our dangers, our confusions, our difficulties in spiritual exercises, because of that unenlightenment of mind which is but the result, or symptom, of declining strength. Though a person may be quite correct in calling himself a backslider, yet the probabilities are greater for him who has no fears and no suspicions that he is really a backslider than for another who does not wait to be charged, but is painfully apprehensive of being in fault. For certainly, as a general rule in religion, to advance is, in some senses, to appear to go back. To grow in grace is to grow in knowledge of ourselves; and, alas! who can know himself better, and not think himself worse? If, however, we would not have the timid unduly severe in accusing themselves, we would have all diligent, and him “that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (*Ibid.*)

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#### CHAPTER XVI.

**VERS. 1-10. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasuries of the house of the Lord.—The folly of bribery:—Trust in man, not in God—I. LED TO SACRILEGE IN RELIGIOUS THINGS.** Gifts bestowed or promised with a view to prevent judgment or corrupt morals abominable. Bribery a canker in constitutional governments, a disgrace in all departments of life. **II. BROUGHT DOWN DIVINE REPROOF.** **III. DEFEATED ITS OWN ENDS.** 1. Asa missed the opportunity of a double victory. Possible by unnecessary and improper alliances to hinder our good and prevent God from granting deliverance. 2. Asa exposed himself to greater danger. Those who bribe and those bribed not to be depended upon. For gold men will sell their votes, their conscience, and themselves. Cato complained that M. Cælius the Tribune “might be hired for a piece of bread to speak or to hold his peace.” (*J. Wolfendale.*)

**Ver. 7. Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord.—Asa's want of faith:—Sin like Asa's has been the supreme apostasy of the Church in all her branches and through all her generations: Christ has been denied, not by lack of devotion, but by want of faith. Champions of the faith, reformers and guardians of the temple, like Asa, have been eager to attach to their holy cause the cruel prejudices of ignorance and folly, the greed and vindictiveness of selfish men. They have feared lest these potent forces should be arrayed amongst the enemies of the Church and her Master. It has even been suggested that national Churches and great national vices were so intimately allied that their supporters were content that they should stand or fall together. On the other hand, the advocates of reform have not been slow to appeal to popular jealousy and to aggravate the bitterness of social feuds. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*)**

**Ver. 9. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.—Divine providence:—We need not concern ourselves with the occasion on which these words were uttered. Spoken by a prophet to Asa, king of Judah, they have been “recorded for our instruction.” The representation sets forth Divine things under human similitudes. Now it can hardly be necessary that we expose the falseness of the opinion that having created this world God left it to itself, and bestows no thought on its concerns. But whilst there are few who hold the opinion, there are many who would limit the providence of God; and it is very easy to put forward descriptions of the magnitude and the power of the Creator, and then to set in contrast the insignificance of man, and to argue from the comparison that it is derogatory to the greatness of God to suppose Him careful of what befalls a house-**

hold or happens to an individual. But this is poor reasoning; it would not hold good if applied amongst ourselves. If it were possible that a great statesman or potentate, whilst superintending the concerns of an empire, should yet find time for ministering at the bedside of sickness, and be active for the widow and the orphan: well, what would you say—that it was derogatory to him that, without neglecting momentous things, he showed himself capable of attending to things comparatively petty? Nay, you would admire and you would venerate him all the more. Neither is it derogatory—nay, rather, it is essential to the greatness of our God—that whilst He marshals the stars and orders the motions of all the worlds in immensity, He yet feedeth the young ravens that call upon Him, and numbereth the very hairs of our head. But now we will bring this truth before you in greater minuteness, and show what is involved in the saying, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” I. We may first affirm it evident THAT NOTHING CAN HAPPEN IN ANY SPOT OF THE PEOPLED IMMENSITY WHICH IS NOT KNOWN TO HIM WHO IS EMPHATICALLY THE OMNISCIENT—indeed, it were to deny the omniscience of God to suppose any the most trivial incident not included within His knowledge. And it is far more than the inspection of an ever-vigilant observer. It is not merely that nothing can happen without the knowledge of our Maker: it is that nothing can happen but by His appointment or permission, for we must ever remember that God is the first cause, and that on the first all secondary depend. But how beautifully simple does everything appear when we trace one hand in all that occurs! It is God whose energies are extended throughout the earth and sea and air, causing those innumerable and beneficial results which we ascribe to nature; it is God by whom all those contingencies which seem to us fortuitous and casual are ordered, so that events brought round by what men count accident proceed from a Divine and therefore irreversible appointment. It is God by whom the human will is secretly inclined towards righteousness, so that there is not wrought upon earth a single action such as God can approve, to whose performance God hath not instigated. It is God who, acting through the instrumentality of various and apparently conflicting causes, keeps together the discordant elements of society, and prevents the whole framework of civil institutions from being rapidly dissolved and broken up piecemeal. I know that it is not the monarch alone at the head of his provinces and tribes who is observed by the Almighty; I know that it is not only at some great crisis in life that an individual becomes the object of the attention of his Maker; rather do I know that the poorest, the meanest, the most despised, the very outcast of society, shares with the monarch the notice of the Universal Protector. Yea, and that this notice is so incessant and so unwearied, that when he goes to his daily toil, or his daily prayer, when he lies down at night, or rises in the morning, or gathers his little ones to the scanty meal, the poor man is not unnoticed by God; he cannot weep a tear God knows not, he cannot smile a smile God knows not, he cannot breathe a wish God knows not. But whilst the universal providence of God is to the full as incomprehensible as aught else that belongs to Divinity, there is nothing in it but what commends itself to the very warmest feelings of our nature. II. We come now to the second doctrine laid down in our text—THAT ALL THE MOTIONS OF PROVIDENCE HAVE FOR THEIR ULTIMATE END THE GOOD OF THOSE WHOSE HEART IS PERFECT TOWARDS GOD. And you may examine this doctrine under two points of view—as referring either to the Church at large, or separately to the individuals of whom that Church is composed. With Scripture for our guide, we must see that God’s design, in all His dealings with this earth, has been the glorifying Himself in the redemption and final exaltation of a vast number of our apostate race. Before Christ appeared amongst men, the whole course of human events was so ordered as to prepare the way for the promised Deliverer. If God sent His own Son to deliver man from the consequences of transgression, and to extirpate evil from the universe, we cannot doubt the objects which engaged so stupendous an interposition must still be those to whose furtherance the Divine dealings tend. There can be no other objects commensurate in importance with those, for no others have required so costly a process; and since these as yet have been only partially attained, we must justly conclude that their thorough accomplishment is the proposed end of all the dealings of providence. The globe was partitioned out with a view to the Church, this land assigned to one nation and that to another, with the set purpose of consulting by the distribution the well-being of Israel. It is as though the Psalmist had said that God directs all the tumults and confusions of the world, guiding the flood with holy and merciful intentions towards His people, that the turbid waters may bring them strength and



peace. Why is it that the Church has outlived so many a fierce persecution—that in the place of being vanquished she is only to be invigorated by assault? We ascribe nothing to the native energies of the preachers or professors of Christianity: we ascribe everything to the protecting and fostering care of Him who so loved the world as to give His Son. And it is not only in reference to the Church at large that we are warranted in thus speaking of God's providence. Of each member in this Church we may declare that God watches sedulously over him with the express design of succouring him with all needful assistance. You learn from various portions of Holy Writ that God has a great interest in the righteous, so that the Lord's portion is said to be His people, and Jacob the lot of His inheritance. He now calls His people His jewels, and declares that whosoever toucheth them toucheth the apple of His eye. We know that many things may happen to the righteous which seem against them, and that it is easy to find in their disasters apparent exceptions to the truth affirmed by the text; yet who that knows anything of Christian experience would deny that the trials which are permitted to overtake the godly serve as means through which their spiritual well-being is advanced, and afford occasions for such communications of grace as prove that God's strength is made perfect in weakness? It is no proof that the eye of the Lord is not on the righteous that troubles may be found in their portion. When again this man is visited with calamity, death may make inroads in his household, and disorder may pervade his affairs; but the eyes of the Lord are incessantly on him, and if he will but seek his comfort in God, God will show Himself strong by giving him a peace which passeth all understanding. And if anything can encourage the righteous man, and give him confidence amid the onsets of trial, it must be the consideration that the providence of the Almighty is thus perpetually vigilant in his behalf.

(*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The eyes of the Lord*:—I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE EYES OF THE LORD. This is figurative. It designs His all-seeing providence; and that, as concerned in a special manner with His own people (Zech. iii. 9, iv. 10). The eyes of the Lord, as they are set upon His own people, are like the eyes of doves—expressive of mildness, gentleness, tenderness, and love; but as they are set upon wicked men, His eyes are as flames of fire—expressive of wrath and vengeance (Amos ix. 4-8; Psa. xxxiv. 15).

II. IN WHAT SENSE THESE ARE SAID TO RUN TO AND FRO THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH. This is expressive of His watchfulness over His people (Jer. xxxi. 28). As those who are watchful look here and there, and are very diligent in their observations, so the Lord watches over His people. 1. To help them. 2. To counter-work the adversary (Job i. 7). III. THE END OF THEIR RUNNING THUS. To show Himself strong on the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him. 1. The descriptive character: "perfect toward Him"; that is, sincere and upright. Where there is "love out of a pure heart and faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. i. 5) the heart may be said to be perfect. 2. The exertion of Divine power on their behalf. (*J. Gill, D.D.*)

*The eyes of the Lord*:—In Scripture these signify—I. HIS KNOWLEDGE (Job xxxiv. 21; Heb. iv. 13). II. HIS PROVIDENCE. 1. For good (1 Kings vi. 3; Psa. xxxii. 8). 2. For evil (Isa. iii. 8). (*S. Charnock, B.D.*) *God's providence—a description, and its end*:—I. THE DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE. 1. Its immediateness: "His eyes." Not like princes, who see by their servants' eyes, more than by their own, what is done in their kingdoms; His care is immediate. 2. Its quickness and speed: "run." 3. Its extent: "the whole earth." 4. Its diligence: "to and fro." His care is repeated. 5. Its efficacy. His care doth engage His strength. II. THE END OF PROVIDENCE. (*Ibid.*) *The foundations of the doctrine of providence*:—I. GOD HATH AN INDISPUTABLE AND PECULIAR RIGHT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD. This right is founded upon—1. That of creation. 2. The excellency of His being. Every man hath a natural right to rule another in his own art and skill wherein he excels him. II. GOD ONLY IS QUALIFIED FOR THE UNIVERSAL GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD. God only is fit in regard of—1. Power. 2. Holiness and righteousness. All disorder is the effect of unrighteousness. 3. Knowledge. 4. Patience. III. THERE CAN BE NO REASON RENDERED WHY GOD SHOULD NOT ACTUALLY GOVERN THE WORLD, SINCE HE ONLY HATH A RIGHT AND A FITNESS. IV. GOD DOTH ACTUALLY PRESERVE AND GOVERN THE WORLD. 1. Nothing is acted in the world without God's knowledge. The vision of the wheels in Ezekiel presents us with an excellent portraiture of providence (Ezek. i. 18). 2. Nothing is acted in the world without the will of God (Eph. i. 11; Psa. cxxxv. 6). 3. Nothing doth subsist without God's care and power. (*Ibid.*) *The universality of God's providence*:—I. IT IS OVER ALL CREATURES. 1. The highest. (1) Over Jesus

Christ, the First-born of every creature (Acts ii. 23). (2) Over angels and men. 2. The meanest. As the sun's light, so God's providence, disdains not the meanest worms. II. IT EXTENDS TO ALL THE ACTIONS AND MOTIONS OF THE CREATURE. 1. To natural actions. How do fish serve several coasts at several seasons? why do plants that grow between a barren and a fruitful soil shoot all their roots towards the moist and fruitful ground, but by a secret direction of providential wisdom? 2. To civil actions. Counsels of men are ordered by Him to other ends than what they aim at, and which their wisdom cannot discover. 3. To preternatural actions. God doth command creatures to do those things which are no way suitable to their inclinations (1 Kings xvii. 4; Jonah ii. 10; Dan. iii.). 4. To all supernatural and miraculous actions of the creatures. As when the sun went backward in Hezekiah's time, and when it stood still in the valley of Ajalon. 5. To all fortuitous actions. The whole disposing of the lot which is cast into the lap is of the Lord (Prov. xvi. 33). 6. To all voluntary actions. (*Ibid.*) *The mysteriousness of God's providence*.—I. HIS WAYS ARE ABOVE HUMAN METHODS. Dark providences are often the groundwork of some excellent piece He is about to discover to the world. His methods are like a plaited picture, which on the one side represents a negro and the other a beauty. II. HIS ENDS ARE OF A HIGHER STRAIN THAN THE AIMS OF MEN. Who would have thought that the forces Cyrus raised against Babylon, to satisfy his own ambition, should be a means to deliver the Israelites and restore the worship of God in the temple? III. GOD HATH SEVERAL ENDS IN THE SAME ACTION. Jacob is oppressed with famine, Pharaoh enriched with plenty, but Joseph's imprisonment is in order to his father's relief and Pharaoh's wealth. IV. GOD HAS MORE REMOTE ENDS THAN SHORT-SIGHTED SOULS ARE ABLE TO ESPY. (*Ibid.*) *The providence of God*.—I. THE WISDOM OF GOD WOULD NOT BE SO PERSPICUOUS WERE THERE NOT A PROVIDENCE IN THE WORLD. A musician discovers more skill in the touching an instrument, and ordering the strings, to sound what note he pleaseth, than he doth in the first framing and making of it (Isa. xxviii. 29). All God's providences are but His touch of the strings of this great instrument of the world. II. THE MEANS WHEREBY GOD'S ACTS DISCOVER A PROVIDENCE. He acts—1. By small means. (1) In His ordinary works. Great plants are formed from small seeds. (2) In His extraordinary works. (a) In the deliverance of a people or person. A dream was the occasion of Joseph's greatness. He used the cacklings of geese to save the Roman Capitol from a surprise by the Gauls. (b) In the salvation of the soul. Our Saviour Himself, though God, was so mean in the eyes of the world that He calls Himself "a worm, and no man" (Psa. xxii. 6). The world is saved by a crucified Christ. 2. By contrary means. God makes contrary things contribute to His glory, as contrary colours in a picture do to the beauty of the piece. In some engines you shall see wheels have contrary motions, and yet all in order to one and the same end. God cured those by a brazen serpent which were stung by the fiery ones, whereas brass (according to Grotius) is naturally hurtful to those that are bit by serpents. (*Ibid.*) *A supreme providence the only explanation of many actions and events in the world*.—This is evidenced—I. BY THE RESTRAINTS UPON THE PASSIONS OF MEN. How strangely did God qualify the hearts of the Egyptians willingly to submit to the sale of their land, when they might have risen in a tumult, broke open the granaries, and supplied their wants (Gen. xlvii. 19, 21). II. BY THE SUDDEN CHANGES WHICH ARE MADE UPON THE SPIRITS OF MEN FOR THE PRESERVATION OF OTHERS (Gen. xxxiii. 4; 1 Sam. xxiv. 17, 18; 2 Chron. xviii. 31; Esther vi. 1, 2). III. IN CAUSING ENEMIES TO DO THINGS FOR OTHERS WHICH ARE CONTRARY TO ALL RULES OF POLICY. The Jews in the worst of their captivities were often befriended by their conquerors, to rebuild their city and re-edify their temple, and at the charge of their conquerors too (Ezra i. 1, 2, 7, iv. 12, 15, 19, vi. 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 22; Neh. ii. 8). IV. IN INFATUATING THE COUNSELS OF MEN (Isa. xxxiii. 11; 2 Sam. xvii. 14). V. IN MAKING THE COUNSELS OF MEN SUBSERVIENT TO THE VERY ENDS THEY DESIGN AGAINST (Gen. xi. 4, 8; John xii. 32). VI. IN MAKING THE FANCIES OF MEN SUBSERVIENT TO THEIR OWN RUIN (2 Kings iii. 22, 23, vii. 6; Judg. vii. 19-22). (*Ibid.*) *The unequal distributions of providence—a question*.—If there be a providence, how come those unequal distributions to happen in the world? I. ANSWER IN GENERAL. 1. Is it not a high presumption for ignorance to judge God's proceedings? 2. God is sovereign of the world. Why should a finite understanding prescribe measures and methods to an infinite Majesty? 3. God is wise and just, and knows how to distribute. If we question His providence, we question His wisdom. We see the present dispensations, but are we able to understand the internal motives? 4. There is a necessity for some

seeming inequality, at least, in order to the good government of the world. The afflictions of good men are a foil to set off the beauty of God's providence in the world. 5. Unequal distributions do not argue carelessness. A father may give one child a gayer coat than he gives another, yet he extends his fatherly care and tenderness over all. 6. Upon due consideration the inequality will not appear so great as the complaint of it. A running sore may lie under a purple robe. As some are stripped of wealth and power, so they are stripped of their incumbrances they bring with them. II. ANSWER MORE PARTICULARLY. 1. It is not well with bad men here. (1) They are tortured by their own lusts. (2) They have a great account to make, and know not how to make it (Luke xvi. 2). (3) They are worse for what they have (Psa. lxxix. 22; Prov. i. 32). (4) In the midst of their prosperity they are reserved for justice (Exod. ix. 16; Psa. xxxvii. 2). 2. Neither is it bad here with good men. (1) Adversity cannot be called absolutely an evil. (2) God never leaves good men so bare but He provides for their necessities (Psa. xxxvii. 5, lxxxiv. 11). (3) The little good men have is better than the highest enjoyments of wicked men (Psa. xxxvii. 16; Prov. xvi. 8). (4) No righteous man would in his sober wits be willing to have an exchange of his smartest afflictions for a wicked man's prosperity, with all the circumstances attending it. (5) It is not ill with the righteous in afflictions because they have high advantages by them. (a) Sensible experiments of the tender providence of God over them (Psa. xxxvii. 19, 39; 2 Tim. iv. 17; 2 Cor. i. 5; 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14). (b) Inward improvements, opportunities to manifest more love to God, more dependence on Him, the perfection of the soul (1 Tim. v. 5; Job xxii. 10). (c) Future glory. (d) Suffering of good men for the truth highly glorifies the providence of God (1 Pet. iv. 16). (e) This argument is stronger for a day of reckoning after this life than against providence. (*Ibid.*) *The unworthiness and absurdity of denying providence*.—I. THE EVIL OF DENYING PROVIDENCE. 1. It gives a liberty to all sin. What may not be done where there is no government? 2. It destroys all religion. (1) All worship. How is it possible to persuade men to regard Him for God who takes no care of them? (2) Prayer. What favour can we expect of Him who is regardless of dispensing any? (3) Praise. (4) Dependence, trust, and hope. 3. It is a high disparagement of God. 4. It is clearly against natural light. Socrates could say, "Whosoever denied providence was possessed with a devil." II. THE GROUNDS OF THE DENIAL OF PROVIDENCE. This is founded—1. Upon an overweening conceit of men's own worth. When men saw themselves frustrated of the rewards they expected, and saw others that were instruments of tyranny and just graced with the favours they thought due to their own virtue, they ran into a conceit that God did not mind the actions of men below. 2. Upon pedantical and sensual notions of God. As though it might detract from His pleasures and delight to look down upon this world, or as though it were a molestation of an infinite power to busy Himself about the cares of sublunary things. 3. On a flattering conceit of the majesty of God. 4. On their wishes upon any gripes of conscience. Those in Zephaniah were first settled upon their lees, and then to drive away all fears of punishment, deny God's government (Zeph. i. 12). Some men, upon a sense of guilt, wish, for their own security, there were no providential eye to inspect them. III. THE VARIOUS WAYS WHEREIN MEN PRACTICALLY DENY PROVIDENCE, OR ABUSE IT, OR CONTEMN IT. 1. When they will walk on in a contrary way to checks of Providence. 2. In omissions of prayer (Psa. xiv. 2; 2 Kings i. 3; Job. xv. 4). 3. When men will turn every stone to gain the favourable assistance of men in their designs, and never address to God for His direction or blessing (Job xxxv. 9, 10; 2 Chron. xvi. 7, 12; Prov. iii. 5). 4. When upon receiving any good they make more grateful acknowledgment to the instruments than to God, the principal author of it (Isa. x. 13, 14; Dan. v. 23; Heb. i. 16). 5. When we use indirect courses and dishonest ways to gain wealth or honour. 6. When we distrust God when there is no visible means (Isa. li. 12, 13; Psa. lii. 7). 7. Stoutness, under God's afflicting or merciful hand, is a denial or contempt of providence (Dan. v. 23; Hos. vii. 9; Isa. xxii. 12, 13). 8. Envy is also a denial of providence. 9. Impatience under cross providence is a denial and contempt of God's government (Isa. viii. 21, 22). 10. In charging our sins and miscarriages by them upon Providence (Prov. xix. 3). 11. Many other ways. (1) When we do things with a respect to the pleasure of men more than of God. (2) In vain boasting and vaunting of ourselves. (3) Oppression (Psa. xciv. 6, 7). (4) Misinterpretations of Providence (Num. xiv. 3). (5) In limiting Providence (Psa. lxxviii. 41). (*Ibid.*) *Belief in Providence a source of comfort*.—I. MAN IS A SPECIAL OBJECT

OF PROVIDENCE (Gen. i. 26). II. HOLY MEN A MORE SPECIAL OBJECT OF IT (Psa. xxxiii. 18, xxxvii. 23; text). III. HENCE IT WILL FOLLOW THAT THE SPIRITS OF GOOD MEN HAVE SUFFICIENT GROUNDS TO BEAR UP IN THEIR INNOCENT SUFFERINGS AND STORMS IN THE WORLD (Heb. vi. 10). IV. HENCE FOLLOWS A CERTAIN SECURITY AGAINST A GOOD MAN'S WANT (Psa. xxxiv. 10; 1. Tim. iv. 8). (*Ibid.*) *Our duty in regard to Providence*:—I. TO SEEK EVERYTHING WE NEED AT THE HANDS OF GOD. II. TO TRUST PROVIDENCE. 1. In the greatest extremities. 2. In the way of means. 3. In the way of precept. Let not any reliance upon an ordinary providence induce us into any way contrary to the command (Psa. xxxvii. 5). 4. Solely, without prescribing any methods to Him. III. TO SUBMIT TO PROVIDENCE: for—1. Whatsoever God doth, He doth wisely. 2. God discovers His mind to us by providences (Luke vii. 22; Acts. v. 38, 39). IV. TO MURMUR NOT AT PROVIDENCE. V. TO STUDY PROVIDENCE. 1. Universally. (1) The darkest. (2) The terriblest. (3) The smallest. 2. Regularly. (1) By the Word: compare providence and the promise together. (2) By faith. We many times correct our sense by reason; why should we not correct reason by faith? 3. Entirely. (1) View them in their connection. The providences of God bear a just proportion to one another, and are beautiful in their entire scheme. As in a piece of arras folded up, and afterwards particularly opened, we see the hand or foot of a man, the branch of a tree; or, if we look on the outside, we see nothing but knots and threads and uncouth shapes that we know not what to make of; but when it is fully opened, and we have the whole web before us, we see what histories and pleasing characters are interwoven in it. (2) View them in their end (Psa. lxxiii. 16, 17). 4. Calmly. 5. Seriously. 6. Holily; with a design to that duty Providence calls for (Isa. xxii. 12). 7. Ascribe the glory of every providence to God. (*Ibid.*) *Providence follows the rule of Scripture*:—Whatsoever was written was written for the Church's comfort (Rom. xv. 4); whatsoever is acted in order to anything written is acted for the Church's good. All the providences of God in the world are conformable to His declarations in His Word. I. ALL GOOD THINGS ARE FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH. 1. The world. (1) The continuance of the world is for their sakes (Acts xvii. 30). (2) The course of natural things is for the good of the Church or particular members of it (Hos. ii. 18; Josh. x. 12, 13). (3) The interest of nations is ordered as is most for the Church's good (2 Kings ix. 6, 7). 2. The gifts and common graces of men in the world. 3. Angels. (1) The highest orders among them are not exempted from being officers for the Church (Matt. xviii. 10; Heb. i. 14; Psa. xci. 11; Luke xvi. 22). (2) Armies of them are employed upon this occasion (Gen. xxxiii. 1, 2). (3) Christ hath the government of them to this end for His Church (Heb. ii. 7, 8; Eph. i. 21, 22). (4) The great actions which have been done in the world, or shall be done for the Church, are performed by them (Deut. vii. 16, viii. 16; Rev. x. 8, 9, xxii. 8, 9). (5) They engage in this work with delight. II. ALL BAD THINGS ARE FOR THEIR GOOD. 1. Bad persons. (1) The devil. The malice of the devil against Job hath rendered him a standing miracle of patience for ever. God overreaches the devil, and makes him instrumental for good where he designs hurt and mischief. (2) Wicked men. They exist in the midst of the Church either for the exercise of their grace or security of their person or interest (Prov. xvi. 7). 2. Bad things. (1) Sin. (a) A man's own sin. Onesimus runs from his master, and finds a spiritual father. God makes the remainder of sin in a good man an occasion to exercise His grace, discover his strength, and show his loyalty to God. (b) Other men's sins. The revengeful threatening of Esau was the occasion of Jacob's flight, which saved him from possible idolatry (Gen. xxvii. 43, 46). (2) Commotions in the world (Psa. xxix. 10, 11; Isa. xlv. 28). (3) Destroying judgments (Rom. xi. 11, 12). (4) Divisions in the Church. (5) Persecutions. (*Ibid.*) *Providence glorifies God's grace in Christ*:—I. ALL THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS FOR THE GLORIFYING HIS GRACE IN CHRIST (Eph. i. 10, 22, 23). II. GOD HATH GIVEN THE POWER OF PROVIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION OF THINGS TO CHRIST, FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH. III. GOD IN THE CHURCH DISCOVERS THE GLORY OF ALL HIS ATTRIBUTES. What wisdom, power, sufficiency, grace, and kindness He hath is principally for them. IV. THERE IS A PECULIAR RELATION OF GOD IN CHRIST TO THE CHURCH, UPON WHICH ACCOUNT THIS DOCTRINE MUST NEEDS BE TRUE. God is a father to provide for them (Isa. lxiv. 8); a mother to suckle them (Isa. xlix. 15); Christ is a husband to love and protect them (Eph. v. 29); a brother to counsel them (John xx. 17). V. THE WHOLE INTEREST OF GOD IN THE WORLD LIES IN HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE. VI. IT CANNOT BE BUT ALL THE

PROVIDENCES OF GOD SHALL WORK TO THE GOOD OF HIS CHURCH, IF WE CONSIDER THE AFFECTIONS OF GOD. 1. His love. 2. His delight (Zeph. iii. 17). VII. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS CHURCH WILL MAKE ALL PROVIDENCES TEND TO THE GOOD OF IT. VIII. THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH HAVE A MIGHTY FORCE WITH GOD TO THIS END; because—1. God delights in the prayers of His people. 2. Prayer is nothing else but a pleading of God's promises. 3. They are the united supplications and pleadings both in heaven and earth. (1) Christ intercedes for the Church. (2) Angels in all probability do the same. (3) Glorified saints are not surely behind. Use I. For information. 1. God will always have a Church in the world. 2. God will, in the greatest exigencies, find out means for the protection of His Church. 3. The Church shall, in the end, prove victorious against all its adversaries, or Providence must miss its aim. 4. The interest of nations is to bear a respect to the Church, and countenance the worship of God in it. 5. We may see hence the ground of most of the judgments in the world. 6. What esteem, then, should there be of the godly in the world! 7. It is, then, a very foolish thing for any to contend against the welfare of God's people. Use II. For comfort. 1. In duties and special services. 2. In meanness and lowness. 3. In the greatest judgments upon others. 4. In His people's greatest extremities (Isa. xliii. 2; Psa. xci. 4; John vi. 17, 18). 5. In fear of wants. 6. In the low estate of the Church at any time. Use III. If the providence of God is chiefly designed for the good of the Church—1. Fear not the enemies of the Church. 2. Censure not God in His dark providences. 3. Inquire into providence and interpret all public providences by this rule. 4. Consider the former providences God hath wrought for the Church in past ages. 5. Act faith in God's providences. 6. Wait upon God in His providence. 7. Pray for the Church. 8. When you receive any mercy for the Church in answer to prayer give God the glory of it. 9. Imitate God in His affection to the Church. 10. Look after sincerity before God. (*Ibid.*) *The look of God* :—I. God looks upon all things DISTINCTLY. He looks upon every parcel and opens the whole pack of human affairs. II. He beholds every thing and person PERFECTLY, fully, quite through. III. IN SEEING HE GOVERNS EVERYTHING EFFECTUALLY, and works it to His own ends. IV. HE SEETH ALL THINGS TOGETHER. (*J. Caryl.*) *God's loving providence over His people* :—There is something sadly natural in the conduct of Asa as described in the context. It is so hard for us to feel that our interests are secure unless we are manipulating them ourselves. A soldier in the battle seizes yonder knoll, driving off with his superior valour the enemies who were holding it. It is nobly done, and it will be well if the plan of his general includes the capture of that knoll. But if not, when the tide of battle rolls off in another direction, the valiant soldier will be left unsupported in the midst of the returning enemies. How many men have been utterly undone by the accomplishment of their own plans, through their own vast industry and heroic enterprise, simply because they had not made their plans subordinate to the purposes of God, the supreme commandant of every life. Keep your eye upon the pillar of fire and cloud which moves over the desert! I. HOW EAGERLY, THEN, GOD CONSULTS THE WELFARE OF HIS PEOPLE. II. HOW MINUTELY CAREFUL OF US IS GOD. III. HOW COMPLETE IS GOD'S SUPERVISION OF OUR WELFARE. (*J. M. Ludlow, D.D.*) *Divine Providence* :—The term "Providence," as now commonly applied to God, does not occur in Holy Scripture. It occurs only in two passages in the *Apocrypha*, viz., Wisd. xiv. 3 and xvii. 3. It is, nevertheless, a term convenient and proper for the statement of a Scriptural doctrine. By those of the ancient philosophers who admitted the existence of a God, or of a plurality of gods, terms of correspondent grammatical import were employed, to express that Divine superintendence by which all things in the material creation were fitted and directed to their proper ends, and by which the universe was kept from falling back into that state of chaos which was supposed to have preceded the present orderly and beauteous frame of things. After their example, we have learned to employ the term "Providence," for the purpose of describing "the conduct and direction of the several parts of the universe by a superintending and intelligent Being." My purpose is to invite your attention to such views of the providence of God as more immediately affect the higher interests of man. I. First, then, we inquire into the GENERAL PROOFS EVINCING A DIVINE PROVIDENCE. 1. The first of these proofs is drawn from the moral fitness and necessity of such a Providence. The Psalmist teaches us he is a "fool" who says "There is no God"; and surely he is not less so who, professing to believe in the existence of such a God as the Jehovah of the Scriptures, can say, "There is no Providence." Some writers on

this subject have gone so far as to assert that, in the abstract, the idea of a God without a providence involves a contradiction. But the truth of that position may be reasonably questioned. If we suppose a God, invested with no higher attributes than those which were applied to the false deities of ancient heathenism, where is the folly of farther supposing Him to dwell in a remote and selfish seclusion from terrestrial things? In this respect, the followers of Epicurus gave good proof of their consistency at least when, believing only in such gods as those referred to, they not only denied them to be the governors, but also the creators, of the world; it being, as they rightly judged, but reasonable to conclude that such gods had neither the wisdom nor the power to create, or govern, such a world as this. And they were equally consistent when, having no distinct notion of any intelligent Being to whom the lofty attributes of eternal existence and universal power might be considered as pertaining, they attributed eternity to matter, and give the empire of the world to chance. Were there in reality no higher object of worship than the dæmon-gods of Greece and Rome, and were there, consequently, no Providence but such as these gods might be supposed to be capable of exercising, it were surely consistent with good reason and benevolence at least to wish the sceptre of the world's dominion might be wrested from their grasp, and that, rather than be subject to such rule, the course of nature and of all events might be committed to the sportive dance of atoms and the blind rush of accidental causes. But if, as taught in Scripture, we acknowledge, as the first cause of all created things, a Being absolutely perfect, and therefore infinite in wisdom, in goodness, and in power, we must at the same time admit a Divine Providence as still sustaining and governing the universe which He has made; and especially we must admit there is a Providence, to administer and overrule the affairs and interests of men. Much as it has laboured on that point, "the wisdom of this world" presents us with no principles which can at all suffice to show how anything created can even continue to exist unless by a perpetual exertion of wisdom and power on the part of Him who first called it into being; or how, upon the supposition that the Divine guidance and support should be withdrawn, the world could do otherwise than immediately sink back into the nothingness from which it originally sprung. Even supposing the material creation, in "the dew" of its "morning," and in "the beauty" of its primæval excellence, to have received the impression of such properties and laws as would have been sufficient, but for the positive intervention of some disturbing cause, to perpetuate its existence and its order, yet we cannot contemplate the character and aspect of the world, as it exists at present, and especially we cannot contemplate its moral character and aspect, without perceiving the necessity of a Divine Providence, to counteract the evils which have gained access to it. That the universal Creator should leave, without a providence, a world like this, in which evil of all kinds has won so large and terrible a sway, and in which there are so many fearful tendencies to universal mischief and confusion, would neither be consistent with wisdom, nor goodness, nor justice, on any other supposition than that of man's having been judiciously abandoned, without hope of redemption, to reap the natural fruit of his own evil and rebellious doings. 2. The second proof of a Divine Providence is found in the positive and repeated testimony of Holy Writ. 3. A third proof evincing a Divine Providence is found in certain miraculous attestations which have occasionally marked its interposition. We are enabled to point out numerous occasions on which God has come forth from the "hiding-place" in which He usually dwells and carries on His operations and has "shown Himself," as it is stated in my text, by tokens which could not but be seen, and which could not be mistaken. There is the flood coming on "the world of the ungodly," whilst Noah and his family, being "warned of God," are directed to the means of their exemption from the general destruction. We point to "the cities of the plain, turned into ashes by fire and brimstone, which the Lord rained upon them out of heaven," whilst righteous Lot is escorted by angelic attendants to a place of safety. We will exhibit to him the long roll of those "mighty acts and wonders" which are displayed in the history of the Israelitish people. We contemplate the strange deliverance of Daniel and his three countrymen from the power of savage beasts and from the rage of the devouring flame. We will show him how Nature herself—the imaginary deity whom infidels pretend to worship—has in many instances forgotten her own laws, and been arrested, or even turned backwards, in her course; and we will challenge him to show us how these stupendous anomalies are to be accounted for, unless upon the supposition that in these instances there was the interposition of a Power superior to anything that has

ever been understood by the term Nature—an interposition which must necessarily lead us to admit the providence for which we are contending. II. THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THAT DIVINE PROVIDENCE WHICH IS DEMONSTRATED TO EXIST. 1. This Providence is universal, “for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” By a universal Providence we mean a Providence which is at the same time general and particular. Indeed a Providence which is Divine must necessarily bear both these characteristics. No argument can be adduced in favour of the one which is not equally applicable in favour of the other; and we cannot exclude either of them from our notion of that Providence by which the world is governed without admitting into our notion of the Deity by whom that providence is exercised an imperfection of which He is incapable. For, in excluding either a general or a particular Providence, we necessarily suppose some portion of our world, of greater or less extent, from which the Divine presence and care are totally excluded. It is true that we are utterly confounded in every attempt we make to estimate the wisdom and power and condescension which are required to be in constant exercise, in order to the maintenance of an inspection so vast in its extent, and yet so minute in its details. But from this feeling of astonishment no objection would arise against the doctrine either of a general or a particular Providence, were it not for those monstrously absurd comparisons which we are wont to institute between the Almighty and ourselves, together with our strange forgetfulness of the important truth that God is everywhere present at one and the same time; and that to One whose knowledge and power are subject to no bound or imperfection, it must be quite as easy to attend to many things, however numerous or complicated they may be, as to attend to only one. 2. A second characteristic of the providence of God is its beneficence. In all its operations it regards, as its final object, the welfare of mankind in general; and as far as may be found consistent with that object, the welfare of individuals in particular. This general purpose of beneficence is to a great degree apparent in the general provision which is made for human sustenance and comfort. It is impossible to view the astonishing arrangements which everywhere display themselves, for the supply of “food convenient for us,” and for the general preservation of our race, without being prompted to exclaim, “Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; Thy paths drop fatness.” And the moral ends contemplated by a Providence which is thus mindful of our bodily necessities, and of our humblest natural infirmities, must be, in even more than an equal degree, characterised by a pure and infinite beneficence. There may at first, indeed, appear to be something almost incompatible with such a doctrine, in the affliction and misery which desolate the earth. But the difficulty arising on that ground is easily resolved by such considerations as the following: (1) In the first place, much of the natural evil which exists is rendered, in some sort, necessary by the depravity of man. It constitutes, in fact, a part of that salutary chastening by which, not unmindful even of the prodigal who has wandered from His household, and “wasted his substance in riotous living,” our heavenly Father seeks to recover “the children of disobedience to the wisdom of the just”; or if they are already recovered, opens to their faith the means of apprehending “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” In vain, perhaps, have been the attempts of His Providence, by the dispensations of its bounty, to win the thoughtless wanderer to reflection and repentance; “but in the day of his affliction,” says Jehovah, “he will seek Me early.” In mercy, therefore, to the sinner, rather than in anger, and not with anything like a vindictive purpose, He lays His chastening hand upon him. (2) Even in those cases where individuals, or collective communities of men, derive themselves no moral benefits from the evils which they suffer, yet very frequently there results a moral benefit to others; and thus, under all the circumstances of such cases, the infliction of those evils is vindicated, as being consistent with the goodness and mercy of God, not less than with His justice. We cannot but adore, amidst the justice and judgment displayed in their destruction, the goodness which was careful so to order the circumstances of their fate as to render it in the most eminent degree available to the instruction and benefit of all succeeding generations. 3. A third characteristic of Divine Providence is its mysteriousness. I do not say that there is any mystery as to the general object which that Providence regards. We have already “seen the end of the Lord, that He is pitiful and of great mercy.” But of the course which He pursues to the attainment of that end, it may frequently be said, that “His path is in the whirlwind, and His way in the great deep, and His footsteps are not known.” And surely a Providence which is Divine must necessarily, in the

detail of many of its plans and operations, appear to be mysterious to creatures so short-sighted as we are. It is certainly right, because perfectly consistent with just notions of the God whom we adore, that we should acknowledge the existence of mysteries in providence; but why should we profess to wonder at such mysteries, while there remain so many mysteries in Nature? I have said that the general principles of the Divine administration of the world are clearly made known. But I remember the saying of a great man, now no more, that "things pertaining to God may be mysterious, in proportion as they are revealed"; and I cannot but feel the application of that paradoxical yet just position to the point which is before us. Were God a finite being, like ourselves, the revelation of the principles on which He acts, however vast and comprehensive in their range and application those principles might be, would not, perhaps, be such as we should be unable adequately to conceive. But principles which know no limit, in themselves or in their application, save that which is imposed by the will, or by the necessity, of a Divine and incomprehensible nature, must necessarily, in whatever degree they are revealed to us, remain mysterious because of their infinity; and the more nearly we are enabled to contemplate those principles, the more overpowering—I had almost said, the more bewildering—will be the effect of their united splendour, both on our mental and spiritual vision. And then, besides the physical reason to which I have referred, why the providence of God should in many of its dispensations be mysterious, there is a moral reason—a reason arising out of the beneficence by which the operations of that providence are shaped to their intended issue. For were those operations free from mystery, then would our faith want those trials which constitute its most important and profitable exercise; and in wanting those trials, it would want, at the same time, the arena on which it wins its brightest victories, and becomes entitled to its richest and most glorious reward. Think, for example, of the difference which it might have made to Abraham if in his path to the attainment and confirmation of the promise in regard to his son Isaac, there had been no adverse hope against which he might continue to "believe in hope," and no apparent impossibilities in the midst of which he might still be "strong in faith, giving glory to God." 4. There remains to be noticed yet one other characteristic of the providence of God, and that is, its entire subservience to the purposes of His redeeming grace. Indeed, it is altogether of that grace that there exists at all a Providence of such a character; in other words, had there been no redeeming grace, then no such Providence could have existed. No; it is then only accounted for on principles justly claiming to be considered "rational," when it is set forth as the result of "the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ." On the part of persons who maintain a contrary opinion, we sometimes hear the question, "How can the death of Christ, as an atoning sacrifice, be made to seem consistent either with perfect justice or with perfect goodness?" But we may retort that question with another, which they will find it much more difficult to answer. Suppose our fallen world to have been left without redemption, and that no means had been devised, in the counsels of the Divine grace and wisdom, for the recovery of its guilty population to "the favour and the peace of God," where then would have been the consistency—nay, where the possibility, of a Providence so condescending and beneficent as that which now appears? Or where would have been the actual benefit to man of a Providence to correct and modify the course of outward things, if he had still been doomed, for want of a Redeemer, to bear for ever the burden of a guilt for which there was no expiation? But let us take that doctrine along with us, and we then discover an apt and harmonious reason for such a Providence, by which its utmost beneficence is justified. And, as that characteristic of the providence of God which renders it especially dear and valuable to us originates in, or operates at least as the result of, the "grace" which "came by Jesus Christ," so, as already stated, it is ever in subservience to the purposes of the same grace that its operations are conducted. It is thus in those extensive operations which involve the character and fate of nations and empires. It were vain for us to indulge in speculation as to the objects which Jehovah might contemplate, on the supposition of man's having continued in his original uprightness. We have the fact of his departure from that character into a state of guilty estrangement and hostility. And taking the world in its present circumstances, and seeing that "God so loved that world," fallen as it is, as to "give His only begotten Son" for its redemption, we may be assured that there can be no object dearer to the heart of God than that His Son should "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied," in the reception of "the heathen for His



inheritance," and of "the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession." As the providence of God thus stands, and ever must stand, connected with the purposes of His redeeming grace, so it is in those cases where the grace of God specially prevails, that this Providence specially exerts its powerful and benignant operation; or, as stated in the text, it is "on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" that the Lord "shews Himself strong," and for their sakes more especially His "eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth." In other words, He is eminently the God of providence to those who bow before Him, and rejoice in Him, as the God of comforting and sanctifying grace. Doubtless, this was one of the great truths designed to be set forth by those numerous providential interpositions which shed so illustrious a light upon the early history of the Israelitish people. On this express condition, that they should "have no other gods before Him," and that they should "keep His statutes and His judgments diligently, to do them," Jehovah engaged on His part to "shew himself strong" on their behalf, in such a manner as should render them the astonishment and envy of surrounding nations. And, on the other hand, the judgment so frequently inflicted on that people during their journeys through the wilderness, and in the subsequent periods of their history, and more especially their present wonderful dispersion throughout other nations, go to remind us, with equal emphasis and certainty, that it is only in proportion as our heart is "perfect toward Him" that God can be expected to "shew Himself strong" on our behalf. We thus perceive that the great lesson intended to be taught by all the mighty acts and wonders which God did for Israel is, that the same God will ever in a peculiar manner, care for those who, being Christ's, are therefore "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise," whilst those who are yet "aliens," or outcasts from His spiritual Israel, though not excluded entirely from His providential care, shall still enjoy that care in an inferior degree. It is on this ground that we discover the foundation of those promises which ensure to all God's people, in their individual as well as their collective character, an adequate supply of all their bodily and temporal necessities. For if, as intimated in the history of the Jewish people, the providence of God is the handmaid of His grace, and, as such, is commissioned with the special care of those "whose heart is perfect toward Him," then, unless we would again charge an all-perfect Being with infirmity, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion, that all those things which Nature absolutely needs, and the providing of which often brings so severe a burden on the mind, "shall (certainly) be added." Again, the principle that the operations of God's providence are subservient to the purposes of His grace sheds no inconsiderable light upon the mystery which is supposed to be presented when, whilst the ungodly "increase in riches," and "have more than heart could wish," the man whose heart, if not absolutely perfect toward God, is yet, in general, upright and sincere before Him, is "plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning." It is not that He who claims as His own, "the gold and the silver, and the cattle on a thousand hills," would merely "for His own pleasure" deny to His people the advantages of health and riches. But He regards their eternal salvation as being an object infinitely more important than their worldly comfort, and to this one great object all others must be subordinate and secondary. 1. In the first place, the doctrine of a Divine Providence, that Providence being beneficent as well as universal, condemns that excessive anxiety with which we are so prone to burden and distress ourselves. 2. Secondly, this doctrine inculcates the duty, and when heartily embraced, it will inspire the feeling, of a grateful acquiescence in our lot, however far removed that lot may be from the circumstances which we should have chosen for ourselves. 3. More especially, this subject, as connecting the operations of God's providence with the purposes of His grace, calls upon us to look well to it, that our own "hearts are perfect towards Him"; and that, in order to their being so, they are the subjects of that grace which can alone destroy their deceitfulness and enmity, and render them a holy and acceptable sacrifice. (*J. Crouther.*) *God the guardian of the world*.—I. THAT GOD'S GUARDIANSHIP OF THE WORLD IS UNIVERSALLY INSPECTIVE. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." God sees the whole of a thing. Of those objects with which we are most acquainted, we know but a little of their outside; the essence of everything is hid beneath an impenetrable veil from us. Few, indeed, are the things we are permitted to see even the outside of. Space limits us. Our widest horizon is not a handbreadth to the heavens as compared with the universe. Duration limits us. Wonderful things were transpiring, even on this planet, ages ere we woke into conscious thought. But neither space nor

duration limits the knowledge of God; He is in all places; He exists through all times. Whatever is, has been, will be, or can be, are in His eye. All actualities and possibilities are there. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." If the eye of a child has sometimes been known to paralyse the arm and frustrate the intentions of him who has been bent on some criminal deed, how would not the lightning glance of God check thee from all evil?

II. THAT GOD'S GUARDIANSHIP OF THE WORLD IS PERSONALLY EXERCISED. He does not watch and superintend the world through the instrumentality of others; His eyes, His own eyes, are employed. He does not, like human potentates, get a knowledge of His empire by hearsay and report, but by His own personal inspection. It is a glorious truth that God Himself is in our world. He is not merely here by representation. He does not look after the universe as parents after their children, merchants after their business, monarchs after their dominions—by proxy. He employs others, it is true, but He is with them and in them—the force of all causes, the motive of all motives. Nor is He here merely by influence, just as the author is in the book, or as the telegraphic officer is at the time wherever he transmits his message. Those heavenly bodies, which fill thoughtful minds, as they "gaze upon them shining," with unutterable emotions, and seem to engulf the spirit into their own immeasurable vastness, we are told, radiate and revolve by law. Man is born, sustained, enjoys, suffers, lives, and dies, by "laws." Blessed thought! the great Father of the world is here, not merely by representation, or influence, but in person. The world has not only His agents and His works, but His eyes—His all-seeing Self is here.

III. THAT GOD'S GUARDIANSHIP OF THE WORLD IS MORALLY DESIGNED. Why does He thus so sedulously and constantly guard the world? "To shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." God guards the universe for the interests of the good. It is not material Nature in any of its wondrous combinations of beauty and sublimity, not blooming landscapes, mighty oceans, starry spheres, revolving worlds, or refulgent systems, that interest Him most. No; it is His adopted ones, His loving children, though little and afflicted, that engage His sympathies. He says, in effect, "I keep up the machinery of the universe only for the good of My children. I have no affection for it, 'but for the saints that are in the earth, in whom is all My delight': wherever they are, 'Mine eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually.'" This subject teaches—1. The true spirit of life. If God is the all-seeing Guardian of the world, whose eyes pierce into every avenue of existence, what should be the spirit of life? Not the spirit of empty frivolity and childish trifling, treating all things as if made for foolish jests and giddy laughter, but the spirit of solemnity clothing all objects with a Divine significance. 2. The true interests of life. What are they? Secular possessions? mental attainments? social honours? No, but a perfect heart. 3. The true Judge of life. Our life has many judges, at many tribunals are we tried, and many, and often diverse, are the verdicts returned. Some are too favourable, and some too adverse. The few instances of accuracy are random guesses, not righteous deductions. But there is one true Judge; it is He whose "eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth." (*Homilist.*)

*The guardianship of God:—*I. THE WORLD HAD A GUARDIAN. II. THAT THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE WORLD IS OF THE MOST MINUTE CHARACTER. III. THAT THIS GUARDIANSHIP OF GOD IS OF THE MOST LOVING AND ORACIOUS CHARACTER. (*W. G. Barrett.*)

*God's thoughts toward good men:—*I. WHY DOES GOD EXERCISE ALL HIS POWER OF OBSERVATION AND CONTROL IN THIS WORLD IN BEHALF OF GOOD MEN? The answer is that they of all creatures best illustrate His character and glorify Him most. They alone—1. Were originally created in the Divine likeness. 2. Have been born again into His spiritual image. 3. Glorify Him in the highest degree by holy lives. II. HOW HAVE GOD'S POWERS OF OBSERVATION AND CONTROL BEEN EXERCISED IN THEIR BEHALF? 1. The process of the earth's development during the vast geologic periods of the first five creative days all meant that man was coming, and that God's eyes were running forward to prepare him a home. 2. In connection with the creation of living creatures, by the aid of comparative anatomy we can see God's eyes running forward through all the orders of animate life up to man. 3. Having given him a body fearfully and wonderfully made, He has made abundant provision for the supply of all his wants. (1) Physical. (2) Intellectual. (3) Social. (4) Religious. Sanctified afflictions; Bible; Christ. (*J. C. Jackson.*)

*No mist before the eyes of God:—*We see a Divine purpose in the discovery of America, in the art of printing, in the exposure of the Gunpowder Plot, in the contrivance of the needle gun, in the ruin of an Austrian or Napoleonic despotism; but how hard

it is to see God in the minute personal affairs of our lives. We think of God as making a record of the starry host, but cannot realise the Bible truth that He knows how many hairs are on our head. It seems a grand thing that God provided food for thousands of Israelites in the desert, but not how He feeds hungry sparrows. We cannot understand how He encamps in the crystal palace of a dew-drop, or finds room to stand, without being crowded, between the alabaster pillars of a pond-lily. Cromwell, Alexander, Washington, or an archangel, is not more under Divine inspection than your life or mine. Pompey thought that there must be a mist over the eyes of God because he favoured Cæsar. But there is no such mist. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

**To shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.**—*God waiting to show Himself strong*:—I. GOD HAS SHOWN HIMSELF STRONG ON BEHALF OF MEN. It is often the knowledge of God's ability to help that causes us the greatest difficulty, and paralyses our faith in Him. We do not feel able to say quite as confidently as we might that all His promises are yea and amen, or else we limit their reference, and say that they have only to do with certain orders of things. Now we have this fact before us: God is able, He must be, to control all things. His knowledge is infinite; His wisdom, His strength eternal. As it is, while we acknowledge His ability we limit its exercise, and find in this a reason for our independent action. We see, in opposition to the limit which we are often ready to place on God's interference on our behalf, the wonderful variety and modes of the help given to men as recorded in the Scripture. There is not a condition but God has appeared in that, strong to help. What wisdom and power are here shown on behalf of men! Lost by sin, we are restored by faith in Christ. II. GOD LOOKS OUT FOR OPPORTUNITIES OF SHOWING HIMSELF STRONG. His eyes run to and fro throughout the earth. He is thus represented as watching men for the purpose of revealing Himself, so that when He sees the opportunity He is there ready to do it. He is not reluctant to give. III. WHY, THEN, DO WE NOT ALWAYS RECEIVE? How is it we make mistakes, complain of want of life and light and progress? Here is the reply. The opportunity for which He waits is a heart perfect toward Him. This is the fitness which is always needed ere He shows Himself strong. "How wilt Thou manifest Thyself to us?" &c. "My Father will love him, and We will take up our abode with him." We are not so dependent on the condition of our life as we think. Let the heart be right, and everything else will be transformed. But what fitness is here required? Asa did not trust God, but his own wisdom and gold and silver. Apply the general truth of God as for all, without considering that God, though the absolute monarch of all, does not act arbitrarily towards any. Thus here God does not manifest His strength to men always. Far from it. Asa found that God's strength did not help him; he had wars all the remainder of his life. We are often left in our weakness, otherwise there would be no such thing as failure in the details of life. We ask why does not God make bare His arm when He sees the weak struggling against greater forces. Be it nation, be it tribe, or people, or individual, He knows the need, He measures it, and at a time and under conditions most calculated to ensure the eternal and lasting good of His creatures, He comes forth to help and to save. That this is His way of dealing with men may be seen in the greatest and highest gift He has given. We gather, in conclusion—(1) God knows and estimates our life and needs from the state of heart, our actual condition. His standard differs greatly from ours. He withholds blessings that we may get a more firm hold of them as we learn this. You have not enjoyment of Christ. You have not forgiveness. You have not strength to overcome sin. You have not a perfect heart toward God. (2) This gives you the real object of life. (*H. W. Butcher.*) *The heartening certainty*:—Asa is in trouble. Baasha has captured and fortified Ramah and so hemmed in Jerusalem. Is not that a frequent type of life? Is not every man often thrust into straits as Asa was? Is there not for every man some threatening Ramah over against his Jerusalem. 1. Here is a man whose work in life seems sometimes vaster than his energies. How can life's work get done—the support of a family, the meeting of obligations, &c.? 2. Here is a man confronted with some special obstacle, e.g., unholy competition in business, &c. 3. Here is a man under the shadow of the Ramah of disappointment. 4. Here is another man who is dissatisfied with his pernicious way of life. 5. And there is Doubt, another Ramah often built across our way. Is there any help for a man in the presence of these Ramahs? Our Scripture is the statement of the heartening certainty. "Perfect" in our Scripture means pure intent. Once I was becalmed upon the sea. I was in a sailing ship. For some days the wind died utterly away. There was

not the curl of a minute ripple even on the ocean's surface. We were drifted here and there, now backward and then forward, as the tides rose and as they fell. Of course we could not get on thus. There was no inherent power of motion in the vessel. What did the captain do? Order the sails furled? Let the man at the helm sleep? No, he did the best he could. Every sail was hung broadly on the yards. The helm was firmly held. The vessel was kept pointed toward her port. In a word, the captain kept the vessel in pure intent; not perfect in power; she had no power. And when, at last, the wind did come, the sails were filled, and we were wafted into harbour. This is the heartening certainty. This is the meaning of our Scripture. The man who thus holds himself in pure intent, keeping his sails spread and his helm steadily pointed toward the right, and fixed, and from the wrong, that man God shall see, and He shall send upon him the breezes of a Divine strength, and waft the man on into accomplishment, victory, heaven. (*Wayland Hoyt, D.D.*) *Perfection discriminated*.—We must discriminate between purity of heart and maturity of Christian character. The entire cleansing received by faith is perfect health of soul; but it is not perfect development. Perfect health is the entire absence of disease. Perfect holiness is the entire absence of sin. Christian purity brings finality to nothing but inbred sin. It is the field cleared of the noxious weeds, not the ripe waving harvest. It is the best preparation for growth, not the consummation of growth. Sin in the heart makes us like a child that is sickly, or a tree with a worm at the root. Some hope by cultivating the graces of the Spirit to grow into purity, which is like a man cultivating the vegetables in his garden to grow the weeds out from about the roots of the plants. Common sense says, "Pluck up the weeds, and give the plant a fair chance for growth and development." This is the Divine method. God cleanses the heart from inbred sin, after which growth is always more rapid and symmetrical; advancement in knowledge, and love of God, and all spiritual excellence, becomes possible then as it never was before. Maturity is the result of experiences, trial, conflict, and requires time; but in purity we grasp by faith the sin-consuming power that sweeps the heart clean at a stroke. (*Thomas Cook.*)

**Ver. 10. Then Asa was wroth with the seer.**—*A reluctant conscience*.—It is said that straw which had been used for the bedding of the lions at Wombwell's menagerie was sold, and placed in a stable as bedding for some horses. No sooner did the horses enter than they began to show signs of alarm, snorting, snuffing the air, and trembling as though conscious of a threatening presence. Horses in this country have had no experience of the hostility or strength of carnivora; but there is a persistency in hereditary powers which certain objects can stimulate into activity. The conscience of man exhibits a similar persistency of sense, if not by self-reproach or remorse, at least by a reluctance to enter on the consideration of sin. It is not too much to infer that all is not right, when pain, alarm, aversion are felt when inquiry is suggested. (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*)

**Vers. 11, 12. And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they are written in the books of the kings.**—*Asa; or failure at the last*.—Asa's case is a Scriptural declaration, that one who has begun well, who has even done much for God, may fall miserably, may fail at last. What were the causes of his fall? I. HE WAS TRIED BY GREAT SUCCESS. Nothing is more liable than success to produce self-confidence, and neglect of Him who bestoweth on the wise their wisdom and on the strong their strength. Unless a man watches himself very narrowly, pride will insinuate itself even into the midst of his thanksgivings; complacent thoughts of his own foresight underlie his recognition of God's providence; confessions of his own good desert qualify his confessions of sin. II. HE WAS PLACED IN THE PERILOUS POSITION OF HAVING TO GUIDE AND INSTRUCT OTHERS. This is a great snare to any one. The mother who teaches her child to pray; the father who watches over his son's moral progress; the master who is a strict censor of the behaviour of his servants; the Scripture-reader, the district visitor, the nurse of the sick, the almoner of the poor; yea, even the minister of God who has professionally to bring before his people the means of grace and hope of glory; these persons are all in danger of neglecting themselves—of placing themselves, as it were, *ab extra*, to the duties which they have to inculcate. They are tempted to forget themselves, to abate their self-discipline, and when the novelty of their employment has passed away, to fall back on other things; it may be, to end with languor, disgust, or carelessness, if not with utter faithlessness and sin. (*D. Hessey.*)

Vers. 12, 13. And Asa, in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet.—*Mind-cure*:—That sickness is twin born with sin is the oldest tradition in the world. Our maladies arise from something finer than the germs any microscope can detect; and if all disease has its origin in the ill-disposed spirit, in a different well-disposed spirit it may have its cure. There can be no doubt that a mind morbid or in health affects the body. Some persons, by their presence and air, make us sick or well. Temperance is a virtue before it is a bodily trait. All vice digs a mine of ruin which no physician can countermine. What doctor can prescribe for an inordinate affection, from his pocket-book or medicine-chest? A little mind-cure were better than a complete apothecary's shop; and in one's own mind, often more than in another's, the remedy lies. Safety and peril reside in the same region of the affections, even as the very sea that tosses brings us to port. Like cures like; the hair of the dog his own bite; and herbs, as George Herbert says, the flesh they find their acquaintance in. There is no malady which guilty intrigues, extravagant passions, and corroding cares may not produce or increase; and none which good affections will not alleviate or remove. Many a heap of flowers have I seen on coffins that would not have been made by plane and hammer so soon had a tith of the green leaves, lilies, and roses been strewn along the way. Christ's miracles were wrought on a promise of faith, for the blind eye, for the withered hand, and for the remorseful conscience in him whom He assured, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," an insane compunction being in this case the evil root. Peter commanded the cripple to stand on his feet, perceiving that he had faith to be healed. The good Samaritan poured out something more than oil and wine into the robbed traveller's wounds. There are in us gashes and ghastly wounds, perhaps unknown to the inflictors, which no sword or dagger ever made. A word or a look was enough to stab us; shall no words or looks suffice to make us whole? No medicaments, only mental cure, can either probe them or bind them up. Right ordering of our active powers is a medicine, as well as that merry heart of which the Preacher speaks. The steadfast will is a life-preserver, and buoys up against spiritual drowning. Heal the mind tired and sore with brooding on absent or unresponsive objects: with labour that eases it, while it wearies the muscles and makes the sweat, according to the old decree, run down the face. As the girders and cross-ties of the bridge distribute the pressure on it of heavy loads, so various duty lightens by dividing every burden of grief or pain. Such considerations may show how far a sane body is not only inhabited, but made, by a sane mind. Let us notice more particularly the connection between sickness and sin. I. THEY HAVE THE SAME ORIGIN. II. THEY HAVE THE SAME PROPAGATION AND SPREAD. III. WHY, THEN, SHOULD NOT THE CURE OF SICKNESS RUN PARALLEL WITH ITS CONTINUANCE AND CAUSE? Disorder is inherited. Ezekiel protests against the proverb that the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. Nevertheless, it is true. For example of this communication or transmission, take the illustration of fear. What a leaven it is! Terror is not only a wretchedness, but a disgrace, an exposure to harm. You will be likely to have what you dread. What you rehearse you will enact. This is the shorthand history of disease, misery, and crime. Bonaparte, in his better days, thought the bullet was not run and moulded he should be hit by, though cannon-balls ploughed the earth into powder at his side; felt no alarm for himself from the plague in Egypt, and fortified his soldiers against it, with that brave deportment of his own. To what but panic is due the large destruction of life in buildings falling or on fire, in battles like that of Bull Run, and in wrecks at sea? We must be of good heart to be secure. How many have been sick of a thought or of a certain company or of a single companion! How many have got well with thoughts alone that could cure! By one who served in our civil war I was told of sick soldiers who, in their despair, voluntarily turned their faces to the wall and died, because they wanted, and had made up their mind, to die. If as they lay moaning on their beds had come some token of affection, the step of some Florence Nightingale, or any good message, they would have opened their eyes, stretched their limbs, and lived! A grain, a hair, the twentieth part of a scruple, in delicate conditions and a tremulous suspense determines the scale; and the balance hangs for us all to put the atom into, so intimate is the relation between body and mind. We decide each other's fate every day. Balzac tells us of a mother who suddenly expires after one more of her unnatural daughter's hard words; and he adds that the slaughter by savages of those too old to continue on the march is philanthropy in the comparison. This is happening every day. A

gentle remembrance from one—a note, a flower, a book, a hand-grasp—to assure us our days of usefulness are not over, enables us to live and labour still. The supernatural acts through the natural. Let us make the connection and be all of us well. Be its fault or defect what it may, I greet, therefore, the new departure which lays the stress on the mind. (*C. A. Bartol, D.D.*) *The sin of Asa*:—

1. Though it is not my purpose to dwell upon the general features in this history, I cannot help remarking how strongly one is inclined in hearing it to exclaim, "Lord, what is man! In his best estate, moral as well as physical, he is altogether vanity." Here is a person that appears to have been piously educated, that in his youth was piously and deeply impressed; that when clothed in royal purple still remembered his responsibility to a higher power, and felt and acknowledged his dependence on it; that in his mature years departed not from the way in which he had been trained up; and that knew by a single personal experience that it is a way of pleasantness and a path of peace; in his old age guilty of the greatest inconsistencies, to say the very least. May we not reasonably suppose that, during his long prosperity, his heart had become in a measure hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; that indolence had corrupted, and pride, taking occasion from the happy condition of his people, of which he had been the instrument, had puffed him up; and that prayer, in consequence, had been restrained before God? Be sober, be vigilant, be prayerful, be humble, is the moral of this melancholy tale.

2. This monarch's history may also teach us that, what we deem our strongest point of character may in fact prove our weakest. Asa's distrust in Divine, and over-trust in human power, was the last sin, most probably, which he thought would ever beset him. "Though all men forsake Thee," said St. Peter, "yet will not I." His courage he was sure would abide, however that of the other disciples might falter. That he felt was not his weak point; and probably it was not naturally. When we are conscious of weakness, and in consequence lean constantly on an Almighty arm, then our strength never faileth. How can it? In the confidence of this it was that the apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me." On the other hand, let a man feel strong in himself, and of consequence lean on himself, in the things of religion, we are told we can do nothing. The lesson, then, to be learned from the history of Asa, in this view of it, plainly is, to glory in nothing as of ourselves, to distrust ourselves even in our strongest point, and to count all our sufficiency as of God through Christ.

3. A third particular in this narrative, well worth noticing, is the pertinacity which Asa exhibited in his sin, and how in consequence one transgression led on to another. David committed some most fearful sins, and a prophet was sent to reprove and warn him. His confession was, "I have sinned against the Lord." Not so Asa. His crime, though indeed not so horrible, was equally certain; yet when the prophet reproves him, the historian tells us "he was in a rage with him because of this thing"; and added to the sin, and to a denial of it, persecution of God's servant for delivering God's message. The sin of Asa, though certain and heinous, as I have said, was not so palpable and overt as that of David. It lay more exclusively between God and his own soul. It was an offence which shortsighted men, who cannot read the heart, could not with propriety charge him with. The sins which are known with certainty only to Omniscience are the last which corrupt human nature is willing to acknowledge. It hides itself from its own guilt and from its obligation to confess and forsake its sin, under the cover of its fellow-creatures' ignorance. From this hiding place, to which Asa had manifestly fled, man could not dislodge him. God's resources, however, were not exhausted. When His prophet failed to do it, He sent another messenger to the king in the shape of a most painful disease which finally proved mortal.

1. Health, it is generally acknowledged, is the very greatest of all personal and temporal blessings. By its influence on the inner man it gives new glory to objects already bright, and pours light on that which would otherwise be dark. It converts to luxuries the plainest food, and adds a sweetness to a cup of cold water which nectar in the hand of an invalid partakes not of. Health is valuable not only as an exemption from pain and anxiety, but as a positive good. It causes positive happiness to spring up—to well up from the depths of the soul, the operation of which the man may be unable to explain, but to the mysterious sweetness of which he is ready to testify with a rejoicing, and would that we could say always, a grateful heart. I do not mean to say, however, that the blessing when in possession is always adequately realised and appreciated. Like other things, the loss of it, at least for a time, is in many cases necessary to open our eyes to its value. The fact that the

natural issue of sickness is death is, of itself, enough to give health an inestimable value; and that fact is felt by him who has felt the gnawings of disease; and who that has reached even middle life has not experienced them? 2. But though it is thus inevitable, disease may be mitigated and its fatal consequences postponed. This is effected by one of the greatest mercies which Providence has vouchsafed to man: I mean the healing art. It is not common, perhaps, to regard it in this light, but most certainly it ought to be so regarded. This art is one of great dignity and beneficence. It is found in every country, and among the most savage and most cultivated nations of the earth; and though it seems to have advanced more slowly than many other—perhaps most other—arts and sciences, yet so early was its commencement, and so universal has been its cultivation, it has now attained great perfection. In most departments, where once human aid was unattempted or unavailing to the patient, it is astonishing what can be done for his relief, and for his restoration to society and the full enjoyment of it. This blessed art, moreover, is but an imitation of a merciful provision of nature; even as when pursued and practised on its proper principles, it consists in a co-operating with, and taking advantage of, the powers of nature. With the recuperative and healing properties of nature a true practitioner of the healing art is a co-worker. It is his high calling, in a scientific manner to aid and minister to and increase this beneficent provision. He is not occupied in helping to gratify an idle vanity, nor in pandering to luxury and over-indulgence. His business is, in the way described, to relieve distress, to dry the tear of sorrow, to rekindle the lamp of hope. It has been acutely observed that there is a likeness in the practice of this art, not only to the healing power of nature referred to, and to the course of that Providence by which both nature and art have been ordained, and to the all-merciful conduct of God manifest in the flesh while He sojourned on the earth, but also in the methods which Providence uses ordinarily for the attainment of these benevolent ends. "Both are designed to restore what is lost, and to repair what is disordered; both have the production of ease and happiness for their ultimate object; both frequently make use of pains and privations as the means of procuring it, but neither of them employs an atom more of these than is necessary for that purpose." 3. Now from all this it follows that though nothing is expressly said in commendation of this art in the Holy Scriptures, nor any command given to resort to it for relief under our bodily ailments, yet the art and the use of it are manifestly according to the mind and will of God. The mere fact that God has put healing virtue into the productions of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and given man the power to discover its existence, is sufficient warrant, in the silence of Scripture, for the thankful use of it wherever it may be necessary. It has been thought by some that the sin here condemned was resorting not to regular physicians, but to those who attempted cures by charms and other superstitious devices. Such conduct, though not generally thought so by those who indulge in it, is essentially atheistic. He was seeking good from a source not sanctioned by Heaven. He was in pursuit of health in a quarter which God did not bless. In a word, he was not seeking it of Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift. This was atheism. It is not necessary, however, to suppose that Asa ran into this sin. He was guilty enough, and furnished sufficient ground for the censure in the text, without going to this extreme. Let us suppose, what the Scripture narrative makes probable, that through the influence of prosperity and its attendant snares and temptations, the heart of Asa had waxed cold; that his religious feelings had declined; that whereas before, God was in his thoughts as his dependence, his protection, his comfort, his consolation, his joyful portion, now he lives in forgetfulness of Him, or, if thoughts of God ever enter his mind, they come but seldom and are speedily dismissed. While living habitually in this way, sickness smites him, violent and severe, and very naturally alarming. He sends for the physicians—for many of them. His dependence is on the powers of nature to the exclusion of the Divine Author of these powers. He looks anxiously to human skill, but feels no want, or offers no prayer for the Divine blessing on it. Asa seems to have sought a cure, as he would have done had he never heard of that almighty Being in whose hand are the issues of life and death. We see here that the Lord is a jealous God, and will not give His glory to another, and that His glory and His right as God is to be recognised by His intelligent creatures everywhere, in all the exigencies, duties, and privileges of life. In instituting the present system of means and ends, He did not intend that it should be forgotten that He planned the whole; and that the whole, destitute of any self-sustaining

power, is sustained only by Him. He not only created all things, but also upholds all things by the word of His power. This is a fact, and a fact manifestly connected with His glory. He expects, therefore, that all intelligent creatures feel it and acknowledge it. There are two errors—opposite extremes, which He would have them carefully avoid. The first is a reliance upon Him to the exclusion or neglect of the means which He has commanded to be used. At first view it might seem as if such conduct were putting special honour upon Jehovah; but in truth it is open rebellion against His will. He hath not commanded this at our hands. It is a strange offering—an unclean sacrifice. In His works and in His Word, God has enjoined the diligent use of means; it is impious to turn away from the commandment, even under the pretence of honouring Him. The other extreme, and equally presumptuous, is a reliance on the means to the neglect of the Divine agency and blessing. If the first was an arrogant theism, this is a gross and stupid atheism. Paradoxical as it may sound, our duty and the dictate of pure reason is, that we use means as diligently as if God's aid were altogether unnecessary, and rely on God as sincerely as if means were unavailing. This is Scripture; this is the highest reason; nay, this human nature herself teaches when in extremity and unperverted by a theory. Who, when in conscious danger of his life, does not with a convulsive eagerness grasp at any and every means of safety, and at the same time lift a voice of agonising supplication for the Divine assistance? Our duty, then, plainly inculcated by the text, is to use means and to trust in the Lord, and to do this not of necessity, because death is imminent, but from a principle of obedience to His will, respect for His honour, and love to His name; and to do it also not only in extreme cases, but at all times. It belongs to such a spirit, as a matter of privilege as well as duty, to seek to the Lord also, and rely upon His help. In conclusion, I would observe that the text teaches a lesson in all analogous cases. For instance, if such is the temper of mind in which we should look for medicines to heal the body, the same should we have in the use of food for the maintenance of life. A blessing asked, when we take our meals, is only in conformity with these principles. So our Lord when on the earth regarded it, for He sanctioned it by His practice. And again it plainly says to those whose calling in life is trade, that whilst they industriously employ all honourable means for the maintenance and advancement of themselves and their families, they should bear in mind that there is an overruling Providence which sees through the complications of events as man cannot, and can give them such issue as may be pleasing in His sight. In short, the text teaches us that we should all, at all times and under all circumstances, realise the presence of God and lean upon His power and goodness, vouchsafed us through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*W. Sparrow, D.D.*)

*The disease of sin and its true Physician*.—I. SIN IS A DISEASE UNDER WHICH ALL MEN ARE LABOURING. II. TO GET RID OF THE DISEASE OF SIN MEN RESORT TO FORBIDDEN AND UNAUTHORISED MEANS. III. THEY OUGHT TO DEPEND ON CHRIST AS THE ONLY EFFECTUAL AND INFALLIBLE PHYSICIAN OF SOULS. (*Ibid.*)

*To the medical profession*.—Here is King Asa with the gout. In defiance of God he sends for certain conjurors or quacks. With the result "And Asa slept with his fathers." That is, the doctors killed him. In this sharp and graphic way the Bible sets forth the truth that you have no right to shut God out from the realm of pharmacy and therapeutics. If Asa had said, "Oh, Lord, I am sick; bless the instrumentality employed for my recovery! Now, servant, go and get the best doctor you can find," he would have recovered. The world wants Divinely directed physicians. Men of the medical profession, we often meet in the home of distress. We meet to-day by the altars of God. As in the nursery children sometimes re-enact all the scenes of the sick-room, so to-day you play that you are the patient and that I am the physician, and take my prescription just once.

I. In the first place, I think ALL THE MEDICAL PROFESSION SHOULD BECOME CHRISTIANS BECAUSE OF THE DEBT OF GRATITUDE THEY OWE TO GOD FOR THE HONOUR HE HAS PUT UPON THEIR CALLING. Cicero said: "There is nothing in which men so approach the gods as when they try to give health to other men."

II. The medical profession ought to be Christians, BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY TRIALS AND ANNOYANCES IN THAT PROFESSION THAT NEED POSITIVE CHRISTIAN SOLACE.

III. The medical profession ought to be Christians, BECAUSE THERE ARE PROFESSIONAL EXIGENCIES WHEN THEY NEED GOD. Asa's destruction by unbled physicians was a warning. There are awful crises in every medical practice when a doctor ought to know how to pray. I do not mean to say that piety will make up for medical skill. A bungling doctor, confounded with what was not a very bad case, went



into the next room to pray. A skilled physician was called in. He asked for the first practitioner. "Oh!" they said, "he's in the next room praying." "Well," said the skilled doctor, "tell him to come out here and help, he can pray and work at the same time." It was all in that sentence. Do the best we can and ask God to help us. IV. The medical profession ought to be Christians, BECAUSE THERE OPENS BEFORE THEM A GRAND FIELD FOR CHRISTIAN USEFULNESS. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Sickness*:—The great truth taught us in this verse is—that afflictions, in their measure, nature, and duration, result neither from chance nor necessity, nor second causes, but primarily from the wise, sovereign, and righteous appointment of the Eternal. I. ASA'S DISEASE. The former part of this verse mentions what this disease was—"And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great." Commentators suppose that this disease in his feet was the gout, and that it was a just punishment for putting the prophet's feet in the stocks. How varied the disease to which human nature is liable. 1. The person afflicted—Asa the king. This circumstance teaches us that when the Almighty wills afflictions, none can escape them—no, not even kings. When kings commit evil they must expect to be punished as well as others. King Jehoram sinned against the Lord, and the Lord visited him with a disease in his bowels. King Uzziah transgressed the Lord's commandments, and the Lord smote him with leprosy: "And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house, being a leper." Asa was diseased in his feet. Honours, riches, power shield us not from disease. When God gives the commission, afflictions enter the palace as well as the meanest hut. 2. The violence of Asa's disorder. "His disease was exceeding great." Sometimes we think our trials very heavy; but when compared with those of others we find them light. Hence, if your case is very painful, it is not singular. 3. The period of its continuance. Asa was diseased in his feet two years. When the Lord afflicts us for a month, a week, yea, sometimes, when we are in pain only one day, we think it a long time. But how short the period of our pains when compared with others! It might have lasted for many years. II. ASA'S DUTY. When it is said that Asa sought not unto the Lord, it implies that he ought to have done so. 1. The purposes for which you should seek unto the Lord in your afflictions. The advice which Eliphaz gave to Job in his affliction was most excellent, and is suitable to us on all occasions: "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would commit my cause." The afflicted should seek unto God, in disease, that they may know its design. "Shew me," prays Job, "wherefore Thou contendest with me." The Lord's way, both in mercy and in judgment, is in the sea, and His footsteps, oftentimes, are not seen. Since, therefore, none can give us the information we need but God Himself, and since also it is so important for us to know the design of our trials, let us not do as Asa did, but as Eliphaz recommends—seek unto God. When diseases visit us we should seek unto God, that He would give us grace to sustain them. None but He who lays these burdens on our shoulders can sustain us under them. That these visitations may be duly improved is another end we should propose in seeking unto the Lord. God should be sought unto in affliction, that He may remove them. The Lord should be sought unto in sickness, that His righteousness in afflicting may be devoutly acknowledged. 2. The manner in which God should be approached unto in these circumstances. First, in faith—the Christian must exercise faith in his heavenly Father's providence, promises, and revealed character. Secondly, in humility—the Christian has merited all he endures, and has nothing of his own to plead. Thirdly, with resignation. 3. Some reasons why the Lord should be sought unto may be specified. (1) The manifest propriety of the thing itself. Unto whom should the servant go in his distress but unto the master? (2) The absolute dependence of the creature on God shows the importance and reasonableness. On God's will depends our health and sickness, adversity and prosperity, joys and sorrows. (3) These means are Divinely appointed, consequently we cannot neglect them without considerable danger to our souls: "For this thing will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, that I may do it for them." (4) The example of all good men—David, Job, Paul, and others, when in distress, sought unto the Lord in prayer: this was their uniform practice; and, indeed, prayer is the best plaster for all our wounds. III. ASA'S SIN. Asa's sin is a common sin—the way of the multitude. Asa's sin was a great sin—he put the creature before the Creator. Asa's sin, unrepented of, is a ruinous sin. "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord?" Asa's conduct arises from many

causes. 1. Ignorance. Sin has so darkened the mind that many have no right views of their relation to God. 2. Inattention. Some know these things, yet give them little or no serious attention. God is neither in all their ways nor in all their thoughts. 3. Independence. Sin has made man so proud that, if it were possible, he would do without God altogether. 4. Presumption. Many expect health, ease, and success without God's assistance. 5. Unbelief. Multitudes have no vital faith in God, His Word, nor in the necessity, efficacy, and advantages of prayer. Learn from this subject—1. Means may be used, but we must be careful not to abuse them. 2. The best of men do not always keep in the same gracious frame of mind. Compare chap. xiv. 2 with the text, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 3. The same sins that were prevalent in Asa's day are prevalent now. (*H. Hollis.*) *Asa and the physicians*:—I. It is interesting to notice who this sick person was. It was Asa, one of the kings of Judah. A king has no poverty to contend against; but—alike with his meanest subjects—he has sickness. Sickness is impartial, even as death. No luxury can materially soften it, no precaution can keep it away, no wealth can stay its course. What was Asa's course? He sought to the physicians. Surely he was, so far, right. It is thought that these physicians were charmers, bringers in of foreign superstitions, singers of useless incantations, and that herein lay Asa's wrong. The question does not relate to the kind of physician he went to, but only to the fact of his going. He did no wrong in seeking human help. We are never to give up at the first approach of sickness and wait for a special wonder of cure. It is not that he was wrong in seeking to the physicians, but very wrong in some other particulars. 1. He did not seek to the Lord, without whom human physicians may vainly exercise their skill and talents. Neither will prayer dispense with medicine nor medicine with prayer. 2. Asa was a king. The inconsistency which, in an unknown subject, would provoke but little comment, grows serious in the life of royalty. We expect nobleness, manliness, and exemplary conduct from kings. Asa set a bad example to his subjects and was false to his royal order. Asa was also false to God, for he was head of the Church and yet dishonoured prayer. 3. Asa suffered his disease to make him unjust and irritable. He cast Hanani into prison for telling him God's holy will. 4. Asa belied a previous life of piety. One of his prayers in time of health, when marching against his numerous enemies, had been more inspiring than the most stirring war-cry or the most martial summons to certain victory. "Lord! it is nothing to Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power. Help us, O Lord, our God! for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against the multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee!" But now Asa was sick he forgot the trust he had formerly placed in the God of Israel. Sickness, more terrible than an army with banners, spoiled this king of his faith. II. THE GENERAL LESSON TAUGHT BY SICKNESS. 1. Health is the gift of God. Many who are ready to acknowledge recovery to be so, and who gratefully thank God for it, forget that good health is a far greater blessing than recovery. 2. Health is a talent. What has been done with it? 3. Prepare for sickness by continuing mindful of its approach. 4. As regards our conduct to those who are sick. Asa was wrong, impatient, faithless; but the duty of his attendants and subjects was to bear with him. Sickness is trying. What seems like impatience to lookers-on would seem different were the places reversed. 5. The great lesson of all—a lesson of avoidance from Asa's fault—is to commit ourselves to the care of God; to seek, if able, to earthly physicians; but to seek with brighter hopes and fuller certainty to the Great Healer Himself. (*S. B. James, M.A.*) *Retribution*:—From the theological standpoint of the chronicler's school, these invidious records of the sins of good kings were necessary in order to account for their misfortunes. That sin was always punished by complete, immediate, and manifest retribution in this life, and that conversely all misfortune was the punishment of sin, was probably the most popular religious teaching in Israel from early days till the time of Christ. This doctrine of retribution was current among the Greeks. When the Spartan King Cleomenes committed suicide, the public mind in Greece at once inquired of what particular sin he had thus paid the penalty. When in the course of the Peloponnesian war the Æginetans were expelled from their island, this calamity was regarded as a punishment inflicted upon them because fifty years before they had dragged away and put to death a suppliant who had caught hold of the handle of the door of the temple of Demeter Theomophorus. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) *The most serious punishments of sin*:—These are not pain, ruin, disgrace. They are the formation and confirmation of evil character.

Herbert Spencer says "that motion once set up along any line becomes itself a cause of subsequent motion along that line." This is absolutely true in moral and spiritual dynamics: every wrong thought, feeling, word, or act, every failure to think, feel, speak, or act rightly, at once alters a man's character for the worse. Henceforth he will find it easier to sin and more difficult to do right; he has twisted another strand into the cord of habit; and though each may be as fine as a spider's web, in time there will be cords strong enough to have bound Samson before Delilah shaved off his seven locks. This is the true punishment of sin: to lose the fine instincts, the generous impulses, and the nobler ambitions of manhood, and become every day more of a beast and a devil. (*Ibid.*) *Our disinclination to rely upon God only*:—Some years ago my wife and I were walking through the streets of Boston, having recently left our place of residence and living in a flat. My wife was without a servant; the summer was unusually hot even for our country, and the task of preparing the meals for the family was a grievance. Like a good husband, I had great sympathy with my wife, and so I rose in the morning and lit the fire. One day I saw a device advertised for cooking by oil, and after a little while I strained a large point, bought the stove, and brought it home in triumph. I said to my wife, "You will not have to be roasted any more over that old kitchen range"; but she was sceptical, as good wives are wont to be, and when I went in to see how the cooking was going on, I found a roaring fire in the old range as well, in case the new one would not work. I think we all want something to fall back upon, and like to have a roaring fire in the old range—to trust in our own efforts instead of relying on God. (*G. F. Pentecost.*) *God left out of the calculation*:—I knew a man who professed to love the Lord, and who really did so. He got into great difficulties, and racked his brain all night without avail for a way out of them. In the morning he went to the squire and the rector, and racked their brains about his troubles, but to no good effect. He then came to me, and asked me to pray with him about them, and my reply was, "No, I will not; you have racked your own, the rector's, and the squire's brain, and now you wish to make Jesus only the fourth instead of first. I won't take any part in doing that." He fell on his knees with such a beseeching look for forgiveness, and prayed, "Oh, how could I forget Thee, Lord? Yet even now I come and ask guidance." It is needless to say that the Lord graciously heard and answered, and gave him a triumphant issue out of all his troubles. (*Christian Herald.*)

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## CHAPTER XVII.

**VERS. 1-19. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead.**—*The conditions of national prosperity*:—This chapter shows—**I. THAT TRUE RELIGION IS THE BASIS OF THE STATE**; and that wherever it prospers there the State prospers. **II. THAT IT IS THE WISDOM OF KINGS TO ENCOURAGE RELIGION** with all their power and influence. **III. THAT A RELIGIOUS NATION IS EVER A GREAT NATION.** **IV. THAT A RELIGIOUS NATION IS EVER A PEACEFUL AND UNITED NATION.** (*A. Clarke, D.D.*) *Jehoshaphat*:—**I. HIS POLICY AS A STATESMAN.** 1. It was protective (ver. 1, 2). 2. It was wise. 3. It was eminently patriotic. **II. HIS CHARACTER AS A MAN.** 1. He was distinguished for true piety. (1) In his every-day life (ver. 3). (2) In his private devotions (vers. 3, 4). (3) In his obedience to God (ver. 4). 2. The inspiration of his heart came from the consciousness of his obedience to God (ver. 6). **III. HIS WISDOM AS A RULER.** 1. He removed temptation from his people (ver. 6). 2. He provided for his people the highest means of good (vers. 7-9). (*Metropolitan Pulpit.*) *Jehoshaphat's prosperity*:—**I. ITS MEASURE.** Everything indicates that it was great and genuine. Not an element of true prosperity is wanting, whether we consider him individually or as identified with the realm. It involved—1. The safety of the kingdom. 2. Wealth. 3. Honour from abroad. 4. The love and confidence of his own people. **II. ITS ORIGIN.** This was partly natural, partly supernatural. 1. Natural. (1) The roots of his prosperity lay largely in himself. He was a man of correct instincts and good convictions. A man of worth and weight of character. By these he won the love and secured the co-operation of his people. (2) He was wise in management. 2. Supernatural. "The Lord established the kingdom in his hand." It was a reward of piety. He honoured God, and God honoured and exalted him. Lessons: 1. The union of

prudence and piety. Each is helpful to the other; neither is sufficient without the other. Prudence gives tone and practicality to piety; piety gives sweetness and mellowness to prudence. Piety alone tends to feebleness and inefficiency; prudence alone inclines to coldness and covetousness. United they round out the character in beauty and strength. 2. Reform through religion and law. Jehoshaphat united the civil and religious power in securing national reform. How necessary is this union in the great struggle with intemperance and other moral defilements. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 2. And set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim.—*Defences*:—It is concerning Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, this is said. He was a good king (see vers. 1-6). The one kingdom of Solomon was now disrupted into two. The northern kingdom, known as the kingdom of Israel, was specially given to idolatry, to Baal-worshipping. Along the somewhat irregular line separating the two kingdoms, Asa, the father of Jehoshaphat, had set fortified cities to resist the perpetual incursions of the Baal-worshipping northern kingdom. On coming to the throne, Jehoshaphat immediately saw that these fenced, fortified cities were in good repair, that their garrisons were strong. A young man I knew had charge of the woollen-room in a great wholesale house. His companion clerks were wild, roistering, dissipated, profane fellows. He was of necessity in the perpetual atmosphere of bad speech and profanity. It seemed to him sometimes very hard to withstand it all. What did he do? He did spiritually precisely what Jehoshaphat did physically: he stood his ground. He fortified and kept garrisoned his defences. Years afterward I saw that same man in high and prosperous place. He had won the confidence of his employers. Take you example of Jehoshaphat: place your fenced cities, set your garrisons. What sort of fortified and garrisoned cities ought we to set along the frontiers of our lives, that we may maintain them against encroaching evil? I. I think the fortified and garrisoned city of **A DISTINCT PLAN FOR LIFE**. What do I propose to do with my life? That ought to be a question clearly conceived and distinctly answered by every one of us. I have certain resources—time, talent, education, moral consciousness, &c. All sorts of sudden contingencies spring up in experience. All sorts of moral questions constantly occur. Shall I do this or that? Shall I enter into this or that business? Shall I allow myself in this or that pleasure, indulgence? They are at once met and decided by the simple presence of the plan. This is Christ's suggestion of moral plan: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." II. I think there ought to be such city, fortified and garrisoned, of **AN ENNOBLING LOVE**. Jehoshaphat loved Jehovah better than the Baalim, therefore he could stand out against the Baalim. A high, pure love can always hold out against lower ones. The highest, holiest love is that for Christ. III. I think there ought to be such city, fortified and garrisoned, of **QUICK VOLITION**. Temporising, to save oneself from brave and instant choice of the right, is useless. It breaks down defences, scatters garrisons. In Thomas Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus" there is a very wonderful chapter on the "Everlasting No." There is a place where this "everlasting no" ought, even thunderously, to be uttered. That place is precisely where the tempting, urgent wrong begins to solicit. IV. I think there ought to be such city, fortified and garrisoned, of **THE DAILY PRAYER**. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat.—*The great companionship*:—I. Jehoshaphat secured the great companionship by **FOLLOWING TRUE EXAMPLE**. "Because he walked in the first ways of David his father." Beautiful those first ways of David. Turn to the eighteenth Psalm, which David sang in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. These first ways of David were ways of love to God (ver. 1); of trust in God (ver. 2); of prayer to God (ver. 3); of strength in God (ver. 29); of thanks to God (vers. 49, 50). But the later ways of David—the ways concerning Bathsheba, &c., Jehoshaphat would not walk in. This matter of true example for the ways of life is a great thing. Such following will surely lead us into the great companionship of God. II. The Lord was with Jehoshaphat; he secured the great companionship by **STANDING OUT AGAINST THE EVIL SPIRIT OF HIS TIME**. "And sought not unto the Baalim." The Baalim represented the popular religious tendency. III. And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat; he secured the great companionship by **RIGHT AFFECTION**. "But sought to the God of his father." Do not imagine the set of the supreme affection a light matter

And when our heart supremely sets towards God, God answers with companionship. IV. And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat; he secured the great companionship by RIGHT PRACTICE. "And walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel." Jehoshaphat did not mean about it, and dream about it, and think about it; he vigorously did it. Do not imagine that inward and sentimental intention which never finds expression in corresponding action amounts to anything. What vigorous volition and right practise sound in that "walked"! Man is three things—intellect, affection, will. Jehoshaphat turned these three toward God. Intellectually, he recognised Jehovah as God, not the Baalim; affectionately, he sought to God; volitionally, he practised for God. What wonder he was wrapped about with the great companionship? (*Homiletic Review*.) Because he walked in the first ways of his father David.—*The first ways of David*:—1. We have here a pattern and a warning. It is an eulogy heightened by a limitation. The merit of the copy is advanced at the expense of the pattern. It is intimated that David's first ways were his best ways. This is in contradiction of the true order of the spiritual life. A retrograde motion in it is a violation of its nature and a frustration of its intent. Deterioration in goodness is a disease and an anomaly. 2. Notice the impartiality and candour which characterise the accounts of good men in Scripture. The Bible has no human idols. Fault and virtue it sets forth with equal distinctness and prominence. Herein it shows itself Divine. The Bible in its way of dealing with the lives and characters of men, almost as much as in anything, bespeaks itself the voice of God. 3. The change in David's spiritual course was connected with an equally marked change in his outward condition. 4. See here the danger of prosperity. 5. We infer that men are not to be our patterns, but only "the man Christ Jesus." Him alone we can look up to with unqualified admiration. 6. Let us always be looking out for the symptoms and beginnings of spiritual decline. (*R. A. Hallam, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord.—*Encouragement in the ways of the Lord*:—I. The ways of the Lord are DIVINE. Are His ways cold and unpleasant? If we descend a deep coal-pit and look up the shaft into the bright sky, we see the stars, but the pit is cold and dark. So men think that when they commune with God, it is like being in a coal-pit beholding a star; it is a beautiful sight, but makes one cold and unpleasant. Is this the truth? No; the Bible describes God's people as having melody in their hearts, and one of His sweetest names is "The happy God." Some people are afraid of becoming religious, lest they should be miserable; but they mistake the God in whose breast there is an ever-flowing heaven. The man who the most loves God is the happiest in disposition and the most cheerful as well as the most graceful in life. II. His ways are also HUMANE; they constrain us to love our suffering fellow-man, when he can do us no good but when we can do him good. (*W. Birch.*) *Jehoshaphat*:—I. SOME MEN WHEN, LIKE JEHOSEPHAT, THEY HAVE RICHES AND HONOUR IN ABUNDANCE, HAVE THEIR HEARTS LIFTED UP, BUT NOT IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD. The natural tendency of such circumstances is to create and foster a spirit of pride, of self-sufficiency, and of independence. How necessary the warning (*Deut. viii. 11-14*). Nebuchadnezzar is a striking exemplification of this. II. SOME MEN WHOSE HEARTS ARE NOT LIFTED UP ARE IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD. They are real Christians, but doubting, desponding Christians. III. SOME MEN HAVE THEIR HEARTS LIFTED UP, LIKE JEHOSEPHAT, IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD. They "rejoice in the Lord alway." (*R. Harley.*)

Ver. 16. Who willingly offered himself unto the Lord.—*Wanted, volunteers*:—I. AMASIAH MADE IT HIS LIFE-WORK TO SERVE THE LORD. This service is—1. Reasonable. 2. Honourable. 3. Remunerative. 4. Safe. II. AMASIAH WAS A READY VOLUNTEER. 1. He needed no pressing. 2. He needed no hunting out. 3. He needed no looking after. 4. He needed no leader. III. Amasiah offered HIMSELF to the Lord. 1. He made no reserve as to what he had. 2. He made no reserve as to what he did. 3. He made no reserve as to when it should be. 4. He made no reserve as to how that service should be rendered. IV. When Amasiah willingly offered himself unto the Lord, HE DID THIS IN A SECULAR CALLING. 1. He did not stipulate to be a prophet. 2. His was a difficult calling. 3. He rose to eminence in it. 4. He left an honourable record. V. Amasiah not only served the Lord himself, but HE IS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS. 1. To the young. 2. To men of position. 3. To men who are rising in the world. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

## CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 4-34. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day.—*Divine truth and its typical reception*:—Here are four types of human conduct in relation to Divine truth. I. Those who SEEK THE TRUTH. Micaiah believed in its existence, prayed for its teaching, and determined to follow its leading. II. Those who are OPPOSED TO THE TRUTH. The priests assumed to be its only depositaries, denied the claims of others, ridiculed and opposed its representative. None so slow to believe in a Divine Spirit as those accustomed to speak Divine words, but in whose hearts is no Divine life. III. Those who BELIEVE YET DISOBEY THE TRUTH. Jehoshaphat believed the prophet Micaiah, mildly defended his character, yet would not withdraw from Ahab. IV. Those who are ALARMED AT TRUTH. Ahab roused in conscience, afraid of results, and tried to escape by stratagem. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Vers. 6-7. There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him.—*Micaiah the son of Imla*:—Jehoshaphat's is the wise and reverent question to ask, amid the illusions of every fashionable opinion, amid all smooth and flattering promises. It marks the devout habit of looking behind the outward show and of searching every matter to its depths in the fear of God. Let us notice the frame of mind revealed in Ahab's reply. I. Note THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT ONE OBDURATE VOICE, rising clearly above the four hundred unanimous in their approval. 1. That is a voice which we hear again and again in our life; we hear it most loudly at special crises of our career. 2. When one solitary voice flatly contradicts the voice of a multitude, and contradicts it on matters of serious moment—which voice are we to believe? Sometimes the question is practically decided, as in Ahab's case, by the mood with which we come to think of the unsilenced prophet. "I hate him." (1) That tribute of hatred sprang from Ahab's conscience. It is the precise method by which weak and cruel men are wont to confess that not the man, but the message has found them out. (2) Notice also Ahab's device for suppressing an unwelcome truth. II. THIS NARRATIVE SYMBOLISES MAN'S FREQUENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE TRUTH. It is a test case. 1. Young men and women starting in life with abundant promise, amid the acclamation of hosts of friends, you may be irritated by perhaps one grim, dissenting voice, critical, dissatisfied, implacable, which sadly challenges the place in this universe to which general opinion reads your title clear. Be very careful how you treat that voice! It may be the voice of an ignorant, envious, churlish man, but, on the other hand, it may be the voice of one who has pierced to the secret of your inner life, and who, if you would only listen, might spare you an idle journey, might rescue you from misery and shame. 2. Again, there are books or teachers whom we have to deal with, and who sadly irritate us, and we say, like Marguerite to Faust, but often, alas, without her simplicity: "Thou art not a Christian." Let us patiently ask: are we really angry in the name of the Lord of hosts? or, are we angry because these books or voices spoil our own theories, wound our prejudices, smile at our favourite catch-words, wither our ideas of success, and are, in the name of the Truth of God, relentless amid our flatterers? Do they simply offend our self-love, and rebuke our calculated prudence? Let us be careful. These books and voices may be wrong; if so, their's the loss and the penalty. But, very often, conscience would tell us there is a possibility that they are right. 3. There is one solemn application of this incident which has, no doubt, occurred to us already. In every human heart disobedient to Christ, impenitent and unreconciled, there is a voice as of Micaiah the son of Imla; but it is really the voice of the Lord Himself, speaking to that heart, amid all its distractions and its earthly pleasures, the message of evil and not of good. And men may come to chafe so angrily under that patient, ever-haunting warning, and appeal, that finally they may cry: "I hate it, I hate it!" If that be so, remember Ahab's doom. (*T. Rhys Evans.*) *Virtues necessary for religious workers*:—Close sympathy with his kind, personal lowliness, self-suppression pushed even to pathetic extremes, unshakable loyalty to the teaching of the Spirit of God, and calm indifference to fashionable moods of flattery or disapproval—these are virtues necessary to every religious worker. If he deferentially consults the noble of this world what message he may utter; if he asks the man of affairs, whose difficult life reminds him always, not only of Jacob's wrestling, but also of Jacob's subtlety, and who is fiercely tempted to give his vote for a gospel of compromise; if he asks the poor and becomes the spokesman, not of their wrongs, but of a maddened despair which

does not represent their truer self, he passes from the side of Micaiah to that of the four hundred. (*Ibid.*) *The faithful prophet*.—I. THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH HE WAS HELD. "I hate him." Hatred, inveterate and strong, often the reward of fidelity. "Am I then become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" II. THE STAND WHICH HE TAKES (ver. 13). 1. Dependence upon God. 2. Expectation of God's help (Matt. x. 18, 19). 3. Determination to utter God's Word. III. THE PLEAS URGED TO MOVE HIM FROM THIS STAND. 1. The opinion of the majority. 2. The difficulty of judging who is right. "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to thee?" 3. The employment of physical force. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Hated for the truth's sake*.—I. What an appalling illustration is this of the fact that MEN LOVE TO BE FLATTERED AND ENCOURAGED EVEN AT THE EXPENSE OF EVERYTHING HOLY AND TRUE. "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so." II. What a vivid illustration is this of THE SUBLIME FUNCTION OF AN INCORRUPTIBLE TRUTH-TELLER! This is not Micaiah's first appearance before the king. He had established his reputation as a God-fearing and truth-speaking man, and Ahab's denunciation was in reality Micaiah's highest praise. 1. No wicked man should be quite easy in the sanctuary. 2. Do you suppose that it is pleasant for a minister to be always opposing any man? 3. A man is not your enemy because he tells you the truth. Opposition will come. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Truth awakens enmity*.—As the Turk taunted some Christians at Constantinople, who said that they came thither to suffer for the truth, telling them that they needed not to have come so far for that; for had they but told the truth at home, they could not have missed suffering for it. Telling truth needs not travel far for enmity; enmity will encounter it at home, wheresoever it be. Hence is that definition that Luther made of preaching, "*Prædicare nihil est quam derivare in se furorem,*" &c.—that to preach, and preach home, as he did, was nothing else but to stir up the furies of hell about their ears. (*J. Spencer.*) *Ministers not to accommodate their message to the likings of men*.—Suppose a number of persons were to call on a minister on the Sabbath-day morning, and being admitted into his study, one of them should say to him, "I hope, sir, you do not mean to-day to be severe against avarice, for I love money, and my heart goes after my covetousness." Suppose another should say, "I trust you will not be severe against backbiting, for my tongue walketh with slanderers, and I consider scandal to be the seasoning of all conversation." Suppose another should say, "Do not represent implacability as being inconsistent with Divine goodness, for I never did forgive such an one, and I never will." And so of the rest. What would this minister say to these men? Why, if he were in a proper state of mind he would say, "Oh, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (*W. Jay.*)

Ver. 16. Then he said, I see all Israel scattered.—*The prophetic visions*.—Micaiah declared the visions revealed to him by the Spirit of God. I. THE SHEPHERDLESS PEOPLE. II. THE PARABOLIC PROVIDENCE. 1. A picture of God's supremacy. 2. An insight into supernatural ministry. "All the host of heaven" ready to serve. 3. An interpretation of the events of history. (*J. Wolfendale.*)

Vers. 25-27. Then the king of Israel said, Take ye Micaiah.—*Ahab and Micaiah; or the false and true in character*.—I. THE POWER OF THE POPULAR VOICE. We see the multitude accommodating itself to the wishes of the king. How easy and how congenial it is to human nature to float with the tide. As a rule it pays best to suffer yourself to be carried along by the current. Light things and feeble things can travel this way with small demand on strength and skill. But dead things and all manner of refuse go this way, too. There is something to be feared in a great popular cry. I have heard men say that they dreaded a crowd as much as they did a contagion. If men had as wholesome a fear of going with the stream because it is the stream, society would be healthier. "Everybody" is a fearful tyrant. II. HERE IS ONE MAN OPPOSED TO THE POPULAR SENTIMENT. He valued truth. Of Micaiah it may be said, as it was of another more illustrious, "Of the people there were none with him." He esteemed truth to be more precious than gold or any other earthly consideration. He was a hero of no common mould. Men are often misunderstood by those who should know them best. III. MEN OF SUCH MORAL HEROISM HAVE OFTEN TO SUFFER FOR THEIR PRINCIPLES. Suffering for conscience sake is not yet obsolete. IV. Such men as Micaiah are morally brave

and heroic because **THEY ARE MEN OF PRAYER**. We are apt to take low views of the nature of prayer. It is more than simply an appointed means of telling God our wants, and of beseeching Him to supply. It is "waiting upon God" as a personal attendant waits upon his master with whom he converses, and from whose lips he receives commands and instructions. It is more than that, it is communion, fellowship, interchange of thought and sentiment. We may go a step further, and say it is a union of kindred minds—the Divine so flowing into the human that it becomes transformed, that God's will and mind become its governing law. So life becomes one great connected prayer. A man who understands and enjoys this is one of the strongest and bravest of men. Stephen was such a man of prayer. A man of prayer is prepared to do deeds of holy heroism which put to the blush the vaunted deeds of chivalry. **V. A CONSCIOUSNESS OF MORAL WEAKNESS IS CLOSELY ALLIED TO MORAL COWARDICE**. Without a scruple Ahab put the life of Jehoshaphat in jeopardy to save his own. "Conscience makes cowards of us all." What a noble tribute was that which was paid to Havelock and his pious soldiers more than once during the Indian Mutiny! When our army was hard pressed, or some specially perilous work had to be done, the command was given, "Call out Havelock and his praying men; if this work can be done at all, they are the men to do it." **VI. RETRIBUTION SOMETIMES OVERTAKES MEN IN THIS LIFE**. Ahab was left alone to pursue his course of hardened folly until he was ripe for retribution; then God met him and ignominiously closed his career. (*J. T. Higgins.*)

**Ver. 33. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture.**—*The venturesome aim*:—Now I would have you notice particularly the words: "A certain man drew a bow at a venture." We take it that this was no distinguished warrior among the army of the Syrians, but simply one of the ordinary archers. He little thought that to him was the task committed of slaying the enemy of God and the king of His own nation. "At a venture" he drew his bow, or, in the words of the Revised Version, as given in the margin, "In his simplicity"—that is, never supposing at whom he was aiming the dart. We may be for year after year fighting the Lord's battles, and seeking after some offender above other offenders, some Ahab in disguise; but our efforts shall in the end be rewarded with success—we may have mistaken some conspicuous fault as manifest as were the gorgeous robes of Jehoshaphat for the sin that doth so easily beset, bringing a host of others in its train; but at length God's Spirit shall guide our words to the weak place in that soul's armour. Some word spoken with no special purpose, perhaps in season, perhaps out of season, shall open the wound that means death to that besetting sin. But if what we have said applies to the case of those individual souls, the same rule holds good also as regards our pulpit ministrations. When we preach the Word we do not know who may be present before us; probably many faces are familiar to us, but we cannot see the inmost soul; we know not what has passed in the life of any single person since last we spoke. Therefore, to a great extent, our bow must be ever drawn at a venture. (*J. Nepleton.*) *A bow drawn at a venture*:—Mr. Spurgeon was wont to relate the following striking cases of drawing the bow at a venture: "I supposed the case of a young man who had got into fast company, and once there meant to have his fling unfettered; so was on the eve of starting to India, in order to escape the restraint of a godly, widowed mother's influence. I pointed to him, and pleaded with him to retrace his steps ere yet he had broken his praying mother's heart. At the close of the Monday evening prayer-meeting a young man was shown into my room by William Olney. As soon as alone with me he wished to know who had informed me as to his movements. He could scarcely believe me when I told him I had received no information concerning him, and did not even know his name. The same week, after the Thursday evening service, another young man wished to see me alone; wanted to know who had been telling me about him. I asked, What about him? About his fast life, and his intention to leave the country and escape his praying mother's influence? He had been very distressed ever since. I pointed him out and appealed to him on Sunday evening; he wished to see me about it, but could not come on Monday evening as he had intended. 'But,' said he, 'there is one mistake you made, Mr. Spurgeon; you told the people I was going to India, and it is China I am booked for.'" *Gospel archery*:—I. THE HEARTS OF THE UNSAVED ARE ENCASED IN HARNESS. 1. Indifference. 2. Pleasure. 3. Worldliness. 4. Religious formality. II. HAVING THESE HEARTS FOR A MARK, THE GOSPEL BOW MUST BE DRAWN. At some must be shot the arrows of—1. Divine goodness. 2. Divine threatenings. 3. Divine love. (*R. Berry.*)



## CHAPTER XIX.

**VERS. 1-9.** And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem.—*Jehoshaphat's declension and recovery* :—I. GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BACKSLIDDEN CHILD AND AN APOSTATE. 1. He preserves the life of the child (ver. 1). 2. God reproves in grace His backslidden child (ver. 2, 3). 3. God commends His backslidden child for the good he has done. II. JEHOSEPHAT EXEMPLIFIES THE TRUE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE SHOULD RECEIVE DIVINE REPROOF. 1. He received the Divine reproof without resentment and with real contrition for his sin. 2. He sought to make amends for past misconduct by greater personal efforts to promote the spiritual interests of his people. III. JEHOSEPHAT LAYS DOWN RULES FOR THE JUDGES OF THE PEOPLE WHICH ARE APPLICABLE AND ESSENTIAL TO OUR OWN TIMES. 1. That a true judge must have reference to God in his decisions (ver. 6). 2. That a true judge should be a real Christian (ver. 7). Lessons: 1. Unholy alliances are fraught with the greatest danger to every child of God. 2. In his backslidden state the child of God should at once heed God's warning and reproof through His servants. 3. God requires personal efforts for the promotion of His cause from the rich as well as poor; from those in the highest positions of State as well as from the obscure and lowly. (*D. C. Hughes.*) **Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?**—*Entangling alliances* :—I. THE FRIENDSHIP OF WICKED MEN ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS TEMPTATIONS TO WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE SUBJECT. Modern life in cities illustrates this with special force. 1. The wealth of the world is largely in the hands of men who are not friends of Christ. 2. In many communities intelligence and culture are possessed mainly by the irreligious. 3. Interests of business sometimes create similar peril. 4. In a higher circle of life professional success often tempts young men of aspiring mind to ally themselves with those who love not God. II. WHILE CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE REQUIRES NO NARROW OR ASCETIC SECLUSION FROM THE WORLD, YET IT FORBIDS SEEKING WORLDLY FRIENDSHIPS AND ALLIANCES FOR SELFISH ENDS AND TO THE PERIL OF RELIGIOUS USEFULNESS AND RELIGIOUS CHARACTER. III. THE IRRELIGIOUS FRIENDSHIPS OF RELIGIOUS MEN VIOLATE THE RULING SPIRIT OF THE SCRIPTURES. IV. ENTANGLING ALLIANCES WITH THE WORLD OFTEN INVOLVE IMMENSE SACRIFICE OF CHRISTIAN USEFULNESS. V. CHRISTIAN ALLIANCES WITH THE WICKED DO NOT COMMAND THE RESPECT OF THE VERY MAN FOR WHOSE FAVOUR THEY ARE FORMED. VI. LOVING THOSE THAT HATE GOD INFLECTS A WOUND OF GREAT SEVERITY ON THE FEELINGS OF JESUS CHRIST. It is from Calvary that the voice comes to each in our solitude, "Shouldest thou love them that hate the Lord?" (*A. Phelps.*) *Jehoshaphat's connection with Ahab* :—I. WHAT IS THAT INTIMACY WITH THE UNGODLY WHICH GOD FORBIDS? 1. An alliance with them. 2. A conformity with them. 3. An unnecessary association with them. II. WHY IS IT SO DISPLEASING TO GOD? 1. On account of the state of mind it implies. 2. On account of its pernicious tendency. 3. On account of its opposition to His revealed will. (*J. Chapin.*) *Associating with the ungodly* :—It is told of a sweet-voiced canary that it forgot how to sing by having its cage hung outside where it was constantly surrounded by sparrows. It gave up its once sweet notes and learned to chatter the meaningless, tuneless notes of the sparrow. The constant association with the Christless is apt to make our hearts grow Christless. *Jehoshaphat; or the dangers of indecision* :—I have to describe to you a man, not lost, but continually in danger of being lost; a man not wicked, but weak; a man possessing in his character much that was good, but allowing his goodness to be sullied by approach to evil and evil men. I have to show you how one ill-considered step, in the earlier part of his career, embarrassed his whole reign. Affinity with Ahab's family affected more or less the whole life of Jehoshaphat. This should make us cautious. I. IN SUCH SERIOUS MATTERS AS FORMING FAMILY CONNECTIONS, OR PARTNERSHIPS IN BUSINESS. II. IN WHAT APPEAR MINOR THINGS. Observe the man who is over-persuaded to what he believes to be evil; the man who consents to do what is wrong, and justifies himself by saying some good will come of it; the man who frequents the society of the vicious, yet believes that he can escape corruption; the man who enjoys the jest of the profane, yet supposes that his mind can retain its reverence for holy things; the man who is silent when he should declare openly his disapprobation of evil; the man who runs himself into temptation, yet trusts that God will find him a way out of it. All these persons do, in their measure and degree, expose themselves to danger—commit acts of indecision—take a step which may necessitate others, against which

they may exert themselves in vain—impress a stain on their conscience which it may require years to efface—and plant on the soil of their souls a weed so vivacious, so self-spreading, so absorbent of moisture and nutriment, that by and by it may choke the growth of all Christian graces and virtues. (*J. Hessey.*) Nevertheless there are good things found in thee.—*The stimulus of an encouraging word*:—The Lord will analyse a man's disposition and a man's character, and will assign to him all that is due. What man is wholly bad? Surely in the very worst of men there are excellences, and it ought to be our delight to consider these, and where possible, with due regard to justice, to magnify them and to call the man's attention to them. A man may take heart when he sees some of his best points. Here is a lesson for parents, magistrates, and teachers and monitors of every name and position. Tell a boy that he has done something well. We are too much afraid of what is called flattery, forgetting that flattery is a lie; but we are called upon simply to state the truth, and to state it with affection and emphasis, that it may become an encouragement to hearts that are very easily cast down. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Good and bad things in moral character*:—Is a man whose character is good to the extent of six-sevenths to be pronounced a bad man? Is there not a spiritual arithmetic which looks into majorities and minorities of a moral kind? Will God, then, at last drive away from Him men who have had six good points out of seven? As business men, suppose a man be recommended to you in these terms: This man has seven qualities, and six of them are really admirable; the only thing about him is that you cannot trust him with money. Would you take him? Six points are good out of seven: will you go by the majority or by the minority? Another man is also good in six points, admirable; the only fault he has is that you cannot believe a word he says. Will you take him into your business? There is a minority greater than any majority can be. That is the doctrine which we have omitted when we have been criticising eternal providence and wondering about the issues of human action. Amongst ourselves it is right that we should say of one another, "He is a good man take him on the whole." But what is the meaning of the reservation? Is it a grace, a posture that may be taught by a hired master? Or is it a morality, the want of which turns the whole being into a bog on which you cannot rest with security? (*Ibid.*) *Jehu's commendation*:—We may very well admit that the nearer we get to God and to His sunlight the more freely and fully we shall admit that there is no good thing to be found in us. But yet God sometimes allows His angels to say of a mortal man, "There are good things in him," without any frown of supreme displeasure. This should—1. Comfort us. Our good deeds are not useless, not forgotten. 2. Encourage us. If God speak so like an indulgent master to a trying servant, then we need not fear Him. We need dread no impatient frowns upon our insufficient strivings. 3. Humble us. We are perhaps not so good as Jehoshaphat. For his one backsliding ours, perhaps, are many. Lessons: 1. Mutual forbearance. Let us not set down any of our neighbours as altogether bad. 2. Let us see that our good qualities are definite and discoverable. 3. Let us pray earnestly, agonisingly, that the good in us may overcome the evil. Evil must not for a moment be tolerated. Christ must reign. (*S. B. James, M.A.*)

Vers. 5–11. *And he set judges in the land.*—*Good government should be the result of piety in rulers*:—Alfred the Great was a distinguished statesman and warrior, as well as zealous for true religion. St. Louis of France exercised a wise control over Church and State. On the other hand, Charlemagne's successor, the Emperor Louis the Pious, and our own Kings Edward the Confessor and the saintly Henry VI. were alike feeble and inefficient; the zeal of the Spanish kings and their kinswoman, Mary Tudor, is chiefly remembered for its ghastly cruelty; and in comparatively modern times the misgovernment of the States of the Church was a byword throughout Europe. Many causes combined to produce this mingled record. The one most clearly contrary to the chronicler's teaching was an immoral opinion that the Christian should cease to be a citizen, and that the saint has no duties to society. This view is often considered to be the special vice of monasticism, but it reappears in one form or another in every generation. In our own day there are those who think that a newspaper should have no interest for a really earnest Christian. According to their ideas, Jehoshaphat should have divided his time between a private oratory in his palace and the public services of the temple, and have left his kingdom to the mercy of unjust judges at home and heathen enemies abroad, or else have abdicated in favour of some kinsmen whose heart was

not so perfect with Jehovah. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) *The origin and right of human judicature*:—The administration is for the Lord. I. THE POWER OF THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S RIGHT. II. THE MATTER OF THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S CAUSE. III. THE ISSUE OF THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S END. "Is with you in the judgment." (*Dean Young.*)

Ver. 7. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you.—*Jehoshaphat reproved*:—I. HIS SIN. This was—1. Helping in an ungodly enterprise, against which the prophet had warned him. 2. Forming an alliance, of which the influence on himself, his family, and people could only be bad. It fills one with a kind of despair to see how, among those who profess to regard religion as all-important, friendships and alliances discussed and fixed without this ever coming into view. II. THE REBUKE WHICH FOLLOWED THE KING'S SIN. III. THE KING'S REPENTANCE. 1. He received reproof with meekness. 2. He kept aloof from occasions of fresh sin. 3. He did what he could to repair the wrong his example had done. IV. WHAT MADE JEHOSEPHATH SO PROMPT TO RETURN TO THE RIGHT PATH WHEN ONCE HE HAD LEFT IT? His deep sense of God and right appreciation of His character. "Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." Nothing so controllingly underlies what a man is and does as his cherished thoughts of God. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 11. Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good.—*The blessedness of the good*:—I. WHO ARE THE GOOD? The Scripture points out two things on this subject. 1. The only way in which men become good—by faith in Christ and the consequent reception of the Holy Spirit to create us anew. 2. The principal ingredients of the goodness of the regenerate. (1) Integrity of character. (2) Benevolence of character. (3) Piety of character. II. THE MEANING OF THIS DECLARATION AND HOW ITS TRUTH IS SUPPORTED. "The Lord shall be with the good." This means that the Lord will be with them in the supply of His Spirit, in providing for them in providence, preserving them from trouble, supporting them in it, or delivering them out of it, and blessing others for their sakes. This truth is justified—1. From the purposes of God and the relation in which His people stand to Him. 2. By the promises of Scripture. 3. By all experience and by all history. Conclusion: 1. He shall be with the good nationally if they act consistently and faithfully. 2. He shall be with them individually. Fear not that He will ever leave His work of grace unfinished in you. (*J. Leischild.*) *A tonic promise*:—Explain what is meant by "good." The melancholy fact that all men are not good. The promise of the text justifies three inquiries. 1. Why should the good be fearful? "They that be with us," &c. 2. How can bad designs finally prevail? 3. How are men to know that God is surely with them? The answer involves character: "the good." God identifies Himself with all that is good in thought as well as in act; in purpose as well as in service. Even when the godly man ceaseth God will maintain the cause that is "good." This promise, like all the promises of God, is designated not as a sedative, but a stimulant. Deal courageously! See how the text might have read: The Lord shall be with the good, therefore sit still; the Lord shall be with the good, therefore let wickedness have its own way in the world; the Lord shall be with the good, therefore pay no attention to self-discipline. The text reads contrariwise. The Lord is with the good, therefore deal courageously. Goodness is not to be merely passive—it is to be aggressive, defiant of all evil. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Courage*:—Probably few of us ever sufficiently consider the value and need of courage in order to any high condition of character. There are to be found in one of the letters of one of the most interesting men of modern times these words, "How rare is it to have a friend who will defend you thoroughly and boldly! Mr. — missed an opportunity of doing this for me, and has not the courage to do it now as he ought to do, leaving me in consequence defenceless against a slander, though I put the proof into his hands. How indispensable strength is for high goodness—strength moral or intellectual, neither depending necessarily on physical strength." Many a man neglects to live a Christian life not because he lacks Christian sympathies, sentiments, and feelings, not even because he has no Christian ideas, but simply for lack of courage to put himself where he properly belongs. This lack of courage denotes, of course, either want of confidence in himself or want of depth of

feeling as to religious truth, or fear of some man or men, which fear has too much influence over him to allow him to act conscientiously and in the line of his best sympathies. 1. In speaking of courage let us recognise that there is animal courage as well as intellectual and moral courage. Animal courage is of the lowest kind. Oftentimes it is nothing more than bull-dog ferocity. It oftentimes makes men good soldiers, successful pugilists, stalwart seamen—even daring adventurers. Men may have it without any intellectual or moral courage. A little of it is good. An excess tends to brutality. This form of courage—the courage to take physical punishment without flinching—is of a kind which the most uncultured and unrefined can appreciate. It will always have an attraction for the coarse, undeveloped, and unrespectable classes of society. 2. Intellectual courage is of another order, and indicates a superior type of man. It means practically the ability to think for one's self, and to follow out one's thinkings to their inevitable conclusions. It is necessary, however, to guard this language. Taking opinions into one's mind is not thinking. There is a period in our life when we have more conceit than wisdom, and more independence than politeness. We say to ourselves and others that "we mean to do our own thinking," which often amounts to this—that we mean to assert ourselves as not agreeing with certain persons who are said to be narrow and exclusive, and agreeing with those who shake themselves free from everybody else except a few intellectual rakes and dandies. Alas, how silly it all seems when we get a little older! Then it appears to us that it was the want of ability to think which made us so impertinent and ridiculous. Of course all young birds have to learn to do their own flying, and, after rolling and tumbling about for awhile, they settle down to do it precisely after the fashion of the old birds. So, also, with thinking. From the beginning even until now it has been done in exactly the same way. The process has consisted of the discernments of comparisons and contrasts, likenesses and unlikenesses, of induction, deduction, and inference. Every man has to do his own thinking to some extent, as every man has to do his own eating and his own digesting. There is no possibility of any one eating our food for us, or digesting it for us. And no man can possibly begin at the beginning of things, and think out each problem of life as if no one had been on the earth before him. The present is so related to the past, as that the past is in it and the future is in it. Everything is in the present. We inherit the earth, not as it first came out from the hands of the Creator before man was on it, but as it is, modified by man's co-operation with God. So of everything—that which is moral and mental as well as that which is material. In each department of things there are men who have thinking power and erudition far, far beyond what is possible to us. In each department they are our helpers, our instructors; yes, our masters. That independence which we assume in youth is only ignorance, foolishness, unthinkingness. The greatest men the world has ever known have been the most receptive and dependent men; the most diligent students, the aptest learners. If I am to learn painting it would be folly indeed if I said, "I am going to be independent of Murillo and Raphael, of Turner and Correggio and Rubens and all other artists who have gone before me." So in music the man who thinks for himself and never appropriates the science of others is idiotic. So everywhere in all departments. Not less so in theology, the revelation of God and of man, and of the relation of the human to the Divine. If I set up on my own account, and did not open my mind to the thinkings of others, the name of "Verdant Green" would be the only name that could fit me. I would have our younger people distinguish between two ideas which are very distinct, and yet are often confounded the one with the other—viz., thinking for one's self and cultivating a spirit of truth. The truth is that which corresponds to the fact. As a fact reports itself to your mind that is the truth for you. By and by as your mind grows it may report itself somewhat differently, then there will be something added to the original impression, and that will be the truth. Now, intellectual courage consists in this perfect truthfulness—this faithfulness to report what you see and recognise. It may sometimes put you in seeming inconsistency with yourself. It may subject you to being accused of inconsistency. But never mind. God does not ask us to be consistent—on that shallow view of consistency—but to be faithful and true. There is a deeper consistency—a nobler consistency. If I see a thing very partially in youth, because of the undeveloped condition of my mind, and see it more completely in manhood, because I have had more experience and more vision; if I truly say what I saw then and truly say what I see now, though I see now more than I saw then, am I not consistent—more nobly consistent—than I should be if I were afraid, under more experience, to contradict

my former self? What is life for if not to educate us into deeper and larger views of truth? Only we must take good heed that they are deeper and larger. Many people change, but their change is not growth. Let us recognise that, in order to be assured of the leading of the Spirit of God into all truth, we must have intellectual courage—the courage to follow the truth wherever it leads and to own up to believing that it is the truth. Often it takes even sublime courage to do it. Every child ought to read the story of the martyrs of old. It is dreadful to think how little the religion of some of us means. The loss of the ability to grow deep-rooted convictions, and the loss of courage to be faithful in owing to them, is, wherever it occurs, a dreadful loss. It means the loss of that nobility of soul the possession of which is one of the surest marks of our being children of God. 3. But of all kinds of courage, moral courage is the noblest. Of course it enters into intellectual courage. The two are not distinct, and yet while intellectual courage implies thinking power and faithful following where the light seems to be, moral courage does not necessarily mean the courage of the crack thinker, but the courage of character; the courage which acts conscientiously in trying circumstances. For instance, the liar is always the coward. A man lies because he has not the courage to speak the truth and take the consequences. There is one exception to that rule. It is conceivable that a really truthful man might need courage to tell a lie which he thought would shelter a friend from injury or harm. My intellect may sometimes stand in contradiction to my conscience, "but conscience is given me to act by. In matters of duty, therefore, I am bound to obey my conscience rather than my intellect." Hence moral courage amounts pretty much to this—the steady, persistent following of the light which is in conscience. It involves, of course, the bringing of the conscience into the light, where it may be illuminated, for conscience is a light receiver, not a light originator. Courage, and much of it, is needed to act always and everywhere conscientiously. Intelligence is needed to distinguish between conscience and prejudice. Many a man assumes to be acting conscientiously when he is really acting only from prejudice and feeling. If he quietly took himself to task, he would recognise his true motive. Conscience represents God's judgment throne. The very fact that a man condemns himself in spite of his natural unwillingness to do it, proves that the voice of conscience is not his own voice. 4. But how are we to get the courage we need—intellectual courage to follow the truth wherever it leads, to utter it always in love, but to utter it; and the moral courage to obey conscience? Where did those apostles in the early Christian days get theirs? Few of them were more than average men. At the approach of calamity all the disciples forsook Jesus and fled. If there was an exception it was John. Peter disgraced himself pitifully. Yet within a few weeks we find men of such sublime courage that we hardly recognise them as the same men. Not Luther himself at the Diet of Worms, challenging the old ecclesiastical order of centuries, was braver. Not the Prince de Condé was braver as he stood before the King of France when given the choice of three things—first, to go to Mass; second, to die; third, to be imprisoned for life. He replied with regard to the first, "I am fully determined never to go to Mass; as to the other two I am so perfectly indifferent that I leave the choice to your Majesty." These are illustrations of the noble courage of noble men. They seem phenomenal and unusual. But there may be here amongst us men and women, yes, and children, capable of as determined a courage if put in similar circumstances. None of us can tell what we should do in any condition till we get there. It requires as much courage to suffer and be quiet and self-controlled as it does to act. Nothing is more admirable than the quiet domestic courage which many illustrate. I am inclined to adopt and endorse the words of one who has written, "few persons have courage enough to appear as good as they really are." That is the essence of moral courage. The religious life of business men is very shy and timid. There are men in this and every congregation who feel and believe more—far more—than they act. Sydney Smith has said that a great deal of talent is lost to the world for the want of a little courage. With more truth still we may say that a great deal of influence is lost to the Church for want of a little courage. I believe that few persons have the courage to appear as good as they really are. Courage is opposed to the spirit of compromise—the spirit of indolence—the spirit of silence when silence will be interpreted as consent on our part to what we do not believe. The spirit of fear, of indolence, of compromise, of guilty silence has to be overcome. How? The Spirit of God is granted to every seeking soul that the soul may overcome. (*Reverend Thomas, D.D.*)

## CHAPTER XX.

VER. 1. *It came to pass.*—*It came to pass.*—"It came to pass." The phrase occurs again and again in the Old Testament. "It came to pass after four hundred and thirty years that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt," and, "It came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took the harp and played with his hand," and so on. But has it ever occurred to you that the phrase is a very suitable one as describing the different events of earthly history and the varied phases of earthly experience? It hints not only that they happen, but that they are so soon over; they come, but they "come to pass." We do not always realise that, but it is always true. We are not conscious that the earth is moving round the sun, or that it is revolving daily on its axis, yet it is true. Summer and winter, day and night, do not cease, there is perpetual movement.

I. All that comes to us here "comes to pass," *NOTHING LASTS VERY LONG*, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." It is true a Christian has an abiding joy, it is joy that springs from an inward life, but joys that are ours through happy circumstances, through successes, recoveries, attainments, meetings, of these it is as true as of their opposites that give us trouble, they "come to pass." Each period of life comes to pass. Childhood, how swiftly gone! Soon the soft limbs grow robust, the hair loses its flaxen tint; and youth, with its gaiety, novelty, and romance, it comes so quickly, but it "comes to pass." And, of course, this is equally true of all that we mean by the word "opportunity." Thomas à Kempis says, "The wealth of both Indies cannot redeem one single opportunity which you have once let slip." Every day as it passes takes with it in its hand the opportunities that we have slighted and refused to take. The feeling of irritation that you have under trying circumstances. Things have not gone as you wish. Things do go strangely sometimes. So much disappointment and trouble are caused by one screw being loose somewhere. Well, the thing has come, but remember, like everything else, it has "come to pass." Or it may be something much more serious than that. A reversal of fortune, the failure or death of one who, if not the sharer in your heart's affections was one whose presence and favour were of great value to you. That great crisis of yours came, but it "came to pass." God guided you into the wilderness that He might speak comfortably to you. The stormy night full of terrors brought the vision and the morning. But some may be reminding the speaker in the silence of their own thought, there are sorrows in life that come to stay. Yes, you may say, it is the greater griefs, the darker dispensations, that come but do not "come to pass." In proportion to the depth of the wound is its permanency. And yet, even in regard to the greater sorrows that come to us in life there is an example of that which the text expresses. Wounds heal, though the marks of them abide, and though in some cases, like Jacob after the night of wrestling, we halt upon our thigh, there is an assuaging influence in time; the intense grief, the sense of despair, the feeling that all has gone, that life has no recuperative power, and that there is nothing worth living for—of these feelings it is true they come, but they "come to pass." Is not this equally true of very opposite experiences? Though successes and the honours of the world may remain, yet the first feeling of elation and pride of attainment, these "come to pass." We get accustomed to success, it ceases to exhilarate, it no longer gives us satisfaction.

II. Now having given, I trust, sufficient illustrations of this phase of life, of the constant flux of transitory things—they come, but they "come to pass"—let us consider *ITS RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE*. What does it teach us, how should it affect us? 1. What an emphasis it lends to the fact of our own continuance, the continuity of the personal life through all the changes of time! How much has come to pass! Youth, marriage, parentage, maturity, the successive seasons and steps in life, have come to pass. Friends, and even the nearest and dearest of all, have come to pass. We ourselves have changed. There is not a physical atom of our bodies that belonged to us ten years ago; the gait, the expression, all have changed. But all that makes the continuity of the *I*, the fundamental elements of our humanity, the more striking. I am the same being that long years ago first spoke God's name at my mother's knee; the same being as when health gave vigour to the limbs and youth fresh beauty to the cheek; the same being who, once a prodigal son far from God, rioting in pleasure, then miserable in the consciousness of spiritual pauperism, came back unto the Father. The essence, the very constitution of man, is within, it is hidden, it is that which abides. Surely then there is

nothing unreasonable in the faith that I may survive the last change of all? "The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." 2. Then should not the fact that most, if not all, things only "come to pass" have a moderating influence on passion? The things in life which we most regret are moments when we lose control of ourselves. Said Johnson to Boswell, when something had intensely irritated that inimitable biographer, "Consider, sir, how insignificant this will appear six months hence." Boswell's comment on relating it is, "Were this consideration applied to most of the little vexations of life by which one's quiet is too often disturbed, it would prevent many painful sensations." Exactly. There is a great argument for temperance in this text. "It came to pass." 3. Surely, too, this should affect our judgment as well as our feelings. Permanency must be a factor in judgment. Should it not guide us to choose and cherish the good that abides, the better part that cannot be taken away from us? Character is an abiding thing; the evil effects as well as the good effects are lasting, but the pleasure only comes to pass; no one can enjoy the pleasures of sin more than for a season, but "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Surely, too, this should affect our judgment of movements of thought and taste, schemes that men devise for benefiting the race, will they last? Are they only a passing phase, a fashionable craze, a novelty, attractive because it is new? Here they are, they have come; wait a little, and you will see that they have only "come to pass." The Word of God abides, the Christ the Sun of Righteousness is still the sun of the moral world. The Bible has been attacked ever since there was a Bible. (*R. Baldwin Brindley.*)

**Ver. 3. And proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.—***Objections to fasting answered* (on the occasion of a public fast):—A fast may be defined to be a voluntary abstinence from food, as a token of our humiliation before God. **Objections—**1. There may be this outward mark of repentance without any real sorrow for sin. **Answer—**The outward expression then becomes a mockery. 2. A public fast has the appearance of ostentation. **Answer—**If you alone were to keep the fast, it might avert the appearance of ostentation, but in the case of public fasting, it becomes a duty not only really to fast, but to show openly your compliance with a prescribed service, and gladly to embrace the opportunity of humbling yourselves before God. 3. If we feel repentance in our hearts, God, who sees our hearts, does not require to be informed of it by any external expression. **Answer—**The same may be said of prayer and also of all the means of grace which God has appointed. 4. Why should fasting in particular be selected as an external mark of humiliation. **Answer—**(1) Fasting has always been the public token of humility, and this in heathen nations as well as amongst Jews and Christians. (2) It was enjoined of God upon the Jews. (3) It was practised by our Saviour and His disciples; and recommended by them to the world. (4) It has all the qualities that might reasonably be expected in an external act of humiliation. (a) It is a duty easily practised. (b) Requiring no apparatus. (c) Connected with no expense. (d) Simple in its own nature. (e) Equally adapted to all ranks, climates, and places. (f) It involves an act of self-denial. (g) It is an act connected with the mortification of those very appetites whence many of the sins for which we thus humble ourselves proceed. 5. Fasting may disorder a person of weak health, and thus indispose him even for the service of the day. **Answer—**The spirit of the Christian system, insists only on the principle, and leaves the application of it to the case and conscience of the worshipper. 6. A public command to fast is a species of compulsion, and therefore inconsistent with the notion of a voluntary act of humiliation. **Answer—**All that is done by the command of the Government is, to render that convenient which might otherwise be very inconvenient, and that practicable which might be otherwise impracticable. 7. It is unreasonable to expect the poor to give up a day's labour, and to abridge their diet who scarcely ever enjoy a full meal. **Answer—**It is a voluntary sacrifice: God enjoins no man to make it who is unwilling. No man will really be a loser by serving God. (*J. Venn, M.A.*)

**Vers. 5-13. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah.—***Man's extremity is God's opportunity.*—I. THAT IN THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE WE SHOULD EXPECT DANGERS AND EXTREMITIES. TO KNOW OTHER RESOURCES WE MUST LEARN THE WEAKNESS OF OUR OWN. II. THAT IN THESE DANGERS AND EXTREMITIES GOD HAS MANY WAYS OF DELIVERANCE. Human agency but a small part of holy ministry. Birds

and beasts, insects, elements of Nature, and hosts of angels under His command. Hence the folly of proscribing, measuring, or limiting in God's work. III. THAT IN ALL DANGERS AND EXTREMITIES OF LIFE WE SHOULD LOOK TO GOD FOR HELP. (*J. Wolfendale.*) If, when evil cometh upon us.—*The cause of famine and our duty:*—I. WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF FAMINE? 1. Dishonour of God (Ezek. xiv. 13). 2. Blasphemy (Jer. xxiii. 10). 3. Sabbath-breaking (Isa. lviii. 13, 14). 4. Contempt of God's Word (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). II. WHAT SHOULD BE OUR DUTY WHEN GOD SENDS A FAMINE UPON THE LAND? 1. Humbling ourselves before Him in prayer. 2. Showing kindness to our neighbours (Psa. xli. 1, 2). (*Charles A. Maguire, M.A.*)

Ver. 12. For we have no might against this great company.—*Embarrassment:*—I. There are embarrassments concerning our country. II. Many good men and women are often greatly embarrassed about the DIVINE INSPIRATION of every sentence in the Bible. III. Some of us are at times much embarrassed by the CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE. Like a man who looks out of a railway carriage at night and sees nothing, so some of us often look towards to-morrow and see no light. This fear of to-morrow is the wet-blanket of the Christian's life. Act rightly now; do your duty to-day, and never mind to-morrow. (*W. Birch.*) *Moral courage:*—I. There are often TERRIBLE CRISES in men's lives when moral courage is required. Most men are brought at times to a crisis when they are ready to exclaim, "We know not what to do." 1. In the course of secular work. A great company of worldly anxieties. 2. In the course of personal moral culture. Old habits, lusts, propensities. 3. In the process of philanthropic labour. II. THE ONLY SOURCE OF TRUE MORAL COURAGE IS TRUST IN GOD. To trust Him is to trust—1. Love. 2. Wisdom equal to every emergency. 3. Power that can make the weakest mighty. (*Homilist.*) *The helpless Church and the mighty God:*—I want to take this as a text to preach the experience of the people of God. I. AN APPROPRIATION OF GOD. "O our God." II. THE ENEMY TO BE JUDGED. "Wilt Thou not judge them?" The Christian has many enemies, internal, external, and infernal, but self is the greatest enemy the people of God have. Self must be brought under judgment. III. THE SINNER'S POWERLESSNESS. "We have no might." We are spiritual insolvents. Perfect poverty: all true disciples of Christ must be brought into this state. Like Mary, we have nothing to pay, according to Christ's parable, and yet we are pardoned. That is the gospel. IV. THE CHURCH'S PERPLEXITY. "Neither know we what to do." This is often the condition of the Church, V. FAITH'S INVIGORATING LOOK. "But our eyes are upon Thee." (*J. J. West, M.A.*) *Jehoshaphat, face to face with one of life's great emergencies, our model:*—Say we not well, that prayer is a model for presidents, princes, kings, and rulers for all time? But it has wider applications. The King of Judah is confronted by a great and startling peril;—what does he do? I. Let us rather mark WHAT HE DOES NOT DO. 1. He does not underestimate his danger. There are some men who think it wisdom to pooh-pooh a difficulty. Jehoshaphat is not one of them. He is at the farthest remove from foolhardiness or a rash contempt of the impending peril. The men who under-estimate risks are not the wise men or the safe men, morally, politically, or spiritually. There are many of this easy-going—if you please, buoyant—disposition who decline to look probable defeat or disaster in the face. They deprecate your fears, advise you to trust to luck, to go on and take the chances with a stout heart. They are willing to do it in politics, suffering the Ship of State to take her chances among the unknown shoals and rocks! They do it in religion. They discount heavily the Divine requirements, the Divine warnings, the Divine hatred of sin, the tremendous Divine penalties pronounced upon it; for them these all mean nothing or very little. 2. So neither did Jehoshaphat over-estimate them. His was no panic fright. Seen through the atmosphere of our fears, a man may become a monster. The King of Judah certainly discerned the danger and appreciated it to the full, but his brave and trustful spirit was as far as possible removed from panic, desperation, or despair. Jehoshaphat, confronted by a danger which seemed certainly to insure the ruin of his throne and kingdom, declines to regard the case as by any means hopeless, refuses to believe that the Lord's arm is shortened that it cannot save, or His ear heavy that it cannot hear. Who says Moab and Ammon are stronger than God? Any peril is over-estimated of which men cry: "There is no help for him in his God!" 3. Again, if Jehoshaphat does not underestimate or over-estimate his dangers, so neither does he place any false reliance upon human power—his resources, his aids, or himself. Some men trust God when they are bereft of every other ground of confidence, but not till then. They brave



it out till ruin stares them in the face, and then run to cover. Not so Jehoshaphat. The nation had scarcely known a more prosperous and potent reign than his. He had a great army at his command, and, it would appear from the record (chap. xvii. 12-19), could bring upward of a million of men into the field, a drilled and organised militia capable of effective service in emergency. Many a man in his position, and with such military and national resources behind him, would have given God altogether the go-by, and chosen, like Napoleon Bonaparte, to trust in the heaviest battalions. II. Turning from this negative to a positive view, we ask, then what did he do? Where was his real confidence? If ever there was a man who offered effective and ample illustration of the Psalmist's words—"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God"—that man was Jehoshaphat of Judah. What then did he do? He turned to God! And observe how he did this. 1. It was publicly done. The King of Judah made no secret of his dependence on the King of kings. "He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah"—"And out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord"—"And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, and their wives, and their children."—"And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, and said." What announcement of national and personal need and reliance upon Jehovah could be more distinctly open and unreserved than this? 2. And it was as humble and self-renouncing as it was public in its character. National grief is an affecting spectacle. You have it here: "All Judah, their little ones, their wives, their children, stood before the Lord." While speaking in their name, Jehoshaphat exclaimed: "O our God, we have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do." Lowly-mindedness and self-abasement in a whole people, as certainly as in a man, goes far to secure—as truly as it solicits—the Divine favour. 3. Jehoshaphat's plea for Judah was further marked by an unreserved trust in God. With Jehoshaphat Jehovah is all and enough. "Art not Thou God in heaven, and rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in Thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee?" Never a thought here of limitation, or weakness in Him; never a suspicion that He is unable or unwilling to rescue those that trust in Him to the uttermost. No association of His name with any other. He is not to be a helper, a partner, a contributor. He is to be all, to do all! The royal, the national reliance on Jehovah is entire. 4. This brings us to note finally that Jehoshaphat's plea is marked by the fullest recognition of the Divine Sovereignty and Providence. A writer, quoted in one of our leading weeklies, says that, "No secular history would be read in our schools to-day or in the schools of any enlightened community in which the fortunes of nations were represented as controlled by special Divine intervention." The man who wrote that sentence would, we fancy, have been treated with rather scant courtesy if he had chanced in the court of Jehoshaphat. 5. More than this, the King of Judah appeals to the Covenant. Now God loves to be plied with His own promises and reminded of the gracious relations He occupies to us. The Psalmist founded a claim to Divine help and mercy upon the ground of a godly parentage: "O Lord, I am the son of Thine handmaid." Our best resource, our true "help," is not in alliances, in circumstances, in capacities, in luck, in others, in ourselves, but ever and only "in the name of the Lord." (*W. T. Sabine, D.D.*) *Leaving the vote with God*:—Sir Fowell Buxton, who shared with Wilberforce the labours which secured the emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies, ascribed their triumph directly to the power of prayer. Writing to his daughter when all was over, he said, "I firmly believe that prayer was the cause of that division" (vote in the House of Commons). "You know how we waited upon God for guidance, with these words in our hearts, 'O our God, we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee'; and the answer, 'Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.' You will find the whole story in 2nd Chronicles xx. Turn to my Bible; it will open of itself to the place. We had no preconceived plan; the course we took appeared to be the right one, and we followed it blindly."

Ver. 15. For the battle is not your's, but God's.—*Victory the gift of God*:—**I. LET US REMEMBER THE GREAT TRUTH ENUNCIATED HERE, AND LET US IN ALL THANKFULNESS ADDRESS OUR TRIBUTE OF PRAISE TO GOD FOR THE SUCCESS WHEREWITH HE HAS CROWNED OUR EXERTIONS. II. LET US NEVER FORGET THAT WAR MUST ALWAYS BE CONSIDERED AS A JUDGMENT, HOWEVER IT MAY, IN ANSWER TO A NATION'S PRAYERS,**

BE ACCOMPANIED WITH VICTORY. (*J. Bainbridge Smith, M.A.*) *God in battle*:—This battle was—I. A COMMITTED THING TO GOD. The course of events was committed by a specific act to God; and Jehoshaphat and Judah stood in expectation of what He would do. Solemn acts of committal are of great importance in our spiritual life. If we have a bad habit to fight with, or a temper or special temptation to overcome; or if we have to deal with some wayward spirit; or if we want to attain to some grace, or even to do something that is too hard for our own strength, but which lies before us in the path of duty, let each of these be “committed things.” II. AN ACCEPTED THING BY HIM. God espoused Jehoshaphat’s cause: “The battle is not yours.” When we commit matters to God and He accepts them, we may see them in new lights altogether. We often do so, and wonder that we were so blind before. But we need not wonder. The light came in with God. When matters seem very dark to us, let us be fully assured that they are capable of being lit up. 1. “Not yours!” Why not? Because another interest had come in. In one respect the battle is always ours, inasmuch as we are the persons to reap all the substantial benefits, but in another it is God’s; He has interests as well as we. In our trial time, we must view Him as an interested God. 2. How was it not to be theirs? Just by God acting in the matter in His own way. We seem at times more as though we wished God to follow our leadings than that we should follow His. God will lead us by ways which we know not. We have to learn the double lesson of the insufficiency of known ways and the all-sufficiency of unknown. God has continually to teach us the last through the first. By taking the battle out of their hands, God severed Jehoshaphat and Judah from the depressing thoughts of the results being affected by their weakness. Conclusion: Consider Christ, who “committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously,” and Paul, who said, “I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” (*P. B. Power, M.A.*) *The Divine victory*:—I. These words imply THAT THE CAUSE IS THE CAUSE OF GOD. While the Christian life is undoubtedly a personal matter, it is well to look away from our interest and remember that God’s cause is chiefly concerned in the conflict of life. 1. Individually. The Divine ideal for each man is the perfection of each man’s character, and therefore he makes the successful prosecution of the warfare for this end his own. 2. What is true of the individual is also true of the race. A redeemed and regenerated world is the idea of God. Our conflict, therefore, for these ends against the evil of sin and the corruption of the world is a battle of God. II. These words imply THAT THE METHOD OF VICTORY IS DIVINE. If the cause is God’s, the forces we employ and the mode of our warfare must also be His. The Koran might be accompanied with the sword, but not the gospel. Its weapon was a Cross, and in that sign it triumphed. So in all the battle of life he who would win the victory for God must use the Divine armour. Eloquence, learning, wealth, and even physical force, have contributed at times to the success of the Church, but quite as often they have been hindrances. The method of Jesus is meekness and truth, the Word ever spoken, the life quietly lived, and the testimony borne and the faith kept clear and strong in the darkest and most distressful hour. How often in the conflict of life we try to fight the battle in our own way! We seek to conquer indwelling sin, to overcome the attack of the enemy who would destroy us, by some methods of our own. We always fail. III. IF THE BATTLE BE GOD’S, THEN WE MAY BE CONFIDENT THAT THE END WILL BE THE DIVINE END. 1. How many good people are greatly distressed about their final salvation. But salvation is a condition of mind and heart—a present trust and submission to God, each moment assured, and therefore assurance for the next moment. Leave the end with God. It will be God’s triumph. 2. In respect of the final outcome of the conflict between good and evil, in the Church and the world, let us believe that God will take care of the issues, and that all will be well. Let us leave our doubts, and our forebodings, and our mistrustings with Him. (*Llewelyn D. Bevan, D.D.*) *Jehoshaphat helped of God*:—I. JEHOSSHAPHAT’S PRAYER TEACHES US WHEN WE MAY EXPECT HELP OF GOD. 1. In matters which we know God has at heart. 2. In matters for which Christ’s atonement stands pledged. 3. In matters for which we have not ourselves to blame. 4. In matters wherein we are powerless to help ourselves. II. HOW WE MAY SECURE GOD’S HELP. 1. We must come into communion with Him. 2. We must pray for God’s help. 3. We must implicitly follow God’s guidance. 4. Faith is an especial prerequisite to God’s aid. III. HOW GOD’S HELP IS GIVEN. 1. Not always or necessarily in the shape we desire it. God makes spiritual growth His first aim in all His dealings with His people. 2. But when compatible with higher

advantages, God aids us in temporal things. 3. God gives us blessings beyond His promise or our asking. Conclusion: 1. In God's people the Divine help awakens gratitude. 2. Those who are not Christians are never unaffected when they see God help His children: "the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel." (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The battle is not yours, but God's*:—The text addresses a word—1. To all who are bearing Christian protest against evil. 2. To all who are undergoing severe temptation. 3. To all who are labouring for the good of the world. 4. To all who are engaged in controversy on behalf of Christian doctrine. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The Lord's battle*:—Luther's strength lay in the way in which he laid the burden of the Reformation upon the Lord. Continually in prayer he pleaded, "Lord, this is Thy cause, not mine. Therefore do Thine own work; for if this gospel do not prosper, it will not be Luther alone who will be a loser, but Thine own name will be dishonoured." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 17. **Ye shall not need to fight in this battle.**—*The conditions and certainty of obtaining God's deliverance*:—I. That since our enemies' designs are known to us, WE OUGHT TO SET OURSELVES, THAT IS, MAKE WHAT PROVISION WE CAN AGAINST THEM. II. That having thus set ourselves, we must then STAND STILL, THAT IS, DO NOTHING WHICH IS UNLAWFUL, ALTHOUGH IT BE FOR OUR OWN PRESERVATION. 1. By doing any unlawful action we deprive ourselves of God's care and protection. 2. By doing anything unlawful we bring a scandal upon our religion. 3. To do evil, although for our own preservation, would be most likely to unsettle and ruin us. When once we break down the fences of duty, who can tell where we shall stop? If we allow ourselves the liberty of doing one sinful act, we may easily be prompted on to commit a thousand. III. REPENTANCE AND AMENDMENT OF LIFE BEING SUPPOSED, WE HAVE ALL REASON TO HOPE THAT WE SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD. 1. Whatever our danger, God hath sufficient power to save and deliver us. 2. This is to be inferred from the design of God's sending judgments upon any nation. (*Jer. xviii. 7.*) (*Thomas Lynford, A.M.*) **For the Lord is with you.**—*The power behind us*:—In my firewood factory we use a circular saw for cutting timber. Until recently this saw was worked by a crank turned by men. It was slow work, and we bought a gas engine. The saw, driven by this engine, does more work and at less cost. It is the same saw, but the difference lies in the power that drives it. It was driven by hand-power, now by an equivalent for steam, we only need to keep the connecting band tight. It is not a question of our abilities, but of the power behind us. (*F. B. Meyer.*)

Ver. 20. **Believe in the Lord your God.**—*Salvation by faith*:—Judah is to be "saved by faith" from Moab and Ammon, as the Christian is delivered by faith from sin and its penalty. The incident might almost seem to have been recorded in order to illustrate the truth that Paul was to teach. It is strange that there is no reference to this chapter in the Epistles of St. Paul and St. James, and that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not remind us how "by faith Jehoshaphat was delivered from Moab and Ammon." (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) *God-fearing makes grand soldiers*:—Carlyle has taught the present generation many lessons, and one of these is that "God-fearing" armies are the best armies. Before his time people laughed at Cromwell's saying, "Trust in God and keep your powder dry." But we now know that the trust was of as much use as the powder, if not of more. That high concentration of steady feeling makes men dare everything and do anything. Those kinds of morals and that kind of religion which tend to make the firmest and most effectual character are sure to prevail, all else being the same; and creeds or systems that conduce to a soft limp mind tend to perish, except some hard extrinsic force keep them alive. Strong beliefs win strong men, and then make them stronger. (*J. Bagehot.*)

Ver. 21. **And when he had consulted with the people.**—*Shouting before the victory*:—Anybody can sing the *Te Deum* after the battle is over. The German soldiers shouted when they had conquered their foe in the first battle in the war with France. It did not want much of a spirit to do that. The difference between an ordinary man of war and a Christian is this: a Christian shouts before the victory, because he knows it is sure to come. You remember how the people gave a shout of triumph before the wall of Jericho before it fell down. I. We are here

taught THE GREAT DUTY OF PATRIOTISM. In a leading newspaper it was stated that if we were not so good we might do a great many things which would be to our worldly advantage, that we are cursed with a great amount of scrupulousness with respect to our conduct in Ireland, Egypt, and Burmah; that if we were a little more unscrupulous, and did not trouble ourselves about the rights and wrongs of men, we might seize Egypt and settle all our differences in India. Yet all history proves to us that this kind of foreign policy in the long run is an utter fallacy. Why is it that the great Empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Rome have fallen? Why has Spain lost her position and France been humbled in our own day? Because they yielded to the foul ungodly spirit of national self-assertion and aggression; because they did not praise the beauty of holiness. II. Our special object is to ILLUSTRATE THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. We are engaged in a holy war. The Bishop of Durham said the Churches of this country were indebted to the Salvation Army, because they had revived the consciousness of the fact that the Church of God was an army, and that our great business as a country is war—not with one another, but with all human misery. What must we do? Praise the beauty of holiness. If we go forth to war, we must do as Jehoshaphat—we must needs be clothed with the Spirit of holiness. The apostle John was not ready for the great work he was called to until he had put on the power from on high, which was the Spirit of holiness. What was the practical result of the Pentecostal blessing? They were filled with the Holy Ghost. What followed? They were delivered from—1. Cowardice. 2. Selfishness. 3. Ignorance. John Wesley and those with him at Oxford saw, after reading the Bible, that holiness comes by faith. Our great mission is to spread Scriptural holiness. If we march forth to war with confidence in the Spirit of holiness, we shall triumph even without fighting. (*Hugh Price Hughes, M.A.*) *Enthusiastic soldiers*:—When the Spartans marched into battle, they advanced with cheerful songs, willing to fight; but when the Persians entered the conflict, you could hear, as the regiments came on, the crack of the whip, by which the officers drove the cowards to the fray. What wonder that the Spartans were like lions in the midst of sheep! Were we enthusiastic soldiers of the Cross, through God's help, nothing would be able to stand against us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Praise*:—The biographer of Bishop Hannington says, "How often had he encouraged his companions in times of doubt or difficulty with the words, 'Never be disappointed, only praise.'"

Ver. 23. *Every one helped to destroy another.*—*Mutual destruction*:—As we look upon the world at large, how do we see men occupied but as destroying one another! This is a marked character of the lower and worse forms of vice, that each degraded one has a wretched pleasure in bringing down other souls to the same level of degradation and ruin; but the same tendency to mutual destruction is to be seen in the first fallings away from God through all the subsequent steps in the downward road. When young men first lead one another away from home into the strange ways and strange company against which the wise man has raised his voice, what do they but destroy one another? And in the wildness which they call, for a time, pleasure—whatever form the self-indulgence, the sensuality, may wear—every one still helps to destroy another: actually, as to the misused and worn body, and with not less reality as to the corrupted and earth-engrossed soul. In another way, also, not less direct, not less fatal, though less regarded, each wanderer from God helps to destroy others. Example is sufficient to make danger. It would be a bold thing, indeed, for any one human being to look back upon his life, and to say that his example had not been fatal to some other soul. When the Spirit has done His work of converting the heart to God, and the saved sinner turns his eyes upon the sins which made the Cross necessary for him, who will not have Paul's remembrance of having given his word for death? Who will not have John Newton's memory of souls led into wrong, for whom there remains no power of recovery? And what is the record of this kind preparing for the unconverted, when a more true and more awful scene than the great dramatist has conceived of the presence of wronged souls in the visions of the night shall be upon the dying man, or, yet worse, upon the man after death; when the memory, no longer clouded by the flesh, no longer impeded by prejudice or passion, shall recall the multitudes to whom evil has been taught by word or by example; when the immortal spirit shall have the light of eternity poured upon the passed events of life, and the evil example of one look or one word shall be traced through all its train of consequences up to its final ruin of other souls? And this mutual destruction, which belongs to

the very character of the unregenerate man, follows him hither even into the house of God. How is it that the children of our schools have so little profit here? that they know so little of all that passes here? How is it that we so rarely find the truth making its way from either desk or pulpit to the hearts of our docile young ones? Simply because they are destroying one another by combined inattention. The trifle which draws off the mind from prayer, the whispered word which puts some thought of earth in the place of the Bible, the merry smile which catches another's ready eye—these are the means by which every one helps to destroy another; so that grace is provided and preached in vain. And we can scarcely hope that this will be with children alone. In a congregation of merely nominal Christians, met merely for the sake of respectability, the work of mutual destruction would go on in the general support of their common lukewarmness, and every one would help to destroy another in the subjects for conversation prepared in God's house, and the discussion of them in the homeward way. (*David Laing, M.A.*)

Ver. 26. **The valley of Berachah.**—*Bible valleys*.—The word valley is a poem in itself; it is associated with a great deal that is beautiful, comforting, and that gives the soul a sense of security and plentifulness. The Bible is full of valleys, as it is full of wells. What is this valley of Berachah? In some senses I do not care much for it; I know it means the valley of blessing, and that the people, in whom I have not the slightest confidence at all, sang themselves hoarse in the valley of Berachah because they were fed like oxen that were to be slaughtered. That is what the people were doing in the valley of Berachah. To me their blessing goes for nothing until I have deeply inquired into the motive of the hymn, the intent and the genesis of the ringing psalm. It was all right enough within given limits, but the limits themselves were wrong. No doubt there had been great victories, no doubt Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them that had been overthrown; and they found abundance of riches. I listened with reluctance to their selfish psalm. God might see some good in it; God sees good wherever it exists, in how poor soever a form. Sometimes the goodness is like a little starveling thing that has got no blood, no fire in the eyes, and no real trust in the soul—a kind of living, self-vexing speculation. Who would not sing in carrying off all these precious jewels? There is a better time for singing than the time of all this commercial aggrandisement and secular comfort. One little song of patience is worth the whole of this blaring noise. There is another valley mentioned in Numbers xxxii. 9—"the valley of Eshcol." What valley is that? 'Tis the valley of grapes and summer fruits, all of which we may pluck, because it is the intent of Divine love that we should possess ourselves of such luxuriant vineyards. Do we not suddenly come upon the grapes intellectual, social, educational, spiritual? Is not hunger itself often surprised by unexpected plentifulness? Yet sometimes men cannot believe even in this uncrushed wine of the grape; they will hasten home and say, "Do not, we beseech thee, venture in that direction; grapes enough there may be, even to abundance, but we had better remain where we are; can a man live upon grapes? We cannot tell what there may be beyond the river or on the other side of the mountain; here, you see, we have grapes enough; until we have drunken of this wine why should we strike our tents and go ahead?" We may pervert some little mean proverbs of our own, and say, "Better bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of." We have grapes to-day: why should we care about to-morrow? Thus enthusiasm is killed, and all daring, high exploit, and noble endeavour. Ambition may be perverted, but ambition may be one of the forms or aspects of inspiration. It is the future that draws us on, it is the prophetic assurance of some fiery man that a mile further on and we shall have it that keeps the world young and keep the rust away. You cannot silence the divinely inspired and most restless man. We could rouse him and say, Now, why not be content? why not rest and be thankful? of course there may be higher heights and wider landscapes, let us admit all that for a moment; but why worry ourselves about it? there may be something beyond the grave; when we die we shall see what there is. Perhaps not; there is a right way of dying. The world has been kept going by what foolish people would call sensationalism. The very persons who now wrap their rugs around them and enjoy the immediate comfort of the day owe the very rugs in which they wrap themselves to the sensationalism of a former time that could not be kept back from the wilderness or the jungle or the far-away land, no, not by the roaring sea and the tempest

that seemed to be an embodied destruction. Do not live yourselves down into saplessness and reluctance to move. And it is easy for some persons to come and sanction such indolence, but we want the true spies to say to us, "We have seen a land worth going to; it grows life, it is warm with summer, it is boundless with an illimitable hospitality." Young souls, do not be frightened by the man sitting next you, for he is no man, he is hardly a figure in wax. In Hosea there is a glorious valley—"the valley of Achor" (ii. 15). What is the meaning of Achor in this connection? what is the broad spiritual interpretation of Achor? It may be given in two little words, each word a syllable, one of the words a letter: "a door of hope." I have given thee a new beginning, new chances, new opportunities, new mornings; this is not the end, this is the beginning; there is the great wall, go grope in blindness, but with finger-tips that can see; thou wilt in that great blank wall find a door; it is there, I made it, I made it for thee; I know the blankness of the wall, but on my word go thou forth and grope for the door, the Achor that will give thee visions beyond big as horizons, big as firmaments, big as outlined heavens: go forth in the spirit of hope. We are saved by hope. We are not saved by depression. There is a new beginning for you if you please to avail yourself of it. I have heard your story about lost opportunities and a wasted life and failure upon failure. That is atheistic controversy; you had better know it, it spoils your life. What the preacher is set to do is to proclaim the door of hope; salvation by hope, hope that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the book of Isaiah we have a beautiful valley; in chapter xxii. 1 we read about "the valley of vision." That is a large valley, that valley is worth living in. To live with people who have always seen new lights, new possibilities, and new and brighter interpretations than have ever been realised before; that is companionship, that is resurrection. Who cares for those dullards who never see new lights, new companions, and the outlines of new springs and summers in the morning sky? What a poor life it is to live without vision! In Isaiah xxviii. 1 we come into "fat valleys." The poor drunkards were all lying down dead drunk and choked and suffocated with their own wine of fatness. They were pampered creatures; their soul was subordinated to the body, they were all flesh and next to no spirit. There are fat valleys that have no fatness of the true sort. Then there are valleys that are spiritually rich with all manner of nutritious food. There is a wine that has no intoxication in it, there is a wine that does not carry the seal of death. Into those fat valleys, and not into the other, may God lead us. Can Ezekiel be alive and not take his position in this great question of valleys? Ezekiel saw a valley, it was a valley of dry bones. Read chapter xxxvii. 1 and the context. It was an awful valley, a valley of death. "Son of man, can these bones live?" And the son of man said, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." The wisest answer to every Divine inquiry: refer the question back; let Him who propounds the problem solve it. I wish we could read all about the valleys. There is a beautiful historical expression: "So we abode in the valley." We wanted to climb the green banks and get up to the points and coigns that catch the earliest kiss of the sun, but seeing that it was better for us to take another course, seeing that we had better obey God than obey your own fancy or whim, we abode in the valley. Abode in a dark, cold place? No; you are misinterpreting the word valley when you attach such epithets to it. I read of other valleys. The valleys are covered over with corn. That is never said about the snow mountains. Have the valleys no compensations? Is sickness itself without advantages? When you are weak are you not sometimes strong? Where did you get the little flower from? I know not that I have seen aught sweeter for many a day: what is it? The lily of the valley. Tell me there is no compensation in poverty, in sickness, in weakness, and even in failure and disappointment? It was in the valley that the lily grew. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Berachah*:—Suppose every place were to receive its name from what is done in it! How startling and varied would be some of the names! *Berachah* means a valley of blessing.

I. AFTER PRAYER. Jehoshaphat pleads with God on various grounds. II. AFTER CONFLICT in the spirit of praise. III. AFTER VICTORY. The triumph was speedy, signal, and complete. Let the valley of our life often be made a *Berachah*. (*H. Gammage.*)

Vers. 30-34. So the reign of Jehoshaphat was quiet.—*The character of Jehoshaphat*:—I. JEHOSSHAPHAT IS NOT UNLIKE HEZEKIAH AND JOSIAH. II. HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER SEEMS TO HAVE HAD VERY DISTINCTIVE FEATURES IN IT. III. HE WAS DIS-

TINGUISHED FOR HIS SIMPLE AND YET PROFOUND RELIANCE ON GOD. IV. THE RELIGION OF MOST PERSONS OF GREAT POWER AND POSITION—such as those possessed by Jehoshaphat—is usually reserved, and anything but childlike. Conclusion: The practical bearing of this study is that there are many in whom the possession and exercise of great powers, which are usually called worldly, are not by any means inconsistent with the most humble and sincere piety. (*E. Monro.*)

Vers. 35-37. To make ships to go to Tarshish.—*The wrecked fleet*:—I. THE DISASTER TO JEHOSEPHAT'S SHIPPING. II. THE CAUSE OF THIS DISASTER. A judgment from Heaven. If Jehoshaphat had been a mere man of the world probably this disaster would not have occurred, but God would not allow one of His own servants to prosper in such an undertaking. III. THE LESSON WHICH THE DISASTER TEACHES. Do not choose your associates amongst those who do not fear God. Always safest to keep under Christian influences. You will do well even to sacrifice a measure of financial interest and worldly prospect rather than be associated in business with a man who is out of all sympathy with you in religion. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 37. Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works.—*Evil compacts*:—Some partnerships are inexplicable. A Church officer who has led the devotions of the Church has been known to enter into partnership with a grovelling man who never hesitated to use profane language in the warehouse; a generous supporter of good institutions has associated with a man who would have sold his own father if he could have made money by the transaction. And men have wondered who have not known how two could walk together except they were agreed, and who have gone upon the principle that light could have no communion with darkness. The principle of ill-associated partnerships works in two ways: the professing Christian finds it convenient to be able to remit all questionable work to the man who has made away with his conscience and honour, and the said man finds it very satisfactory to point to his professing partner as a proof and pledge that all is straightforward and upright. But is this as it ought to be? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *An immoral fallacy*:—It will be said that business is business, and religion is religion, that there is a distinction between the merchant and the man. Let us admit that there remains this question: When the merchant is damned for his wicked deeds where will the man go? (*Ibid.*) *Evil associations*:—The principle of the text—I. Supplies a LESSON FOR THE YOUNG. What you have to settle first and foremost is, the moral basis on which you are proceeding; you must get the full consent of your judgment and heart and conscience before you give yourself up to any commercial course. II. Is expansive enough to include the subject of MARRIAGE. We do not hesitate to lay down the broad principle that where there is incongruity of religious conviction between man and woman happiness of the deepest and purest kind is entirely out of the question. III. Will permit an earnest word about EVIL COMPANIONSHIP GENERALLY. (*Ibid.*)

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## CHAPTER XXI.

VER. 20. And departed without being desired.—*The undestrableness of a wicked man's life*:—I. SUCH A LIFE IS NOT DESIRABLE ON ITS OWN ACCOUNT. Two facts will show this. 1. His highest enjoyments are unsatisfactory and brief. It is impossible for us to be satisfied in any condition where we have not a consciousness of right, a sense of Divine favour, a hope of a bright future, and the pulsation of holy loves. Observe—(1) How foolish to aim at such a life as this. (2) How foolish to envy such a life as this. 2. That the longer it continues the greater becomes his responsibility. II. SUCH A LIFE IS NOT DESIRABLE ON ACCOUNT OF OTHERS. 1. It renders no real good to others. 2. It produces incalculable mischief. In the spiritual, as in the material, like begets like. "One sinner destroyeth much good." (*Homilist.*)

## CHAPTER XXII.

Vers. 1-9. **And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king.**—*Ahaziah's wicked reign*:—I. ITS BEGINNING THROUGH HOME INFLUENCE. Here all start life in right or wrong direction. Home influence affects societies, Churches, and nations. II. ITS CONTINUANCE BY EVIL COUNSELLORS (ver. 4). A nation with evil legislators like a ship directed in the midst of rocks—in imminent peril. III. ITS END IN JUDGMENT WHICH IT ENTAILED. (*J. Wolfendale*.)

Ver. 3. **For his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.**—*A mother's influence*:—Every first thing continues for ever with the child; the first colour, the first music, the first flower paint the foreground of life. Every new educator effects less than his predecessor, until at last, if we regard all life as an educational institute, a circumnavigator of the world is less influenced by all the nations he has seen than by his nurse. (*W. Richter*.) *A mother's influence*:—Mothers, ye are the sculptors of the souls of the coming men; queens of the cradle, humble or high, ye are the queens of the future. In your hands lie the destinies of men. I am not speaking poetry, but plain fact, which history proves. Nero's mother was a murderess; Nero was a murderer, on a gigantic scale. Byron's mother was proud, ill-tempered, and violent; Byron was proud, ill-tempered, and violent. Washington's mother was noble and pure; Washington was noble and pure. Scott's mother loved poetry and painting; you know what Walter Scott was. Carlyle's mother was stern, and full of reverence; Carlyle very much so. Wesley's mother was a God-like woman; Wesley was a God-like man. The prison chaplain will tell you that the last thing forgotten, in all the recklessness of dissolute profligacy, is the prayer or hymn taught by a mother's lips, or uttered at a father's knee. Yes, when all other roads are closed, there is one road open to the heart of the desperate man—the memory of his mother. (*Great Thoughts*.) *An unnatural mother*:—"For his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly." There must be a mistranslation! All nature is offended by this tremendous affront. Can we not find some other word for "mother"? Any other word will do better, even "father" would not be so objectionable. The one word that cannot be tolerated here is the word that is found, namely, "mother"! We might close the Bible here, and say the book that contains this statement was never inspired. But we cannot do so. Then the word "counsellor" is so full of plan, premeditation, arrangement; the mother was a schoolmistress, with one pupil, and she suggested, invented, culminated ends, whispered, threw out hints, advised bad policies; told him when he was halting because the course was evil to "go on!" Napoleon said, "They that rock the cradle rule the world." To have a cradle rocked by such a mother as Athaliah surely were enough to be foredoomed to endless misery! How sweetly the text would have read had it proceeded on the lines of nature!—for his mother was his counsellor to do bravely. Surely the word "wickedly" is a misprint, traceable to some careless copyist!—his mother was his counsellor to do wisely, patiently, hopefully,—these would have been womanly words, words most motherly, the very words with which we build home and Church and heaven. But the word is "wickedly," and we must regard it in its literal significance. What are mothers doing now? They could be God's foremost ministers. No man can pray like a woman; no man has the art of eloquence as a woman has it; no one can come into life so silently, quietly, blessingly as woman, mother, sister. If women would preach surely the world would listen. They ought to preach; they know the secret of love, they have the answer to the Cross, they can solve in some degree the enigma of sacrifice. This is the very reason of the horrorfulness of the text. If woman had been otherwise, then the word "wickedly" would not have read with such a sense of irony and moral collision as it does in this instance. It is because woman can be so heavenly that she can be so low, and wicked, and bad; it is because she can be so like a saviour that she can be such an engine and agent of ruin. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **And Athaliah reigned over the land.**—*The evil effects of royal marriages*:—A distinguished authority on European history is fond of pointing to the evil effects of royal marriages as one of the chief drawbacks to the monarchical system of government. A crown may at any time devolve upon a woman, and by her marriage with a powerful reigning prince her country may virtually be subjected



to a foreign yoke. If it happens that the new sovereign professes a different religion from that of his wife's subjects, the evils arising from the marriage are seriously aggravated. Some such fate befell the Netherlands as the result of the marriage of Mary of Burgundy with the Emperor Maximilian, and England was only saved from the danger of transference to Catholic dominion by the caution and patriotism of Queen Elizabeth. Athaliah's usurpation was a bold attempt to reverse the usual process and transfer the husband's dominions to the authority of faith of the wife's family. It is probable that Athaliah's permanent success would have led to the absorption of Judah in the northern kingdom. Our own history furnishes numerous illustrations of the evil influences that come in the train of foreign queens. Edward II. suffered grievously at the hands of his French queen; Henry VI.'s wife, Margaret of Anjou, contributed considerably to the prolonged bitterness of the struggle between York and Lancaster; and to Henry VIII.'s marriage with Catherine of Aragon the country owed the miseries and persecutions inflicted by Mary Tudor. But no foreign queen of England has had the opportunities for mischief that were enjoyed and fully utilised by Athaliah. The peace and honour and prosperity of godly families in all ranks of life have been disturbed, and often destroyed, by the marriage of one of their members with a woman of alien spirit and temperament. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*)

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### CHAPTER XXIII.

**VER. 21.** *And the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.—A wicked woman:*—Is it possible that a time may come when people will rejoice that we are dead? Will some pulpits be more honoured by emptiness than by occupancy? Will some businesses have a chance to recover their character when the principals are dead, but not so long as those principals initiate and conduct the policy of the house? Is it possible that a throne may be a fountain of mischief? Questions such as these, penetrating, unsparring, we should thrust into ourselves, that they may work first painfully and then curatively. Is there no explanation given of all this rejoicing over the death of Athaliah? The explanation is given in chap. xxiv. 7—"that wicked woman." This is an alliteration which the grammarian might detest, the rhetorician avoid as a vice in eloquence, but which the moralist must look at with a sense of ineffable shame. "Wicked woman"—it is impossible! It ought to be an affront to the very genius of creation; say dark sun, say waterless sea, say flowerless summer, and the irony might be tolerated, for it might be only a discord in words; but "wicked woman" indicates a possibility that makes all hell easy of belief. This is the moral explanation of the physical disaster. Athaliah was slain with the sword—cry, Murder then! Arrest the homicide, the regicide! But wait; you know not all; the explanatory word is found in the context—"that wicked woman." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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### CHAPTER XXIV.

**VER. 2.** *And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.—Goodness as a morning cloud:*—There are certain characters that are great curiosities. There are also other characters that are great monstrosities. The case of Joash is a very extraordinary one. From his history learn—**I. THAT IT IS A GREAT BLESSING WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE YIELD TO GODLY INFLUENCES.** 1. The first six years of Joash's life were spent in the temple. 2. He was started in life's business in a very admirable way. 3. He was outwardly obedient to the law of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada. 4. He was zealous for the externals of religion. 5. He influenced others for good. **II. GOOD AS ALL THIS IS, IT IS NOT ALL THAT IS NEEDED.** 1. This is not yielding the heart to God. 2. All this yielding to godly influences may exist without any personal, vital godliness whatever. 3. An externally pious character may even prevent men from being saved at all. It may

lead a man to take for granted that he is saved. 4. To be under godly influences year after year, without any great trial or temptation, may leave the personal character altogether undeveloped. We must have some kind of test, or else we cannot be sure of the character. You cannot be sure about principle being in any young man if he has been kept under a glass case, and if his principles have never been tried. The real character of Joash had never come out at all, because Jehoiada, as it were, covered him. His own disposition was only waiting the opportunity of developing itself. I have heard of an officer in India who had brought up a young leopard. It was apparently as tame as a cat. One afternoon, while asleep in his chair, the leopard licked his hand in all tenderness as a cat might have done; but after licking awhile it licked too hard and a little blood began to flow. It no sooner tasted blood than the old leopard spirit was up, and his master was his master no more. So does it happen to many that being shut in, and tamed, as it were, but not changed, subdued but not renewed, kept in check but not converted, there has come a time afterwards when the taste of blood has called out the old nature, and away the man has gone. III. THIS YIELDING CHARACTER MAY EVEN PROVE A SOURCE OF MISCHIEF. The princes of Judah came and "made obeisance to the king." What followed? 1. Joash went off to sin. 2. He refused reproof. 3. He slew his friend's son. 4. Having no faith in God, he robbed the temple, and gave all the gold and treasures unto Hazeael the Syrian. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The goodness of King Joash*:—1. The history of Joash enforces the duty of training ourselves, and those who are under our guidance, to stand alone, and not to rest upon the support of others. 2. Not that we should make small account of the counsel of wise and religious friends. The perfect use of a wise adviser is not to determine for us what we shall do in every particular case that day by day arises; but to help us to store our minds with sound principles, such as we may call up for our own direction when any emergency requires them. 3. There is a great difference in the natural constitution of men's minds. Some are like the creeping plant that grows up rapidly, but must always hang for support upon some external prop. Others are like the oak, slowly developing itself from among the meaner underwood, until it rears its head alone above the trees of the forest. When the trellis or pole decays, the creeper must fall to the ground; the oak abides seemingly unmovable in its own strength. All the culture that man could bestow would never give to the creeper the sturdiness of the oak. 4. But though man cannot change nature God can. He can impart strength to the weakest character. Therefore the way to be firm in what is good, is to take God for your guide and support, and not man (Gal. vi. 4, 5; Phil. ii. 12, 13). 5. There is no contradiction between the duty of seeking and in due measure following the counsel of our good instructors and the duty of standing fast for ourselves in the counsel of God. Just as the office of the moon is to transmit the reflected light of the sun to the dark side of the earth; but if the moon comes between the earth and the sun, it does but darken the earth, by intercepting from it the rays that beam from that great light which is the source of light and heat to both; so the parent, the teacher, or the priest, is to stand for God towards the child, the pupil, or the private Christian, so far as their imperfect knowledge or their spiritual needs require; but not so as to eclipse God, or to make them forget that to God and not to man they are answerable in the last resort for their deeds. (James Randall, M.A.) *Joash*:—Men may constrain us to a temporary amendment, but God alone can control us to a lasting change of character and heart. Circumstances can make any one of you religious for a time, and give you feelings and habits which will make you appear religious to others, and what is worse still, lead you to suppose that the outward appearance is the effect of inward principle. But nothing but the grace of God, and the love of His name and His truth, can produce that piety of heart which withstands temptation, and lives when all earthly agencies are gone which nursed it, because it lives in Him who was pleased to make those earthly agencies the means of grace to the soul. We have in this verse two characters for contemplation. I. JEHOIADA, AS AN EXAMPLE OF INFLUENCE EXERTED FOR GOOD. 1. He had three elements of success with which to work. (1) Power, arising from his priestly office and his marriage relationship. (2) Piety, which gave him the principles on which to discharge his mission. (3) Courage, arising from his faith in God. 2. Note here the relative influence of personal piety. "Joash did that which is right." The nation prospered in every sense through the faithfulness of one man. Clear and consistent personal piety is always a persuasive thing. No treatises upon religion can rival for persuasive power the "living epistles known and read of all men." Our calling as Christians is to win others, as Jehoiada did,

to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord. We have received light that our faces may shine before men. The design of God in our salvation is not only our happiness but our usefulness. II. JOASH AS AN EXAMPLE FOR OUR WARNING. The religion which had its life and influence only from a man was soon forgotten when the source of that influence had passed away. There is a vital difference between the godliness which is the result of external circumstances and that which is the product of internal principle. It is the difference between the galvanised corpse and the living man; the star and the meteor; the flash of the lightning and the action of the sunbeam. There is a false godliness current among men. 1. With some piety is dependent upon policy. 2. With others it is a matter of periods. 3. With others it is a religion of place. 4. With others it is dependent upon the personal influence of some minister, or upon the advice and counsel of a friend. (*C. J. Phipps Eyre, M.A.*) *Life and character of Joash*:—I. THE INSTABILITY OF HIS RELIGION. 1. He was zealous for God under restraint. 2. He degenerated when that restraint was taken away. II. THE HONOUR AND THE DISGRACE OF HIS REIGN. 1. Honourable reforms. 2. Disgraceful crimes. Like Nero after the death of his teacher Seneca, the philosopher, he was stained with crimes. III. THE DISASTROUS END OF HIS LIFE. Conclusion: Learn—1. The responsibility of those to whom the care of young persons is entrusted. 2. Caution those yet under guardianship and tutors and friends. 3. The awful end of those who turn aside from hopeful beginnings. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *The Jehoiadas of society*:—It would seem to be about the last thing men do, to estimate properly the value of subtle and silent influences, the magic and wizardry of noble character. We may even be ashamed to do certain things in the presence of the Jehoiadas of society. We are not ashamed of the things themselves, nor are we unprepared to make experiments in regard to them; but whenever we would put forth our hand to begin the experiments we see the observing Jehoiada, and withdraw from the pernicious attempt. So it is that there are trustees of commercial and social honour, men who would never do the dishonourable deed, speak the calumnious word, or mislead the sentiment of the market-place in times of strong temptation and peril. We rely upon them as disinfectants, keeping the commercial atmosphere pure, and discouraging in the most positive and decisive manner the spirit and action of men who are low-minded and selfish. These Jehoiadas deliver no lectures upon commercial morality, nor do they in any manner that can be charged with conceit display their own virtues; they simply go on their straightforward course, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, and the result of their presence and character is that even the worst men are restrained, weak men are confirmed in good resolutions, and men whose character needs inspiration receive it from their example. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 4-14. That Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord.—*The temple repaired*:—It is worthy of note that in the mere outline of a reign extending over twenty years, in very exciting times, space should have been taken to record so minutely the repairing of the temple. No less remarkable is it that the initiative in this great work was due to Joash and not to Jehoiada—the king, not the priest. There was need for some one to lift the standard for Jehovah and His worship. For since the accession of Jehoram, the wicked son of the good Jehoshaphat, there had been a steady decline toward idolatry. Spurred on by his wife, Athaliah, the worthy daughter of the monster Jezebel, Jehoram allowed "high places" to be built to the heathen deities. Dying after less than ten years of rule, of an agonising internal disease, the crown descended to his one surviving son, Ahaziah. After a reign of little more than a year, during which he was wholly under the power of his mother, Ahaziah was slain by Jehu while on a visit to Israel. Athaliah seized the throne and ruled for six years, fostering and encouraging heathenism to the utmost. To make her usurpation more secure, she had, at the beginning of her reign, as she supposed, compassed the death of all aspirants to the crown. But, through the cunning and daring of Jehoiada and his wife, one boy, Joash, a son of Ahaziah, was preserved. When the time was ripe the priest led a revolt against the queen, putting the young Joash, only eight years of age, upon the throne, and causing the death of Athaliah. A great opportunity opened up for the young prince. Jehoiada carefully instructed him during his childhood in the religion of Jehovah, that, when he came to the years of responsible reign, he might zealously foster the old faith. But, unfortunately, Joash was not strong enough for the task. As long as he was under the tuition of Jehoiada he did fairly

well, though idolatry was suffered to extend itself; but after the death of the old priest the pressure from heathenism was too great for his weak nature to resist, and Joash followed the path of his immediate predecessors. True, the third verse of our lesson may not indicate anything more than a resemblance to heathen customs, inasmuch as they may have worshipped Jehovah in the "high places"; still, having adopted that mode of heathen worship, it became easier to introduce others, and thus the way was opened for that awful apostasy from God when incense was burned to strange gods "in every single city of Judah." Nevertheless, Joash should have full credit for the one luminous work of his whole reign—the repair of the temple. We shall find his plans of gathering and expending the money worthy of our careful study.

I. THE PLANS OF COLLECTION. 1. The first one, undoubtedly the king's, shows him in a favourable light. He assumes no priestly prerogative or authority. He simply enjoins the priests to do their legitimate work—"go out into the cities of Judah and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of the Lord." The parallel account in 2 Kings xii. 4, gives the details of the plan. Three methods of collecting the money are there described. First, "The money of every one that passeth the account." Bähr considers these words an incorrect translation of the original, preferring "money which passes over"—that is, current money. If he is right, then no separate method is indicated. But the weight of authority is in favour of the old translation, and, following this, the half-shekel which was paid for every one that was numbered, from twenty years old and upward (Exod. xxx. 13, *seq.*), seems to be meant. Second, "The money that every man is set at"—that is, the amount prescribed by the priests for those who made a "singular vow" according to the law in Lev. xxvii. 1-8. The third was the free-will offering, and probably more dependence was placed on this than upon either or both of the other methods. Taken all in all, this plan was compulsive and judicious, and deserved to succeed. But it failed, and why? There appears to have been a combination of reasons. The words, "Howbeit the Levites hastened it not," furnish a hint that the appointed collectors, on whom the success of the plan largely depended, did not enter heartily into its prosecution. They were expected not only to take what the people brought in voluntarily, but actively to solicit "every man of his acquaintance" (parallel account in 2 Kings xii. 5). Whether they did not relish moving, at the orders of the king, or were too lazy to "go out into the cities of Judah," we can only conjecture. We only know they did not hasten. No doubt, too, there was much inertia on the part of the people themselves. The general indifference to the old system of worship and the inevitable corruption which followed dabbling with heathen practices both contributed to a lethargy which could only be broken up by some extraordinary method. But the great reason lies deeper, much deeper. Soften the account as we will, there was wide-spread dissatisfaction with the course pursued by the priests. Whether they had good grounds for suspicion or not, the people believed the collectors had misappropriated the funds. And it is hard to clear them of this charge. Doubtless some money came in from loyal souls who longed to see God's temple shining with the olden glory. Indeed, we know that some did, because when the king called on the priests for a report he ordered them to "take no more money." Some, then, had been gathered. But what became of it? The priests never made any return thereof. True, it condones the fault somewhat to plead that the regular sacerdotal revenue had largely fallen off during the prevalence of idolatry, and that the priests found themselves hard pushed for funds for their subsistence and the temple-worship, and thus were forced to use what came into their hands for immediate needs. But to divert money given for a specific purpose to other channels, however proper, is practical embezzlement. And it is easy to see how this course would breed dissatisfaction and revolt among the people. Their joyful acceptance of the second plan, and the hearty liberality exhibited, show conclusively that we have not argued unjustly. And the taking of the whole matter out of the hands of the priests by the king confirms our position. It would appear that Joash gave ample time for the successful working of this first plan. Not until the twenty-third year of his reign did he call the priests to account. This does not mean, of course, that the collectors had been at work twenty-three years, for we are not told in what year they received their commission. It certainly could not have been in the first years of Joash's reign, because he began to rule at the age of eight.

2. But having abandoned the first plan, the king quickly unfolded his second one. This was as simple as it was effective. A box or chest, securely locked, with a hole cut in the lid to admit pieces of money, was first prepared. It was placed at the entrance-gate to the priest's court on the right. Royal proclamation was then made

of the new plan throughout the land, and the people exhorted to bring in their contributions in accordance with the law found in Exod. xxx. 12-16, and see their money deposited in the chest. The part of the priests was the mere perfunctory duty of receiving the money and putting it into the receptacle in the presence of the donors. And now money fairly flowed in. Nor was it given grudgingly. "All the princes and all the people rejoiced." When the chest was full the priest sent his scribe and the king his secretary, and the two emptied it, weighed the money, bound it up in bags (2 Kings v. 23), and carried it back to its place. The process was repeated until an abundance was gathered for the purpose. The plan was a great success. And why? Doubtless the novelty of the plan accounts partly for it. The curiosity to look upon the first money-chest of this description would bring in many contributions that otherwise would not have been given. But, chiefly, every person saw his gift deposited in the receptacle which was inaccessible to any but the regularly appointed officers, and thus he could be reasonably sure that his money would be laid out for the purpose he intended. Herein lies the chief cause of the plan's success—every piece of money was strictly accounted for, and there was no possible chance for a misuse of the funds. II. THE EXPENDITURE WAS AS NOTEWORTHY AS THE GATHERING. The same clear-headed, far-seeing intelligence was behind it. Putting the two accounts together, it is plain that overseers were appointed who had general charge of the repairs. The words, "such as did the work of the service of the house of the Lord," in the twelfth verse, indicate that the overseers were Levites. They had authority to employ artisans of different kinds—masons and carpenters and workers in brass and iron—and also to purchase the needed materials. Into their hands went the immense sums which had been collected, and to them the workmen looked for their wages. And what seems strange—almost incomprehensible—in view of the careful scrutiny exercised over the collections, their overseers were not required to give account of their stewardship (2 Kings xii. 15). That they were honest and "dealt faithfully" is apparent from the fact that, after finishing their task and paying all the bills, they brought back a remainder to the king and Jehoiada. With this unexpended balance they were enabled to furnish the temple anew with the vessels necessary for the ritual service (1 Kings vii. 49, 50). The old ones had been devoted to Baalim (ver. 7). An apparent discrepancy exists at this point between our account and that in 2 Kings xii. 13, where the writer declares that vessels were not made of the "money that was brought into the house of the Lord." Rawlinson seems to explain the matter satisfactorily by showing that "all that the writer of Kings desires to impress on his readers is, that the repairs were not delayed by any deductions from the money that flowed in through the chest on account of vessels or ornaments of the house. What became of the surplus in the chest after the last repairs were completed he does not care to tell us. But it is exactly this, the application of which is mentioned by the writer of Chronicles." We may venture to add our opinion that the writer of Kings, in enumerating the special points of the overseers' responsibility, mentions, casually, that they were not responsible for the furnishing of the temple with the appropriate vessels. Their special business was to look after the repairs. So, after many years of dilapidation, the people saw their glorious sanctuary shine in all its former glory. The smoke of sacrifice again rose heavenward, calling the backsliding children of Israel to the faith of their fathers. III. PRACTICAL WORDS. 1. One of the great problems which ever confront the Church is the financial one. Doors open on every hand, and consecrated workers wait to go through them, but the treasuries are empty. Settle this matter of finance, and the spiritual interests will progress correspondingly. 2. The contribution box is not a "Vandal in the house of God." It is the legitimate successor of Jehoiada's chest, and its regular use should be considered a part of worship. 3. The people who give the money have a right to know where it goes. And if it be diverted from its proper use, those who administer should not complain if there follow a falling off in contributions. Men will have honest dealing in Church finances. (*H. H. French.*) *The temple repaired* :—The work of Joash was to repair the temple and restore the sacrificial worship. The bright side of Joash's rule divides itself into the man and his mission—his motive and his method. I. JOASH HAD TO CONQUER, SPIRITUALLY, HIS OWN HEART AS WELL AS THE HEART OF HIS PEOPLE. To know Joash you must understand—1. His lineage. Heredity did little for, but much against, the formation in him of a pure character. Athaliah and Jezebel were his grandmother and great-grandmother. 2. His environment. This was Jehoiada. (1) He was a father to Joash. (2) He was the impersonation of piety. (3) His patriotism so

blended with his piety that though separable in thought, they were scarcely distinguishable in action. (4) Jehoiada's philanthropy is seen in his self-restraint in the hour of triumph. Only two perished—Athaliah the usurper and the idolatrous priest. II. THE MISSION OF JOASH WAS TO EFFECT AMONG HIS PEOPLE A GENUINE REFORMATION. The reconstruction of the temple he viewed as the road to religious revival and reformation. Destruction and reconstruction are alternating or synchronous processes ever manifesting themselves in the efforts of God's people. Joash is the resultant and embodiment of both these forces. Destruction is easy, and to wicked men only too natural (ver. 7). Construction, and still more reconstruction, is as difficult as destruction is easy. III. JOASH WAS UNSELFISH IN HIS MOTIVE. 1. The times called loudly for reform. 2. Joash aimed at a revival of religion. (1) Revivals take their rise in the individual heart. (2) Revivals of religion, if genuine, are contagious. (3) Revivals naturally induce co-operation. IV. THE METHOD OF JOASH FOR INCREASING MEN'S INTEREST IN RELIGION WAS THE RESTORATION OF THE LORD'S HOUSE. A dilapidated temple of God is painfully significant. The great collection under Joash for the temple is a model for Christian beneficence. Dimly shadowed in the people's offering under Joash, but distinctly taught in the letters of Paul, are eight rules of Christian giving. We should give—1. By principle and habit. 2. In the spirit of stewardship. 3. According to ability. 4. Willingly and cheerfully. 5. Secretly as a general thing, as unto the Lord, and not unto men. 6. As an act of worship. 7. In faith, venturing on God, as did the widow with her two mites. 8. Intelligently, as to the object. Application: Mankind is "the house of the Lord" in ruins. We are under solemn obligation to reconstruct this broken and shattered temple. (*W. Landrum, D.D.*) *Joash repairing the temple:—*I. THAT THE PROVIDENCES OF GOD CONNECTED WITH THE HOUSE OF THE LORD CALL FOR GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE. II. THE MORAL VALUE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE COUNTRY IN WHICH IT STANDS DEMANDS HONOURED RECOGNITION. III. THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF SACRED PLACES SHOULD BE FITLY ACKNOWLEDGED. I lately heard an eminent business man say, "Forty-six years ago yesterday noon the Holy Spirit came into my soul. Yesterday I walked to the place and adored the ground where He blessed me, and remembered that for forty-six years He had talked with me and kept me." IV. THE HOUSE OF GOD CAN BE PROPERLY CARED FOR ONLY BY REGULAR, SYSTEMATIC EFFORT. V. GOD HAS, TO A GREAT DEGREE, INTRUSTED THE BEAUTIFYING OF HIS HOUSE TO THE YOUNG. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Repairing the temple:—*1. To each one among us there is a temple which should be far holier in his eyes than was even the temple at Jerusalem in the eyes of the children of Israel. 2. This holiest of temples, a man's own self, is exposed to injury and decay. 3. As year passes after year, let us be reminded to repair each one of us to that house of God which is built within him, and which has been dedicated to the worship of God by the Holy Spirit which dwells in it. 4. In repairing the spiritual temple, one of our main purposes should be to ascertain what in it needs to be stripped away and what demands preservation. 5. The things to be discarded are—(1) Old enmities; how they interfere with the pure worship and mar the quiet beauty of the house! (2) Old weaknesses and vanities. (3) Old habits of self-indulgence and self-degradation. (4) Old sins, presumptuous sins, secret sins. 6. The things which must be retained are—(1) Old friendships. (2) Old habits of order and punctuality, of truth, of kindness and prayer. 3. Old virtues. (*F. W. P. Greenwood, D.D.*) *Howbeit the Levites hastened not.—Indifference rebuked:—*There is a distinct tinge of suspicion and "whipping up" in his injunction to "hasten the matter." Half-heartedness always means languid work, and that always means failure. The earnest people are fretted continually by the indifferent. Every good scheme is held back, like a ship with a foul bottom, by the barnacles that stick to its keel and bring down its speed. Eager zeal has in all ages to be yoked to torpid indifference, and to drag its unwilling companion along like two dogs in a leash. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. *And cast into the chest until they had made an end.—Compulsory and free-will offerings:—*The restoration of Solomon's temple by Jehoiada under Joash's authority is a remarkable instance of cheerful giving, of a truly voluntary offering. The money was not raised by a royal edict imposing a subsidy, nor were the workmen impressed for service for so many months in the year. By taxation and by forced labour, or levies, had Solomon's temple been erected. Such indeed was, and is, the almost invariable custom of Eastern monarchs in the construction

of all great works, whether religious or secular. Though the prince might be lauded as a patron of religion or of art, a rankling sense of oppression and injustice remained in the breasts of the toilers. This Rehoboam had found to his cost, when his people demanded relief from the burdens which the glories of Solomon had entailed on them. We may illustrate this by an interesting inscription at Abilene. A splendid aqueduct and military road have been engineered along the face of the lofty cliff which bounds the deep valley. At the commencement of the aqueduct is the long inscription in honour of the Emperor Trajan, for whom the gratitude of posterity is claimed because of this great achievement. But below the inscription is chiseled deep on the face of the rock, in letters of a rather different shape, added, no doubt, after the emperor's departure, "*Impensis Abilenorum*"—"At the expense of the people of Abilene." (*Canon Tristram.*)

Vers. 15, 16. **Jehoiada waxed old.**—*A message for the aged*:—I. EXAMINE THE NAME OF THIS AGED PRIEST. "Jehoiada"—"one who has knowledge of Jehovah." 1. He had been experimentally acquainted with Jehovah in His fatherly and merciful character. 2. He had as priest special opportunities of gaining acquaintance with God. II. CONSIDER HIS BENEFICENT INFLUENCE IN—1. Instructing the youthful king. 2. Acting as regent of the kingdom. 3. Patriotically serving his country and promoting the well-being of her people. 4. Doing good to, and in connection with, the house of God. III. CONTEMPLATE THE HONOURED CLOSE OF A LONG AND USEFUL LIFE. (*Fairfax Goodall, M.A.*) *Religious instructors useful to civil society*:—Some have conjectured that these words were a part of an epitaph put upon Jehoiada's tomb. They express the high sense which the nation entertained of his eminent usefulness in his sacred profession. I. THE COMMON OPINION OF MANKIND RESPECTING THE USEFULNESS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTORS IN CIVIL SOCIETY. The opinion of the world upon this subject is evidenced by their uniform and immemorial practice. Jews, Christians, and heathen have universally agreed to support religious teachers. II. THIS COMMON OPINION OF MANKIND RESPECTING RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTORS IS WELL FOUNDED. 1. The common opinion of the world is generally just. Men seldom form a wrong judgment of those things which come under their own observation and experience. 2. Another argument is drawn—(1) From the duties which the ministers of religion ought to teach. (a) The duties which rulers owe to their subjects. (b) The duties which subjects owe to their rulers. (c) Every private as well as public duty. (2) From the motives by which they ought to enforce all their religious instructions. (a) The being and presence of the all-seeing and heart-searching God. (b) The infinite authority of all His precepts and prohibitions. (c) The controlling influence of His universal providence. (d) Future and eternal rewards and punishments. III. SUGGESTIONS. 1. Since men in all ages have generally and justly agreed in the opinion that religious instructors are useful in civil society, it discovers no less ignorance than presumption in those who adopt and endeavour to propagate the opposite sentiment. (1) It betrays want of knowledge in the science of politics. (2) It betrays ignorance of the impotency of human laws. 2. None are fit for civil rulers who would exclude religious instructors from civil society. 3. A people ought to consider the gift of wise and faithful ministers as a great public blessing. 4. It is the wisdom and duty of civil rulers to favour the cause of religion and employ every proper method to promote the general diffusion of religious knowledge. 5. It argues a great degree of infatuation in those who govern to oppose or restrain religious instruction. 6. It is extremely difficult for civil rulers to subvert a good government while religious teachers faithfully discharge their duty. 7. Ministers of the gospel ought to exert all the power and influence which their sacred office gives them to prevent the ruin of the nation. 8. We have great reason to fear the displeasure of God for neglecting and abusing the ministrations of His Word. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Vers. 19–21. **Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord.**—*Judah's apostasy*:—I. PROPHETIC DENUNCIATION OF APOSTASY RESENTED. II. ZECHARIAH'S DEATH WAS PARALLEL WITH THAT OF ST. STEPHEN. 1. His offence was the denunciation of the sin of the leaders of Judah (Acts vii. 51–53). 2. Stoned as a blasphemer. III. CONTRAST IN THE SPIRIT OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY—1. Zechariah's last words: "The Lord look on it and requite it." 2. Stephen's: "Lord lay not this sin to their charge." IV. REFLECTIONS. 1. The value of a wise and true friend. Jehoiada's influence on Joash. 2. The necessity of a moral refor-

mation as well as a political to secure permanent results in religious changes. The reformation under Joash was merely outward conformity. V. THE CERTAINTY THAT A FAITHFUL MINISTRY IMPLIES THE UNPOPULARITY OF THOSE WHO EXERCISE IT. 1. All the prophets suffered under Judaism (Matt. xxiii. 35; Luke xi. 51). 2. Christ, Stephen, the apostles, the early Christians. Reformers all through history. 3. Human nature always the same. It hates those who attack its sins. VI. THE SPIRIT THAT RESENTS FAITHFUL REPROOF ALWAYS ENTAILS RETRIBUTION ON ITSELF (ver. 23). To do wrong and refuse instruction is the greatest misfortune a man can suffer. VII. THE NECESSITY TO DO RIGHT FOR DUTY'S SAKE, WITHOUT EXPECTING GRATITUDE OR ACKNOWLEDGMENT. (*J. C. Geikie, D.D.*) *The goodness of King Joash*:—1. In ten years from the death of Jehoiada, Joash was so utterly another man that you cannot recognise in him one feature of that godly disposition which distinguished his earlier years. He is a sad illustration of the deceitfulness of the human heart; of the weakness of the natural man; and of the perishing nature of that impulsive goodness which rests solely for its permanence upon the constraining influences of others. 2. Joash still represents a large class—persons of warm and susceptible feelings, acting habitually under impulse, of a temper of mind volatile, or pliable, or keenly sensitive, upon which impressions are easily made and as easily effaced. 3. Speaking as I am in a university city, I am reminded that I can point to no spot more suggestive than this of the evanescent quality of that light of the soul which is simply reflected, of that transient goodness which walks by sight and not by faith. How many young men have gathered here, filled with noble emulation, and strong in their own resolution to fulfil the purpose of their coming! And what has followed? First the whisper of the arch-tempter, "You are free; eat, drink, and be merry." Then the sceptic, asking contemptuously, "What is truth?" The controversial humourist, commending his ingenious sophistries with insidious drollery. The listless idler, intruding his unwelcome presence upon the conventional hours of study. The voluptuary, putting his bottle to his companions, and filling them with shame for glory. The sinner in the city, whose house is in the way to hell. The tradesman with his offer of unlimited credit. The sordid money-lender, weaving his web of usury. These, and such as these, have "made their obeisance," like the princes of Judah; and behold, Jehoiada is gone, and Joash has hearkened to them! He has left the God of his fathers. He cannot prosper, because God has forsaken him. 4. Oh, if I am to send my son to fight the good fight of faith, to wrestle against the powers of darkness, let me stablish him with this fact as the counterpoise and antidote to the delusions of the world—that he is now a responsible being. (*Henry Drury, M.A.*)

Ver. 22. But slew his son.—*Joash and Jehoiada*:—The picture here drawn of the failure of the best of tutors and governors is unfortunately only too typical. Julian the Apostate was educated by a distinguished Christian prelate, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and was trained in a strict routine of religious observances; yet he repudiated Christianity at the earliest safe opportunity. His apostasy, like that of Joash, was probably characterised by base ingratitude. At Constantine's death the troops in Constantinople massacred nearly all the princes of the imperial family, and Julian, then only six years old, is said to have been saved and concealed in a church by Mark, Bishop of Arethusa. When Julian became emperor, he repaid this obligation by subjecting his benefactor to cruel tortures because he had destroyed a heathen temple and refused to make any compensation. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*)

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## CHAPTER XXV.

Vers. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.—*Half-hearted, and therefore a failure*:—It was not because Amaziah was not sinless that his life proved such a failure, but because he was not thorough-going in his principle and piety. English life at present seems to be afflicted with a plague of levity. There is so much hollowness and unreality, so much veneer in character and work, that it behoves us to preach aloud the gospel of thoroughness. A short time ago some workmen were engaged in trying to remove a piece of old London wall. They tried with hammers, then with pick-axes,



but to no purpose, the wall seemed to smile at all their efforts; at last they were obliged to have recourse to boring, and blowing it up like a piece of solid rock. That is hardly the way they build nowadays, for a man might almost push over some of our brick walls with his hand. Now, this is just an illustration of what I mean, the want of thoroughness in every branch of industry and in every walk of life. When a man's own character is not solid, permeated through and through with Christian principle, you cannot have any guarantee of the genuineness of his work. Shams abound everywhere. Gilt and paint carry the day. Ours is an age of tinsel. And the worst of it is that this unrealness characterises much of the religion amongst us. I sometimes meet with a horrible form of Antinomianism, which virtually says, "Anything will do for me—I am a disciple of Christ"; and so the work is actually more slovenly and imperfect because the individual claims to be "not under the law, but under grace." Why, it is almost as monstrous as the proposal a good young man made to his landlady, that his own excellent Christian example should serve in lieu of weekly payment for his lodgings! A man—I don't care who he is—dishonours Christ when any other person is put to disadvantage by his piety. If you imagine you are more free to do slipshod work because you are a Christian, I say, it is precisely the reverse. It is just because you claim to be the Lord's that any sort of work will not do. Bearing His name, you are responsible to Him for every detail of your daily life. If your secular duties are more imperfectly discharged because you are a believer, you do great wrong to the Redeemer. If you snatch a little of your employer's time to scatter tracts, or prepare for a Sabbath class, or even to read your Bible; or if, in business hours, your thoughts are so given to spiritual themes that you cannot do justice to your work, in any of these cases you do real harm to religion. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

*The character of Amaziah*:—This history is adduced to lead to self-scrutiny. I. THE ACT OF ASSEMBLING is in accordance with God's revealed wishes; and therefore the act of assembling is a right act. But am I able to believe that every man and woman joins the assembly from such motives as would stand the test of Heaven? "Not with a perfect heart." II. AGAIN, IN THE MATTER OF LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD PREACHED. Some listen from the desire of passing away a dull hour—as a sort of religious entertainment. Alas for the perfect heart! III. AS TO YOUR CONDUCT OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE SANCTUARY. You are upright and honourable in trade. But why? It is a sad thing when a man's actions are right because he wishes to be aggrandised, or because he wishes a high place in human estimation, and knows not the only right motive—a desire to please Him "who hath loved us, and given Himself for us." (*T. W. Thompson, B.A.*)

*Not with a perfect heart*:—Off Cape Horn we witnessed a singular sight. For some miles there was a narrow strip of water, where the great waves flew in broken spray and dashed high over the ship. On either side the sea was comparatively calm, whilst this boiled with fury, rolling and surging. Yet there was no rock about which the sea surged, nor was there any such fierce wind as to account for it. Overhead the air was thick with sea-fowl. Thousands of the birds dived into this troubled water. The smaller fish were, I suppose, flung up by the toss, and thus fell a prey to the birds. I asked, naturally, what was the reason of this strange sight, and found it was the point at which the tide met the strong current of the sea, and here they raged together. Within, the tide only ran, and it was calm. Without, the current prevailed, and there, too, was calm. On this troubled bit they met, and neither prevailed. It is the picture of those who are at once too religious to belong to the world—too worldly to belong to religion; torn by both and satisfied by neither. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

*Whole-hearted religion required*:—At one of the conferences between the Northern and Southern States of America during the war of 1861–1866 the representatives of the Southern States stated what cession of territory they were prepared to make, provided that the independence of the portion that was not ceded to the Federal Government was secured. More and more attractive offers were made, the portions to be ceded being increased, and those to be retained in a state of independence being proportionately diminished. All the offers were met by a steadfast refusal. At last President Lincoln placed his hand on the map so as to cover all the Southern States, and in these emphatic words delivered his ultimatum: "Gentlemen, this Government must have the whole." God cannot share us with the world. (*A. Plummer, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?—*Self-made difficulties*:—

I. THE PATH OF DUTY WAS PUT CLEARLY BEFORE AMAZIAH. "Send the army of Israel away." II. HE HESITATED TO TREAD IT BECAUSE THERE WAS A SELF-MADE DIFFICULTY IN THE WAY. So with many to-day. 1. Worldly pleasure. 2. Worldly interests. (1) A bad business, one you cannot ask God to bless. (2) A legitimate business that is not conducted on Christian principles. 3. Worldly companions. 4. Bad habits. III. GOD RECOGNISES THE DIFFICULTY. "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." When our first missionaries went to India, Dr. Cope died on the voyage. Some letters of introduction to English gentlemen in India had been written. When his friends arrived they went on shore and told how Dr. Cope had died and been buried in the deep sea. As they knew nothing of the language of India they asked advice, and the advice given was, "Take the first vessel that sails for England and go home again." One of the young men of the party said, "That is out of the question. I came here to preach the gospel, and, God helping me, I mean to do it." They said, "If you bring God into the matter, that alters it altogether." Bring God into your pleasure and into your business, and that will alter them altogether. (*Charles Garrett.*) *God able to remunerate fidelity.*—I know a widow whose husband died and left her with a little family to struggle for. She opened a little shop in the suburbs of the city, when one of the agents of a wine-merchant waited upon her to ask her to be an agent for the sale of strong drink. She said, "Never a drop shall enter my house." He said "It will help you so much." She said, "If it helps me some, it will harm me more. I have children around me, and whether I prosper or not, I will not gain anything to the injury of my fellow-creatures." She has done wonderfully. An intimate friend of mine went to see her, and said, "I cannot understand how you get on, and why so many come to your shop, for they pass a number of good shops to come to yours." She said to her boy, "George, you are fond of ciphering; get down your slate and put down how far off a man must live from my shop that God cannot bring him there." That settled it. "God is able to give more than this." (*Ibid.*) *Rigid integrity may stand in the way.*—There can be no doubt that a certain flexibility and elasticity of soul and conscience may make a man get on, as concerns this world, when rigid integrity would stand in his way. Nothing would be easier than to mention striking instances in which men threw away their chance of the highest places by an act of injudicious honesty. A trader who never puffs his wares as better than they really are may not drive such a business as the brazen individual who never spares the trumpet. A preacher who sets forth sound doctrine to people who have not been accustomed to it, and who do not want it, may make himself for a time obnoxious enough. But let us speak the truth and live the truth, no matter what we may lose by it. (*Ibid.*) *What shall we do for the hundred talents?*—I. THE COMMAND GIVEN. "Let not the army of Israel go with thee." 1. It shows us God's disapproval of union with the enemies of the truth. The children of Ephraim had departed from the Lord, His favour was withdrawn from them: Judah, if he hope for success, must send such helpers away. Yes, truly "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." To join affinity with such, as Amaziah did, is to run into temptation and a snare. 2. But the command of God thus given leads us to notice, further, that His disappointment of our hopes is in mercy, not in wrath. Perhaps to the mind of Amaziah this only was wanting to ensure victory: his army was strong, and could he but procure this aid from Israel all would be secure; and yet no sooner are they come than the command is given. It is often thus in God's dealings with our souls. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." "Could I but be placed in such circumstances," saith one, "Were but this difficulty removed," is the thought of another, "then should I grow in grace, and prosper in my soul." But it cannot be, and you are discouraged. And yet it is in mercy, not in wrath, that your wishes are crossed. 3. Observe that the command calls for immediate compliance. Not after aid received in the battle, but now in the face of danger, at the risk of injury from those sent away, injury, too, that was not feared without cause (ver. 13). God's command will not bear delay. II. THE DIFFICULTY STARTED. "And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?" With some awe upon his mind, a conviction of the necessity of obedience, Amaziah liked not the cost. This is the difficulty proposed, "What shall we do for the hundred talents?" There was the divided mind. On the one side was his fear of the displeasure of the Lord, without whose help he well knew he could not prosper; on the other side the hundred talents weighed down his purpose—he could

not brook the loss of so large a sum. Ah! who would not obey God if he might do it without cost? Who would not be the servant of Christ, if he might be so without pains? Sin must be parted with. "What shall we do for the hundred talents?" We go to the man that has long yielded to his evil habits. We tell him of the door of mercy yet open. The sigh breaks forth as we speak. He owns it "too true." He is "almost persuaded to be a Christian." But, no, "What shall we do for the hundred talents?" III. THE UNANSWERABLE REPLY. "And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." 1. Observe—There is no promise of the restoration of the sum. The command of God was the solid ground on which the prophet claimed obedience of the king. And it is even here we too rest our appeal. "Thus saith the Lord." In urging on you to "yield yourselves unto God," we cannot—we may not—tell you that no difficulties are in the way. We have indeed that overwhelming motive to present, the safety of the soul. 2. Amaziah is referred to the almighty power of Him whose command he is called on to obey. "God is able to give thee much more than this." As though the prophet had said, "Thou art ready to sorrow for the hundred talents uselessly bestowed if now to be forfeited, but whose is the silver and the gold? Grudge not, then, this sum at His word, who bids thee yield it for thine own welfare." For is it dignity, the estimation of others, that you fear to give up? are these "the hundred talents" you are unwilling to part with? What dignity of earth can be compared to that high-sounding and real—not empty—title, "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ"?—"Ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Is it riches, or pleasures, the vanity of life, that seem not vain to you? God is able to give, yea, will give you much more than this. He will give you pardon, that blessed gift—pardon for all thy sins, thy multiplied, aggravated, fearful transgressions—"And in the world to come eternal life." (*F. Storr, M.A.*)

*Soul or silver*.—Amaziah seemed to be a soldier, and little else. He was devoured by military ambition and vainglory. He coveted the domains of his neighbours. He was greedy of conquest. He dared not attack Israel, but on the other side lay the lands of the Edomites. He wanted to fight. There was probably no reason why he should, for the children of Seir had evidently done nothing to provoke an attack, or we should have had an account of it. But Amaziah must have more territory, and impelled by such noble patriotism, he disciplined his people into a large army. Desiring to be on the safe side, he bargained for one hundred thousand men of Israel, and, in order to secure them, he laid down a bounty of one hundred talents of silver. With these men of Ephraim, hired with the silver talents, he possessed an army of about four hundred thousand men. All things are in readiness, and he is about to start out on his grand mission of punishing a people who held lands near him, when a prophet confronts him with the intelligence that if he takes the troops of Israel with him he shall be defeated. Now comes a struggle in the king's mind. He was bent upon war, and could not brook the idea of defeat, but to insure victory he must send the Ephraimites home. Now, he had given these men a hundred talents of silver! What about them? The command of God had touched his pocket-nerve, and it had sent a sensitive thrill through his whole being. Amaziah is not the only man that has been compelled to choose between obedience and self-denial. I. Consider, then, the fact that MEN'S APPARENT INTERESTS ARE SOMETIMES OPPOSED BY THE COMMANDS OF GOD. Very frequently men's practices find such opposition; and their desires are fulfilled very often against the clamourings of their consciences. But I have affirmed something beyond this—that a man's wholesome interests, as they appear to his view, are sometimes in direct opposition to God's commands. I do not think that a man will be allowed to enter upon a course inimical to God's will who starts out by committing his way entirely to Divine guidance. God looks out for such a man, and orders his ways so that his interests and the Divine will conform. But a great many start out in the pursuit of business without any consideration of God. With the majority of men, when the time comes to meet the question, "What shall I do?" the answer is prompted more by expediency than by duty. One man argues, "I can make more money in dry goods than in groceries, so I'll deal in dry goods. But there's more money in whisky, so I think I'll open a saloon." He looks at trade from his own standpoint. I believe that some men really think that they are justified in such a course; they think that a man ought to look after his own interests; that that is the first thing to be consulted; and there never was a greater mistake made in this selfish world! The truth is, that when a man deliberately marks out a course in life, and determines to pursue it, without any consideration of God or his

fellow-men, he is engaged in a very dangerous business. There are some other things to consider besides making money. Soul-culture, helpfulness of his fellows, influence for Christ, the increasing light of a pious life; these things are to be taken into the account, or he may look for some period of his life when the alternative will be between obedience and self-denial, or disobedience and defeat. II. **WHERE THIS IS THE CASE APPARENT INTERESTS ARE TO BE SACRIFICED.** God looks upon temporal matters as if they were subordinate to a higher good. Men look upon them as if they were the highest good attainable. God puts His service and the duties of religion above everything else. Men regard religion as a secondary consideration. Do you never hear men say, "I would engage in religious matters if I had time"? You mark a man's absence from the holy Sabbath worship; he complains, "I feel so tired when Sunday comes, I must rest." So you see men think more of their hundred talents of silver than of obedience to God. But they have Amaziah's protest: "What shall we do for the hundred talents of silver?" The answer is plain enough. Let them go. "What!" cries the overworked business man, "leave my store full of customers just because it is the hour of prayer?" "What!" cries the professional man, "suspend my important studies for unprofitable religious occupation? Not much!" "What!" cries the mechanic, "work hard all week and Sunday too?" "What shall we do for the hundred talents that are involved?" In such embarrassing situations the thing to do is what Amaziah did. He sent home the men of Ephraim, and he lost the hundred talents of silver. If your business stands between you and God, let it go! III. **FOR I beg you to note that the ALTERNATIVE LIES BETWEEN TOTAL DEFEAT AND INCREASED GOOD.** Amaziah was made to select between receiving the value of his invested money and suffering disaster in the prosecution of his scheme. He might do as he pleased, but he might know what to expect. That is the alternative placed before all men. Disobedience leads to defeat. Men may discard the commands of God, but not with impunity. Obedience to the Divine will is the only safeguard against temporal and spiritual disaster. It is a matter that enters into a man's private life. It does not concern those employments alone which are confessedly unrighteous. It is a law affecting the man who persists in a course when God has called him in another direction, as well as he who persists in iniquitous practices. In either case the safest thing to do is to give up the silver, without one hesitating thought. (*Lansing Burrows.*)

**Consequences:**—The subject brought before us in the text is the weighing of consequences. 1. In a certain sense it is the doing of a fool to disdain consequences; and it is the glory of a rational being that he can calculate, and weigh, and be guided by, consequences. 2. And yet there are cases in which to resolutely refuse to take into view what may be the consequences of our conduct, is heroism; is Christianity in its highest and noblest development. Such was the case with the three Jews in Babylon; Moses; Paul. 3. Amaziah's history will make it plain to us, when we should weigh consequences and be guided by them; and when we should disregard them, and refuse to take them into account at all. He was not wrong in naming the money loss to the prophet. He was wrong in regarding this difficulty as a fatal objection to his obeying God's command. He not only states his difficulty, but seems disposed to act upon it. 4. This brings us to the great principle which should guide all wise Christian people in regard to the consideration of consequences. Wherever we are sure that duty leads, wherever we are sure God bids us go, then that way we should go, whatever and however painful the consequences may be. In all other cases a prudent Christian man will weigh the consequences of what he may think of doing, and be guided by the consideration of them. 5. To disdain consequences is not to be done in a boasting, vainglorious spirit. The true proof of a man disdaining consequences is that he should disdain them, not when they are in the distance, coming, but when they are present realities; when they are come. 6. The prophet's reply to the king's difficulty is worthy of being laid to heart: "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." This means that it is worth our while to obey God's will; that though at first we may lose by doing so, we shall gain more than we shall lose. This truly is not a disdaining of consequences; it is a fuller and truer weighing of them. It is to look further on: it is to throw eternity into the scale of duty and interest. (*A. K. H. Boyd.*)

**God's power to remunerate:**—I. **HOW COMMONLY THE QUESTION IS URGED,** "What shall we do for the hundred talents?" We are not of those who would make light of the sacrifices which must be made by such as would live godly in Christ Jesus. Christ speaks of a "yoke," of "taking up the cross," of "forsaking all," of "cutting off the right hand," of "plucking out the right eye."

So that the parallel is most exact between the circumstances of ourselves and those of Amaziah. 1. Consider the case of the young who are urged to the remembering of their Creator and the setting of their affections on things above. If by entreaty and warning we prevail on them to hesitate ere they launch on a course of disobedience to God's commands, the thought of all we ask them to surrender comes upon them with great power, and they feel as though it were unreasonable to summon them to such a sacrifice. And therefore their speech is virtually, "What shall we do for the hundred talents?" 2. Take again the case of the tradesman whose interest seems to demand the profanation of the Sabbath. In asking him to close his shop on the day that perhaps procures him more profit than can be wrung from all the rest of the week, you ask him to make what on mere human principles is scarcely a credible sacrifice. II. How SUFFICIENT AN ANSWER THERE IS IN THE STATEMENT, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." It is the apparent conflict between interest and duty which often induces disobedience to God. Duty and interest can never be really opposed. The righteousness of God's moral government requires that whatever He has made it our duty should also be our interest to perform. But still there is an apparent conflict. This world would cease to be a place of probation if it were always manifest that duty and interest lie in the same direction. When tempted to do wrong for the sake of present advantage, let us magnify the remunerating power of God. If David could say, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee," no text can be more suitable than this one for the talisman of the merchant as he prosecutes the enterprises of commerce, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *The claims of duty*:—The claims of duty are stronger even than those of affection. The tenderest tie on earth should never induce us to set them aside. The sense of duty which distinguished some of the patriots of ancient Rome was extraordinary. After the expulsion of King Tarquin, a conspiracy was formed for the purpose of effecting his return. It was found out by the authorities; and it was also found that Titus and Tiberius, the two sons of Brutus, the consul, were the principal conspirators. People naturally speculated as to how the consul would act in the matter; but he put an end to all controversy by condemning his two sons to death along with the rest; nay, on the day of execution, he commanded the sentence of the law to be carried out on them first of all. "But," you may say, "perhaps he did not love his sons as fathers generally do." On the contrary, the crowd who watched his countenance on the occasion could perceive that there was a terrible struggle within; so that they pitied the grief of the father no less than they admired the bravery of the patriot. Here, then, was a man who preferred duty to affection—the safety of his country to the life of his sons. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 14. Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir.—*Amaziah's apostacy*:—To act like Amaziah—to go out to battle in the name of Jehovah, directed and encouraged by His prophet, to conquer by the grace of the God of Israel, and then to desert Jehovah of hosts, the giver of victory, for the paltry and discredited idols of the conquered Edomites—this was sheer madness. And yet as Greece enslaved her Roman conquerors, so the victor has often been won to the faith of the vanquished. The Church subdued the barbarians who had overwhelmed the empire, and the heathen Saxons adopted at last the religion of the conquered Britons. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*)

Ver. 18. The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon.—*True and false union*:—Our parable thus distinguishes between true and false union. The true is inward and real; the false is outward and superficial. The true rests on the fitness of things and on eternal laws; the false relies on the capriciousness of human nature and the ebb and flow of circumstances. The false comes through conquest, coercion, and oppression; the true comes from God, righteousness and liberty. You will find these two kinds of union facing us in all relations of life. Take the history of Christianity in the world. 1. The aim of the Roman Catholic Church has been to create union among all Christians. But, while the aim has been good, the method employed has been bad. The union thus sought has been a false one because it has tried to coerce and compel men to acknowledge the Pope to be the one earthly vicar of Christ. 2. A similar policy has been that of the Established Church of England. As soon as the prayer-book was compiled a series of Acts of Parliament were passed—the Act of Uniformity,

&c.—to compel all British subjects to conform to its teaching. An effort was made to establish union by Acts of Parliament. The effort with a right and noble aim has failed because based on false methods. 3. Dissenters have also erred in like manner. At the assembly of Westminster divines a number of eminent Christian men drew up a set of doctrines, which were to be the infallible guide for a section of the followers of Christ. If a carpenter has a certain number of boards to make he gets the wood that is necessary; he takes his measurements; he cuts and planes each board exactly to the size, and length, and breadth, and thickness that he desires; he joins the boards together and makes the box, or floor, or other article as the case may be. All are united to complete the one object intended. But it is impossible for us to apply the word "union" in this sense to intelligent, thinking human beings. You may cut, measure wood and inanimate objects as you please, but here you have to do with "creatures" in whom there is the "Divine gift of reason and free-will." If you wish to unite men under any government, religious or political, you must first appeal to their reason, and leave them free to act as that reason leads them. The only true basis of union among human beings is the "Presence of God"—in other words, righteousness, justice, liberty, and truth. For where righteousness, justice, liberty, and truth are, there God is. The members of a family are united not by bearing the same name, resembling each other in stature and features, but by doing what is right and just to each other, and by loving one another. The members of the Church of Christ are not united by repeating the same creed, by meeting in the same place of worship, by calling themselves by the same name, but by having hearts glowing with love to one Saviour, and by gladly serving their one Lord. The people of a nation are united together not by national prejudices and oppressive laws so much as by their common loyalty to a righteous and just government. (*J. Lewis.*)

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

**VER. 5. And as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.**—*Soul prosperity*:—I. THE SEEKERS OF THE LORD. 1. Every real seeker of the Lord must be a heaven-born soul (John iii. 3). This involves the bestowment of a Divine existence, the creating of a new nature (2 Pet. i. 4). This is the nature that habitually seeks after God. 2. Seeking the Lord includes—(1) Worshipping. (2) Wrestling. (3) Waiting. II. THEIR EXPERIENCE OF PROSPERITY. If you ask a worldlyling what constitutes prosperity he will say, "Many excellent bargains, good customers, ready money, quick returns, the accumulation of property, health, friends, extended connections, and the like." But what is Christian prosperity? 1. Spiritual growth. 2. Triumphant victories. The life of a Christian is the life of a conqueror. 3. The taking of spoils from the vanquished foe. The most valuable lessons are often learnt from the heaviest calamities. III. THE EXTENSION OF PROSPERITY: "As long as he sought the Lord." (*Joseph Irons.*) *The secret of strength and its perils*:—I. WE HAVE THE MARVELLOUS HELP WHICH JEHOVAH GIVES TO A RIGHTLY-PURPOSED MAN, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. No one can suppose that Judah was very prosperous before the accession of that king. For, not only had it been humbled at the battle of Beth-Shemesh, but Jerusalem itself had been ravaged and partially dismantled. And, considering the extreme youth of the king, only sixteen years of age when he came to the throne, one would naturally have expected to read of the gradual increase of the disorders of the kingdom through the contests of opposing factions, and of its gradual diminution and enthrallment through the successes of its enemies. But, on the contrary, the first thing recorded of Uzziah is that "he built Eloth and restored it to Judah"; and thenceforward, throughout the greater part of his reign, the story of no single disaster or defeat interrupts the current of prosperity. First of all the Philistines, and then the Arabs, the Mehunim, and the Ammonites were compelled to restore to Judah the cities they had before appropriated, were, indeed, in some instances reduced to the condition of tributary nations. And the internal administration of the country was not less fortunate than its external relationships. Jerusalem was re fortified, and for the first time in Biblical history we read of "engines, invented

by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal." And "he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells; for he had much cattle, both in the low country and in the plains; husbandmen also and vinedressers in the mountains and in Carmel; for he loved husbandry." Everything shows that the kingdom reached a condition of prosperity such as it had not known since the days of Solomon. And the explanation of it all is the marvellous help of the Almighty. You may see it in almost all aspects and exigencies of life—the wonderful help of God making a Christian prosperous and strong. It is quite true that we sometimes trouble ourselves, as Uzziah must have often in those difficult years troubled himself, with the thought that we have no inherent ability for the work which God gives us to do, whether it be work of service or of sanctification. But in that imagination we are altogether wrong, and therefore wrong in letting ourselves be depressed and unnerved by it. For the Scriptural doctrine always is that it is the marvellous help of God that makes a man strong, that no man is or can become strong, in any religious sense of that word, apart from such help. "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you." There can be no other explanation of the prosperity of Uzziah, his conquest of difficulties greater than ours, his faithfulness under burdens heavier than ours, than simply that God, because of his faith in God, helped him. And in all times, when duty, sorrow, responsibility, or doubt presses upon ourselves, we can adopt a course that has never failed, and resolve, "I will seek unto God, and unto God will I commit my cause, which doeth great things, and unsearchable, marvellous things without number . . . to set up on high those that be low, that those which mourn may be exalted to safety." II. THE PERIL OF PROSPERITY, WHICH WAS TOO GREAT A PERIL FOR UZZIAH. His splendid career elated him, and "his heart was lifted up to his destruction." Instead of reverent praise to God for having helped him so marvellously, he began to flatter himself with the thought that his success had been achieved by his own wisdom and skill, and "he transgressed against the Lord, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." It is easy to find excuses for Uzziah, which are sufficient to protect him from our blame, but not sufficient to reduce the heinousness of his sin in the sight of God. It might, for instance, be said that his old godly counsellor Zechariah had lately died. Or it might be said that he was but imitating the conduct of his father, of Jeroboam, of the idolatrous kings around him. But, whatever our charity may dispose us to urge in palliation, the fact remains that he showed his gratitude to God for the marvellous help he had received by setting at nought the express commandment of God. For when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were destroyed, their brazen censers were made into broad plates for a covering of the altar "to be a memorial unto the children of Israel" (so runs the law) "that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord." Nor can Uzziah have forgotten that law. It was, indeed, when he became wrath with the faithful priests who reminded him of it, and pressed forward with his censor, that that moment "the leprosy rose up to his forehead," and, conscience-smitten, he hastened out of the temple. Just think of the contrast which that sin caused between the earlier and the later parts of Uzziah's reign. There is another place in the Old Testament where that warning is embedded in associations of even greater interest than these—the song of Moses in the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy. The marvellous works which God had wrought for Israel are enumerated first. Then follow the ungrateful exaltation of Israel in their own eyes, their desertion of God, and the wrath they thereby brought quickly upon themselves. It is just a type of the process that takes place in many hearts. First of all, God blesses us, enables us to do what otherwise we could not possibly have done, makes us great in control over ourselves, and perhaps, also, in influence over others. We, in some crisis of temptation, listen to the whisper that it was our own hand that made us strong; self-complacency begets presumption; until at last conscience smites us; we know ourselves to be leprous in spirit in the sight of God, and the self-built fabric of prosperity crumbles in a moment. Blessed for us if the Lord gives us what He gave Uzziah—seven quiet years for penitence, thought, and humbler service. It may be well to linger a little upon the different stages of this process, which sometimes leads a godly man from strength to leprosy. Obviously pride was at the bottom of Uzziah's sin. Uzziah seems to have thought, "Philistines and Ammonites, it's I have defeated them, and my name which they applaud and fear even to the entering in of Egypt. My father left the kingdom circumscribed, so reduced that he had to give hostages to Joash; I have made it great

and free." And still whenever by the help of God we have done any useful work, we are liable to a similar temptation, to attribute to ourselves the credit of having done it, and in our self-complacency to forget and to dishonour God. There is nothing but sin, failure, and ruin to be found in yielding to that temptation. For the immediate and necessary consequence of pride is presumption, which, though it may not take the exact form it took in the case of Uzziah, may take an equally sinful form. One form it often assumes now, in the case of men whose real knowledge of God is very defective, is that of patronising the Gospel. But much as that habit of thought requires to be guarded against, it is probably in other directions that most of us are more apt to err. The remembrance of what we have done by the help of God prompts us to attempt what we have to do apart from His help, with confidence in ourselves as sufficient for it, with a neglect of Divine aid as more or less unnecessary and superfluous. Any particle of the pride which leads us to attribute to ourselves the success of the past, whatever the particular form or particular associations of that pride, is a mistake even according to human judgment, an element of weakness which will grievously impede us, and a sin in the sight of God. And, whilst that principle teaches us what is forbidden, it teaches us also what is enjoined. Pride always means folly and failure. And therefore trust in God, the more perfect and supreme the better, means wisdom and success. It was whilst Uzziah "looked unto God" that he was marvellously helped and made strong. And it will be in proportion as we trust in Jehovah that we shall have vigour to finish and patience to bear whatever He gives us to endure or to do. (*R. W. Moss.*)

*Destroyed by prosperity*.—I. UZZIAH'S PROSPEROUS CAREER. "He was marvellously helped till he was strong." His good fortune, as the world would call it, dated from his seventeenth year. It was a trying position for a mere boy to be placed in; for the cares and responsibilities, as well as the temptations and luxuries, of a royal palace demand a ripe wisdom and strength of moral purpose rarely found at so early an age. But God's grace could qualify even so young a man for the task; and I am struck with the fact, that almost every one of the good kings of Judah was quite a youth when he succeeded to the throne. There is no reason why the season of young manhood should be given up to passion and frivolity. It was a great advantage to the young Uzziah that he had the loyal attachment and confidence of his people. But what mainly guarded him from the dangers around him, and kept him steady on his throne, was a sincere piety. Never forget the quarter from whence all true prosperity must come. Success does not depend on yourselves alone. Still less does it come from chance. Take God with you into all the affairs of life. Look to Him to bless your business. Ask His help in every fresh enterprise you undertake.

II. HIS MARVELLOUS PRESUMPTION. "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." It requires special grace to keep a man right when he has had a career of unbroken prosperity. One day, when the celebrated George Whitfield was about to commence the service, an intimation was read out from the desk below: "The prayers of the congregation are desired for a young man who has become heir to an immense fortune, and who feels he has much need of grace to keep him humble in the midst of his riches." Nothing tries a man so much as the favour of fortune and the flattery of the world.

III. THE NOTE OF WARNING. As there are many kinds of prosperity, so there are many kinds of presumption. A man may be "lifted up to his destruction," for example—1. By the pride of money. It does not take a large fortune to make some people "purse-proud"—and very disagreeable people these are. 2. The pride of intellect. I wish to put you on your guard against a current which is running very strong in our day. I mean the tendency to set up the reason against religion. Perhaps I might mention—3. Pride of wit. Now I go in for a sunny, cheerful religion. God has put within us a faculty of mirthfulness, which He did not mean us to suppress. There is no necessary connection between dulness and piety, between a long face and a new heart. True, but there are some men who are hardly ever serious. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

*The rise and the fall*.—To be successful or prosperous, to get on in the world, or to be strong, is what every one, be his position what it may, longs for and struggles after. Prosperity is a relative term. A king is prosperous or strong when from strength of character and purity of life he has secured the confidence and love of his people, and the respect of neighbouring sovereigns and nations. A merchant is prosperous when his dealings are followed by remunerative gains. A minister of Jesus Christ is prosperous when he benefits souls and instructs men's minds, and leads them to think of something higher and more lasting than the passing



show of the world. To be prosperous, to be strong, is in one word to get on in one's own department, and at one's peculiar work. Whatever success be ours we ought to acknowledge that God has been with us. It is just here that men are so often thoughtless and ungrateful, and have their heart lifted up to destruction. We see this often in the case—1. Of individuals. 2. Of families. 3. Of Churches. 4. Of nations. (*W. Mackintosh Arthur, M.A.*) *Uzziah—his sin and punishment*:—Rightly to apprehend Uzziah's sin, we must remember through what barriers he had to break before he could resolve to do this thing. He had to disregard the direct command of Jehovah that the priests alone should burn incense on His altar. He had to despise the history of his people, to reject the solemn lessons that he had learned from childhood. He was defiling his own sacred things; the Jewish history was the history of his own people, the charter of his own blessings; the temple and the priesthood were the solemn ordinances of his own worship. He was impiously defying the holy name by which he himself was called. I. PROSPERITY AND PRIDE. "Uzziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had his understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." The results of godly training and holy companionship are often seen in the prudence, and diligence, and sobriety which command success and reputation. The modes of life which the influence of the gospel forms, which are the tradition of Christian households, are just those which conduce to happiness and honour. Mere worldly prosperity is often the prelude to daring impiety. It is a perpetual question how to "remove" the "hireling" spirit out of the Church. Men whose ships bring them wealth, whose plans in business succeed, come to fancy themselves fit for any place of responsibility in the Church. Churches love to pay honour to men of wealth; choose for places of special service, not those of pure heart, and fervent faith, and lowly self-denial, but those who have succeeded in business, and whose plans, it is therefore thought, must needs be followed. Uzziah was a good king, but he was a bad priest; he was not the priest whom God had chosen. Men whose godliness, and integrity, and Christian conduct have won them respect are most valuable helps in all Christian activities. But mere worldly success is a poor standard by which to measure these things, and ought never to be allowed to secure to any voice and direction in Church affairs. "It appertains not to these to burn incense unto the Lord." It is a matter of personal experience how prosperity lifts up the heart, and lures us to destruction. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." II. PRIDE AND PUNISHMENT. "Here now," you may be ready to say, "is something in the story which is simply Jewish, quite foreign to the life of to-day. Do you mean to say that God visits men with judgments now? Is there anything here to come home to the hearts of Englishmen?" I do say that God is judging us; the same God who judged His people of old. There is in this very part of the narrative something to set us thinking on the mysteries of our daily life, and to help in their interpretation. Suppose, now, a physician had given us a purely medical report of this incident. Suppose he had told us that there was in Uzziah an unsuspected taint of leprosy: a taint which, if he had been careful of himself, especially avoiding strong passionate excitements, might never have developed into actual symptoms of disease. Hereditary or constitutional disease may often lurk for a lifetime unsuspected, till some circumstance favours its development, and instantaneously it works itself out in all its power. Of all such favouring circumstances, strong passionate excitement is the surest; in the heat of pride the seeds of sickness are frequently quickened. What stories are more impressive or more common than those of men suddenly stricken down on the eve of the gratification of their pride, in the first thrill of triumph, in the very fever of unbridled ambition? A man has been all his lifetime amassing wealth; satisfied at length, he builds himself a lordly mansion, that he may rank with the nobles of the land. He builds, but he never enjoys it—he is found some morning smitten with impotence; and the palsied speech-muscles refuse to articulate a word. A statesman is summoned to the royal presence-chamber; at the council-table the blood-stain at his lips declares that honours and life will soon be laid together in the dust. A student is called to preside over some learned body; his brain gives way, and the asylum is henceforth his home. Instead of leprosy, read paralysis or hæmorrhage, or softening of the brain, and it is just a narrative from our daily press. Say what we will, this is true, that pride and passion, unregulated ambition and impious recklessness, do terribly punish those whom they enslave. The Jewish story interprets the English life.

If Englishmen trace these things to natural causes, and go no further, while the Jew says, "God has smitten him," the Jew is right and the Englishman is wrong. It is a sign of unbelief and folly to refuse to trace God's hands, save in events that are utterly unintelligible. God's great work is to reveal, not to hide Himself. It is part of His order of nature that bodily pains should often reveal and rebuke the workings of an ungodly soul. The hour of pride is often, too, an hour of terrible revelation of hidden spiritual taints; which of us has not found secret sins leaping to light in the heats of unbridled passion? We flattered ourselves that God made us to prosper because we sought Him. Our seeking of Him became a tradition of the past, a memory; we thought we had overcome our temptations, laid aside our easily besetting sin; and, even while we boasted, we fell before God and men. We have thanked God we were not as other men; suddenly we have had to change our boasting, we have known ourselves the chief of sinners. As long as we seek God, He will make us to prosper; but only so long. Keep we ever near Him, ever following Him, ever obeying and trusting Him, and we shall be "marvellously helped and be strong." III. PUNISHMENT AND SHAME. Hope concerning Uzziah is given in the record of his hasting to go out of the temple. His proud heart was broken; he was smitten with shame. There needed not "the priests, the valiant men," to thrust him out: "Yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him." It may have been mere terror that drove him forth, the force of circumstances, and not a convicted, penitent heart. His self-abasement may have been as godless as was his exaltation. It may have been so; but it may have been far otherwise. Assuredly God intended it to be otherwise. Of the seven years that he spent in the "several house" we know nothing; of this we may be sure, that during all those years God was seeking to restore and save his soul. In solitude, while his son was over his kingdom, and regents were doing the work God had taken from his hands, he might have learnt many a lesson he had not learnt upon the throne. The dignity and service forfeited through pride may be never regained. A stain may cling to the name; the reputation long held honourable, and lost through a shameful fall, may not even after death be recovered. Sons may blush more over the dishonourable grave and the one terrible sin of their fathers than they triumph in the glory of a whole life. Impiety is a fearful thing, and has a fearful curse. (*A. Mackennal, B.A.*) *The religious element necessary in commonwealths*:—We need more than animals to make a commonwealth worth preserving; we need more than bodies, and more than what is usually, but too narrowly, denominated practical substance; we need the religious element, the spiritual force, that marvellous telescopic faculty that looks away beyond the visible into that which is unseen. We need to have ghostly men among us; men who see the metaphysical in the literal; men who know that nothing is true that is not metaphysically true; men who insist that we see nothing with the naked eye, and that vision is a heart-gift, an inward faculty, a sublime treasure entrusted to men of God. Thus the Church will always have an important part to play in the upbuilding of the State, in the government of kings, in the direction of great affairs. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Vers. 10, 11. For he loved husbandry.**—*We cannot always follow the pursuits we love*:—Is there anything more distressing than to be compelled to do the thing we have no heart for? Many a man in the city would leave his occupation to-morrow if he could find bread in the thing he really loves. And many men are in positions that look lofty, and that are amply rewarded, for which they care nothing; they would rather be at home attending to the garden, watching the bees, reading noble books. But we cannot do what we would like to do. Herein is part of our discipline, which is part of our education. We must have the will broken somewhere. No man can reach the full stature of his manhood, and realise all that is sweetest in life, until his will has been cut right in two. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 15. For he was marvellously helped till he was strong.**—*Marvellously helped till strong*:—Two kinds of help, natural and supernatural. 1. A time when we cannot help ourselves. Infancy. 2. A time of growth, when we can help ourselves. Youth, manhood. 3. When thus strong the supernatural help ceases. Not less provision made on that account. There is joy and co-operation with God. As an earthly father requires to be obeyed and served, beholds strength and disposition to co-operate, so the heavenly Father, &c. (*G. Matheson.*) *Prosperity*:—I. UZZIAH'S PROSPERITY. 1. The particulars of his prosperity.

(1) He prospered in war. He had an army of 307,500 men, over whom were 2,600 mighty and valorous captains. All were fully equipped for service. With these soldiers Uzziah fought against the Philistines, the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, the Mehunims and the Amorites, and in each case he was victorious. (2) He prospered in building. He repaired and fortified the walls of Jerusalem, reared towers "a hundred and fifty cubits high" (Josephus), built walled towns in the desert, and made channels for the conveyance of water. (3) He prospered in agriculture. "He planted it with all sorts of plants, and sowed it with all sorts of seeds." (4) Uzziah's prosperity appears to have been general. He did not keep up a great military establishment at the expense of other departments. His name spread far abroad, and he was acknowledged to be an illustrious and a highly-favoured prince. 2. The author of his prosperity. This was God. (Uzziah signifies "strength from Jehovah.") "He was marvellously helped." God helped him against his enemies, and in all he undertook. It might have been otherwise. Instead of victory he might have experienced defeat. His building and agricultural schemes might have proved unsuccessful. It is always well to set the Lord at our right hand. We may plough and plant, but He only can cause the seed to germinate, and grow, and fructify. We may contrive and work, but He only can bless our endeavours. 3. The secret of Uzziah's prosperity. It is distinctly set forth in the fifth verse of this (xxvi.) chapter, "He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and so long as he sought the Lord God made him to prosper." What is there that God cannot do for a man who takes Him into his counsels? He can help him "marvellously." He can exalt valleys and level mountains, make crooked places straight and rough places plain. He can bring clients into the office and ready-money customers into the shop. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and all the forces of the universe; and He can do whatsoever He will. II. UZZIAH'S PRIDE. 1. His prosperity made him proud. "His heart was lifted up." A great change for the worse was wrought in him. Whether it was brought about suddenly or gradually we are not told. We assume that Uzziah did not become proud all at once. He who had formerly recognised God as the prime cause of his splendid achievements became wilfully blind, and we shall soon see what effect this had upon his conduct. 2. His pride led him into presumption. The tendency of pride is to make men giddy, and as the result their vision is beclouded, their judgment is perverted. (1) The occasion of his presumption. Josephus tells us that it was "a remarkable day, a general festival," and we are left to supply the rest. (2) The nature of his presumption. He usurped the office of the priest. There are hereditary moral diseases as well as those which are physical and mental. Uzziah's folly was in some respects a reproduction of the folly of which Amaziah his father had been guilty. III. UZZIAH'S PUNISHMENT. 1. He was resisted in his attempt to do that which was unlawful; resisted by the proper guardians of the temple. Azariah, the high priest, seeing what he was about to do, went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, who were valiant men. No time was lost (ver. 18). 2. He was smitten with leprosy. "The leprosy rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord." There was the bright scaly spot which told its own terrible tale—the mark of God's disapprobation, and it was on his brow, where all could see it. 3. He was thrust out of the temple as unclean. It was not necessary, however, to use force; conscious that God had smitten him, he hurried out, self-condemned, probably shrieking out his woe, and cursing his folly. 4. He was separated from society (Lev. xiii. 46). 5. He, being a leper, was buried alone. Josephus tells us that he "was buried by himself in his own garden." In all likelihood his resting-place was a field or garden adjoining the usual burial-place of the kings. Lessons: 1. God is the giver of prosperity. 2. Prosperous men are in danger of becoming proud. 3. Pride is often followed by presumption. 4. Presumption is sure of punishment. (*J. Baker Norton.*)

Vers. 17, 18. *It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord.*—*We must abide within our limitation*:—The great temptation of some natures is to try to do the very things for which they are least qualified. There is a marvellous irony in human genius in this matter. It would seem to be an inscrutable mystery that men will persist in attempting to do the thing which they cannot do, and which they were obviously never meant to do. Whenever a man is out of place he is guilty of wasting strength. A man can only work well within his own limit. No man should strain himself at his labour, be he poet, or musician, or

divine, be he prophet or merchantman; he should keep easily within the circle he was appointed to occupy, for all stretching is weakening, all effort that is above the line of nature tends to destruction, both to the worker and of the influence which he ought to exert. Know your own place, and keep it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The jolly of self-will.*—God has sacred places, God has allotted specific duties to men; every man will be wise in proportion as he sees his own calling, and makes his calling and election sure. Reward lies along that line. Leave your native heath, take your life into your own hands, say you will create a sphere for yourself and do as you please, and you shall be stung with disappointments as with a cloud of insects. Say you will insist upon having your own way in the world, and every rock you strike will but injure the hand that smites it. But live and move and have your being in God. Say, "Lord, not my will, but Thine be done; make me door-keeper, or lamp-lighter, or hewer of wood or drawer of water, or a Zechariah having learning in Thy visions and power of reading all the apocalypse of Thy providence: what Thou wilt, as Thou wilt, as long as Thou wilt: Thy will is heaven." It is towards this end that all Christian education must tend. (*Ibid.*) *Uzziah's pride punished.*—I. HIS REIGN AS KING. This was pre-eminently successful. The Arab hordes on his south-east borders were subdued, and the Ammonites were reduced to tribute. He was no less vigorous in defensive than offensive operations. He paid as great attention to the arts of peace as of war. He was the special patron of agriculture; he dug wells, built towers in the wilderness for the protection of the flocks, and cultivated rich vineyards. II. UZZIAH'S SIN. Uzziah was ambitious; he was not willing that any in his realm should enjoy prerogatives denied to him. III. UZZIAH'S PUNISHMENT. Henceforth the most menial subject would not exchange places with the leprous king. As lessons taught by this narrative we learn—1. Prosperity is dangerous. The record of Uzziah does not stand alone. Prosperity seldom draws men to God. Gratitude does not increase in proportion as God's favours multiply. A man's piety is not usually increased by his becoming rich. It is seldom men are more religious in health than in sickness. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy Word." 2. God is to be approached reverently. Uzziah seems to have thought that by being a king, successful and famous, he had earned the right to enter the holy place and offer sacred incense. It is often expected that God will accept worship if the display of wealth mingle with it largely. Does not the ability to offer such choice incense gain for one the right to lift the sacred veil and stand where God hath said His priests only should enter, and "the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death"? Uzziah thought that God would not exclude a favoured king from that sacred presence. Men often think that it is possible to find some incense wafted from a worldly censer which shall ascend as fragrance to the unseen holy. But what had Uzziah's kingdom to do toward fitting him to perform a priestly act? Man's approach to God is through Christ. In the Old Testament dispensation, not even a symbol of His person or work could be accepted or admitted into the holy place, other than that which God had appointed. 3. Sin, though in high places, must be rebuked. It seemed a bold act for the priests to say to Judah's king, "Go out of the sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed." They were the humble ministers of religion, and he the proud and pampered king of a victorious people. He had transcended his limit, and must be rebuked, though he be a king. Such invasions of religion are not rare. The world is always ready to take religious duties into her own hands, to tell how God is to be worshipped, what doctrines are to be preached, what duties prescribed, what faults are to be rebuked, and what allowed. She enters with a regal tread, and speaks with imperious voice. What shall be done? Does and will the Church stand firm in her antagonism to wrong and sin, though they stand in kingly pride to offer polluted incense on her sacred altars? 4. Men may be blinded to sin, till they see its consequences. It is not probable that Uzziah realised his guilt till the "leprosy rose up in his forehead." Then he hastened to go out of the sanctuary. Perhaps he feared other and severer judgments would follow. Had God stayed His retributive hand, and the king been suffered, with no leprous spots, to leave the altar as proud and ambitious as he entered, his guilt would have been as great. The smitten forehead, like a detective, laid the offender under arrest, and thus exposed him; but it did not create or increase his sin. Many, guilty of the most grievous wrongs, think themselves respectable, and claim the confidence of others, till some providence uncovers their evil deeds. It is a mistake to suppose that all the criminals are in prison. A bad man is as bad on one side of iron bars as on the other. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 19. Then Uzziah was wroth.—*Impatience of reproof*:—How often is the sinner only provoked to greater wickedness by the obstacles which Divine grace opposes to his wrong-doing! How few men will tolerate the suggestion that their intentions are cruel, selfish, or dishonourable! Remonstrance is an insult, an offence against their personal dignity; they feel that their self-respect demands that they should persevere in their purpose, and that they should resent and punish any one who has tried to thwart them. The most dramatic feature of this episode, the sudden frost of leprosy in the king's forehead, is not without its spiritual antitype. Men's anger at well-merited reproof has often blighted their lives once for all with ineradicable moral leprosy. In the madness of passion they have broken bonds which have hitherto restrained them and committed themselves beyond recall to evil pursuits and fatal friendships. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*)

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

VER. 3. And on the wall of Ophel he built much.—*Building on Ophel*:—Ophel means "the mount." Where was the mount? On the southern slope. Why did the king build so much on Ophel? Because it was most accessible to the enemy. Like a wise commander he remembered that no man is stronger than his weakest point, and that no fortification is stronger than its frailest part; so the king built much where the wall was weakest, or where the access of the enemy was most open; and in doing so he gathered up and represented the wisdom and experience of the ages, and anticipated what we and all the sons of time ought to do. What is your weakest point in life? Build much there. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.—*Jotham's epitaph*:—I. EVERY MAN IS UNDER GOD'S INSPECTION. How truly did the ancients realise this (Psa. cxxxix.; Jer. xxiii. 23, 24; 2 Chron. xvi. 9; Job xxxiv. 22). We little consider this in the present day. II. EVERY MAN SHOULD LIVE AS UNDER GOD'S INSPECTION. A man's conduct will be very different if he realises that God's eye is on him. He will avoid sin. He will bear in mind the love of his Father who is in heaven. He will try to please Him in thought as well as in deed. III. THE RECOGNITION OF GOD'S PRESENCE IS THE FOUNDATION-STONE OF ALL PROSPERITY. It renders a man great, for—1. It makes him careful not to do that which will disgrace him. 2. It entitles him to Divine protection and help. 3. It fills him with a consciousness of rectitude, which in itself is a panoply of defence. (*Homilist.*) *Jotham, king and saint*:—This is the key-note of Jotham's biography: "He prepared his ways before the Lord his God." This may be applied like a key put into the lock of each of these verses of the record of his life. I. HE WENT RIGHT WHERE HIS FATHER WENT WRONG (ver. 2). Even on the pinnacle of success and popularity, his head was cool, and his heart was clear, and his nerves were steady, for he prepared his ways before the Lord his God. II. HE COVERED THE COUNTRY WITH FORTIFICATIONS (vers. 3, 4). The man who is spiritual to the core will not be a weakling in the city, and he will not be easily turned aside. This disposes of the idea that to be a praying man and to be a business man do not go together. III. HE PREVAILED AGAINST HIS ENEMIES (ver. 5). Because, before he fought he prayed. IV. HIS WEALTH INCREASED (ver. 5). Prayer to God brought him his fortune. V. HIS HUMILITY EXALTED HIM (ver. 6). Conclusion: What was Jotham after all but a dim, distant, foreshadowing of Jesus Christ? If ever the text was true of any one, it was true of Him. (*John McNeill.*) *Godwardness; or the might of an ancient*:—The Bible is the good man's chart: to warn away from danger it points out the places where some good men have gone down; while to encourage, it holds up to view the principles as illustrated by the life of others who have been successful. Jotham's life teaches—I. GODWARDNESS: THE TRUE MIGHT AND MAJESTY OF KINGS. Godwardness is the continuous shaping of our thoughts and deeds as under the immediate inspection of God. Let God be first in every consideration, consulted in every transaction, recognised and deferred to on all occasions and under all circumstances. II. GODWARDNESS: THE TRUE STRENGTH

OF EMPIRES. An empire's strength does not depend upon—1. Riches. Ancient Tyre was rich. 2. Political ability and astute statesmanship. Sparta. 3. Learning. Greece. 4. Legions. Rome. Napoleon Bonaparte. The strength of an empire is in God. Also, the true strength of the soul's empire—the Empire of Self—is Godwardness. III. GODWARDNESS: THE SECRET OF SUCCESS. The true cause of failure and weakness is often moral delinquency. "Jotham became mighty because he prepared his ways before the Lord." (*Enoch Hall.*) *Stimulating effect of God's presence*:—It is said that the air of a famous Kentucky cave has a peculiar power of stimulating the senses. After the visitor has been in its strange and silent labyrinths for an hour or two, and comes back into the open air, he can discern the very scents of the flowers, trees, and grasses. New perceptions of spiritual things will come to us if we get away into the quiet of God's presence, and suffer ourselves to be absorbed by His Word. (*T. G. Selby.*)

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

**VERS. 1-5. Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign.**—*The mysterious in human development*:—The growth of humanity is not after a horticultural manner. We cannot say that a good tree will have good off-shoots, if we are speaking of humanity. The holiest father may have a murderer for his son. The sweetest mother may die of a broken heart. Only a foolish criticism is reckless in fixing definite responsibilities in this matter of the nurture and culture of children. The Lord rebukes us when we say that because the father was good the son must be good; or because the father was evil the son must be evil. The Lord permits men to come in between who are bad, or who are good, that all our little speculation about heredity, and all our arrangements for moral progress, may be thrown back and lost in confusion. Herein is the working of that mysterious law which is often misunderstood when denominated the law of election. We cannot tell what God is doing. Your son ought to have been good, for where is there a braver soul than yourself? The boy ought to have been chivalrous, for he never knew you do a mean deed or give lodgment to an ungenerous thought. In a way, too, he was proud of his father; yet there was no devil's work he would not stoop to do. He did not get the bad blood from his mother, for gentler, sweeter soul never sang God's psalms in God's house. Yet there is the mystery, and it is not for a reckless criticism to define the origin and the issue of this mysterious phenomenon in human development. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Holy influences resisted produce increased wickedness*:—It is very noticeable that those who, in their early days, have resisted holy influences generally turn out the most wicked of men. This, indeed, is a fundamental law of character. Just as a good man, who is good notwithstanding a very bad up-bringing, and despite the most pernicious examples around him, is not infrequently one of the best of men, so a youth who has come from a godly home, and turns out evil himself, is one of the worst characters you can meet with. *The bad son of a good father*:—I. IT IS A SORROWFUL FACT THAT GOOD MEN ARE SOMETIMES THE FATHERS OF BAD SONS. "Like father, like son," we have often heard men say. But this is not always so. Alas! we know but too well that piety, virtue, goodness do not always run in the blood. You may pass on the crown, the throne, the kingdom, but the high moral and religious qualities which make a man a king among men do not always go with the crown and sceptre. II. THE BAD SONS OF GOOD FATHERS ARE OFTEN RUINED BY THE SINS THEY ALLOW TO DECEIVE THEM. Read the twenty-third verse of this chapter. It is very instructive. Ahaz, weakened by his questionable ways, and not supported by the power of the God whose worship he had forsaken, fell into the hands of the foreigner. Conquered by the superior forces and better trained men of Damascus, he fondly imagined that they won because their gods, their idols, helped them in battle. Deceived, deluded, blinded by all this, he determined to follow their bad example. Others are involved in his fall. "They were the ruin of him and of all Israel." It would be sad enough if he were the only one blinded and deluded by sin. But unfortunately its victims are all about us. III. THIS CHAPTER TEACHES THAT GOD OFTEN CHASTENS THE SONS OF GODLY PARENTS WHO FALL INTO SIN, AND SEEKS TO WIN THEM BACK TO HIMSELF. God did not leave Ahaz without warning, reproof,

and trouble. Through his long night of sin God often spake to him. God made this man understand that the way of the transgressor is hard. It is a mercy that God does not allow the sinner to go to hell without warning. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) *Entering on a royal inheritance*:—Every young man enters, like Ahaz, upon a royal inheritance; character and career are as all-important to a peasant or a shopgirl as they are to an emperor or a queen. When a girl of seventeen or a youth of twenty succeeds to some historic throne we are moved to think of the heavy burden of responsibility laid upon unexperienced shoulders and of the grave issues that must be determined during the swiftly passing years of the early manhood or womanhood. Alas! this heavy burden and these grave issues are but the common lot. His lot is only the common lot set upon a hill, in the full sunlight, to illustrate, interpret, and influence lower and obscurer lives. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) *Men should be educated to reign*:—Men should all be educated to reign, to respect themselves and to appreciate their opportunities. We do in some measure adopt this principle with promising lads and gifted girls. We need to apply the principle more consistently and to recognise the royal dignity of the average life and of those whom the superior person is pleased to call commonplace people. It may then be possible to induce the ordinary young men to take a serious interest in his own future. (*Ibid.*) *The kind of "reign" a source of anxiety to parents*:—The fortunes of millions may depend upon the will of some young Czar or Kaiser; the happiness of a hundred tenants or of a thousand workmen may rest on the disposition of the youthful inheritor of a wide estate or a huge factory; but none the less in the poorest cottage mother and father and friends wait with trembling anxiety to see how the boy or girl will "turn out" when they take their destinies into their own hands and begin to reign. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 2. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.**—*The ways of the kings of Israel*:—Israel was for the most part more powerful, wealthy, and cultured than Judah. When Ahaz came to the throne as a mere youth, Pekah was apparently in the prime of life and the zenith of power. He is no inapt symbol of what the modern tempter at any rate desires to appear: the showy, pretentious man of the world, who parades his knowledge of life, and impresses the inexperienced youth with his shrewdness and success, and makes his victim eager to imitate him, to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel. (*Ibid.*) *Molten images for Baalim*.—*Molten images for the Baals*:—The prospect of making images for the Baals is an insidious temptation. Ahaz perhaps had found the decorous worship of the one God dull and monotonous. Baals meant new gods and new rites, with all the excitement of novelty and variety. Jotham may not have realised that this youth of twenty was a man; he may have been treated as a child and left too much to the women of the harem. Responsible activity might have saved him. The Church needs to recognise that healthy, vigorous youth craves interesting occupation, and even excitement. If a father wishes to send his son to the devil, he cannot do better than make that son's life, both secular and religious, a routine of monotonous drudgery. Then any pinchbeck king of Israel will seem a marvel of wit and good fellowship, and the making of molten images a most pleasing diversion. A molten image is something solid, permanent, and conspicuous, a standing advertisement of the enterprise and artistic taste of the maker; he engraves his name on the pedestal, and is proud of the honourable distinction. Many of our modern molten images are duly set forth in popular works; for instance, the reputation for impure life, or hard drinking, or reckless gambling, to achieve which some men have spent their time and money and toil. Other molten images are dedicated to another class of Baals: Mammon the respectable and Belial the polite. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 9. A prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded.**—*The story of the prophet Oded*:—Probably few will recognise this name. It is associated with no book of perpetual instruction, with no course of heroic action. No mighty deeds like those of Elijah or Elisha adorn his story; no length of stately service like that of Daniel is rendered by him. He is a man of one achievement; his prophecy only an argument to brotherly kindness and affection, and yet few men have ever rendered a nobler service to their fellow men than that recorded of him. It exhibits the possibility of finest usefulness as lying more near and within our reach than we had thought. The circumstances are soon told. Already the shadow of the great Assyrian monarchy had fallen on more western lands, and Damascus, Israel, Judah were threatened by it. Their policy would have been union for mutual defence;

national contrition and development of those virtues which would have engaged the approval of God. Unfortunately, instead of uniting with each other, Damascus, Samaria, Jerusalem alike forget the impending danger which ultimately overtakes them; and, as if there was no foe to be feared, by their conflicts with each other destroy their power of saving themselves. One campaign had just ended. Israel and Damascus had united, and between them had inflicted a crushing blow on Judah. A hundred and twenty thousand slain is the enormous register of Judah's loss, and in addition Israel has taken captive of women and children two hundred thousand more. With the bitterness that belongs to a feud between kinsmen, no compunction enfeebles the elation of their victory. It has not entered any mind that any other course should be pursued but simply to use or sell the captives as slaves. They will indulge their lust, they will increase their wealth. With such purposes they bring all their spoil and all their captives to Samaria. When as they are about to enter in unbrotherly triumph, a prophet of the Lord went out to them; of no great importance, as men generally would have judged; single-handed, with none to back him. He goes forth, and addressing not the chiefs alone with whispers of policy, but the host great and small, calls on them to forego their pleasure and their wealth, and as brethren to abstain from reducing to slavery their brethren whom the fortune of war had put into their power. His argument is striking. There is no mention of Assyria, as there might have been, and of the importance of a united front; no flattery or appeal to desire for generous fame. Solemnly he points out that Judah's defeat is the penalty of Judah's sin. That in the slaughter of such multitudes as they put to death they have already committed crimes enough. That to enslave their brethren would be to provoke the anger of their Father God still more, and therefore they should liberate those whom they intended to enslave. The single voice avails. Alone in making the suggestion, he is not long left alone. "Certain heads of the children of Ephraim" stand up stoutly against the more violent that oppose the prophet's word. "Ye shall not bring in the captives hither," they say, with the courage of their nobler mood. When lo! with that openness to generous and noble appeals that sometimes marks a multitude, the whole host suddenly catch the glow of nobler feeling, and at once the resolve to set the captives free is framed and put in execution. The treasure of the spoil is taken to relieve their wants. An incident of a kind too rare, but one which yet indicates to us how much of noble service might be rendered if all did their part towards making the world a little brighter and better than it is.

**I. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS.** A prophet worthy of his calling, and the chief men of Israel having the courage of their position, together sway the whole people with a generous impulse. No greater mercy comes from the Father of lights than leaders whose worth adorns their eminence. The tendencies to good and evil hang on so fine a balance, that let the leaders appeal to the nobler part, and it will respond. Let them appeal to the baser, and it will respond, unchecked by any scruple. If you are in any position of leadership in Church, or world, or lowly home, minister or layman, remember grand things are possible if you are faithful. Do not fall into sin of rulers, assuming a waywardness in the people which you thenceforth do nothing to control. Give those around you a clear keynote of noble duty or generous wisdom, and you will always find some to back you, and sometimes sufficient backing to achieve a grand success. An heroic leader in war will infuse his courage into feeblest followers. A generous leader in peace may win victories no less noble. Let leaders study Oded, till they learn, like him, to forego all flattery and all care for popular acceptance, and find the stately courage which can urge the worthy course upon their fellow men.

**II. THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL ACTION.** How utterly hopeless must it have seemed to dream of turning the people from their purpose. Their blood was heated with their triumph, their passions all inflamed, their self-interest involved. What could one man do to stem such forces? But let him stand alone, or find plentiful support; let his testimony be resented with contempt or accepted with humility, Oded feels his business is to utter what seems to him to be the will of God. And uttering it, lo, he is not long alone. His generosity infects others. Try to count up the service then rendered. Two hundred thousand captives set free, and their dismal fears changed into restful gratitude. His nation saved from the guilt of a great crime. His people ennobled by a generous deed. One man did this, or rather was the occasion of its being done. One man set the ball a-rolling. Learn hence that there is no limit to what, God inspiring and using him, one man may do. Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Knox, Wesley, their lives are but variations of this story. The conviction of



the one to-day becomes that of the many to-morrow. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESENCE OF HEART. So many, when the occasion of rendering great service rises, finding themselves with confused feelings, with heart unequal to the demand made on it. There were other saints in Samaria, doubtless, grieved over this civil war, and shrinking equally with him from idea of their brethren being made their slaves. But Oded was not confused, perplexed, overawed by concurrence of a vast multitude in a great wrong. Nor did he need a week to think what it would be best to do or say. There and then, in all calmness and self-possession, he saw what it was best to do and say, and he did and said it. That calmness comes not because the nerve is cool; it has a higher origin. It comes from walking with God and talking with Him; the sight of His throne, the knowledge of His providence; the habit of asking instructions and waiting for them, and acting when they come. (*Richard Glover.*)

Ver. 10. But are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?—A home question:—This question is pertinent to—1. Nations. 2. Sects. 3. Classes. 4. Individuals. I shall—I. PUT A HOME QUESTION TO—1. The moralist. 2. The accuser of the brethren. 3. The outwardly religious. 4. Those who make no profession of religion. 5. Other classes I may have omitted. “Are there not with you, sins against the Lord your God?” II. PUT A COMMON-SENSE QUESTION: “Who are you that you think to escape the punishment of sin?” III. GIVE A LITTLE ADVICE. 1. Leave other people alone with regard to finding fault. 2. Treat yourselves as you have been accustomed to treat others. 3. Look to the eternal interests of your own souls. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) Home sins:—An object may be placed in such close proximity to the eye as to escape all distinct perception. It may be brought into such near contact with the organs of vision as to become wholly invisible. Analogous to this natural difficulty of a close self-inspection is the general inability or indisposition of men to form a correct estimate of their own moral and spiritual character. Consider—I. SOME OF OUR DISTINGUISHING PRIVILEGES AND ADVANTAGES. II. THE SOLEMN AND AWFUL QUESTION, AS IT RELATES—1. To public, national, legalised transgressions. (1) Want of deference to God’s supreme authority. (2) Sabbath profanation, its diversion from its appropriate objects upon a gigantic scale, as exemplified on our railways, in our public-houses, and in various departments of industrial occupation. 2. To social and individual sins. (1) Drunkenness. (2) Impurity. (3) Blasphemy and profaneness. (4) Covetousness, intense and unscrupulous competition of interests. (5) Vague scepticism and decided infidelity. (*J. Davics, D.D.*) A home sin:—At a meeting of the Mission to Foreigners in London, Lord Shaftesbury said he remembered taking tea with a notorious German Socialist who propounded the most destructive theories about society. His lordship mentioned to this German a nobleman who was one of the richest men in the world. The Socialist boiled over with indignation, and said that the possession of such wealth was a degradation and a scandalous robbery. Perceiving that he wore a brilliant diamond breast-pin in his shirt-front, probably worth £50, his lordship said to him, “You have a diamond, I see; now if you will accompany me to-night to my ragged school, I will show you ragged, shoeless children, and if I were to say, ‘Here is a diamond worth £50 that this gentleman wears in his shirt,’ they too might boil over with indignation, and declare it was iniquitous, scandalous, and a crime.” He replied, “Well, my lord, you have me this time.”

Ver. 19. For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel.—The sin of Ahaz:—I. I would draw attention to SOME SPECIAL POINTS IN THE HISTORY OF AHAZ. 1. The king himself was peculiarly the transgressor. 2. The people also were transgressors. 3. Mark the special sins enumerated in the history. (1) There was idolatry. (2) He substituted an altar of a strange pattern for the altar of the Lord God of hosts. (3) He trusted in an arm of flesh (vers. 16 and 21). (4) He attempted to gain his object by conciliating the false gods and disparaging the true God. 4. Mark the consequences of all this: national desolation and ruin. II. Let us see HOW FAR OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES AS A NATION ARE PARALLEL TO THOSE HERE PRESENTED. III. TWO PRACTICAL QUESTIONS. 1. What can be done with our rulers? 2. What can be done with our people? (*J. C. Goodhart, M.A.*)

Vers. 22, 23. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord.—When affliction may be said to have failed of its object:—I. I suppose that

you have set your heart upon some **CHERISHED DESIGN**—that you have dwelt upon it to such a degree as to neglect for it many social duties and all your thoughts of God. You have missed attaining it, and are deeply disappointed. If you have not learned thenceforward to strive more soberly, to plant and sow, and build and labour, and not look for success without uttering, "Father, if it seem good to Thee, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt"; if you are still engaged in the same projects with the same temper, or one even more infatuated—then distress has been sent to you in vain: you are sacrificing to the gods that smote you; trespassing yet more against the Lord. II. Suppose that you have been **SMITTEN WITH SOME DISEASE**, mental or bodily—the not unnatural consequence of dissipation or thoughtlessness, or perverseness, or the like. If you have not learned from God's displeasure; if you have not resolved that with renewed health you would walk in newness of life; if you have returned to your old sins with new zest from being for a time debarred from them—then the distress which God sent you has hardened and not softened you. You are worshipping the idols of your own hearts with a devotion which it will be more difficult than ever to displace. III. Or, in conclusion, suppose that you **HAVE GIVEN WAY TO ILL-TEMPER**, and that God has punished you by alienation of friends, by retaliation on the part of ill-wishers, by distrust on the part of all. Has this set you upon governing the impetuosity of passion, or checking the reproachful word? Or have you merely turned your spirit into some more unkindly channel—moroseness, peevishness, misanthropy? If so, distress and chastisement have not done their proper work upon you. Like Ahaz you are going on to trespass yet more against the Lord. (*D. Hesse*.) *Ahaz's persistent wickedness:—*

**I. A CONSPICUOUS EXAMPLE OF PERSISTENT WICKEDNESS.** He pushed on in face of many and powerful barriers placed in his way. 1. He had a godly ancestry. "Oh, sir," said an aged sinner who came to his minister in great distress, "to think of my father's and mother's prayers, and then of the vile wretch that I have been!" 2. It would seem that other like influences continued to surround Ahaz in his own palace. The mother of his son Hezekiah was the daughter of the wise and good Zechariah. 3. God often makes use of goodness to bring men to repentance. He tried this upon Ahaz. In a time of peril and alarm Isaiah was commissioned to "say unto him, Take heed and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted." 4. When goodness fails, it is God's way to try severity. II. **WHAT CAME OF ALL THIS?** 1. The king's life was one of ill, not of good. 2. Ahaz brought ill upon others: "He made Judah naked." "If," says Dr. South, "a man could be wicked and a villain to himself alone, the mischief would be so much the more tolerable. But the case is much otherwise. The guilt of the crime lights upon one, but the example of it sways a multitude. Especially is this true if the criminal be one of note or eminence. For the fall of such an one by any temptation is like that of a principal stone or stately pillar tumbling from a lofty eminence into the deep mire of the street. It does not only plunge and sink into the black dirt itself: it also dashes or bespatters all that are about it, or near it, when it falls." 3. In character and influence Ahaz went from bad to worse. 4. He went to an unhonoured and hopeless grave. (*Monday Club Sermons*.) *Sinning under the rod:—*

**I. AHAZ WAS THE SON OF A PIOUS KING OF JUDAH.** II. **FOR HIS WICKEDNESS GOD VISITED HIM WITH A SERIES OF SAD CALAMITIES.** III. We see here the **GUILT AND DANGER OF HARDENING OURSELVES UNDER GOD'S AFFLICTING HAND.** IV. **THOSE WHO RECEIVE AFFLICTIONS MAY GROW MORE REBELLIOUS UNDER THEM.** V. **THE GUILT OF ANY APPROACH TO SUCH A CONDITION MAY BE EASILY SEEN.** VI. **IT BECOMES US TO INQUIRE, WHAT HAVE BEEN THE EFFECTS OF GOD'S CHASTENINGS UPON OURSELVES?** (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *The use and danger of despising afflictions.—*

**I. THE USE OF AFFLICTIONS.** The end of all the Divine dispensations towards mankind is their eternal salvation, in subserviency to the honour of His great name. This end can only be accomplished in the way of repentance, faith, and holiness. The aim, therefore, of all ordinances, providential dispensations, and means of grace, is to beget or strengthen in us these three branches of Christianity. Among the various means which the Lord makes use of for this end, affliction is one of the chief. The right use of afflictions will lead us—

1. To humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand.
2. To ascribe righteousness to Him by confessing our sins and acknowledging the justice of His dealings with us.
3. To return to Him by Jesus Christ.
4. To cleave to Him with full purpose of heart.
5. To submit to His will.
6. To depend upon His grace and power.
7. To walk in His ways.

**II. THE DREADFUL CASE OF THOSE WHO DESPISE AND ABUSE THEM** (Prov. xxix. 1). Ahaz trespassed more and more. Too many are like him

(Rev. xvi. 10, 11). (*W. Richardson.*) *Lessons from the life of Ahaz*:—I. THAT A COURSE OF SIN IS CONTINUALLY DOWNWARD. Sin propagates itself, but is not reformatory. II. THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL IN CHECKING MEN IN THIS DOWNWARD COURSE. God ever seeks by His providence and Spirit to turn men from an evil course which will end in ruin. III. THAT IF MEN WILL NOT BE CHECKED IN AN EVIL COURSE, THEY MAY BECOME NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF PUNISHMENT. (*James Wolfendale.*) *Evil habits*:—1. Evil habits strengthen by indulgence. 2. The world increases its power over its votaries as they advance in life. 3. Sinners in mature years lose the perception of religious truth. 4. There is a limit to Divine endurance. (*Biblical Museum.*)

Ver. 23. **Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them.**—*Destructive substitutes*:—We may not try to substitute one god for another, or to patch out our tattered theology by borrowing and misappropriating the ideas of the enemy. There is one fountain at which we may draw and draw evermore, and that is the Bible. We never knew any man oppose the Bible who had really comprehended its inner meaning. No man can doubt the inspiration of the Bible who has read it, not galloped through it. But once lose the feeling, "Surely God is in this book: this is none other than the book of God," and we take the course of Ahaz; we go down and see what is being done in the world. One man has been delivered by wealth, and we begin to worship the golden idol; another has been delivered by various factitious circumstances, and we instantly become artificers in life, and try to mechanise life and set into motion forces that can co-operate with one another and modify one another, and issue in a plentiful harvest of good fortune for ourselves. And after all this toil we come home wasted, weakened in every joint, the subjects of a complete and disastrous collapse. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **But they were the ruin of him.**—*Seeking false inspirations*:—How many men have been mistaken in seeking false inspiration or in coveting false benedictions? The young man says he has a difficult task to-morrow, he has to meet persons with whom he has no sympathy and from whom he expects no quarter; constitutionally he is nervous, self-distrustful, somewhat afraid of a certain aspect of controversy; he therefore says, "I will fortify myself, I will take wine, the wine will quicken the flow of my blood, will pleasantly and usefully excite the nervous centres, and I shall go forward boldly and confidently and make the best of myself";—but it was the ruin of him. There are others who will sacrifice at the altar of appearances. Over their poverty they will put some borrowed rag in the hope that observers will look at the rag and not at the poverty, and treat them as occupying a certain social position. False pride will be the ruin of them. (*Ibid.*) *Costly and fatal help*:—Ahaz came to the throne when a youth of twenty. From the beginning he reversed the policy of his father, and threw himself into the arms of the heathen party. He did not plunge into idolatry for want of good advice. The greatest of the prophets stood beside him. Isaiah addressed to him remonstrances which might have made the most reckless pause, and promises which might have kindled hope and courage in the bosom of despair. Hosea in the northern kingdom, Micah in Judah, and other less brilliant names were amongst the stars which shone even in that dark night. But their light was all in vain. He was ready to worship anything that called itself a god, always excepting Jehovah. He welcomed Baal, Moloch, Rimmon, and many more with an indiscriminate eagerness that would have been ludicrous if it had not been tragical. From all sides the invaders came. From north, north-east, east, south-east, south, they swarmed in upon him. They tore away the fringes of his kingdom; and hostile armies flaunted their banners beneath the very walls of Jerusalem. And then, in his despair, like a scorpion in a circle of fire, he inflicted a deadly wound on himself by calling in the fatal help of Assyria. Nothing loth, that warlike power responded, scattered his less formidable foes, and then swallowed the prey which it had dragged from between the teeth of the Israelites and Syrians. That was what came of forsaking the God of his fathers. I. First then, let me ask you to notice how this narrative illustrates for us THE CROWD OF VAIN HELPERS WHICH A MAN HAS TO TAKE TO WHEN HE TURNS HIS BACK UPON GOD. If we compare the narrative in our chapter with the parallel in the Second Book of Kings, we get a very vivid picture of the strange medley of idolatries which they introduced. This story illustrates for us what, alas! is only too true, both on the broad scale, as to the generation in which we live, and on the narrower field of our own individual lives. Look at the so-called cultured classes of Europe to-day; turning away, as so many of them are, from the Lord God of their fathers; what sort of things are they worshipping instead? Scraps from

Buddhism, the Vedas, any sacred books but the Bible; quackeries, and Charlatanism, and dreams, and fragmentary philosophies all pieced together to try and make up a whole, instead of the old-fashioned whole that they have left behind them. But look, further, how the same thing is true as to the individual lives of godless men. Many of us are trying to make up for not having the One by seeking to stay our hearts on the many. But no accumulation of insufficiencies will ever make a sufficiency. You cannot make up for God by any extended series of creatures, any more than a row of figures that stretched from here to Sirius and back again would approximate to infinitude. The very fact of the multitude of helpers is a sign that none of them are sufficient. There are no end of "cures" for toothache, that is to say, there is none. Consult your own experience. What is the meaning of the unrest and distraction that marks the lives of most of the men in this generation? Why is it that you hurry from business to pleasure, from pleasure to business, until it is scarcely possible to get a quiet breathing time for thought at all? Why is it but because one after another of your gods have proved insufficient, and so fresh altars must be built for fresh idolatries, and new experiments made, of which we can safely prophesy the result will be the old one. You are seeking what you will never find. The many pearls that you seek will never be enough for you. The true wealth is One, One pearl of great price. II. So, notice again, how this story teaches THE HEAVY COST OF THESE HELPERS' HELP. Ahaz had, as he thought, two strings to his bow. He had the gods of Damascus, and of other lands up there, he had the King of Assyria down here. They both of them exacted onerous terms before they would stir a foot to his aid. As for the northern conqueror, all the wealth of the king and of the princes and of the temple was sent to Assyria as the price of his hurtful help. Do you buy this world's help any cheaper, my brother? You get nothing for nothing in that market. It is a big price that you have to pay before these mercenaries will come to fight on your side. Here is a man that "succeeds in life," as we call it. What does it cost him? Well! It has cost him the suppression, the atrophy by disuse of many capacities in his soul which were far higher and nobler than those that have been exercised in his success. It has cost him all his days; it has possibly cost him the dying out of generous sympathies and the stimulating of unwholesome selfishness. Ah! he has bought his prosperity very dear. There are some of you who know how much what you call enjoyment has cost you. Some of us have bought pleasure at the price of innocence, of moral dignity, of stained memories, of polluted imaginations. The world has a way of getting more out of you than it gives to you. At the best, if you are not Christian men and women, whether you are men of business, votaries of pleasure, seekers after culture and refinement or anything else, you have given heaven to get earth. Is that a good bargain? Is it much wiser than that of a horde of naked savages that sell a great tract of fair country, with gold-bearing reefs in it, for a bottle of rum and a yard or two of calico? III. Lastly, we may gather from this story an illustration of THE FATAL FALSEHOOD OF THE WORLD'S HELP. Ahaz pauperised himself to buy the hiring swords of Assyria, and he got them; but, as it says in the narrative, "The king came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not." He helped Ahaz at first. He scattered the armies that the King of Judah was afraid of like chaff, with his fierce and disciplined onset. And then, having driven them off the bleeding prey, he put his own paw upon it, and growled "Mine!" And where he struck his claws there was little more hope of life for the prostrate creature below him. Ah! and that is what this world always does. A godless life has at the best only partial satisfaction, and that partial satisfaction soon diminishes. The awful power of habit, if there were no other reason, takes the edge off all gratification except in so far as God is in it. Nothing fully retains its power to satisfy. Nothing has that power absolutely, at any moment; but even what measure of it any of our possessions or pursuits may have for a time, soon, or at all events by degrees, passes away. And do not forget that, partial and transient as these satisfactions are, they derive what power of helping and satisfying is in them only from the silence of our consciences, and our success in being able to shut out realities. One word from conscience, one touch of an awakened reflectiveness, one glance at the end—the coffin and the shroud and what comes after these, slay your worldly satisfactions as surely as that falling snow would crush some light-winged gauzy butterfly that had been dancing at the cliff's foot. Your jewellery is all imitation. These fatal helpers come as friends and allies, and they stop as masters. Ahaz and a hundred other weak

princes have tried the policy of sending for a strong foreign power to scatter their enemies, and it has always turned out one way. The foreigner has come and he has stopped. The auxiliary has become the lord, and he that called him to his aid becomes his tributary. Ah! and so it is with all the things of this world. Here is some pleasant indulgence that I call to my help lightly and thoughtlessly. It is very agreeable and does what I wanted, and I try it again. Still it answers to my call. And then after a while I say, "I am going to give that up," and I cannot. I have brought in a master when I thought I was only bringing in an ally that I could dismiss when I liked. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

**VERS. 1-11. Hezekiah began to reign.—Hezekiah's reformation:—**The surroundings of Hezekiah in his youth seem, at first view, to have been unfavourable in the extreme. He was the son of a depraved father. He grew up at a corrupt court. Good kings and bad follow one another in very illogical succession. It must be that there is a self-acting power at the centre of every personal life. Let us cling to the belief, too, that, however vast the moral inequalities of human lives may be, no life is allowed by the Creator to be altogether destitute of gracious influences. In Hezekiah's case, at least, we can have no doubt that such influences were present. It is not unnatural to believe that his mother, presumably the daughter of Zechariah, the faithful prophet of King Uzziab's day, was a woman of devout character. To the loving nurture of a mother was added the faithful counsel of godly men. Moral giants lived in those days. Micah was prophesying, Nahum was about to begin his work. During the entire lifetime of Hezekiah, Isaiah was fulfilling his office in Jerusalem. Tradition says that he was Hezekiah's tutor; there can be no doubt that he was his faithful counsellor. Repulsed by the father, he would naturally turn with greater earnestness to the son. But all this touches only the outer circle of the gracious influences by which Hezekiah was compassed. It has been said, and there is a world of truth in the saying, that more than half of the environment of any man is—God. The God who is not far from every one of us was near to the young prince in the corrupt capital of Judah. We have good reason for believing that Hezekiah had not been unresponsive to his heavenly promptings. A work begun so quickly after his accession to the throne must have been premeditated. We must suppose that Hezekiah had lived a thoughtful life. The character of the work to which the king addressed himself is deserving of attention. It was a radical work. Great as was the peril to which the kingdom was exposed from external attack, great as was its moral unsoundness, Hezekiah saw that all its trouble was rooted in ungodliness. The king's initial act in "opening the doors of the house of the Lord" was, it is likely, more philosophical than he himself realised. Reverence for God lies at the basis of all that is trustworthy in private character and of all that is enduring in public order. Hezekiah's reform was also positive in nature. It addressed itself not chiefly to the extermination of idolatry, but to the development of a genuine faith. Of their own accord the people went out to "break in pieces" the emblems of idolatry. When God wishes to regenerate the soul He does not at the outset uproot sinful affections, He implants love for Himself. Hezekiah's was a thoroughgoing work. The taunting charge of illiberality could not extort from him the smallest concession to the false religions of other lands. Not only image and "grove"—the sacred pillar or tree of Astarte—were to be hewn down, but the worship of the "high places" was to be destroyed. Of Asa and Jehoshaphat we are told both that they did and that they did not interfere with this form of worship. They probably destroyed such sanctuaries as had become openly idolatrous, and allowed the others to remain. But Hezekiah adopted extreme measures. The brazen serpent fashioned by Moses in the wilderness, and still preserved, the people regarded with superstitious veneration. Hezekiah declared that the image was like any other "piece of brass," and broke it in pieces. Hezekiah would not consent that even the germs of idolatry should remain in the land. How difficult was the mission to which Hezekiah thus committed himself! In the mode of procedure adopted by Hezekiah in carrying through his reformation are certain things worthy

of notice. 1. It is peculiarly gratifying to observe that he acted promptly. The die was cast. In the first month of his reign Hezekiah, like Abraham, who, when bidden to offer Isaac, "rose up early in the morning, . . . and went to the place of which God had told him," was wise in allowing himself no time for hesitation. Delay never softens the hard aspects of duty or lessens its difficulties. For committing one's self to the service of Christ no other time is so favourable as the first year, the first month, the first day, of one's entrance upon a new sort or period of life. 2. It is instructive to notice that Hezekiah engaged personally in the work of reform. He did not commit it all to subalterns. 3. Deserving of special mention is the fact that in the prosecution of his policy Hezekiah relied chiefly upon moral influences. He might have been compelled, but he chose rather to persuade. In this he showed the utmost wisdom. If the reform was to be real, the hearts of the people must be enlisted in it. We are, finally, prepared to inquire what results were effected by the king's determined effort. The immediate outcome was most gratifying and most wonderful. The officers of religion responded—the priests somewhat slowly, but the Levites with all their hearts. The people did the same. The nation felt to its utmost limits the electric thrill of a new life. The crusade against idolatry waxed strong throughout the kingdom, and "a burst of spring-time," as Dean Stanley beautifully calls it, succeeded. "The thing was done suddenly," the record says. But is not the same true of well-nigh every successful reform? Those advocating a righteous cause have at least two excellent reasons for viewing it with larger hope than external appearances warrant. Something in every moral being is in secret alliance with truth and justice. The second reason is stronger still; it is that by which the sacred historian explains the success of Hezekiah: "The Lord had prepared the people." We may reckon with confidence upon God's care over any work of His. To the reformatory work of King Hezekiah must be attributed a result still more imposing, though to be sure not more important. It delivered the southern kingdom from the fearful peril by which the northern kingdom had been overwhelmed. Is it not a painful thing to have to add that even so thorough a reform as this did not prove lasting? Some of the people doubtless remained steadfast, but the most fell away. (*T. S. Barbour.*)

*Hezekiah, the good king:—*I. Hezekiah's GOOD BEGINNING. 1. Correct in life (ver. 2). 2. Prompt in action (ver. 3). 3. Holy in influence (ver. 5). II. Hezekiah's SAD CONFESSION. 1. The Lord forsaken (ver. 6). 2. The sanctuary abandoned (ver. 7). 3. The penalty incurred (ver. 8). III. Hezekiah's WISE APPEAL. 1. To make a covenant (ver. 10). 2. To avert wrath (ver. 10). 3. To perform duty (ver. 11). (*Sunday School Times.*)

*Hezekiah's reformation:—*The best way to settle a kingdom is to settle the religion of it, to begin reigning with reforming. Hezekiah's reformation went on in a true step and pace, for it began first with the temple and ministry. It is but Christian prudence to cleanse the spring if we would have the stream clear; to look to God's house, and those that should dispense His Word and ordinances if we would have the people brought into conformity with Him. (*T. Manton, D.D.*)

*Starting well:—*A friend, who is deeply interested in work for Christ among our sailors, told me that at the close of a prayer-meeting of which he had been the leader, a young seaman, who had only a few nights before been converted, came up to him, and laying a blank card before him, requested him to write a few words upon it, because, as he said, "You will do it more plainly than I can." "What must I write?" said my friend. "Write these words, sir; 'I love Jesus—do you?'" After he had written them, my friend said, "Now you must tell me what you are going to do with the card." He replied, "I am going to sea to-morrow, and I am afraid if I do not take a stand at once I may begin to be ashamed of my religion, and let myself be laughed out of it altogether. Now as soon as I go on board, I shall walk straight to my bunk and nail up this card upon it, that every one may know that I am a Christian."

*Hezekiah's action, the result of previous brooding:—*The statement in ver. 3 may be taken as a general résumé of what follows in detail, but this vigorous speech to the priests was clearly among the new king's first acts. No doubt his purpose had slowly grown while his father was affronting Heaven with his mania for idols. Such decisive, swift action does not come without protracted, previous brooding. The hidden fires gather slowly in the silent crater, however rapidly they burst out at last. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

*Taking the right stand at first:—*We can never begin good things too early, and when we come into new positions, it is always prudence as well as bravery to show our colours unmistakably from the first. Many a young man, launched among fresh associations, has been ruined because

of beginning with temporising timidity. It is easier to take the right standing at first than to shift to it afterwards. Hezekiah might have been excused if he had thought that the wretched state of political affairs left by Ahaz needed his first attention. Edomites on the east, Philistines on the west and south, Syrians and Assyrians on the north, compassed him about like bees, and worldly prudence would have said, Look after these enemies to-day, and the temple to-morrow. He was wiser than that, knowing that these were effects of the religious corruption, and so he went at that first. It is useless trying to mend a nation's fortunes unless you mend its morals and religion. And there are some things which are best done quickly, both in individual and national life. Leaving off bad habits by degrees is not hopeful. The only thing to be done is to break with them utterly and at once. One strong, swift blow, right through the heart, kills the wild beast. Slighter cuts may make him bleed to death, but he may kill you first. The existing state was undeniably sinful. There was no need for deliberation as to that. Therefore there was no reason for delay. Let us learn the lesson that, where conscience has no doubts, we should have no dawdling. "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandment." (*Ibid.*) He brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together.—*Co-operation needed*:—No one is so strong that he needs no help in carrying out his plans of reform. The head of a nation or of a state must have the co-operation of many, if he would correct abuses and promote a better state of things in the administration of his government. A pastor must seek the aid of the leaders of his people in trying to raise the standard of his church. A superintendent cannot carry his school to any higher point than that to which he can first bring his teachers. The head of a business establishment, who neglects to give wise counsel to those just below him, finds the lack of it in all the departments which they oversee. The true method of uplifting the masses is by uplifting the leaders of the masses. (*H. Clay Trumbull.*)

Ver. 5. Sanctify now yourselves and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers.—*Personal consecration*:—I. WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PERSONAL DEDICATION? Thomas Aquinas made three kinds of baptism: Sanguinis, fluminis, flaminis—the blood, the flood, the fire! By repentance and faith in Christ's atonement the sinner is saved, and by water-baptism received into the visible Church. But, to be wholly prepared for the Master's work, there must be the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire. The aim of Christianity is to lead us from the material to the spiritual; from the instrumental and accidental to the absolute and eternal. This house is an instrument in the service of God. Its best consecration is the consecration of its occupants, and this is accomplished by the radical work of the Holy Spirit. The tongue of the preacher, the pen of the author, the lips of the singer, the fingers of the musician, and the brush of the painter, are servants of a governing purpose—channels through which thought and feeling, genius and culture, express themselves. If the soul that controls these instruments be consecrated, then they are hallowed. As the wondrous river we read of in ancient fable turned to gold the very sand its currents washed, so does the fountain of a holy heart, pouring forth its enriching flood in speech and effort, dignify the humblest employment or surroundings. With this spirit of consecration enter and occupy this sanctuary, and you will make the place, indeed, holy. II. WHAT ARE THE FRUITS OF THIS RADICAL, HEARTY, AND PERMANENT CONSECRATION? The people by this spirit of high consecration, are set free from the bondage of low and false views, prevalent in worldly circles. And, finally, if the pure and holy spirit of self-dedication, thus outlined, prevails, genuine revivals of religion will surely follow, a healthful growth in activity, love, and liberality will be seen, and true Christian unity will be fostered among all who really love our Lord Jesus Christ. (*Prof. E. P. Thwing.*) *Reformation must be thorough*:—A reformation to be worth much must be thorough. Half-way work in this line is of little value. Again and again the kings of Judah, when they swept away all idol worship, left untouched the high places where Jehovah was sacrificed to irregularly; and, because of their failure at completeness, their people went quickly back to gross idolatry. So in all partial attempts at reform. The man who proposes to give up drinking, or gambling, or profanity, or dishonest courses, without surrendering himself wholly to the Lord, is not likely to succeed even to the extent of his attempts. And it is with the house of the Lord as it is with persons. Unless it is wholly the Lord's, it does little honour to Him. If it is in use for religious purposes on Sunday, and for concerts and fairs and lectures and shows during the week; or if part of it is for a house of

worship, and part for shops of trade—it is at the best a much abused sanctuary. "Carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place." (*H. Clay Trumbull.*)

Ver. 8. Wherefore . . . the Lord . . . hath delivered them to be tossed to and fro, to be an astonishment, and an hissing, as ye see with your eyes.—*The results of sinning* :—It is easier to see than to foresee the results of sinning. If a young man won't foresee the results of an intemperate or a licentious life, those who observe him will, sooner or later, see with their eyes the worst that he was warned of. If a business man won't foresee the results of a dishonest course, others will see it, by and by, in his character and reputation. The future looks fair to most evil doers at the beginning of their career. It is a pity that they do not more commonly consider at the start what a tossing to and fro, what an astonishment, what a hissing, they are sure to be delivered to in the sight of those who watch them, if they go on in the path which now opens attractively before them. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 10. Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel.—*The best covenant* :—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY MAKING "A COVENANT WITH THE LORD"? In our days it means that gracious engagement on God's part to bestow on man the very favour which he supremely needs, and on terms of God's own ordering; and on the part of man, his acceptance of these terms, according to apostolic exhortation—"Be ye reconciled to God." There is implied on man's part—1. The conviction of (1) the fact, (2) the folly, and (3) the sin of his being out of covenant with God. 2. The willing and entire abandonment of every other covenant under which the soul has been enslaved. 3. A hearty reception of the terms on which a covenant with God can be made. II. WHAT COUNSEL AND DIRECTION CAN WE OFFER TO THOSE WHO HAVE IT IN THEIR HEART TO MAKE A "COVENANT WITH THE LORD"? 1. Be not satisfied with only having it in your heart to do so. 2. Let the past mistakes which you have made through trusting to your own hearts set you upon your guard against trusting them in future. 3. If you make a covenant with the Lord, resolve that it shall be a perpetual one. (*John Lewis.*) *The use of covenanting with God* :—A truly pious man will not be satisfied with serving God in his closet. He will exert his influence to bring others also to a sense of their duty. We have a noble example set before us in the conduct of Hezekiah. I. SHOW WHEN WE HAVE REASON TO APPREHEND THAT GOD'S ANGER IS WAXED HOT AGAINST US. 1. When our sins are multiplied against Him. 2. When His judgments are multiplied upon us. II. POINT OUT THE BEST MEANS OF AVERTING HIS WRATH. 1. Repentance and faith. 2. Devoting ourselves to God in a perpetual covenant. 3. Under the Old Testament dispensation, covenants were judged acceptable to God. (*Asa, 2 Chron. xv. 12-15; Josiah, 2 Kings xxiii. 3.*) 4. Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of the making of such covenants as characteristic of the gospel times (*Isa. xlv. 5; Jer. l. 4, 5.*) 5. Paul commends the Macedonians (*2 Cor. viii. 5*); and recommends a similar practice to all Christians (*Rom. xii. 1*). 6. Hezekiah manifestly supposed that God would accept him in this duty. III. URGE UPON YOU THE ADOPTION OF THEM. 1. There is no time for delay. 2. If we neglect this duty we cannot hope to escape the wrath of God. 3. If we heartily engage in this duty, we have nothing to fear. (*Skeletons of Sermons.*)

Ver. 11. For the Lord hath chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him.—*Divine service* :—I. Some persons may ask, "WHY SHOULD WE SERVE GOD? He doesn't seem as if He troubled about us?" We admit that so far as outward appearances go, it seems as if this great universe was something like a well-regulated machine with God as the invisible engineer. When a human being, man, woman, or child, goes against the laws of this great machine, God does not stop it, as a human mechanic would his engine. The Christian believer sometimes wonders why God does not in some critical emergency interfere; but shall we that are but as the creatures of a day express any doubt of the wisdom of God? II. Permit me to say A FEW WORDS TO THOSE WHO ARE NOW SERVING GOD. 1. Be cheerful in your service. 2. Let your service be pure and unselfish. One man who had been helping in a good work for a few months, with a cry of discontent said, "I shall not come any more because nobody ever thanks me." Does the violet, or the rose, or the sun need thanks for giving forth beauty, and perfume, and light? The best reward of good service is in the heart of the server. A man who engages in the Divine service from selfish motives is like a fettered bird. The bird could wing itself into the vault of yonder blue sky; but it has a stone tied to its leg. Your



selfishness is a stone which fetters your usefulness. 3. Let your service be continual. III. Let me speak to THOSE WHO HAVE NO HOPE OF EVER BECOMING THE SERVANTS OF GOD. God knows and cares for you. (*W. Birch.*) *Diligence and exertion in the Christian ministry*.—Let us endeavour—I. TO EXPLAIN THE COUNSEL OF HEZEKIAH TO THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES: “be not now negligent.” This is sometimes rendered: “be not now deceived.” This conveys the idea that we are never more apt to impose upon ourselves than when we are remiss in duty, for we vainly imagine that God will not be strict to mark against us what is so natural and so pleasing to the depraved heart of man. It implies a former deficiency in the performance of duty. This counsel was—1. Most necessary. 2. Highly important and useful. 3. Peculiarly reasonable. II. TO CONSIDER SOME MOTIVES TO ITS ENFORCEMENT. 1. If we would act in accordance with the design of God in the appointment of the sacred office of the ministry, we will use the utmost diligence in His service. 2. The number, the variety, the difficulty and importance of the duties connected with the office of the ministry, require diligence. 3. Consistency with your professed character. 4. The shortness and uncertainty of the time allotted. 5. The sense of responsibility. “Ye serve the Lord Christ.” (*W. Schaw.*) *The Christian ministry*.—I. While all God’s children are called “to serve Him,” there is a SPECIAL SENSE IN WHICH THE MINISTER OF GOD IS “CHOSEN TO SERVE HIM.” 1. He is outwardly “chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them” in the church. 2. He is inwardly brought to it; for he declares that he “thinks in his heart that he is truly called.” II. THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE IS THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE SALVATION OF SINNERS. III. THE MEANS WHEREBY THIS RESULT IS TO BE EFFECTED ARE—1. The preaching of the Gospel. (1) Faithfully. (2) Boldly. (3) Affectionately. 2. The right discharge of his regular official duties, baptism, marriage, &c. 3. Personal intercourse with his flock. 4. The minister’s consistency of life. IV. THE ATTITUDE OF THE MINISTER IS ONE OF PECULIAR DIGNITY; it is to “stand before the Lord.” Exhortation; “be not now negligent.” 1. In Prayer. 2. In study. It is said of the Venerable Bede, that “he never knew what it was to do nothing, and always found it sweet to be either learning, teaching, or writing.” 3. In labour. 4. In conduct. (*F. B. Ashley.*) *The complex idea of worship*.—We make mistakes if we suppose that worship is a mere cloud, a foam of sentiment; it is work of all kinds, door-opening and lamp-lighting and floor-sweeping, cleansing, preparing, ventilating, expecting the people and welcoming them with joy; and then incense-burning, and cross-lifting, and cry of thunderous and mute eloquence, and hymn, sweet, gentle, tender, and prayer that beats against heaven like artillery—all these things and many more are included in the complex idea of worship. Let each man, therefore, do what he can in this matter, knowing that no one man works the whole ministry of worship, but that it is an act of co-operation and combination, one part playing with another part, and each interrelating itself with each other, so as to constitute a sum total significant of unity, adaptation, music, and homage. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. Now they began on the first day of the first month.—*A new year in Jerusalem*.—Let us consider—I. THE WORK DONE (vers. 18, 19). What a grand work of an analogous character is thereby suggested—as a work that may possibly be accomplished in the beginning of this year (1 Cor. iii. 16). II. HOW IT CAME TO PASS THAT IT WAS DONE, AND “DONE SUDDENLY.” 1. “God had prepared the people” (ver. 29). 2. In so doing He had rendered the priests and Levites greatly useful (vers. 12–16). 3. King Hezekiah greatly influenced the spirit of the priests, the Levites, and the people, as evident from the character of his address (vers. 5–11). But “there is another king, one Jesus,” who builds the temple of the Lord, and cleanses it, to whom we are all invited to look, and who “shall bear the glory.” III. SOME IMMEDIATE RESULTS. 1. A great impulse given to the spirit of worship (vers. 28–30). 2. Extension of a spirit of liberality in connection with the worship and service of the Lord (ver. 35). 3. Great joy. And that how valuable! (1) In itself. (2) In relation to moral improvement—for “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (3) In relation to trials (Heb. iii. 17, 18). (4) In relation to usefulness (Psa. li. 12, 13). (*Jos. Elliot.*)

Ver. 27. When the burnt offering began, then the song of the Lord began also.—*Sacrifice and song*.—This chapter contains a brief, graphic account of the great reformation which Hezekiah wrought in the beginning of his reign. The text is

part of that account. I. HOW OFTEN THESE TWO THINGS—SACRIFICE AND SONG—SELF-DENIAL AND JOY—ARE ASSOCIATED. We see the union everywhere. 1. In the home. When is the husband or wife so supremely happy as when by some deed of self-sacrifice he or she has made the other glad? When does the father's heart sing for joy? Not when he has bent the stubborn will of the child, but when, by the sacrifice of some luxury he has made the little soul glad on its birthday. 2. In the best works of fiction, *i.e.*, those which are most true to human nature. Who does not remember the half-sovereign which Tom Pinch, the poor half-starved clerk, concealed in a piece of paper and put into the hand of Martin Chuzzlewit at their parting? And who has not envied the feeling of happiness with which he returned to his bare home and grinding lot? 3. In the lives of God's servants. The memorials of Robert and Mary Moffat, show what sacrifices they had to make in carrying on their work in Africa. They leave no doubt that they found a joy in them that the selfish and luxurious are seeking in vain. 4. In our own lives we have all experienced it. II. THEY ARE INDISSOLUBLY ASSOCIATED—JOINED TOGETHER IN THE NATURE OF THINGS. Man cannot have the one without the other. Let there be no sacrifice and there will be no song, no self-denial and there will ere long be no joy. That is a law written broadly over human nature, attested by the widest experience, and recognised by Prov. xi. 24, 25. It explains some of what seem to be the hardest sayings and most difficult demands of our Lord, as, *e.g.*, Matt. xvi. 24, 25; John xii. 24; and His question put to the two ambitious disciples (Mark x. 37, 38). The lesson is clear. We all want happiness—that our joy may be full. But we cannot have it by aiming at it directly. Begin to sacrifice, to give to God what you really value; say, "I will not offer unto the Lord my God that which doth cost me nothing." Give your money, interest, time, effort. Copy the example of Him who "went about doing good," and "pleased not Himself." Try to make lives brighter, homes happier, business more pure. Take up the cross. Then this bit of old-world history shall record your experience: "When the burnt offering began, then the song of the Lord began also"—a song which grew louder and mightier as the sacrifice went on, and never ended until the sacrifice itself came to an end. (*J. Ogle.*)

Ver. 31. Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord.—*Consecration*:—The reign of Hezekiah was like the spasmodic brightness of a candle about to go out for ever. The root principle in consecrating anything is the recognition of God's exclusive ownership. I. A REAL CONSECRATION IS AN ACT OF FREE WILL. II. CONSECRATION MEANS A GIVING TO GOD HIMSELF. III. NOR WILL SUCH CONSECRATION BE COMPLETE WITHOUT A PERSONAL CONSECRATION. (*Bishop Charles E. Cheney.*) *Worship and thankofferings*:—I. THE OCCASION REFERRED TO: it was the opening of the house of God. 1. This house was a sacred edifice, consecrated to God and typical of the body of Christ. 2. In the house they opened for God, they recognised a place of meeting between God and souls. 3. In the house that was opened for the worship of God, there was an inner court. Into this inner court we have now "access by the Spirit unto the Father." II. THE NATURE OF THEIR WORSHIP. By sacrifice. There is no acceptable worship of God without sacrifice. III. THE EXPRESSIONS OF THANKFULNESS AMONG THE PEOPLE. They were happy—1. In the knowledge of their acceptance with God. 2. In the extension of the life of God in their souls. 3. In the revival of the worship of God among them publicly. 4. In the expression of their ardent concern to rival one another in the service of God—for they all brought their thankofferings. (*Joseph Irons.*)

Ver. 36. For the thing was done suddenly.—*Quickly done*:—I. THAT GOD VERY OFTEN APPEARS TO WORK WITH A SUDDENNESS THAT IS STARTLING. 1. In the realm of nature. (1) Storms. (2) Earthquakes. (3) The transition of the seasons. 2. In the realm of providence. (1) Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea. (2) The elevation of Saul to the throne of Israel. (3) Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation. 3. In the realm of grace. (1) The conversion of Manasseh, of Saul the persecutor. (2) Revivals in churches. II. THE FACT THAT ALTHOUGH GOD'S WORKS MAY APPEAR TO BE MARVELLOUSLY SUDDEN, YET AT THE SAME TIME, THEY HAVE BEEN PRECEDED BY A PREPARATION THAT HAS PERHAPS LASTED FOR YEARS. It was so in this particular case. Hezekiah thanked God for having prepared the people. Do you ask me how they were prepared? I think I could venture to answer that question by saying they were prepared by the very openness of the sin of the previous monarch. Ahaz had gone to such a tremendous length in iniquity that his very excesses of crime had

awoke a counter-feeling amongst the people. So is it in everything. First in the realm of nature. The storm that comes with racehorse speed across the sky might doubtless be traced back to atmospheric agencies far, far remote. The storm is only a climax. As in the realm of nature, so in the realm of providence. The deliverance at the Red Sea—it appeared sudden—it was not. It was only one link in a long chain. From the very beginning God had determined how He would deliver His people. Is not it specially so in the realm of grace? Look at Manasseh, whom we have used as an example of sudden conversion. If at your leisure you refer to his history, you will find in the thirty-third chapter, eleventh and twelfth verses, the account of God's preparation. "And Manasseh was caught in the thorns, and was taken a captive to Babylon; and in his distress he sought the Lord." Take the case of Pentecost. If you read the second chapter of the Acts attentively, you will see that God had brought together at Jerusalem at one time an immense number of people out of every country, and I read they were "devout men"; that is, they were inquirers after the truth. God had heaped together prepared fuel, then He made Peter strike the spark which resulted in the grand Pentecostal blaze. So is it in revivals. A revival appears sudden, and yet it is only the result of previous preparation. You are revived and you say that you are revived suddenly. Let me ask you a question or two, and I think you will see there has been prior working. Did you have any troubles in your business? Did you lose a child? Were you sick? What an encouraging thought it is to every worker for God that mighty things can thus be accomplished in a moment. (*A. G. Brown.*) "Suddenly":—Observe the conjunction of words: "prepared—suddenly." That is the true order of progress—preparation as to process, suddenness as to revelation. As the volcano, it is always gathering its heat, the moment of explosion is sudden; it always comes unexpectedly; it is like death itself, for though we have reckoned about the time death will come, when he does come his white ghastliness makes us forget our preparation and say, It was so sudden at the last! Have some of us not had preparation enough? Is it not time now for enthusiasm? We have heard thousands of discourses; we have attended thousands of religious services; we have even gone so far as to criticise the services we have attended. Has there not been preparation enough? Is it not time for a little suddenness, outburst, genuine enthusiasm? "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple." "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host"; and yet all the ages had been preparing for that one moment. Eternity had been waiting for that crisis, and yet even then it was said, "And suddenly." "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, a sound as of a rushing, mighty wind." . . . Yet, though apparently so unexpected, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER XXX.

**VERS. 7, 8. That the fierceness of His wrath may turn away.**—*Mercy turned to penalty*:—The fire that cheers, refines, and purifies, also burns and tortures. It all depends on our relation to the fire, whether it be our friend or foe. In Retsch's illustration of Goethe's "Faust," there is one plate where angels are seen dropping roses upon the demons who are contending for the soul of Faust. But every rose falls like molten metal wherever it touches. God rains roses down, but our sinful hearts meeting Divine love with wilful disobedience turn His love into wrath. (*Christian Age.*) *The duty of yielding ourselves to the Lord*:—I. A BLESSED SEASON OF GRACE MARKED FOR ALL ISRAEL. Now were the doors of the house of the Lord opened (chap. xxix. 3). II. THEIR DUTY IN THAT BLESSED SEASON OF GRACE. 1. Negative. "Be not stiff-necked." It is a metaphor taken from bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke, who make great difficulty and resistance about taking it on. 2. Positive. (1) Yielding themselves to the Lord. Hebrew, give ye the hand to the Lord. (2) Entering into His sanctuary. (3) Serving Him. (a) In His ordinances. (b) In their daily walk. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *A season of grace*:—In a season of grace, in which God is offering to lay His yoke on sinners, they should beware of being stiff-necked, or refusing to take it on. I. WHAT IS THAT YOKE WHICH THE LORD IS OFFERING TO LAY ON SINNERS. It is the soft and easy yoke

for the salvation and welfare of penitent sinners. "Take My yoke upon you, saith Jesus, and learn of Me: For My yoke is easy." This is the yoke of kindly willing subjection to God in Christ. 1. The yoke of subjection to the will of His commandments. 2. The yoke of His providential will. He claims to dispose of you, as seems good to Him. II. THIS OBEDIENCE OF THE SINNER TO GOD IS CALLED A YOKE, because—1. Coming under it, we are in a state of subjection as those under a yoke. 2. It is laid on us for labour or work. 3. By it we are not only kept at work, but kept in order at our work. They who truly bear the yoke, are uniform and orderly in their obedience. "They have respect unto all God's commandments." 4. Of its uneasiness to the flesh. 5. It fixes subjection upon us. The bonds of obligation are sweet and agreeable to His willing people. III. MOTIVES. 1. God is the party with whom we have to do. 2. There will be nothing gained by stiff-neckedness to the yoke of God. 3. God has waited long on you, but will not wait always (Prov. xxix. 1). Now, while a season of grace is afforded to sinners, it is their duty to fall in with it speedily, to give the hand and yield themselves to the Lord. Here we shall—I. SHOW HOW SINNERS HAVE A SEASON OF GRACE AFFORDED THEM. 1. By their being continued in life. 2. By the call of the Gospel so directed to them. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." 3. By solemn sacramental occasions afforded to a people. This is the case in the text. These make a precious "now" not to be slighted. At ordinary occasions of the gospel, the blessed bargain is offered; but now the seal of heaven is ready to confirm it. 4. By some inward motions felt within one's own soul, pressing them to comply and yield at length. II. INQUIRE WHAT IS SUPPOSED IN THIS GRACIOUS CALL TO SINNERS. It supposes—1. That sinners are naturally in a state of rebellion against the Lord. 2. That though the Lord can break the sinner in pieces for his rebellion, yet He would rather that the sinner yield (Eze. xxxiii. 11). 3. That God's hand is stretched out to receive the sinner yielding himself (Isa. lxxv. 2). 4. That forced work will not be acceptable here. 5. That the sinner willingly yielding shall be kindly received and accepted. III. SHOW WHAT IT IS TO GIVE THE HAND OR YIELD OURSELVES TO THE LORD. 1. In general, it comprehends—(1) The work of conviction. (2) The work of illumination in the knowledge of Christ, in receiving the discovery of a Saviour. (3) The work of humiliation, in becoming pliable to the Divine proposal in the Gospel; leading them to say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The iron sinew in the sinner's neck is broken. The outer door of the mind, and the inner door of the will, are both cast open to the Lord Christ. (4) The work of faith in the sinner's believing on, and so closing with Christ, as his Saviour from sin and wrath, renouncing all others. (5) The work of repentance from dead works, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh (Col. ii. 11). Faith and repentance are inseparable. That faith which produceth not evangelical repentance, is but dead faith. (6) The work of entire resignation. 2. In particular. (1) Yielding the soul, or inner man—mind—conscience—will—to the Lord. (2) Yielding the body or outward man to the Lord. (3) Yielding up all lusts and idols to Him as traitors which you can no more harbour. (4) Yielding all lawful enjoyments to Him, so as to be at His disposal, and never to break with Him for any of them. (5) Yielding your lot and your all to Him; saying, "He shall choose our inheritance for us." Improvement. Use 1: Of conviction and humiliation, in respect of the sad bias which man's nature has got. Use 2: Of exhortation. (1) You must yield yourselves to one or other, for you are not self-sufficient. (2) The Lord hath the best right to you. (3) Consider what the Lord has yielded for you (Rom. viii. 32; Rom. v. 8). (4) The Saviour is very desirous of your yielding. (5) He is not seeking your yielding yourselves for nothing (Hosea iii. 3). (6) You must yield or die, bow or break. (7) Yield and all your former rebellions shall be forgiven. (8) Yield or the Lord will have war with you for ever. How will you bear His coming? (2 Thess. i. 7, 9). (*Ibid.*) *The manner in which the soul should yield itself to the Lord*:—I. AS IN A MARRIAGE COVENANT (Hosea ii. 19). 1. Wholly. 2. For ever. II. AS TO A CONQUEROR. III. AS TO YOUR KING AND SOVEREIGN LORD. At discretion and not by capitulation. IV. AS FILIAL SERVANTS TO A FATHERLY MASTER. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 17-20. For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified.—*Unfitness for the Communion*:—I. THERE ARE SEASONS WHEN WE FEEL UNFIT FOR THE SACRED ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S HOUSE. Let us think of the ways in which the Israelites were rendered unfit for the Passover and see how far they tally with our unfitness for the Supper. 1. Some were kept away by defilement

(1) The dead in sin lie all around us; contact with their ways and motives, unless we are continually cleansed by Divine grace, is defiling in many ways. (2) The mass of sin within our own selves is a constant source of defilement. 2. When a man was on a journey he could not keep the Passover. The heart's blood of the Eucharist, is nearness to God; and when we are afar off, it is a poor dead ceremony. 3. You may have been in an evil case from unknown causes. You feel it is not with you as in days past. Marring influences not mentioned in the Book of Numbers may have been preventing you from eating the spiritual Passover to your heart's content. Among these causes are—(1) Little faith. (2) The absence of overflowing joy. (3) Spiritual weakness at all points. (4) A feeling of uselessness. Whatever your disqualifications, bring them and turn them into confessions of sin. II. **THOUGH WE FEEL AND LAMENT OUR WANT OF PREPARATION WE MAY STILL COME TO THE FEAST.** Let us to some extent follow in the track of the men in Hezekiah's time. 1. They forgot their differences. 2. They removed the idols. 3. They endeavoured to prepare their hearts. 4. They made open and explicit confession unto God. 5. Confession made, let prayer ascend to heaven. III. **IN SO COMING WE MAY EXPECT A BLESSING.** At the Passover in Hezekiah's days there was—1. Great gladness. 2. Great praise to God. 3. Great communion with God. 4. A great enthusiasm. 5. Great liberality. 6. Another great breaking of idols. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Personal sanctification requisite for acceptable worship:*—I. **THE PRINCIPLE WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP.**—Sanctification (Heb. x. 22). Sanctification of heart is necessary if you consider—1. The character of God who is worshipped (Isa. vi. 1-5). 2. The nature of the worship required. 3. The design of all religious worship. (1) To glorify God. (2) To promote our increasing likeness to God. II. **THE ASSERTION THAT IN MANY THIS PRINCIPLE WAS WANTING.** This charge is—1. Comprehensive. 2. Tremendously awful. Connect it with the declaration of the Saviour, "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me." (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) *The people's state and condition:*—This text, though it speaketh of the celebration of the Passover, yet will well enough befit the solemnity of the Lord's Supper. I. **THE INDISPOSITION OR UNPREPAREDNESS OF THE PEOPLE.** "A multitude of the people had not cleansed themselves." 1. In these times in which there is much care had about the right celebration of a sacrament, there are many yet that are unworthy. (1) Because there is a great deal of laziness in people, and an unwillingness against such a soul-searching ordinance as the sacrament. (2) There is a great deal of hypocrisy in many men, and it is possible that they may carry their naughtiness so secretly that they may hide it from the most discerning eye. 2. If when much care is taken about the ordinances, many are unworthy to come, it serveth, (1) To show what need we in this land have to humble ourselves, as for other sins, so especially for our sacramental sins. (2) For a double exhortation: (a) To pastors, that they should use all diligent care to prevent this unworthiness, by instructing the people in the nature of the ordinances, and by admonishing them of the danger of their unprepared coming. (b) To the people. To stir them up every one to look unto himself whether he be not one of the number. A gracious heart is apt to suspect itself (Matt. xxvi. 22). The unprepared, unworthy receiver is he that doth not come with answerable meet affections, and so holy and reverent a frame of spirit as God requires we should bring into His presence. They are—All ignorant persons that cannot discern the Lord's body. Those that do not judge and condemn themselves (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32). A gracious prepared heart is a self-judging heart: a wicked heart is loth to come to trial. Those that come in uncharitableness and malice. 3. There is no cause why men should abstain from the use of ordinances, for fear of communicating with wicked and profane men. II. **THEIR PRACTICE, NOTWITHSTANDING.** "Yet they did eat the Passover otherwise than was written." Many rush on ordinances notwithstanding their unpreparedness. The reasons are—1. The remissness, or abuse of the censures, of the Church, that do not restrain such persons from coming. 2. It proceedeth from ourselves, because—(1) There is a great deal of ignorance and unbelief in the hearts of most men. (2) Custom prevaileth with most rather than conscience. Custom usually eateth out the strength of any performance, and dissolves it into a mere formality. III. **THE FAULT OF THEIR PRACTICE.** They ate otherwise than was written. God's service is a written service. We offend in our duties when we do otherwise than is written. We do this—1. When we do too much. 1. The essentials of a sacrament are set down in the institution; there is the rule. If we seek to patch it up with some zealous additions and pieces of our own, we go beyond the rule. 2. In the outward part of duty, in corporal service,

and in the pomp and solemnity of his worship, there we may do too much—more than we need to have done. It is easy to be too pompous in a sacrament, and to sin against the plainness of the ordinance. Duties are like your coats of arms, best when they are plainest, and not overcharged with too many fillings; or like wine, then most generous and sprightly, when it is pure and uncompounded. The sacraments were to feed men's hearts, not to please their eyes, or tickle their ears. Ordinances nourish best when they come nearest their primitive institution. We may, then, do too much here. A sense-pleasing religion is dangerous, it is too much suitable to our natural inclinations; and that is the reason why country people are so much taken with these shows; they do not love the native beauty that is in duties half so well as they do the painting of them. It is a miserable thing when you will place religion in that for which you have no ground nor warrant. If you will find yourselves work, and not take that which is cut out for you, you know who must pay you your wages. Mark the question of the Saviour (Matt. xv. 3). 2. When we do too little. When we come not up to the spiritual part of the commandment. Consider what is required about duty—(1) Something about the heart before duty. Preparation (ver. 19). We must come with faith and repentance and other qualifications; we must come with a desire to find the Lord (Psa. xciii. 1). (2) Something about the heart in duty. Stirring it up. A duty done without life and efficacy is as a duty not done at all. We come short of the rule if we come not with holy life and activity, with a working waiting spirit that will warm our hearts within us, and make them burn under the ordinances. See what a qualification James requireth in prayer (James v. 16). There is an expression (Acts xxvii. 7). "Instantly serving God day and night," which means in the original, with the forcible putting of all their might and strength, with their stretched-out strength. There can never be too much done in respect of the spiritual part of the commandment. 3. Something to be done after duty. Recollecting and running over all the carriage of the heart towards God in the duty, and the gracious intercourse that the soul had with God. (*T. Manton, D.D.*) *Hezekiah's prayer for the Israelites*:—I. THE IRREGULARITY WHICH SOME OF THE PEOPLE WERE GUILTY OF. II. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER FOR THEM. III. THE SUCCESS OF THIS PRAYER. Application: 1. Let this history engage us to seek the God of our fathers, by observing all His ordinances. 2. Let this subject make us solicitous to prepare our hearts for every religious solemnity. 3. Let this subject encourage those whose hearts are prepared to seek God. 4. Let this subject excite those who have the care of others to watch over them and pray for them. (*J. Orton.*)

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

**VER. 1. Until they had utterly destroyed them all—Utterly**:—Mark the word "utterly." It is for want of that word that so many men have failed. Many men have cut off the heads of weeds. Any man can do that. The weed is in the root, and the root is not straight down in the earth, so that it can be taken out easily; after a certain depth it ramifies, and care must be taken that we get out every fibre and filament, and having got it out, turn it upside down, and let the sun do the rest. A man has undertaken to abstain from some evil pursuit for a month: he has clipped off the top of the weed and looks just as well as anybody else, but he is not; he has still the root in him, and that must be taken out, though he be half murdered in the process. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Reform must lead to regeneration*:—To utterly destroy an idol first, even were it possible, would not be lasting. What must come first in the order of time? Religious enthusiasm, religious conviction; deep, intense spiritual fellowship with God; a look into heaven; vital sympathy with the Cross; a purification of hand and life and tongue, and body, soul, and spirit, by the Passover rightly eaten; and then what giants will go forth with axes of lightning to smite pillar and asherah and idol and every vain thing. Men cannot strike finally if they act only as reformers. Reform is an active word, and is to be regarded with great favour, and is the only word that is permissible under some circumstances; but the greater word is regeneration. Reform that does not point to regeneration is a waxen flower that will melt when the sun is well up in the heavens. (*Ibid.*) *Reform*:—There are three effects which ought always to

follow our solemn assembly on the Lord's day. We should go home and—I. **BREAK IN PIECES ALL OUR IMAGES.** 1. Self-righteousness. 2. Bacchus. 3. Lust. 4. Business; false measures and false weights. 5. Pride. II. **CUT DOWN THE GROVES.** Groves are the places where the images have been set up. There was nothing mark you, positively sinful in the grove; but they have been used for sinful purposes, and therefore down they must come. We would specify—1. The theatre. 2. The tavern. 3. So-called recreation, dancing, &c. 4. Evil books. Light literature, the moral of which is anything but that of piety and goodness. III. **THROW DOWN THE HIGH PLACES AND ALTARS, ETC.** God had said that He would have but one altar, namely, at Jerusalem. There should be a casting down of everything in connection with the true worship that is not according to the law of God and the word of God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, unto their own cities.**—*Home missionary zeal:*—In evangelising our own countrymen we must proceed—I. **IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF THOSE MEANS WHICH ARE CONGENIAL WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE DISPENSATION UNDER WHICH WE LIVE.** The men of Israel were fully justified in doing as described in the text. They lived under a Theocracy, and idolatry was high treason. We live under a different dispensation. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” To destroy the idolatry which still reigns in our land we must go forth and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hezekiah's proclamation of the Passover and its consequences as described in the preceding chapter suggests how this has to be done. 1. Distinctly (ver. 1). 2. Boldly. In spite of ridicule (ver. 10). 3. Affectionately (ver. 6-9). 4. Prayerfully (ver. 18). II. **BY OURSELVES LIVING CONSISTENTLY WITH THE PROFESSION WE MAKE, AND THE GREAT CAUSE WE HAVE ESPOUSED.** Our lives must be characterised—1. By sincerity and uprightness (2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21). 2. By joy and praise (2 Chron. xxx. 21). 3. By self-denial and sacrifice (2 Chron. xxx. 24). III. **WITH A DETERMINATION TO TAKE NO REST TILL THE OBJECT WE HAVE IN VIEW IS FULLY ACCOMPLISHED.** “Until they had utterly destroyed them all.” (*H. Townley.*)

Ver. 20, 21. **And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good.**—*Hezekiah—an example for young men:*—I. **HEZEKIAH'S RELIGION.** 1. It was expensive. He set about reforming the national religion. The spirit of such a life should be, must be, respected in every one of us if the religion we possess is to be worth anything. The young man whose mind is that of Jesus Christ has learned to live, not for himself, but for others. Harlan Page was a house joiner at Coventry, in America. His social position gave him but little influence, but what he had he gave to God. He was the living missionary wherever he went. See how God's grace brought him out of self. He wrote: “When I first obtained a hope I felt that I must labour for souls. I prayed, year after year, that God would make me the means of saving souls.” Is your position that of a clerk? Imitate David Nasmith, who without talent or money sanctified the desk by working for Christ and perishing souls. He was the founder of City Missions, and the home heathen owe more to the Glasgow clerk than to any man who ever lived. Is your position that of a military officer? Imitate Hedley Vicars. The soldier of the Queen became the soldier of Christ. He had hard work to stand his ground at mess, but he did stand it; and one of the soldiers said, “Since Mr. Vicars became so good he has staided about four hundred men in the regiment.” Is your position that of a merchant? Imitate George Moore, who rose to his partnership by sterling integrity, high principle, and hard work. He had no idea of growing rich and forgetting those by whose labours he accumulated his wealth. Every clerk and servant in his employment knew, in a very tangible way, that a good year's business had been done. In a word, young men, whatever you may be, peer or peasant, professional man or tradesman, merchant or mechanic—come out in God's strength as a religious man, and live for others. Let your sympathies embrace suffering bodies and perishing souls. Never mind being poor. Much of God's work in this world has been done by men of little education, slender means, and few advantages. Do your duty for Christ and your influence will reach further than you think. “Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah.” 2. It was sound. He “wrought that which was good and right, and truth before the Lord his God.” A young man's religion, to be worth anything, must be sound. If he is to do anything which is “good and right and truth,” he must—(1) Be able to give some account of the hope which is in him; he must get out of the company of those who “understand neither what they say, nor what they affirm.” (2) Base his religion on a personal study of the Bible. (3) Support his religion by the plain lessons of history: the religious history of our

own country. (4) Continually submit to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. (5) Above all, his religion must be centred in a personal Saviour. 3. It was whole-hearted. II. HEZEKIAH'S REWARD. "And prospered." 1. His reward was of God. 2. He had his reward in his country. What a benefactor he must have appeared in the eyes of his subjects. 3. He had his reward in himself. (*John Burbridge.*) *Life in earnest*:—I. THE SPHERE WHICH CHRISTIAN EARNESTNESS OCCUPIES IN THE DIVINE LIFE. 1. It will make a man think very earnestly for his Lord and Master. In the diary of Jonathan Edwards we find the following account of his feelings towards the Lord's work: "I had great longing for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; my secret prayer used to be in great part taken up in praying for it. If I heard the least hint of anything that had happened in any part of the world which appeared to me in some respect or other to have favourable aspect on the interest of Christ's kingdom, my soul eagerly caught at it, and it would much animate and refresh me. I used to read public news letters, mainly to see if I could find some news favourable to the interest of religion in the world." When we are full of zeal for God it is the same with us. 2. It will make a man plan and purpose for the cause of Christ. 3. It will show itself in perseverance. 4. It will show its zeal in an entire dependence upon God, and in intensely fervent prayer for God's help and for God's blessing. II. ARGUMENTS WHICH PROVOKE TO THIS EARNESTNESS. 1. The greatness of the work we have to deal with. 2. The earnestness of Satan. 3. The responsibilities which lie upon us as a Church. 4. The onflowing of the stream of death. 5. The love which we have received of Jesus. III. MAY GOD GIVE ME FRESH GRACE WHILE I UNDERTAKE THE SOLEMN WORK OF DEALING WITH CARELESS AND UNCONVERTED SOULS. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The character of Hezekiah*:—Every man who wishes to do good in his generation, who would bless others and be blessed himself, must cultivate the same principle of goodness that Hezekiah did. In every work that he began, "he did it with all his heart." I. INDUCEMENTS WHICH SHOULD LEAD US TO ADOPT THIS PRUDENT AND DECISIVE CONDUCT. 1. It saves time; or at least it leads us to apply every part of it to the best advantage. It prevents our life being abridged by years of irresolution and delay. It gives us the assurance that we are husbanding our talent well. 2. It secures our continual happiness. 3. Its beneficial effects on society are incalculable. II. EXAMPLES OF THIS PRINCIPLE ARE TO BE FOUND—1. In the Bible. Moses, Ezra, Nehemiah, &c. 2. In general history. The origin and progress of almost everything great and good in society has been achieved by the zeal and active virtues of a few individuals. The advancement of the arts and sciences; the extension of commerce; the blessings and security of a legal government; the inestimable value of a pure and reformed religion, &c. (*J. Hewlett, B.D.*) *Hezekiah's good reign*:—A beautiful lily laid in your hand would show you nothing of the mud and slime of the river bed from which it sprang. Like such a lily is Hezekiah, the flower of kings. Some natures seem to grow strong in virtue, by contact with its opposite. Joseph, Moses, and Daniel ripened in strange gardens, and Hezekiah must have sucked honey out of thistles. Consider—I. HIS REVERENCE. Victor Hugo affirms that neither Wellington nor Blucher won the battle of Waterloo. Napoleon conquered himself. His own excessive weight destroyed the equilibrium. "He vexed God" by his importance, and so his fall was decreed. Hezekiah began his reign by exalting God and humbling himself. II. HIS RELIGIOUS ZEAL. III. HIS PUBLIC SPIRIT. IV. HIS SINCERITY OF HEART. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *How to succeed in life*:—There are three lessons we may learn from Hezekiah. I. HE WAS NOT AFRAID OF WORK. He did not seek success without toil. "Depend upon it," said Sir Walter Scott, "there is nothing to be had without labour." Horace Greely said to the youth of America, "The darkest day in any man's earthly career is that wherein he first fancies that there is some easier way of gaining a dollar than by squarely earning it." "When I was a telegraph operator in Pittsburgh," said Andrew Carnegie, "I knew all the men who speculated. I have lived to see all of them ruined—bankrupt in money and bankrupt in character. There is scarcely an instance of a man who has made a fortune by speculation and kept it." II. HEZEKIAH CONCENTRATED HIS EFFORT. What he did, he did "with all his heart." "The one prudence in life is concentration," says Emerson, "the one evil is dissipation." There is a proverb which says, "A canoe is paddled on both sides," which means that to succeed you must do one thing at a time, and do it with all your heart and all your powers. III. HEZEKIAH AIMED AT THOROUGHNESS IN HIS WORK. (*A. F. Forrest.*) *Hezekiah's thoroughness in God's service*:—I. We learn from Hezekiah a lesson of CONCENTRATION OF ENERGY. II. METHOD AND PUNCTUALITY, too, seem to be hinted at in the



text, and they are almost indispensable to prosperity. III. The great lesson is THE VALUE OF THOROUGHNESS in doing whatever we undertake, and doing it well. Do nothing as if it were trifling. IV. Emulate Hezekiah's ARDENT AND CONSISTENT PIETY. He stands in the front rank among the saints of Scripture as a man of prayer. (*J. Thain Davidson.*) *Concentration* :—A number of tiny brooklets will turn no mill, and will probably dry up when the sun is hot, but all the water turned into one channel will move the wheel to grind the corn which may supply a town with bread. All apostles of progress in religion, or science, or philosophy, have been men whose aims have all converged to one great centre, and whose forces have been thrown upon one sublime purpose. (*Handbook of Illustration.*) *The objective point* :—In military operations there is always what is called the objective point. The objective point is the point to be made, the thing to be done; all the forces in the army are concentrated on the making of that point, and when that is made, success follows. In one sense life is a warfare, and every one should have his objective point, a clearly defined purpose, and work up to it with undeviating persistency. This is the only way he can succeed. *Enthusiastic service* :—A dealer in pictures who makes it his business to find as many new painters as possible, both in this country and abroad, was asked recently in regard to his methods of selecting pictures to buy. He was very frank in his talk, and one thing which he said is shrewd enough to be worth quoting. "Of course," he said, "with my experience I am able to judge whether there is promise in a painter's work, but I never buy with any idea of putting the painter on my list until I have seen the man and talked with him myself. I always watch him closely, and I never buy his pictures unless his eye lights up when I talk to him about his work and about his profession." The artist whose heart was really in his work could not discuss it without kindling, and the man who did not paint from the heart was not the one whose pictures the dealer wanted. The remark was not only one which showed insight and shrewdness on the part of the dealer, but it is one of a good deal of significance in regard to all work. The man who does anything worth doing is the man who cannot talk about what he has accomplished or what he hopes to accomplish without enthusiasm, no matter how far short of his ideals what he has actually done may seem to him to fall. *National righteousness* :—From Hezekiah's conduct, and from God's approval of it, we learn—**I. THAT TO ESTABLISH RELIGION IN A LAND IS THE DUTY OF EVERY RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT. II. THAT TO EMPLOY THE POWER AND APPLIANCES OF THE STATE IN ORDER TO EXTEND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, IS BENEFICIAL BOTH TO THE INDIVIDUAL AND TO THE NATION AT LARGE.** (*Louis Stenham, M.A.*) *Impassioned men* :—It is the impassioned men that have made history always, religious and secular both. They are the torch to the heaped-up combustibles; they are the pulse to the general body that is listless and waiting. No man has moved the world like Jesus Christ, because no man besides Him has embodied so wide, so profound, and so Divine enthusiasm. People are passionate in everything but their passion for men; and that is the one Christian passion. (*C. H. Parkhurst.*)

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

**VER. 4. Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?—***Stopping the fountains* :—Nothing was more thought of in ancient times in order to add to the greatness of a city than an abundant water supply. It was one of the greatest glories of old Rome that it had never-failing aqueducts, and the same thing was true of Jerusalem in still earlier times. In all the hard sieges the city endured there never was any failure of the water supply. The Jews had chiefly to thank Hezekiah for this. He was both most brave and wise—this old-time Judean king. He turned his attention first of all to the water supply of the country north of Jerusalem, by the route along which the invading hosts must come. There was the upper watercourse of Gihon, not far from the holy city. The springs were abundant there and their fresh waters united to form a brook which ran strongly down the valley. Hezekiah's engineers saw what was to be done, at once to cripple the enemy and greatly to benefit the Jews. The springs should be drawn from their natural outlet to pour their waters into a capacious subterranean aqueduct built strongly and leading the current into vast reservoirs in Jerusalem cut in the

rock far below the foundations of the temple, between the walls of Jerusalem proper and the city of David. So it is said by the inspired chronicler that Hezekiah stopped the fountains, that is, he covered them up after diverting the water, so that the Assyrians might not find them, and he brought the stream by aqueduct straight down to the west side of the city of David. For why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water? I. We are justified in thinking OF OURSELVES IN OUR CHARACTER AS THE SERVANTS OF GOD IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, AS TYPIFIED BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN OLDEN TIME, THE JEWS; AND THE KING OF ASSYRIA FOR US IS THE EVIL ONE HIMSELF WITH ALL HIS HATEFUL HOSTS. He has ever desired to avail himself of the springs of our human life, to sustain and aid him in his assaults upon our souls. The springs of human life are many and various. 1. There are our intellectual faculties, the mind with all its marvellous power of imagination and memory, the intelligence which reasons out things, and by sheer force of resistless logic discerns the true from the false. 2. There is the will, that strange forceful energy which drives our powers and faculties in this way or in that, compelling them to work its bidding, a will so often, alas! set against the Divine will and purpose which called us into being. 3. There are our affections, the emotional side of our nature, working sometimes quite independently of reason, persuading us to this or that course of action because the present inclination outweighs every other consideration. II. THESE SPRINGS OF OUR HUMAN LIFE ARE FULL OF VIGOUR AND SEND FORTH A FULL STREAM OF EFFECTIVE ENERGY. It is no wonder that the enemy of souls desires to appropriate them to his own purpose. 1. He would use the mind to set reason against faith, to be wise in its own conceits, to refuse to accept anything that is not made plain to it. 2. He would use our wills to perform his own purposes against the Most High. He says to us, "You are free agents, to do as you please. You shall not surely die if you eat of the forbidden fruit." 3. Once more there is the emotional side of our nature, our affections. We feel that these have relation especially to the pleasures of life, the happiness of love and of self-indulgence in natural desires of many sorts. The devil would use these for his own purposes, as of old the kings of Assyria would eagerly have used the springs of Gihon. Cunningly does he urge it on the human soul, "Why has God given you passions and natural desires of all sorts if you are not meant to gratify them?" III. Now that wise king Hezekiah in the olden time, when he perceived that the abundant springs of Gihon were likely to help his enemy to the grievous discomfiture of the people of God, SET TO WORK AT ONCE TO COVER THE SPRINGS, HAVING DIVERTED THE CHANNEL THAT THE WATER MIGHT FLOW BY SUBTERRANEAN CONDUITS INTO THE HOLY CITY. The first great thought he had was to hinder the Assyrian from availing himself of those precious springs. And that may well read to us a lesson of the exceeding profitableness of covering our minds and wills and affections from the evil one. 1. Our intellectual powers should be covered that the enemy of souls may not use them to our discomfiture. 2. The will is likewise one of those springs of life which Satan especially seeks to find and to avail himself of. We cover it from him by subjecting ourselves to a higher will through the principle of obedience. 3. Then there are those choice springs of life which we call the affections. We must set restraint upon our natural desires in all sorts of ways, by remembering that our nature has been perverted by original sin; its lusts and appetites are in rebellion against their lawful master the will, and they are sure to lead us into mischief unless strongly repressed by loyalty to the teachings of God. IV. Hezekiah was not content to stop the fountains of Gihon that his enemy might not find abundant water in that dry and dusty country; with a master stroke of policy he built a great subterranean conduit, AND CARRIED ALL THE FRESH SWEET WATER FROM ITS SOURCE IN THE VALLEY TO ENORMOUS ROCK-HEWN RESERVOIRS WHICH HE CONSTRUCTED IN JERUSALEM. One who did not know what the king had done might come to that place where once the waters of Gihon had flowed so freely, and lament the dry wady and filled-up wells. And so the world often looks upon the lives of earnest Christians, thinking how much they are losing through their scruples; the intellectual powers restrained within the dull limits of orthodoxy, the will subjected to what seems like a servile obedience to old-time traditions, the affections not allowed any strong vigorous license to brighten the sadness of this present world. It is only those who do not comprehend the real truth who can talk so however. 1. The mental powers which here would not be prostituted to taking interest in those subjects of human research which blasphemed God's truth, and ridiculed the faith of the ages; subjects which under the specious disguise of realism delved unblushingly into

vice and shameful immoralities, and declared it was the part of true wisdom to know the evil as well as the good—these shall find splendid exercise and joyous development ever more and more in the eternal truths of the universe, in the mysteries of the Divine Being, in the secrets of Divine love which are inexhaustible, and which overflow with supremest delights. 2. The will which here refused to assert its independence of the known laws of the Creator, shall in the holy city find full range for all its craving after freedom. 3. The affections which here resisted the drawings of sensuality and of worldliness, being willing to surrender the loves of this present world for the love of God, shall in the city which is on high find the rapture of heart joy, the bliss of satisfied affection surging back upon the soul from the very being of God Himself. (*Arthur Ritchie.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God.—Hezekiah and the Assyrians.**—The story of Hezekiah and his preservation is one of the most vivid and thrilling. Rightly interpreted, it echoes the words of our text to all time. The king of Assyria is a representative character. The powers of this world are joined against the children of God, and they are variously commanded. Some Sennacherib rises from hour to hour and threatens, often with formidable front and fell purpose. But God's people may always say, "There be more with us than with him," &c. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *We look too much to men*:—Oliver Cromwell was but a gentleman farmer, but the exigency of his time was such that he took up arms on behalf of his country. He was a man of prayer, and went to the battlefield from the prayer meeting. After one great victory, he writes to Parliament, "God brought them into our hands. . . . God is not enough owned. We look too much to men and to visible helps. This hinders our success." *The arm of flesh*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF OUR ENEMIES DESCRIBED BY AN ARM OF FLESH. II. THE SOURCE OF OUR SUPPORT, AND CAUSE OF VICTORY. "But with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight our battles." This denotes—1. Possession. 2. Presence. 3. Support. 4. Victory. 5. The Father is with us. C. The Son is with us. 7. And the Holy Ghost is with us. III. THE RESULT OF GOD'S MANIFESTED PRESENCE. "And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah." (*T. B. Baker.*) *Conditions of victory*:—I. AT THE NEGATIVE SIDE. 1. Numbers are no surety. Gideon's army had to be reduced before it could conquer the Amalekites. 2. Worldly wisdom, policy, shrewdness, enterprise, will not ensure success. 3. Unlimited creature resources of every kind are insufficient. 4. The most seemingly favourable outward circumstances, as to time, place, auspices, expectations, combinations, oftentimes but deceive into carnal security and insure the worst kind of defeat. II. AT THE POSITIVE SIDE—the assured, unflinching conditions of victory in the sense of Righteousness and Godliness. 1. We must have God on our side. There must be no doubt on this point. 2. We must be careful to be on God's side. 3. This brings out the point which the Apostle John emphasises so strongly (1 John v. 4, 5). (*J. M. Sherwood.*) **And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah.**—*Words to rest on*:—I. THE KIND OF MAN WHOSE WORDS ARE LIKELY TO BE RESTED ON. He must be—1. A great man. 2. A good man. 3. A courageous man. 4. A hearty man. 5. In such a case God will add His sanction by granting success and he will be a prosperous man. 6. A man who has respect for God's word. II. In the second place let us TURN THE OTHER WAY AND LOOK AT THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO REST ON SUCH A MAN'S WORD. 1. Children do so with their parents. 2. Illiterate people who cannot read. 3. Unconverted persons who have no spiritual discernment. 4. Persons who naturally run in a groove. Having attended at such a place of worship, and having been brought up in the midst of a certain set of godly people, they scarcely deviate one jot from the teaching that they have received. Almost by the necessity of their nature they rest on what they hear. 5. Persons who profess always to do their own thinking. If you will trace them home, they are in nine cases out of ten the veriest slaves that ever lived. They are the bondservants of some heretic or other who has put it into their heads that in following him they become free men. III. THE KIND OF WORDS YOU MAY REST ON. You may safely rest on—1. Words which urge you to faith in God. 2. Words which are the words of God Himself. 3. Words which are sealed by the Lord Jesus. 4. Words which have been blessed to other men. 5. Words which breathe a sense of rest into the soul. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 20. **Prayed and cried to heaven.**—*True prayer*:—True prayer is not pester-

ing the Throne with passionate entreaties that a certain method of deliverance which seems best to us, should be forthwith effected; but is a calm utterance of need, and a patient, submissive expectance of fitting help, of which we dare not define the manner or the time. They are wisest, most trustful and reverent, who do not seek to impose their notions or wills on the clearer wisdom and deeper love to which they betake themselves, but are satisfied with leaving all to His arbitrament. True prayer is the bending of our own wills to the Divine, not the urging of ours on it. When Hezekiah received the insolent letter from the invader, he took it and "spread it before the Lord," asking God to read it, leaving all else to Him to determine: as if he had said, "Behold, Lord, this boastful page. I bring it to Thee, and now it is Thine affair more than mine." The burden which we roll on God lies lightly on our own shoulders; and if we do roll it thither, we need not trouble ourselves with the question of how He will deal with it. (*Alex. Maclaren, D.D.*)

"*Fire upwards*":—A story of the wars of the first Napoleon has often come back to me. He was trying in a winter campaign to cut off the march of the enemy across a frozen lake. The gunners were told to fire on the ice and break it, but the cannon balls glanced harmlessly along the surface. With one of the sudden flashes of genius he gave the word, "Fire upwards!" and the balls crashed down full weight, shattering the whole sheet into fragments, and the day was won. You can fire upwards in this battle even if you are shut out from fighting it face to face. You can do your share within the four walls of your room. (*Miss Trotter.*)

Vers. 24, 25. In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death.—*Hezekiah's sickness and recovery*:—I. THE GREAT CONTRASTS IN THE EVENTS OF LIFE. II. THE SUDDENNESS WITH WHICH THESE EVENTS HAPPEN. III. THE DISTRESS WITH WHICH THEY ARE OFTEN ATTENDED. IV. THE WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE WHICH GOD CAN GRANT. (*James Wolfendale.*) But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him.—*A ruler's sin*:—I. AN UNDOUBTED TRUTH; THAT THE SINS OF THE RULERS AND THE PEOPLE RULED, ARE SO INTIMATELY CONNECTED, THAT ONE INVARIABLY INVOLVES THE OTHER (*Zech. x. 3*). II. THE INTELLIGIBLE MOTIVE. God gives us in the present order of things a large share in one another's punishments, that He may make us take a deeper interest in one another's duties. All are deeply interested in all. The government of every Christian country is intimately connected with the transgressions of the people; and the governed are closely involved in the sins of the government; so that each has an important duty to perform to the other. The government, apart from all political considerations, to curb and repress the immoralities and the wickedness of the people; and the people, firmly though mildly, to warn and caution and speak plainly to the government, lest by partaking silently and voluntarily of other men's sins, they become partakers in other men's pains. (*H. Blunt.*)

*Hezekiah deserted*:—I. THE PERSON HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. His personal character. 2. His peculiar necessities. II. THE DISPENSATION HERE DESCRIBED. 1. The suspension of grace. 2. The withdrawal of comfort. III. THE PURPOSE OF THAT DISPENSATION. 1. To discover sin, with a view to its cure. 2. To conduct to greater happiness and honour. IV. THE ISSUE OF THE TRIAL—he sinned. 1. Wherein was the sin? He neglected an opportunity of proclaiming the true God, and indulged in a vain self-seeking. 2. How small in comparison with the sins of others—of ourselves. 3. How soon repented of. 4. How severely visited. (*J. C. Gray.*)

*Ingratitude to God an heinous but general iniquity*:—Among the many vices that are at once universally decried and universally practised in the world, there is none more base or more common than ingratitude; ingratitude is the sin of individuals, of families, of Churches, of kingdoms. None of us can flatter ourselves that we are in little or no danger of this sin when even so good and great a man as Hezekiah did not escape the infection. In order to make you the more sensible of your ingratitude towards your Divine Benefactor, I shall—I. GIVE A BRIEF VIEW OF HIS MERCIES TOWARDS YOU. II. EXPOSE THE AGGRAVATED BASENESS OF INGRATITUDE UNDER THE RECEPTION OF SO MANY MERCIES. (*S. Davies, M.A.*)

*A rendering for mercies*:—I. THAT THOSE THAT HAVE RECEIVED MERCIES MUST BE CAREFUL TO GIVE IN ANSWERABLE RETURNS OR TO RENDER ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED. 1. There must be a rendering. There is a reflection upon God from all His works. Hell-fire casts back the reflection of the lustre of His justice and the power of His wrath. The world is round, and the motion of all things circular; they begin in God, and end in God (*Rom. xi. 36*). (1) We must be effected with the mercies. (2) Solemnly praise God for

them. (3) Renew the remembrance of them (Psa. cxi. 4). (4) Improve them to some good use. We must improve them to—(a) Greater trust in God. (b) Greater love to Him (Psa. cxvi. 1, 2). (c) Fearing Him more, lest we should offend so good a God (Hosea iii. 5). (d) More complete obedience. 2. This rendering must be proportionate. (1) Real mercies require real acknowledgments. (2) The acknowledgment must answer the proportion of the mercy. (a) If the acknowledgment be in word, it must be taken notice of in a more than ordinary manner (Psa. cl. 2). (b) If in deed, some notable thing must be done for God (Esther vi. 3; 2 Sam. vii. 2). 3. This reproves—(1) Those that instead of rendering according, render the quite contrary; who the more God hath blessed them, grow unthankful, proud, sensual, dead formal in prayer, less in communion with God, more licentious in their actions. They are like tops never well but when they are scourged; abuse their mercies to the contempt of God, as the Israelites took the earrings of gold and silver, which were the spoils of the Egyptians, and made a golden calf of them. As the sea turneth all the sweet dews and influences of heaven into salt water, so they turn all their mercies into occasions of sin. (2) Those that do not render ought at all. There was a law in (Ezekiel xlvi. 9). He that went in at one gate was not to go out at the same gate, but an opposite; some say, lest he should turn his back upon the mercy-seat. (3) Those that render something but not suitable. (a) We must be first reconciled to God before we can do anything acceptable. (b) Awaken the heart to the work. (c) Search out the works of God (Psa. cxi. 2). (d) Consider what the world gaineth by every discovery of God. (e) Desire God to give you the heart to render (Psa. li. 15). (f) Reason and argue from your experiences to your duty (Ezra ix. 13). II. THAT IT IS A SIGN WE ARE UNTHANKFUL UNDER MERCIES WHEN THE HEART IS LIFTED UP UPON THE ENJOYMENT OF THEM. 1. Because God can never be rightly praised or exalted while the heart is proud (Isa. ii. 17). God is exalted in the creature's self-abasement. 2. A proud heart cannot be rightly conversant about blessings. It doth not give them their—(1) Due rise, as David (2 Sam. vii. 18). (2) Due value (Psa. lxxviii. 20; Esther v. 13; Mal. i. 2). (3) Due ends. 3. How shall we know when the heart is lifted up? It is mainly shown—(1) In security. Men live as if they were above changes. God is neglected, or but coldly owned, as if we now had no more need of Him (Lam. i. 9). (2) In insolency. This is manifested—(a) By contention. When we are delivered, then we revive old quarrels; as timber warpeth in the sunshine. (b) By insultation over enemies. (c) By oppression and violence. 4. Use. (1) Take heed of secret thoughts of merit (Deut. ix. 4). (2) Take heed of ascribing to your wisdom, power, and conduct (Heb. i. 16; Deut. viii. 14, 17). 3. Take heed of the pride of self-dependence. Conclusion: 1. A special recognition and recalling of sins is not unseasonable (Ezek. xxxvi. 30, 31). 2. Meditate upon the changes of providence (Psa. xxxix. 5). Belisarius, a famous general to-day, and within a little while forced to beg for a halfpenny. Things and persons are as the spokes of a wheel, sometimes in the dirt and sometimes out. (*S. Manton, D.D.*)

**Ver. 26. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart.**  
 —*Hezekiah's sin and humiliation.*—I. SHOW THE NATURE AND GROUNDS OF HEZEKIAH'S HUMILIATION. His sin does not seem great in human estimation; but it was exceeding sinful in God's sight. 1. He sought his own glory. He wished to show what a great man he was, in order that his alliance might be courted and his power feared. 2. He sought his own glory in preference to God's honour. He had now a happy opportunity of magnifying the God of Israel. He might have (1) recounted God's past dealings with His people; (2) commended Jehovah as an answerer of prayer. 3. He sought his own glory before the good of his friends. He should have recompensed the great kindness of the ambassadors by instructing them in the knowledge of the God of Israel. II. ENQUIRE WHETHER WE ALSO HAVE NOT SIMILAR GROUNDS FOR HUMILIATION. 1. Pride is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man. We are vain (1) of any natural endowments of body or mind. (2) Of any acquired distinctions. (3) Even the gifts of grace become occasions of pride. 2. We indulge this disposition to the neglect of God's honour and of the eternal welfare of those around us. (1) We have many opportunities of speaking for God. (2) But how rarely is our intercourse with each other made subservient to His glory. III. INFERENCE. 1. What dreadful evils arise from small beginnings. Hezekiah at first probably intended only to show civility to his friends. 2. How great is the efficacy of fervent prayer and intercession. God deferred the evil threatened till the next generation. (*Skeletons of Sermons.*)

Ver. 31. God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart. *Hezekiah's fall considered and applied*:—I. HEZEKIAH'S SIN. 1. Its nature. (1) All sin originates in the heart. Hezekiah's sin did not, like that of David, break forth into gross and external violations of the Divine law, but it betrayed itself in the indulgence of secret pride, in the gratification of a vainglorious spirit, in an idolatrous exaltation of the creature above the Creator. His heart was lifted up. (2) The particular nature of his sin will be more clearly discerned, if we advert to the occasion of his fall (2 Kings xx. 13). (a) He was actuated by a wrong spirit. (b) His action had a wrong tendency. It was calculated to erase every serious impression which a recital of the wonder done in the land might have made on these heathen strangers. It was also calculated to confirm them in the conviction that the kings of Judah, notwithstanding their superior pretensions to the knowledge and favour of the true God, in reality neither possessed nor avowed any better source of protection and prosperity than the kings of other nations enjoyed. 2. Its aggravations. (1) His whole life had been an uninterrupted succession of great distinguished mercies. (2) He had lately experienced a most remarkable proof of the Divine interposition in his favour. II. THE PARTICULAR VIEW OF THIS TRANSACTION EXHIBITED IN THE TEXT. 1. It unfolds the cause of Hezekiah's fall. "God left him." What a striking illustration is thus incidentally presented to us of man's depravity and weakness. No sooner was the barrier removed than the stream rushed with impetuosity into the channel of sin. To guard us against presumption the Scriptures present to us the examples of some of the most eminent servants of God, not all falling whenever they were left to themselves, but falling in those very points where we should conceive them to have been most firmly established; Abraham, Moses, &c. What need for us to pray, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us." 2. It discloses to us the secret reasons of the Divine conduct in thus permitting him for a season to be overcome. God left him "to try him," that Hezekiah himself might know all that was in his heart. (1) Nothing but a deep sense of our natural depravity can effectually destroy our vain self-confidence, and can excite us to a diligent use of those means which are essential to our growth in grace, and to our perseverance in well-doing. We shall (a) Regard our heart with a holy jealousy. (b) Studiously examine the secret motives of our conduct. (c) Sedulously avoid those places and practices which are most likely to prove a snare to us. (d) Be instant in prayer for a supply of the grace that is in Christ. (e) Fear to resist and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. (2) In exact proportion to our views of the depravity of our heart will be the degree of our self-condemnation and humiliation before God. Hence, how highly should we value self-knowledge, and how anxiously should we labour to acquire it. Address—1. Those who studiously close their eyes and shut their ears against every discovery of the sin which dwelleth in them. 2. Those who having in vain endeavoured to stifle their convictions of sin, are filled with consternation and terror at the extent of their depravity. (*E. Cooper.*) *Hezekiah's trespass with the ambassadors from Babylon*:—1. Nations professing God's holy name must beware of sinful compromises with those by whom His truth is corrupted. The chief fault for which judgment befel Hezekiah was listening to the proposal to become the ally of a heathen prince. 2. It is an imperative duty which rests upon Christians to do somewhat for the spiritual welfare of foreigners who visit them. 3. The necessity for recognising every moment our need of Divine help. (*R. Bickersteth, M.A.*) *Hezekiah's sin*:—A fragment of the history of the Assyrian writer Berosus tells us that at this time Babylon had shaken off for a season the supremacy of Assyria, and, under Berodach Baladan, was strengthening herself as a rival sovereignty. The fame of the discomfiture of Sennacherib before Jerusalem had reached his ears, and it might well seem to him that an alliance with Hezekiah would be useful against a common danger. The recovery of Hezekiah and the miraculous sign furnished a suitable occasion for an embassy which was sent ostensibly to congratulate the king and "inquire of the wonder done in the land." There was no sin in Hezekiah showing the embassy what was costly, useful, beautiful, but in the vanity which gave these things chief prominence. I. HERE IS A LESSON FOR US AS A NATION. Let us also show strangers whatever we have of interest; but let us not keep in the background what should be chief of all, and let them go away thinking that what we most value is wealth, power, pleasure. It is the duty of the Christian pulpit at such a time to ask the people, "What have you shown? What is in your heart?" Has God the chief place? Is righteousness more to us than riches, and principle than policy? Are we more desirous to live in the fear of God than to keep in awe other nations? If we pompously display

our treasures, may we not some day be ignominiously despoiled? If in any form we embrace Babylon, may not our nation some day be crushed by Babylon? Whatever our princes and statesmen may do, let the people, who, more and more, are the nation and responsible for its character and conduct, let the people cherish and make manifest the conviction that worth is more than wealth, and piety than power, and righteousness than rank, and purity than pleasure, and God than gold. "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence"; "The throne is established by righteousness"; "Righteousness exalteth a nation"; "Seek, first, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." II. THE LESSON IS APPLICABLE TO THE CHURCH as well as to the Nation. What is our idea of the chief excellence and stability of any Church? Is it the support of Law, the patronage of princes, a grand hierarchy, rich endowments? Is it noble buildings, imposing ritual, inspiring music? Is it learning and eloquence in the pulpit, with congregations numerous, or cultured, or wealthy? These features have their value more or less, and these can be shown, displayed, gloried in. But the chief treasures of the Church cannot thus be exhibited. Alas for the Church that prides itself chiefly in the outward and visible. Do we desire for our church such things chiefly and regard them most worth seeking, prizing, extolling? Or are we cultivating, praying for, and valuing far more—Penitence, Faith, Love, Zeal, Holiness, Usefulness? What is in our heart? III. WE MAY APPLY THE LESSON TO INDIVIDUALS. What do we ourselves regard as our chief treasure? This may be developed by circumstances. It has been said that after the massacre at Culloden certain flowers bloomed where blood had been copiously shed, unknown before. The seeds were dormant, till favourable conditions brought them forth. Hezekiah was a good man, but in his heart were latent weaknesses, which it was well for him to know before it was too late. Better that they should be revealed and cured than be hidden, unchecked, and with worse and more lasting fruits. Crises in the life of nations and individuals have developed unsuspected capacities, both for good and evil. For both in the case of David and Peter. For the commission of the worst of crimes in the case of Judas. If occasion occurred of displaying our most valued possession, what would we select? We may reasonably show what is showable—house, garden, books, pictures, children; if gratefully to the Giver, and not in vanity. But are these our chief treasures? If angels came to us from their far country, what would they see we prize most? Were some such unexpected visitor to enter our abode to interview us, would he find family religion—the gathered household at the domestic altar, private prayer, personal godliness? Is the maturity of Christian character sought more than the prosperity of business and the increase of wealth? Do we regard the favour of God more than the praise of men; communion with heaven more than intimacy with the great ones of the earth; a good conscience more than stores of silver and gold? Temptation may come to try what is in our heart. By some departure from strict integrity business may be promoted and wealth increased. If we yield it is evident that we regard money as more worth having than a good conscience. If some gratification is indulged at the cost of sobriety and virtue, we show that pleasure is more to us than purity. On what do our thoughts chiefly dwell? "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." On what do we chiefly set our affections and direct our energies? "Where a man's treasure is there will his heart be also." Hezekiah's wealth went to the Babylon he courted. If we choose the world we perish with it. Jerusalem in ruins is an emblem of a soul without God. (*Newman Hall, LL.B.*) *Danger of prosperity* :—The naturalists observe well, that the north wind is more healthful, though the south be more pleasant; the south with his warmth raiseth vapours, which breed putrefaction, and cause diseases; the north with his cold drieth those vapours up, purging the blood, and quickening the spirits. Thus adversity is unpleasant, but it keeps us watchful against sin, and careful to do our duties; whereas prosperity doth flatteringly lull us asleep. It never goes worse with men spiritually than when they find themselves corporeally best at ease; Hezekiah was better upon his sick-bed than when he was showing off his treasures to the ambassadors of the King of Babylon. (*J. Spencer.*) *The danger of being left to oneself* :—One day I went out with my little girl. I said to her, "Emma, you had better let me take hold of your hand." She said, "No; I had rather keep my hands in my muff," and she walked off very proudly. Presently she came to some ice, and down she went, and was hurt a little. I said, "You had better let me hold on to your hand." She said, "No; but let me hold on to your finger." Presently she came to some more ice; she could not hold on to my finger, and down she went, and hurt herself still more. Then she said,

"Papa, I wish you would hold on to my hand." So I took her wrist in my hand, and she couldn't fall. (*D. L. Moody.*)

Vers. 32, 33. Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness.—*Hezekiah's goodness*:—I. THE GENUINE GOODNESS SHALL NOT WANT APPROPRIATE RECORD AND REMEMBRANCE. 1. God, the inspirer of goodness in the hearts of men, will not forget it. 2. The beneficiaries of goodness will not be unmindful of their benefactors. 3. Sympathetic imitators will mirror forth their goodness, from whom they have derived its idea and impulse. Christian philanthropists like John Howard and Elizabeth Fry are living over again in their practical admirers and copyists. II. THE SEASONS SELECTED BY GOD FOR SUCH RECOGNITION ARE OFTEN SOBER AND SORROWFUL. 1. Public calamity. Sennacherib's invasion. 2. Personal affliction. Hezekiah's sickness. 3. Death. Hezekiah's burial. "Blessed are the dead." (*J. Spencer Hill.*) *Goodness of heart*:—The wind is unseen, but it cools the brow of the fevered one, sweetens the summer atmosphere, and ripples the surface of the lake into silver spangles of beauty. So goodness of heart, though invisible to the material eye, makes its presence felt; and from its effects upon surrounding things we are assured of its existence. And they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David.—*The life and character of Hezekiah*:—A very wise and salutary custom prevailed among the ancient Egyptians; that of sitting in judgment upon the life and character of a man after his death, that, according as he had been deserving or undeserving, honourable burial might be granted to him or denied. The Jews appear to have brought something like the same custom out of Egypt, and to have acted upon it in the case of their wicked kings (1 Kings xiv. 13; 2 Kings ix. 10; Jer. xxii. 18; Isa. xiv. 19). Hence a burial specially mentioned in the Scriptures signifies honour, approbation, and affectionate remembrance, more distinctly than among us. The funeral of Hezekiah is the proper place for a review of his life and character. Consider—I. HIS PUBLIC ZEAL FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD AND THE GOOD OF HIS PEOPLE. II. THE PECULIAR TROUBLES WITH WHICH HE WAS EXERCISED. III. THE REMARKABLE DELIVERANCES WHICH HE EXPERIENCED. IV. THE SINGULAR CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH HE PASSED HIS CLOSING YEARS. V. THE EXCELLENCES AND DEFECTS OF HIS RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AND CONDUCT. (*Daniel Katterns.*)

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

VER. 1. Manasseh was twelve years old.—*Manasseh; or, the material and the moral in human life*:—There are two great mistakes prevalent amongst men, one is an over-estimation of the secular, the other a depreciation of the spiritual. Man is one, and all his duties and interests are concurrent and harmonious; the end of Christianity is to make men happy body and soul, here and hereafter. I. THE ELEVATION OF THE SECULAR AND THE DEGRADATION OF THE SPIRITUAL. Here is a man at the height of secular elevation. He is raised to a throne, called to sway his sceptre over a people the most enlightened, and in a country the most fertile and lovely on the face of the earth. In the person of this Manasseh, you have secular greatness in its highest altitude and most attractive position. But in connection with this you have spiritual degradation. Penetrate the gaudy trappings of royalty, look within, and what see you? A low, wretched, infamous spirit, a spirit debased almost to the lowest point in morals. 1. Look at him socially. How acted he as a son? His father, Hezekiah, was a man of undoubted piety—a monarch of distinguished worth. His sire was scarcely cold in his grave, before the son commenced undoing in the kingdom all that his pious father had for years endeavoured to accomplish. "He built up again the high place which Hezekiah his father had destroyed," &c. How did he act as a parent? Was he anxious for the virtue and happiness of his children? No, "he caused his children to pass through the fire of the son of Hinnoom." 2. Look at him religiously—dupe of the most stupid imposture. "He observed times and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards." 3. Look at him politically ruining his country, provoking the indignation of heaven. "So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the



heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." This elevation of the secular, and the degradation of the spiritual, so manifest in the life of this monarch, and so manifest, alas, in all times and lands, is not destitute of many grave and startling suggestions. First: It shows the moral disorganisation of the human world. This state of things can never be, according to the original plan of the creation. A terrible convulsion has happened to the human world; a convulsion that has thrown every part in disorder. "All the foundations of the earth are out of course." The social world is in a moral chaos. The Bible traces the cause, and propounds the remedy of this terrible disorganisation. Secondly: It shows the perverting capability of the soul. The greater the amount of worldly good a man possesses, the stronger is the appeal of the Creator for his gratitude and devotion. Moreover, the larger the amount of worldly wealth and power, the greater the facilities as well as the obligations to a life of spiritual intelligence, holiness, and piety. The perverting capability of the soul within us, may well fill us with amazement and alarm. Thirdly: It shows the high probability of a judgment. Under the government of a righteous monarch, will vice always have its banquets, its purple, and its crown? Will the great Lord allow His stewards to misappropriate His substance, and never call them to account? II. THE DEGRADATION OF THE SECULAR, AND THE ELEVATION OF THE SPIRITUAL. The judgment of God, which must ever follow sin, at length overtook the wicked monarch. The Assyrian army, under the direction of Esarhaddon, invaded the country, and carried all before it. The miserable monarch quits his palace and his throne, flies in terror of his life, and conceals himself in a thorn brake. Here he is discovered. He is bound in chains, transported to Babylon, and there cast into prison. Here is secular degradation. First: That man's circumstances are no necessary hindrances to conversion. If the question were asked, What circumstances are the most inimical to the cultivation of piety? I should unhesitatingly answer—Adversity. I am well aware indeed that adversity, as in the case before us, often succeeds in inducing religious thoughtfulness and penitence when prosperity has failed. But, notwithstanding this, I cannot regard adversity itself as the most suited to the cultivation of the religious character. Sufferings are inimical to that grateful feeling and spiritual effort which religious culture requires. It is when the system bounds with health, when Providence smiles on the path, that men are in the best position to discipline themselves into a godly life. But here we find a man in the most unfavourable circumstances—away from religious institutions, and friends, and books, an ironbound exile in a pagan land—beginning to think of his ways, and directing his feet into the paths of holiness. Such a case as this meets all the excuses which men offer for their want of religion. It is often said, "Were we in such and such circumstances, we would be religious." The rich man says, "Were I in humble life, more free from the anxieties, cares, responsibilities, and associations of my position, I would live a godly life"; whilst the poor, on the other hand, says, with far more reason, "Were my spirit not pressed down by the crushing forces of poverty; had I sufficient of worldly goods to remove me from all necessary anxiety, I would give my mind to religion, and serve my God." The man in the midst of excitement and bustle of commercial life, says, "Were I in a more retired situation, in some moral region away from the eternal din of business—away in quiet fields, and under clear skies, amidst the music of birds and brooks, I would serve my Maker." The fact, after all, is that circumstances are no necessary hindrances or helps to a religious life. Secondly: That heaven's mercy is greater than man's iniquities. III. THE CONCURRENT ELEVATION BOTH OF THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SECULAR. The Almighty hears his prayer. He is emancipated from his bondage, brought back to his own country, and restored to the throne of Israel. There he is now with a true heart, in a noble position—a real great man occupying a great office. This is a rare scene; and yet the only scene in accordance with the real constitution of things and the will of God. It seems to me that if man had remained in innocence, his outward position would always have been the product and type of his inner soul. Manasseh's restoration to the throne, and the work of reformation to which he sets himself, suggests two subjects for thought. First: The tendency of godliness to promote man's secular elevation. The monarch comes back in spirit to God, and God brings him back to his throne. As the material condition of men depends upon their moral, improve the latter, and you improve the former. As the world gets spiritually holier, it will get secularly happier. Secondly: The tendency of penitence to make restitution. Concerning Manasseh it is thus written: "Now, after this he

built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish-gate," &c. Here is restitution, and an earnest endeavour to undo the mischief which he had wrought. Thus Zaccheus acted, and thus all true penitents have ever acted and will ever act. True penitence has a restitutionary instinct. But how little, alas! of the mischief done can be undone! (*Homilist*.)

Vers. 10, 11. **And bound him with fetters.**—*Divine discipline*.—The proper way for a sinner to be brought to God is for God to speak to him, and for him to hear. Manasseh would not come that way, so God fetched him back by a rougher road. I. THE LORD OFTEN ALLOWS TEMPORAL TRIALS TO TAKE MEN CAPTIVE. 1. Business disasters. 2. Want of employment. 3. Extraordinary troubles. 4. Bodily affliction. 5. The loss of dear friends. II. THE LORD SOMETIMES ALLOWS MEN TO BE BOUND BY MENTAL TRIALS; "bound with fetters." Such as—1. When sin ceases to afford pleasure. The very things that once made him all aglow with delight do not affect him now, nor cast a single ray of light on his path. 2. The daily avocation becomes distasteful. 3. There is great inability in prayer. 4. Your old sins come out of their hiding-places. 5. A great want of power to grasp the promises. 5. A fear of death and dread of judgment. Conclusion: In order to your comfort and peace—1. Know that the Lord is God. 2. Humble yourself before Him. 3. Begin to pray. 4. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. (*C. H. Spurgeon*.)

Vers. 12, 13. **And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God.**—*Manasseh's wickedness and penitence*.—I. MANASSEH'S CAREER IN CRIME. II. HIS RETURN TO AND ACCEPTANCE OF GOD. III. THE GRACIOUS RESULTS OF HIS PENITENCE. Improvement. 1. The lamentable wickedness and duplicity of the human heart. 2. The freeness, fullness, and efficacy of Divine grace. 3. The consequences of salvation are reformation and obedience. (*T. B. Baker*.) *Manasseh*.—Manasseh is an eminent instance of the power, richness, and freeness of the Divine mercy. Observe—I. THE SINS WHICH HE COMMITTED. 1. Their contributory cause. His early freedom from restraint, his coming to supreme power when only twelve years of age. 2. Their special nature. The catalogue is appalling. 3. Their aggravated nature. (1) They were committed in defiance of religious education, and of the admonitions and example of his father. (2) They were of more than common enormity. (3) They were productive of more than ordinary evil to others. (4) They were in defiance of the expostulations of the prophets (ver. 10). II. THE REPENTANCE WHICH HE EXERCISED. 1. Its cause. (1) Its more remote cause was probably his religious education. The case of Manasseh is not discouraging to training children in the way they should go. (2) The immediate cause was affliction. 2. Its nature. (1) Deep conviction of sin. (2) Deep contrition. (3) Earnest prayer. (4) Reformation of life. III. THE MERCIES WHICH MANASSEH RECEIVED. 1. Temporal nature. 2. Spiritual. He was brought to the spiritual knowledge of the God of his salvation. "Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God." This knowledge led him to fear, trust, love, and obey. This obedience was accompanied by the deepest self-renunciation and abasement to the end of his life. Lessons. 1. To those who are insensible of their sinfulness. 2. To those who are ready to sink into despair under the weight of their sinfulness. 3. To those who are disposed to presume on the mercy of God. Manasseh's son Amon was quickly cut off in the midst of his sins (vers. 21–23). He seems to be a beacon set up close by the side of his penitent and accepted father, to warn all persons against presuming on the mercy manifested to Manasseh. (*Homilist*.) *Manasseh's repentance*.—I. HIS CHARACTER AS A SINNER. 1. He was a notorious sinner. 2. He was not a hopeless sinner. II. HIS CONDUCT AS A PENITENT. 1. The period of his repentance is specified. "When he was in affliction." 2. The nature of his repentance is described. (1) Deep humility. (2) Fervent prayer. These invariably distinguish the conduct of every true penitent (Jer. xxxi. 18, 19; Luke xviii. 13; Acts ix. 11). III. HIS SALVATION AS A BELIEVER. 1. He obtained the pardoning mercy of God. 2. He received a saving knowledge of God. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons*.) *Manasseh humbled*.—I. THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTIONS IN BRINGING THE SINNER TO A TRUE SENSE OF HIS CONDITION AND CONVERTING HIM TO GOD. II. THE MERCY OF GOD IN SO BRINGING AND RECEIVING HIM. III. THE REMAINING AND LASTING PORTION OF THE EVIL OF SIN, EVEN AFTER THE INDIVIDUAL IS PARDONED. In the Second Book of Kings it is repeatedly declared that Judah was

destroyed on account of the sons of Manasseh. 1. A man looks back with sorrow and contrite concern upon the follies and sins of his youth; but what of his companions in guilt? Some, perhaps, whom he seduced into sin, and many whom he encouraged and confirmed in sin. 2. Some writers have employed their pens in the odious cause of immorality and irreligion. Such persons have lamented their errors; but the publication has done its work; the poison has been circulated, and the corruption is incurable. (*J. Stade, M.A.*) *The conversion of Manasseh* :—

I. THAT EARLY ADVANTAGES MAY BE SUCCEEDED BY COMPLICATED SIN. II. THAT SIN IS FREQUENTLY THE CAUSE OF SEVERE AFFLICTION. III. THAT AFFLICTION, WHEN SANCTIFIED, EXALTS TO PRAYER, AND PROMOTES HUMILIATION. IV. THAT PRAYER AND HUMILIATION ARE ALWAYS ATTENDED WITH DISTINGUISHED BLESSINGS, AND PRODUCE VALUABLE EFFECTS. V. FROM THE WHOLE. 1. The patience of God. 2. The sovereignty of God. 3. The wisdom of God in adapting means to the conversion of men. 4. The mercy of God in saving the chief of sinners. (*S. Kidd.*) *The repentance of Manasseh* :—We will connect the important change which took place in the mind of Manasseh—I. WITH HIS EARLY ADVANTAGES. John Newton states somewhere, "When I was in the deepest misery, and when I was committing the most atrocious sin, I always seemed to feel the hand of my sainted mother pressing my head." II. WITH THE AFFLICTIONS BY WHICH IT WAS PRODUCED. III. WITH THE EFFECTS WHICH IT UNFOLDED. IV. WITH THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE. (*A. E. Farrar.*) *Manasseh brought to repentance* :—I. HIS LIFE OF SIN. 1. It was in direct contrast to the good reign of his father. 2. His sin involved many in guilt. He "made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err." 3. He was not moved by the sight of the same wickedness in those whom he despised (2 Kings xxi. 9). 4. His sin was not checked by God's punishment of others. The heathen had been driven out from the land because of their wickedness. Judah occupied their place and adopted their vice. II. THE LIFE OF MANASSEH UNDER GOD'S CHASTISEMENT. We learn from recently discovered Assyrian inscriptions what is meant by "among the thorns." The word thus translated means a hook, which was put through the under lips of captives. The depths of Manasseh's degradation may be imagined. Yet it was sent in mercy to turn him to God. III. HIS REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION. IV. HIS RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD. Lessons. 1. Never to be ashamed of repentance. 2. We see the meaning of God's chastisements. 3. The power of a single man when he has turned from sin to God. 4. The necessity of solitary communion with God. 5. The patient love of God. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The conversion of an aged transgressor* :—

I. Let us attend to the CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH BY THE GRACE OF GOD LED TO THE CONVERSION OF MANASSEH. 1. Affliction. 2. Solitary reflection. 3. Prayer. II. Consider next HOW THE GRACE OF GOD OPERATED IN MANASSEH. 1. He humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 2. He was made to know that the Lord was God. 3. He brought forth fruits meet for repentance. III. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MADE HIS CONVERSION PECULIARLY STRIKING. 1. It was the conversion of an atrocious sinner. 2. Of an aged sinner. 3. It took place at a distance from the ordinary means of grace. (*H. Belfrage, D.D.*) *Manasseh* :—God contents not Himself to have left on record in His word declarations and promises of grace as beacons of hope to the sinner. We have examples also of His acts of grace. Abounding iniquity, and more abounding grace, are the special features presented to us in this history of Manasseh. I. ABOUNDING INIQUITY marked Manasseh's course. 1. He was the son of Hezekiah the servant of the Lord. We place this foremost as an aggravation of his sin, that in spite of a father's example he cast off the fear of the Lord and sinned with a high hand against his God. That father, indeed, was early taken from him, for Manasseh was but twelve years old when he began to reign; still, the memory of Hezekiah's piety could not have been utterly forgotten. Too marked had been the interposition of Jehovah in that father's deliverance from Assyria and in his recovery from sickness for the report to have passed away. But Manasseh heeded not these things; "he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger." 2. Manasseh added to his disregard of a godly parent this iniquity also, that he led his children unto sin, "he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom." . . . Some godless parents have shown a happy inconsistency, in that whilst pursuing themselves that path "whose end is destruction," they have desired for their offspring that they should seek the Lord. The force of example, indeed, meeting as it does with "the evil that is bound up in the heart of a child," will in such cases often prove too powerful to be withstood. But Manasseh took no such course, but

dedicated his children as well as himself to the service of the false gods. Alas, the reproducing power of evil! Thou that art a citizen of the world, intent on gain or pleasure, can it be expected but that thy children should walk after thee in the same destructive road? 3. Manasseh bade defiance to Jehovah in His own sanctuary. Not only did he build again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, but "he set a carved image," the idol which he had made, "in the house of God." It was not enough that he himself should bow down to idols, and that his children should also do them homage, but with yet more presumptuous sin he declared himself, in the face of all Israel, an idolater, and desecrated to this base end the very temple, of which the Lord had said, "My Name shall be there." It is the very character of Jehovah that He is "a jealous God," "His glory will He not give to another." 4. But further, Manasseh "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." The faithful who warned him were doubtless the ones especially sacrificed to his vengeance, and it is supposed that Isaiah suffered death under this fearful persecutor of the Church of God. For the wickedness of Manasseh could not plead this even in palliation that he was unrebuked: "The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken." What depth of malignity is there in the unchanged soul! what pollutions! what ingratitude! what rebellion! Were it not for the restraining grace of God, what a scene of bloodshed and of all enormity would this earth be!

II. MORE ABOUNDING STILL THE GRACE OF GOD. 1. In chastisement the first faint streak of mercy manifested itself. The voice of plenty had spoken to him in vain, the voice of warning had been treated with neglect, but now the voice of correction speaks in tones not to be gainsaid. The alarm of war is heard in that guilty court. 2. His deep penitence bore witness to the workings of grace. He humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. That word "greatly" speaks much, as recorded by the Spirit of truth. As with the gospel itself, so with the chastenings of the Lord, they are either "a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." 3. The voice of prayer went up from that prison-house, "He besought the Lord . . . and prayed unto Him." Tears, many it may be, fell before one prayer was uttered. 4. Abounding grace shone forth, too, in the answer granted to prayer. "God was intreated of him." He heard his cry, and hope sprung up in his downcast soul. 5. The workings of God's grace were further evidenced by the fruits of faith in life according to godliness. Manasseh restored to his kingdom, has now but one object in view, the glory of God, and that object he consistently pursued. The idol is cast out from the temple, and the altars of the false gods out of the city, and the people are commanded "to serve the Lord God of Israel." He turned not aside from his purpose to bring back to Jehovah those whom formerly he had led away to sin; and this godly course he pursued unto the end.

LESSONS. 1. The first is, that there is a fulness of grace in God as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus beyond the power of heart to conceive, or of tongue to utter. 2. But this history also reminds us of the dreadful nature of sin. Deep are its furrows, lasting its effects. Manasseh is pardoned, but could he repair the evil he had done? (*F. Storr, M.A.*)

*Manasseh*:—We shall consider Manasseh—I. AS A SINNER. 1. He sinned against light, against a pious education and early training. It is a notorious fact that when men do go wrong after a good training they are the worst men in the world. The murder of John Williams at Erromanga was brought about by the evil doings of a trader who had gone to the island, and who was also the son of a missionary. He had become reckless in his habits, and treated the islanders with such barbarity and cruelty that they revenged his conduct upon the next white man who put his foot upon their shore. 2. He was a very bold sinner. 3. He had the power of leading others to a very large extent astray. II. AS AN UNBELIEVER. He did not believe that Jehovah was God alone. 1. The unlimited power that Manasseh possessed had a great tendency to make him a disbeliever. 2. His pride was another cause. 3. Another cause was his love for sin. III. AS A CONVERT. He believed in God—1. Because God had answered his prayer. 2. Because He had forgiven his sin. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

*Manasseh's repentance*:—Manasseh is unique alike in extreme wickedness, sincere penitence, and thorough reformation. The reformation of Julius Cæsar or of our own Henry V., or to take a different class of instance, the conversion of Paul, was nothing compared to the conversion of Manasseh. It was as though Herod the Great or Cæsar Borgia had been checked midway in a career of cruelty and vice, and had thenceforward lived pure and holy lives, glorifying God by ministering to their fellow-men. (*W. H. Bennett, M.A.*) He was intreated of him.—*Pardon for the greatest guilt*:—The story of Manasseh is a very valu-

able one. I feel sure of this, because you meet with it twice in the Word of God. God would have us again and again dwell upon such wonders of sovereign grace as Manasseh presents to us. I. LET US EXAMINE THE CASE BEFORE US. 1. Manasseh was the son of a good father. 2. He undid all his father's actions. 3. He served false gods. 4. He desecrated the Lord's courts. There are some to-day who do this; for they make even their attendance at the house of God to be an occasion for evil. 5. He dedicated his children to the devil. Nobody here will dedicate his children to the devil, surely; yet many do. Have I not seen a father dedicate his boy to the devil, as he has encouraged him to drink? And do not many in this great city, dedicate their children to the devil by allowing them to go into all kinds of licentiousness, until they become the victims of vice? 6. He fraternised with the devil, by seeking after all kinds of supernatural witcheries and wizardries. 7. He led others astray. 8. He persecuted the people of God. It is said,—we do not know whether it was so or not,—but it is highly probable, that he caused Isaiah to be cut asunder with a wooden saw. 9. In short, Manasseh was a compound of every sort of wickedness. 10. Notwithstanding all this Manasseh was pardoned. How it came about? (1) Being in great trouble, he turned to Jehovah his God. (2) He humbled himself greatly. (3) He prayed. II. LET US CONSIDER WHY THERE SHOULD BE OTHERS LIKE MANASSEH. Judging from many probabilities, that God will save other great sinners as He saved Manasseh. 1. Because He speaks to such great sinners and commands them to repent (Isa. i. 16-18). Because of the great promises God has given to great sinners. 3. Because of the nature of God. 4. From what I know of the value of the blood of Jesus. (C. H. Spurgeon.) Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God.—*Forgiveness and the knowledge of God*:—Men first begin to know God when they are forgiven. What did the prodigal know about his father when he asked for the portion of goods that fell to him, or while he was wasting his substance in riotous living? Because love and forgiveness are more strange and unearthly than rebuke and chastisement, the sinner is humbled by pardon far more than by punishment; and his trembling submission to the righteous Judge deepens into profounder reverence and awe for the God who can forgive, who is superior to all vindictiveness, whose infinite resources enable Him to blot out the guilt, to cancel the penalty, and annul the consequences of sin. (W. H. Bennett, M.A.)

Ver. 23. But Amon transgressed more and more.—*Consolidation in the forces of evil*:—It is wonderful what evil can be done with a profession of religion. Amon was sacrificing unto all the carved images; he was so religious as to be irreligious; he reached the point of exaggeration, and that point is blasphemy. When there is mere ignorance, God in His lovingkindness and tender mercy often closes His eyes as if He could not see what is being done: but when it is not ignorance but violence, determination, real obstinacy in the way of evil, and utter recklessness as to what it may cost—what if God should be compelled to open His eyes, and look the evil man full in the face, and condemn him by silent observation? It is wonderful, too, how much evil can be done in a little time. Nothing is so easy as evil. A man could almost fell a forest before he could grow one tree. Every blow tells: every bad word becomes a great blot: there is an infinite contagion in evil; it affects every one, it poisons quickly, it makes a harvest in the night-time. To do good how much time is required! How few people will believe that we are doing good! We have to encounter suspicion, criticism, distrust; men say, "We must wait to see the end; we cannot believe in the possibility of all this earnestness and sacrifice"; they ask questions about its possible permanence; even good men are apt to hinder other good men in endeavouring to do good. But evil has no such disadvantages to contend with. There is a consolidation in the forces of evil that is not known among the forces of good. It would seem as if the poet's description were right—"Devil with devil damned, firm concord holds." It may be that in that energetic expression Milton has stated the reality of the case. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 25. Josiah his son king in his stead.—*Far-reaching heredity*:—Josiah was the son of Amon—which is equal to saying that the greatest sinner of his day was the progenitor of one of the finest saints that ever prayed. If that is not a miracle, what is meant by the term miracle? Read the account and say if it be not the reading of music:—"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father" (xxxiv. 2) "and declined

neither to the right hand, nor to the left." Then he had more fathers than one. That is the explanation. You are not the son of the man that went immediately before you; you are only his son in a very incidental manner. Josiah was the son of "David his father"—the larger father, the deeper root, the elect of God; a sun fouled by many a black spot, but a shining orb notwithstanding. We must enlarge our view if we would come to right conclusions regarding many mysteries. Amon was but a link in the chain. The bad man here, or the good man there, taken in his solitariness, is but a comparatively trivial incident in life's tragedy. Heredity is not from one to two; it is from one to the last; from the beginning to the ending. In every man there lives all the humanity that ever lived. We are fearfully and wonderfully made—not physically only, but morally, religiously, temperamentally. All the kings live in the last king or the reigning monarch. We are one humanity. Solidarity has its lessons as well as individuality. We know not which of our ancestors comes up in us at this moment or that—now the tiger, now the eagle; now the praying mother, now the daring sire; now some mean soul that got into the current by a mystery never to be explained; now the cunning, watchful, patient deceiver, who can wait for nights at a time and never complain of the dark or the cold, and now the hero that never had a fear, the philanthropist that loved the world, the mother that never looked otherwise than God Himself would have her look. We can never tell which of our ancestors is really thinking in us, speaking through us; we cannot tell the accent of the immediate consciousness;—these are mysteries, and when the judgment comes it will be based upon all the ground, and not upon incidental points here and there. (*Ibid.*)

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#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

**VERS. 1-8. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign.—*Josiah's early piety* :—**I. THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUTHFUL RESPONSIBILITY. Other children besides Josiah have been called to the cares of a kingdom. Manasseh commenced to reign at twelve, Joash was seven, Uzziah sixteen; Henry III. and Edward VI. of England were both nine; four of the Scottish kings, James II., III., IV., and V., ascended the throne when children. Of the French kings, Louis I. began to reign at sixteen, Louis IX. at eleven, Louis XIII. at nine, Charles VI. at eleven, Charles IX. at ten; Louis XIV., inheriting the kingdom at five, assumed full control by his own force of character at thirteen. Charles I. of Spain, better known as Charles V. of Germany, became king at sixteen; Charles II. at fourteen, seizing the kingdom from an ill-governing regency which had existed since his fourth year.

II. EARLY PIETY IS POSSIBLE AND DESIRABLE. When does the period of moral accountability begin? We cannot fix it definitely. But this much is certain: whenever the child can intelligently choose this or that because it is right or wrong, then has moral accountability commenced, and the child can be a Christian.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF GOOD ADVISERS. Josiah was but a boy, and yet around him were spiritual Titans—Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah.

IV. THE ENERGY OF YOUTHFUL PIETY.

V. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SURROUNDING ATMOSPHERE ON PIETY.

We must be watchful against irreligious influences. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

*Importance of early piety* :—Ancient nations would not receive old men into their armies, as being unfit for service. Let us not wait until we can only offer unto "Him who hath loved us" dry and worthless bones. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

*The example of Josiah* :—There is at the top of the Queen's staircase in Windsor Castle a statue from the studio of Baron Triqueti, of Edward VI., marking with his sceptre a passage in the Bible, which he holds in his left hand, and upon which he earnestly looks. The passage is this concerning Josiah: "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David, his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." The statue was erected by the will of the late Prince Consort, who intended it to convey to his son the Divine principles by which the future governor of England should mould his life and reign on the throne of Great Britain. (*T. Hughes.*)

*Early piety* :—I was admitted into the Church at the early age of eight. I don't remember that I experienced at the time any extraordinary work

of God on my soul. I loved Christ, and felt a strong desire to be identified with His people. When I mentioned the fact to some of the deacons some of them looked askance, and expressed grave doubts as to the propriety of allowing one so young to sit at the Lord's table. Among them, however, there were wiser men. Their counsels prevailed, and after some months of probation I was admitted. From that day until now I have never ceased to thank God that I was induced to take the important step at the time I did. Had I not done so I doubt whether I should have been a missionary—if a member of the Christian Church at all. (*Griffith Johns.*) *Josiah the old-fashioned young man*:—As the sensitive plate in the photographic camera, when the person who sits for a likeness is placed in a powerful light, takes an impression of him in which every line upon the countenance and every furrow upon the brow are exaggerated, so that the artist has to touch the negative in order to do him simple justice, so, when a man sits in the fierce glare of public light, his failings are so prominently recorded, and his defects so clearly brought out, that it is necessary for us in fairness to touch the negative with the pencil of charity, and thus soften down the defects. Remembering this, this description of Josiah fills us with wonder. Consider—I. HIS DISADVANTAGES. 1. His extreme youth. 2. The degeneracy of the times. He ascended the throne in a dark age. 3. He was the son of a bad father. II. WHAT IS THE EXPLANATION OF HIS PIETY? It may have been largely due to the quiet but all-powerful influence of a good mother. But there are wonders of grace often wrought in the lives of the children of wicked men which you cannot explain. III. THE MANIFESTATION OF HIS PIETY. He "walked in the ways of David his father." Four hundred years separated Josiah from David. Thank God, there are seasons, even in degenerate times, when the old purity of things is restored, when the grand old faith is received and lived over again, and when the heroism of those who are gone comes back like a new inspiration to young lives. "Ah! he is an old-fashioned young man: he lives behind the age; he ought to have been living in the time of David, for he has quite adopted his ancient ways," exclaimed some young men of the period. All the conceited striplings of the day would join in the chorus, "Poor Josiah, he does not move with the age. He is an eccentric young fellow, very puritanic in his notions, and sings psalms as if he lived in the days of old King David." My young friends, a true man likes to be old-fashioned sometimes. It is noble to move with the age when the age is going forward; but it is grand to remain with the past when the age in which we live retrogrades from ancient purity and ancient faith. When there is no spiritual vigour or moral fibre in our day, it is well to stick to the old days when there were strength and fibre in religion and morals. Do not be afraid of the charge of being old-fashioned. It is cheaply made, and is often meaningless, save as it is the highest possible compliment. Be in the company of the world's best and noblest men: never mind whether they live to-day, or whether they lived eighteen hundred years ago, or even more. (*D. Davies.*)

Ver. 3. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David.—*Seeking after God*:—I. WHY WE SHOULD SEEK AFTER GOD. 1. We are by nature without God. 2. To be without God is certain misery. 3. In God alone we can obtain peace and rest. II. HOW WE ARE TO SEEK AFTER GOD. 1. With respect to God Himself. Josiah sought—not the God of nature; not the God of Providence; but "the God of David his father." And why? David was a type of Christ; the covenant made with David a type of the covenant of grace, and "the sure mercies of David," symbols of the better blessings of the New Covenant. 2. With respect to ourselves. By repentance, faith, and obedience. III. WHEN WE ARE TO SEEK AFTER GOD. (*Robert Stevenson.*) *Early piety and its advantages*:—I. ENLIGHTENED PIETY CONSISTS IN SEEKING GOD. 1. Earnestly. 2. Promptly. 3. Perseveringly. II. SEEKING GOD EARLY WILL CONDUCE TO HONOUR. 1. It keeps alive religious susceptibilities. 2. It saves from snares. 3. It brings eminent usefulness in life. 4. It prepares for happy death. (*J. Wolfendale.*) *Youth the best time to serve God*:—Let us think of some reasons why we should seek God in childhood. 1. The first reason is because youth is the best time. 2. Another reason is because youth is the most important time. "Satisfy us early with Thy goodness, that we may be glad and rejoice all our days." What seems a slight mistake at the beginning may make a terrible difference at the end. 3. Another reason for seeking God in early life is because it is noblest to do right now, not to wait until we have spent most of our life doing wrong. (*Christian Age.*) *Well started*:—I. THAT ANY SOUL

SHOULD BEGIN EARLY TO SEEK THE LORD, IS AN EVENT THAT WOULD BE THOUGHT UNIMPORTANT BY SOME, BUT IT IS CHRONICLED IN HEAVEN. II. EVERY MAN MUST SEARCH CAREFULLY HIS OWN HEART, AND DETERMINE WHETHER THE DEFINITE DESIRE AFTER GOD IS THERE OR NOT. The desire is equivalent to spiritual sight. To help to build up righteousness is serving God. III. SOME WILL SAY: "BUT I HAVE NO SUCH OPPORTUNITIES AS JOSIAH." Have you sought them? Is not influence on relatives, friends, comrades, fellow-workers an opportunity? Can you never seize suitable occasions for uttering a Christian sentence or scowling on a social sin? IV. A FURTHER OBJECTION IS "BUT I HAVE SO MANY DIFFICULTIES IN MY WAY, THAT I CAN DO NOTHING USEFUL." Think of those Josiah must have met with. V. OTHERS SAY: "BUT I NEVER HAD ANY SPECIAL CALL TO SERVE GOD." What if parents, or brothers, or sisters, or friend never mentioned it? Have you never heard it in your heart, and cannot you hear it now? The very passage of time calls you to serve God. VI. THOSE WHO BEGIN LIFE WITH CHRIST AS SAVIOUR, GUIDE, HELPER, ETERNAL FRIEND, AND WHO ARE HONESTLY TRYING TO SERVE HIM, MAY BE SURE THAT HE WILL REJOICE OVER THEM, AND REMEMBER THEM, EVEN THOUGH THEIR NAMES MAY NOT BE EMBLAZONED ON ANY GREAT WORLD-ROLL OF HONOUR. VII. SOME ARE CONSCIOUS THAT THEY ARE NOT MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING OF LIFE. They are drifting onwards and towards dangerous rapids and a deathly abyss. Christ comes to save and to give a fresh start. This is an opportunity which is worth seizing. (*F. Hastings.*) *Early piety*:—I. WHAT JOSIAH TURNED FROM. 1. From what is familiarly called "the way of the world." 2. From the carnal appetites of youth, which craved to be pampered by their gratification. 3. From all vanities of the imagination. 4. From the exercise of power, before weighing its responsibilities. 5. From false friends and evil counsellors. 6. From the delusions of the gaudy appendages of a worldly Court. II. WHAT JOSIAH TURNED TO. He fixed his heart and the faith of his soul upon God, as his—1. Friend. 2. Father. 3. Guide. III. HE WAS FAITHFUL AND PIOUS FROM HIS EARLIEST DAYS. (*A. Gatty, M.A.*) *Early piety*:—I. NOTHING IS MORE AMIABLE IN ITSELF, OR MORE PLEASING TO GOD, THAN EARLY PIETY. II. YOUTH IS A SEASON IN WHICH YOU HAVE THE GREATEST ADVANTAGES FOR CULTIVATING THE PRINCIPLES OF PIETY, AND THE GREATEST NEED OF RELIGION, AS A DEFENCE FROM TEMPTATION AND DANGERS. III. BY EARLY PIETY YOU WILL PREPARE TRANQUILITY AND JOY FOR OLD AGE, WHILST BY AN OPPOSITE CONDUCT YOU WILL FILL IT WITH REMORSE AND FEARS. IV. A REGARD TO THE FEELINGS OF ALL PIOUS PERSONS IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL, A RESPECT TO THE HAPPINESS OF YOUR PARENTS, SHOULD INDUCE YOU EARLY TO DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO GOD. V. ON YOUR CONDUCT IN YOUTH, YOUR SALVATION OR PERDITION ALMOST INFALLIBLY DEPEND. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *Early piety*:—I. We shall briefly notice THE STRIKING EXAMPLE OF YOUTHFUL PIETY HERE PRESENTED TO OUR VIEW. 1. He was a decidedly religious character. 2. His genuine religion commenced at an early period. 3. An exemplary life and conversation abundantly proved the sincerity and ardour of his piety. 4. Josiah's early piety is adduced as the pledge if not the basis of his future eminence in religion. 5. Josiah and his country reaped great advantages from his early devotedness to God. II. We shall produce ARGUMENTS URGING UPON ALL OUR YOUNG PEOPLE THE EXEMPLIFICATION OF SIMILAR DECIDED PIETY. 1. A due regard to your personal welfare. 2. The plea of relative usefulness—(1) In the family. (2) The social circle. (3) The Church. 3. Many whom you dearly love feel deeply interested in your spiritual welfare. (1) Parents. (2) Ministers. 4. The compassionate Saviour not only claims but kindly encourages youthful piety. (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) *Early piety exemplified in Josiah*:—I. JOSIAH IMITATED DAVID. 1. God was David's teacher. 2. God was David's comfort. 3. God was David's delight. 4. God was David's defence. II. THE MANNER HOW HE SOUGHT AFTER GOD. He sought God—1. From a deep conviction that his conduct and the conduct of Israel generally was highly offensive to God, and that they were exposed to imminent peril. 2. In deep self-abasement of soul. 3. By destroying the idols out of the land. 4. By restoring God's true worship and frequenting it. 5. With all his heart (2 Kings xxiii. 25). III. THE PERIOD OF LIFE WHEN HE DID IT. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Josiah*:—Josiah WAS—I. AN EARLY SEEKER. Our Queen wears a velvet cap under her crown lest it should hurt her head: this eight-year-old king had more need of such a covering. The crown is a heavy burden for young soldiers. Yet there have been younger kings than Josiah. An old Norse king was called Olaf Lapking because he was a king while on his mother's lap. Royal boyhood is often poisoned boyhood. The people of Israel around little Josiah were doing worse than the heathen. The sins and sorrows of that time are described in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, whose



heart they had broken, Yet Josiah at the age of eight did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and at sixteen began to seek the God of his father David with more earnestness than ever. God calls us to seek Him earlier. In our Latin exercises there was a story about a simpleton sitting one evening at the river's brink. A traveller coming up wished his company in crossing. "No," he replied, "I am waiting till the river flows past." The tiny stream of difficulties between you and Christ won't flow past, but will flow on, and broaden and deepen, till it grows like an angry torrent, swollen with winter floods, that threatens to sweep down the old man who would ford it. II. JOSIAH WAS ALSO A HEARTY HATER OF EVIL. He did not hate in others the sins he practised himself. He was not like the Czar of Russia who used to say, "I reform my country, and am not able to reform myself." Dr. Arnold used to say, "Commend me to boys who love God and hate evil." Love without hate makes a mere milksop, and Christ's disciples are to be the *salt*, and not the sugar of society. We need boys who will hate all evil as young Hannibal hated Rome. The young Christian ought to be the sworn foe of the kingdom of darkness. III. JOSIAH WAS A REAL HERO. A hero is one who, in doing duty, scorns great dangers. He had the spirit of Chrysothom, who replied to the threats of the Empress Eudoxia, "I fear nothing but sin." Josiah's love for the Bible would open his soul to all the best influences from the heroic lives of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel and Gideon. Thus was developed in him what Dr. Chalmers calls "the expulsive power of a new affection." IV. JOSIAH WAS MISSED AND MOURNED WHEN HE DIED. There is a night in Spain called "the sad night": and so in the history of Judah, the death of Josiah was "the sad day." The Rabbis say that "the memory of him was like costly incense, and sweet as honey in the mouths of all." (*James Wells, M.A.*)

Vers. 14-33. And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord.—*Restoring God's house*:—I. SPIRITUAL DESOLATION. 1. The negligent priesthood (ver. 5). 2. The dilapidated temple (ver. 7). 3. The perverted utensils (ver. 7). II. ABUNDANT OFFERINGS. 1. Opportunity to give (ver. 8). 2. Called to give (ver. 9). 3. Giving cheerfully (ver. 10). III. EFFECTIVE WORK. 1. Skilled workmen (ver. 12). 2. Diligent service (ver. 13). 3. Renewed devotion (ver. 14). (*Sunday School Times.*) *The book of the law found*:—1. We to-day are in some danger of losing the Scriptures. Not as a volume of literature. (1) It is possible for the Word of God to sink out of our consciousness through our indifference. (2) We may also make so much of prayer-books and creeds, of systems of doctrine and religious treatises, that the Scriptures themselves are seen only by a reflected light. (3) Because we have been acquainted with the Scriptures from childhood, as we grow older we may fancy that we know what they contain, and leave them unstudied and unread. (4) It is not unusual in public worship for the devotional services and the sermon to come between the soul and God's Word. (5) It is not unusual to find men so wedded to traditional interpretations, having origin in some theological theory, that when they read the Bible they are like one looking upon a landscape through coloured spectacles. When this tendency rules we are in danger of losing the Bible. 2. The discovery of "the book of the law" gave Josiah a new basis for faith. He must have felt when he read it, that he was supernaturally strengthened in his great task of reformation. There are few of us who do not desire to have our various undertakings approved by those in whose sagacity and moral discernment we trust. Josiah undertook his work with a new heart, for he felt that the Lord was with him. 3. We have here suggested the broad distinction between our certainty of what seems to be true and our certainty of what is vouched for as true by the Word of God. 4. This discovery of the law enlarged Josiah's conception of duty. The knowledge that came to him and to the nation, through this book, was what a flash of light is to a ship on a dangerous coast; the light reveals the rocks upon which she nearly struck; it also reveals the safe channel and the course to the harbour. The Bible performs this double office for all to whom it comes. It reveals sin; and it discloses the path to a better life. God's prohibitions are not restrictions upon life, but protections to it. God's calls to men are calls to blessedness. 5. This narrative illustrates the way truth enters a human life and recreates it. 6. Two reflections. (1) The large importance to each one of us of our finding the truth of God. (2) The chief blessing we can confer on others is to give them the truth God has given us. The men who went to the temple treasury came back with more than money. (*G. E. Horr.*) *The book of the law found*:—I. THE RESULTS OF LOSING THE LAW. 1. Knowledge of the truth was lost. 2. True religion passed away.

3. The services of the temple ceased. 4. The sanctuary was polluted. 5. False religion "came in like a flood." "The land was full of idols." 6. "Crimes of violence and deeds of oppression abounded everywhere." When man ceases to fear God he begins to hate his fellow-man. 7. "Immorality was rampant." Morality does not live without religion. 8. Misery and final destruction followed.

II. THE RESULTS OF FINDING THE LAW. 1. False religion was put away. 2. The people repented and turned to God. 3. The truth was learned. 4. The temple was beautified and opened for services. 5. A measure of mercy was found. 6. The truth was handed down to other ages. Miscellaneous lessons: 1. Temple and services are vain without the truth. 2. Those who seek to serve God discover his will. 3. When men desire to do wrong they hate the Word of God. 4. The Bible will survive all efforts of man to destroy it. 5. Where leaders set an example of piety the people follow. 6. Sin, vice, misery, and destruction come where the truth is not possessed. 7. If the times are bad we should hold up the law of God. 8. The Bible is a lost book to those who (a) neglect it; (b) disbelieve it; (c) disobey it. 9. Every child should own, read, and love the Bible. 10. One can be loyal to God amid the most opposing surroundings. 11. One's course in childhood generally determines what the youth and manhood will be. 12. The world greatly needs the services of children and men and women of righteousness. (*J. E. Jacklin.*)

*Josiah and the newly-found law*.—I. THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW. We see here—1. A striking instance of the indestructibility of God's Word. It has a charmed life. 2. That honest efforts after reformation are usually rewarded by clearer knowledge of God's will. If Hilkiah had not been busy in setting wrong things right, he would not have found the book in its dark hiding-place. We are told that the coincidence of the discovery at the nick of time is suspicious. So it is, if you do not believe in Providence. If you do, the coincidence is but one instance of his sending gifts of the right sort at the right moment. 3. That the true basis of all religious reform is the Word of God. The nearest parallel is Luther's finding the dusty Latin Bible among the neglected convent books. Faded flowers will lift up their heads when plunged into water. The old Bible, discovered and applied anew, must underlie all real renovation of dead or moribund Christianity.

II. THE EFFECT OF THE REDISCOVERED LAW. If a man will give God's Word a fair hearing, and be honest with himself, it will bring him to his knees. No man rightly uses God's law who is not convinced by it of his sin, and impelled to that self-abased sorrow of which the rent royal robes were the passionate expression. The first function of the law is to arouse the knowledge of sin, as Paul profoundly teaches. Without that penitential knowledge religion is superficial, and reformation merely external.

III. THE DOUBLE-EYED MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETESS. Josiah does not seem to have told his messengers where to go; but they knew, and went to a very unlikely person, the wife of an obscure man, only known as his father's son. Where was Jeremiah of Anathoth? Perhaps not in the city at the time. This embassy to Huldah is in full accord with the high position which women held in that state, of which the framework was shaped by God Himself. In Christ Jesus "there is neither male nor female," and Judaism approximated much more closely to that ideal than other lands did. Huldah's message has two parts. 1. The confirmation of the threatenings of the law. 2. The assurance to Josiah of the acceptance of his repentance and gracious promise of escape from the coming storm. These two are precisely equivalent to the double aspect of the gospel, which completes the law, endorsing its sentence and pointing the way of escape. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

*The Scriptures found and searched*.—I. THE BIBLE LOST. 1. It is lost to nations. Sometimes kings and governments forbid its circulation. 2. In communities where it freely circulates in the vernacular of the people—by misconstruction, false teaching and disregard. 3. It is lost to individuals by the way they treat it. How many a man suffers the Bible to lie in his home unused, dust-covered, like the sacred roll in the Temple, until it be almost forgotten! How many cast it away because it reproves them as it reproved the wicked kings of Judah! II. DEGENERACY INEVITABLE WITHOUT IT. The Word of God is the great source and conservator of moral life and health. It is sunlight to the moral world. It is the invigorating element in the moral atmosphere. No more surely do plants grow pale without sunlight, or animal life grow feeble without oxygen, than all that makes a worthy life in man, individual or collective, wanes and fails when deprived of the Word of God. How true was this of Judah! When the Word of God was lost, the nation sunk rapidly into wickedness and consequent weakness. False religion ran riot. The smoke of

incense to heathen gods filled the land. The consciences of the people were debauched. And whenever the Word of God has been lost by prohibition or neglect, the downward tendency of national life has been marked. Other elements of strength may have withstood it, and, for a time, upheld with seeming success the fabric of state. But, the best elements being wanting, degeneracy and feebleness sooner or later inevitably appear. But illustrations of the matter under consideration are more open to observation in regard to communities. Whenever the Word of God is not set on high, and honoured as the arbiter in morals, the teacher in religion, and the guide in life, there wickedness and vice will prevail. But individual life furnishes the best illustration. Without the word of God abiding in the mind and regnant in the life, deterioration in all things good certainly supervenes. Take out of a man's life the distinctive truths of the Divine revelation, and he is utterly exposed. Every avenue of his being is open to temptation. He will surely run down, sink to a lower plane, and ordinarily to a plane lower and lower the longer he lives. How many parents weep over sons and daughters tarnished, degraded, lost, because they would not heed the voice of God!

III. ITS EFFECT WHEN FOUND. 1. In the case of Josiah, it was astonishment. That such a book should have existed, stating so clearly the Divine will, so full of denunciations against the sins of the land, filled him with amazement. This is natural and legitimate. Only let men to whom the Bible has been lost wake to the solemn reality that its statements are everlasting truth, and that they will hold with unrelaxing energy in life, in death, and in eternity, and amazement must overwhelm them. "Is it possible that these things are true and I have not realised them?" 2. Another effect was to set him to earnest study. God was speaking. It was necessary for him to know what was said that he might order his conduct accordingly. Investigation of the Bible follows naturally a realisation of its nature. 3. Another result was to awaken anxiety. Study of the "book of the law" revealed his true condition. And so it is always. The Bible does not create the facts of our existence, but it does reveal them. In it we see our necessities and our danger. The past is marked with sin, the present full of corruption; the future forbidding, through fear of coming doom. 4. Again, the Bible found leads to repentance and reformation. How thorough was it in the case of Josiah! How deeply he deplored the sins of the land, how strenuously put them away! So it is always. It shows men what they are, and what they have done. It reveals the intensity of their sinfulness and the multitude of their sins. New thoughts, new desires, new affections, new purposes dwell within; new conduct, new habits mark the external life. And the same thing occurs in a wider field. Communities are waked to newness of life by finding the Bible. All this is true of tribes and nations. Many are the nations which have been revolutionised by it in the past, and it is doing the same to-day. Freedom of conscience attends the Bible, and civil liberty follows close behind. The Bible is the charter of the world's hope and the mainspring of its reformation. How sad is the thought that to so many of our race there is no Bible! (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

*Finding the book of the Law*:—1. Many precious things are found when we set to work at repairs. Try to remove the dust from old sanctuaries of life and memory, and see what you will light upon. 2. How one good thing leads to another. First "walking in the way of the Lord"; then interest in the house of the Lord; then the book found. 3. The connection between pecuniary integrity and the Divine blessing. When they brought the money they found the book. 4. How many old things are new to us when we are in trouble and distress of mind. 5. The age of sixteen is a time of his life which no man ever forgets. 6. Devotedness to God at sixteen is so great a step in the life of a youth that it cannot be alone; you must make another onward into the sphere of spirit and of life. 7. God always finds some work to do for those who are His. 8. There is no deeper distress possible to us than that which pierces us in the discovery of our enmity to God. (*B. Kent, M.A.*)

*The loss of the Scriptures*:—Consider what we should lose if we were to part with the Christian Scriptures, and with all the institutions and blessings for which we are indebted to them. I. We should lose the KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUE GOD. Mankind needs a book to keep alive in the earth the knowledge of a spiritual and personal God. II. We should lose sooner or later OUR INSTITUTIONS OF BENEVOLENCE. III. We should lose OUR INSTITUTIONS FOR POPULAR EDUCATION. Popular education is of Bible origin. Other than Christian religions build themselves on the ignorance of the masses. IV. We should lose sooner or later OUR INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIL LIBERTY. History shows that the great charter of freedom in the world is the Word of God.

The great free nations of the earth are the great Christian nations. (4. *Phelps.*)

Ver. 27. Because thine heart was tender.—*The tender heart*:—We see that waters of the same colour have not the same nature and effect, for hot waters are of the same colour with plain ordinary waters, yet more effectual; so the words of man coming from a man may seem at first to be the same with others, yet notwithstanding, the words of God coming from the Spirit of God carry a more wonderful excellency in them even to hearts of kings. Therefore Huldah speaks to the king, "Thus saith the Lord," &c. Josiah in uprightness sends to inquire, and the Lord returns him a full and upright answer. Whence we may learn—I. THAT GOD DOETH GRACIOUSLY FIT PROPHETS FOR PERSONS, AND HIS WORD TO A PEOPLE THAT ARE UPRIGHT IN THEIR HEARTS. Where there is a true desire to know the will of God, there God will give men sincere prophets that shall answer them exactly. But those that are false-hearted shall have suitable teachers, who shall instruct them according to their lusts. If they be like Ahab, they shall have four hundred false prophets to teach falsehood to please their lusts (1 Kings xxii. 6); but if they be Davids they shall have Nathans. If they be Josiahs they shall have Huldahs and Jeremiahs. God commended Josiah because his heart was tender. A tender heart is—1. Sensitive. 2. Pliable. 3. Yielding. II. THAT IT IS A SUPERNATURAL DISPOSITION OF A TRUE CHILD OF GOD TO HAVE A TENDER, SOFT, AND A MELTING HEART. All by nature have stony hearts in respect of spiritual goodness. Say what you will to a hard heart, it will never yield. A hammer will do no good to a stone. It may break it in pieces, but not draw it to any form. So to a stony heart all the threatenings in the world will do no good. You may break it in pieces but never work upon it. It must be the Almighty power of God. All that are gracious must of necessity have soft hearts. III. THEREFORE I WILL SHOW—1. How a tender heart is wrought. It is made tender by Him who made it (Ezek. xi. 19). 1. God through the use of means softens it by His Word, in producing apprehension of judgment. 2. It is wrought by an apprehension of tenderness and love in Christ. Many say that an adamant cannot be melted with fire, but by blood. I cannot tell whether this be true or no; but I am sure nothing will melt the hard heart of man but the blood of Christ. 3. When the heart is made tender by the Spirit, many things will work tenderness. (1) The works of God. (2) His judgments. (3) The Word and sacraments. (4) God's promises. 2. How it may be preserved and maintained. (1) Keep under the means whereby God's Spirit will work. (2) Seek to realise the forlorn state of the Church abroad. (3) Labour for a legal and evangelical faith. (4) Associate with those who are tender-hearted. (5) Take heed of the least sin against conscience. As water, when it begins to freeze, will not endure anything, not so much as the weight of a pin upon it, but after a while will bear the weight of a cart; even so at the beginning, the heart being tender, trembles at the least sin, and will not bear with any one; but when it once gives way to sins against conscience, it becomes so frozen that it can endure any sin, and so becomes more and more hard. (6) Take heed of spiritual drunkenness; that is, be not drunk with an immoderate use of the creatures (Hos. iv. 11). (7) Take heed of hypocrisy. (8) Take heed of great sins. (9) Consider the miserable estate of hardness of heart. 3. How it may be discerned from the contrary. By applying of the soul unto objects—(1) To God. As it is tender from God, so it is tender for God. He that hath a tender heart cannot endure to dishonour God himself, or to hear others dishonour Him. (2) To His Word. A tender heart is sensitive to—(a) Its threatening (Isa. lxvi. 2; 2 Cor. v. 11; 2 Pet. iii. 11); its promises, its directions (Isa. vi. 8; Psa. xxvii. 8). (3) To the works of God. A tender heart quakes when it sees the judgments of God upon others. (4) To our regard of the estate of others, whether they be good or bad (Psa. cxix. 136; Phil. iii. 18; Matt. xxiii. 37; Matt. xi. 25). Conclusion: 1. What an excellent thing a tender heart is (Isa. lvii. 15). 2. It fits a man for the end for which he was created. The service of God. 3. It is fit for any blessedness. It is capable of any beatitude. 4. Consider the wretched state of a heart that is not tender, and will not yield. (*R. Sibbes.*) *A tender heart*:—I. GIVE A GENERAL ACCOUNT OF A TENDER HEART. It implies—1. A quick and ready sense and feeling in spiritual things. (1) Quickness of apprehension. (2) Ready reflections of conscience. (3) A disposition to be easily affected. 2. A pliable disposition to yield to Divine influences. II. DESCRIBE THE WAY IN WHICH SUCH A TEMPER SHOULD EXPRESS ITSELF. 1. In relation to the Word of God. A man of religious tenderness of spirit will—

(1) Make it his business to acquaint himself with the mind of God. (2) Pay a ready subjection to the authority of God in His Word. (3) Be afraid to do anything which he doubts to be disagreeable to God's Word. (4) Will frequently compare his heart and life with God's Word. 2. In relation to sin. 3. In relation to providential events. 4. In relation to the honour of God. III. WHAT FOUNDATION IS LAID FOR SUCH A TEMPER IN CHRISTIANITY. 1. The rule of our faith and practice is more complete. 2. The recompenses of the life to come are more fully revealed to us. 3. Richer discoveries of grace are made to us. 4. Ceremonials have given way to substantials of religion. 5. The softening spirit is more plentifully communicated. IV. INFERENCES. 1. Discern the differences between a truly Christian temper and some things mistaken for it. It is not—(1) Natural easiness of disposition—(2) Occasional. 2. Let us all seek after and cultivate this tenderness of spirit. 3. If conscious of its possession, take the comfort of it as good evidence of a renewed and Christian state. (*J. Evans, D.D.*) **And thou didst humble thyself.**—*Self-humbling*:—I. THE ACCEPTABLE ACT. 1. It was a real and personal act. 2. It was voluntary. "Thou didst humble thyself." 3. It was a sincerely devout act. 4. It was a very deep and thorough one. II. REASONS FOR IMITATING IT. 1. A deep sense of sin, its heinousness and the punishment it deserves. 2. Our origin and our end. 3. The sovereign grace which has made us to differ. 4. The greatness of God. 5. The life and death of Christ. III. THE ENCOURAGING RESULTS WHICH FOLLOWED. 1. Humiliation will often avert judgment. 2. It always brings a positive blessing with it. 3. It will improve our spiritual health. 4. It promotes our usefulness. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The art of self-humbling*:—I. THAT IT IS A DISPOSITION NOT UNEFITTING KINGS TO HUMBLE THEMSELVES BEFORE GOD. II. THAT THE ACTIONS OF GRACE ARE REFLECTED ACTIONS. They begin from a man's self, and end in a man's self. Yet we must not exclude the Spirit. For the further expression of this humbling of ourselves before God, we will consider—1. The kinds and degrees of it. (1) Inward. (a) Humiliation in the mind in regard of judgment and knowledge, when our understandings are convinced, that we are as we are. (b) Affections of humiliation, shame, sorrow, fear. (2) Outward. As manifested in words and in outward behaviour and carriage. 2. Some directions how we may humble ourselves. (1) Get poor spirits, that is spirits to see the wants in ourselves and in the creature; the emptiness of all earthly things without God's favour; the insufficiency of ourselves and of the creature at the day of judgment. (2) Let us bring ourselves into the presence of the Great God and consider His attributes, His works of justice abroad in the world, and upon ourselves in particular (Job xlii. 6; John i. 27; 1 Cor. xv. 9; Matt. viii. 8; Gen. xxxii. 10). (3) Let us be content to hear of our sins and baseness by others. (4) Look to the time to come, what we shall be ere long, earth and dust; and at the day of judgment we must be stripped of all. (5) Let us set before us the example of our blessed Saviour. (6) Let us work upon our own souls by reasoning, discoursing, and speaking to our own hearts. 3. The motives to move us to get this humiliation. (1) Consider the promises that are made to this disposition (Isa. lvii. 15; James iv. 10). As examples we have Peter, David, Manasseh, Josiah. Every branch of humiliation hath a promise. A humble heart is a vessel of all graces. Humility emptieth the heart for God to fill it. God hath but two heavens to dwell in; the heaven of heavens and the heart of a poor humble man. When a man is humbled he is fit for all good. As all the water that is upon the hills runs into the valleys, so all grace goes to the humble. (2) All outward actions benefit other men; but this inward action of humbling a man's self makes the soul itself good. (3) A humble soul is a secure and safe soul. 4. The notes whereby it may be known. (1) Holy humiliation is voluntary. (2) It is ever joined with reformation. (3) Sin must appear bitter to the soul. There is in every renewed soul a secret loathing and hatred of evil, and is expressed—(a) In a serious purpose and resolution not to offend God in the least kind. (b) There must be a constant endeavour to avoid the occasions and allurements of sin. (c) There must be a hatred and loathing of sin in our confessions (Psa. li. 4). (4) True humiliation proceeds from faith. It quakes at the foresight of judgment, but the wicked never humble themselves but when judgment is upon them. (5) With true humiliation is joined hope. (6) Hypocrites are sorrowful for the judgment that is upon them, but not for that which is the cause of judgment, but the child of God is humbled for sin. (7) True humiliation is a thorough humiliation. It is not like Ephraim's morning dew, quickly gone. (*R. Sibbes.*) *The art of mourning*:—"Rending of clothes" was a thing frequently used in old times, and it was a visible representation of the inward sorrow of the heart (Job i. 20;

Job ii. 12; Acts xiv. 14; Mark xiv. 63; Isa. xxvii. 1). It was frequently used among the heathen also. Observe—I. THAT THE BODY AND SOUL MUST JOIN TOGETHER IN THE ACTION OF HUMILIATION. II. THAT WHEN GOD WILL AFFLICT OR HUMBLE A MAN, IT IS NOT A KINGDOM THAT WILL SAVE HIM. III. THAT TEARS AND MOURNING FOR SIN, WHEN IT COMES FROM INWARD GRIEF, IS A TEMPER WELL BEFITTING ANY MAN. IV. THAT IT CONCERNS MAGISTRATES ABOVE ALL OTHERS, TO TAKE TO HEART ANY DANGER WHATSOEVER THAT IS UPON THEIR PEOPLE. V. THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN TO TAKE TO HEART THE THREATENING OF GOD AGAINST THE PLACE AND PEOPLE WHERE HE BOTH LIVE. VI. THAT GOD TAKES A PARTICULAR NOTICE AND UNDERSTANDS THE PRAYERS WE MAKE UNTO HIM. God hears our prayers, because—1. He is gracious and merciful. 2. He is our Father. 3. He has promised to do so (Psa. l. 15). 4. They are the motions of His own Spirit (Rom. viii. 26, 27). 5. They are offered up in the name of a Mediator. 6. They are made according to His will. Conclusion: If we would have God hear us, then—1. Let us hear God as Josiah did. 2. Our prayers must proceed from a broken heart. 3. We must add to them the wings of love, faith, hope and earnestness, as Josiah did here. 4. Let us have such a resolution and purpose of reformation like Josiah's. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 28. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers.—*The saint's refreshing*:—I. THAT GOD TAKES NOTICE OF EVERY GOOD THING HIS CHILDREN DO AND REWARDS THEM FOR IT EVEN IN THIS LIFE. II. HOW THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN COMMON MATTERS BOTH RAISE UP THE SOUL TO THINK HIGHLY OF THEM. It sweetens death with the phrase of "gathering." III. THAT DEATH IS NOTHING BUT A GATHERING. IV. THAT THE CHANGES OF GOD'S CHILDREN ARE FOR THE BETTER. V. THAT BURIAL IS A COMELY AND HONOURABLE THING. VI. THAT DEATH IS LESS MISERABLE THAN THE ILL WHICH A MAN MAY LIVE TO SEE IN THIS LIFE. VII. THAT OUR TIMES ARE IN GOD'S HANDS. VIII. THAT IT IS THE SIGHT OF MISERY WHICH WORKS THE DEEPEST IMPRESSION. IX. THAT THOSE WHICH BE DEAD IN THE LORD ARE FREED FROM SEEING OF ANY EVIL OR MISERY. X. Another conclusion, THAT TAKES AWAY THEIR INVOCATION OF SAINTS. XI. THAT THE LIVES OF GOD'S CHILDREN DO KEEP BACK JUDGMENT AND EVIL FROM THE PLACE WHERE THEY LIVE, AND THEIR DEATH IS A FORERUNNER OF JUDGMENT. Because—1. Gracious men do make the times and the places good where they live. 2. Gracious men do bind God by their prayers. XII. THAT THE EVILS WHICH WE SUFFER ARE FROM THE EVIL OF SIN. XIII. THAT GOD WILL GIVE GOOD MEN FAITHFUL SERVANTS THAT SHALL DEAL FAITHFULLY WITH THEM. The messengers dealt faithfully with Josiah. XIV. THAT THE CARE OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND OF THE CHURCH IS A DUTY BELONGING UNTO THE KING. (*Ibid.*)

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

VER. 2. And encouraged them.—*Cheer up, my comrades!*—The first thing is to get every man into his proper place; the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place so as to occupy it worthily. At this time it shall not be my business to arrange you, but assuming that it is well for you to keep where you are, my object shall be to encourage you to do your work for the Lord without being cast down. I will speak—I. TO THOSE WHO THINK THEY CAN DO NOTHING. II. TO WORKERS WHO ARE LAID ASIDE. III. TO THOSE WHO ARE MUCH DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE BUT SMALL TALENT. IV. TO WORKERS WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES. V. TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT APPRECIATED. VI. TO THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Encouragement*:—"I never should have reached success," Lord Beaconsfield once wrote, "had it not been for one woman who, in the darkest hour, believed I could win, and cheered me on."

Ver. 21. For God commanded me to make haste.—*Spiritual haste*:—Haste is not hurry. Hurry implies confusion and disorder. It is not the same with speed. I. WHAT IT REFERS TO. We should not err were we to apply it to the duties of relative and secular life. It applies particularly—1. To the salvation of the soul. 2. To a course of godliness. 3. To labour for the welfare of others (Prov. iii. 27, 28). II. ON WHAT IT IS FOUNDED. 1. The importance of the thing itself. 2. The limitation of our opportunities. 3. This only season is short. (*W. Jay.*)

Vers. 24, 25. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot.—*The lamentation for Josiah*:—I. THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF THE LAMENTATION. 1. Extensively. All Judah and Jerusalem. 2. Intensively. Bitter lamentation. 3. Protensively. Of long duration, “an ordinance in Israel.” II. THE CAUSE AND GROUND OF IT. The loss of a good leader whose life had been useful. III. DOCTRINE. That faithful, active, and public-spirited men in the Church of God should not be laid in their graves without great lamentations. In replication I will show—1. Negatively. On what account the death of good men is not to be lamented. 2. Positively. The true grounds and causes of such lamentation. (1) Because so much of the Spirit of God as dwelt in them, when amongst us, is now recalled and gathered up from this lower world. As it is a real loss to a company when any merchant withdraws a great stock he had running in trade, out of the bank; so certainly it is a great loss to the Church of God, when the precious gifts and graces of the Spirit, dwelling in the saints, are drawn out by death. (2) Because thereby a breach is made to let in the judgments of God upon the remnant that is left. (3) The beauty and ornaments of the places they lived in are defaced and removed by their death. (4) Because the propagation of religion is obstructed in the places from whence they are removed. (5) The consideration of the time in which good men die aggravates the loss, if it falls out—(a) In a declining state of religion. (b) When the numbers of the godly are thinned and lessened. (c) When the spring and succession of good men is obstructed. (6) When we consider what influence our sins and provocations have had upon those judgments and calamities. I look upon every good man, as a good book, lent by its owners for another to read, and transcribe the excellent notions and golden passages that are in it for his own benefit, that they may return with him when the owner shall call for his book again. But in case this excellent book shall be thrown into a corner, and no use made of it, it justly provokes the owner to take it away in displeasure. Application. This reproves—1. The worst of men, such as secretly rejoice at the removal of such men. 2. The insensibleness of good men, who are apt too slightly to pass over such tremendous strokes of God (Isa. lvii. 1). 3. The very best of men, who though they do bewail and lament the loss of such men, yet they do not lament it in the due manner. (*John Flavel.*) *The death and burial of Josiah*:—1. That the best of men may err in judgment and in act. 2. The danger of undertaking any work without asking counsel of the Lord. 3. How universal is the reign of death. 4. That we should be cautious how we attribute sudden and violent death to the vengeance of the Most High. 5. That it is not wrong to mourn for the dead. (*J. S. Wilkins, B.A.*) *The death of Josiah*:—I. WHAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD DID UPON THE DEATH OF JOSIAH. 1. There was a general mourning for him. 2. The prophet Jeremiah made a particular office for it. 3. This office was used among others upon the day of lamentation. 4. This use was established by a law upon Israel, which was observed till the end of the Babylonian Captivity. II. THE REASONS OF THEIR DOING IT. 1. Because it was caused by their sins. 2. Because it was a punishment for their sins. (*Bishop W. Lloyd.*) *A nation's tears*:—Why does the Jewish nation now weep over Josiah? The reasons are: I. THE GREAT NATIONAL LOSS WHICH THE EVENT INVOLVED. Josiah was a prince—1. Of a reflective nature. His mind was in the quest of the highest truth. 2. Of a tender spirit. 3. Of reformatory disposition. II. THE SAD MEMORY OF THE MORAL CAUSE OF THE CALAMITY. III. THE TERRIBLY DISTRESSING MYSTERY ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISPENSATION. Josiah was the most useful man of his age; yet he dies at thirty-nine. Mystery though it be, it teaches us—1. That Heaven's government is no respecter of persons. 2. The irresistibility of death. 3. That there is nothing on this fleeting earth on which we should set our hearts. 4. That there must be an after life. (*Homilist.*)

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 CHAPTER XXXVI.

Vers. 15-17. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes.—*Presumptuous rebellion*:—I. We see here CONTINUED REBELLION, which suggests—1. That habits are easily commenced. There is little difficulty in forming habits. They are not acquired by one mighty bound, but by a series of almost imperceptible steps. 2. That habits are readily strengthened. Every step

that is taken is planted with firmer grip. With every ripple that flows the stream becomes wider and swifter, fed as it were with other streamlets on the way. Every time an action is repeated the easier it becomes, and the more deeply rooted in the soul. 3. That habits are seldom eradicated. Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Yea, easier than a man unassisted by Divine help can break away from evil habits. They become part of the nature of the man himself. II. WE SEE THE PRESUMPTION OF CONTINUED REBELLION. We are constantly reminded of the fact that God is merciful. But there is a limit to the mercy and forbearance even of God. This is evident—1. From the fact that it is impossible always to continue His warning and judgments on the impenitent. If the obstinacy of one person cannot be overcome it were unjust on that account to remove the chance of salvation from others. 2. From the inevitable progress of temporal affairs. Death comes on with his rapid step and cuts short the life and with it the opportunities of repentance from the obdurate spirit. Then the door of mercy must be shut for ever. 3. From the very nature of the refusal. Is it likely that He, the Lord of all, will continue offering heavenly treasures to human swine who only trample His gifts in the mire? Oh, it is a sad and an awful truth that man may presume too far even on infinite love! III. WE SEE THE AWFUL END OF PRESUMPTUOUS SIN. The consequences are at the last utter destruction and irretrievable loss. This stands to reason if we remember—1. That God must vindicate His character. 2. That an example must be set to the world at large. 3. That the sinful must be removed out of the way. (*Homilist.*) *Unheeded warning*:—The island of Ischia was a favourite summer resort of Italians. In 1883 the sinking of water in wells, mutterings and rumblings underground, distinctly foretold a coming earthquake; these signs were noticed and understood, but through fear of frightening visitors, and so losing custom, hotel-keepers and others refrained from making public these warnings. Ruin and death ensued, involving those who knew and heeded not, and those who, through lack of warning, had unwittingly exposed themselves to peril. **Till there was no remedy.**—*No remedy*:—These words contain three facts of great importance. 1. That there was, at least at one time, a remedy. 2. That the remedy went on, and might have been used, for a very long period. 3. That there came a time when the remedy ceased. I. ALL LIFE IS A REMEDY. The conditions of things require it. Life a great restorative process. 1. Comes that marvellous provision of God in Jesus Christ. 2. All providences have a curative character. 3. Every one carries within himself an antidote to evil. Conscience, till silenced, a sure antidote to evil. II. Notice the word "TILL." It shows how slow God is to take away the remedy. We may sin ourselves into a state, not in which there is no forgiveness, but no thought or desire to seek forgiveness. "No remedy," not on God's account, but your own; not in God's want of will to save you, but in your own incapacity to will your own salvation. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

Vers. 22, 23. Now, in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia.—*Cyrus: the divinely-directed deliverer*:—I. GOD STIRRED UP CYRUS TO DO A GREAT AND NECESSARY WORK. II. CYRUS WAS A FITTING INSTRUMENT FOR THE GREAT WORK. III. GOD HAS VARIOUS MEANS WHEREBY TO INCITE TO ACTION. IV. THE DIVINE INCITEMENT TO THE NECESSARY WORK WAS AT A MOST OPPORTUNE TIME. V. GOD TEACHES HIS INSTRUMENTS HOW AS WELL AS WHEN TO ACT. VI. AS THE LORD STIRRED UP THE SPIRIT OF CYRUS, SO HE CAN STIR MEN NOW. (*F. Hastings.*) **He made a proclamation.**—*The decree of Cyrus; or, all things for the Church*:—I. GOD USES KINGS AND RULERS FOR HIS CHURCH. That the Lord raises up men within the Church to be leaders and mighty workers in her behalf is a fact which the Bible and all history fully prove. Such men were Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley. But He calls men from without also to work for her. Conspicuous among this number is Cyrus, the Persian king. Though Cyrus be a marked illustration of the matter under discussion, especially so because of the clear declarations of prophecy on his behalf, still he is by no means the only one. Through the intervention of Joseph, God made Pharaoh the preserver of His people. The immediate successors of Cyrus on the Persian throne followed his example. Through the influence of Esther and Mordecai, Ahasuerus, in a most critical time, became the saviour of the Jews. Later, in the time of Darius, the interrupted work upon the temple at Jerusalem was renewed and pushed forward. Still later, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, Artaxerxes expended his royal treasure in establishing the remnant of the Jews in their ancient land. Alexander the Great, marching upon Jerusalem with a bitter purpose in his heart,



is suddenly changed from foe to friend. Like Cyrus, he too doubtless was shown the sacred books of the Jews, and in the prophecy of Daniel saw himself described and his career delineated. The general policy of the Roman government was severe, but many of the emperors, moved by kindness of disposition or considerations of State, were lenient towards the Christians. Ere long the government itself became Christian, and throughout the Middle Ages, power was on the side of the Church. At the Reformation, whenever and wherever needed, men were raised up among the rulers of the world to be abettors of the new faith and breakwaters against the floods of persecution. Such were the elector of Saxony in the days of Luther, and measurably so Henry VIII. of England. Such were the Syndics who stood around Calvin at Geneva. Such Elizabeth, Gustavus Adolphus, Cromwell. And the same thing is transpiring in our own days. II. GOD HANDLES THE NATIONS FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH. We know that the nations round about the Hebrews in all their history were instruments in God's hands for disciplining them and fashioning them to His will. To this end He ordered their affairs. And the same thing is apparent in these modern ages. Was it fortuitous that England early became Protestant and the champion of the new faith? Was it a thing of chance that Saxony, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, resisted the tyranny of the Pope? Did it merely happen that this broad land of ours was sealed against the efforts of Rome to possess it, and was preserved as virgin soil for a pure faith and a free government? Is not God's hand in England's occupancy of India, and can we not see that thereby that land is bespoken for Christ? Is Italy's emancipation from the Pope wholly of man? Is Germany's attitude to Rome of Bismarck as much as it is of God? Blind is he who cannot see God's use of the nations in these modern times! III. GOD USES THE WORLD'S MATERIAL RESOURCES AND FORCES FOR THE CHURCH. God has always put the world's wealth under tribute as He has needed it, from the day when Israel went out of Egypt to the present time. And the tribute increases as the Church increases. More of the world's wealth is flowing into the channels of the Church now than ever before. But not merely wealth—money expression of value—but every good and uplifting force at work among men God uses for the development of His plan. Discovery, invention, progress in economical and industrial arts, natural science—all these things, which are represented in the complicated civilisation of our day, are likewise represented in the Christianity of the times. Providence takes them up and utilises them as they appear; nay, more, orders the time and the manner of their appearance. How true of the art of printing! The first book printed was the Bible, and from that day forward God has been presiding at the printing press and scattering its leaves for the healing of the nations. The fleets of commerce bear the gospel to the corners of the world. Discovery in geography, ethnology, philology adds new buttresses to Christianity. All these and the like, though material and natural forces, yet work spiritual results. 1. By all these means God fulfils His prophecies and accomplishes His purposes. None can hinder, none compel. On the trains of providence there are neither accidents nor delays. 2. Herein we see the undying nature of the Church. Great has been the heat of her affliction, but by it have her enemies been consumed. 3. The Spirit of God is abroad in the world, preparing the way for the coming of Christ's kingdom. How should the servants of the Lord be encouraged in labour and in prayer by the Spirit's antecedent work in every heart! 4. In all these things we have the assurance of the triumph of God's kingdom. (*H. S. Kelsey.*)



**THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.**

**EZRA.**



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Literature, on the Verses of the Bible

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, A. M.

*EZRA*



NEW YORK

CHICAGO

TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

Publishers of Evangelical Literature



## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF EZRA.

THAT the Book of Ezra is a continuation of the Books of Chronicles is evident from the fact that the last verses of "Chronicles" are repeated as the first verses of EZRA. There is also the most marked similarity in the literary style and method.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK.—There is no reasonable ground for denying that Ezra was the author of the book that now bears his name. But the admission must be made that the present form of the work may be due to the editorial labours of the Great Synagogue in the early days of the Grecian ascendancy. It is quite possible that Ezra was rather a collector than an organiser, and that what he left at his death was rather a mass of material than a completely edited history. These materials may have come into the hands of a later editor, who had the historical genius, and he has put them into the shape with which we are familiar, making necessary editorial corrections and editions.

DATE OF THE BOOK.—There seems to be some uncertainty as to whether the Jewish literary "renaissance" is to be dated the time of Ezra or between one and two centuries later, when the nation felt the inspiration of contact with Greek culture. We should have no doubt about its identification with the later period, but we must be willing to admit that the revived literary interest, and the new standards, must have materially influenced the re-editing of the ancient Scripture records.

AN UNFINISHED FRAGMENT.—The Book of Ezra, as it stands, is an evidently unfinished fragment; and some would find the natural continuation in Nehemiah, chap. viii. The object of the compiler is evidently the same as that which gives character and tone to the Books of Chronicles. The mission upon which Ezra's whole heart was set was the full re-establishment of the old Mosaic ritual; the reassertion of the old Mosaic social laws; and the revival of religion of that formal type which is always dear to the heart of the priest.

THE PERSONALITY OF EZRA.—It may greatly help to a right understanding of the Book of Ezra if some effort is made to form a fair estimate of the personality of this scribe, and to notice how the circumstances of his age found a fitting sphere for the intense expression of his personality.

Ezra was a priest, with an unusually valuable pedigree, of which he would be sure to think much, and to make much. He was descended from Hilkiah, and traced his line back to Aaron. And he "magnified his office." How he had gained his position of influence at the Persian Court we do not know, but we may be sure that his residence at Babylon made him familiar with the Chaldee language, which he introduces in some portions of his work (see chaps. iv. 8; vi. 18; vii. 12-26). In the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, Ezra was granted a commission to lead a second body of Jews back to Jerusalem, to take upon himself the administration of public affairs, and to correct those social abuses which had arisen among the returned exiles, and of which serious news had reached Babylon. This commission Ezra carried out, but in the spirit of the priest rather than in the spirit of the statesman. He showed himself to be a ruler with a very narrow, one-sided, and exaggerated point of view. The reformation that he effected proved to be the beginning of mischiefs as serious as the evils which he so violently

rooted out. The healthy and lasting reformation always has its basis in some spiritual truth, either freshly revealed or quickened to the view of men by the vivid apprehension of some reformer. Ezra was strong on duty, but he had no revelation or inspiration of truth at the back of the demands he made. He forced men to do what he thought right, and men only await the relief of the "force" to turn back to their wrong again.

Ezra's first visit to Jerusalem was not prolonged. He returned a second time, apparently a short time after Nehemiah's appointment as governor, and he was able to render to him valuable assistance. Ezra's life-work appears to cover a period of about eighty years; but no account of the place or date of his death is given in Scripture. It is generally assigned to 432 or 431 B.C., but as Josephus says that he died a very old man, Rawlinson prefers the date 420-410 B.C. Traditions assign him a grave near Samara, after his return to dwell in Persia; and is said to have lived to be 120 years old.

G. Rawlinson says of Ezra: "He comes before us in so many capacities, and is revealed to us in such brief and hurried flashes, that we can with difficulty form any distinct conception of his personality. He was student, critic, linguist, antiquary, historian, teacher and preacher, judge, governor, reformer of a religious system, second founder of a political community. We cannot call him a person of brilliant genius, or of great originality; but yet we have to acknowledge in him one of the born leaders of men, one of those who have exercised on the world a vast influence, and an influence almost entirely good. . . . It may be true that his aims were 'narrow,' and his methods 'rigid.' But he achieved a great success. In temperament Ezra was passionate and emotional."

Dr. Geikie says: "Intensely earnest, he had the absolute confidence of a zealot in his own definitions of the requirements of the law. To enforce the Levitical holiness of Israel had become his one idea, and no Puritan was ever more energetic or stern in pressing his will on others as that of God."

Dr. W. B. Pope says: "There is no character in the Old Testament more perfect and complete than that of Ezra. We see him as a servant and as a master; as a student of the law, and as its administrator, as supreme in authority and as subordinate, in public and in private, uniformly and always the same devout, disinterested, patriotic lover of his people, and friend of God."

Dean Stanley says: "Ezra and Nehemiah (for in some respects they are inseparable) are the very impersonations of the impenetrable toughness and persistency which constituted them the reformers of their people. Reformers in the noblest sense of that word they were not."

AS TO THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF EZRA, it may be noted that they are divided into two periods (a third period is treated by Nehemiah). The first period is anterior to the time of Ezra, and extends over twenty-three years, from the first return of the exiles in 538 B.C., up to the completion of the temple, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius, 515 B.C. The books of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah shed light on this period. The second period begins with the eighth chapter of Ezra, and extends to the close of the book.

One of the difficulties felt in dealing with the work of Ezra arises from the fact that some sections are written in the first person, and some in the third person. The most simple and natural explanation of this peculiarity may be found in the habit of Ezra, in inserting his extracts bodily, just as he found them.

Regarding Ezra and Nehemiah as one book, Dean Stanley writes: "In this one book is discoverable the agglomeration of four distinct elements; which is instructive as an undoubted instance of the composite structure shared by other books of the Old and New Testaments, where it is not so distinctly traceable. These component parts are as follows: *a.* The portions written by the chronicler—the same as the compiler of the Book of Chronicles (comp. Ezra i. 1, 2; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23)—Ezra i., iii., vi.; Neh. xiii. 1-20. *b.* Ezra's own narrative, Ezra vii.-x. c. Nehemiah's own narrative, Neh. i.-vii. 5; viii.-xi. 2; xii. 27-xiii. 31. *d.* Archives; Ezra ii.; Neh. vii. 6-73; xi. 3-36. In the divisions *a.*, *b.*, *c.* it may be questioned whether Ezra vii. 1-26; x. 1-44; Neh. viii. i.-xi. 2; vii. 27-xiii. 3 (in which Ezra and Nehemiah are described in the third person) belong to another narrative interwoven by the chronicler who compiled the whole book."

As a general conclusion, it may be said that there is no sufficient reason for distrusting the uniform tradition that the materials of the book were provided by Ezra.



# THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

## EZRA.

### CHAPTER I.

**VERS. 1-11.** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord.—*The discipline of the captivity* :—The captivity is clearly represented as God's judgment upon His people for their sins, but it was a judgment so tempered with mercy that it brought them much of blessing in the way of spiritual development. Their trials became a means, in various ways, of spiritual discipline. Losing the temple with its solemn ritual they found that God was a spirit and could be worshipped anywhere; at Jerusalem they had been able to hear His voice in the holy ordinances, but now they were dependent upon the revealed Word; hence diligent attention was paid to the preservation and transcription of the sacred writings, a service which prepared the way for the arrangement, not long after, by Ezra of the Old Testament canon. All such good impulses helped to work out a gradual but sure deliverance from their old sin of idolatry. In Judea the service of idols had become strangely confused with the service of Jehovah. It was thought by many not so very wrong to worship images if at the same time they worshipped God. The evils which assail us now are different in form, but are working along the same line; we have other idols, but the same snare. Natural history has an interesting chapter called "Mimicries of Nature," the description of certain creatures which have, in a wonderful degree, the appearance of vegetable life and are able thereby to seize more surely upon their unsuspecting prey. It illustrates the peril that surrounds us on many sides in the moral world; evil takes the shape of good; pleasures that seem harmless hide the sting of death, &c. Through such subtle temptations among the Jews idolatry became almost universal. But when they came to Chaldea they saw idolatry in all its naked deformity; it was not confused with true worship, it stood alone. They saw how it denied and despised Jehovah, and it filled them with horror. If idolatry bore such fruit their course was clear; they would have nothing to do with it. Not likely there were some whose religion in Judea had not been very pronounced who in Chaldea were among the foremost champions of Jehovah. In any Christian community there are good citizens who take no sides in the conflict between Christianity and unbelief. But imagine one of them suddenly removed to a community where infidelity prevails, where Christian worship is prohibited, where the Bible is dishonoured, where the prevailing sentiment is that of defiant atheism—how long would it be before he would be found standing out resolutely among the friends of Christ? In a recent revival multitudes signed this simple covenant: "I am trying to live a Christian life, and am willing to be counted on that side." An impulse like this must have come to many of the Jews in Babylon. The contempt heaped upon their religion strengthened their constancy, and they refused to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land." It is not meant that their harps were kept silent through all those years; but they would never sing the songs of Zion for anybody's sport; they would die first. Their spirit recalls the drummer-boy in the Irish Rebellion of 1798 who, being ordered by some rebels who had captured him to play for their entertainment, laid his instrument on the ground and leaped into it, tearing the parchment to shreds, and exclaiming, "God forbid that the king's drum should be beaten for

rebels!" whereupon they spiked him to death. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*) *Returning from the captivity*.—God rules. His throne is the centre of history. His sovereignty is the key of all the mysteries in providence and grace. We look behind and speak of history; before and speak of prophecy; but He looks neither behind nor before. Yesterday and to-morrow are alike to Him. One glance sweeps the whole horizon. Does it seem wonderful that Cyrus should have been called and commissioned two centuries before his birth? We forget that telling and foretelling are the same with God. The map of eternity and the universe has always been spread out before Him. I. **THE CAPTIVITY.** It was in the year 604 B.C. that Nebuchadnezzar reduced Jerusalem and returned with his first deportation of captives. The date is important because it furnishes the prime factor in all calculations respecting the deliverance from Babylon. The captivity was for an appointed time, seventy years. There was a special reason why it should be precisely seventy years. The Lord had required of Israel the observance of every seventh year as a season of Sabbatic rest; for a period of four hundred and ninety years this injunction had been practically ignored. Seventy Sabbatic years have been desecrated, seventy years of Babylonish chastisement shall expiate the sin. So true is retribution. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." But the captivity was not mere retribution, it was discipline. Its purpose was not so much to punish as to reform. Bearing a filial relation to God, the chosen people experienced the children's portion of chastisement (Heb. xii. 6-11). The Jews had a mission. God had called them from among the nations to take charge of His oracles. Monotheism must be kept until Christ. For this Abram was chosen out of Ur of the Chaldees. However superior to other tribes and nations in many particulars, they had not been loyal to their trust. They needed chastening. God had no alternative but to inflict it. Hence the captivity. Nor was the discipline vain. It will be profitable to note some of the lessons which they learned in captivity. 1. They were cured of idolatry. They had previously been unable to resist the imposing rites and ceremonies of their pagan neighbours. Familiarity with the abominations of the Babylonish gods nauseated them. They longed for the living God, saying, "When shall we return and appear before God?" 2. They conceived a new devotion to the Lord's sanctuary. Its holy ordinances had once been a weariness; but now they were homesick for Zion. The institution of the synagogue is traced to this period. 3. They learned the value of the Scriptures (Neh. viii.) 4. The stock of Israel was culled and improved. Only the choicest and best joined the restoration. 5. They were greatly knit together during the captivity. "One touch of nature make the whole world kin." A common sorrow will erase the enmity of years. Pain is a mighty solvent. The Jews of to-day scattered abroad over the earth are a living witness to the unifying power of adversity. 6. The heart and intellect of the nation were broadened. This widening of vision is manifest in all their subsequent history. Thus it appears that the captivity was an essential part of the Divine plan. II. **THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS.** This also was in pursuance of the Divine plan. The clock struck at precisely the right moment. Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C. The proclamation was issued 536 B.C., leaving time for the beginning of the second temple in May of the year 534 B.C. The intervening period was just seventy years. "Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyprus." How? 1. By the voice of His Spirit in the inner man. 2. Probably Daniel brought the matter to his attention. He may have read to him the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. xxix. 10) and the prophecies of Isaiah (Isa. xlv. 94-28, xlv. 1-4). 3. It may have shaped itself in his mind as a suggestion of policy. 4. Or possibly there was a religious motive. He was a monotheist. He may have received the message and commission from Jehovah as from his own Ormuzd. III. **THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM.** It was a voluntary movement. None were compelled to go. All were encouraged. They set forth prayerful and hopeful. In the 126th Psalm we have one of the songs of this pilgrimage. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The exile ended*.—We may safely conclude from the events stated in this and the following chapters—I. **THAT THE LONG EXILE OF THE JEWS HAD DONE ITS APPOINTED WORK.** God sent them into captivity partly to punish and partly to purify them. They had now been sufficiently chastened and they had been cleansed from their iniquity. 1. We may argue from the fact of the Jews commending themselves so much as they did to Cyrus that their lives were estimable and honourable. 2. We know that after the captivity in Babylon they left idolatry behind them for ever. Trouble will sometimes teach us what nothing else will. The Church and the school may have failed to lead us into the kingdom

of Christ, but the sadness of orphanage or the loneliness of the first absence from home may lead us to find a refuge in "the God of all comfort," in the unfailing Friend of the human heart. II. THAT GOD ACTS WITH GENTLE POWER ON THE MINDS OF MEN. 1. On those of His own people. He "raised the spirit" of many of the Jews (ver. 5). He caused them to feel deeply how excellent a thing it would be to repopulate the city of Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple of God. He kindled in their hearts the fires of patriotism and of piety. He lifted them up above unworthy and unmanly fears. He made them brave and strong. 2. On those outside the Church. He girded Cyrus though that king knew Him not (Isa. lxxv. 5). It was by His all-wise direction that Greece prepared her thought and her language, and Rome her highways for the gospel in "the fulness of time." Therefore—(1) Let us ask of God that He will inspire us in our time of need. We may have before us some difficult task at school, some trying ordeal to pass through, some new sphere to enter upon, and we may shrink from going forward, but if we ask of God He will "raise our spirit" and make us equal to the effort. (2) Let us intercede with God for others; they may appear to be quite outside all holy influences, but they are not without the reach of that mighty Hand that can enlighten the darkest mind and soften the hardest heart and renew the most obdurate and stubborn will. III. THAT AT THE CALL OF GOD WE SHOULD BE READY TO UNDERTAKE ARDUOUS OR DANGEROUS WORK. It was a long journey and a perilous one to Jerusalem. 1. It was uncertain what they would find when they reached the city of their fathers; no such tidings came to them as now come daily to our countrymen in England who are emigrating to America; they went forth not knowing what would await them. Moreover, they left behind them some home, kindred, occupation, property. Where God clearly calls us we need not be daunted by danger or by difficulty. He who summons us will clear the way, and will sustain us under every trial. IV. THAT THOSE WHO CANNOT RENDER THE GREATER ARE WELCOME TO OFFER THE SMALLER SERVICE. Of those who declined to return there would be some who might have gone but would not, either because they were too timid or because they had attachments which they were unwilling to break away from. Others there were that would have gone but could not, either because they were too aged or infirm, or because they had ties which they felt it would be wrong to sunder. Of the latter there were many who, as they could not do the best possible, did the best practical thing. They could not swell the number of the returning, but they could strengthen the hand of those who went (ver. 6). We may be unable to serve Christ by missionary or ministerial or evangelistic labours, but we can strengthen the hands and cheer the hearts of those who can. We can give them gold or silver or pence. We can speak the inspiring word. We can pray for them and let them know that we are praying. We can write to those who are absent or send them that which others have written. V. THAT WHEN WE OBEY THE VOICE OF OUR MASTER WE DO MORE THAN WE KNOW. The Jews who returned from Babylon no doubt believed that they were acting as patriots and were serving their country; but they could have had no conception of all that would grow out of their courageous conduct. We never know what will be the long and large result of a true and brave course. Carey did not foresee the fruits of his self-denying zeal, nor Wesley of his "more abundant labours," nor Livingstone of his travels and his lonely death. It is a cheering and inspiring thought that our present faithfulness may be a living seed from which a large harvest of blessing may spring. VI. THAT THERE IS A BETTER RESTORATION than that of precious vessels to the house of God. It was a kindly act of Cyrus (see vers. 7-11), and the Jews rejoiced greatly when they saw those ancient and hallowed vessels beneath the roof of the new temple which they built. But there is a deeper joy in heaven, and there will may be on earth, when a human heart that has been taken away from the service of Christ is brought back again and is included among the spiritual treasures of the kingdom of God. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*) *The captivity of evil*.—Sin may be conceived of as an object, but also as a power—as something to which our actions are directed, but also as something from which our actions proceed. Sin is an internal principle, and he who "commits sin," who lives in it, obeys it in this sense—obeys it as a force. The whole and constant tendency and bias of the soul is a despotic rule. It is more than an external authority or verbal law. It has a more vigorous and relentless rule. It is more besetting; has a more constant presence and constraining power; it acts directly on the will; it controls and stimulates volition. That is a great bondage that overbears the will, which brings it against itself into subjection, which ignores and defies its active choice, but that is a greater

far which corrupts and perverts it. There is no slavery like that in which the very seat and source of freedom is held captive. It is the salt losing its savour; it is the light leading astray; it is the king and leader falling in battle. (*A. J. Morris.*) *The return from the captivity—an argument for Daniel's history of the Jews in Chaldea being true*:—The return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon is not only a proof of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, considered as the accomplishment of a prophecy, but it is an additional proof of it in this light, that it affords a strong internal presumption that the history which Daniel gives of the manifestations of Divine power in Chaldea, during the residence of the Jews in that country, were true. That we may place this argument in a stronger light, let us consider the full importance of the measure which Cyrus now adopted, and of the benefit which he conferred upon the Jews. The practice of slavery among the ancient nations is well known. The slaves were, in that period, one great branch of property. The slaves cultivated the land, did the household business, exercised the necessary trades, and, in general, performed all that labour in which the mass of the people are now employed. The slaves, therefore, formed one great portion of private property, and of the national stock. The slaves arose chiefly, among ancient nations, from the captives taken in war. This was the great fund from which they were supplied, and constituted a very considerable branch of the profits which accrued to the conquerors in the ancient wars. They estimated the profits of the war, not more by the extent of territory which they gained than by the number of slaves whom they captured. From this view we will be enabled to conceive how very difficult it must have been in ancient times for men who were once reduced to slavery to regain their liberty. The interests of the State, as well as the rights and properties of individuals, were all against them. Where there were so many interests to be consulted, so many properties to be separated, and so many private rights to be resumed, we may conclude that the liberating of the slaves, among the ancient nations, must have been a very arduous State measure. This accounts perfectly for the difficulty which the Jewish nation found in their attempt to emigrate from Egypt. Private persons have sometimes given a slave his liberty as a reward for some distinguished service; but it was impossible, under the ancient manners, for any considerable body of men to be set free without some cause which was very extraordinary. In the edict of Cyrus, then, and the return of the Jews from Babylon, we have a very uncommon piece of history presented to us. That conqueror, among the other valuable property of the vanquished empire, found a whole nation of slaves. This, according to the ideas of these times, was an immense acquisition. It was, in fact, an immense property, the value of which, to a political prince like Cyrus, must have been fully known. Yet we find this politic and wise prince giving liberty at once to this whole nation, and sending them back, after seventy years' captivity, into their own country. It is this extraordinary circumstance which Isaiah describes, and of the value of which he appears fully sensible, when he says, in his prophecy of Cyrus, "He shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives, not for price nor reward." Nor was this a sudden resolution. It was not adopted in the moment of victory, nor meant to exhibit a momentary triumph over the vanquished. The Jews remained in the same state in which they had lived under the Chaldeans during one entire reign of the new empire. I say, then, that this transaction affords a strong proof of the credit in which the Jewish nation then were in Babylon, and that the history which Daniel gives of the manifestations of Divine power which were made, during that period, and by the agency of that nation, in the province of Chaldea, were true. The transaction proves itself. There are no data here necessary, but to believe that the nation of the Jews were in Babylon, and that they returned from it. Their return proves the history. It supposes all that is related, and cannot otherwise be accounted for. It is affirmed that, in this period, the God of the Hebrews was acknowledged throughout the extensive provinces of Chaldea and Persia. At last the body of the Jews, whom the people they lived with regarded as a sacred nation, obtain their liberty, and are restored to their country. This is the history which is presented to us by their own writers; and the actual return of the Jews from their captivity, and resettlement in their own country, in opposition to so many complicated rights, in opposition to so many great interests, and in opposition to the universal practice of mankind in that period, suppose this history, and are a full proof of its authenticity. (*J. Mackenzie, D.D.*) *The first year of Cyrus*:—After making himself master of Persia and building up an empire in Asia Minor and the north, Cyrus swept down on the plains of Chaldea and cap-

tured Babylon in the year B.C. 538. To the Jews this would be the first year of his reign, because it was the first year of his rule over them, just as the year A.D. 1603 is reckoned by Englishmen as the first year of James I., because the king of Scotland then inherited the English throne. (*Walter F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Cyrus* :—The valley of the Euphrates was the centre of three out of the five great empires of antiquity—the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian. In the eighth and seventh centuries before Christ the first of these was in its strength, and from its capital, Nineveh, dominated peoples and lands from the Persian Gulf on the south to the Euxine Sea on the north; from Palestine on the west to the Caspian on the east. But among the many subject cities and tribes there was one city and there was one tribe which with special impatience bore the yoke and with special vehemence sought to cast it off. The rival city was Babylon, some three hundred miles further south, situated on and watered by the Euphrates, as Nineveh was by the Tigris. In the province of Babylonia one caste or tribe, the Chaldeans, became distinguished for its energy and enterprise and gradually imprinted its character and its name upon the people of the whole province. But despite all efforts to throw off the yoke, the Assyrian grip held fast. Nineveh ruled Babylon; the Assyrian dominated the Chaldean. The rival tribe was that of the Medes, to the east and north of the province of which Nineveh was the centre. Closely allied with and kindred to the Medes was another tribe, destined through Cyrus to give a famous name to history—the Persians. As yet the more civilised Medes have the mastery, and the hardier warriors follow the standard of the Median king; but both perforce acknowledge the supremacy of the lord of Nineveh. Thus it was till nigh the close of the seventh century B.C. A common policy and hatred and the presence of two able leaders then brought Babylonians and Medes into a temporary alliance. The city of the south and the tribes of the east joined hands and forces. Nineveh was besieged and taken, and the Assyrian empire ended. Babylon now entered upon a brief but brilliant career. Hers is the “Golden Empire” of antiquity. Under Nebuchadnezzar she mounted to the very zenith of her greatness. Meanwhile the Median kingdom became consolidated; and still the Median supremacy over the Persians is unchallenged. But about 560 B.C. a youthful hero-prince named Cyrus summoned the archer horsemen of the clans to arms. A long and bloody struggle ensued; in the end, by the aid of the young commander’s genius, the conquerors were conquered and the foundations laid of the mighty Persian Empire. Cyrus is one of the most benign figures of history. His name (from the sun, “the sunny one”) indicates his nature. When Xenophon sought a sovereign of sagacity and piety to sit as a model for his “ideal king” he found what he sought in Cyrus. On the downfall of the Medes, he conciliated the good-will of the vanquished by permitting one of their own race to be titular king, whilst the real power of both nations resided in himself. The nominal king reigns but Cyrus rules at Ecbatana. Powerful as he is, his position is one of even greater danger than power. An alliance of three out of the four Great Powers of the day is formed against him. The young lion awaits not the huntsman but prepares to spring. He selects as his first foe Croesus, the king of Lydia. He surprises and storms the city of Sardis, Croesus is taken prisoner, and the Lydian dominion is ended. The Greek cities that fringe the coast of Asia Minor next feel his power and acknowledge his sway. Then he turned his attention to the east, and compelled the Bactrian and Parthian warriors to own him as their master. Cyrus is now free for the great enterprise of his career, the struggle which is to decide whether the Persian or the Chaldean is to rule in Babylon, the seat of the world’s empire. He is now brought within the sweep of the Biblical record. There is an ethnological as well as a religious interest attached to this Persian advance upon Babylon. It is the first great collision on which clear light of history falls between two great families of nations, the final result of which was to push back the Semitic races from the front rank of humanity and to place in their stead the Aryan nations who were henceforth to occupy the high places of the field. Aryan and Semitic thus meet in arms before the walls of Babylon. It is most fitting that the advent of the leader of a movement which had such far-reaching results should be inaugurated with so sublime an expectation as that with which Cyrus is hailed by Isaiah. He was the Morning Star of the Aryan races. Persia made way for Greece, and Greece prepared for Rome, and out of Rome has sprung the modern world, and in the modern world the most vigorous branch of the Aryan stock more and more unmistakably rules. On the downfall of Babylon, Cyrus does not immediately take possession of the position he has won. With the same politic end in view as had previously caused him to make a Median Prince precede him at Ecbatana, he now

places another of the same nationality upon the vacant throne of Babylon. For two years Darius reigns, then dies; and Cyrus quietly takes possession as the sole ruler of the territories he had inherited and conquered. Henceforth the Persian who rules from Babylon is "The Great King." The edict for the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple was issued 536 B.C. It was the Declaration of the Imperial Policy, and the basis of all that came after. It announced by implication friendship between the empire and the Jews—a friendship to which the Jews remained faithful till, two hundred years afterwards, Alexander the Great erected the Brazen Empire upon the ruins of that of Silver. Cyrus was a man of war to the close, and died in battle, disastrous according to one account, victorious according to another. (*G. M. Grant, B.D.*)

**That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.**—*The fulfilment of the word of the Lord:*—Here are four things which claim our attention. I. **THE REGARD OF GOD FOR HIS WORD.** "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled," &c. (*Jer. xxix. 10; Num. xxiii. 19.*) "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever." "He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." We have in this—1. An assurance that the prophecies and promises of His Word will be fulfilled. "As the architect progressively executes every part of the plan which he has delineated, till the whole design is completed, so God in His providence performs in due order all the prophecies of His Word: a great proportion of His great scheme has already been accomplished, and revolving ages will hasten the performance of all the rest in the appointed periods." 2. An encouragement to trust in Him. "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be set on high" (*Psa. xxii. 4, 5; xviii. 2.*)

II. **THE MERCY OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE.** This mercy is seen—1. In the design and effect of the captivity. "Thus the Divine word of chastisement," says Schultz, "ever goes hand in hand with His word of salvation." 2. In the release from captivity. (1) As to its time. (2) As to its meaning. It was an assurance of the Divine forgiveness of their sins. Their release was also the commencement of many and great blessings. "What a fulness of salvation after the night of misfortune—the entire extent of Messianic redemption." III. **THE INFLUENCE OF GOD UPON THE SPIRIT OF MAN.** "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia." 1. The nature of this influence. "This does not mean," says Schultz, "that Cyrus was influenced in the same way as were the prophets, upon whom, with their greater susceptibility, the Spirit of the Lord came; but yet an influence in consequence of which Cyrus made the will of God his own will, and executed it in the things under consideration. God gave him the resolution and the desire to execute His intention." All the good in human life is the result of Divine influence. 2. The subject of this influence: Cyrus king of Persia. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever He will." He is now using the powers of the world to promote the interests of His cause. 3. The design of this influence. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, that he made a proclamation," &c. In all the inspirations and impressions He imparts to man, His aim is to save and bless him, and to make him an agent in blessing others. IV. **THE SUITABLE RESPONSE OF MAN TO THE INFLUENCE OF GOD.** "Cyrus made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom," &c. (*W. Jones.*)

**The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus.**—*Inspiration tested:*—The soul of man is the great arbiter. We need not, therefore, bow down before every man or woman who claims inspiration. We listen respectfully to the claim, and say, "What does it amount to? what end would you accomplish? to what purpose does this inspiration you claim point?" and if in answer there should come replies indicative of reform, progress, purification, liberation, enlargement, beneficence, verily the answer will prove the inspiration that is claimed. No man is inspired who wishes to do evil. Disclaim and repudiate, not with sorrow, but with indignation, the inspiration that would seek to curtail liberty, arrest progress, hinder the mission of philanthropy—that would overload the weak, still further impoverish the poor, and shut off from the meanest dwelling any beam of daylight. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*Divine communications:*—Last week I was in the office of one of our great Glasgow merchants, and, while we were conversing together, he suddenly asked to be excused for a moment, as there was a summons to speak with another Glasgow firm. Without moving from his seat, without being put about in the slightest, or even turning his head, he lifted from before him the telephone connection. A few minutes passed: not a word did I hear of that conversation except "Goodbye." That was all I heard; but I knew that the man

to whom I was talking had been put in possession of a fact which I knew nothing about, and yet all the while I had been in his presence. He had heard, through the special connection that he had, the business and the object of the firm with which he was in communication. Ah me! Sometimes at your side a man gets a communication from Almighty God that you know nothing about, and that is the reason of his activity, and that is the programme that he resolves to carry out at all hazards. He has heard from God; he has been in communication with the Almighty. (*John Robertson.*) *Cyrus selected*:—It seems strange at first that this man should have been chosen for such commission. God might have employed some one of His own people, Ezekiel, for instance, investing him with supernatural power, as Moses was invested when he delivered the nation from its first captivity in Egypt. But no; He selected rather a pagan king, whose appointment had been foretold by Isaiah more than a hundred years before. Often since then God has pursued a like course, employing for His purposes those who were not His professed servants—men of wealth, of learning, of position, of power. He does not count their service as excuse for withholding from Him the trust and obedience which are His due; He does not condone their idolatry; but He permits them to be His helpers, sometimes, it would seem, in order that, brought thus in line with His beneficent designs, they may be persuaded to come heartily into His kingdom. (*T. J. Holmes.*) *Divine stirrings in the human soul*:—It is taught that, besides the general moral influences, unconscious and diffused—as it were distilled, like the dew, in silence and darkness—there is an active energy, arousing, filling, impelling the souls of men. It is said that the Spirit of the Lord came upon judges, that it came upon kings, upon prophets, upon apostles—came mightily and stirred them all up. As sudden and mighty winds make trees rock, and wrench them, and even overturn them, so, as by a mighty rushing wind, the Spirit of God has descended on men—on Samuel, on David, on Isaiah, on Paul. It is taught likewise that, while this energy of the Divine mind prepared certain men for emergencies, and prepared them to act official parts, all true Christians, all godly souls, are opening to a quickening influence, if not so mighty, yet of the same general kind—an influence which stimulates, assists, ripens, and so finally sanctifies. *Revivals*:—There have been great awakenings in literature. Suddenly a nation has, so to say, sprung to its feet and said, “Let us read!” That is a mere matter of what is called profane history. Ages have passed in which men cared not to read, or write, or think; if there were any books to be opened, as a rule they lay untouched; but quite suddenly there has been what is termed a literary revival. Is such a thing possible? If it is possible to have a literary revival—that is, a revival of the love of learning, the love of reading, the love of writing—why may there not be such a thing as a religious revival, in which men shall say suddenly, but unanimously, “Let us pray”? And when men so moved to pray they shorten the distance between earth and heaven. It would be perhaps most difficult to believe in a religious revival if there had not been analogous revivals—revivals of learning, revivals of art. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **That he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom.**—*The edict of Cyrus*:—**I. THE DEVOUT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY.** 1. In the bestowment of His favours. 2. In the authority of His commands. **II. THE MAGNANIMOUS EMANCIPATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.** 1. The spirit in which this emancipation was made. (1) It was generous. (2) It was pious. 2. The purpose for which the emancipation was made. **III. THE GENEROUS EXHORTATION TO ASSIST GOD'S PEOPLE.** 1. Its purport. 2. The persons to whom it was addressed. 3. The pattern by which it was enforced. Rawlinson regards “the free-will offering for the house of God” as the gift of Cyrus himself. He not only wished them well, but helped them to realise his wishes. **Lessons**: 1. Be prepared to acknowledge and appreciate moral excellence outside of the visible Church of God (Luke vii. 1–10; Acts x. 22). 2. Imitate Cyrus in his practical acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. 3. When we cannot offer our labours in good enterprises, let us cheerfully offer our gifts. (*William Jones.*) *The proclamation of Cyrus*:—View it—**I. In a way of LITERAL INTERPRETATION.** 1. The person by whom this proclamation was issued. 2. The proclamation itself. **II. In a way of SPIRITUAL IMPROVEMENT.** 1. What a sad state the men of the world at large are in. They are slaves, being in bondage to their lusts, to the world, to Satan, and to the grave (Rom. vi. 12, viii. 21; Eph. ii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 26; 2 Pet. ii. 19; 1 John v. 19.) 2. What an invaluable blessing the gospel is. 3. What will be necessary to obtain what it offers? 4. What is our bounden duty when it has become effectual for our good?

God is said to "raise the spirits" of such as are ambitious for liberty; and it need not be said to whom we are indebted if we differ from others (1 Cor. iv. 7, xv. 10; Jas. i. 17). (*William Sleigh.*) *The proclamation of Cyrus and the proclamation of the gospel minister compared*:—The text suggests to us a resemblance between the proclamation of Cyrus and that of a gospel preacher. I. The proclamation of both is **MERCIFUL**. The proclamation of Cyrus meant restoration. 1. Restoration of lost liberty; and—2. Of lost religious privileges. The gospel preacher has to preach deliverance to the captives and set men to rebuild the temple of the soul that has fallen into ruins by reason of sin. II. The proclamation of both is **DIVINE**. The God of heaven gave Cyrus this commission—it did not spring out of his own policy or philanthropy; it had its origin in God. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." The true gospel minister is a messenger of heaven. He has not to proclaim his own theories, but the Word of God. No man is a true gospel preacher whose spirit has not been "stirred up" by the Lord, and who does not feel that necessity has been laid upon him. How does God stir up a man to preach now? 1. By a powerful revelation to his soul of the miserable moral condition of humanity. He is made to see all men in bondage and in ruin. 2. By firing him with the spirit of Christly philanthropy. The love of Christ is made to constrain him, &c. III. The proclamation of both is **UNIVERSAL**. The proclamation of Cyrus was to every Jew. Not one excluded. It is so with the gospel minister: his message is to all. "Go ye into all the world." He calls upon every man to repent, to believe; he invites every man to liberty and peace. IV. The proclamation of both is **PRACTICABLE**. Cyrus laid down no terms difficult to fulfil. 1. The power to return every Jew possessed. All necessary helps were promised. 2. Cyrus furnished them liberally with the means to rebuild their own temple (vers. 7-11), so every man is enabled to obey the gospel. V. The proclamation of both is **EXTENSIVELY DISOBEYED**. (*Homilist.*) *To build Him an house at Jerusalem.*—*God is calling men to build*:—God is calling men to build—not necessarily in wood and stone and iron, but to build character, life, utility. And this can be done everywhere. Not to public building are all men called. What sweet homes some men have built! The moment you pass within the door you feel the genius of home welcoming and blessing you; the traveller says, "I must tarry here"; the hungry man says, "There is bread within these walls; I know it though I do not see it." What businesses some men are building, marked by high policy, reputable for known morality, upright, straightforwardness—complicated businesses, yet every line palpitating with conscience. This kind of building is not always recognised as it ought to be; but it ought to be pointed out as a possibility to every man. We cannot all build upon the mountain-top or in the great thoroughfares of the city, but we can build privately, quietly, secretly: we can build up broken hearts, we can be confirming feeble knees, we can be towers of strength to men who are enfeebled and impoverished. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's house built for the sake of man*:—What need had God for a house? He made the stars; He wears the constellations as a garment; the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him: what does He want with a house? Nothing; but He knows that we do; He knows that the building of the house is necessary for our education. What need has He of our prayer? None. Can we tell Him anything? No. Does He not know what things we have need of before we ask Him? Yes. Why, then, should He call upon us to tell Him what He knows, to ask Him for what He well understands we need? Why should there be any throne of grace or altar of prayer? For our sakes. This is a means of education. We learn things by doing them. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 3. Let him go up to Jerusalem.**—*The release of the Jews from Babylon an illustration of the redemption of man from sin*:—We discover an analogy in these two things as regards—I. **THE SUBJECTS**. The Jews were exiles and captives in Babylon. "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin" (John viii. 34). In his sinful state man is an exile from his true condition and place, and the bondsman of evil powers. II. **THE AGENTS**. Cyrus and Jesus Christ. The analogy between them is at least twofold. 1. Both were called of God to this work. Ages before his birth Cyrus was pre-eminently for this work (Isa. xlv. 24, xlv. 6). And Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the Servant, the Anointed, the Sent of God (Isa. xlii. 1, lxi. 1-3; Luke iv. 18, 19; John iii. 16, 17; Gal. iv. 4, 5; 1 John iv. 9). 2. Both effected this work by battling with and overcoming the oppressors. Cyrus had to conquer the Babylonian Empire before he could release the captive Jews. And our Lord



and Saviour, as the Son of Man, encountered sin and mastered it. III. THE SOURCE. In both cases the blessing flowed from the free and unmerited grace of God. The Jews had no claim upon Him against whom they had so persistently rebelled. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." IV. THE EXTENT. 1. It is offered to all. 2. It is accepted only by some. Great numbers preferred to remain in Babylon. (1) Many did not feel any deprivation or degradation in their exile and subjection. (2) Many had attachments and interests in Babylon which they could not or would not leave. V. "GO UP TO BUILD THE HOUSE OF THE LORD WHICH IS IN JERUSALEM." A striking illustration of the grand end of redemption. (*W. Jones.*) *Our choice of the true life:—*

I. CYRUS PRESENTED THESE EXILED JEWS WITH THE CHANCE OF A FREE CHOICE. Cyrus did not compel. These Jews might, or they might not, go to Jerusalem. It was for each one of them to choose. So Christ, in His call to the true life and heaven, puts before men the chance of an utterly free choice. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." II. This choice which Cyrus presented to these exiled Jews was a CHOICE OF EXCLUSIONS. If they chose to go to Palestine they must yield what things would keep them in Babylon. They might carry with them many things (vers. 7-11). But their houses and lands, every detaining thing, must be surrendered. So this choice which Christ presents to men is necessarily a choice of exclusions. Christianity is not narrowness. Read the charter of a Christian liberty in 1 Cor. iii. 21-23. But Christ comes to save a man from sin. What Babylonish and preventing sins you cleave to must be yielded. III. IT WAS A CHOICE TOWARD NOBLENES which Cyrus gave these exiled Jews. Surely it was better, nobler to go to Jerusalem and rebuild God's temple than to dwell in exiled ease in Babylon. IV. This choice which Cyrus opened for these exiled Jews was a choice NECESSITATING FAITH. Between Babylon and Palestine stretched vast wide sandy plains. But for the heartening of the Jews choosing the nobler destiny there was the Divine promise. So for the Christian, the man who accepts Christ's call to the nobler life, there are Divine promises. V. THIS NECESSITY OF CHOICE. For every one of us, in high spiritual way, this choice confronts Babylon or Jerusalem. (*Homiletic Review.*) His God be with him.—*God with us:—*Notice—I. THE DEVOUT WISH EXPRESSED: "His God be with him." It is equivalent to our "goodbye," which is an abbreviation of "God be with you." The wish comprises two things. 1. Personal relation to God: "His God." This expression may be viewed in two aspects. (1) "His God," as opposed to the gods of the heathen. (2) "His God," as engaged to him in covenant relation. Thus our Lord speaks, "My Father, and your Father"; "My God, and your God" (John xx. 17). Martin Luther said that the sweetness of the gospel consisted chiefly in its pronouns, such as me, my, thy, &c. "My Lord and my God" (John xx. 28). "Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. ii. 20). "Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). 2. Realisation of the presence of God: "His God be with him." His presence is a guarantee of all the help and blessing which we need. But in uttering this wish in respect to the Jews, Cyrus probably had an eye to two things which the presence of God would secure to them: (1) Guidance and guardianship on their long journey. (2) Success in their great undertaking. II. THE KIND EXPRESSION OF THIS WISH. The expression of this wish indicates on the part of Cyrus—1. Reverence towards God. He does not utter these words thoughtlessly, but seriously. 2. Kindness towards the captives. He wished them well, and proved the sincerity of his wishes by practically helping them in their best interests. Conclusion: 1. Do we sustain this personal relation to God? 2. Do we realise the blessed presence of God? 3. Do we desire that others also may realise His gracious presence? (*William Jones.*) *Our God:—*As He is not a God without infinite wisdom, and infinite power, and infinite goodness, and infinite blessedness, &c., so He passes over in this covenant all that which presents Him as the most adorable Being to His creatures. He will be to them as great, as wise, as powerful, as good as He is in Himself; and the assuring us in this covenant to be our God imports also that He will do as much for us, as we would do for ourselves were we furnished with the same goodness, power, and wisdom. In being our God He testifies that it is all one, as if we had the same perfections in our own power to employ for our use; for He being possessed with them, it is as much as if we ourselves were possessed with them for our own advantage, according to the rules of wisdom and the several conditions we pass through for His glory. (*Stephen Charnock, B.D.*)

Ver. 4. Let the men of the place help him with silver.—*Spontaneous offering:—*

"Not many years since," writes a clergyman, "I had occasion to solicit funds to aid in the prosecution of a work of benevolence. I stepped into the office of a Christian friend, with whom I had a partial acquaintance, and incidentally mentioned the unpleasant business before me, and inquired of him for the residence of a certain benevolent individual, and added that I hoped to get one dollar of him. After receiving directions, I turned to go out. 'But stop,' said this brother, 'suppose you let me have the privilege of contributing a little of the money which the Lord has lent me to this cause. Put down £20 for me.' I expressed my surprise that he should contribute so liberally, and remarked that I should feel myself in duty bound not to call on him very soon on a similar errand. 'Well, then,' said he, 'my brother, I think you will very much mistake your duty. If you knew how much pleasure it gave me to contribute of my substance to the Lord, you would feel no reluctance in calling again. And now let me charge you, when engaged in similar business, never to pass me by. Call, and I think I shall be able to do something; and if not, my prayers shall go with you.'" (*Signal.*) *A stimulus to generous offering:*—Two weeks ago I told you that three thousand dollars had got to be raised to pay for the repairs of this house. The plates were sent round, and about six hundred dollars were raised. I was heartily ashamed, and have not got over it yet. Last week the trustees came, and asked me if I would name the matter again, and I said, "No, I will not." But this week, upon their renewed application, I have consented to speak once more. If this don't do, you may pay your debt how you can, for I will never mention it again. I'm not going to be a pump to be thrust into men's pockets to force up what ought to come up freely. When the surgeon comes to a place where he must cut, he had better cut. For more than a year I've seen that our plate collections grew meaner and meaner. I didn't want to face you with such things as I've got to say to-day, and I put it off as long as I could. Now I shall speak plainly once for all, not having the face to bring the matter up again. This debt has got to be paid, and will you meet it honourably, and pay it like men, or will you let it drip, drip, drip out of you reluctantly, a few dollars at a time? You can take your choice. I'm not going to try to drill money out of you as I would drill stones. The amount of meanness among respectable people is appalling. One needs to take a solar microscope in order to see some men. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Vers. 7-11. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord.—*The restoration of the sacred vessels:*—I. THE PRESERVATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS (vers. 7, 8). These are the vessels which are mentioned in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 7 and Dan. i. 2. In the providence of God most of these vessels were remarkably preserved, to be in due time restored to their original place and uses. Learn: Since God is so careful of the mere vessels consecrated to His service, may we not rest assured that He will much more preserve His consecrated people? II. THE NUMERATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS. This numbering indicates—1. The reverent care of Cyrus for these sacred vessels. 2. The grave responsibility of Sheshbazzar for these sacred vessels. Learn: That persons, places, and things which are devoted to religious uses should be reverently regarded by us. III. THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS (ver. 11). 1. This was a fulfilment of prophecy (Jer. xxvii. 22). 2. This is an illustration of the restoration of perverted things to their true uses. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great restorer of the violated order and the broken harmony of the universe of God. (*William Jones.*) *The restitution of the stolen vessels:*—This appears to be more than an act of generosity or justice. A certain religious import belongs to it. It put an end to an ancient insult offered by Babylon to the God of Israel, and it might be taken as an act of homage offered to Jehovah by Cyrus. Yet it was only a restitution, a return of what was God's before, and so a type of every gift man makes to God. (*Walter F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Mithredath:*—It is not without significance that the treasurer who handed over their temple-prosperity to the Jews was named "Mithredath"—a word that means "given by Mithra," or "devoted to Mithra." This suggests that the Persian sun-god was honoured among the servants of Cyrus, and yet that one who by name at least was especially associated with this divinity was constrained to honour the God of Israel. Next to Judaism and Christianity, the worship of Mithra showed the greatest vitality of all religions in Western Asia, and later even in Europe. So vigorous was it as recently as the commencement of the Christian era, that M. Renan has remarked that if the Roman world had not become Christian it would have become Mithraistic. In the homage paid by Mithredath to the God of Israel may we not see an image of the recognition of the claims of the Supreme by our priests of the sun—Kepler,

Newton, Faraday? (*Ibid.*) *A restoration of misappropriated property*:—There was a great restoration of misappropriated property. What a restoration there will one day be. What have men taken away from God's Church? Nearly everything they could lay hands on. They have taken away gold, art, music, miracles, inspiration, rationalism, morality, science, and they have left God a very bare house. When the period of spiritual revival has come, and the holy issue is wrought out in all its meaning, all these things will be brought back again. Art will come with her brush and pencil, and say, "I will beautify the house of God's revelation." Music will bring back her harp and her instrument of ten strings, and her cymbals and organs, and say, "Make me a handmaid in God's house, for all I have and am must belong to Him"; and Reason—exiled, expatriated Reason shall return, saying "They have kept me in vile servitude; admit me to my Father's house." And Science will come and pray; and Morality will say, "They have been trying to divorce me from theology, from right religious motive and impulse, and I have died like a flower that has been plucked; restore me to my vital relations, and I will once more bloom in the house of God." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER II.

**VERS. 1, 2. Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity.**—*Going up out of captivity*:—I. **THE DELIVERANCE FROM CAPTIVITY.** 1. This captivity had been—(1) A degradation; (2) a subjection; (3) a transformation; (4) a retribution. The most deplorable degradation and the most real and terrible subjection are those of sin. 2. This deliverance—(1) Originated in the favour of God; (2) was effected by an unlikely agent; (3) was permissive and not compulsory. Salvation from the bondage of sin is freely offered in the gospel, but no one is compelled to accept the offer. II. **THE JOURNEY HOME.** This journey was—1. A restoration. 2. A restoration to their own home. 3. A restoration to religious privileges. The salvation of Jesus Christ restores man to his true condition and to his forfeited inheritance. III. **THE SUBORDINATION TO LEADERS.** Society could not exist without leaders and rulers. They are necessary—1. For the maintenance of order. 2. For insuring progress. 3. Because of the differences in the characters and abilities of men. (*William Jones.*) *Emancipation*:—The Rev. J. Jackson Fuller, of the Cameroons, a coloured missionary, said at the Young People's Meeting of the Baptist Centenary: "Although our fathers in my country were born under the British flag, yet we were nothing more and nothing else than the chattels of the Englishman. We were British slaves, and it was partly by the missionaries going to our country—the island of Jamaica—and telling us of the love of Jesus Christ that their vivid description of our oppressed condition aroused the English nation, and in the year 1834, after paying twenty millions of money, you set us all free. The very day you passed the Emancipation Act in England, I was made free. You young people would have been glad, or your fathers before you would have been glad, had they the opportunity of seeing that morning in the year 1834 when thousands of children and their fathers and mothers gathered together during the evening, waiting for that morning of the 31st of July to dawn. At eleven o'clock at night they gathered in mass and waited for the hour to pass when the clock should strike twelve. And then you would have been glad to see that mighty mass of human beings rise on their feet and sing the Doxology—'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.' I was among that number that gathered that night. I heard the Doxology sung. I am one of the boys that were rescued when you paid twenty millions of money and set our fathers free."

**VERS. 2-64. The number of the men of the people of Israel.**—*A suggestive record*:—Consider—I. **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FACT OF THE RECORD.** 1. It was an honour to the pious and patriotic ones who returned. 2. It is an illustration of the Divine record of God's spiritual Israel (*Luke x. 20*). 3. It suggests that every one of His people is precious in the sight of God (*Isa. xlix. 16*). II. **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONTENTS OF THE RECORD.** We have in this list—1. Significant persons. (1) Zerubbabel, an ancestor of the Messiah (*Matt. i. 12*). (2) Jeshua, who was a distinguished type of Jesus Christ (*Zech. iii., vi. 11-13*). 2. A signi

ficant place: Bethlehem (ver. 21). 3. Significant numbers. (*William Jones.*) *Religious service*:—It is here suggested—I. THAT THERE ARE VARIOUS SPHERES OF SERVICE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD (Eph. iv. 11, 12). II. THAT THE HUMBLEST SPHERE OF SERVICE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD IS A PLACE OF PRIVILEGE AND HONOUR. III. THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD IS NOT LIMITED TO ANY PARTICULAR RACES OR CLASSES OF MEN. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 62. *These sought their register.*—*The importance of a clear spiritual pedigree*.—I. THE DOUBTFUL PEDIGREE AMONGST THE PEOPLE IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF UNCERTAINTY AS TO OUR SPIRITUAL STATE. 1. This uncertainty may consist with association with the people of God (vers. 59, 60). 2. This uncertainty must involve spiritual loss. (1) Of spiritual joy. (2) Of spiritual usefulness. Lacking Christian assurance our testimony for Christ would be likely to be deficient in clearness and attractiveness, in fervour and force; it would especially fail to set forth the joyful character of true religion. II. THE DOUBTFUL PEDIGREE AMONGST THE PRIESTS IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF UNCERTAINTY AS TO OUR MINISTERIAL CALLING AND CONDITION. 1. A ministerial pedigree may be lost by reason of worldliness. 2. The loss of ministerial pedigree involves a corresponding loss of ministerial power and reward. 3. The final decision as to the standing of a minister of uncertain pedigree must be given by God Himself (ver. 63). (*Ibid.*) *Melancholy records*.—Here is the picture of men seeking a register, and finding nothing in it; looking up old family papers, and their names are not found in the tender record. A man not known at home! He may have been born there, and have lived a good many years of his early life there; but to-day he has no record on the hearthstone, no place at the table, no portion in the family memory: it would be a breach of courtesy to name his name. Something must have happened. There is an ineffable sadness about this: all nature seems to be violated; instincts have been rooted out; natural affection seems to have been burned down and utterly destroyed. Consider the tremendous possibility of outliving one's natural rights, or forfeiting birthright, inheritance, paternal blessing, all the wealth of home's true love. Talk of falling from grace! What is this but an apostasy from the best grace—a fall from childhood's trust, the wilful obliteration of the name from the scroll whose meaning is nothing but love? Here is a child who is not named in the will. Consider what you have done. How infinite in detestation must have been the character which resulted in this issue! Take more general ground, and the principle still applies. Here is a man who is unknown in the community; his name may be written upon certain official papers, but it is not inscribed on the scroll of the heart, on the memory of gratitude; it is not to be found anywhere put up as a thing most prized and loved. He is but a figure in the community, but a tax-payer, but an occupier of a house; he is not a living presence in any sense of beneficence. When he is buried no one will miss him in the heart. His name is not written upon the register of trust, affection, or benevolent interest. Seeing that all these things are possible, there must be a reason for them: what is it? It is always a moral reason, where it touches any conception of general justice. At the last shall we go to the book of life and not find our names there? The answer is in our own lives. Sad to turn away from the record, saying, "My name is not there!" But, blessed be God, the humblest, least, vilest may, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, the whole mystery of the priesthood of Christ, have their names written in heaven. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 65-70. *And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem, offered freely.*—*Possessions and offerings*.—I. THE COMPLETION OF THEIR JOURNEY. "They came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem." II. THE EXTENT OF THEIR POSSESSIONS (vers. 65-67). III. THE PRESENTATION OF THEIR OFFERINGS. 1. The object of their offerings. 2. The spirit of their offerings. (1) They offered promptly, without delay. (2) They offered spontaneously, without constraint. 3. The measure of their offerings. (1) Proportionately. (2) Liberally. IV. THE SETTLEMENT IN THEIR CITIES. This suggests—1. Home after exile. 2. Rest after a long and tedious journey. (*William Jones.*) *Offering freely*.—As I was reading my Greek Testament the other day, I was delighted with a discovery concerning the well-known text: "God loveth a cheerful giver." The word "cheerful" is our word for "hilarious." And I began to imagine what would happen if the meaning of the word was put into action. "Will you give five pounds to missions?" "Will you contribute a

hundred pounds towards our evangelistic work this winter?" "Ha, ha, ha! I am only too glad for the opportunity to give, since I have so abundantly received." And the hilarious giver writes out a cheque on the spot. How much better that sounds than the doleful, "Oh, dear! I am tired with the never-ending calls for money, money, money." But this "hilarious" giving is not possible except the Spirit is dwelling richly within. For only the Spirit shows the greatness of that salvation which we received through Christ, and the greatness of our consequent obligation. (*A. J. Gordon.*) *The Church the rallying point of nations.*—The temple and its worship marked the last days of the kingdom of the Jews anterior to their captivity, and formed the point around which the returning wanderers gathered at their restoration to the home of their fathers. So around the Church, the events of all successive empires have gathered since the day of Pentecost. I. EVERY STATE OF IMPORTANCE, alike in ancient, mediæval, or modern history HAS GATHERED ROUND THE CHURCH, AND HAS RECEIVED ITS SHAPE AND DEFINITENESS FROM HER. Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome each became important in their different times in proportion as they were able to bless or to chasten the Church of God. The long dynasties that ruled on the banks of the Nile; the invasion of the Hyksos; the vast undertakings of Rameses or Amasis; the gigantic records of antiquity which rise in such sepulchral magnificence in Egypt from amidst her waste of sand; the high philosophy of one Ptolemy and the literary research of another, proclaim one after the other in successive generations the splendour of an empire whose principal end of existence was to aid in the throes of the early Church; to give a home to the famine-stricken patriarchs; to be a scourge in the successive invasions of Shishak, Pharaoh Hophra, and Pharaoh Necho, and to be the probation of the Jews when God ordained the Chaldean captivity. All these seem to have been the main objects for which Egypt existed as a nation. So in each successive period in after-history the Church became more and more the central body which gave shape to the kingdoms of the world, alike in mediæval as in modern history. The vast multitudes from the north-east of Europe which swept like a bankless flood over the fertile plains of Italy, arrested by the walls of Constantinople or of Rome, or diverted by the intercession of Ambrose or Gregory, became at length themselves children of the Church whom they had persecuted; and the imaginative genius of the Goth lent mellowness, sublimity, and tone to the architecture and service of the Church. Men who came to persecute remained to pray, and the Gothic invasion formed an era in ecclesiastical history. The kingdom of France beheld a repetition of the acts of Constantine in the conversion of Clovis; and Clotilda and her husband resembled in the story of their conversion Ethelbert, king of Kent, and Bertha his wife. Charlemagne followed in the passage of years, in family as well as name mixed up with those who were giving protection to while they received their own definiteness from the Church of Christ. And the gifts of Pepin became a record to a long after-day of the power which the Church had to give shape to the early civilisation of Europe. From the death of Charlemagne throughout eight following centuries, the interests of Europe became synonymous with those of France or Germany, while they oscillated in alternating supremacy, each of them seeking the recognition of the Church for their claims. The Great Reformation which broke out over Northern and Western Europe bore upon the billows of its tempestuous sea the vessels that carried the destinies of Spain and Austria, France and England, and many of the minor states of Germany; while religious questions became the direct causes which shook the dynasty of the Stuarts, and agitated France through the illustrious periods of Catharine de Medici and Henry the Great and the imbecile reign of Louis XIII; while the names that have rendered so many pages of French history interesting—the Hugonot and Coligni, Condé and Turenne—were immediately brought out by questions connected with the doctrine and discipline of the Church in defence of which each one of them was brought before the notice of history. II. THE CHURCH HAS IN HER THAT PRINCIPLE OF VITALITY WHICH GIVES HER THE POWER TO REKINDLE LIFE WHERE IT HAS BEEN EXTINGUISHED, AND TO RECONSTRUCT THE SHATTERED PORTIONS OF FABRICS WHICH HAVE FALLEN TO DECAY. The children of Israel, leaving their patriarchal government at Goshen to enter upon that developed state of their history which was to issue in the kingly line of David, preserved their nationality and drew together their otherwise scattered forces around the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the lawgiver; and the Church of God became in the wilderness of Sinai the source and fountain of national life and existence to the tribes reseaking their home. A second time the chosen people were called upon to bewail their sins in a long captivity; a second

time their national distinctiveness bid fair to be lost, but the voices of Daniel and Ezekiel sounded loudly to penitence and prayer by the Chebar and in Babylon. These were the voices of the Church of God—these represented that eternal principle around which national and individual existence might coil and find compactness. These were the forces from within which kept together the people of the captivity, and were the means of restoring them in their national integrity to their homes. Forlorn and orphaned indeed must the returning tribes have felt; like men who in the chill of the morning wander amid the fading flowers of the banquet of yesterday. At that moment the Church again became the centre of their national revival and around the foundation stones of the temple the scattered people again became a nation. (*E. Monro.*)

### CHAPTER III.

**VERS. 1-13. And when the seventh month was come.—Rebuilding the temple.—**  
**I. THEY BEGAN BY RE-ESTABLISHING THE WORSHIP AND SERVICE OF THE HOLY PLACE.** They set up an altar, and offered the daily sacrifice. A wise beginning. Their task was hard, and they did well to begin with God. They made the right use of fear. It stirred them up to religious duty. **II. BEFORE SETTING THEMSELVES TO THEIR TASKS THEY KEPT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.** The full repression of our religious joy, even though it be prolonged, will not delay the performance of life's severer tasks. It is a suitable preparation for them. **III. THEY USED THEIR TREASURES IN SECURING THE BEST MATERIALS AND THE MOST SKILLED LABOUR.** **IV. THE FOUNDATIONS WERE LAID AMIDST ACCLAMATIONS OF JOY.** Many of the psalms which fill the Psalter with joyous strains were doubtless sung or composed on this occasion. **V. IT WAS, HOWEVER, A JOY MINGLED WITH SORROW.** (*Willard G. Sperry.*)  
**Rebuilding the temple:—I. THE FIRST THING THEY DID WAS TO REBUILD THE ALTAR.** This was a right beginning. The altar of sacrifice was the centre of the Jewish religion; just as its antitype, the Cross, is the centre of Christianity. The Cross is our altar; it stands at the centre of our religion. **1. The altar of burnt-offering in this instance was intended as a safeguard.** There is no security like that which a timid soul finds under the shadow of the altar (*Psa. lxxxiv. 3*). A man is never so safe from adverse influences as when upon his knees. **2. This altar was "set upon its bases"—that is, it was restored upon its former foundations.** There is virtue in observing old landmarks. Some things never grow obsolete. Air and water and sunlight are just what they always were, nor is human ingenuity likely to improve them in any way. There are some truths which bear to our spiritual constitution the same relation that light does to the eyes and water to the lungs. Nothing can amend or improve them. There may be new formulations, new modes of presentation; but the altar of the Christian religion will stand on its old bases as long as time endures. **3. The ceremonies of this restored altar were conducted after the prescribed form.** **II. THEY NEXT PREPARED FOR THE REBUILDING OF THEIR TEMPLE.** **1. The altar meanwhile was kept in constant use.** Its fires never went out. There was no lack of offerings upon it. The people had learned by sad experience their dependence upon God. **2. There was little difficulty in collecting the necessary funds.** **3. The workmen were secured by generous outlay and paid promptly when the wages fell due.** **4. The materials for the temple were collected from every quarter.** Tyre and Sidon and the forests of Lebanon were put under contribution. Thus God ever utilises the nations. The Cæsars built highways for the propagation of the gospel. Soulless corporations in our time are binding the far corners of the earth together with iron bands and cables, not knowing nor caring that God's kingdom is thus being ushered in. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*)  
**Rebuilding the temple:—I. RELIGION IS, OR SHOULD BE, A UNITING FORCE.** **II. WE NEED NOT, AND SHOULD NOT, WAIT BEFORE WE WORSHIP GOD.** **III. THERE SHOULD BE SOME REGULARITY IN OUR DEVOTION.** **IV. OUR OFFERING MUST COME FROM THE HEART AS WELL AS FROM THE HAND.** **V. THE CAUSE OF CHRIST MUST HAVE THE BEST SERVICE WE CAN SECURE.** **VI. SOME TAKE A HIGHER, SOME A HUMBLER POST IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.** **VII. WE DO WELL TO REJOICE WHEN WE LAY THE FOUNDATION OF A USEFUL WORK.** **VIII. JOY IS SAFE AND WISE WHEN IT PASSES INTO PRAISE.** **IX. SORROW AND JOY BLEND STRANGELY IN THE EVENTS OF LIFE.** (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*) *The benefits of the captivity:—Notice—*

I. THE PEOPLE ARE AGAIN HEARTILY UNITED IN ACTION. They "gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." These cheering words sound like a reminiscence of the best days of David, Hezekiah, and Josiah. A revival of union was sorely needed. The last three reigns before the captivity had been marked by unnatural discords. The providential cure of this evil was captivity. Two generations at least must pass away, and their feuds be buried with them; the worth of a temple and the blessing of a pure worship must be learned by their loss. This method of cementing nations was not new, and it has been exemplified since in almost countless instances. Every forward movement in society seems to be preceded by seasons of trial, whose hot fires are needed to fuse the heart and will of the people into one.

II. THEY MADE A RIGHT BEGINNING OF THEIR WORK. They began with an altar. Can this be the same people whose closing record seventy years before had been that "they polluted the house of the Lord"? Reverence as well as union had been developed by captivity. They might have begun by clearing away the ruins, but that would have been a second step before the first; not even the rubbish of an unhallowed past may be touched without the blessing of God; they might have held a council to determine what they would do, but this would have been taking their own advice first and afterwards seeking the endorsement of Jehovah; they might have raised the walls around the spot before building the altar upon it, but that would have been asking God to own what He had been allowed no share in directing. On the contrary, with a reverence chastened by long exile they began with the altar itself. Where else would they have begun and not blundered? This order of building has always prospered. Ambitions, plans, hopes even, waited upon praise and supplication, and more than half the first year was devoted to continuous sacrifice and petition. What years of bitter deprivation had taught them this dependence! But bitter sweetness let it be called, blessed bondage, to produce this wholesome fruit of reverence.

III. IN THE FORM OF THEIR WORSHIP THEY RETURNED SCRUPULOUSLY TO THE PATTERN ON THE MOUNT. They not only offered burnt-offerings, but they offered them "as it is written." They kept feasts by name not only, but in the way prescribed by the law of Moses. Their new moons and free-will offerings were those only that the Lord had consecrated in days past. This exact respect for the letter of the law shows how truly they appreciated the real cause of the national calamities. Every disaster since the days of Josiah had come from departing from the way of the Lord. A careless liberalism in worship had begotten a wicked license in the court and home life. It is one sign, therefore, that Judah's captivity was not in vain, that the first inquiry of the people after setting up the new altar was this, "How is it written to worship?" and a better sign, that they conformed to the Divine pattern as scrupulously as if it had come but yesterday from the flaming Mount. Many are the evils suspected of a too rigid adherence to the Divine command. But where has a nation or an individual been ruined by a too scrupulous obedience? Not too much conscience, but too little; not strictness, but license is the national danger. Hence great reforms sweeping over the land always drive the people back to the simpler living, the holier thinking, and the minuter obedience of the fathers. The despised writing of the past is reopened, the neglected pattern of the Mount is clothed with a new authority, and so men returning unto God find God returned to them.

IV. THE WORSHIP OF THE PEOPLE WAS ACCOMPANIED WITH THEIR GIFTS. "They gave money also unto the masons and to the carpenters," and their meat and drink and oil they exchanged for the sacred cedars of Lebanon. Surely, if any people might have found excuse for building on credit, they were these poor colonists, who had their burned cities to revive. They were building, too, for the future. Why should not the future share the cost? But these modern apologies for debt were then unknown. They remembered the story of the first tabernacle, the free-will offerings of their fathers and mothers. Something richer than cedar and brick must compose every true temple of worship. If the heart of the people, their love and devotion, are not built into the rising walls, they go up in vain; captivities are not in vain which thus revive the grace of self-sacrifice.

V. THE HOLY JOY WITH WHICH THEY FINALLY LAY THE FIRST STONE. With that stone an undisciplined people would have gone months before, but not these children of the captivity. There are spiritual foundations lower than the cornerstone of any temple, and these we have seen the people had been seven months in laying and seventy years in learning to lay—unity, reverence, obedience, and self-sacrifice. With a just and well-earned joy, therefore, they might lay on these settled foundations their first visible stone. It was not the joy of pride, for to themselves they took no praise. It was a tuneful joy, for they sang together by

course in praising and giving thanks to God. It was a hearty joy, for all the people shouted with a great shout. This holy jubilee marked the break of a new day in the history of Israel. Weeping had endured for a long night of seventy years. This was the joy of the morning, and the happy dawn was all the brighter for the shadows that lay behind it. The joy that follows discipline and is earned by repentance and obedience is perhaps the sweetest joy known to men in this world.

VI. THE HEALTHFUL SORROW AND REGRETS THAT TEMPERED THESE OUTBURSTS OF JOY. Undisciplined joy is sure to be giddy, but the joy of these returning exiles has in its sweet a dash of bitter, which saves it from hurtful excess. Many of the old men of the nation had seen the first house. They could not forget its glory. They remembered also, it may be, the impiety of their own days, and possibly of their own hearts, which hastened the nation's shame. Something of self-reproach must mingle with that regret. The new house bids fair to stand, for it is founded for use. No foolish display taints the plan. A mighty hunger after Jehovah impels them to make Him a dwelling-place in their midst. A Church thus rooted in real spiritual want comes near indeed to the true ideal of a spiritual home. Every attitude of the builders also is a propitiation of Jehovah. He will certainly accept their work, for their union is perfect; their reverence is simple, sincere; their obedience unforced; their self-sacrifice ungrudging. Here are the materials of all acceptable sacrifice. An altar built in this spirit will never want fire. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *A working Church*:—1. All at work: "The people gathered themselves together." 2. All working in unison: "As one man." A massed force is a winning force. 3. All working obediently: "As it is written in the law." Christian activity not a sentiment but a duty. "To the law and the testimony." 4. All working unceasingly: "As the duty of every day required." The daily performance of Christian duty leaves no arrears. (*Willis S. Hinman.*) And they set the altar upon his bases.—*The altar set up*:—I. IN A NEW HOME THE FIRST THING THEY SHOULD DO WHO FEAR GOD IS TO SET UP AN ALTAR THERE. II. THE SERVICE OF THOSE WHO ARE OF ONE HEART IS WHAT HE TAKES PLEASURE IN (Acts ii. 1, iv. 32).

III. THE BEST OF DEFENCES IS THE FAVOUR OF GOD, AND SO AN ALTAR MAY BE A STRONGER BULWARK THAN A FORTRESS. (*E. Day.*) *The rebuilding of the altar: exemplary features of Divine worship*:—I. UNANIMITY AND ZEAL IN DIVINE WORSHIP. II. SACRIFICE IN DIVINE WORSHIP. This suggests—1. Man's need of atonement with God. 2. Man's duty of consecration to God. III. RESPECT FOR PRECEDENT IN DIVINE WORSHIP. There are memories and associations clinging around certain ancient forms and places hallowed by holy uses which greatly stimulate and enrich the devout heart. IV. CONFORMITY TO SCRIPTURE IN DIVINE WORSHIP. V. FEAR OF ENEMIES IN DIVINE WORSHIP. 1. The fear of enemies should not intimidate us from the worship of God. 2. The fear of enemies should impel us to worship God.

VI. REGULARITY IN DIVINE WORSHIP. The offering of the daily sacrifice suggests—1. Our daily need of atonement with God. 2. Our daily need of renewed consecration. 3. Our daily need of renewed blessings. (*William Jones.*) *Sacred to Jehovah*:—When a British vessel comes to an uninhabited country, or one inhabited only by savages, the captain goes on shore with a boat's crew, and, after landing, he unfurls the Union Jack and takes possession of the whole country in the name of Queen Victoria and his native land. He plants the flagstaff, and no foreign nation dare come and knock it down, or pull down the ensign of the power of Britain. So the priest built first the altar of sacrifice to show that the place was sacred to Jehovah, and that they and all the people were His servants. (*Sunday School.*) They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written.—*Preparations for building*:—I. IT IS ONLY IGNORANT, SELF-SUFFICIENT PEOPLE WHO DESPISE THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST TREASURED UP IN HISTORY. II. IF WE CANNOT HAVE FOR GOD'S WORSHIP ALL THE EXTERNAL PROPRIETIES WE DESIRE, WE ARE NOT TO WAIT TILL WE CAN GET THEM. III. THE EXTERNALS OF WORSHIP ARE NOTHING TO GOD, EXCEPT SO FAR AS THEY INFLUENCE US OR ARE EXPRESSIVE OF SOMETHING IN US. (*E. Day.*) *The celebration of the sacred festivals resumed*:—I. THE COMMEMORATION IN DIVINE WORSHIP OF NATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND BLESSINGS. 1. It was a memorial of the emancipation of Israel from Egypt, teaching us that we should cherish the memory of former mercies (Lev. xxiii. 43). 2. It was a memorial of their life in the wilderness, reminding us that our present condition is that of strangers and pilgrims (Lev. xxiii. 40-43; Heb. xiii. 14). 3. It was a thanksgiving for rest and a settled abode in the promised land, suggesting the certainty and blessedness of the rest which remains for the people of God (Lev. xxiii. 40; Rev. vii. 9). 4. It was a thanksgiving for the completed harvest, teaching us to receive the precious



fruits of the earth as the kind gifts of a bountiful Providence (Exod. xxiii. 16; Lev. xxiii. 39; Deut. xvi. 13-15). II. THE CELEBRATION IN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP OF THE NATURAL DIVISIONS OF TIME. "And of the new moons." What was the design of this religious celebration of "the beginning of their months"? 1. To impress them with the value of time. 2. To assist them to form a correct estimate of their life upon earth. 3. To arouse them to make a wise use of the time which remained to them. III. THE PRESENTATION IN DIVINE WORSHIP OF PERSONAL VOLUNTARY OFFERINGS. (*William Jones.*)

Ver. 4. As the duty of every day required.—*The work of the day in the day* :—Time in the hands of many—I use the words of Solomon—is "a price in the hand of fools." They know not its value. It is in the margin, "the matter of the day in his day." This has grown into a proverbial saying among those who love Scripture phraseology; and teaches us that we should do the work of the day in the day. I. We may apply this to LIFE IN GENERAL. "To-day if ye will hear His voice harden not your heart." "Behold now is the day of salvation." "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh wherein no man can work." II. It will apply to PROSPERITY. This is called a day, and Solomon tells us the duty of it, "In the day of prosperity be joyful." He cannot, we may be assured, intend to countenance extravagance or excess. Those men are to be pitied who possess much and enjoy little; who have the blessings of life in abundance but no heart to use them. These generally promise themselves great enjoyment hereafter when they have obtained so much. We should never sacrifice present happiness to future imaginations. God, like a generous friend, is pleased to see His presents enjoyed—"to enjoy is to obey." Another thing that the duty of this day requires is gratitude. The more you have received from God, the greater is your obligation to Him. And surely the duty of this day requires liberality. He had others in view as well as yourselves in all that He has done for you. III. It will apply to ADVERSITY. This also is called a day, and it is said, "In the day of adversity consider." You are to consider the alleviations of your suffering; how much worse it might have been; and to compare your resources with your difficulties. Another part of the duty of this day is submission. The duty of this day also requires prayer. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." IV. We may apply it to THE SABBATH. This is called "the Lord's day," because it is consecrated to the memory of His resurrection, and is employed in His service. But as to advantage it is our day. It "was made for man." Such a season has peculiar claims upon us, and we are commanded "to sanctify it, calling the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honourable; not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words." Can this be doing all the duty of the day? When once a regard for the Sabbath is gone everything serious goes with it. Have we to learn this? V. It will apply to EVERY DAY. No day comes without its appropriate duty. We are to be diligent in our respective callings. And not only so—but we are to do everything in its season; to do the work of the day in the day, and not leave it till to-morrow. 1. Because we may not live till to-morrow. "We know not what a day may bring forth." 2. Each day will have its own engagements; and it is wrong to surcharge one period with the additional work of another. 3. Because by this temporary negligence we have nothing to do, or too much; whereas by doing the work of the day in the day we are never unoccupied, never oppressed; we keep our affairs under easy management, and never suffer them to accumulate into a discouraging mass. 4. Because by this means the mind is kept cool, and tranquil, and cheerful; and we shall know nothing of the perplexities and ill-temper of those who are always in confusion and haste. To verify this important maxim let me lay down three rules. Rise early. Grasp not so much business as to "entangle yourselves in the affairs of this life." If you look abroad into the world you may be satisfied, at the first glance, that a vicious and infidel life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer that order is friendly to religion. (*W. Jay.*) *The day's duty* :—That every day is enough for its own evil was a word of Jesus Christ. And there is another word that may be grafted on this. It is, that every day is enough for its own duty. It is suited to withdraw the thoughts from a vague futurity and collect them upon a space that can easily be surveyed, judged of, commanded. A day is one of the small circles of time. We can lay out its work though we cannot predict its fortunes. We can remember how it has been spent, whatever may have come to pass in it. It is capable of holding as much duty as our minds can

well compass. He who fills each of them well as they pass and are recorded, is wanting in nothing. We hear it often said that life is but a day. It is said to express the shortness of our stay upon the earth. It is said, for the most part, sorrowfully. Let us reverse it and say, with more striking truth, that each day is a life. Every day is a life fresh with reinstated power, setting out on its allotted labour and limited path. Its morning resembles a whole youth. Its eventide its sobering into age. It is rounded at either end by a sleep, unconsciousness at the outset and oblivion at the close. We are born again every time that the sun rises, and lights up the world for man to do his part in it. A day is a complete whole then; a finished piece. It had its tasks and toils, and they have been more or less faithfully gone through with. Or if they have been neglected quite it is too late to fulfil them now, for the opportunity has passed away. You may say, however, that it is by no means so entire, so much a thing by itself, as has now been represented. A day falls in among the accounts of time not as one of its separated fragments, but as strongly connected with portions of it that went before and are to follow. It is bound to the past which it continues. It is full of unfinished performances and projects that have nothing to do with the going down of the sun or the hour for the night's rest. All this is true of it. But is it not true also of life itself? A day is a life. It has all the elements in it of an entire being. It may be fair or foul. It may find us sick or well. But the soul is there that must create its own atmosphere, and that is often the healthiest when the pulses beat languidly and the flesh is in pain. The faculties are there that are to be exercised, and the affections that are to be kept in play. There an inward action is going on with all its responsibility. Again, a day is a life. We do not consider how much is contained within its rapid round. In describing its importance moralists and divines are apt to dwell principally on the uncertainty whether it may not be our last. And yet it would grow into great consequence in our eyes if we supposed that it was absolutely the whole. Reflect for an instant upon these two assertions. The narrow space that intervenes between your rising and your lying down does in the first place present the total sum, the full result of all your preceding experience. It is just what time and you have made it. Whatever you have observed, felt, done, there goes to the making up of what you are. The habits that you have been contracting, there reveal their strength. The dispositions that you cherish, there spread their thicknesses of deepening colour. A long action of forgotten days has been busy in forming to what it is the single day that has been rolling over you. You are prepared, then, to make a right estimate of the moral length of a day when you see it reaching back to infancy, and gathering upon itself the influences of a thousand facts of your history and emotions of your hearts, and reflecting a universe of truth and glory. And then consider further that it not only deserves so much from what is gone, but it extends itself forward also. It contains the germ of what is to be unfolded into far distant consequences. While it shows what the man has gradually become, it indicates with a warning finger what it is likely that he will be. Whatever one day is permitted to do with him, will probably continue to be done; if for good, going up to better: if for bad, going down to worse. The principles it exemplifies, the temper it displays, the bent of mind that traverses it, are not confined to its compass, and do not pass off with its date. Read that little leaf which is turned over so soon, and you may perceive that it is the book of your fate. We are thus brought to the practical application of the sentiment to which your attention has been directed. If a day is a life, let its work be done as its hours are passing. Let it have something of completeness in it. Men err in "despising those little ones." They love to send their thoughts over years and ages. They defer their good intentions to further periods. But these little ones are the chief of all if we will look at them as they are, and if we will make them what they should be. Think of what you have gained or lost in the account that all must render in at the last day. Remember how you have comported yourself towards those who love you and towards those who love you not. Remember what the currents of your inclination have been. Reflect whether the will has gone right, and the heart has been a true one, whatever else may have proved adverse or unjust. (*N. L. Frothingham.*) *A day*:—As the circuits of the earth round the sun give us the year and the seasons, and the revolutions of the moon round the earth our months, so the revolving of our earth on its axis marks out as the condition of human life that it should be divided into days and nights, and these are constituted alternate seasons of labour and repose. So life as a time for work resolves itself into a thing of days (*Psa. civ. 23*). I. LIFE BEING MADE UP

OF DAYS, THE CHARACTER AND COMPLEXION OF LIFE WILL DEPEND ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF DAYS AS THEY SUCCESSIVELY PASS BY. It is more easy to feel the importance of life as a whole, than to be duly impressed with the value of its smaller divisions. If the mind be set on improving life, its distribution into days offers to us many advantages for attaining this end. 1. A day is more easily brought within the grasp of the mind and planned for. 2. There is less difficulty in reviewing it and judging of its character. 3. Every day a new beginning is made and opportunity afforded for correcting to-day by the experience of yesterday. 4. Who can calculate the advantage of the freshness derived from sleep and the new vigour thus imported into life? (1) Physically. (2) Mentally. (3) Morally. The will is endued with new vigour as a man rises to a new day of life and activity.

II. THE DUTY WHICH EVERY DAY REQUIRES. Every day has its appropriate duty. 1. Some duties daily should terminate directly upon God. Such are prayer and praise. Who can tell what our needs may be, what accidents may happen, what decisions we may be called to take and what moral risks may be encountered? Daily petitions should therefore be offered. And how meet it is to mingle with daily petitioning thanksgiving for daily mercies. "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits." 2. There is all the life-work. (1) The culture of the mind. (2) The business of each one's station. (3) Some direct service for the kingdom of Christ. This serves to hallow the day and to connect time the more distinctly with eternity. 3. Then there is the bearing of the burdens of the day.

III. THE WORK OF EACH DAY IS TO BE DONE, WITH ONLY A MODERATE THOUGHTFULNESS, YET WITHOUT PRESUMPTION AS TO THE MORROW AND DAYS TO COME. Christ discountenanced anxious forecasting as to the possibilities of the future. God is to be trusted to lay upon us burdens as He sees that we have strength, or as He will give strength to sustain them. Still less should there be presumption as to the future. Act as "in the living present," "as the matter of every day requires." "To-morrow," exclaimed a powerful French preacher once, "is the devil's word; God's word is to-day." "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." (*E. T. Prust.*)

Vers. 6-13. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord.—*The full establishment of religious services precedes the building of the temple:*—A weighty truth is enshrined in this apparently incongruous fact. The worship itself is felt to be more important than the house in which it is to be celebrated (John iv. 21-24). How vain is it, then, to treat the erection of churches as though it were a revival of religion! As surely as the empty seashell can never secrete a living organism to inherit it, a mere building—whether it be the most gorgeous cathedral or the plainest village meeting-house—will never induce a living spirit of worship to dwell in its cold desolation. Every true revival of religion begins in the spiritual sphere. (*Walter F. Adeney, M.A.*) They gave money also unto the carpenters.—*The preparations for rebuilding the temple:*—I. THE GREAT WORK YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. This illustrates—1. The incompleteness of human joys. 2. The incompleteness of human works. The altar was built, but the temple was not begun. The work of the earnest man is never accomplished. Even when death approaches, most men have much which they desire to accomplish. This incompleteness of our human works is also ordered wisely and well. It tends to prevent stagnation; to rouse to earnest activities, &c. 3. The obligation of the Church of God. The Jews at Jerusalem felt themselves bound not to rest content with the joys and blessings of the altar, but to proceed to the more arduous task of rebuilding the temple. II. THE PROMPT PREPARATIONS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THIS WORK. Two points claim attention—1. The variety of service and the unity of design. 2. The co-operation of Jews and Gentiles. Conclusion—1. Are we "as living stones built up" in the spiritual temple of God? (1 Pet. ii. 4-6). 2. Are we also assisting to build this glorious temple? (1 Cor. iii. 10-15). (*William Jones.*) *The building of the temple:*—I. THAT DIFFICULTIES OUGHT NOT TO DISCOURAGE US IN THE LORD'S WORK. Paucity of numbers and feebleness of resources. Enemies. II. THE READINESS OF THE PEOPLE TO GIVE OF THEIR MEANS UNTO THE LORD (Ezra ii. 68, 69). Their first care was the house of God. Without homes of their own, their cities in ruins, with a thousand demands pressing upon them, they nevertheless provided first of all for the worship of the temple. How needful the lesson! God's house before our own. God first and afterward self. This work first, and then our own. 1. They offered willingly. It was not the tithe which they were required by law to give. It was a

free-will offering to God, and hence all the more acceptable (2 Cor. ix. 7). 2. They gave according to their ability. Proportionate giving as God has prospered us is one of the most pressing needs of the Church to-day. It is a duty as plainly enjoined as prayer and praise (Deut. xvi. 17; 1 Cor. xvi. 2). III. THE PEOPLE WERE READY TO WORK AS WELL AS GIVE. The Church needs willing workers even more than generous givers. Hearts and hands are always worth more than gold and silver. 1. They worked unitedly. The people laboured "as one" (margin). Their counsels were not divided. There were no jealousies, no personal ambitions to hinder the progress of the undertaking. 2. The work was systematically prosecuted. Zeal and energy were displayed, but without making them substitutes for intelligence and adaptation. One of the great needs of God's people is appreciation of the advantages of systematic work. IV. THANKFUL JOY IN THE LORD'S SERVICE. The ancient men wept with a loud voice as they saw the foundation of the new house laid. Yet, after all, their weeping may have had nothing in it of the spirit of murmuring. Tears are oftentimes expressive of the deepest joy.

"There's not a string attuned to mirth  
But has its chord in melancholy."

The joy that is touched with pain is the noblest of joys. The sweetest music is written in the minor key. Possibly the noise of their weeping was more grateful to God than the shouts of their younger companions. (*Rufus S. Green, D.D.*) *The second temple*.—I. THE BUILDING OF THIS TEMPLE WAS A VISIBLE AND ABIDING TESTIMONY TO MAN'S FIRM FAITH IN THE EXISTENCE AND POWER OF THE GOD OF HEAVEN. "The mystery of holy shrines," says Kinglake, "lies deep in human nature. However the more spiritual minds may be able to rise and soar, the common man, during his mortal career, is tethered to the globe that is his appointed dwelling-place; and the more his affections are pure and holy, the more they seem to blend with some sacred spot, that belongs to the outward and visible world." Temples tell us of one who is invisible. As Jacob set up an altar in the place where God talked with him and called the name of the place Bethel, so always men have erected memorial stones to commemorate their faith in God. II. THE TEMPLES AND ALTARS WHICH MAN BUILDS SIGNIFY A DESIRE ON HIS PART FOR NEARER AND MORE CONSTANT COMMUNION WITH GOD. From the first God had revealed Himself as One who was ready to meet with His people, to draw aside the veil, at least in part, and commune with them from off the holy place. Outside the walls of Eden He appeared above the altar of Abel. Whenever, in later times, the patriarchs set up an altar and called on the name of the Lord, they expected that He would come and sanctify the spot by His presence. They were not disappointed. Enoch walked with Him; Noah built an ark under His direction; Abraham saw His day; to Jacob He appeared again and again; He talked with Moses and showed His glory to Isaiah; Elijah's altar was touched with fire; to the whole people He showed a pillar of cloud and flame, and commanded them, saying, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," and when it was finished, the shekinah appeared, God dwelt in the Holy of holies, and from off the fiery seat talked with His prophets and priests. Although under the Christian dispensation the idea of communion with God is ennobled, and the fellowship made more exalted and spiritual, so that Jesus Christ is now our true sanctuary and passover, still the old conception is not altogether abandoned. While the veil of the temple is rent in twain and every common bush is aflame with God, still there is a special blessing for those who meet together in the sanctuary. The place of worship is correctly spoken of as the "meeting-house," the meeting-house where man comes to meet his God. III. THE CONDUCT OF THESE TEMPLE BUILDERS INDICATES DETERMINATION AND SELF-SACRIFICE. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*)

Vers. 11-13. And they sang together by course.—*Religious feeling prompts to praise*.—During the persecution in Madagascar, a number of native Christians would assemble at midnight in the house of the missionary for religious instruction. On one occasion they said, "Mr. Ellis, we must sing." "No," said he, "it is as much as your lives are worth to be heard." They continued to talk about the love of Christ, and then exclaimed again, "Sing we must." He cautioned them, and they added, "We will sing in a whisper." So on their bended knees they quietly sang a hymn. "But I could only weep," said the missionary, who knew their peril. (*Sunday Companion.*) *Building for God's praise*.—During the month:

that St. Francis went up and down the streets of Assisi, carrying in his delicate hands the stones for rebuilding the St. Damiano Chapel, he was continually singing psalms, breaking forth into ejaculations of gratitude, his face beaming as one who saw visions of unspeakable delight. When questioned why he sang he replied, "I build for God's praise, and desire that every stone should be laid with joy." (*H. O. Mackey.*) **Who had seen the first house.**—*Declensions in religion observed and lamented.*—The first and second temple may be considered as expressive of the state of real and substantial godliness in our own land, in two ages not much more distant from each other than those were in which these two temples stood. What I purpose is to point out some of those articles respecting the first and second compared, which seem most applicable to the end I have in view. I. THAT THE FIRST AND SECOND TEMPLES WERE BUILT IN THE SAME PLACE, HAD NEARLY THE SAME FOUNDATION, AND WERE BOTH RAISED WITH THE SAME DESIGN. The temple which we raise and that which our forefathers saw, are built on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets; Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone." We have the same Gospel, the same Saviour, and the same precious Agent is employed for conversion, edification, support and comfort. II. THAT THE FIRST HOUSE SURPASSED THE SECOND, AS IT WAS MADE OF MORE GOODLY MATERIALS AND WAS BUILT ON A NOBLER PLAN. Whilst we are built on the same foundation as our fathers we are less perfect in the eyes of God than they—we have less dignity of character in the various relations of life—we are less fit to become the habitation of God. It is to be feared that we have less divine knowledge than those in the past; that the ways, works, and word of God are less studied with a design to amend and purify the heart, and that those ordinances are more neglected now than they once were which have the most apparent tendency to carry on a work of grace and piety. Our graces are defective. We are too apt to rest in present attainments. Our fathers seem to have excelled us in a determined opposition to sin—in a weanedness from this world—and in a spiritual, holy, heavenly walk. We seem less in earnest than they in the cultivation of those things that improve, enlarge, and ennoble the soul, and that stamp a dignity on human nature. III. THAT THE FIRST HOUSE EXCEEDED THE SECOND, IN THE MANNER OF ITS DEDICATION. The temple we raise is dedicated to God. How far this dedication falls short of that which our fathers made is not easy to say. There seems to have been no sacrifice which the apostles and martyrs were not willing to make; and they seemed to conceive of themselves as sacred to God. We are sprung from those who in their day were examples of devotedness to God, and who carried with them this persuasion that the temple of God should be holy, whose temple they were. Ancient men remember the dedication they made, the correspondence there was between their lives and that dedication, and the degree in which "holiness to the Lord" was inscribed upon them. We of the present generation seem to be making a more partial dedication to Him than our fathers made. Multitudes among us seem to be trying to "serve two masters." It is alas! too apparent from the thoughts with which we begin and close the day—from the desires and passions that possess our minds through the hours of it—and from the nature of objects which we eagerly pursue, that we are not so exemplary in devotedness to God as many in past ages have been. The progress of a worldly spirit is visible among us; the great objects of religion are not habitually thought so amiable, important, and venerable by us as by the last generation of the people of God; nor is our regard to God, to Christ, and eternity so commanding a principle as it appears formerly to have been. Knowledge cannot so easily be taken of us that we have been with Jesus; nor can I think that we stand among men, like temples built for God and consecrated to Him as they did. IV. THAT THE FIRST TEMPLE SURPASSED THE SECOND, ON ACCOUNT OF THAT HOLY FIRE BURNING WITHIN, WHICH PROCEEDED FROM GOD. They from whom we are descended were eminently devout, the holy fire, the fervour of devotion which attended their offerings and sacrifices rendered them through Christ highly acceptable to God. They were mighty in prayer. Those who never prayed themselves remarked their devotion. Their closets, their families, some social band and the house of God could witness their communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ; their pious breathings of soul—the holy ardour of their spirit—and that pleasure, that improvement and lustre they derived from thence. The friends of the Church and their country sought an interest in their prayers. I dare not say that the devout among us are as numerous as they have ever been, or that the sacred fire of devotion burns now as bright and strong in the breasts of professors as it hath ever done. Ancient men may remember when there was more apparent devotion in our public assemblies—

when more preparation was made for a profitable attendance there—when family worship, reading the Scriptures, and praying was more general among professors—when private devotion was made a more serious business, and when more schemes were entered upon and vigorously pursued to maintain and transmit a spirit of piety and devotion in societies and the world. Some professors content themselves with praying in their families once a day, others once in the week, and many without praying at all. Devotion is one grand instrument in the increase of faith; in strengthening the hand and encouraging the heart in the service of God and our generation; in lightening all the burdens and afflictions of life, in forming the inhabitants of earth to a resemblance of those in heaven, and in drawing down the blessings of God.

V. THAT THE FIRST TEMPLE EXCEEDED THE SECOND IN THE CLOUD OF GLORY, THAT AMAZING SYMBOL OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE. God is present with His Church in every age; but in different ages, and in the same age in different places, His presence and glory have been manifested in different degrees. Where there is a spirit of prayer and supplication poured forth; where the house and ordinances of God are frequented with a high relish and growing profit; and where benevolent and pious sentiments, affections, and passions are alive in the soul; there God is in an eminent degree. That the presence and glory of God are not seen in our temple as in that which ancient men and chief of the fathers remember, is, I fear, but too true. With respect to some places, it can only be said, "Here God once dwelt"; and in some others that are still frequented, a certain languor and coldness attend the worship which the manifestation of the presence and glory of God would have removed. (*N. Hill.*) Wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy.—*The same events may be a cause for joy and a cause for sorrow.*—The name of Ezra, which signifies a helper, is strikingly illustrated in the character which this excellent man sustained. He was pre-eminently so to the Jews just about the period of their return from the Chaldean captivity. He stirred up the spirits of many to engage with him in this sacred employment; he devoted much of his talents, of his time, of his substance, and of his labours to the work; he occupied himself in rectifying and reforming many of the civil, political, and ecclesiastical abuses. Ask yourselves whether you sustain that character in a religious sense which Ezra so admirably bore? Have none of you proved hindrances instead of helpers in the work of God? Have none of you endeavoured to impede the religious procedures of those by whom you are surrounded—in your families, or in the circle in which you move, or in your neighbourhood, or in the Church, or in the world? The immediate reference in the language is, the set time which God had appointed to favour Zion had come. Israel had now to be delivered from the bondage beneath which it had for many years languished. The circumstance which is stated here is very remarkable. It seems that when the foundations of the house were laid the younger persons in the congregation of the people shouted aloud for joy; on the other hand, there were certain hoary-headed men, called here "the ancient men," who wept aloud upon the occasion. There is no censure here implied; I should rather commend them for their tears. And I purpose to show you that there often exists in connection with the very same events cause for joy and cause for sorrow.

I. First in reference to THE FACT WHICH IS HERE STATED CONCERNING THE JEWS. We are told that the younger persons shouted for joy when the foundations of the house of God were laid, and the elder among them wept for sorrow. Jeremiah predicted that this would be actually the case (*Jer. xxxiii. 10, 11*). What was there in this event to inspire joy? I answer four things.

1. First of all, the rise of this temple was a proof in itself that the fierceness of God's anger had been turned away, and that He was now about to show mercy to His people. For a long time they had been deprived of their temple, of their altar, and of the institution of the most high God. They languished beneath His frown, but although He had punished them for their backslidings He had not utterly cast away the people whom He foreknew.
2. In the second place, now they had a prospect of enjoying an opportunity of attending on the public ordinances of God's house. For a long time they had been scattered; the truly penitent among them had their private devotions by the banks of Kebar, and by the Euphrates they had wept when they remembered Zion, but they had no opportunity to convene themselves together to celebrate the ordinances to which they had been previously accustomed.
3. There was a third reason, too, and that respected the display of the power and of the truth of God. Here was a display of His truth in the actual fulfilment of the prediction of His word, and here was likewise an exhibition of His almighty power which had surmounted a

variety of obstacles to the accomplishment of the important work. 4. Lastly, joy was natural on the present occasion because of the happy influence which this event would have on the interests of religion at large. What evidence was here given of the accomplishment of the promise of God illustrating His veracity and other of His perfections! What new facilities were now opened for the instruction of the ignorant, for the conversion of the souls of sinners to God! What a favourable opinion was likely to be produced on the minds of the heathen themselves when they saw the wonders which God had wrought for His chosen people (Ezek. xxxvii. 24; Jer. xxxiii. 9). Now what was there in association with this procedure that was likely to awaken sorrow? There was much which justified the feelings of those excellent men who wept so that the noise of the weeping was heard afar off. For they could not but remember that it was in consequence of their backsliding from God that they had been so long suffering under religious deprivations; and there is something in the reminiscences of sin which will always produce some bitterness of feeling. Moreover they recollected the magnificence of the former temple; they could not but mourn when they contrasted the two structures. Venerable men, there was much worthy of their tears! There is a justifiable difference between the pleasurable joys of youth and age; in youth the passions are warm, health is usually vigorous, life is clothed in all its scenes which are yet to open with the freshness and beauty of novelty. Inexperience, too, disqualifies for a due consideration of those alloys which are always the companions of terrestrial delights. On the contrary, the ancient man is sobered by time, his feelings are mellowed by experience and observation. He is aware of much that will infallibly arise in a world of infirmity and imperfection like this to embitter the choicest pleasures, and consequently there is more of seriousness in the old man's joy and less of ecstasy. We therefore eulogise those old men for their religious tears. They had no intention of damping the joys of those around them; they had no intention of diverting the ardent zeal of those who shouted for joy when the foundations of God's temple were laid.

II. I ILLUSTRATE THE HISTORY AND THE SENTIMENT WHICH I DERIVE FROM IT IN CONNECTION WITH A VARIETY OF FACTS WHICH WILL BE FOUND EXISTING IN OUR CHURCHES, IN OUR FAMILIES, IN OUR CIRCLES, AND LIKEWISE IN THE WORLD AT LARGE, POINTING OUR REMARKS CHIEFLY AT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. 1. First of all we may apply the statement before us to the diffusion of the truths of revelation and of Christianity throughout the world in which we live. Unquestionably we have cause for gratitude when we reflect upon what has been accomplished by British Christians within the last forty years. We are building a temple which shall gradually rise to a holy building in the Lord, and the top of which, the pinnacle, shall pierce the very heavens. But when we compare all these diversified exertions with the immense population of the world who are still destitute of the privileges of Christianity, the contrast abates our pleasures, for it is no more than the small drop of the bucket compared to the ocean, than a spark of fire or the kindling lamp to the sun which shines in the firmament. 2. However, the principles we have drawn from this passage may be applied to the various exertions of zeal in the days in which we live. We cannot but mourn over the lamentable apathy in reference to public religious interests which a considerable number of our forefathers and of our ancestors displayed. But what a change has taken place—for one institution that was established then for the benefit of the various classes of mankind, there are actually hundreds existing in our land. Surely, then, it behoves us to exclaim, "Come, magnify the Lord, and let us exalt His name together." But honesty and fidelity must compel us to say also that there are abatements of our pleasures even in connection with this delightful subject. For I ask whether we are not sometimes driving ourselves into the opposite extreme which draws us away from our family altars and closet religion, or at least subjects them to much hurry and confusion? I ask, too, whether there are not some things in connection with our religious procedures which should be carefully avoided—pomp, and vanity, and ostentation, and display? I ask whether there are not passing even at the present hour, lamentable contentions and strifes in connection with some of our noblest Christian institutions? 3. The principle before us would apply likewise to the religious aspect of things in your family and in your circle. Well may you exclaim, "We have no greater joy than to see our children walking in the truth." But oh, is there no abatement to this pleasure? Is there no daughter who by her irreligion, her levity, and her folly, is the grief of her father and of her mother who bore her? Christian masters and mistresses, it may be that you have taught your servants and inmates to know the way of God, and there are some of them walking

in His commandments and in His ordinances blameless; there are others who are evidently irreligious and living without God in the world. III. Once more, however, and to bring our remarks to personal experience, THE PRINCIPLE OR SENTIMENT WE HAVE DRAWN FROM THIS PASSAGE MAY BE FOUND APPLICABLE TO THE STATE OF RELIGION IN YOUR OWN SOULS. My Christian friends, compare your former and your latter state. Time was when you were all darkness. But one thing you know, that whereas you were once blind, now you see—see the evil of sin, see the excellence of the Saviour. And does not all this demand a song and an ascription of praise? Is not this event the result of the mercy of God which endureth for ever? And yet I make another appeal to you, whether even amidst all the joys there is much which should make you walk humbly before God, much which not unfrequently extorts from you the cry, “Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Does not all this awaken painful regrets? Now let me say that this combination of joy and sorrow in the bosom of a believer is perfectly congenial and compatible. Professed humility, the habitual exercise of penitence for sin, and a joy unutterable and full of glory, may exist together in the bosom of those who are converted and sanctified by the grace of God. You have much to deplore, much that is to be removed, much that is to be accomplished; yet we would prevent you from indulging too much depression, we would tell you that the little leaven shall leaven the whole lump. Oh, yes! He that has begun the good work in you shall perform it till the day of Jesus Christ; and though powerful obstructions may again rise up to hinder the erection of this building which you are rearing, the top stone shall at last be brought forth with shoutings of grace, grace unto it. And soon the conflict shall be over, the enterprise shall be complete, and you, like the returned children of the captivity, shall settle down in a better country, even the heavenly, which shall be your permanent abode, where there shall be no admixture of pain. (*J. Clayton.*) *The shouts and weeping of a day of jubilee*:—It is worth while noticing that while the old men’s grateful tears honoured their God as really as the young men’s shouts of praise, yet that these last were after all the truest to the fact, for that whilst to the eyes of those who had seen the house in her past glory this house was in comparison as nothing, yet that to the opened glance of God’s prophet it was even now revealed that “the glory of this latter house should be greater than that of the former.” At such a time pure exultation and absolute dejection are alike out of place. Shouts of joy which pass into sobs and tears, which tell of humbled but grateful recollection, are the meetest temper in which we can present before our God our best offerings. If, then, this be the right temper for our minds, it must be a proper time for us to mark some of the chief imperfections which have hindered our service, as well as some of those brighter features which may at once fill our hearts with hope and help to direct us in our further course. I. First, then, for SOME OF THE LEADING IMPERFECTIONS OF OUR WORK. 1. Now in entering upon this subject of the imperfections of our services, I may say at once, in the first place, that a work which is so much as this is, the coming forth of the Church’s inner spiritual life, must, by the inevitable laws of the kingdom of grace, bear about it marks of the sins and infirmities which at the time weaken the spiritual life of the Church. We shall therefore surely find repeated in this our work the transcript of our own besetting sins; our secularity, our love of ease, our want of self-denial, our low estimate or unbelief of the spiritual character and power of Christ’s Church, our indistinct apprehensions of her distinctive doctrines, our low sense of the power of the Cross of Christ and of the indwelling of God the Holy Ghost in His regenerate people, our want of love to Christ, our weak faith, our fainting love to our brethren. But to use this truth most practically let us endeavour to see in detail some of the special forms of weakness in which our own spiritual evils have in fact made themselves manifest. And first among these, how scanty has our work been when weighed against our opportunities. Where are nations born through us into the faith? Where is there not the same sight?—a little work done, feeble and divided efforts blest far above their deserving, but still effecting little against the mass of evil. Next, how late was our service! And then to note but one more mark of imperfection and instrument of weakness, how have our services lacked, alas! how do they still lack, that grace of unity, with which more perhaps than with any other condition, both in the Word of God and in the experience of the Church, any great success in the evangelisation of the world has always been connected! Who can estimate the measure in which these, our sinful strifes, banish from us the indwelling strength of the ever-blessed Spirit of unity?



Who can limit the success which might accompany His working, even by our feeble hands, if there were but restored to us the gift of a true brotherly union and concord? II. AND YET WITH THAT SOUND OF WEeping SHOULD THERE NOT BE FOR US ALSO VOICES OF MEN THAT SHOUT FOR JOY? For too scanty as our work is, compared with what it should be, yet is it in itself great, real, and increasing. Late as we began it, yet for three half centuries has God received from us its thankful offering. It is no little thing to have been enabled to plant the Church of Christ throughout North America. It is no light blessing to have been permitted to accompany everywhere throughout the world England's too irreligious colonisation with the blessed seed of the Church's life, so that even for the extent of our work with all its scantiness we may indeed bless God. And for our last and greatest imperfection, for our own separations, many as are still, alas! our divisions, yet are marks of unity appearing and increasing with us. How full of hope and humble joy is this day's new and glorious sight? Surely it is written for us to-day, "Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband." But then once more there is here matter for our future guidance, as well as for our present joy. Such gifts of God as those which are this day poured out upon us must not only be received with thankfulness, they must also be used with diligence. They are cheering mercies, but they are also stirring calls to duty. (*Ep. Samuel Wilberforce.*)

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#### CHAPTER IV.

**VERS. 1-3. Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard.—The proposal of the Samaritans to the Jews:—**I. THE PROPOSAL MADE BY THE SAMARITANS. 1. Plausible in its form. 2. But evil in itself. (1) They were not Israelites. (2) They did not worship Jehovah as the true God. To have received such a people into community and co-operation with the true people of God would have been an act of utter unfaithfulness and disloyalty to Him. (3) Their design in making this proposal was an unworthy one. (4) The acceptance of their proposal would have been perilous to the Jews. II. THE PROPOSAL REJECTED BY THE JEWS. 1. An exclusive obligation in relation to the work is asserted. The alleged similarity of worship is indirectly denied. 3. The command of Cyrus is adduced in support of this rejection. This was prudent. "Be ye wise as serpents," &c. 4. The rejection of the proposal was unanimous. 5. The rejection of the proposal was prompt and decided. (*William Jones.*) *The proposals of the wicked and how to treat them:—*I. THAT THE WICKED OFTEN PROPOSE TO ENTER INTO ALLIANCE WITH THE GOOD. These alliances are of different kinds. 1. Commercial. 2. Social. 3. Matrimonial. 4. Religious. II. THAT THE PROPOSALS OF THE WICKED FOR ALLIANCE WITH THE GOOD ARE OFTEN SUPPORTED BY PLAUSIBLE REASONS. III. THAT THE ALLIANCES PROPOSED BY THE WICKED ARE ALWAYS PERILOUS TO THE GOOD. IV. THAT THE PROPOSALS OF THE WICKED FOR ALLIANCE WITH THE GOOD SHOULD ALWAYS BE FIRMLY REJECTED. (*Ibid.*) *The uses of an enemy:—*1. The having one is proof that you are somebody. Wishy-washy, empty, worthless people, never have enemies. Men who never move, never run against anything; and when a man is thoroughly dead and utterly buried, nothing ever runs against him. To be run against, is proof of existence and position; to run against something, is proof of motion. 2. An enemy is, to say the least, not partial to you. He will not flatter. He will not exaggerate your virtues. It is very probable that he will slightly magnify your faults. The benefit of that is twofold. It permits you to know that you have faults; it makes them visible and so manageable. Your enemy does for you this valuable work. 3. In addition, your enemy keeps you wide awake. He does not let you sleep at your post. There are two that always keep watch—namely, the lover and the hater. Your lover watches that you may sleep. He keeps off noises, excludes light, adjusts surroundings, that nothing may disturb you. Your hater watches that you may not sleep. He stirs you up when you are napping. He keeps your faculties on the alert. 4. He is a detective among your friends. You need to know who your friends are, and who are not, and who are your enemies. The last of these three will discriminate the other two. When your enemy goes to one who is neither friend nor enemy, and assails you, the indifferent one will have

nothing to say or chime in, not because he is your enemy, but because it is so much easier to assent than to oppose, and especially than to refute. But your friend will take up cudgels for you on the instant. He will deny everything and insist on proof, and proving is very hard work. Follow your enemy and you will find your friends, for he will have developed them so that they cannot be mistaken. The next best thing to having a hundred real friends, is to have one open enemy. (*C. F. Deems, D.D.*)

*The adversary an abiding quantity in life*:—The adversary is a man who seeks to discover flaws, disadvantages, mistakes; a man who magnifies all that is unworthy until he makes a great sore and wound of it, so as to offend as many as possible; he knows how the work could have been better done; he sees where every mistake has been committed; and under his breath, or above it, as circumstances may suggest, he curses the builders and their building, and thinks that such an edifice built by such men is but an incubus which the earth is doomed to bear. Regard the criticism of adversaries as inevitable. If we think of it only as incidental, occasional, characteristic of a moment's experience, we shall treat it too lightly; the adversary is an abiding quantity in life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*Let us build with you.—Beware of your associates*:—Beware of your associates. With some men we ought not to build even God's house. We may spoil the sacred edifice by taking money made by the ruin of men. The Samaritans who thus spoke to Zerubbabel and to the chief of the fathers were not telling an absolute lie. No absolute lie can ever do much in the world; its very nakedness would cause it to be driven out of society; it must wear some rag of truth. The Samaritans in the ancient time did worship God after their fashion, but they did not give up a single idolatrous practice; they wanted to have two religions—to serve in some sort all the gods there were, and then when one failed they could flee to another; so they would build any wall, any altar, any city, any sanctuary; they wanted to be at peace with all the gods, then they would know what to do in the day of adversity. We have spoken of the Samaritans of the ancient time: why not speak of the Samaritans of the present day who wish to do this very thing—men who can bow their heads in prayer, and drink toasts to the devil? “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” (*Ibid.*)

*Simulated unselfishness*:—How oftentimes are people overcome by manner, by persuasiveness of tone, by assumed gentleness of spirit! The young creature is often so overcome; she says she knows he who has spoken to her is not a bad man; whatever he be he has a guileless tongue; his words are well chosen; he speaks them as a man might speak them who knows the gentleness of pity, all the sympathy of love; it is impossible that he can be simulating such tenderness; it is impossible that he can for selfish reasons be putting himself to such inconvenience and sacrifice. It is to-morrow that she finds out that beneath the velvet there lay the claw of the tiger. Nothing stands but character—real, simple, transparent, solid character. That will bear a thousand blasts of opposition and hostility, and at the end will seem the richer, the chaster, for the rude discipline through which it has passed. (*Ibid.*)

*The true builders of the spiritual temple of God*:—That Christian work should be done only by Christians may be supported by the following reasons. I. THEY ALONE WILL BUILD ON THE TRUE FOUNDATION. II. THEY ALONE WILL BUILD WITH THE TRUE MATERIALS. III. THEY ALONE WILL BUILD IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TRUE PLAN. IV. THEY ALONE WILL BUILD WITH THE TRUE AIM. This is the glory of God. V. THEY ALONE WILL BUILD IN THE TRUE SPIRIT. That of—1. Obedience. 2. Humility. 3. Patience. 4. Trust in God. 5. Self-consecration. (*William Jones.*)

*Compromising help refused*:—How strangely history repeats itself. In this early struggle between the Jews and the Samaritans we have a foreshadow of many a struggle in the Christian Church. When Paul and the other apostles went forth preaching the Gospel, the Greeks and the Romans would willingly enough have tolerated Christianity if Christianity would but tolerate their idolatrous systems. They would even have patronised the new religion, and would have offered no opposition to the erection of an image of Jesus amongst the images of other gods. But, when they saw that Christianity demanded the renouncing of idolatry and the exclusive worship of the one living and true God, at once priests, rulers, and people rose in arms against the preachers. Every obstacle was placed in the way of the spread of Christianity. But in spite of all persecution the Church prospered. Idolatry fought for its life and gradually lost every battle, until, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Gospel had conquered the Roman Empire, and Christianity became the nominal religion of all her people. This is the battle, too, that the Church has to fight to-day. We can and we ought to be liberal in many things, but the followers of Jesus dare not

be so liberal as to allow men of the world and men of sin to engage hand in hand with them in the Master's work. The Church ought, and she does, invite into her fellowship all classes. However fallen and bad men may be they are welcome to enter the Church. But they must leave the world and their sins behind them. There cannot be two masters. Christ must have the whole heart, the whole strength, and the entire devotion. (*J. Menzies.*) *Questionable money help should be refused*.—The Church will take money from anybody; the whole Christian Church in all her ramifications and communions cheats herself into the persuasion that she can take the money of bad men and turn it to good uses. Grander would be the Church, more virgin in her beauty and loveliness, more snow-like in her incorruptibleness, if she could say to every bad man who offers her assistance, Ye have nothing to do with us in building the house of our God: the windows shall remain unglazed, and the roof-beams unslated, before we will touch money made by the sale of poison or by practices that are marked by the utmost corruption and evil. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Doubtful men a source of weakness to a church*.—Thus we can learn from the Old Testament a good deal that would bear immediate modern application. This is the right answer to all doubtful Christians as well as to all unbelievers. We should say to them, So long as you are doubtful you are not helpful: your character is gone on one side, and therefore it is ineffective on the other. But would not this class of discipline and scope of criticism shear down the congregations? Certainly. Would God they were shorn down! Every doubtful man amongst us is a loss, a source of weakness, a point of perplexity and vexation. We are only unanimous when we are one in moral faith and consent. The critic will do us no good; the clever man who sees our metaphysical error will keep us back: only the soul that has given itself to Christ, out-and-out, in an unbargaining surrender, can really stand fire in the great war, and build through all weathers, and hope even in the midst of darkness. We may have too many people round about us; we may be overburdened and obstructed by numbers. The Church owes not a little of its strength to the purity of its discipline. (*Ibid.*) *Mental penetration in leaders*.—Leaders must be critical. The man who has little responsibility can soon achieve a reputation for energy. Leaders must halt, hesitate, balance, and compare things, and come to conclusions supported by the largest inferences. There are men who would take a short and ready method in accomplishing their purpose: there are men of rude strength, of undisciplined and unsanctified force. But Zerubbabel and Jeshua must look at all the offers of assistance, and ask what their real value is; they must go into the sanctuary of motive, into the arcana of purpose and under-meanings. Zerubbabel and Jeshua—men who could undertake to build a city—were men who had mental penetration; they could see into other men. They saw into the Samaritan adversaries, and said, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God." (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 4-24. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah.—*The hostility of the Samaritans to the Jews*.—I. THE TACTICS OF THE WICKED. If they cannot bend the good to their wishes and aims by plausible pretences, they alter their tactics and betake themselves to unscrupulous opposition in various forms. II. THE VENALITY OF THE WICKED. The Samaritans "hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purposes." It is reasonable to infer that these counsellors were men of some skill and resource and power of persuasion who deliberately exercised their abilities in an evil cause for gain. III. THE TEMPORARY TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED. IV. THE FREEDOM ALLOWED BY GOD TO THE WICKED. (*William Jones.*) *The antagonism of the world to the Church*.—THIS antagonism as here illustrated is—I. PERSISTENT. II. AUTHORITATIVE. III. COMBINED. IV. UNSCRUPULOUS. V. PLAUSIBLE. 1. In their profession of loyalty to the king. 2. In their presentation of proof of their assertions. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 14. Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace.—*Good cause for great zeal*.—I. WE ACKNOWLEDGE A VERY GRACIOUS FACT. 1. We have been maintained from the King's palace—(1) In things temporal. (2) In things spiritual. 2. Our maintenance from the King's palace has cost His Majesty dear. He spared not His own Son. 3. We have had a bountiful supply. 4. We have had an unfailing portion. 5. The supply has ennobled us. 6. How cheering it is to have such a soul-satisfying portion in God. II. HERE IS A DUTY RECOGNISED. By every sense of propriety we are bound not to see God dishonoured—1. By ourselves. 2. By those who dwell under our roof. 3. By those with whom we have influence;

particularly those who desire to unite with us in Church fellowship. We must not receive into our membership persons of unhallowed life—those who know not the truth as it is in Jesus. 4. By the mutilation and misrepresentation of His Word. 5. By a neglect of His ordinances. 6. By a general decline of His Church. 7. By so many rejecting His gospel. We cannot prevent their doing so, but we can weep for them, pray for them, &c. III. A COURSE OF ACTION PURSUED. “Certified the king.” It is a holy exercise of the saints to report to the Lord the sins and the sorrows they observe among the people and to plead for their removal. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 15. That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers. *Church registers* :—In a general view, all human records are interesting, if they are scarcely more than registers of names. Those names are always appended to some act or event, however concisely stated, and thus these mere catalogues serve to show us how they who have gone before us have been occupied, and are the founts and rills which flow into the great stream of human history; or, rather perhaps, to change the metaphor, are among the foundation-stones on which the fabric of human history is reared; they are low and concealed from observation, but are nevertheless essential to the building. Nothing can be apparently more devoid of interest than the pages of a church register; and yet, let us look at it nearly and intently, and with a reference to the principle just intimated, and interest will be found in every column, in every name. Consider—I. The register of BAPTISMS. II. The register of MARRIAGES. III. The register of DEATHS. (F. W. P. Greenwood.)

Vers. 17–24.—Then sent the king an answer.—*The temporary triumph of the wicked* :—I. EXAMINE THE LETTER OF THE KING. This letter suggests—1. That the subtlety of the wicked frequently obtains a temporary triumph over the good. 2. That one generation frequently suffers through the sins of another and earlier one. The Jews smarted for their sins of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. 3. That the cause of God is frequently reproached and hindered by the evil conduct of some of its adherents. The rebellions of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were now made use of to asperse the Jews and to stop the work of God. All who love the gospel should therefore walk circumspectly. II. THE ACTION OF THE SAMARITANS. “Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes’ letter was read,” &c. Their action was—1. Prompt. 2. Personal. 3. Powerful. Learn: 1. That the temporary triumph of a cause or a party is not a proof of its righteousness. The death and burial of Christ. 2. That we are not competent to judge the relation of the present events to the purpose and providence of the great God. (William Jones.) *Unto the rest beyond the river, Peace.*—*Peace beyond the river* :—I. THE ADVENT MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH TO SINNERS IS, “Beyond the river, Peace!” She tells of a promised land and arouses the slaves of sin. II. CHRIST IS COME AND WITH HIM PEACE, BUT WE MUST GO TO MEET HIM. III. THE ROAD THITHER IS HARD—we must cross the river of self-denial. A legend says that once a wanderer went to a city, and the first man he met said to him, “Of course you come to see our famous statue?” and each one he met in that town told him of the famous statue; and, moreover, each one prided himself in having something to do with it: this one to guard it; that one to keep it clean, and so forth. As the traveller stood before it he asked, “Who is this?” “Oh! we’ve forgotten his name,” was the reply, “but that’s no matter, it is a splendid statue, and the glory of our town.” Sadly the wanderer turned away, and do you know, dear people, as he went out of the gate some little children cried, “Why, that is the man our famous statue was put up to!” Is it not still possible for men and women to be church-goers and church-workers, to be proud of their Church, and yet the Living Christ passes by unknown? (*The Literary Churchman.*)

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## CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1, 2. Then the prophets, Haggai.—*The great work resumed* :—The best commentary on these verses is the first chapter of Haggai. I. THE INCITERS TO THE WORK. 1. Want of interest in the work is implied. 2. Obligation to perform the work is implied. 3. Exhortations to resume the work were given. II. THE

LEADERS IN THE WORK. "Then rose up Zerubbabel," &c. 1. They resumed the work readily. 2. They led the work appropriately. "Those that are in places of dignity and power, ought with their dignity to put honour upon and with their power to put life into every good work." 3. They led work influentially. The example of those who occupy high stations is—(1) Most conspicuous. (2) Most attractive. III. THE HELPERS IN THE WORK. "The prophets." They assisted by their—1. Exhortations to vigorous prosecution of the work. 2. Assurances of the presence of God with them. 3. Promises of future blessings from God to them. IV. THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE OF THE WORK. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel," &c. "All holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed" from Him. "I will build My Church," said our Lord to Peter. All the inspiration, wisdom, &c., of the under-builders come from him. Learn—1. The insidious nature of worldliness. 2. The value of faithful ministers. 3. The solemn obligation of men in eminent stations. (*William Jones.*) *Hebrew prophets in unfavourable times*:—The Hebrew prophets came when the circumstances of society were least favourable. Like painters arising to adorn a dingy city, like poets singing of summer in the winter of discontent, like flowers in the wilderness, like wells in the desert, they brought life and strength and gladness to the helpless and despondent, because they came from God. The literary form of their work reflected the civilisation of their day, but there was on it a light that never shone on sea or shore, and this they knew to be the light of God. We never find a true religious revival springing from the spirit of the age. Such a revival always begins in one or two choice souls—in a Moses, a Samuel, a John the Baptist, a St. Bernard, a Jonathan-Edwards, a Wesley, a Newman. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Vers. 3-5. At the same time came to them Tatnia.—*The great work investigated and continued*:—THE SACRED WORK INVESTIGATED BY THE SECULAR AUTHORITIES. 1. The nature of the investigation. 2. The spirit of the investigation. The eye of the world is upon the work of the Church to-day. Let the members see to it that it shall be apparent to all unprejudiced persons that their work tends to promote truth and righteousness, purity and peace, piety and patriotism. II. THE SACRED WORK CARRIED ON THROUGH THE DIVINE BLESSING. "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews," &c. This suggests—1. The Divine interest in the work. 2. The Divine oversight of the work. 3. The Divine inspiration of the workers. 4. The Divine protection of the workers. (*William Jones.*)

Vers. 6-17. The copy of the letter that Tatnai.—*The letter of the king concerning the work*:—This letter has three chief divisions. I. THE INQUISTION OF THE PERSIAN AUTHORITIES. II. THE REPLY OF THE JEWISH LEADERS. It presents the following aspects of the work. That it was—1. Not a mere human enterprise, but a Divine commission. 2. Not an innovation, but a restoration. 3. Not in a spirit of presumption and pride, but of obedience and humility. 4. Not in opposition to, but in conformity with, royal authority. 5. Not political, but religious in its character. III. THE APPEAL OF THE PERSIAN AUTHORITIES TO THE KING. Conclusion: Two things we may well admire and imitate. 1. The fairness of the Persian officials. 2. The faithfulness of the Jewish leaders. (*Ibid.*) We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.—*The supremacy of God*:—Consider: I. THE UNIVERSAL SUPREMACY OF GOD. 1. Its ground. (1) The perfections of His being. (2) All things were created by Him. (3) All things are sustained by Him. (4) The benefits He bestows upon us and especially our redemption by Christ. 2. Its extent. (1) Throughout heaven. (2) Throughout earth. (3) Throughout hell (2 Pet. ii. 4). II. THE GREAT OBLIGATION OF MEN. To obey Him. Our obedience should be—1. Complete. 2. Perpetual. 3. Hearty. 4. Joyous. III. THE EXALTED PRIVILEGE OF MEN. When the service of God is rightly estimated, it is regarded as a glory and rejoiced in as a privilege. (*Ibid.*) But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven.—*Arguments against sinning*:—In this verse we have three weighty reasons against abstaining from sin. I. IT PROVOKES GOD. This will be more impressively realised if we reflect that He is a being of—1. Infinite purity. 2. Infinite patience. II. IT DEPRIVES THE SINNER OF HIS PROTECTION. III. IT STRIPS THE SINNER OF POWER TO BATTLE WITH HIS FOES. Guilt robs a man of courage. The consciousness of right action in a righteous cause is the mightiest inspiration in conflict and the surest defence in peril. (*Ibid.*)

## CHAPTER VI.

**VERS. 1-5. And search was made in the house of the rolls.**—*The search for the decree of Cyrus*:—Learn—1. Honest and thorough investigation promotes the interests of religion and of the Church of God. 2. The advantage of written history. 3. How great should be our gratitude for the sacred writings. (*William Jones*.) “*The house of books*”:—One of Mr. Layard’s most valuable discoveries was that of a set of chambers in a palace at Koyunjik, the whole of the floor of which was covered more than a foot deep with terra-cotta tablets inscribed with public records. A similar collection has been recently found in the neighbourhood of Babylon. In some such record-house the search for the edict of Cyrus was made. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) **A record thus written.**—*Record of the year*:—The record here referred to was of what had been done for the house and service of God. It was a religious record such as I propose we should now read of the past year. Records are made of changes of what is altering from day to day in that great empire of change of which we are all subjects. This law of change is often spoken of as a melancholy law. It is better to regard it as the decree of growth and progress. It is the ordinance of escape from old limitations, and the impulse of rising to new stages of life to gain fresh energy of thought and will. A state of sameness or immobility would be in truth a wretched doom. The record of any year is not a record of sadness or decay alone, even as respects this world, but very much of delight and advancement. **I. THE FIRST CHAPTER IS THAT OF NEW BEING, BIRTH AND GROWTH.** Many houses have been made the scenes of holy gladness by the gifts of God’s creative and inspiring power. What trust so great as that of a living spirit, with its own individual nature and with capacities for a peculiar development of intellectual and moral strength? With what reverent, trembling sense of responsibility it should be received! What office so high in rank, so great in opportunity, so large in patronage or susceptible of good, with such hope and fear wrapped up in it, as the parental office? What expanding of outward nature or unfolding of earthly ambition is really so grand and affecting as that of an undying soul? No changes of material growth, of splendid seasons and solemn spectacles can equal this. It makes the purest inspiration of love, it turns self-sacrifice into a pleasure; it plies the inventive faculties with all knowledge and wisdom to provide for the beloved object; it draws the mind into long foresight of its benefit and improvement; and by the force of mingling filial and parental communications exalts the soul to a perception of the relation of all to Him who is the common Father. Life’s record, then, is not all of gloomy change and irreparable privation, but of strength enhancing, existence renovating, and of new possession. **II. BUT I MUST TURN THIS ILLUMINATED LEAF OF THE RECORD TO A PAGE VEILED IN SHADES.** It is the record of sickness and decline. And what shall we say of this change? We cannot make our record all pleasant and cheerful if we would. The skeleton that the Egyptians carried to their banquets will intrude upon every feast of our earthly joy and fling its ghastly shadow both across the avenues of our immediate thought and along the vistas of our farthest recollection. But although sickness comes with very sharp instrumentalities, yet she comes with a bright retinue. Patience, resignation, spiritual thoughts of God and of futurity come with her. As the most blazing effulgence of heaven sleeps within the black cloud, so in the lowering darkness and eclipse of bodily suffering often lies the very brilliance of a spiritual and Divine glory. **III. WE NOW TURN THE LAST LEAF OF OUR RECORD.** It ends, like all earthly records, with death. God by His Son Jesus Christ lifts up the burden of sadness that settles down on a record like this. Being dead in the body, our departed friends yet speak for truth and goodness more loudly and more persuasively than when their words fell on our outward hearing. They have gone that they might awaken our virtue, and that they might chill and discourage our worldly lusts. Like the stars, though with a warmer attraction, they lift and beckon us up. The light burns on, the fountain flows, the music sounds for us. Neither is this final change and record in the providence of God a ground for lamentation. It is rather a declaration of our native dignity as His children. It is the announcement of our glorious destiny. It is a summons to us to gird up our loins, trim our lamps, watch and be ready. (*C. A. Bartol.*)

**Ver. 4. And let the expenses be given out of the king’s house.**—*A believer’s expenses*:—**I. WHAT ARE OUR EXPENSES?** The expenses referred to in the text are

those connected with the return of the Jews to their own land, the rebuilding of the temple and its continual sacrifices. 1. Our release from the thralldom of sin involved enormous expenditure (1 Pet. i. 18, 19). 2. The important steps of public profession of faith in Christ, and of union with His Church, need peculiar supplies of grace. 3. There is much new material to be built up in our habits and life. 4. Our bodies being temples of the Holy Ghost, every physical power and every mental faculty should be "a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use." 5. Our hearts are altars whereon should be offered the sacrifices of worship and praise. II. WHERE SHALL WE FIND MEANS TO MEET THESE EXPENSES? 1. The Word of God's truth. 2. The throne of His grace. 3. The fellowship of His people. 4. The dispensation of His providence. 5. The opposition of His foes. The Persian monarch was naturally Israel's enemy, yet God arranges that he shall pay Israel's expenses. Even the lions we may meet shall supply sweet honey for our nourishment and refreshment. 6. The work of Christ (Phil. iv. 19). III. HOW SHALL WE ACT IN THE PRESENCE OF SUCH ABUNDANCE? 1. We need not be afraid of exhausting Heaven's treasures. 2. We dare not be slow in availing ourselves of these supplies. 3. We cannot help wondering at the goodness of the King. 4. We will not forget to express our gratitude to the King. 5. We must not be so selfish as to hide these glad tidings. (*R. S. Latimer.*)

Vers. 8-11. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews.—*The Scriptural warrant for an established Church* :—Look at this history, and consider candidly the great principles involved in these facts. Consider— I. WHO THESE MEN WERE WHO ISSUED THESE DECREES CONCERNING THE BUILDING, AND CONCERNING THE SUPPLIES OF THE HOUSE OF GOD AT JERUSALEM. They were Gentile kings. II. WHAT IT WAS THAT THESE KINGS ORDERED. They ordered—1. The building of the house, and that the expenses incurred thereby should be taken from the king's treasury. 2. The supply of the house, with every item of all the details necessary for carrying out the worship of God—rams, and lambs, and bullocks, and wheat, and wine, and oil, and salt, according to the appointment of the priests. 3. They assigned certain reasons why this should be done. (1) That sacrifices of sweet savour might be offered to the God of Heaven. (2) That prayer might be made for the life of the king and his sons. (3) That wrath might not come upon the king's realm, implying that, if they did not do this, the realm incurred the wrath of God. 4. They insisted upon all this by imposing a heavy penalty upon any recusant subject. The penalty in the decree of Darius was death; the penalty in the decree of Artaxerxes was varying, according to the discretion of the executive magistracy, "whether unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment"; but in each case, there was a penalty for non-payment. III. THE PARTIES ADDRESSED IN THE DECREE, AND INCLUDED AMONGST THE CONTRIBUTORS. These were not the people only who approved of, and could enjoy the worship of the house, but they included also the adversaries, who did not approve of—who could not enjoy—and who would not join in the worship of the house; yet, although they did not approve, although they would not join in the worship of that house, they were compelled by the king's decree to contribute to the expense of building, and to the continued supply of the materials of that worship. And remember all this was done by those kings, according to the commandment and in harmony with the revealed will of the Lord God of Israel. (*H. M'Neile, M.A.*)

Vers. 9, 10. That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven.—*Sacrifice as a rule of supplication unto God* :—I have made choice of this passage to show that sacrifice was a rite of supplication to God, wherein the supplicant came not with his naked prayer, but presented something unto God whereby to find favour in His sight. The thing presented was a federal gift, consisting of meat and drink, in the tender whereof as a sinner he recognised himself to be his God's vassal and servant, so by acceptance of the same he was reconciled and restored to His covenant by the atonement and forgiveness of his sins. For as according to the custom of mankind, to receive meat and drink from the hand of another was a sign of amity and friendship, much more to make another partaker of his table, as the sinner was here of God's, by eating of His oblation : hence those who came to make supplication of the Divine Majesty whom they had offended were wont by this rite to make way for their suit by removing the obstacle of His offence. 1. It is often said of Abraham and Isaac that where they pitched their tents they also built an altar, and "there called upon the name of the Lord"; but an altar is a place for

sacrifice; therefore sacrifice must be a rite whereby they called upon the name of God. 2. The same appears by the speech of Saul (1 Sam. xiii. 12), which shows that to offer a burnt-offering was to make supplication (1 Sam. vii. 8, 9). 3. This is further proved by Psa. cxvi. 13: "I will take the cup of salvation" (or drink offering) "and call upon the name of the Lord." 4. The same is implied in Micah vi. 6 and also in Prov. xv. 1, where sacrifice and prayer are taken the one for the other. 5. The like may be inferred out of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple and the Lord's answer thereto. In the prayer no mention is made of sacrifice to be there offered, but only that God would be pleased to hear the prayers that should be made in that place or towards it. Nevertheless, when God appeared to Solomon in the night, He said unto him, "I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for a house of sacrifice" (2 Chron. vii. 12). From what has been said we can understand in what sense the ancient Church called the Eucharist a sacrifice, and how harmless that notion was, viz., they took this sacrament to have been ordained by Christ to succeed the bloody sacrifices of the law, and to be a means of supplication and address to God, in the New Testament as they were in the Old, by representing the body and blood of Christ unto His Father, according to His appointment. (*J. Mede, B.D.*)

Vers. 14-22. **And they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai.**—*The true pulpit the best promoter of honest industry*:—It—I. QUICKENS THE POWER OF THOUGHT. He quickens public thought most who presents the most startling subjects with the highest enthusiasm. The true pulpit does this. The subjects it presents are the most vital to man's interests, the most stimulating to his inquiry. They involve the sublimest facts of nature and the grandest truths of inspiration, the highest interests of man now and for ever. Hence there is no power equal to the power of the true pulpit to break the monotony of mind and set the wheels of intellect agoing. This being so, the attendant on a true ministry will be—1. The more qualified to form a good plan of action. 2. The more practical sagacity he will have to adapt means to ends. 3. The more solicitous he will be to execute his plan. II. SUPPLIES THE TIMID WITH MOTIVE FOR ACTION. The man who has been made thoughtful by the power of the pulpit is made to feel that the more successful he is in his business—1. The more useful he is as a citizen. 2. The more useful as a religionist. (*Homilist.*) *Prophets and builders*:—The prophet and the builder must always go hand in hand. It is noticeable that the builder seldom or never goes first, but invariably succeeds the intelligent and ardent speaker. This is only another way of saying that thought precedes action. When men think deeply they are preparing the way for laying massive foundations by persons who could not themselves have entered into such intellectual strife. The one must not despise the other. Haggai built nothing, nor did Zechariah probably lay stone upon stone; on the other hand, Zerubbabel may not have been a man of active thought, and Jeshua may not have been gifted with eloquence; but they all worked together—the first man, seeing the truth of God and feeling the burden of the zeal of heaven, excited the sentiment of the two, that they might proceed to give practical and visible effect to the noble prophecies dictated by the Spirit. It is in vain for hearers to complain of preachers when they themselves are not prepared to carry out the word of the Lord. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God requires men to work*:—God puts the oak in the forest, and the pine on its sand and rock, and says to men, "There are your houses, go hew, saw, frame, build, make." God builds the trees; men must build the house. God supplies the timber; men must construct the ship. God buries the iron in the heart of the earth; men must dig it, and smelt it, and fashion it. Clay and rock are given us, not brick and square stones. What is useful for the body, and, still more, what is useful for the mind, is to be had only by exertion—exertion that will work men more than iron is wrought, and will shape men more than timber is shaped. Again, in the spiritual world God requires men to work. He gives them certain things, and then says, "Go, work." He requires them to work in building up His spiritual temple as much as He required the Jews, in days of old, to work in building up His earthly temple. *The building of God's temple*:—Men are like workmen set each by the architect upon some single bit of carving. One has given him to fashion a fragment where incompleteness breaks a promise of beauty. Another has set him only level lines and surfaces of blank monotony. To one it falls to carve a head without a body; to another, a lovely face; to many, patterns seemingly of little grace or meaning. But the task of each demands long labour and utmost care. At last the various blocks are put together,



and, lo! there rises a glorious cathedral, filling eye and heart with its majesty and loveliness, destined to draw to it and shelter within itself one generation after another of devout worshippers. So, the temple of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is building through the ages. Whoever, in high place or in low, is living the life of fidelity and love, is carving a stone for the fabric. (*George S. Merriam.*) *The erection of churches*:—There is no book that throws more light upon the obligation of building temples for God, and the spirit that should ever inspire it, than that of Ezra. I. IN BUILDING A CHRISTIAN TEMPLE WE EXPRESS OUR FELT CONNECTION WITH THE SPIRITUAL WORLD. All building may be regarded as the expression of some sentiment, instinct, or wish of human nature. Markets, senate-houses, theatres, hotels, have all risen as the effects, embodiments, and realisations of some principle in our common nature. But these are all for our material wants and interests. In building a house for God we declare that we have other relations than those that connect us with this material system, other wants than those of the body, other interests than the secular and the physical. We thus attest our connection with the spiritual universe, our relation to eternity, our moral obligation to the Infinite, our desire for communion with God. II. IN BUILDING A CHRISTIAN TEMPLE WE EXPRESS THE IDEA THAT WE REQUIRE SPECIAL MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD. In the temple of nature God is portrayed in every object and proclaimed in every sound. But we feel that some other manifestation is required. In nature we can only see Him as the Almighty Creator and Absolute Sovereign; we want Him to appear in another relationship, one more suited to our fallen condition; we want Him to appear to us a redeeming God—one mighty to save. Had we not sinned we should need no such manifestations of God as we seek in the erection of temples. The temple of nature would suffice. There is no temple in heaven; God is seen in all, loved in all, worshipped in all. III. IN BUILDING A CHRISTIAN TEMPLE WE ATTEST OUR FAITH IN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. 1. As a revelation from God intended and adapted to meet the condition of sinners. 2. As necessary to all men, through all times. We feel that while coming generations may not require our systems of philosophy, our ecclesiastical polities, our schemes of government, our codes of laws, they will require the gospel; and hence we rear a temple for its proclamation. IV. IN BUILDING A CHRISTIAN TEMPLE WE EXPRESS OUR PHILANTHROPY. We are not building merely for ourselves, but for others; not even for our contemporaries, but for posterity. A Christian temple true to its mission is the greatest blessing to society. There the most soul-elevating ideas are proclaimed. Of all ideas to which men are subject none are so important as the religious. Other ideas will arouse certain faculties—some the intellect, some the imagination, some the emotions—but this the entire man. Other ideas act upon human nature as the rays of winter upon the soil; under its influence only a few germs will be evolved and a few plants will grow; but this, like the glowing beams of the vernal sun, will penetrate the deepest depths with its quickening energy, cause every seed-bud to burst into life and expand into fruitfulness. The mystic rod of Moses was not so mighty as the instrument the religious teacher wielded. He lives nearest the heart of the world; he is up at the head springs, out of which proceed the issues of life. True religious ideas wherever proclaimed are the chief blessings of the world. In Christian temples such ideas are brought to bear with all their force upon the human mind; by them men are made to feel their obligations to be truthful, virtuous, benevolent, and Godlike; evil is subdued, hearts are changed, and souls are saved by these ideas. Christian temples are to society what tides are to the ocean, what the winds are to the atmosphere; they stir the mass and keep it pure. V. IN BUILDING A CHRISTIAN TEMPLE WE EXPRESS THE IDEA THAT PUBLIC WORSHIP IS TO BE PERPETUATED BY HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITY. We have reason to thank God that He has left such work as the building of temples to us. Had the necessities of life sprung from the earth, so as to require no labour, the physical energies of man would never have been developed. Had knowledge come into our mind without the exercise of our faculties, we should never have known anything of intellectual force. In like manner, had everything in religion been done for us, so that no demand would have been made upon our benevolent sympathies, we should have been beings of morbid religious sentiment, and without any force or greatness of character. (*Homilist.*) *The second temple*:—From this subject we learn—1. That man in this world needs a sanctuary, in which he may call on the name of the Lord his God. We are closely bound to the material globe, and the holiest affections. The most spiritual exercises naturally cling round some sacred spot where we have been accustomed to meet with God and with His people. Speaking

of an old village church, Washington Irving says, "For my part, there are feelings that visit me in a country church, amid the beautiful serenity of nature, which I experience nowhere else; and, if not a more religious, I think I am a better man on Sunday than on any other day of the seven." This principle lies deep in human nature. Among the most sacred memories of life are the childhood recollections which carry us back to the old familiar church, which then seemed so grand and impressive, where with father and mother we reverently worshipped God. 2. We learn that toil and sacrifice enter into the building of these sanctuaries. God does not ask for that which costs us nothing. Sacrifice may not be needed by Him, but it is necessary for us, and without it human nature cannot attain its highest and best. 3. We learn not to neglect the sanctuary. (*E. B. Mason.*)

**Kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.**—*Dedicating the temple:*—I. THE BUILDING OF GOD'S HOUSE WAS CARRIED ON IN FACE OF OBSTACLES. Every important work has its hindrances. No great results have been achieved without meeting obstacles. But men have always been found qualified for the hard tasks. A clear brain, boundless energy, and unflinching will are hidden away in the right man, ready to be revealed at the right time. The tremendous barriers that stand before the waiting and needed reform chill the courage of the many, while they also arouse the energy and provoke the will of the true leader. Haggai had counted the cost, and knew exactly what he had to contend against. There was the cry of procrastination. "The time is not come—the time that the Lord's house should be built." "The time is not ripe" is a phrase that might often be interpreted to mean, "the people are not ready." When any reform is pressing, you hear a clamour for delay. There are some who take counsel of their fears rather than of their faith. When Lincoln read his Proclamation of Emancipation to Seward, the Secretary of State counselled delay, until at last the President took the matter into his own hands and sent the message of liberty ringing through the land. Haggai understood the reason for delay, the people were filled with self-love and desire for display. II. THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE HAD A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE ON THE PEOPLE. At the dedication they offered a sin offering of "twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." When once the temple was furnished, and the people saw all the appointments complete and an altar standing before them and in use, their sense of sin was aroused. The first sacrifice on that new altar was for their sins. With their new house they began a new life. The house of God in a community stands for a spiritual idea. The school-house and college stand for the intellectual needs of man. The moral and spiritual side finds its exponent in the church. These silent memorials of God's grace compel us for a moment to think of duty and the hereafter, and they are suggestive of the rest that "remaineth." A reverential soul can worship God anywhere, but a house dedicated to Him is an aid to such worship. While there we are released for the time from the distracting sights and sounds of outside life, and under the singing of hymns and the uplifting influence of prayer the mind becomes calmed for the consideration of truth. III. THE HOUSE OF GOD IS THE HOME OF JOY. The Oriental expressed his feelings in most demonstrative ways. He shouted, clapped his hands, and danced when happy, and these extravagances were carried into his religious worship. Worship with the Jew was a natural channel for the display of feeling, while the Occidental suppresses his emotion in worship. We need more naturalness in the house of God. We come before God to express ourselves, not to suppress ourselves. The very truth proclaimed in God's house is fitted to produce the liveliest emotions. Mankind ought to be induced to come to the house of God because of the abundance of peace to be found there. The view of God should be the one fitted to draw all hearts to Him. A young man, homeless and lonely, wandered through the streets of one of our cities. He could get no work, and had had no food for some time. Despair had seized his soul, and in that frame of mind he entered a church and dropped into a back seat. The sermon was being delivered, and it presented such a view of God and emphasised certain elements of truth that it deepened his despair, and he rushed from the church and threw himself into the river. This ought not to have been. There are stern truths in the gospel, yet to give them undue prominence, and make them overshadow the obvious intent of the gospel is to deprive it of its essential quality of helpfulness. The house of God stands for the best and brightest and cheeriest in human life. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

*Dedicating the temple:*—We are here advised as to the accessories by which the builders of the temple were enabled to succeed. I. GOD WAS WITH THEM. All along He had been predisposed in their behalf. We also are exhorted to work out

our own salvation because it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do. II. GOD WAS PLEASED TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM THROUGH HIS ORDAINED SERVANTS. Haggai was an old man whose strength lay largely in admonition. Zechariah was younger, more inclined to the dreaming of hopeful dreams and the seeing of bright visions. III. THEY WERE ENCOURAGED BY THE FAVOURABLE ATTITUDE OF TEMPORAL PRINCES. The dedication took place in the month Adar, "the month of splendour," so called because of the brightness of its suns and the beauty of its flowers. 1. A hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs were offered in sacrifice; "and for a sin offering, twelve he goats for all Israel." There is something pathetic in the mention of these he goats. Ten of the twelve tribes, having cut themselves loose from their brethren, had little or no part in the building of this temple, but they were remembered, and a place in the sin offering was sacredly reserved for them. It was as when mothers set vacant chairs for their absent, wayward sons on thanksgiving day. Whatever might happen, the religious unity of Israel must be preserved. In like manner the Church of Christ, however parted asunder by the controversies of the past, should be at one in the work of the kingdom and in the rejoicings of the triumph of Christ. 2. At this dedication the ancient order of service was restored. The assignments of the priests and Levites date back to the time of Moses (Num. iii. 6-10). It does not follow that because a custom is old it is obsolete. Prayer is as old as human want, like the air we breathe, and time can make no improvement upon it. It should be observed that the Feast of Passover was among the venerable customs which were revived at this dedication. It was a foreshadowing of the atonement of Christ, without which all other pomp and circumstance of service are a dumb show. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The joy of dedicating a house for the Lord*:—I. WE OBSERVE IN GENERAL THAT THE JOY WITH WHICH THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, &c., KEPT THE DEDICATION OF THE HOUSE OF GOD AROSE—1. Because of the consideration of its being now completely finished. 2. Of their regarding it as a token of God for good, a demonstration at once of His faithfulness and favour towards them and of the delightful prospect which it held out to them of their enjoying with comfort and with advantage the public ordinances of religion. II. BUT MORE PARTICULARLY THIS JOY AROSE—1. From the consideration of their having been honoured and enabled to build a house to the Lord their God. 2. From the consideration of its being a means of promoting the glory of God. 3. From its being a means of securing the observance and extending the benefits of religious ordinances to future and succeeding generations. (*G. B. Brand.*) *The dedication of the second temple*:—I. THE OCCASION WAS ONE OF JOY. Hebrew and Christian worship are joyful, because believers worship a revealed God of salvation. Heathen worship is a straining or groping of man after God (1 Kings xviii. 26-29). II. THE SERVICE WAS ONE FOR WHICH ALL WHO HAD TO TAKE PART IN IT HAD PREVIOUSLY PURIFIED THEMSELVES. III. THERE WERE BURNT OFFERINGS AS A TOKEN OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE PEOPLE HEART AND SOUL AFRESH TO GOD. IV. THERE WERE SIN OFFERINGS. In Divine worship there should always be a recognition of sin, and of Christ's having "put away sin" by the sacrifice of Himself. V. THERE WAS THE OBSERVANCE OF THE PASSOVER. They loved God because God loved them; this is the order now, and we cannot reverse it (1 John iv. 19). VI. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD WAS KEPT JOYFULLY FOR SEVEN DAYS. 1. In token of national unity and fellowship. 2. In token of their desire to cultivate purity. VII. The new national life thus inaugurated had far less of pomp and show about it than were seen in the days of Solomon. But there was more of spiritual power (Hag. ii. 9). (*C. Clemance, D.D.*) *The dedication of the temple* was characterised by—I. RELIGIOUS REJOICING. The reasons for this were—1. Protracted labours brought to a close. 2. The honour offered to Jehovah their God. 3. The benefits which were likely to accrue to men through their sacred edifice and its worship. II. DEVOUT GRATITUDE. III. DEEP HUMILITY. IV. APPROPRIATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ITS FUTURE USE. (*William Jones.*)

Ver. 21. *To seek the Lord God of Israel.—Seeking God*:—Birds are very fond of catching the last evening rays of a winter's sun, and are often to be found in the afternoon on banks facing the west, or swinging, if there is no wind, on the topmost branch of trees. On the mountains, too, all birds, as the sun gets low, take to the slopes to face the west, whilst in the morning they betake themselves to the eastern banks and slopes to meet his rays. Golden plovers, in the evenings, ascend from slope to slope, as each becomes shaded by the intervening heights, until they are all collected on the very last ridge which the sun shines upon. God's children

resemble birds in seeking light, only the light they seek is the light of goodness, and truth, and righteousness which comes from God. They seek the Source of Light, and turn away from the darkness. (*S. S. Chronicle.*)

Ver. 22. For the Lord had made them joyful.—*God the joy-bringer*:—I. GOD IS THE JOY-MAKER. 1. The object of much that God does is simply the blessedness of human hearts. The poorest creature that lives has a right to ask of God the satisfaction of its instincts, and every man has a claim on God to make him glad. God pays all cheques legitimately drawn on Him, and regards Himself as occupied in a manner entirely congruous with His magnificence and infinitude, when He stoops to put some kind of vibrating gladness into the wings of a gnat that dances for an hour in the sunshine, and into the heart of a man that lives his time for only a very little longer. 2. God's method of making us glad is by putting Himself into us. The secret of all true human well-being is close communion with God. 3. By His providences He gives the secondary and lower gifts which men according to their circumstances need. He gives whatever is contributory to any kind of gladness; and if we are wise we shall trace all to Him. Our common mercies are His love-tokens and they all come to us just as the gifts of parents to their children do, with this on the fly-leaf, "With a father's love." II. THE OBLIGATION AND WISDOM OF TAKING OUR GOD-GIVEN JOYS. 1. Be sure you take Him. When He is waiting to pour all His love into your heart, and all His sweetness into your spirit, to calm your anxieties, to deepen your blessedness; to strengthen everything that is good in you; to be to you a stay in the midst of crumbling prosperity and a light in the midst of the gathering darkness, be sure that you take the joy that waits your acceptance. 2. Recognise Him in all common mercies, because He is at the back of them all. Everything ought to be vocal to us of the loving-kindness of our Father in heaven. Link Him with everything that makes your heart glad. God does not desire to be put away high up on a pedestal above our lives, as if He regulated the great things and the trifles regulated themselves; but He seeks to come as air into the lungs, into every particle of the mass of life, and to fill it all with His purifying presence. 3. Recognise Him in common joys. 4. Be sure that you use the joys which He gives. There are two ways in which you can look at the world and at everything that befalls you. There is enough in everybody's life to make him sad if he selects these things to dwell upon. There is enough in everybody's life to make him continually glad if he wisely picks out these things to think about. It depends altogether on the angle at which you look at your life what you see about it. For instance, you know how children do when they get a bit of a willow wand into their possession. They cut off rings of bark and get the switch alternately white and black, white and black, and so on right to the tip. Whether will you look at the white rings or the black ones? They are both there, but if you rightly look at the black you will find out that there is white below it, and it only needs a very little stripping off of a film to make it into white too. No Christian man has a right to regard anything that God's providence brings to him as such unmingled evil that it ought to make him sad. We are bound to "rejoice in the Lord alway." 5. Be sure that you limit your delights by God-made joys. There is nothing sadder than the joys that come into a life and do not come from God. Let us see to it that we do not fill our cisterns with poisonous sewage, when God is waiting to fill them with the pure river of the water of life. Does my joy help me to come near to God? Does it interfere with my communion with Him? Does it aid me in the consecration of myself? Does my conscience go with it when my conscience is most awake? The alternative presented to each of us is whether we will have surface joy and a centre of dark discontent, or surface sorrow and a centre of calm blessedness. The film of stagnant water on a pond of rottenness simulates the glories of the rainbow, in which pure sunshine falls upon the pure drops, but it is only painted corruption after all, and if a man put his lips to it, it will kill him. Such is the joy which is apart from God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Cheerfulness*:—Cheerfulness is the root of constancy; for there is no more shifty and unreliable person than your curmudgeon, who is the slave of his own caprices; it is the best assurance of life, health, and wealth; it is the sign and evidence of a steady and energetic mind. It will make a fruitful youth, a happy manhood, and a serene old age. It is the "open sesame" to many secrets which the discontented and peevish strive hard to discover but always miss; it is the magic medium of friendship, if not even of love; where there may be lack of special tastes and sympathies, cheerfulness will do much to supply their place. As water to the

flower, so is cheerfulness to the mind. It keeps all green and sweet, and sends forth a gracious savour that is imperceptible, but wins all by its perfume. By cheerfulness a man's powers of work and production are doubled; he has, as it were, taken in a set of working partners most ready to aid him in every task and enterprise. Cheerfulness keeps all the faculties in good condition, so that they are ever ready to do their utmost without strain. (*Dr. Japp, in the "Argosy."*) *Joy favourable to religion: sing and rejoice*.—One bright summer's day we noticed a lark; at first we could not see it, but with the eye shaded by an uplifted hand it was soon detected. There it flew, a little speck, a dim spot in the Italian-blue sky, pouring down floods of music. On it went, higher and higher; as long as it sang and rejoiced, it arose. But when the song ceased its flight ceased too. Thus is it with our souls; they ascend Godwards while we sing and rejoice. "Rejoice in the Lord; for you it is safe"; take refuge in the citadel of heaven-sent bliss, and you are secure against many a Satanic attack. (*T. R. Stevenson.*)

## CHAPTER VII.

**VERS. 1-10. Ezra the son of Seraiah.—Ezra the distinguished:**—Consider Ezra as—**I.** A man of distinguished ANCESTRY. **II.** A man of distinguished ATTAINMENTS. **III.** A man in the enjoyment of distinguished FAVOURS. **IV.** A man of distinguished INFLUENCE. **V.** A man of distinguished SUCCESS. **VI.** A man of distinguished AIM. He aimed at—**1.** The acquisition of the highest knowledge. **2.** The practice of the highest knowledge. **3.** The impartation of the highest knowledge. **VII.** A man of distinguished BLESSING. (*William Jones.*) **And he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses.—Scribism:**—Scribism was one of the remarkable features of the later days of Israel. Its existence in so much prominence showed that religion had passed into a new phase, that it had assumed a literary aspect. At first in their religious life the Jews did not give much heed to literary documents. Priestism was regulated by traditional usages rather than by written directions, and justice was administered under the kings according to custom, precedent, and equity. Quite apart from the discussion concerning the antiquity of the Pentateuch, it is certain that its precepts were neither used nor known in the time of Josiah, when the reading of the roll discovered in the temple was listened to with amazement. Still less did prophetism rely on literary resources. What need was there of a book when the Spirit of God was speaking through the audible voice of a living man? The function of the scribes was to collect the sayings and traditions of earlier ages, to arrange and edit the literary fragments of more original minds. Scribism rose when prophecy declined. It was a melancholy confession that the fountains of living water were drying up. It was like an aqueduct laboriously constructed in order to convey stored water to a thirsty people from distant reservoirs. Moreover, scribism degenerated into rabbinism, the scholasticism of the Jews. We may see its counterpart in the Catholic scholasticism which drew supplies from patristic tradition, and again in Protestant scholasticism—which comes nearer to the source of inspiration in the Bible, and yet which stiffened into a traditional interpretation of Scripture, confining its waters to iron pipes of orthodoxy. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) **According to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.—God's helping hand:**—Ezra was wonderfully blessed in his desire and effort to restore Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Seemingly, the power and the blessing which served Ezra so signally was all from "the king," but really it was all from Ezra's "God," whose will disposed the king's heart, whose providence guided every step, and whose power and Spirit gave efficiency and success to every plan and effort. And so it is in all human planning and effort. The success is just in the measure of "God's hand upon us." If we rise up to build, and do not first enlist His gracious approval, providential interposition, and Spirit's agency, our best efforts will miscarry or prove disastrous. If we plan a revival, and put in requisition the agencies, and will the conversion of sinners, we shall be sadly disappointed, if we do not first, by prayer and preparation, array God the Lord on our side, and get hold of His "outstretched arm of salvation." It is easy to work, and glorious are the results—all human agencies so readily fall into line and aid us—when the hand of the Lord our God is upon us. The application, the lesson, is therefore obvious—**1.** Prayer lies at the foundation

of all wise planning and all successful effort to advance Christ's kingdom in the world. 2. God's hand must be upon us—His providence must be enlisted in our behalf—there must be co-operation between the Divine and the human. 3. The secret of declension, of abounding evil, of the lack of converting power in the Church, of the dearth of revivals, is to be found in the fact that God's hand is not upon us, because of the lack of faith and prayer. (*J. M. Sherwood, D. D.*) For upon the first day of the first month.—*New Year's Day* (a talk with children):—The Bible attaches a great deal of importance to first things; the first-fruits of the earth were sacred, the first batch of bread was a consecrated batch, the first hour of the day, the first day of the week, the first week of the month, the first month of the year, the first year in seven years, and above all the first day of the first month, or in other words "New Year's Day," were considered specially important. It was on New Year's Day that the waters of the deluge finally dried up; it was on New Year's Day that the tabernacle was set up for the first time, that the temple was completely consecrated in the days of Hezekiah; and it was on New Year's Day that the captives in Babylon began their march out of captivity on their return to Canaan under Ezra. Now if you will just remember these four striking instances you will say that New Year's Day has a very important history. How monotonous life would be if there were not something new every day! Why you know that little baby boy at home wants a fresh toy every day. The old toys soon become uninteresting and he wants a new one constantly. Now you used to be the same when you were a very little boy, and you are not very different from that now. All through your little life you have been glad of any little change that gives a novelty and freshness to it. God thinks of all that, and therefore He gives you one thing at a time that will be likely to interest you; and when you have made use of that He gives you another and still another. He gives you life moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day. One day is in one sense very much like the other; and yet not two days are alike, especially when you think of the experiences of each day. Every day has something fresh in it; and God ordains all that in order to make you happy and to enable you to learn constantly, from some experience which each day teaches you, something you have not learnt before. This is specially true with regard to the first day of the New Year. You remember when at school you had a copy book given you. When you had it first of all it was a clean and charming copy book. When you began to write you took a great deal of trouble, especially with the first page. There was not a mistake or blot, or careless line on the whole page. The second page had just one little mistake. Then the third, perhaps, had a blot, and then you got rather careless, and hurried over some of the pages as you drew near the end of your copy book. Your teacher was probably vexed with you because you had not improved as you proceeded with it; then you felt ashamed of yourself, and said, "I wish I could begin again." The day at length came when you got a new copy book, and you were permitted to begin again. Now that is just as God deals with you. He gave you a fine copy book last year—it had 365 pages, and clean throughout; and you were expected to write your very best on those pages. I know some of you tried the first day or two, and now and then you tried again; but some of you got rather careless and restless as you advanced. Here and there you did that which was wrong, and that in each case left a blot behind. The Master took note of it, and there it is now in His presence. You cannot be very proud of your last year's history. Yet to-day the Lord says, "I know all about it; but I will give you a new copy book; and will put that old one aside and forget all about it. I will forgive you; but you must try to do better with this new copy book. Do your very best. If you cannot write as you would, ask Me to help you, and I will take your hand and guide it, and will help you to do what is right and well-pleasing in My sight." When I was a boy at school we used to have in our copy books what we called a script line on the top of the page. We used to copy that. Now the Saviour has put the script line over every day for us. It is His own writing, and we have to copy it. (*D. Davies.*) *New Year's Day*:—The name of Fernando de Magellan is not so well known as it should be. 'Tis over 350 years ago since he first discovered for us the Pacific Ocean, and to reach it he had to go through the Straits which have ever since borne his name—straits extending hundreds of miles, sometimes narrowing to the breadth of a broad river, and again expanding to the breadth of seas. What a day that was when, after long windings to and fro, his ships entered the waters of the Pacific! These were the first keels which ploughed it. His ships came back, but their brave commander never did; the silent sea which had beckoned him on lured him to his death. Is it much different with the

boom of the clock which tells us we have entered on the unknown stretch of a New Year? I think not; we are all voyaging, and no ship has gone in advance into the New Year. What lies ahead of us? No one knows, and no one needs to know. The important thing is, that with all our tacking to and fro we are seeking to drop our anchor at last in the good haven. If that is our aim, and we are prayerful and earnest about it, it matters little what the year has in store for us: all will prove well and rightly done in the end. Bend heart and head to this, and leave all else with God. (*J. Reid Howatt.*)

**For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.**—*Man's duty in relation to God's redemptive truth:*—The text indicates man's duty in relation to God's redemptive truth. The "law" here refers undoubtedly not to God's truth in general, but to that truth which He has condescended to reveal to man as a fallen being. In relation to this he has to do three things—I. HE HAS TO LEARN IT. "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord." Two things are to be attended to in our endeavours to attain a knowledge of the truth which God has revealed to fallen man. 1. It must be sought for where it is to be found. Truth from God may be found written in the volume of nature, in the facts of human history, in the constitution of the human soul: but the truth from God which man wants as a sinner is to be found in the Bible. It must be sought for here; it is here under the cover of facts and histories, metaphors and poetries. 2. It must be sought for in the manner in which it is to be found. There is a right way of seeking as well as a wrong way. "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek" it. It must be sought—(1) With devout earnestness. It must be regarded as the supreme good. (2) With persevering diligence. It must be searched for as hidden treasures. II. HE HAS TO PRACTISE IT. Ezra had not only "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord," but "to do it." The truth that God has revealed to sinners is not a subject for mere speculative thought or logical debate, it is a practical system. 1. The doing of it is essential to a thorough understanding of it. "He that doeth the will of God shall know of the doctrine." There are some things that a man may understand without practising. A man may understand architecture who has never built a house, agriculture who has never cultivated a farm, but no one can understand theology unless he has practised it. 2. The doing of it is necessary in order to be really benefited by it. Truth as ideas in the mind is only like floating clouds, rolling undischarged over the barren soil; but truth as deeds is like living streams so intersecting each other, and winding in every direction, as to touch the whole region into life, verdure, and beauty. III. HE HAS TO PREACH IT. "And to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." God's truth to sinners is to be taught by men. But none can teach it but those who have learnt it and practised: the right kind of preaching is life preaching. This life preaching is—1. The most intelligible. 2. The most incontrovertible. 3. The most constant. 4. The most Christlike. Conclusion: We must learn, practise, and preach the Bible. The last can only be done by those who have accomplished the first and second. (*Homilist.*) *Ezra the scribe:*—I. HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER. 1. I would call him a manly man. The most uncouth, ignorant country clodhopper may be drilled into being a common soldier, who may pass muster with his fellows in a review. But there are few men who can become great generals. Many are able and willing to follow a leader, but there are only too few who have the power to lead others. In the Church as well as in the State our great want is men, manly men. 2. He was a godly man. It is not always the case that great men are godly men also. Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord his God, and to do it; and that added to his greatness. 3. He was a man of discernment. For himself he found it was wisest and best to seek the law of the Lord and to do it. He saw also that it was righteousness for the nation as well as the individual. II. EZRA IN THE DISCHARGE OF HIS PUBLIC DUTIES. 1. As the leader of the returning exiles he was scrupulously honest. 2. He showed boundless trust in the protection of God. 3. As the ruler of the people in Jerusalem he identified himself with the people under him. (*James Menzies.*) *Ezra's exemplary conduct:*—Contemplate its chief features. I. THE ACQUISITION OF DIVINE TRUTH FOR HIMSELF. In aiming at this attainment he adopted—1. The right method. He sought for it. 2. The right manner. "He had prepared"—i.e., fixed or set—"his heart to seek the law of the Lord." 3. The right place. II. THE EMBODIMENT OF DIVINE TRUTH IN HIS LIFE. Knowledge misapplied is—1. Useless (*Matt. vii. 21-27; Jas. i. 25.*) 2. An occasion of condemnation (*Luke xii. 47, 48.*) III. THE COMMUNICATION OF DIVINE TRUTH TO OTHERS. He taught others both by his speech and by his action. Merely verbal teaching will not bear

comparison with that which is also of the character and conduct. The latter is—1. More intelligible. 2. More continuous. 3. More influential. (*William Jones*.)

*The Christian ministry*:—We have here pointed out some indispensable qualifications for an able minister of the New Testament. I. DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD'S WORD. II. PUBLIC INSTRUCTION. (*The Preacher's Portfolio*.) *Divine sequence in service*:—Everything in its due order is a universal law. This applies to Sabbath-school teaching. I. THERE MUST BE DILIGENT SEARCHING FOR THE LAW OF GOD. II. THERE MUST BE A HEARTY DOING OF THE DISCOVERED WILL. Alas! for him who seeks to teach others laws which he himself does not obey, and to enforce commands which he himself defies. III. THEN MAY WE TEACH THE LAW OF THE LORD. Let us give heed to this sequence. It is taught in many parts of Scripture; but let Ezra's embodiment of it make it plain. (*Sunday School Teacher*.)

*A mind saturated with Scripture*:—The late Sydney Dobell, poet and philosopher, and devout Christian, has this remark: "The more exquisite your sense of beauty becomes, the dearer will the Holy Scripture become to you, the more natural and indispensable will the wisest and grandest of its sayings become to your heart and mind—as wings to the air, as feet to the ground, as light to the eyes; you will feel certain that the mind was created for the saying, and the saying for the mind. I learned at one period of my life the whole New Testament by rote, and I cannot unlearn the beauty of those sweet old Saxon phrases in which I thought so long. Full of 'the light that never was on sea or shore,' I feel, in using them, to mingle a new element with earthly speech and to relieve, in some sort, with their glory, the dreary lifelessness of words." *Testimonies to the Bible*:—"In this book," said Ewald to Dean Stanley, "is all the wisdom of the world." "That book," said Andrew Jackson, as he lay on his death-bed, "is the rock on which our republic rests." Said the great chemist Faraday, "Why will people go astray when they have this blessed book to guide them?" "If we be ignorant," say the translators of 1611, "the Scriptures will instruct us; if out of the way, they will bring us home; if out of order, they will reform us; if in heaviness, they will comfort us; if dull, quicken us; if cold, inflame us." Hooker said, "There is scarcely any part of knowledge worthy of the mind of man but from Scripture it may have some direction and light." Theodore Parker said, "The literature of Greece, which goes up like incense from that land of temples, has not half the influence of this book of a despised nation. The sun never sets upon its gleaming pages." Heine, the infidel, said, "What a book! Vast and wide as the world, rooted in the abysses of creation, and towering up behind the blue secrets of heaven. Sunrise and sunset, promise and fulfilment, birth and death, the whole drama of humanity, all in this book." (*Sunday School Times*.)

*Study of the Scriptures*:—The Abbé Wincklemann, a classical writer on the fine arts, after descanting with great zeal on the perfection of sculpture, as exhibited in the Apollo Belvedere, said to the students, "Now go and study it, and if you see no beauty in it, go again and again, go until you feel it, for be assured it is there." So we say to the Bible student, "Go and study the Scripture, and if at first you discover no beauty, go until you feel the power of its glorious truths, for be assured it is there." (*J. Bowden Allen*.)

*The Scriptures a safeguard of a nation*:—If we wish to know what the Christian tradition has done for us, we must examine the moral standards of nations who have differed from us in not having it. For example, we must look at the Greeks of the fifth century before Christ, or the Romans at or after the period of the Advent. The Christian faith and the Holy Scriptures arm us with the means of neutralising and repelling the assaults of evil in and from ourselves. Mist may rest upon the surrounding landscape, but our own path is always visible. (*W. E. Gladstone*.)

*The inestimable value of the Scriptures*:—Dr. Smith, of Edinburgh, preaching recently, said the Scriptures were an unalienable treasure of the Church, and urged his hearers to make a more diligent use of them. He told of an Australian farmer, who for years tried vainly to make a competence out of his soil. He transferred it at a low price to a neighbour, who shortly discovered a priceless mine upon the property. "So," the preacher said, "we are apt to forget that underneath the newspapers and novels which cumber our tables, lies a small volume which is worth inestimably more than all of them." *The Scriptures a winding splendour*:—Passing from Bonn to Coblenz, on the Rhine, the scenery is comparatively tame. But from Coblenz to Mayence it is enchanting. You sit on deck, and feel as if this last flash of beauty must exhaust the scene; but in a moment there is a turn of the river, which covers up the former view with more luxuriant vineyards, and more



defiant castles, and holder bluffs, vine-wreathed, and grapes so ripe that if the hills be touched they would bleed their rich life away into the bowels of Bingen and Hockheimer. Here and there there are streams of water melting into the river, like smaller joys swallowed in the bosom of a great gladness. And when night begins to throw its black mantle over the shoulder of the hills, and you are approaching disembarkation at Mayence, the lights along the shore fairly bewitch the scene with their beauty, giving one a thrill that he feels but once, yet that lasts him for ever. So this river of God's Word is not a straight stream, but a winding splendour—at every turn new wonders to attract, still riper vintage pressing to the brink, and crowded castles of strength—Stolzenfels and Johannisberger as nothing compared with the strong tower into which the righteous run and are saved—and our disembarkation at last, in the evening, amid the lights that gleam from the shore of heaven. The trouble is, that the vast majority of Bible voyagers stop at Coblenz, where the chief glories begin. (*Christian Age*.)

Vers. 11-27. Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes.—*The office and duty of the civil magistrate*:—It is the office of a Christian magistrate to encourage and protect good men in the exercise of religion, both by his own example and wholesome laws, and to promote true religion in his dominions. Thus far the good magistrates among Jews, heathens, and Christians have proceeded to their lasting honour and commendation; but those who acted on the contrary have been branded with infamy and contempt. Joshua, the Judges, David, Solomon and Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah and others, destroyed idolatry, erected altars, ordered the courses of the priests, built and repaired the temple, collected and disposed of money for those charges, caused the Passover and other religious duties to be celebrated, and wrought a glorious reformation in true religion, when the priests and Levites were negligent in their office. Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes, the King of Nineveh, Alexander the Great, and Seleucus, &c., made decrees through all their dominions to worship the true God; they set His people at liberty, ordered them to rebuild the temple to the Lord God of heaven, allowed timber, salt, and similar charges for the sacrifices out of their own treasury; they required the prayers of God's people for themselves, their families and dominions, they protected them from their adversaries and appointed solemn fasts, &c. Lycurgus, Numa, and Solon made laws concerning religion in Athens, Rome, and Sparta; Timoleon, Augustus, and others rebuilt and endowed all the temples that had fallen into decay in Crete and about Rome. Judas Maccabeus repaired the breaches, purchased holy vessels and instruments for the service of the temple, pulled down the idols, and cleansed the sanctuary from the profanation of Antiochus Epiphanes, chose priests of a blameless conversation, and appointed an anniversary festival in commemoration of the reparation of the temple which our Saviour honoured with His own presence (John x. 22). Constantine published several edicts in favour of Christian religion, granting to all professors the free exercise of it; he destroyed the idol temples, restored the former places of worship to them, and built several magnificent churches and gave great gifts to them; he also commanded fine copies of the Bible to be made. When the heresy of Arius infected the Church, he assembled the first General Council at Nice, consisting of 318 bishops from all quarters of the empire. He banished Arius and burnt his books, he settled the time for the keeping of Easter, and made many good laws for the discipline and government of the Church. Theodosius, Justinian, and others of his successors thought it their duty to enact good laws for the establishment of the true religion. The British, Saxon, and English princes have been as active therein as other Christian monarchs, for King Lucius sent a letter to Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome, desiring his directions to make him a Christian; he also turned some heathen temples into Christian churches and built and endowed others at his own charges. Ethelbert kindly received and maintained Augustine and his companions, Edward the Confessor built and granted great privileges to the Abbey of Westminster, and made many excellent laws for the benefit and protection of the Church, which were rather the laws of his predecessors than those of his own making. William the Conqueror at his coronation took an oath that he should defend the Church of Christ, and all our monarchs have done the like. By Act of Parliament the sovereign is declared to be supreme Head of the Church, and has the glory of being described as Defender of the Faith. (*Philoclesius*.) *The commission of Artaxerxes*:—It indicated a spirit of—I. GREAT REVERENCE FOR GOD. II. PROFOUND RESPECT FOR THE LAW OF

GOD. III. SINCERE REGARD FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD. IV. HEARTY APPRECIATION OF THE CHARACTER OF A GOOD MAN. His liberal gifts may be exhibited as—1. A rebuke to the parsimony of many Christians. 2. An example to all Christians. (*William Jones.*)

Vers. 15. The Lord God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem.—*Jehovah's habitation*:—I. THIS HOLY ALLIANCE: "The God of Israel." We have here—1. A description of God and His Church. The "God of Israel" includes both. Israel His Church; and the God that claims it; a living God amidst a living people. 2. Infinitude associated with a royal seed. Israel signifies a prevailing prince before God. 3. A veritable portion on both sides. "The Lord's portion is His people"; "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." 4. The living connection between God and His people constitutes the stronghold of faith. II. HIS HABITATION. He dwells—1. In "the Jerusalem which is above." 2. In the living Church of God which was typified by Jerusalem. 3. In the Jerusalem of every regenerated soul. (*J. Irons.*)

Ver. 23. **Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done.**—*The decree of Artaxerxes*:—It is remarkable that some of the richest effusions of poetry in the whole Scriptures proceeded from heathen monarchs, e.g., Darius and Nebuchadnezzar. Consider these words—I. IN REFERENCE TO THE JEWISH CHURCH. 1. The state of the Jewish Church at this time is not unlike to that in which it was in the days of Ezra. It is impossible to behold them in their religious services, and not to see how thick a veil is yet upon their hearts. Nor do they manifest any respect for their own law in its sublimer precepts. Of real holiness of heart and life they are ignorant in the extreme. 2. But to us is given, no less than to Ezra, a command to advance their welfare. 3. In this work we should engage with all diligence (Rom. xi. 30, 31). II. IN REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH WHICH IS AMONGST US. 1. We need to have God's work advanced in our midst. 2. We ought to engage in this work with our whole hearts. Conclusion: We ought to obey this imperial mandate—1. In a way of personal reformation. 2. In a way of ministerial exertion. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) *Christian missions*:—We may well sit at the feet of Artaxerxes and learn from heathen lips the extent of our duty and the nature of our obligations. We plead for missions. I. TO ASSIGN SOME REASONS FOR ACTIVE DEVOTEDNESS TO THE CAUSE OF GOD IN THE WORLD. 1. From the Divine authority by which it is enjoined. It "is commanded by the God of heaven." We love to see the estimate of Christian duties from the men of the world. They often take a just measure of our obligations. The law of love to the perishing heathen is clearly laid down. God makes man the medium of His blessings to man. The same God who bids us "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" that we may be saved bids us "go into all the world," &c. We should like to see inscribed over all our missionary institutions the law, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." 2. From the urgent necessity which exists for your exertions. 3. From the fearful consequences of the neglect of this duty. "For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" 4. From the success which has attended the fulfilment of this duty. II. TO OFFER SOME SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE SPIRIT AND MODE IN WHICH THIS WORK SHOULD BE CARRIED ON. 1. Earnestly, without remissness. "Let it be diligently done." 2. Prayerfully. 3. Speedily. (*Samuel Thodey.*)

Vers. 27, 28. **Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart.**—*Kings of Persia—nursing fathers of the Church*:—The book of Ezra contains an interesting record of the dealings of God in His providence towards His visible Church under the Persian Empire. That empire performed important services for the Church—a brief consideration of which as they are recorded in the first seven chapters of Ezra will exhibit wonderful instances of the watchful care of Providence for the Church, and open up the way for the following inferences: I. THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES WAS RIGHT IN THE JUDGMENT OF GOD AS WELL AS IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE CHURCH. Ezra gives thanks to God for this decree and ascribes the procuring of it to the immediate hand of God. II. THAT IT IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO OBTAIN THE COUNTENANCE AND AID OF THE CIVIL POWER IN FAVOUR OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH IN ALL AGES. It is true God can preserve and increase His Church without the aid and in spite of the opposition of kings and rulers. It multiplied amidst the exterminating persecution in Egypt;

and it was not lost during the seventy years' captivity in Babylon; and for three hundred years after Christ the Church was generally persecuted by the civil powers, and yet multiplied exceedingly. But still opposition by the civil powers, and much more persecution, is in itself an evil; and the nursing care of the kings of the earth is a great blessing to the Church. III. IF CIVIL AID AND COUNTENANCE BE SO IMPORTANT TO THE CHURCH, IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL WHO LOVE THE PROSPERITY OF JERUSALEM TO ENDEAVOUR TO OBTAIN IT. Ezra did so (ver. 6), "And the king granted him all his request according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." IV. WE OUGHT NOT TO BE DISCOURAGED FROM SEEKING THE ADEQUATE SUPPORT OF THE STATE BY THE APPARENT IMPROBABILITY OF OBTAINING IT. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" said the prophet Zechariah, in reference to the usurping Persian king, stirred up by the enemies of the Church, "before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (Zech. iv. 6, 7). V. THE FRIENDS OF RELIGION AND THE CHURCH OUGHT NOT TO BE UNDULY CONCERNED WHICH PARTY IS UP OR WHICH IS DOWN. When the friends of the Church are uppermost, give thanks, like Ezra, to God, who putteth it into the heart of the king to beautify His house. When the enemies are uppermost, do as David did, when he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. VI. THE FRIENDS OF THE CHURCH OUGHT NOT TO BE MUCH MOVED EITHER BY THE FLATTERIES OR THE THREATS OF THE ENEMIES. VII. THE CHURCH NEEDS, AND IS ENTITLED TO, THE PRIVATE LIBERALITY OF INDIVIDUALS AS WELL AS THE PUBLIC SUPPORT OF THE NATION. Large and liberal as were the government grants by Darius, Cyrus, and Artaxerxes, yet the voluntary liberality of the private Jews was called into exercise. So it was in the time of Moses and the kings, and so it must be as it has been in the times of the gospel. VIII. THE CHURCH OF GOD OUGHT NOT TO BE TREATED EITHER BY INDIVIDUALS OR NATIONS IN A MEAN AND NIGGARDLY MANNER. Artaxerxes had not to build the temple—that was done already—but he beautified it; he laid out money on it, as some would say unnecessarily and extravagantly. But Ezra thanks God for putting such a thing as this into the king's heart, to beautify the house of God. IX. AS IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL TO SERVE AND GLORIFY GOD, SO NO ONE IS EXEMPTED FROM THE DUTY OF SUPPORTING HIS TRUE CHURCH. X. WE OUGHT NOT TO REFUSE TO ADD TO THE NUMBER OF MINISTERS AND BUILDINGS IN THE CHURCH UNTIL THE CHURCH IS PERFECTLY REFORMED. XI. THE AID OF GOVERNMENT TO THE EXTENSION OF THE CHURCH IS THE RICH GIVING TO THE POOR. XII. LET US NOT THINK THAT WE SHALL GROW POOR IF WE GIVE MUCH TO GOD. (*W. Mackenzie.*)

*Exemplary praise:—*I. THE TRUE OFFERERS OF PRAISE. Ezra exhibits in these verses—1. Unaffected humility. 2. Sincere piety. 3. Practical religiousness. II. THE GRAND OBJECT OF PRAISE. 1. The Supreme Being. 2. The Supreme Being in covenant relation with His worshippers. 3. The Supreme Being whom our fathers worshipped. III. GOOD REASONS FOR PRAISE. 1. God inspires the worthy purposes of men. 2. He beneficently influences the moral judgments of men. 3. He invigorates the heart and life of His servants. (*William Jones.*)

To beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.—*God's love of the beautiful:—*One of the desires common to humanity is the desire for what is beautiful. We need not go far for evidence of this universal feeling. It is seen declaring itself in the little flower that lends a nameless grace to the cottage window, in many a simple ornament and picture to be found in the homes of labour and in the preference given to some spot favoured with more than usual sweetness and charm. The desire for beauty and the expressions of it are the creation of the Divine inbreathing. To limit human conduct to what is strictly useful would impoverish existence and rob it of half its interest and grace. If utility were to be the sole standard of human action, the mother would be forbidden to kiss her child and the mourner to shed a tear at the graveside of a friend. According to this, to admire the glowing sunset or to lift our eyes in wonder to the star-spangled sky would be foolishness. The spires and monuments of our cities, the ornamental facings of our buildings, the taste and skill displayed in the laying out of our public parks and gardens, according to this system of appraisement, would be wasteful and worthless. Man desires beauty in the house of God because of its fittingness; we feel it to be in harmony with God's works above and around us to introduce something of the beautiful into the house of prayer and praise. The feeling of hostility in the presence of flagrant abuses of art is now passing away. There is no inevitable alliance between artistic arrangement and idolatrous practices—superstition need never be the offspring of the beautiful; and if good taste is desirable in the home, there is even stronger reason to give it fitting expression in the house of God. We are learners in the school of One who was greater than

the temple, One who was altogether lovely, whose loveliness was the loveliness of perfect deeds, and whose beauty was the beauty of holiness. With this beauty we must adorn life's daily temple, taking care that no image of falsehood, uncleanness, or dishonour mars its fairness and grieves the Holy Spirit that would dwell within. (*W. Proudfoot, M.A.*) *Beauty in God's house*:—So long as our streets are walled with barren brick, and our eyes rest continually, in our daily life, on objects utterly ugly, or of inconsistent and meaningless design, it may be a doubtful question whether the faculties of eye and mind which are capable of perceiving beauty, having been left without food during the whole of our active life, should suddenly be feasted upon entering a place of worship, and colour and music and sculpture should delight the senses and stir the curiosity of men unaccustomed to such appeal, at the moment when they are required to compose themselves for acts of devotion; but it cannot be a question at all, that if once familiarised with beautiful form and colour, we shall desire to see this also in the house of prayer; its absence will disturb instead of assisting devotion; and we shall feel it as vain to ask whether, with our own house full of goodly craftsmanship, we should worship God in a house destitute of it as to ask whether a pilgrim, whose day's journey has led him through fair woods and by sweet waters, must at evening turn aside into some barren place to pray. (*J. Ruskin.*)

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## CHAPTER VIII.

**VERS. 1-20. And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava.**  
 —*The assembly at Ahava*:—I. THE LONG JOURNEY COMMENCED. II. AN IMPORTANT INSPECTION MADE. This halt illustrates—1. The need of seasons of rest. 2. The use of seasons of rest. III. A GRAVE DEFICIENCY DISCOVERED. Ministers of religion are sometimes slow in making personal sacrifices and rendering personal assistance even in a good enterprise. IV. THE SUPPLY OF THE DEFICIENCY SOUGHT. He sought them—1. By means of influential men. 2. By sending them to the right place. 3. By sending them to the right man. 4. By sending them with precise instructions. V. THE SUPPLY OF THE DEFICIENCY OBTAINED. 1. The supply was sufficient. 2. The supply was various. 3. The supply was remarkable for the presence of at least one man of distinguished ability. 4. The supply was obtained by the blessing of God. (*William Jones.*) **A man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli.—Men of understanding**—I. ARE THE GIFTS OF GOD. 1. They derive their abilities from Him. 2. They rightly develop their abilities by His blessing. 3. They attain their moral excellences by His blessing. II. ARE OF GREAT WORTH AMONGST MEN. 1. Understanding is essential to the beneficent employment of other gifts and powers. 2. The employment of understanding itself confers great benefits upon society. Conclusion: It behoves us—1. To praise God for men of understanding. 2. To prize such men. 3. To endeavour to become men of understanding. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 21. Then I proclaimed a fast there.—Prayer and fasting** (preached on the occasion of a public fast):—I. THAT THE BEST MEANS TO PROCURE SUCCESS UPON OUR COUNSELS AND ENDEAVOURS IS TO SEEK GOD FOR HIS BLESSING. 1. This results from the first principles on which all religion is built. (1) That there is a God of infinite power who governs the world and can dispose all things in it to such ends as are agreeable to His will. (2) That human policy and strength are of no moment when they come in opposition to His providence: "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." (3) That He has a particular care of those who serve Him faithfully. 2. In giving His assistance God does not always act in so palpable a manner as that whereby we see second causes producing their effects. But that it is the most rational and most religious way to begin at Heaven in all His consultations and designs will appear by reflecting—(1) That it is impossible for a creature to be independent. (2) That God can no more cease to govern the world than He can cease to be God. (3) That He cannot govern His creatures if He does not influence them. (4) That those who depend upon their own policy and strength, without any regard to His will, affront His majesty, reject His government, and justly provoke Him to punish and disappoint them

(Prov. iii. 6, 7). II. THAT SOLEMN FASTING IS A PROPER METHOD TO BE USED IN SUCH ADDRESSES TO GOD. We have but two ways to express our thoughts and the inclinations of our minds, either by words or by such actions as naturally flow from them, and both of these are equally proper and therefore such as become our devotions. For God is the author of decency and order, and His service is then most decent and orderly when it is unaffected and agreeable to nature; and therefore such gestures or actions are proper in His worship which do naturally flow from or by custom are used to accompany such a disposition of mind as we ought to be in when we make our approaches to Him. Thus kneeling becomes us at our prayers, because it is the usual posture of supplicants; singing of hymns is decent in thanksgiving, because songs and music are fit attendants on praise and joy; and fasting is extremely proper for a solemn humiliation before God, for the begging pardon of our sins, and assistance in our difficulties, because it is a natural expression of sorrow, and is productive of humble thoughts in ourselves and devout ones towards God. And therefore we find that it has been the practice not only of the Churches of God, but even of the heathens themselves, to use solemn fasts upon extraordinary applications to Heaven, so that fasting is a part of worship prescribed by nature and by common sense of men. Public fasting should be attended with public demonstrations of seriousness, such as gravity in our discourse and behaviour, a ceasing from the business of our particular callings, abstaining from ornaments, recreations, and places of civil concourse, and spending the day in the public devotions of the Church and in the retirements of our closets. For though a private Christian may fast (as he may pray) without any of this pomp, and discharge the duty in his own breast, yet to make it public there is no other way but an outward solemnity; and a community cannot hold a fast but by such an appearance. In this the minds of men are more apt to be grave and serious when there is no appearance of jollity to divert them, they are drawn off from thoughts of worldly business and fixed on pious meditations, when they see their neighbours thronging to the temple, when there is no commerce in the shops nor hurry in the streets. Such a face of things shows that men are about the more serious business of another world. (*William Hayley, D.D.*)

Vers. 22, 23. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers.—*Ezra's confidence in God*.—I. CONFIDENCE IN GOD AVOWED. 1. In His providence. 2. In His providence as efficiently promoting the interests of His people. 3. In His providence as opposed to those who forsake Him. II. CONFIDENCE IN GOD TESTED. 1. By their need of guidance. 2. By their need of protection. III. CONFIDENCE IN GOD MAINTAINED. 1. In not seeking guidance and defence from the king. 2. In seeking guidance and defence from God. IV. CONFIDENCE IN GOD VINDICATED. 1. In their inward assurance. 2. In the outward result. (*William Jones.*) *Ezra and his times*.—I. EZRA'S LANGUAGE WAS IN STRIKING CONTRAST WITH THE GENERAL STATE OF OPINION AROUND HIM. He knew he was right, and could afford to be singular. At particular crises of public opinion it devolves upon some men to go into the land of the enemy, that they may bring truth out of captivity. Such men have no ultimate fear for truth; they know its vitality. Such men never change sides. The world wonders at their eccentricity, and recommends them to beg or borrow a band of soldiers and horsemen to assist them in their progress; but they are ashamed to think of such a thing. If they could make truth successful to-morrow they must do it with truth's weapons and her weapons only; but they cannot advance the liberation of truth by any unworthy means, or by any unnatural alliance. II. EZRA'S SITUATION AFFORDED HIM AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ASSERTING THIS GREAT PRINCIPLE UNDER VERY TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES. Christ's whole life illustrates Ezra's principle of confidence in God under circumstances of great temptation. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *Ezra an example in business*.—I. HIS HUMILIATION. II. HIS FAITH. III. HIS PRAYER. IV. HIS HOLY JEALOUSY. V. HIS SUCCESS. (*R. Cecil.*) *Heroic faith*.—Our text gives us a glimpse of high-toned faith, and a noble strain of feeling. Ezra knew that he had but to ask and have an escort from the king that would ensure their safety till they saw Jerusalem. It took some strength of principle to abstain from asking what it would have been so natural to ask, so easy to get, so comfortable to have. The symbolic phrase "the hand of our God," as expressive of the Divine protection, occurs with remarkable frequency in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and though not peculiar to them, is yet strikingly characteristic of them. It has a certain beauty and force of its own. The hand is, of course, the seat of active

power. It is on or over a man like some great shield held aloft above him, below which there is safe hiding. So that great hand bends itself over us, and we are secure beneath its hollow. As a child sometimes carries a tender-winged butterfly in the globe of its two hands, that the bloom on its wings may not be ruffled by its fluttering, so He carries our feeble, enamoured souls enclosed in the covert of His almighty hand. As a father may lay his own large muscular hand on his child's tiny fingers to help him, or as "Elisha put his hands on the king's hands," that the contact might strengthen him to shoot the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, so the hand of our God is upon us to impart power as well as protection; and "our bow abides in strength" when "the arms of our hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." That was Ezra's faith, and that should be ours. Note Ezra's sensitive shrinking from anything like inconsistency between his creed and his practice, and we may well learn this lesson—to be true to our professed principles; to beware of making our religion a matter of words; to live, when the time for putting them into practice comes, by the maxims which we have been forward to proclaim when there was no risk of applying them; and to try sometimes to look at our lives with the eyes of people who do not share our faith, that we may bring our actions up to the mark of what they expect of us. Especially in regard to this matter of trust in an unseen hand, and reliance on visible helps, we all need to be very rigid in our self-inspection. Faith in the good hand of God upon us for good should often lead to the abandonment, and always to the subordination, of material aids. Each man must settle for himself when abandonment or subordination is his duty. We ought to work into our lives the principle that the absolute surrender and forsaking of external helps and goods is sometimes essential to the preservation and due expression of reliance on God. What shall we say of people who profess that God is their portion and are as eager in the scramble for money as anybody? What kind of commentary will sharp-sighted, sharp-tongued observers have a right to make on us, whose creed is so unlike theirs, while our lives are identical? Do you believe that "the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him"? Then do you not think that racing after the prizes of this world, with flushed cheek and labouring breath, or longing, with a gnawing hunger of heart, for any earthly good, or lamenting over the removal of creaturely defences and joys, as if heaven were empty because some one's place here is, or as if God were dead because dear ones die, may well be a shame to us, and a taunt on the lips of our enemies? Note further that his faith not only impels him to the renunciation of the Babylonian guard, but to earnest supplication for the defence in which he is so confident. So for us the condition and preparation on and by which we are sheltered by that great hand is the faith that asks and the asking of faith. We make God responsible for our safety when we abandon other defence and commit ourselves to Him. He will accept the trust and set His guards about us. So our story ends with the triumphant vindication of this Quixotic faith: "The hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way; and we came to Jerusalem." The ventures of faith are ever rewarded. When we come to tell the completed story of our lives, we shall have to record the fulfilment of all God's promises, and the accomplishment of all our prayers that were built on these.

(A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Fear of inconsistency*.—I. EZRA'S CONVICTION. 1. He was convinced that there were some men who sought God, and others who forsook Him. There were some who sought—(1) The knowledge of God. (2) The favour of God. (3) The glory of God. But there were others who cared for none of these things. So it is still. There are some who read the Bible and listen to the gospel with an earnest desire to know God, and who feel that to have God for their friend is to have the business of life accomplished; while there are others who turn a deaf ear to the invitations of Divine love, and who never seriously ask regarding the requirements of the law of God. The conviction of Ezra is that of every thoughtful good man. There is also the further conviction that this is the grand distinction. He who thinks of one neighbour being a seeker of God, and another a forsaker of God, looks at a distinction of the soul, and one which will prove lasting and important as the soul itself. 2. Ezra was convinced that God's hand for good was on the one class, and that His power and wrath were against the other. (1) The Bible declares this in the plainest terms (Gen. xviii. 23–25, &c.). (2) This is illustrated by the history of the Jews and of others with whom they had to do. (3) This truth is as evident now as it was then. Sloth and intemperance and profligacy lead to ruin, while diligence and sobriety lead to respectability and competence.

3. Ezra was convinced that he and his companions were among those who sought God, and on whom God's hand was for good. He calls Jehovah "our Lord." His language was intended to convey that they were in a state of favour with God, and that they knew this. From this we learn that a man may assure himself of God's friendship. II. EZRA'S DECLARATION OF HIS CONVICTION. This declaration was probably made when he requested authority to make his proposed journey to Jerusalem. At such a time he would feel under peculiar obligation to declare his belief in God, and his hope that Jehovah was his own Father, Protector, and Guide. This obligation every good man ought to feel. Christ requires us to confess Him. Such a profession is made by the observance of outward and positive institutions. When a man calls his family around him, sings a song of praise, and reads a portion of Scripture, and presents an offering of supplication and thanksgiving, he is telling his children and neighbours that he is a disciple of Jesus Christ. When he engages in the exercises of public worship, and especially when he takes his place at the communion-table, he is making an open and decided declaration that he is a disciple of Jesus. III. EZRA'S ANXIETY LEST HE SHOULD DO ANYTHING INCONSISTENT WITH THIS DECLARATION. Two instructive points require to be looked at. 1. There was real and great danger. 2. The inconsistency from which he shrank was more apparent than real. A good man believes that God renews the face of the earth, and covers the valleys with corn, but he does not neglect to plough and sow; he believes that God is a refuge and a strength, a sun and a shield, yet he takes food when he is hungry and medicine when he is sick; he does not expect that God is to protect and bless him apart from such means as prudence and experience may dictate. If Ezra had asked for a guard of soldiers, the request would not have been inconsistent with confidence in the power and faithfulness of God, but it would probably have appeared so to the king and his nobles, and he feared lest in this way the character of God should suffer. Things which are in themselves lawful are at times inexpedient, and a Christian man by doing such things may greatly injure both his comfort and usefulness. A sacrifice of principle and a wise consideration of times and circumstances are very different things, and to confound them shows only ignorance and folly. (*J. B. Johnston, D.D.*) *The good hand of God*:—It is a glimpse into a spiritual history which our text here presents to us. Of Ezra himself we have but a vague and shadowy idea; he has long since passed to the realm where storms and struggles are ended, and the mystery of life gives place to the clear sunlight of God's love. But within that strong, devout soul a great struggle was once fought out. The anxious questioning of his troubled and perplexed spirit was real enough then. And while it is possible to miss the true lesson and to push the teaching to a dangerous extreme, it will, if we penetrate to the spirit of the story, supply an answer to a modern problem and a truth fruitful for our modern lives. Ezra sought to satisfy the old equation between the Divine power and the human agency. He put to himself the familiar question—Is the use of means any the less a trusting in God? may not the means fall within the compass of God's plan of deliverance? And the issue of the struggle was this: at every hazard he must stand right with God and with his own heart, and therefore he refused to resort to an arm of flesh at all. We appear to have here a plain and blank refusal to use means. Some would have said—"Surely we may trust in the good hand of God, and the soldiers of the king." But to Ezra's scrupulous faith it presented an alternative. One or the other but not both. One or the other he must elect to have. He refused, not only because of the nature of the instrument, but also because it was an instrument. He said in effect, "Both we and our enemies are in the hands of God; it is His work, therefore, and not ours, to secure our safety and our welfare." Let us not suppose that we have here a unique instance of complete trust in God. It was when Jacob saw no human way of escape, and God had showed him his utter helplessness, that he went forth with a calm face and a brave heart to meet his brother Esau. It was when the horsemen were hard upon the children of Israel that the Lord began to trouble the Egyptians. There is nothing grander in this Book than the calm tramp of Moses on through the wilderness, with no attempt at self-defence, only the simple assurance, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." Let me remind you of the boy who went to meet the mightiest of living warriors with a sling and a stone. Perhaps there were some who said, "Surely you can trust in God and put on the armour of Saul as well." But David felt that the armour was unnecessary if he had the shield of God's power. In all these examples we find a faith which rested in God and not in means of deliverance.

We may find it hard to understand Ezra, because our Christian character is often composed of one part of faith and ninety-nine parts of common sense, while his contained ninety-nine parts of faith and one part common sense. We trust in God, but feel safer if the mail-clad warriors are at our side; we know the twelve legions of angels are around us, but we are glad to feel the two swords concealed beneath our cloaks; we believe that the manna will fall day by day, yet we like to take bread with us lest it should fail to come. At the same time it is important to observe that it is the spirit of this incident we are to copy and not the form. As an instance of the rejection of means it is not an instance for all times and for all circumstances. Our Lord Himself taught us not to trust in God to do that which we may do for ourselves. The jars of water at Cana, the net cast into the sea, and the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, teach us that God will work through earthly instruments. But we maintain that failure oftener results from trusting in the means more than in God than from trusting in God and not in means. It is the deepest truth for the Christian worker that our churches, our ministrations, our methods, are but channels for the grace of God. We want not so much the eloquent tongue as the bended knee; not so much the crowded church as the crowded prayer meeting; not so much the beautiful temple as the glory of the Lord within. The great need now is not for better and more perfect machinery, but for a more consecrated spiritual life, and for a profounder trust in God, who can work with or without our machinery. It is, moreover, the secret of peace for the Christian life. But further, not only had Ezra the earnest longing to be right with God, but also to seem right. He was unwilling to put any stumbling-block in the way of the king. Though Artaxerxes might grant the request, might it not lessen his conception of the goodness and power of God? This age, which more than any other demands reality in its religion, demands the most careful seeming also. Tell men that we are pilgrims, and then let them see us making our habitations here; tell them that we are laying up the incorruptible riches, and then let them see us intent on the corruptible gain; tell them our confidence is in God, and then let them see us as hard in sorrow, as cynical in disappointment, as unbelieving in distress as themselves; tell them that we live for the unseen and the eternal, and then let them mark us caring for nothing we cannot see and clutch with our fingers; tell them that we confess a higher allegiance, and bow before a higher will, and then let them see us conforming our lives to their cold, worldly maxims, and we may say what we will, but they will treasure up our words as among the hollow falsities of a false creed. Let us be on our guard not to offend a watching world by the broad gulf between the spoken word and the visible life. (*J. H. Shakespeare, M.A.*)

*Faith and prudence* :—Ezra felt what Christian people still often feel, the conflict between prudence and faith. We observe—**I. THAT AS A GRAND RULE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE FAITH AND PRUDENCE MUST GO TOGETHER.** The Scriptures give no countenance to presumptuous reliance on supernatural intervention. As a rule of life they bind us to take all human precautions against the various forms of mischief we have reason to apprehend. In this unbelieving generation there is not much reason to speak against excessive faith, but there is some reason. The workman gave as his reason for not going to church, "That religious people were hypocrites because they called the temple God's house, and yet put upon it a lightning rod." This worldly workman could not see that God's Church ought to recognise God's law, and act agreeably thereto; but he thought that he saw a glaring contradiction in this union of prudence and piety. And some noble men in the Church sympathise with this workman, and reject the securities which prudence would counsel. They have no faith in the band of soldiers. They leave their property uninsured; in times of disturbance they will not claim the protection of the magistrate; and in times of sickness they will not call the physician. That is, to a large extent, a serious mistake. As a rule we are to accept the band of soldiers which Ezra, in peculiar circumstances, rejected. We must not rashly cast ourselves into peril on the idea that angels have charge concerning us. We must not tempt the Lord our God. If devout men do not attend to the dictates of prudence they must suffer for it; and not only so, but they injure Christianity likewise. The truth of religion is based on false issues, and thus brought into suspicion or contempt. As the rule of life we must march through the desert with the band of soldiers. Our religion is not fatalism. "The good man guideth his affairs with discretion." Yet there are times—**II. WHEN FAITH IN GOD MUST SUPERSEDE THE PROVISIONS OF ORDINARY PRUDENCE.** When faith and prudence gave different counsel, Ezra chose to walk by faith, and we must all feel that he did right. The question is: When



are we to go beyond merely prudential considerations and venture all on the unseen power of God? When are we justified in neglecting policy and appealing to the higher law? We are "shut up" to "faith" when—1. Prudential action would most probably be construed as a denial of the Divine government. Ezra had told the king that "the hand of God was upon all them for good who feared Him." And now he considered that to reveal any anxiety for a guard of soldiers would appear to the heathen king like a practical denial of the overshadowing providence of Jehovah. On this ground he elected to brave the perils of the wilderness without the military escort. A band of soldiers would have hidden the Shepherd of Israel, Artaxerxes alone would have been seen; and so Ezra, with a fine spiritual instinct, saw the hour for simple trust had come, and by declining the soldiers left open the full view of God and His gracious and glorious government. A line of action is marked here for ourselves. To remove the scruples of the few we are not to take the lightning conductors from our temples and essay similar reformatations; but we must seek so to act that we satisfy the world generally that we do believe in the Divine superintendence and care. A worldly man believes only in the band of soldiers; and to let him know that we believe in something beyond we must sometimes be willing to act without the soldiers altogether. Are we not too anxious about material helps and visible securities? Has not the Church, by clinging so feverishly to visible resources and helps and defenders, given some sanction to the world's unbelief? Ezra blushed to ask Artaxerxes for help that might seem a denial of the power and presence of God. Are we sufficiently sensitive on this matter? Trapp says, "It is the ingenuity of saints to study God's ends more than their own." And if we are very jealous for the honour of God, and seek to uphold His government in the eyes of the world, we shall sometimes be ready to imperil our personal interest and safety for His sake; and let us be assured that when we act in this lofty spirit of faith and self-forgetfulness, we shall not be confounded. When—2. Prudential action would cause us to lean on worldly associations and resources. Artaxerxes was an idolater, and Ezra was anxious not to ask too much at his hands. It seemed inconsistent to Ezra that he should be soliciting a band of pagan soldiers to protect God's people and the treasures of God's temple. Policy drove him to find assistance in a suspicious quarter, and so he retired to the higher ground of simple trust in God. Here again we have a line of action marked out for us. We are the confessed servants of the Holy One of Israel, and prudence must not lead us to worldly alliances and dependence upon sinful circles. In our personal life we must observe this. We must beware of compromises with the world for the sake of our personal safety and aggrandisement. And in regard to God's Church we must observe this. Policy would often direct us to expect great things from the greatness, wealth, or wisdom of unregenerate men for the Church's sake. So far from seeking their assistance, we ought to be shy of their gold and their patronage. Thus did Ezra. And thus acted Paul and Silas (Acts xvi. 16-19). When prudence would lead us to seek for much, either for ourselves or for the Church, at the hands of unbelieving men, we must pause and follow the path faith indicates. Let us dare anything, suffer anything, rather than compromise our own character and the character of God in the eyes of the world by linking our fortunes and the fortunes of the Church with those who are joined to idols. When—3. Prudential action might embarrass the progress of God's kingdom. If Artaxerxes had detected any inconsistency in Ezra he might have ceased to be favourable to his cause and have prevented or delayed the return to Jerusalem. Rather than endanger the popularity and progress of the cause of God, Ezra was prepared to run great risks. Here another line of action is marked out for us. If prudence would circumscribe, fetter, or destroy the work of God, the time has come to appeal to loftier considerations. Calculating, cautious piety would condemn the act of Ezra as imprudent; but many imprudent things have been done or there would not have been so much Christianity in the world as there is; and many more imprudent things will have to be done before Christianity fills the world. Let us remember that God's kingdom is a supernatural one, and in its promotion we must often act with a boldness which could not be justified in the court of prudence. There is a holy venturesomeness in evangelisation which carries with it a far higher guarantee of success than do the pondered schemes of a rationalising statesmanship. Thus, then, there are times when we must renounce the counsellings of worldly wisdom and, stepping boldly into the darkness, cry with Ezra, "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee." III. THE SEPARATION OF FAITH FROM PRUDENCE MUST BE EFFECTED ONLY IN THE SPIRIT OF SINCERE AND EARNEST DEPENDENCE UPON HEAVEN (ver. 23). No precipitancy, no levity, no

presumption. By fasting and prayer they obtained the assurance that God would honour their faith and preserve them. Not lightly must we discard ordinary defences and helps. When we can do no other we must humbly, solemnly rest ourselves in the hands of God. The times come to us all when faith and policy give contradictory counsel. When such times come let us not be found wanting to our profession and our God. In many circumstances simple trust in God will prove to be the truest policy. In Heb. xi. 7 Noah's conduct in preparing the ark is spoken of as "prudence." "By his believing obedience he came to be at last the one who was truly prudent. A truth of great practical importance. He who like a child blindly follows the will of God, regardless of all consequences, is the one who is truly prudent, for he builds on the Eternal, and He will never allow His own to come to shame."—*Ebrard*. And on the contrary, policy leading God's people to rest on worldly men and means and measures, finally demoralises and betrays them (Isa. xxxi. 3). (*W. L. Watkinson*.)

*Alliance with God*:—We are like William of Orange, with a few followers and an empty purse, making war against the master of half the world, with the mines of Peru for a treasury. But like William, too, when questioned concerning our resources, we can reply, "Before we took up this cause we entered into a close alliance with the King of Kings." Those on the Lord's side are on the winning side. He never has, and never will, lose a battle. (*David Gracey*.)

*God's protection*:—Pastor Oncken was forbidden by the burgomaster of Hamburg from holding religious meetings. "Do you see that little finger?" said the burgomaster; "as long as I can move that finger, so long will I put down the Baptists." "Yes," said Oncken, "I see your little finger, and I see also the great arm of God; and whilst that arm is lifted on our behalf, your little finger will have little terror for us."

*Want of faith in God manifested*:—Mr. G. J. Holyoake, in his "Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life," gives an interesting account of the Zulus who converted Bishop Colenso. Robert Ryder, a secular carpenter, was employed by the bishop to build his church and school-house in Natal. Ryder sent Mr. Holyoake several photographs of the actual Zulus who accomplished the conversion, long before the change was heard of in England. The Zulu workers under Ryder were conversed with by the bishop daily. They were remarkably shrewd in argument. They remarked upon the fact that the bishop had a room built in the rear of his church, in which he stored an eighteen-pounder. They knew what that cannon was for, and they thought that the bishop, fair-spoken as he was, did not place his ultimate reliance on the "God Father," in whom he told them to trust.

*Faith in God*:—A century ago William Carey entered Nottingham with the thought in his heart, from which he preached the following day in a sermon which really originated the Baptist Missionary Society: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." It was a very simple thing. It was very memorable. It was one of those inspirations that illumine as by a single flash the whole realm of thought. "Expect great things from God." Looking back over a hundred years, it was interesting to note upon what Carey based his expectations. Not on human resources, not on wealth, not on eloquence. Those few men who gathered together at Kettering had no worldly backing. They were obscure men in the extreme. With scarcely an exception they were quite unknown outside their own immediate neighbourhood. The wise and prudent in the Christian world doomed the enterprise to ignominious failure. With one exception, there was not a man of any mark in London who would have anything to do with it, and when a meeting was held to consider the advisability of forming an auxiliary, the idea was negated by an overwhelming majority. But Carey believed in God. Doubts, unlikelihoods, impossibilities, vanished from his mind. And what has been the result of this faith? During the last hundred years, wherever the missionary had gone God had given testimony to the word of His grace by signs and wonders as marvellous as miracle. As in no former age the world lay open, aye, and opened-minded to the Gospel. (*J. Culross*.)

*Fearlessness of the godly*:—"I go up alone," General Gordon wrote, as he started from Cairo to Khartoum, "with an Infinite Almighty God to direct and guide me; and I am so called to trust in Him as to fear nothing, and, indeed, to feel sure of success."

*A lesson of faith*:—I was passing one of the busiest spots in the City of London, opposite the Royal Exchange. Here numerous turnings meet, and pour their mighty burden of vehicular traffic in bewildering streams. As the cabs, carriages, carts and waggons hastened along I could not help thinking what need there was for care in crossing, and how dangerous at that busy hour a false step would be. With such thoughts, my attention was attracted by something that seemed entirely out of harmony with

the whole surroundings. Right in the midst of the danger, at a time when the traffic was most bewildering, I saw a woman crossing the street. She was pushing a perambulator, not eagerly or excitedly trying to reach the other side, but with perfect calmness, and apparently without fear. What was the explanation? A City policeman held her arm, and she relied upon him. And shall we not place the same confidence in our Guide, and though dangers and difficulties, and trials and temptations surround us, shall we not trust Him perfectly who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy? Shall we not disdain to fear, knowing that we are protected and sustained by the everlasting arm? (*Signal.*) *Luther's courage*:—Luther's words in the first struggles of his public ministry have the sacred anxiety, the solemn confidence, and almost the language, of the apostle: "I am compassed with no guards, but those of heaven. I live in the midst of enemies who have legal power to kill me every hour. But this is the way in which I comfort myself: I know that Christ is Lord of all; and that the Father hath put all things under His feet, among the rest, the wrath of the emperor and of all evil spirits. If it please Christ that I should be slain, let me die in His name. If it do not please Him, who shall slay me?" *Definition of faith*:—Phillips Brooks gave a definition of faith so true and helpful to sinners needing salvation, that I reproduce it. "Forsaking All, I Take Him." It will be noticed that the initial letters spell "Faith"; and what I want you to do to-night is to "forsake all and take Him." It would be a good thing if every one present were to write on the fly-leaf of their Bibles those beautiful words, "Forsaking all, I take Him." (*W. R. Bradlaugh.*) **The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him: but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him.**—*Contrasts*:—I. A contrast of HUMAN CHARACTER. II. A contrast of DIVINE TREATMENT. Conclusion—1. How solemnly man's destiny is in his own hands, or, more correctly, in his own choice. "Deeds are destiny; character is fate." 2. In this world character may be changed (*Hos. xiv. 1, 2, 4.*) (*William Jones.*) *Seeking the Lord, and its advantages*:—We are directed—I. TO SEEKING GOD AND ITS ADVANTAGES. 1. Seeking God denotes—(1) A consciousness of our need of Him. (2) Earnest and fervent prayer to Him (*ver. 23*). (3) Coming to Him in the way of His appointment. (4) To labour in all things to have His approbation. 2. The advantages to those who thus seek Him. "The hand of our God is upon all," &c. The hand of His—(1) Pardoning mercy. (2) Delivering power. (3) Providing goodness. (4) Heavenly guidance. (5) Sustaining grace. (6) Manifest providence. II. FORSAKING GOD AND ITS ATTENDANT EVILS. Learn—1. The value of true religion. 2. The awfulness of apostasy. 3. The necessity of both vigilance and perseverance (*Heb. iii. 12; iv. 10-13.*) (*Jabez Burns, D.D.*)

Vers. 24-30. **And weighed unto them the silver and the gold, and the vessels.**—*The guardianship of the sacred treasures*:—I. THE TREASURES TO BE GUARDED. 1. Valuable in themselves. 2. Valuable as being consecrated to God. 3. Valuable as being the spontaneous gifts of friends and well wishers. II. THE GUARDIANS OF THE TREASURES. III. THE CHARGE TO THE GUARDIANS OF THE TREASURES. IV. THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE TREASURES. Conclusion—1. Our subject speaks to ministers of the gospel (*1 Cor. iv. 1, 2; Titus i. 7, 9; 1 Tim. vi. 20; 2 Tim. i. 14*). 2. To all who have charge of public funds or the property of others. 3. To all men (*Matt. xxv. 14-30.*) (*William Jones.*) *The charge of the pilgrim priests*:—Without being unduly fanciful, I think I may venture to take these words as a type of the injunctions which are given to us Christian people, and to see in them a picturesque representation of the duties that devolve upon us in the course of our journey across the desert to the temple-home above. I. Consider: THE PRECIOUS TREASURE ENTRUSTED TO OUR KEEPING. 1. The treasure is first our own selves, with all that we are and may be under the humiliating and quickening influence of His grace and spirit. That which we carry with us—the infinite possibilities of these awful spirits of ours, the tremendous faculties which are given to every human soul, and which, like a candle plunged into oxygen, are meant to burn far more brightly under the stimulus of Christian faith and the possession of God's truth, are the rich deposit committed to our charge. The precious treasure of our own natures, our own hearts, our own understandings, wills, consciences, desires—keep these until they are weighed in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. 2. The treasure is next—This great word of salvation, once delivered to the saints, and to be handed on without diminution or alteration to the generations that are to

come. Possession involves responsibility always. The word of salvation is given to us. If we go tampering with it, by erroneous apprehension, by unfair usage, by failing to apply it to our own daily life, then it will fade and disappear from our grasp. It is given to us in order that we may keep it safe, and carry it high up across the desert as becomes the priests of the most high God. II. Next, THE COMMAND, THE GUARDIANSHIP THAT IS HERE SET FORTH. Watch ye and keep them. That is to say, watch in order that ye may keep. This involves—1. Unslumbering vigilance. 2. Lowly trust. 3. Punctilious purity. It was fitting that the priests should carry the things that belonged to the temple. No other hands but consecrated hands had a right to touch them. To none other guardianship but the guardianship of the possessors of a symbolic and ceremonial purity could the vessels of a symbolic and ceremonial worship be entrusted; and to none others but the possessors of real and spiritual holiness can the treasures of the true temple, of an inward and spiritual worship be entrusted, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord," said Isaiah long after. The only way to keep our treasure undiminished and untarnished, is to keep ourselves pure and clean. 4. Constant use of the treasure. Although the vessels borne through the desert by those priests were used for no service during the march, they weighed just the same when they got to the end as at the beginning. But if we do not use the vessels that are entrusted to our care they will not weigh the same. There never was an unused talent yet, but when it was taken out and put into the scales it was lighter than when it was committed to the keeping of the earth. Gifts that are used fructify. Capacities that are strained to the uttermost increase. Service strengthens the power of service; and just as the reward of work is more work, the way for making ourselves fit for bigger things is to do the things that are lying by us. The blacksmith's arm, the sailor's eye, the organs of any piece of handicraft, as we all know, are strengthened by exercise, and so it is in the higher region. III. THE WEIGHING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD. Though it cannot be that we shall meet the trial and the weighing of that day without many a flaw and much loss, yet we may hope that by His precious help and His pitying acceptance we may lay ourselves down in peace at last, saying, "I have kept the faith," and may be awakened by the word "Well done, good and faithful servant." (*A. Maclaran, D.D.*) From *Ahava to Jerusalem*:—This illustrates the pilgrimage of the Christian. I. THE SETTING OUT FROM AHAVA. 1. From captivity to liberty. 2. From exile to their ancestral home. 3. From the land of idolatry to the scene of true worship. II. THE PROGRESS ON THE JOURNEY. III. THE ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM. This was characterised by—1. Grateful rest. 2. Joyful welcome. (*William Jones.*)

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## CHAPTER IX.

**VERS. 1-4. Doing according to their abominations.**—*The good man's sorrow over the people's sin*:—Learn—1. Separation from the world is obligatory upon the true Christian. 2. Sin in others should be regarded by the true Christian with unfeigned sorrow and reprobation of the sin. 3. Sin in the avowed people of God is especially heinous and mournful. 4. It behoves Christians to give all diligence to walk holily and unblamably before God and before men (*Ibid.*)

**VERS. 5-15. And at the evening sacrifice I rose up from my heaviness.**—*Ezra's confession of the people's sin*:—We have here—I. DEEP PERSONAL SHAME AND SORROW ON ACCOUNT OF THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. II. HUMBLE CONFESSION OF THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. III. A SOLEMN ANTICIPATION OF THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE CONTINUANCE OF THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. 1. Continuance in sin would lead to their utter end as a community. 2. That such a consequence of the continuance of sin would be just (ver. 15). 3. That such a consequence of the continuance of sin was to be dreaded. Learn—1. The great evil of sin. 2. The grand hope of the sinner (*Psa. cxxx. 3, 4, 7; 1 John i. 9*). 3. The right relation of the good man to sin. (*Ibid.*) *Ezra's humiliation for the sins of the people*:—I. THE REASON OF HIS SORROW. He regarded their sin—1. As being a violation of an express command (vers. 10-12; *Deut. 2, 3*). 2. As having an evident tendency to bring the people back to idolatry. II. THE EXPRESSION OF HIS SORROW. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*)

And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God.—*Ezra's address*:—I. THE GRACE ISRAEL HAD EXPERIENCED. II. THE EXALTED POSITION TO WHICH THEY HAD BEEN RAISED. III. THE BLESSING CONNECTED WITH THESE PRIVILEGES. Let the subject be—1. A test of character. 2. An appeal as to our position. 3. A question as to our desires. 4. An exhortation. (*Jabez Burns, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. Now, therefore, give not your daughters unto their sons.—*Forbidden marriages*:—I. THEY ARE OPPOSED TO THE EXPRESS COMMAND OF GOD (2 Cor. vi. 14). II. THEY ARE INCONSISTENT WITH THE MOST SACRED ASPECTS AND ENDS OF MARRIAGE. III. THEY IMPERIL THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL. IV. THEY ARE INIMICAL TO WISE AND HARMONIOUS HOME GOVERNMENT. V. THEY ARE DETRIMENTAL TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE MARRIAGE. (*William Jones.*)

VERS. 13-14. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.—*The goodness of God and the aggravations of sin*:—We find in Scripture upon the most solemn occasions of humiliation that good men have always testified a thankful sense of the goodness of God to them. The greater and more lively sense we have of the goodness of God to us, the more we shall abhor ourselves, nothing being more apt to melt us to tears of repentance than the consideration of great and undeserved mercies vouchsafed to us. The goodness of God doth naturally lead to repentance. In the text we have—I. A CASE SUPPOSED, WHICH INVOLVES—1. That sin is the cause of all our sufferings. 2. That great sins have usually a proportionable punishment. 3. That all the punishments which God inflicts in this life do fall short of the demerit of our sins. 4. That God many times works very great deliverances for those who are very unworthy of them. 5. That we are but too apt, even after great judgments and after great mercies, to relapse into our former sins. 6. That it is good to take notice of the particular sins that have brought the judgments of God upon us. II. A SENTENCE AND DETERMINATION IN THE CASE—"Wouldst not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" This question implies a strong affirmative. 1. It is a fearful aggravation of sin after great judgments and great deliverances to return to sin, and especially to the same sins again. (1) To return to sin after great judgments is an argument of great obstinacy in evil. The longer Pharaoh resisted the judgments of God, the more was his wicked heart hardened, till at last he arrived at a monstrous degree of hardness. And we find that after God had threatened the people of Israel with several judgments, He tells them that if they "will not be reformed by all these things, He will punish them seven times more for their sins." What a sad complaint doth Isaiah make of the people of Israel growing worse for judgments (Isa. i. 4, 5; ix. 13; xxvi. 11). There is a particular brand set upon Ahaz because affliction made him worse (2 Chron. xxviii. 2). (2) When sin is committed after great mercies and deliverances vouchsafed to us is an argument of great ingratitude. This we find recorded as a heavy charge upon the people of Israel (Judg. viii. 34, 35). How severely doth Nathan reproach David on this account (2 Sam. xii. 7-9). And he was angry with Solomon for the same reason (1 Kings xi. 9). However we may slight the mercies of God, He keeps a strict account of them. It is noted as a blot of Hezekiah that "he returned not again according to the benefits done unto him." Ingratitude to God is so unnatural and monstrous that we find Him appealing against us for it to the inanimate creatures (Isa. i. 2). And then He goes on and upbraids them with the brute creatures as being more grateful to men than men are to God (Isa. i. 3; xxvi. 10). There is no greater evidence of an untractable disposition than not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercies, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle usage. Nay, God expects that His mercies should lay so great an obligation upon us that even a miracle should not tempt us to be unthankful (Deut. xiii. 1, 2). (3) To return to the same sins after great mercies and judgments is an argument of a perverse and incorrigible temper. With what resentment God speaks of the ill returns the children of Israel made to Him for the great mercy of their deliverance from Egypt (Judg. x. 11-14). Upon such an occasion well might the prophet say, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee and thy sins shall reprove thee," &c. (Jer. ii. 19). 2. To return to the same sins again after great judgments and deliverances is a sad presage of ruin to a people. (1) Because this doth ripen the sins of a nation (Gen. xv. 16). When neither the mercies nor the judgments of God

will bring us to repentance, we are then fit for destruction (Rom. ix. 22). (2) Because this incorrigible temper shows the case of such persons to be desperate and incurable (Isa. i. 5; Matt. xxiii. 37, 38). When God sees that all the means which He can use do prove ineffectual, He will then give over a people as physicians do their patients when they see that nature is spent and their case past remedy. When men will not be the better for the best means that Heaven can use, God will then leave them to reap the fruit of their own doings and abandon them to the demerit of their sin. (*Abp. Tillotson.*) *The great trespass*:—I. THAT JUDGMENTS ARE SENT AS THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN. 1. The unvarying testimony of Scripture is that transgression and punishment are closely united (Gen. ii. 17; vi. 13; xviii. 20, 21). Throughout the entire history of Israel this fact was continually brought out into distinct recognition. 2. The "great trespass" deplored in the text. When God gave the law against intermingling with the nations he said, "for they will turn away thy sons from following Me that they may serve other gods." The fatal counsel of Balaam to Belak was to seduce Israel into alliance with the Moabites. And it is recorded of Solomon, "when he was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods." Whatever, therefore, tended to lead them into idolatry was to be regarded as an evil of the deadliest character; and as nothing tended so powerfully to draw away their hearts as this forbidden affinity with the heathen, it might well be termed their "great trespass." II. THAT DIVINE JUDGMENTS ARE MINGLED WITH MERCY. Ezra's acknowledgment was also made by Nehemiah, "Nevertheless, for Thy great mercy's sake, Thou didst not utterly consume them; for Thou art a gracious and merciful God." In the same spirit of grateful humility Jeremiah says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." The Psalmist sings in a similar strain, "He hath not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Sinners live under a respite—their punishment is intended to alarm, not to crush them. III. THE DANGER OF DISREGARDING DIVINE JUDGMENTS. The history of the Jews is a dark narrative of mercies and ingratitude; exhortations and disobedience; warnings and neglect; judgments and impenitence; judicial blindness and total rejection. God's dealings with Israel were typical of His dealings with the Church at large and with its individual members. Religious privileges are sometimes long continued to a Church; but when it proves unfruitful, then is fulfilled—"The kingdom of God is taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." The Churches at Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea have perished. The Spirit strives long with the disobedient; but there is a time when He ceases. As Christians we are under obligations to renounce the world and all familiar intercourse with those whose character and conduct might prove a snare to beguile us into sin (2 Cor. vi. 14-17). In almost every similitude employed in the Scriptures to characterise the situation and deportment of believers, we find something bearing a pointed allusion to this matter. They are called a "little flock"; "brethren living together in the same family"; "a garden enclosed"; "a lily among thorns"; "hidden ones"; a peculiar people; "the light of the world" shining amid the surrounding darkness. The Christian is represented as a "soldier" enlisted under the banner of the "Captain of his salvation," and who obviously cannot discharge his duty if he consort with his Master's enemies. He is a pilgrim who has bidden adieu to all the friends and follies of his youth, and who has set out alone on his wilderness path. In all these figures the idea of separation from the world is clearly implied. Separation from the world is not the supercilious distance of the haughty Pharisee. Isaiah speaks of a people which say "stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou." But what is said of them? "These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burneth all the day." Neither is it a superstitious exclusion from society. The duties and business of active life must be attended to. The interchanges of civility and kindness must not be neglected. Our Lord and His apostles have left us an example in this matter. But there is a separation which, as the avowed friends of the Redeemer, we must maintain (Matt. x. 37, 38). We must come out of every society where our consistency may be compromised, where our character may be suspected, where our personal piety may be invaded, and our conscience blunted. (*David Arnott, D.D.*) *The voices of the soul in view of sin and of salvation from it*:—Under the influence of a great grief we have here the soul uttering two voices. I. THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE IN VIEW OF SIN. Conscience says—1. That man himself is responsible for his sins. "Our evil deeds and our great trespass." There is a strong tendency in man to charge his sins on others. (1) Sometimes on God Himself. (2) Sometimes on his fellow

human creatures, as Adam did (Gen. iii. 12). (3) Sometimes on the devil (Gen. iii. 13). But an awakened conscience says with emphasis, "Our evil deeds and our great trespass." Conscience speaks—2. Of the great evil of sin. Man is prone to make his sins look less than they really are. Conscience, like the Divine commandment, shows the "exceeding sinfulness of sin." Conscience says—3. That punishment is connected with sin. There is punishment connected with the transgression of every law of God, both in the natural and in the moral world. God has so made His laws that they punish every one that transgresseth them themselves. Punishment may also follow sin in the world to come without the direct interposition of God. Conscience says—4. That sin is not punished in this world according to its ill desert. This is accounted for—(1) Because this is a world in which good and evil exist. (2) Because there is more mercy than justice in this world. The scale is never level when there is more weight in one end than in the other. The cause of the lightning and thundering in the natural world is the loss of the equilibrium in the air. So in the moral world, we see it sometimes much disturbed, and that in consequence of there being more mercy here than justice. Justice in this life is like an eternal sea kept within its bounds with only a few streams running over its banks just to show that it exists, while mercy is like an eternal ocean deluging the world. II. THE VOICE OF WONDER IN VIEW OF GOD'S SALVATION FROM SIN. This wonder is caused by two things. 1. By the greatness of the deliverance. This is seen—(1) In its origin. (2) In the way in which it has been brought about. (3) In the vastness of the blessings which it brings to man. 2. By looking at the awful consequences of rejecting this salvation. Ezra is confounded here by thinking of the people's transgression and the awful consequences that would follow if they would not repent and seek forgiveness (ver. 14). "But what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (*Homilist.*) *A past reviewed, a future contemplated* (a thanksgiving sermon for the removal of cholera):—I. A PAST REVIEWED. We are reminded—1. That the distresses of a nation come upon them for their sins. Now on this point we must be careful to use nothing but the language of holy sobriety. We reason, indeed, neither wisely, nor safely, nor honourably to God, when we make every national calamity stand in some definite retributive relation to certain national sins. We have no data for establishing such a relation either in reason or in Scripture, or in the constituted order of moral government. Thus, if a country should lose its colonies through misrule or bad government, or if an army should be cut up through a general's inconsiderate rashness, or if our emigrant population should perish by hundreds through being sent out in vessels that were not seaworthy, or if a malaria should infect a neighbourhood where all sanitary precautions have been neglected, it were a manifest misuse of terms to call any one of these resulting evils by the name of a Divine judgment. They are the ordinary consequences of a broken law. Still, while it is neither safe nor Scriptural to interpret as direct Divine visitations what are manifestly only the immediate and perceived result of human misdoing, it is just as bad philosophy to disown the traces of God's hand in calamities where the efficient causes are more occult and indirect and far-removed and untraceable. This world is His world; we must not cast Him out of its management. The pestilence is His servant, not His vicegerent; the strict dispenser of His judgment, not the uncontrolled executioner of its own. Why, I could just as soon be an idolater as one of our modern worshippers of second causes; for, if the one bows the knee to Juggernaut, the other seems to build a temple to the plague. But we have not so learned the rod, or so misinterpreted its harsh but emphatic voice. If Providence does travel beyond its wonted cycles, if the Lord does come out of His place, we know what it is for; it is "to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." Our state is probationary, but God will have some smaller reckonings with us now. "All this came upon us," said Ezra, "for our evil deeds and for our great trespass." 2. When God visits a nation for their sins, He always mingles mercy with His chastisements. "Less than our iniquities deserve!" Why, what do they deserve? What do our murmurings, and crimes, and cruelties, and wicked blasphemies deserve? What do we deserve for the licentiousness of our pleasures, the covetousness of our gains, the stint measure of our charities, the worldliness of our homes? What do our rich men deserve for their pride, or our poor men for their profaneness? What do patriots deserve for their lukewarm love, or Christian rulers for enforcing a breach of the Divine commandments? Oh! in all this we see how far apart are offence and chastisement, the nation's sins and the nation's scourge. II. A POSSIBLE FUTURE. Two points are here insisted upon. 1. Sins

after warning are the worst sins. To go on committing the same sins after judgments and chastisements evinces an obstinacy in evil, a stoutness of heart, a baseness of ingratitude, and almost a defiance of God. A continuance in sin under such circumstances shows a man's spirit to be intractable. Alarm him with warnings, he will not be affected by them; load him with benefits, he will not be obliged by them. His heart is like an anvil, strokes only make it more hard.

2. Judgments after deliverance are the worst judgments. There is an awful expression used by the apostle, "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." When God has used all merciful expedients to no purpose—when judgments awake no terror, and deliverances inspire no gratitude—then He takes a final leave of us; we must reap the fruit of our own doings. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *Sorrowing for the sins of others*:—I propound two things: First, an indictment preferred by Ezra against Israel; secondly, his pleading it for God against themselves. In the first he remembers God's mercy and their rebellion. God's mercy is laid down in the thirteenth verse, and that three ways. First, he shows that they were not punished without cause; secondly, that God punished them less than they deserved; thirdly, that He had totally delivered them. Their rebellion is comprised in the fourteenth verse, in which there are two parts: first, the sin; secondly, the punishment. The sin is laid down, first generally, "Should we again break Thy commandments?" Secondly particularly, "and join in affinity with the people of these abominations?" Then follows the punishment. First, God will be angry; secondly, there is the degree of His anger, He will not leave consuming till all be destroyed. Before we handle the particulars there are two things in general. The first is out of the party, which was Ezra; the second is out of the course he takes, and that is humbling himself in God's presence. I. FOR THE PARTY, it is EZRA. Ye shall read in this book that he was a man that set his heart to seek the Lord; neither did he this only himself, but sought by all possible means to incite others to follow his godly example. Had all Israel been such as he, they needed not to have feared judgments coming upon them. Doctrine: Good men, though they be at peace with God, find cause of sorrow for other men's sins. Ye shall see this proved in the Scripture. The Spirit of God calls Lot a righteous man—yet this righteous man's soul was vexed from day to day with the unclean conversation of the Sodomites (2 Pet. ii. 8). The like we see in Moses (Exod. xxxii. 19). It was so with the prophet (1 Sam. xv. 35). The like we see in David (Psa. cxix. 136). May some man say, "What were the sins of the world to David?" It is true they were none of his, yet he thinks himself bound to grieve for them, because he knew they were displeasing to his Maker. We see the same in good Jeremiah (Jer. ix. 1, 2; xiii. 17). O blessed Saviour, Thou didst mourn for the hardness of men's hearts (Mark iii. 5; Luke xix. 41, 42). Use 1. It shall be to let us see the stupidity of the sons of Belial. Though they have most cause to weep and mourn, yet they live in jollity and merriment, and are mere strangers to all sadness. Some of these stick not to say, What hath any man to do to weep for their sins? and that by their impieties they trouble none but their own souls. But I tell thee, O wretch, thou troublest not only thine own house and soul, but thou troublest all Israel, thou givest the saints of God occasion to be pensive for that which makes thee jocant and glad; and happy is it for thee that there be such as Noah, Lot, Samuel, and David to mourn for thee; for were it not that some did mourn for thy profaneness, thou shouldst not live again to commit it. Use 2. This may answer a common objection which is put to the saints, because they be sad. I would have you know that it is not holiness which makes them sad, but the profaneness of the world (Psa. cix. 5). Use 3. Lastly, according to the practice of Ezra, though we have made our peace with God, let us mourn for the wickedness of others; every one knows what a cause there is for this. Religion is out of fashion, and none are so esteemed as fashion-mongers, they be your only men now in credit. First, it is piety to mourn for the sins of others. Shall we hear and see God to be dishonoured and not grieve for it? Piety cannot lodge in that breast where such an ill spirit inhabits. A man will and ought to grieve when his friend is wronged (John xv. 15). Secondly, pity requires this duty at our hands. I read of Marcellus, the Roman, that entering a city which he had gained by composition after a long siege, he burst forth into tears; one that stood beside him demanded why he wept. Saith he, "I cannot choose but weep to see so many thousand led into captivity." Shall a heathen weep for the captivity of men's bodies? and shall not Christians mourn for their sins which are enough to enthrall souls? Thirdly, if we do not mourn for other men's sins we make them our own.



Lastly, we should be moved to this duty by the blessing which attends it. What saith our blessed Saviour (Matt. v. 4)? And in Ezek. ix. 4 the Lord gives command to spare them in Jerusalem, that did "sigh and cry for the abominations done in the midst thereof." II. THE COURSE WHICH EZRA TAKES—and that is humbling himself by confession, weeping, and supplication. The main receipt in time of affliction is humiliation. This will appear in God's people (2 Chron. xx. 3; Eph. iv. 16; Jonah iii. 5; Jer. xiv. 20; Joel ii. 12). The people of God have done the same when the sword hath been amongst them; this we find in Josh. vii. 6. So likewise in the case of the whole Church (Hos. vi. 1). The grounds they went upon were these two: First, they knew it was God's commandment—that place in Zeph. ii. 1, 2, is notable to this purpose. Secondly, the saints were sure that sin was the cause of all their miseries; that being the Achan which troubled the whole host, and the Jonah endangering the whole ship. What shall we think of a number of desperate wretches in the world who, when they should be humbled under God's afflicting hand, sin more and more and more against Him? This was the sin of Ahaz (2 Chron. xxviii. 22; Isa. lvii. 17). We now descend to the particulars as they were laid down. We begin with the indictment preferred by Ezra against Israel, in which is remembered God's mercy and their rebellion. God's mercy is laid down in the thirteenth verse, and that three ways. First, he shows that they were not punished without cause; secondly, that God punished them less than they deserved; thirdly, that He had totally delivered them. First, for the first particular in the gradation of God's mercy, "Thou our God hast punished us"—that is, Thou hast punished us deservedly. Tyrants will and do punish men without cause; but the Judge of all the world never proceeds to punish but when He is provoked. In that Ezra saith, "Seeing that Thou our God hast punished us." Take notice in the first place of this observation. Whatsoever is the instrument, God is the author of the punishment (Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 6). In 1 Cor. xi. 32 St. Paul there labours to persuade the Corinthians that God chastened them; and David saith (Psa. xxxix. 9), "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." This may inform us what is the ground of all the impatience in the world. There be a number which repine when God's hand is upon them. What is the reason? They stick in the second causes, and look so much on the lower links of the chain, that they forget Him that hath the top of it in His hand. Secondly, here is a use of admonition. Ever look up to God in all thy afflictions. Look to Him in thy fever, in thy ague, in the plague. Lastly, when the Lord's hand is upon us, and that we would have it removed, the nearest way we can take is to have recourse to God by prayer. God doth never punish any without desert (Gen. xviii. 25). We should ever justify God in all the judgments He brings upon us. The saints of God have done this in all times; thus did David (Psa. cxix. 75). In the second place, seeing God punishes none without cause, let it teach us patience under His afflicting hand. Further, we may observe that Ezra speaks not only of sin in general, but of "a great trespass." What was it? It was the people mingling themselves with the heathen. The doctrine arising from hence is thus much. When God arises to judgment, He ever sets Himself against the foul sins of men. Wilt thou deal otherwise with God Almighty than with thy physician? When he comes to thee in thy sickness thou wilt conceal nothing from him, but tell him how it is with thee in every particular. And yet when thou comest to confess thy sins to thy God, thou concealest those capital sins which have most offended Him. (*Josiah Shute, B.D.*) *Divine cordials*:—We come now to the second amplification of God's mercy. Ezra had said that God had dealt mercifully with them. How proves he the mercy of God? He proves it thus, because that when He punished them it was less than they deserved. Here is one word joined with punishing, which I would have you take notice of, "Thou our God hast punished us." Herein he is a pattern to us when at any time we come to confess our sins before God. "Our God" intimates a strong relation and affection. Certainly, when he saith thus, he knew there was hope of God's being reconciled to them again, giving us thereby to understand what is required of men in the confession of sin. A man must not only, as David, "wash his couch with his tears" (Psa. vi. 6); nor with Peter, "go out and weep bitterly" (Matt. xxvi. 75); nor with the woman which was a sinner in the city, "wash Christ's feet with our tears" (Luke vii. 38); nor, secondly, must he only with a great deal of self shame confess his sin, as did Ezra in this chapter, and the poor publican (Luke xviii. 13). Thirdly, nor must he only confess his sins with anger, as did Job (Job xlii. 6) and Ephraim (Hos. xiv. 8). But, lastly, he must confess them with faith and confidence; that is, so to aggravate his sins before

God as not to let go his hold in God (Dan. ix. 9). Let the consideration of this teach us to take out this needful lesson. Some there be that confess their sins, but it is with despair; thus did Cain and Judas. But for ourselves, let us confess our sins with hope that God will pardon us, and with the servants of Benhadad let us address ourselves to Him, and say, "We have heard that Thou, who art the King of Israel, art a merciful King." Let us never despair. God may love and yet punish. I desire from my soul that people would be persuaded of this. I confess it is a hard saying, and men will hardly be drawn to believe it, especially when the affliction is smart. How often did Job think God his enemy when His hand was heavy upon him! So in David, all men knew that he loved his Absalom well, but yet when he turns rebel he must take up arms against him; yet, at the same time, he bids his men intreat the young man Absalom kindly. Now, can man punish and yet love? And shall not God do the same, who is fuller of mercy than the sea is of water? In the second place, it should teach every man to take heed of censuring any to be such as God hates, on whom God lays His afflicting hand. God doth not punish any of His so much as they deserve. Secondly, let us learn of our heavenly Father, to be merciful as He is merciful. The last amplification of God's mercy is, that He had delivered them—"Thou hast given us such a deliverance as this." Will some men say, "What deliverance was that?" It was the delivering of Israel from the Babylonish captivity, which lasted seventy years, and was a very great deliverance. There be certain deliverances which God bestows on men, for which they are to be more thankful than for others. It is true God is so great in the greatest that He is not little in the least, yet some are greater than others. Some of God's works are written in greater, some in smaller characters. It was not every deliverance which caused Hezekiah to pen a song, but it was God's adding a lease of fifteen years to his life when he thought himself past recovery. They were great deliverances that made the Jews keep their anniversaries, as the Feast of the Passover, of Tabernacles, and of Trumpets. Let me call upon you to reflect and to say with Ezra, "God hath given us such a deliverance as this." What a deliverance did God give unto us in this land at the entrance of good Queen Elizabeth of ever blessed memory, who restored true religion among us! As, therefore, at that time of need His mercy was great towards us, so let it appear in our lives that we are sensible of His extraordinary favour, by living holy and righteously all the days of our life. (*Ibid.*) **Should we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations.—No affinity with abominations:—I. OUR NATIONAL DUTY TO GOD.** This may be viewed in three lights. 1. Of moral and Christian obligation. 2. Of Scripture precedent. 3. Of prophetic promise. **II. THE ABOMINATIONS TO BE RENOUNCED.** Christian idolatry and the Papacy of Rome. 1. It is unbelieving. True faith is blotted out by a blind credulity. 2. It is idolatrous. 3. It is self-righteous. 4. It is persecuting. 5. In its whole practice it denies the Father and the Son. **III. THE KIND OF AFFINITY WHICH IS SINFUL AND FORBIDDEN.** It is one of sympathy, of partial adoption, and of the direct patronage of idolatrous error. **IV. THE AGGRAVATION OF OUR SIN BY FORMER MERCIES.** (*T. R. Birks, M.A.*) *Sorrow for sin followed by amendment of conduct:—*In this verse we may take knowledge how Ezra justifies God's severity upon the precedence of man's sin. The verse divides itself into two parts: First, the sin; secondly, the punishment. The sin is laid down: First, generally, "Shall we return to break Thy commandments?" Secondly, particularly, "And join in affinity with the people of these abominations?" Then follows the punishment: First, "God will be angry"; secondly, there is the degree of His anger, "He will not leave consuming till all be destroyed." We begin with the sin in general: "Should we return again to commit iniquities?"—which intimates to us that when God's hand was upon them it wrought them to amendment: from whence I note this much. That is sound repentance when a man so sorrows for his sin that he forsakes it. This lets us see the vanity of those who say they have repented of, and yet have not turned from their evil ways. It may be while God's hand was on them they repented. Secondly, as we say, we repent of our sins, so let us turn from them. This was the savoury counsel of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." It is possible for a man to turn from sin and yet be never the better, if he grieve not for it; and it is possible for a man to grieve for sin, and yet far enough from true repentance if he turn not from it. If any of us should have a servant that grieved for his offence, promising

no more to commit the like, and yet as soon as our back is turned should run into the same again, we would presently conclude that he did but dissemble. "Should we return to break Thy commandments?" The manner of Ezra's speaking intimates to us, that it is possible for a man to be engaged in sin when he hath had a taste of God's mercy; and if so, give me leave from hence to gather this observation. After the receipt of great mercies, God's children are apt to be engaged in great sins. See it made good in some instances. Was there ever a greater deliverance bestowed on any than that which the Lord afforded Noah, when he outrid that storm of the deluge in the ark, when all the world besides him and his were drowned? But soon after he forgot his great favour, and was overtaken with intemperance. So in the children of Israel, what a deliverance did God vouchsafe them when He freed them from Egyptian bondage! What may be the reason of this? First, it is from the corruption of our nature since the fall of Adam, which is so depraved thereby that we are apt to forget the mercy of God even then, when we have most cause to remember it. Secondly, it proceeds from the malice of the devil; for when he sees God to bestow great mercies on men, he then labours especially to engage them in transgression. And why so? That the mercies of God may be obscured by their unthankfulness. Let me persuade you, that as ye be sensible of God's mercies, so to watch over yourselves upon the receipt of them that ye may be thankful for them. And as the devil doth labour then to step in when God hath done men most good, so above all times labour at that time to be most thankful and obedient, that God may have His glory and you a sweet relish of His mercy. "Shall we break Thy commandments?" How shall we understand this "break Thy commandments"? How could it be otherwise? Doth any man live and not sin? And yet shall they for this be exposed to God's judgments? His meaning is, that if after so great mercy as God hath vouchsafed them they should fall into gross sins, then God should be just in punishing them. As therefore a man should avoid great sins, so also all lesser impieties. The heart of man should be against all sin, and he should have respect to all God's commandments, that if he chance to fall it may not be presumptuously, but by infirmity. "Shall we join in affinity with the people of these abominations?" Here I could observe how hateful the heathen and all their doings be unto God, as also how odious all gross sinners are in His pure eyes. In the Scripture ye shall find if the godly be compared to gold, the wicked are termed dross. Again, if the godly be termed sheep, the wicked are called goats; nay, in our text "they be abominable." So we may say of the wicked man, he be never so rich and honourable, if he be a gross sinner he is hateful to God. The Holy Ghost makes it a foul sin to join in affinity with the heathen; and, indeed, so it is, for God charges the contrary (Exod. xxiv. 15, 16). And ye shall find that God hath followed those with punishments that have joined themselves to heathens. Esau married strange wives, to the great grief of his father and mother, and he was made the more profane by it. The like we see in Solomon. It was so with Samson, he would needs have the daughter of a Philistine to wife; what followed upon it? she proved his bane. Make no league with gross sinners, for there is much danger in it. First, the danger of suspicion. Let a man be never so good, yet if he associate himself with those that be bad, he will be thought as bad as they; for what will men say? "Birds of a feather fly together." Secondly, he runs the hazard of infection. All the rivers of the world run into the sea, but yet they cannot sweeten it, but are made brackish by it. And a wicked man is ten times more apt to corrupt a good man than he is to be wrought on by the conversation of a good man. Thirdly, there is a danger of a curse by consorting with wicked men. For as many ill men fare the better for one man, thus the household of Potipher was blest for one Joseph; and all in the ship fared the better for Paul's presence. So many good men may sometimes fare the worse for one wicked person, thus for one Achan the whole host of Israel is discomfited. Besides, when a good man maintains inward familiarity with the wicked: First, he seems to approve and applaud their wickedness: secondly, it is a scandal to religion, and doth greatly prejudice weak Christians; thirdly, it is a great means to keep the wicked from repenting, for too much intimacy with them hardens them in their sin. We now come to the punishment: "Wouldst Thou not be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" First, here is God's anger in the first clause, "Wouldst Thou not be angry with us?" Secondly, we have the degree of His anger in the last words, "so that there should be no escaping." We begin with God's anger, "Wouldst Thou not be angry with us?" Out of this first clause I note two things for our instruction. The first is this:

great sins, after the receipt of great favours, are usually followed by great judgments. And wonder not at this, for it is a great dishonour to God that His favours should be slighted (Rom. ii. 4). The second observation arising from that clause, "Wouldst Thou not be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us?" is this: there be degrees of God's wrath; it rises by little and little till it consume. This is proved in Lev. xxvi. There we find that as men's sins increase, so God's plagues shall increase; and if they persist in sin, He will plague them seven times more and seven times more. So in Psa. lxxviii. 38. Thus the wrath of God rises higher and higher. Could Rehoboam make his little finger as heavy as his father's loins? and could Nebuchadnezzar make his oven seven times hotter than it was before? and shall not God increase His wrath? Yes, He can at pleasure. One meets with a great number who, if they have been freed from an ague of which they had four or five fits, they presently say with Agag, "The bitterness is past, and they shall no more have it." What thinkest thou? Is not God able to visit thee again? In the second place, whensoever God's hand is upon us, let us know that He could lay much more upon us if He would. (*Josiah Shute, B.D.*)

Ver. 15. O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous; for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before Thee because of this.—*Divine cordials*:—In this verse Ezra pleads guilty to the indictment, acknowledging God to be just, though He should renew His judgments afresh upon them. There be two things in it: First, his justifying God in these words, "O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous." Secondly, the reason which he gives for it: First, on God's part. He had used all possible means to bring them to reformation—"We remain yet escaped as at this day." Secondly, on their part. They were still in their trespasses; and therefore they were the fresh fuel of God's indignation. Before we come to these particulars, give me leave to speak a word or two of the style he gives God; he calls Him "Lord God of Israel." The title "Lord" signifies His greatness; "the God of Israel," His goodness. A fit preface for a prayer, for the word "Lord" is a term well befitting God. In the Holy Scripture He is said to be "strong in power, and wonderful in working." Let it comfort God's people: God is the Lord Almighty in power. What then shall be too hard for Him to perform with them? Lastly, it should teach us to stand in awe and not sin against God. So we come to the second, which is, that He is "the God of Israel." And if in the first He was the greatest, then in this He is the best. I know He is "the God of all the earth" (Psa. xxiv. 1); but more especially He is "the God of Israel." First, by a special and peculiar worship. To them above other people He revealed how He would be worshipped. Secondly, He is the God of Israel in regard to that special care He had of them. He was a wall of fire round about them to preserve them from their enemies. Thirdly, He is the God of Israel by a special reward which He hath promised them. He said to Abraham, "I am thy exceeding great reward." This that hath been said may assure God's children of His affection towards them. Secondly, methinks this should take off the edge of all persecutors. Is God the God of His people? and dare they touch that which is hallowed unto God? Will they meddle with the apple of His eye? Thirdly, methinks it should teach all persecutors and all wicked men to love the people of God. How are we affected with earthly things? If we know a man whom the king favours, how do we seek to get into his favour? We will do him any service to obtain it. And are not the saints of God His favourites? Lastly, is the Lord the God of Israel? Let Israel then behave themselves as God's people. What saith the Spirit of God in Deut. xxvi. 18; 1 Cor. vi. 20; Titus ii. 14? Now we come to the particulars in the text as we laid them down. First, for the justifying of God, "Thou art righteous." This hath been ever the practice of God's people; they have still confessed God to be just in what He hath brought upon them. Thus doth David (Psa. li. 4; cxix. 137). This lets us see how the world fails in this particular. When God lays His hand on men, how apt are they to dispute with God and say, Why doth He deal thus and thus with us? Who art thou, O man, that repliest to thy Maker? Secondly, let us always be persuaded of the justice of God in all His proceedings; for though we see not the reason why He doth this or that, yet there is good reason for it. We proceed now to the reason which he gives for justifying God: "For we remain yet escaped, as it is this day." As if he had said, "Thy goodness is demonstrate; ye that runs may read it." In general judgments which God brings upon the world, there are still some escaping. When God sent the deluge upon the world, Noah and

his family perished not. In the fiery shower which God rained on Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters perished not. What is the ground of this? First, all God's ways are interveined with mercy. Secondly, God still spares some to bring them to repentance, that they may turn out of the crooked into the straight path. Let me advise them that have tasted of God's mercy in this way never to forget it; and for this let me stir up my own soul to praise God with you. When my next neighbour was smitten dead, why was not I smitten also? It was only God's mercy. What a fearful judgment it is not to profit by afflictions. It is that for which God finds great fault with His people in Deut. xxix. 2, 3, 4. In the second place, let us labour to profit by affliction. The last clause is, "Neither can we stand before Thee, because of this." As if he had said, "We cannot come before Thee with any confidence while we be in our sins unrepented of." That man that comes before God in his sins without repentance cannot come with any confidence or hope of mercy. In Prov. xxviii. 13, mercy is promised to him that confesseth and forsaketh his sin; but wrath is pronounced against him that hideth them. (*Ibid.*)

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### CHAPTER X.

**VERS. 1-25. Now when Ezra had prayed.—Prayer and confession:—**The former chapter did set down the humiliation of Ezra; this demonstrates the fruit and effect that it produced. When the people saw that he was so affected and afflicted, and that not so much for his own sins as for the sins of the people, they take it to heart. And first, there is a very great assembly gathered together; secondly, they weep sore; thirdly, one particular person, Shechaniah by name, confesseth the sins of the people; fourthly, they conceive hope of remission; fifthly, they resolve to put away their strange wives; lastly, they put their late resolution into execution. That which gives occasion to all these is laid down in the first words of the chapter, which contains: First, the actions of Ezra, and they be two, "praying and weeping." Secondly, his manner of confessing, "he cast himself down before the house of the Lord." Upon this follows the coming together of a great assembly of men, women, and children. We begin with his actions, and first for his praying, "When Ezra had prayed." The commandment of God is for it (Psa. l. 15), "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." So in James v. 13, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." And as God commanded it, so His children have practised it. First, pray sensibly. Be sensible of what thou sufferest. God loves not that men should be as so many Stoics. Secondly, a man must pray as feelingly as fervently (Jam. v. 15). Thirdly, we must pray faithfully, that is, believing we shall receive what we implore God. Fourthly, we must pray constantly. First, we must aim at the glory of God in all the prayers we make. Secondly, a man must so pray to God that withal he use means to accomplish his desires. So much for Ezra's first act. The second act performed by him is his confession, the text saith, "When he had confessed." I desire you to practise this second act of Ezra. Do not only pray unto God, but likewise confess your sins unto Him. First, we must confess them with shame, thus did Job (Job xlii. 6). Secondly, we must do it ingeniously. It must not be extorted from us as it was from Achan, but we must willingly confess our iniquities. Thirdly, we must do it with sorrow and contrition of soul. Fourthly, with anger. Fifthly, with honest hearts; that is, with an assured purpose to leave our impieties. Lastly, we must confess our sins fully; there must be no retaining, excusing, or extenuating of sin. We come now to the manner of Ezra's confession, laid down in these words, "Weeping, and casting himself down before the house of the Lord." The first thing in it is his weeping, and this hath ever been a usual concomitant of prayer. See it in David (Psa. vi. 6). Mark, he made his prayer to God, and tears went along with it. First, because of the great good that sin deprives us of. We are apt to grieve for the loss of a father, a wife, or a child. And shall not we mourn for sin, which deprives us of the true God? Secondly, we have reason to weep for sin, because of the miseries which it brings on the sons of men. It should exhort us to weep and mourn for our sins. We spend tears in abundance for these secular things; but we should spare them there, and spend

them here. Is it not a foolery to wash a stable with sweet water? Thy tears be the sweetest water in the world, therefore spend them on thy sins; I am sure thou canst not spend them better. The second thing in the manner is, "He cast himself down before the house of the Lord." Where repentance is true inward, it will put itself outward. Those that find not this in themselves may suspect their repentance. "He cast himself down before the house of the Lord." Why so? It was the more to stir him up to humiliation. He seems to say, "What? shall Thy people enjoy the privileges of Thy house? And shall they thus irritate and provoke Thee?" (*Ibid.*)

*The influence of an eminent example*:—We come now to the firstfruit of Ezra's humiliation; and that is the convening of a great congregation to him. So that Ezra hath here the glory of being an example of goodness to others. It is to stir us all up to this holy pride, to be the first in good actions. He that did first invent printing, his name will be famous to the end of the world. So now, to be the first that believes in a town, to be the first that puts a good law in execution, to lay the first stone in a pious work, this is no small, but a very great honour. We say he is an ill horse that will not lead the way but only follow; and I will not give a button for that Christian that will do no more than he sees others do. How do ye in your affairs in the world? If a commodity come from beyond the seas of which you stand in need, do you stay till others bid money for it? No; but with all speed you get it into your own hands. And shall there be such a moderation in spiritual things? Further, as Ezra had the honour to be an example to others in goodness, so now see the effect of it, "A great company of men, women, and children assembled together." And why so? Doubtless for no other cause but to humble themselves as he had done. So efficacious and powerful is the example of goodness in great ones. It is said of Augustus that in his time Rome was full of scholars because he affected learning. In the time of Commodus it was full of fencers because he loved that exercise. And in Nero's time it was full of musicians, for he took great delight in music. All men compose their manners to his who is their governor. The truth is, the example of great ones is the loadstone which draws inferiors after it; that is the compass by which most men sail. In the second place, let it be a use to those who are eminent in the Church, such as Ezra was. Let them not only preach, but live well. Where the sin is general and epidemical, good reason that all should be joined together in humiliation. When we shall see that the sins of the times do overflow and be grown up to heaven, as at this time they are, it shall be fit, though a public humiliation be not prescribed by authority, to make our humiliation general by every man's sorrowing for his own sins. "Oh," say those in the city, "those of the court are so horribly wicked that we are all like to smart for their profaneness." And saith the court, "Such is the cheating of the citizens, that they will draw down judgments upon us all." Thus one accuses another; but in the meantime, who smites his hand on his breast and saith, "What have I done?" But mark the particular numeration which the Spirit of God makes, "men, women, children." First, men; and good reason men should lead the dance and go before the rest in a good way. Abraham went first out of his country, and Sarah followed him. I press it no further than thus: you that are men, I confess you have more honour put upon you than women have, and I know you are apt enough to arrogate as much to yourselves; but take heed that whilst you go before them in honour that they prevent you not in the best things. The second sort of people spoken of are women, and indeed the service of God is charged upon them as well as upon men, as in 1 Tim. ii. 10, 15; 1 Pet. iii. 4. Thirdly, "the children came." What? the children join in humiliation? Yes; why not? for God was offended, and they had reason to be humbled for it. The second thing set down in this verse is "that the people wept very sore." What was the reason? The reason shall be the observation. Great sins must have a great measure of sorrow. In *Psa. vi. 6*, David having committed great sins, "made his bed to swim, and watered his couch with his tears." "Sin must have sorrow at one time or another" (*Prov. xxix. 6*). (*Ibid.*) *Helping the minister*:—What comfort it pleaseth God to give his ministers here in that happy fruit of people's humiliation. So great is the comfort of this kind that there cannot be a greater. I do not think but at this very time the tears stood in Ezra's eyes; yet when he saw tears distill from the people's eyes it made him glad at the heart. Ministers know that if great persons be won to God they will win others by their example—so powerful is the example of great ones to inferiors. It should teach the ministers of the Word, like Ezra, to labour the conversion of great and eminent persons, and to do what they can to bring them to sorrow for their sins. How comfortable it is in good actions

to have an assistant. Is it not lamentable that men should get good business on foot and have none to join with them? It is a happy thing when the priest and magistrate, the word and the sword, go hand in hand together. There will be no reformation till the word of Ezra and the sword of Shechaniah go together. But now what is it which Shechaniah saith? He speaketh that in a few words, which Ezra had delivered more largely, "We have trespassed against our God." The penitent soul is more severe against itself than the most slanderous tongue in the world. But I pass by that and fall upon another observation, which naturally springs from Shechaniah's words, and it is this: Above all other griefs, this to a good soul is the chiefest, "that he hath offended God." (*Ibid.*) *Forgiveness for great sins*:—We descend now to another fruit of Ezra: his humiliation. Shechaniah confesseth the sin of the people, which was of the first magnitude; to wit, their joining themselves in marriage with heathens. Yet he despairs not of forgiveness from God, but saith, "Yet there is hope in Israel concerning this thing." From whence I ground this observation. The greatness of a sin, if there be repentance, is no impediment to the forgiveness of it. So saith Shechaniah. First, it may appear to be true by the charge that God gives men to repent (*Isa. i. 16*). The second reason is drawn from the examples of those great sinners on whom God hath showed mercy. The third reason is drawn from the attributes of God. (*Ibid.*) *Covenanting with God*:—Shechaniah is not only resolved to do as he saith, but he is willing to make a covenant with God, both in his own and the people's behalf. The true penitent is desirous to tie himself by all possible bonds to keep that which God commands. Mark it in some proofs. First, the child of God knows that the service of God is a matter of special consequence. He knows it is as much as the salvation of his soul, and therefore he conceives he cannot perform it too strictly. Secondly, there is a desire in God's child to show how willing he is to obey God. One meets with those which are afraid of these bonds. There be those that will not come to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper because, they say, it is a sacred thing; and if they come there they must enter into a solemn covenant with God. I cannot but mourn for this, that they are afraid to tie themselves to God. In the second place, let us ever be willing to be tied to God as close as may be. Yea, if we know any way in the world to tie ourselves faster to Him, let us put it in practice. Now we are to examine the matter of this covenant. First, it was "to put away their strange wives." Beyond doubt this to flesh and blood was a hard and grievous thing. When the soul is truly penitent, whatsoever it be that is pleasing to a man, if it displease God he will forego it. It serves to stir us up to this hard task. I call it a hard task because a man will be content to part with many sins rather than he will leave his beloved corruption. As it is in flaying a skin of a dead body, it comes off with ease till ye come to the dead, but there it sticks and comes not off without difficulty. Come to the covetous man, and he will easily be persuaded to avoid prodigality. Here you shall find him as tractable as may be, but yet all that you can say or do shall not work upon him to forsake his covetousness. Secondly, they put away the children born of them. What was the cause of this? Carthusian gives the reason, and it is a very good one, which will yield us the ground of an observation. Saith he, "They cast out the children with their mothers, lest the wives having left their children behind them should take occasion to return again to fetch them. He that would avoid sin must make conscience of avoiding all the occasions of sin. For proof hereof see that place (*Gen. xxxix. 10*). Joseph was so resolute in goodness that he not only repels his mistress her unlawful request; but, saith the text, "Though she spake to him day by day, yet he hearkened not unto her to lie with her or to be with her." First, if it be a sin that a man hath repented of before, then he must be so much the more careful to avoid not only the sin itself, but all occasions tending to it. Secondly, if it be an evil that a man was never engaged in before, yet he must avoid the occasion, for there is great need that our prayers strengthen our works, and that our works give vigour to our prayers. Nothing is truer than that proverb, "Occasion makes a thief." If therefore we desire to overcome our lusts, let us avoid all the occasions of sin, which are as so many pandars waiting upon it. As for example, thou art an excessive person, and wouldest conquer that sin. First, get a hatred to this sin; secondly, avoid all occasions which tend this way: sit not long at wine, and beware of idleness and ill company. Thou art a contentious person, and desirest strength against that sin. Take heed of heat in holding arguments with others. Well, when Shechaniah and the rest had done this, what rule will they then walk by? "According to the counsel of my lord." Now, if it were so that Shechaniah, who

was a prince, thus said Ezra the priest, take knowledge, then, of this much : what respect in times past was given to those whom God called to serve Him, as to be His priests ! It is to be deplored in these days, when every base fellow thinks himself better than the minister. (*Ibid.*) *Trembling at the Word of God* :—It should seem that there were others besides Ezra which advised the people to put away their strange wives, and they such as are said to tremble at the Word of God. And here observe the power of God's Word. The power of God's Word is such that it makes men tremble. To prove this look at Jer. xxiii. 29. Let us labour for this holy disposition of soul to tremble at God's Word. A man that hath been exercised with the terrors of God, such a man is most fit to advise and counsel others. A man that knows a country by the map may be able to speak something of it, but it is nothing in comparison of what a traveller can say which hath been there. So a man that hath never felt the terrors of God may be able in part to advise and comfort those in such distresses ; but not like him that hath been exercised with the same terror. Let it teach those that be teachers of others to lay things to their own hearts, and to make trial of them there before they prescribe them to others. Wilt thou teach the people how to conquer such a lust ? Hast thou made trial of it thyself ? But I go another way, and think that by those who trembled at God's Word is meant such as had not been engaged in that common abomination of marrying strange wives ; and if so, I cannot but note this much : When the times are most wicked God reserves some to Himself. Secondly, let us labour to keep ourselves from the corruptions of the times. When all others do that which is evil, do it not then. And that thou mayest do so, remember these things : First, David makes it a blessed thing not to walk in the way of sinners (Psa. i. 1). Secondly, the purity of a man's religion stands in this, "to keep himself unspotted of the world" (Jas. i. 27). Thirdly, remember for what end Christ died. He gave Himself for our sins, "that He might deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. i. 4). Fourthly, I would have a man to consider what a glory it is to God when he is good amidst a froward generation, to be as fish which retains its freshness in the salt sea. Fifthly, mark what a confusion it is to Satan when a man goes on in a good way where most men go wrong. Lastly, if we sort ourselves with the sinners of the time we hinder the conversion of the world. Whereas, when a man shall shun such a wicked man's company, he will begin to say with himself, "Surely such a man sees something amiss in me, which makes him refrain my society." And by this means he may be reclaimed. The fear of God is the restraint of all sin. This is proved sufficiently (Prov. xvi. 6). That man is most fit to advise others who is not engaged in the same transgression. The hand that must wash a thing clean, except it be clean will add to its pollution. (*Ibid.*) *The reformation proposed* :—I. THE IMPRESSION WHICH EZRA'S CONDITION AND CONDUCT BY REASON OF THEIR SIN PRODUCED UPON THE PEOPLE WAS—1. Sympathetic. 2. Deep. II. THE PROPOSAL OF REFORMATION MADE. III. THE PROPOSAL OF REFORMATION ACCEPTED. Learn—1. The manifestation of intense feeling is sometimes commendable, and very influential for good. 2. A deep feeling of the guilt of sin is a strong encouragement to hope for forgiveness, amendment, &c. (ver. 2). 3. That repentance only is genuine which leads to restitution and reformation (ver. 3). 4. It is of the utmost importance to translate religious feeling into corresponding action without delay. 5. Great leaders may receive valuable aid from even their humblest followers. 6. It is sometimes wise to fortify good resolutions by a solemn covenant with God, or by a serious pledge to men. (*William Jones.*) *Arise ; for this matter belongeth unto thee : we also will be with thee.*—*True loyalty* :—True loyalty is marked—1. BY GENUINE RESPECT. In the commonwealth of Israel at that moment there was great need of reform. The people had not long returned from captivity. They were powerless and few. Yet the very evil which had previously occasioned their captivity had begun to reappear. Steps had been taken which if not retraced would certainly bring that evil about. Many in high places—some of the speaker's own relatives—were in fault (ver. 26). The matter therefore was pressing. He felt it so. He desired reform very earnestly ; he recommended it very strongly (vers. 2, 3). Yet he would not take it upon him to be the first to move in this matter. He would not set aside those whose office it was to do this. "Arise ; for this matter belongeth unto thee." You see exactly the state of his mind. Notwithstanding the depth of his zeal and convictions, he would sooner do nothing than be disrespectful to Ezra. No change, in his judgment, would be proper reform that should set proper authority on one side. II. BY SINCERE SYMPATHY. This is shown here in the words that come next : "We will also be with thee : be of good courage and do it."



It is possible to defer to authority in a cold and unfriendly spirit, to leave too much on the hands of our rulers, and to fail in taking our proper share of odium in supporting them and their measures. If we wish to be truly loyal we are bound to encourage them openly in their righteous efforts. We are bound also to promise them our support and assistance. We may apply these lessons—1. To the laws of our land. Except where religious principle is in question, these should be the laws of our lives. It is the object of the "criminal classes" to try to evade them. It should be the object of God-fearing persons to try and observe them. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's" (Matt. xxii. 21; Rom. xiii. 1, 2, 7). All this should be regarded by us as part of our duty towards God. This also should be applied by us carefully to all the points it embraces; e.g., our income-tax returns; our action towards contraband trade; our respect for the administrators of justice; our support of its officers, and so on. A bad citizen will never make a good Christian. 2. To the laws and officers of our Church. Ezra was acting here ecclesiastically as much as politically; of the two, perhaps, rather more so. In all things in regard to which a Church hath power to ordain, in all matters where its ministers have a right to be consulted, let us not only acquiesce, but encourage; not only encourage, but support. The English word "leader" signifies both a commander and a guide. Therefore never be many steps behind your Leader; never be one step in front. (*W. S. Lewis, M.A.*) *Pastor and Church*:—Three general remarks—I. THAT THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER IS THE CHIEF INSTRUMENT IN THE MORAL RENOVATION OF SOCIETY. Four things show this. 1. He is originally endowed with powers which specially qualify him for his work. 2. He has been educated for his high vocation. 3. He has more time than others for such an end. 4. It is to the Christian minister that the world looks for moral and spiritual help. II. THAT THE TRUE CHURCH GLADLY CO-OPERATES WITH THE MINISTER IN HIS NOBLE AIM. The Church can co-operate with him—1. By showing him practical sympathy. 2. By working out his plans. 3. By praying for him. III. THAT THE CO-OPERATION OF THE CHURCH IS A SOURCE OF JOY AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE MINISTER. 1. Co-operation is indicative of the spiritual health of the Church. 2. It shows that the Church appreciates the minister's exertions. 3. Co-operation is a necessary condition of success. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 9. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin.—*A great and troubled assembly*:—The text teaches—I. THAT IT IS THE TENDENCY OF SIN TO PRODUCE SORROW AND CONSTERNATION OF SOUL. There is a scorpion sin in remembered guilt when outward troubles and inward fears meet together (Gen. xlii. 21). II. THAT GOD MARKS WITH PECULIAR INTEREST THE TIME IN WHICH REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE BEGINS IN THE SOUL. III. THAT REPENTANCE WHEN IT IS REAL WILL BRING FORTH ITS APPROPRIATE FRUITS. IV. THAT THE NAMES AND PERSONS OF GENUINE PENITENTS ARE FOR EVER PRECIOUS TO GOD AND RECORDED IN HIS BOOK. (*Samuel Thodey.*)

Vers. 13-17. But the people are many.—*The reformation effected*:—I. NOTWITHSTANDING DIFFICULTIES. 1. The greatness of the undertaking. 2. The inclemency of the weather. Learn: To eradicate sin is a task of the greatest difficulty. II. NOTWITHSTANDING OPPOSITION (ver. 15). In effecting any great reformation opposition is to be expected. III. WITH EXEMPLARY WISDOM AND FAIRNESS. 1. By the proper authorities. 2. With competent and reliable witnesses. 3. In the presence of the accused. 4. With due regard for the convenience of the people. 5. With careful inquiry. Learn: The importance of combining prudence of method with earnestness of purpose in carrying out great reformations. IV. THOROUGHLY. Learn: The importance of making an end of sin when we are battling with it. (*William Jones.*) *Postponed reparations*:—These people, called upon to do justice, to confess, to go and begin a new life, said, "Certainly: only let the rain get over, and you will find us pious enough; in the meantime we cannot turn the heathen wives out of doors." How pitiable, how conspicuously human! They said in effect, "We cannot go out in the rain to settle this matter—'we are not able to stand without'—we are without shelter, protection, and thou seest how the rain is coming down in cataracts: we are not trifling with the covenant, we respect it in every syllable and every letter, and it shall certainly all be carried out: but let the weather clear up!" Treacherous conscience, treacherous reason! How can a man go over a muddy road to repair an injustice he has done! Let the scavenger come first, let the highway be clean for his dainty feet; then when all is dry as summer dust, and

that summer dust has been well laid by watering-cart, my lord will cross the road. But my lord is too late. The life on which the injustice was inflicted is dead. How full is the heart of these postponed reparations! How much we are going to do when the clouds break and the sun comes back again! When the commercial sun returns cloudlessly, then we will pay up our arrears and discharge our obligations; we shall then be able to go out with some comfort, and then we shall return in the evening with a new song and a secret joy. You will not do so. If you cannot face the weather, you cannot face a grand moral obligation. You are paltering with yourselves, you are killing your conscience. Every day's delay means disqualification for the thing that is to be done. Send away the evil though it should be drenched with rain! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Delay is unwise in moral reformation*:—The longer you keep a sin in your heart the more it gets hold of you; its fangs are getting deeper and deeper. Thus men would deal with all manner of problems, whether they be personal problems, or social problems, or imperial questions. Men are very anxious not to make vital reforms speedily. They do not want to guillotine their crimes. Let those crimes be slowly poisoned; let our sins die a lingering death. The drunkard says he is going to reform, but if you were to take away the intoxicating poison from him all at once he would go mad. He is going to slope his way gradually down into sobriety; he is going to drink himself into teetotalism. "This thing," saith he, "cannot be done in a day or two; why be unreasonable about it?" It is very wonderful what our prison discipline does in this matter. A man is caught in the very act of intoxication, and for six months he sees no more of intoxicating drink, and yet he does not go mad. What can be said to such poor innocents as Judah and Benjamin and Israel when they say, "We have taken a covenant, and we are going to do all that we have confessed and promised; only the weather is so atrociously bad and the great problem is so complicated and far-stretching that it cannot be done in a day or two"? There are thousands of people involved in this same thing, who say, "Give us time!" Not an hour should be given. The reformation should be begun now. There are some things you cannot make right little by little. In the first instance you should make the covenant so binding that you will not touch the evil thing again, and then you must little by little work your way into greater and greater strength. No wise teacher will contend that the strength will come in sufficient adequateness all at once: but the step first taken must be positive and irreversible; then the after-progress may be wisely slow. (*Ibid.*) *And it is a time of much rain.*—*A time of much rain*:—The rain to which the text refers fell, it is supposed, in December, the coldest and most rainy month in Palestine. It came at an important juncture, when work requiring fine weather had to be done. Ezra has arrived in Jerusalem. He has come full of patriotism, clothed with authority, with vast treasures for the temple from the Persian court. He has come fired with zeal for the honour of God, determined to do his utmost for the restoration of city, temple, and reformation of life. He soon learns that the people need something more important than gold and silver, or a magnificent ritualism. Their morals had been corrupted through their marriage alliances with the heathen. A convocation was summoned, when it was resolved that there should be a dissolution of all marriage relations that were contrary to the law of the land; but so heavy was the rain that fell, that the people trembled for fear, as though the judgment of a second flood had broken in upon them on account of their sins. Israel could not forget that rain; nor will the rain of the present year (1880, a year of much rain) be easily forgotten. Many are looking at it in the light of science, some in the light of agriculture, others are looking at it in the light of commerce, but let us look at it in the light of Revelation. There is a Divine meaning in all things. Every drop of rain is full of God's purpose. I. A TIME OF MUCH RAIN TEACHES US OUR DEPENDENCE. 1. It shows us there can be no harvests unless God permit. The farmer may plough and sow, his land may be most fertile, the seed of the best kind, cultivation perfect; but if God forbid His sun from shining, and command the clouds to pour down an over-abundance of rain, day by day, for months, the hopes of harvest will be blasted. 2. A time of great rain reminds us that our commerce is at the Divine disposal. A bad harvest cannot fail to lessen the wealth of a country and seriously affect its merchandise. 3. A time of much rain shows our dependence in many ways. You need change of air, and set out on a journey, but the benefit you seek depends on the weather which God will give; or you resolve to go to a distant town for the transaction of important business, you appoint the hour when you will be there to meet a person concerned in the transaction. But if it please God that at that very

time there shall be much rain, your friend may fail to come, your plans may miscarry, your health may suffer, and your life may be imperilled through the inclemency of the weather. "Go to now, ye that say," &c. The law of dependence is stamped on all things. Every atom is dependent on atom, man on man, nation on nation, world on world, and all are dependent on God. 4. This time of much rain makes us feel, as Englishmen, that we are exceedingly dependent on other nations. What a dismal future would be before England to-day if she could not draw supplies of corn from foreign markets. II. THAT A TIME OF MUCH RAIN IS VERY TRYING. 1. To patience. Have we stood the trial? Have we murmured? Have we said, "This is not right? A season so wet is not what we want; it is not what we have a right to expect." If so, we have forgotten that the spiritual life requires trial. A flower may come to perfection in one summer, but the tree that is to bear fruit requires not only the summer's sun, but the rain and storms of many a winter. 2. To faith. It tried the faith of the Hebrews in the time of Ezra. It led to a temporary loss of faith in the goodness of God, for they trembled, thinking that the rain was a sign of His displeasure. But the faith of some people seems to be tried in relation to the Divine justice as well as goodness. Nay, they are tempted to question the very existence of God and to regard the world as an orphan, abandoned to fate or stern law. They see the great machine of nature, but see not the personality that lives behind and through the whole. What a reproof does the wise economy of nature under which rain descends minister to such unbelief. But for the water that rises from the sea in clouds, and falls in showers on the earth, vegetable, animal, and human life could not exist. It is wisely ordained that in an island like ours, that is becoming so thickly populated and the large towns of which require at times more than an ordinary cleansing, that the average fall of rain should be maintained, not year by year, but by the overplus of one period making up for the deficiency of another. Sir Charles Lyell was on the continent when he said to a gentleman sitting next to him at table: "I fear the rains have been doing a great deal of mischief." "I should think," replied his companion, "they were much needed to replenish the springs after this year of drought." "I immediately felt," says Sir Charles Lyell, "I had made an idle and thoughtless speech." III. THAT A TIME OF MUCH RAIN SHOULD LEAD TO PRAYER. Whatever some may say against the propriety of prayer for temporal blessings, there is in human nature an instinct that bids it ask for the Divine interposition in all seasons of distress. Surely prayer in relation to rain is as reasonable to-day as when Elijah prayed that there might be no rain; "and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months." (*F. Fox Thomas.*) *A wet harvest*:—It has been with us a time of much rain. And yet the present occasion suggests— I. THANKFULNESS. We are here to thank God, and we do well. If we cannot thank God for giving us a harvest at all, we are unworthy of being called His sons. What we ought to ask ourselves is this: When times were good and the seasons good, how did we show our gratitude? Did we show it by our lives? For if we only show it by eating or drinking more or in rude merry-making we can hardly wonder that we should not always be likewise blessed. Are there not some of us always ready to complain, seldom ready to give thanks? like the farmer in Cheshire that two boys went to see. The season had been particularly good. "I wonder what he'll find to complain of now," they said as they passed along. "Well, farmer," they cried out, "you have had a capital season." The farmer's brow clouded as he pointed indignantly to a little patch of beans. "Look at those beans," he said. Some of you are ready to complain of the swollen rivers, the sheets of water in the fields, the damaged crops, and the deluged gardens. But I would ask you to remember what we have escaped as well as what we have suffered. Only a few weeks ago men were trembling at the approach of the cholera, but through mercy we have escaped it. If we cannot thank God for His mercy we are unworthy of the Christian name. II. AMENDMENT. What were the people about in the days of Ezra when they trembled for the great rain? They were about to set their houses in order to have done with the ways of sin. The time of careless sin was to give place to the day of Reformation. If it could only be the same with some soul in this church to-night! The harvest brings you to think of the day when God shall look over His fields, and gather the good grain into His barns and cast the bad away. These bad years and these floods of rain will not be wasted on you if they shall turn your thoughts from the good things of earth to the better things of heaven—if habits of careless sensuality give place to the fear of God. (*W. R. Hutton, M.A.*) Neither is this a work of one day or two.—*Perseverance*:—I take this word as a

motto of encouragement to all beginning or baffled by the hardships of the Christian life. I. PERSEVERANCE IS THE SECRET OF EVERY SUCCESSFUL LIFE AND WORK. Walk through the streets of our city. Who are its prosperous men? Many who began in a low estate, all their wealth then but two willing hands, a clear head, a determined will. How has the change come about? Perseverance has done it. They have reached their position by no sudden flight. They plodded on. Rung by rung they crept up the ladder. Step by step they climbed the mountain. Difficulties have been wrestled with and beaten down. It has been hard work. Not a work of one day or two. This is universal. Look at men nationally eminent. Almost without exception what they became was owing to their own determined effort. Men are what, God helping them, they make themselves. But the journey to success in commerce, literature, the arts, the sciences, is a long one. A long journey from the first saved shilling to the millionaire's wealth; from the rude chalk profile to the famous painting on the walls of the Academy; from the first experiments to the marvellous discoveries of a Faraday; from the boy's halting verse to the "poem round and perfect as a star." The heights of prosperity are not reached at a bound. Over the clerks' desks in the office of a prosperous Christian merchant were written in prominent letters the words—a key to his own success—"Try again!" By trying again, and again, and again, men touch the top of their ambition. But "neither is this a work of one day or two." What a history of heroism is written in the turbulent pages of the great book of the deep! Think of Columbus. How splendid his day-dream of lands in the unknown West. But how difficulty after difficulty shut him in from the ocean he desired to adventure. Native Genoa was deaf to him. Venice refused to help him. The Court of Portugal deceived him. Spain at last befriended his request. And then, when out on the vast and unknown waters, his vessel rang with the cries of mutiny. But the stout heart quailed not. And, at length, the cry of "Land! land!" announced a New World given to the Old. And in our own day one of the greatest triumphs of perseverance has united by sensitive and communicating wire that New World with the Old. And was that salutary work easily accomplished? Hear the words of Cyrus Field, the captain of this bloodless and blessed victory: "It has been a long and hard struggle. Nearly thirteen years of anxious watching and ceaseless toil. Often has my heart been ready to sink. Many times when wandering in the forests of Newfoundland in the pelting rain or on the deck of ships on dark, stormy nights, alone, far from home, I have almost accused myself of madness and folly to sacrifice the peace of my family and all the hopes of life for what might prove, after all, but a dream. I have seen my companions one after another fall by my side, and feared I too might not live to see the end. And yet one hope has led me on, and I have prayed that I might not taste of death till this work was accomplished. That prayer is answered; and now beyond all acknowledgments to men is the feeling of gratitude to Almighty God." A vast and beneficent success, and "neither was that a work of one day or two." So with all great and philanthropic movements. They have sprung from a feeble beginning. They have become incarnate in some determined man. Slowly have friends gathered to his side. Obstacles have impeded them. Misrepresentations have assailed them. Still on the little band has gone. So moved John Howard in his effort to cleanse and reform prisons and prisoners. So moved Clarkson and others in their efforts to secure emancipation for every English-owned slave. So have moved Livesey and others in their effort to make England a sober land. But we must say in view of the huge obstructions and tests of philanthropic patience, "neither is this a work of one day or two." II. PERSEVERANCE IS THE NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND PROSPERITY. If perseverance is needed for secular interests and temporary prosperity, who can complain if it is also needed for spiritual and eternal blessing. Evil ways have to be broken off, and that is not an easy thing. Habit in sin is tyrannic. We cannot drop a habit as we change an old garment for a new, discarding the old at once and for ever. The guilt of sin may be pardoned, but something still of its power survives. Has a man been accustomed to vice? Though a new creature, he must prayerfully and resolutely watch lest in unguarded moment he fall to the old life. Has the habit been profanity? How well must the lips be watched lest unconsciously the sinful words break forth. Has the habit been inebriety? How well the reclaimed must avoid scenes and associations with their alluring and pitiless spell, and the very beginning of the cup whose dregs are death. Has the habit been profligacy? How well must the eyes be watched lest through Eye Gate the soul be stormed and the rescued soul be

dragged down once more into "the horrible pit." And if the sin has been secret and of the soul, all the more need of vigilance. To break from sin to holiness is not an easy thing. It is possible, though difficult. Possible, "though not a work of one day or two." Who among the Bible saints were without sin? Their piety grew. Take the case of Jacob. He is an unlovely, self-seeking man when he first comes into history. But even then he had that faith by which the heart is purified. Through many years the contest went on between the baser and nobler elements of his nature. To be all that the saint ought was not easy to Jacob, but he kept on trying. And when we see him in the sunset of life before Pharaoh, on his death-bed, blessing his children, we see a man so unlike the Jacob that deceived Isaac that we scarcely know him for the same. "But that was not a work of one day or two." You have perhaps in your eye some Christian man or Christian woman that you desire to be like. You say, "If now, I could be so pure, so holy, so gentle, so useful as that one or that, then I should be happy. Well, remember that they to whom perhaps you look as spiritual models have had many years and many trials to fashion them to what they are. Then take heart about yourself. Sad indeed if you were quite content with yourself; but despair not. Paul said, "I have learnt in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." With his circumstances, though often hard and bitter, he had learnt to be content. But with himself, never. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." "But this is not a work of one day or two." Character is formed, as life is filled, with little things. Some of you may have a future of distinguished eminence in usefulness, but for the majority life will have a common cast. If we are to do any good we must utilise as they come, common occurrences and opportunities. If we are to be holy it must be in the lowly valley seen by few. And if our character is to be moulded by circumstances, it must be by trivial-seeming ones, by events that, light as gentlest chisel-touch on the marble face brings out the perfect beauty of expression that lives in the sculptor's soul! By serving God in little things we shall become liker to Him. And if He is not served in the little He will not be in the greater. Look at any man. If he is not kinder for his religion, more considerate of others, their comfort and feelings, more industrious at toil, more courteous, more patient under trial, more happy in the joy of others and more sorrowful in their sorrow, then his religion is vain. Are these small things? They are witnesses to the greatest of all—the man's renewal. By little acts we are forming habits and shaping character. "Little strokes made that ark which saved Noah." The good work is a much hindered work. We have proclivities to evil. The very spirituality of religion is a vital element of difficulty. Then how many hindrances from without? With such hindrances time is a necessity to progress. We are called to perfection. We are to be holy as Christ is holy. There is a work to be wrought in us. A work of one day or two? A work for eternity? Think of the encouragements to perseverance. Christ prays for us. He saves us from sin. He breaks its power. He marks our steps and rejoices in our progress. He loves us to the end. Because He prays, "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities" in every time of need. And because He pleads heaven will be yours at last. (*G. T. Coster.*) *Character improvement takes time*:—The masterpieces of literature were not produced in a few weeks, nay, nor a few years. Their authors displayed an almost infinite patience before they were finished. Comparatively few authors have such patience to-day, and hence the multitude of ephemeral works. Who in these days would seriously attempt such buildings as the Pyramids? Works that last cannot be put together or run up in a few hours. A whole crop of mushrooms will spring up in a night; oaks take centuries to come to perfection. (*Christian Weekly.*) *Persistence required in moral reformations*:—Virtue is not a mushroom that springeth up of itself in one night, when we are asleep or regard it not; but a delicate plant that groweth slowly and tenderly, needing much pains to cultivate it, much time to guard it, much time to mature it. Neither is vice a spirit that will be conjured away with a charm, slain by a single blow, or dispatched by one stab. Who, then, will be so foolish as to leave the eradicating of vice and the planting in of virtue into its place for a few years or weeks? Yet he who procrastinates his repentance and amendment grossly does so with his eyes open, he abridges the time allotted for the longest and most important work he has to perform; he is a fool. (*I. Barrow.*)

Vers. 18-44. And among the sons of the priests there were found that had

taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua.—*The list of offenders*:—For what purpose is this catalogue of names inserted here? I. AS A WARNING AGAINST SIN. This catalogue shows us—1. Sin extending to all classes. 2. Sin injuring the reputation. 3. Sin corrupting the influence. II. AS AN EXAMPLE OF GENUINE REPENTANCE. 1. They confessed their sin with sorrow. 2. They offered sacrifice on account of the sin. 3. They forsook the sin. III. AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO GENUINE REPENTANCE. 1. Their sin was forgiven (Ezek. xxxiii. 14–16). 2. The Divine favour was vouchsafed. (*William Jones*.)

A ram of the flock for the ram! That ram is always being killed, and cannot understand the reason why. A ram cannot save you. You might kill all the flocks that browse on the hill and still your sin would stain the centre of your heart and the palm of your hand. There are some things for which you cannot make up. There are some actions which lie beyond apology. There are some deeds which almost go beyond the large boundary of penitence. Some of us have been in danger of sinning ourselves beyond God's mercy. Beware of every method of getting out of moral obligation and moral penalty by cheap ways, by expiations that cost you nothing. Every man must have a true expiation, but the true expiation includes the offering of himself as well as the offering of the priest and the victim. It is so in the case of the Christ. He tasted death for every man; He bore my sins in His own body on the tree; yet I must be crucified with Christ. There is the difference between the true expiation and the false. The true expiation involves self-immolation; it involves fellowship with the sufferings of Christ that we may be made partakers of His resurrection. Christ being crucified for us is an aggravation of our sin if we be not crucified with Christ. Thus there is absolute loneliness in the priesthood of Christ, and thus there is a mysterious fellowship with that loneliness. There is a work which none but Christ could do, and there is a complete work which the poorest, meanest sinner has to do. The sinner does not offer Christ; if he did so that would be what we mean by a cheap or poor expiation. Christ was not offered by man; by man Christ was murdered; by God Christ was offered. Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The Christian expiation is not a buying off or a calculated substitution: the expiation of Christ means that we are to enter into it, in a sense share the agony. The offering is all God's, the substitution is all divine; but man is called upon to enter mystically, spiritually, and really into the offering of Christ and to be offered as it were with Christ—the sinner and the Saviour united in one sublime sacrifice. Do not imagine that you can buy yourself off by offering a ram. Do not suppose that you can make up for your sin by doubling your pew rent. Do not imagine that you can be forgiven every outrage against reason, justice, and conscience by doling out something superfluous from your own table to the hunger of the needy. Expiation touches the soul with agony, or it is a worthless offering. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.**

**NEHEMIAH.**





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OR

Anecdotes, Similes, Emblems, Illustrations;  
Expository, Scientific, Geographical, His-  
torical, and Homiletic, Gathered from  
a Wide Range of Home and Foreign  
Literature, on the Verses of the Bible

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, A. M.

*NEHEMIAH*



NEW YORK

CHICAGO

TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

Publishers of Evangelical Literature



## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

THE modern critics are probably right in their conclusion that Ezra and Nehemiah were compiled from memoranda of those two persons, who were Tirshathas, *i.e.*, governors under the Persian kings, and other contemporary historical documents. But their conclusion does no more than confirm the previous opinion on the subject. It is evident that certain sections of the Book of Nehemiah are the personal work of Nehemiah, and if we could think of him as keeping a diary, we should say there were selected pages from his diary. But it is also certain that the literary genius of the compiler of Chronicles and Ezra is strongly marked in the other sections of Nehemiah and in the general setting and arrangement of the whole work. The very retention of the first person in the extracts which he selects is an evidence of the work of this compiler. We may therefore reasonably assume that, while some of the material was the work of Nehemiah, the book, as we have it, shows the editing of Ezra, and was designed by him to form a historical supplement to his larger work.

Thirteen years after the arrival in Jerusalem of the party from Babylon that was led by Ezra, Nehemiah appeared at Jerusalem. On the whole, it seems most probable that Ezra was not in Jerusalem at the time, but returned soon afterwards. Nehemiah came with the authority of Tirshatha, and with a definite purpose, which he judged it prudent to keep secret for a time. The first six chapters contain an account of the circumstances which led to his visiting Jerusalem; the scheme by which he came to know the condition of the city wall, his successful plan for restoring the wall; the resistance he met with, and the skilful way in which he outwitted, and overcame, the national enemies. The seventh chapter is a genealogy after the manner of Ezra, and the materials for it, we can hardly doubt, were furnished by him. From the eighth chapter Ezra is associated with Nehemiah, and the influence of Ezra is especially marked in the chapters from the eighth to the end. There are signs of his characteristic priestly interest, and his fondness for genealogical tables. The point of view in Nehemiah is clearly the same as that we have recognised in Chronicles and Ezra.

THE DATE OF THE WORK, so far as collecting and putting together the sections is concerned, must be the later years of Ezra's life; but the re-editing which put the book into its present form may be dated at least a century later.

We meet with the same difficulty here that we had to consider when dealing with the genealogy from David in the Books of Chronicles. Some names in these genealogical lists come down to a period long posterior to Nehemiah. Jaddua, for instance, was high-priest at least a century later than Nehemiah. But the explanation previously given will apply with equal force to this difficulty.

PERSONAL HISTORY OF NEHEMIAH.—Very little is known of the personal history of Nehemiah, but a very fair estimate of his character may be formed from the

pages of his diary which have been preserved. His office, as cup-bearer at the Persian Court, was an honourable one, and he was evidently held in confidence and esteem by the king. He must have been in a position of wealth and influence. "He was a man of profound piety, connecting everything, great or small, with the will of God." But the interjectional prayers which habitually occur in his diary indicate a somewhat weak self-consciousness. The truly noble man does right in simple loyalty and love, and does not think about its being accepted and rewarded. This indicates the weak side of an otherwise strong and vigorous individuality. "His prudence was equally marked; and there is no better example of dependence on God, united with practical forethought. He was disinterested and unselfish, and there is not the slightest reference to self apart from the common good. . . . He always appeals to the judgment of a merciful God, and that appeal avails against much hard modern criticism which dwells on his alleged asperity, self-confidence, and self-assertion." (*W. B. Pope, D.D.*)

Dean Stanley says: "There is a pathetic cry, again and again repeated throughout this rare autobiographical sketch, hardly found elsewhere in the Hebrew records, which shows the current of his thoughts, as though at every turn he feared that those self-denying, self-forgetting labours might pass away, that his countrymen of the future might be as ungrateful as his countrymen of the present. 'Think upon me, my God, for good.'"

G. Rawlinson writes: "It has been said that in the character of Nehemiah it is almost impossible to detect a single fault. But this praise is a little exaggerated. Nehemiah's nature was strongly emotional, and he did not always control his emotions sufficiently. His 'fiery soul' was sometimes 'roused to burning frenzy.' In these fits of passion, he forgot the calmness and dignified behaviour which befits a governor. He may 'do well to be angry,' but he does ill to be vindictive. And he is a little too self-satisfied and self-complacent. He contrasts with somewhat too evident self-approval his own conduct in his government with that of former governors. And there is a tinge of Pharisaism in some of his prayers."

**CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.**—The Book of Nehemiah may be roughly divided into three sections. I. Chaps. i.–vii., comprising the narrative of Nehemiah's appointment to office, his rebuilding, in spite of opposition, the walls of Jerusalem, and his purpose of bringing the people to an orderly settlement. II. Chaps. viii.–x. contain an account of certain religious solemnities. III. Chaps. xi.–xiii. are made up of various lists, appointments, and settlements, with a recital of some acts of Nehemiah's administration on resuming his post. (*Ayre.*)

Nehemiah's first administration at Jerusalem lasted twelve years. Then he returned to the Persian Court. After some years, variously estimated from five to nine years, he was permitted to resume his office at Jerusalem, and endeavour to redress the abuses which had grown up during his absence. It is probable that he spent the remainder of his life at Jerusalem, but of his death and burial no record has been preserved. Beyond the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, to which Nehemiah's own narrative leads us, we have no account of Nehemiah whatever.

# THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

## NEHEMIAH.

### CHAPTER I.

**VERS. 1-11. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.**—*The royal cup-bearer*:—I. LET US NOTICE THE WORDS ALLUDED TO BY NEHEMIAH. They were as follows: "And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year," &c. 1. You observe that the time and the place of this conversation are given. It was at Shushan or Susa, the winter residence of the King of Persia. 2. There are places and periods that stand out more prominently than others in the history of most of us. "It came to pass in the month Chisleu," &c. 3. The particular matter referred to was a conversation he had with a kinsman of his, and with other co-religionists lately come from Palestine, respecting the state of the Jews there, "and concerning Jerusalem." Nehemiah was not indifferent to his country's condition. It was a twofold question that he put. (1) He wanted to know how it had fared with the Hebrews—"the delivered ones," "the escaped ones." (2) The other aspect of the question here put by Nehemiah has reference to Jerusalem. An exiled Londoner or Parisian's love for London or Paris would not, we may be sure, be deeper, stronger than that which Nehemiah must have had for the promised land, and for "the city, the place of his fathers' sepulchres." As was to be expected, he asked for information "concerning Jerusalem." It has been well said, "No place is so strong, no building so grand, no wall so firm, that sin cannot undermine and overthrow it." Let no man trust in ceremonies, or sacred houses, or sacred traditions, so long as his heart is far from God, and his life is not in accord with His righteous creed. II. LET US NOTICE THE EMOTION OF NEHEMIAH ON HEARING THE TIDINGS ALLUDED TO. "I sat down and wept," he says, "and mourned certain days, and fasted." He also adds, "and prayed before the God of heaven." He wept. Nor was it weak or unmanly for him to do so. "His was the tear most sacred shed for others' pain." To weep at trifles, or at fictitious sorrows, may be effeminate; but 'twas no trifle, no imaginary sorrow, that now drew tears from Nehemiah. 1. His grief was further manifested by lamentation and fasting. 2. It was a profound grief which seized him. 3. It was a somewhat prolonged as well as profound grief. It lasted, at any rate, certain days. 4. It was a patriot's grief. 5. Again, it was a penitent grief. 6. Nehemiah's grief reminds us of another and yet more touching spectacle, the tears which Jesus shed over Jerusalem. "And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it," &c. III. In the third place, LET US LOOK AT THE PRAYER WHICH NEHEMIAH WAS THUS PROMPTED TO OFFER. Let us learn that the province of prayer is not restricted to things spiritual. It embraces the affairs of everyday life, and all lawful undertakings great and small. (*T. Rowson.*) *The typical patriot*:—Nehemiah the civilian, as contrasted with Ezra the ecclesiastic, is brought before us in this book as the patriot deliverer of his people. I. The typical patriot is PURELY DISINTERESTED IN PRINCIPLE. Personal ambition is sunk in desire for public good. Selfish motives are abandoned for generous impulses. 1. This does not prevent his rising to a position of honour even in an alien country. A good man is valued anywhere. Fidelity to convictions ever commands respect apart from the merit of the convictions themselves. Honour from an alien chief can only be allowed to the true patriot conditionally—(1) That no vital principle is sacrificed. Nehemiah

evidently remained true to his nation and loyal to his God. (2) That it is made subservient to the interests of his people. At Shushan Nehemiah was really serving them better than he could do at Jerusalem until summoned there by Divine Providence. He was learning the principles of government at the centre of the most powerful government in the world. He had immediate access to the monarch himself. 2. He is always ready to surrender personal honour for his people's good—(1) If by so doing he can be of more service to his brethren. Self-sacrifice is the grand test of all pretension. (2) If personal honour be associated with his people's oppression. Learn—1. By obedience we make the most stubborn laws of nature our servants. 2. By patience foes may be transformed into friends. 3. By the discipline of adversity the foundations of prosperity are laid. II. The typical patriot IS LARGE-HEARTED IN HIS SYMPATHIES. 1. He manifests a real interest in the condition of his country (ver. 2). The words imply—(1) That Nehemiah was not a passive listener to the rehearsal of his people's affliction. (2) That he entered into particulars and was most minute in his inquiries. They who have no intention of practical sympathy are careful to elicit no tales of sorrow. 2. He takes upon himself the burden of his country's woes (ver. 4). III. The typical patriot RECOGNISES A DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN HUMAN AFFAIRS. 1. By accepting the existence and authority of the King of kings. Not only as—(1) A dogma, but also as—(2) A regulative principle. "O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God." 2. By regarding Divine aid as superior to all other. (1) As the most powerful that can be obtained. (2) As controlling all other aid. Nehemiah seeks Divine assistance in urging his suit in his approaching interview with the king—(a) That he may reach the monarch's will by the most accessible channel. (b) That he may approach him at the most accessible moment. (c) That he may urge his request in the most prevalent form. 3. By regarding Divine aid as available through prayer. Nehemiah's prayer is one of the model prayers of the Bible, as—(1) Reverent in its attitude towards God (ver. 5). (2) Persistent in pressing its suit (ver. 6). (3) Penitent in its tone and temper (vers. 6, 7). (4) Scriptural in its argument (vers. 8, 9). (5) Childlike in its spirit (vers. 10, 11). (6) Definite in its aim (ver. 11). Learn—1. Nehemiah is a type of Him who "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor," &c. 2. Intercessory prayer is the inspiration and the evidence of true patriotism. 3. Divine interposition is the safest to invoke in national crises. (W. H. Booth.) *The pious patriot*:—He was willing, moreover, to make no little sacrifice in the cause of patriotism. Even in asking the king for leave of absence on such a mission, he was probably risking the royal displeasure. No one could well predict how an Oriental despot would be likely to regard such a request. All might depend on the whim or caprice of the moment. That Nehemiah should wish to exchange Susa for Jerusalem—that he should desire to quit, even for a time, the sunlight of the royal presence which was condescending to shine upon him—might possibly be viewed as an insult. The very fact that he was a favourite might only increase the royal irritation. A tyrant likes his pets to appreciate their privileges; and Nehemiah, by asking for leave of absence, might only lose the royal favour and be deposed from his office. Then, again, even if his request should be granted, he would have to sacrifice for a time all the luxury and ease of his present position; he would have to subject himself to toil and danger; he would have to face the arduous journey between Susa and Jerusalem; and then, after arriving in the city of his fathers, he would have to confront the hostility of the surrounding tribes, and might even have to exchange the courtier's robes for the soldier's armour. But all these sacrifices Nehemiah was prepared to make in the cause of patriotism. His court life had not enervated his spirit. An intelligent and manly piety does not destroy or despise any of the natural affections. There is, indeed, a "pietism" which makes light of the ties of home and kindred, which disparages patriotism, as if it were inconsistent with the universal love inspired by the gospel, or which even ventures to taboo politics as a worldly region which a spiritual man ought rather to avoid. Let us beware of this false spirituality. The world of natural human relationships is God's world, and not the devil's; and if the devil has intruded into it, there is all the more need that it should be occupied by the earnest soldiers of God. Pietism may say, "Never mind the condition of the walls of Jerusalem: souls are the grand concern." But, in point of fact, the condition of walls may sometimes affect the condition of souls. Things external often stand in subtle relation to things spiritual. The body influences the mind; and the outward conditions of national existence may stand in the closest connection with the religious life of a people. Besides, it is natural that we should love our own country with a special

affection; and a true religion does not destroy but consecrates all natural attachments. On the other hand, there are many politicians who are no patriots, and there is also a patriotism in which there is no godliness. There are men who take the keenest interest in politics merely because it furnishes an arena for the exercise of their faculties, the display of their talents, and the furtherance of their ambitions. And there are also true patriots—real lovers of their country—who yet never recognise the hand of God in national history, who never think of praying to God in connection with their plans, or of submitting their political projects and methods to the test of His will. Now, if a man's patriotism is his only religion, this is doubtless better than that his "god" should be his "belly," and that he should "glory in his shame." But still, this patriotism in which there is no regard for God is fraught with danger. For the grand and prime demand on every one of us is that we be the servants of the Most High, the soldiers of Christ, the loyal subjects of the Divine kingdom. And then it is our bounden duty to serve God in and through all our natural pursuits, affections, and relationships, and, amongst other things, to bring all our political theories, aims, and methods into the light of Christ and of His Spirit. We want, both in the Church and in the commonwealth, men and women in whom, as in Nehemiah of old, piety and patriotism are blended and intertwined. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *Divine purposes working through providence:—*

**I. HERE IS EMINENT PIETY IN A MOST UNLIKELY PLACE (ver. 1).** 1. Palaces are not generally favourable to piety—(1) Because unrestrained liberty usually degenerates into license and lavish luxury into licentiousness. Court morals are proverbially corrupt. (2) Because religion does not flourish amidst human pomp and the outward symbols of pride. A palace is, above all others, a theatre of human exaltation and proud display. (3) Because the commands of a sovereign are liable to clash with the mandates of Jehovah. 2. Piety is not impossible even in a palace—(1) Inasmuch as God will protect them who honour Him. If God has placed His servant in the palace to do His work, He will keep him there until the work is done. (2) Inasmuch as many eminent examples are recorded in Scripture. Not only Nehemiah, but Moses, Joseph, Obadiah, and Daniel. Learn—1. Eminent piety does not depend upon the accidentals of a man's social position. 2. Exalted positions are less desirable than they appear. 3. The most desirable station in life is that in which we can serve God to the best advantage. **II. HERE IS AN EVENT APPARENTLY TRIFLING LEADING TO RESULTS OF THE GREATEST MAGNITUDE (ver. 2).** 1. The most trivial event may lead to the most momentous issues. The oak is contained in the acorn; the prairie is fired by a spark; a nation is plunged into war as the result of a jest. Many a quiet conversation has led to world-wide revolutions. 2. Nothing is therefore trivial to a wise man. Learn—1. Every detail in a good man's life is part of a Divine plan. 2. To avoid crossing the Divine purpose and thwarting the Divine plan we must do all to the glory of God. **III. HERE IS A STARTLING SUMMONS OF A MOST UNEXPECTED CHARACTER.** Although no direct appeal was made, Nehemiah as truly heard the Divine call as Samuel the voice in the darkness, or Paul the voice of the vision, "Come over to Macedonia." 1. Here is an appeal for sympathy and help—not the less powerful because indirect. Mute appeals are often the most eloquent. Æschylus appealing for the life of his brother by holding up the stump of the arm he had lost in the service of his country. The high-priest in the holy place sprinkled the blood seven times without speaking. This appeal was—(1) The cry of humanity appealing to human sympathies. (2) The cry of brotherhood appealing to his kinship. (3) The cry of fatherland appealing to his patriotism. (4) The call of God. 2. Here is a summons which involved great sacrifice. Love never counts the cost. Sacrifice is its glory. Sincerity always distinguished from hypocrisy by this test. 3. Here is an unexpected summons promptly obeyed. Learn—1. Life is full of surprises, and the tenure of ease uncertain. 2. The good man is prepared to follow the leadings of providence without hesitation and at any cost. **IV. HERE IS A SAVIOUR RAISED UP IN A MOST UNLOOKED-FOR QUARTER.** 1. God is ever training His agents for the work which He means them to accomplish. Nehemiah, Joseph, Moses, David, Cyrus, Paul, Luther, Wesley, and many others. 2. At the proper time God will bring His agents into contact with their life-work. 3. The qualifications of God's agents are not always recognised at first. Learn—1. God uses the most unlikely agents. 2. God leads in the most unlooked-for ways. 3. God's redemptive scheme is the most incomprehensible of all mysteries. **V. HERE IS A PICTURE OF THE DEMORALISING AND DISMANTLING TENDENCY OF SIN, ALIKE IN CITIES AND IN SOULS.** 1. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were demoralised: "In great affliction and reproach." Long captivity

and dependence had enervated them. Powers not used lapse into impotence. Sin cherished withers moral force. 2. The battlements of Jerusalem were dismantled. Thus does sin ever destroy defences and throw down battlements, leaving souls at the mercy of destructive forces which lead to eternal shame. Learn—1. Sin reveals its deadly nature in its direful consequences even in this life. 2. These consequences are designed to act as warnings to unwary souls. 3. They suggest still more awful penalties in that world where judgment is untempered by mercy. (*W. H. Booth.*)

*The exile*:—Nothing is here said of the parentage or early training of Nehemiah. We may suppose he grew up in a pious home, where daily prayers, and instructions, and acts of godliness were imbued with deep religious feeling. The early days of the future reformer were perhaps spent in listening to the recital of many an endeared memory of the land of Judah, and his young heart was probably taught to beat high with hope of the restoration of his people to their covenant inheritance.

**I. THE SITUATION HE OCCUPIED.** The palace at Shushan was one of the most magnificent in the ancient world. The site of its ruins has been identified by modern travellers, and here large blocks of marble, with other fragments of splendid edifices, are often dug up—the relics of a grandeur that has long since passed away. The place of his abode offered many attractions to captivate a youthful mind. There were in the streets of that vast city the splendour and bustle of Oriental life. There might seem in all this “lust of the eye and pride of life” ominous danger to youthful piety. But it is a wonderful power, the grace of God in the human heart. It is marvellous in the souls it selects for saving change, in the places where it operates, and in the triumphs it achieves. Often it appears wanting in those who seem most favourably situated for its possession, while it reigns in hearts where it might seem impossible for it to live and grow. And in him God made the palace of a heathen prince the nursery and sanctuary of an eminent servant of His cause. In view of this, let none among us allege that their situation or circumstances render it impracticable for them to cultivate religion or abound in well-doing. Men may rush into temptation in their earthly business, and thereby raise up invincible barriers to the exercise of piety; but God, by His providence, never places any man in a situation where it is impossible for him to love and obey Him. If you are where God has placed you, be sure you may be, and do, what God requires you. In every situation of life there is enough to test the sincerity of faith in things unseen.

**II. THE SPIRIT HE DISPLAYED.** It was a spirit of tender interest for the good of Jerusalem. The subjects of inquiry show the spirit of the man. He was living in ease and affluence himself, but he could not forget he was “of the stock of Israel,” and he felt, therefore, the prosperity of religion bound up with that feeble remnant. He might have seen couriers arrive at the royal palace from distant regions, bearing tidings of fresh victories gained by Persian armies, and of new countries subjected to the Persian crown, and yet not be greatly moved by the intelligence; but the arrival of these fellow-saints stirred up his spirit within him to inquire concerning the state of the Church in the land of his fathers. Do we not see here that it is the history and condition of the cause of truth on earth which interests the wise and good? They may not, indeed, be unaffected by events which concern the welfare of mankind and illustrate the wisdom of God in His providence; but it is especially the progress of the kingdom of grace that engages the attention of its true subjects. It was a spirit of deep sorrow for the distress of his people in Judah.

**III. THE EXERCISES IN WHICH HE ENGAGED.** Nehemiah “fasted and prayed.” (*W. Ritchie.*)

*The use of a great purpose*:—To a thoughtful mind there is much interest in the contemplation of the circumstances under which the great purpose of a life first rise into distinctness before the mind of one whose energies, henceforth, are to be used for his country and his God, and whose example stands before us as a noble incentive to steadfastness of purpose and courage in the performance of duty. (*Scenes from the Life of Nehemiah.*)

*Piety in unexpected places*:—Fine gold has often been found under a barren and unpromising surface. Rare jewels have been found in the crevices of rocks and in the pebbly beds of rivers. Exquisite flowers have peeped forth from the ledge of a stupendous Alpine rock, and have breathed their sweetness amid a wilderness of ice and snow. Palm-trees have lifted up their tall and elegant stems, adorned at the summit with long pendant leaves and enriched with nourishing fruit, in the midst of the sandy desert, and their life has been sustained by a hidden well of springing water at their root. This has often been the case with God’s children—Joseph, Obadiah, saints in Cæsar’s household. Here Nehemiah in the court of one of the most luxurious eastern princes. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Nehemiah and his*



*contemporaries* :—Nehemiah flourished four centuries before Christ. When consuls and dictators were beginning to play an important part in Roman politics; when Xenophon and Herodotus were historians and Phidias was sculptor; when Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristophanes wrote tragedy and comedy; when Socrates taught philosophy and Pericles was prime minister at Athens; and when the western nations of Europe were sunk in savage barbarism, Nehemiah was the devout cup-bearer at Shushan. We are not told from what tribe he sprang. His grandfather had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar; his father was born and educated at Babylon. Probably the beauty of his person and the sweetness of his manners, the extensive range of his intellect, and the integrity of his character, recommended Nehemiah to royal favour. (*Ibid.*) I asked them concerning the Jews . . . and concerning Jerusalem.—*Careful inquiry helpful to philanthropic effort* :—Few portions of Scripture set forth more clearly than the Book of Nehemiah the power of one man to do great things for God when God is with him. With an earnest desire to work for God, Nehemiah first sought to gain accurate information, from a reliable source, both as to the need that existed and the nature of the work that had to be done. Careful inquiry respecting the field of any projected effort will often reveal much of which we had previously but little conception. This should not dishearten us, however, for we ought rather to remember that the deeper the darkness and degradation of those whom we seek to reach, the more needful is it to bring them under the enlightening and elevating power of the gospel of Christ. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Man's love for the land of his birth* :—Mr. Christie Murray, writing of the old Australian settlers, relates an incident to show how, after a long life of exile, they still pine for home and England. When his ship left Plymouth Sound a good deal of mud adhered to the anchor. After it was dried he broke off a bit, declaring, half in jest and half in earnest, that this piece of English earth should go with him around the world. In Australia he showed it to a white-haired ranchman among the hills. The old man eyed it wistfully. "Give it to me," he said at last. "You will see old England again; I never shall. I would value that bit of earth more than diamonds." Mr. Murray gave it to him, and continued his journey. When he came back, months later, he found that the old man had ridden more than a hundred miles to a settlement to buy a gay little plush stand and a glass case in which to preserve his treasure. De Maistre, describing the hut of the Moravian missionary in the most northern human settlement within the Arctic circle, says that he observed, suspended over the fireplace like a holy relic, a piece of rough, unbarked wood. He looked at it curiously. The Dane touched it with reverence. "It is a bit of the old oak-tree at home," he said, his eyes full of tears. Nothing can be more real than that clinging in the heart of a man to the land of his birth. It may be of all countries in the world the poorest, the least beautiful, the most insignificant. But it is his own, and if he is a genuine man the trifle which tells him of it, though he stands in a king's palace, will speak to him as with the power of his mother's voice. (*Christian Age.*) The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.—*Walls and gates* :—What, then, are the "walls and gates" of the New Testament? The Church is now catholic, and no longer national. It is not now a civil polity and the necessities of a civil community that determine the nature of these "walls and gates." Yet there are some things of prime importance, like the walls and gates of Jerusalem. I. THE SACRED OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S DAY. All history shows that whenever and wherever the Sabbath is overthrown the Church is perilously exposed, not only to decay, but even to extinction. II. A NUMEROUS CONGREGATION OF ATTENDANTS UPON THE ORDINANCES AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH. III. SABBATH SCHOOLS ARE "THE GATES" OF OUR JERUSALEM. IV. THE LIBERALITY AND SELF-SACRIFICE OF GOD'S PEOPLE. (*J. A. Lefevre, D.D.*) *Interest in Jerusalem*.—I. THE STORY OF JERUSALEM THROWS LIGHT UPON GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT. Great privileges involve great responsibilities. National sin brings national ruin. Nations are rewarded and punished in this world. II. IT IS A MARK OF REAL PIETY TO BE ZEALOUS FOR THE CAUSE AND KINGDOM OF GOD. How bitterly do Christians mourn over the wickedness around them, and the severe conflict they have to maintain in their own breasts. III. EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS, MORE OR LESS, TO TREAD A SOLITARY PATH, AND HIS DEEPEST SORROWS ARE FREQUENTLY THOSE WHICH HE CANNOT COMMUNICATE TO THE NEAREST AND DEAREST ON EARTH. Who would have thought that when his attendance upon the king was over for the day, Nehemiah would hasten to his chamber, weep bitter tears of grief, and mourn and pray? (*J. M. Randall.*) *Jerusalem, the holy*

city :—Thoroughly to realise the sad tidings brought to Nehemiah, we must briefly recall the former history of Jerusalem. No city possesses so deep and thrilling an interest. Other cities may boast of a higher antiquity. Thebes and Nineveh may go back even to the re-peopling of the world after the deluge. Other cities may claim a broader area, a more numerous population, a more extended commerce. Other cities may claim to be the centres of a far greater earthly dominion than was ever accorded to David. But whether in the past, the present, or the future, there is no interest like that which attaches to the holy city. (*Ibid.*) *Sin ruins a kingdom* :—I. IF THERE BE A MORAL GOVERNOR OF THE UNIVERSE SIN MUST PROVOKE HIM. II. IF SIN PROVOKE GOD HE IS ABLE TO PUNISH IT. III. BODIES OF MEN ARE PUNISHABLE IN THIS WORLD ONLY. IV. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE VERY NATURE OF SIN TO INJURE AND RUIN A COUNTRY. V. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH GUILTY NATIONS ARE CONFIRMED BOTH BY HIS WORD AND ALL HUMAN HISTORY. VI. GOD ALWAYS GIVES PREVIOUS INTIMATION OF HIS COMING TO JUDGE A NATION. VII. IF GOD HAS FAVOURED A NATION WITH AN INTIMATION OF HIS WILL, THEIR SINS ARE AGGRAVATED BY MEANS OF THIS LIGHT. VIII. WHEN GOD HAS DISTINGUISHED A PEOPLE BY SINGULAR INSTANCES OF HIS FAVOUR, THAT PEOPLE WILL BE PROPORTIONALLY CRIMINAL UNLESS THEY DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES BY THEIR DEVOTEDNESS TO HIM. IX. WHEN A NATION IS UNDER CORRECTIONS OF THE ALMIGHTY, THEY ARE EMINENTLY SINFUL IF THEY DISREGARD THE TOKENS OF HIS WRATH. X. SHAMELESS SINNING IS A SURE PROOF OF GENERAL CORRUPTION. (*W. Jay.*) *The walls of Jerusalem* :—What do we know of these walls previous to the time of Nehemiah? The city of Jerusalem passed into the hands of the Jews under David. He wrested the rocky stronghold of Zion, which commands Jerusalem, from the Canaanitish tribe of the Jebusites. He made it the capital of his kingdom. To secure his position David threw a wall round the entire city, including the fortress of Zion. In the reign of Solomon (b.c. 1016-976) this wall was greatly strengthened. Very large towers were erected at intervals upon it, and its height was increased. Probably also some outlying parts of the city were now comprised within its circuit. For nearly two centuries this wall remained intact. Jerusalem sustained several sieges; but it was only in the reign of Amaziah, in b.c. 826, that a breach was made in the fortifications. Jehoash, the king of Israel, "brake down the wall of Jerusalem, from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits" (2 Kings xiv. 13). Through this gap in the wall, Josephus tells us, the victorious Jehoash drove his chariot into Jerusalem, leading Amaziah captive with him. Uzziah (b.c. 808) the succeeding king of Judah, was a prosperous and enterprising prince. He occupied himself for a large portion of his life in the improvement of his capital. He repaired the breach made by Jehoash, and built additional towers. Other portions of the walls that had been suffered to fall into decay were renewed. He was an artilleryist; he equipped the walls and their towers with powerful engines for hurling stones and other missiles against besiegers. Jothan, his son (b.c. 756), also strengthened the walls by building new massive towers. The care which had been expended upon the fortifications of the city by successive kings, for so long a period, bore memorable fruit in the reign of Hezekiah. The tide of Assyrian invasion which then swept over Palestine, and which overwhelmed for ever the ten tribes of Israel, met with a check before the fortress of Jerusalem. In prospect of this invasion Hezekiah had repaired the walls wherever they had become dilapidated, and had erected an additional wall. While the city was invested the mysterious plague came upon the camp of the Assyrians, which swept off myriads of them in a single night. They were content to retire (b.c. 710) with a tribute paid by Hezekiah; the city itself, however, remained uncaptured. Manasseh, after his repentance (b.c. 677-642), paid attention to the fortifications of the city. "He did not only," says Josephus, "repair the old walls with great diligence, but added another wall to the former. He built, also, very lofty towers, and the garrisoned places before the city he strengthened not only in other respects, but with provisions of all sorts that they wanted." It was nearly forty years later that the series of calamities commenced which lasted for twenty years, and which culminated in the complete overthrow of this illustrious city. In b.c. 606 Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem, and after threatening Jehoiakim, the king, with captivity, left him in possession of his throne. He appeared before the city again nine years later; and Jehoiachin, who had succeeded his father Jehoiakim, surrendered Jerusalem to him with scarcely a struggle. Nebuchadnezzar carried him off with him to Babylon, and placed his uncle Zedekiah upon the throne in Jerusalem. Six years after this Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and after a

siege of a year and a half, the severest it had undergone since it had been a Jewish city, a breach was made in the wall of Jerusalem, through which the Babylonian army poured into the city. Zedekiah and most of the people were transferred to Babylon. The royal palace, the temple, and all the principal buildings were burned, and the stately and massive walls were levelled to the ground, their circuit being only traceable by the vast heaps of rubbish left by the devastators. To restore these famous walls, to perform once more the work of David and Solomon and their successors, to reproduce in a few weeks the labour of centuries, this was the task which lay before Nehemiah. But what was their size? What were the particulars of the work undertaken by Nehemiah? The city of Jerusalem is not at the present time a great city. The circumference of the modern walls is two and a half miles; and while the ancient walls would not in many portions coincide with the present, nevertheless the total circuit of the old walls would not greatly differ in length from those of the present time. It has been stated by the eminent architect, Mr. Ferguson, in Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," that the area within the old walls was never more than one hundred and eighty acres; and he remarks, by way of comparison, that the building known as the Great Exhibition of 1851 covered eighteen acres, or a tenth part of the area of ancient Jerusalem. From this estimate it will be seen that the city was one of moderate dimensions. We must remember also that here and there portions of the wall were left standing. The foundations, too, would remain, throughout the entire circuit, as they originally were. The object of the invaders would be to render the fortifications incapable of serving any longer as a defence to the inhabitants; and this object would be gained without disturbing the foundations of the walls. The stones and rubble of which they had been built were not carried to a distance, but lay in heaps ready to the hands of the builders. This material would not, however, be available in every case. The limestone around Jerusalem, which was used in the construction of the important buildings, when exposed to fire (as many parts of the wall had been) rapidly disintegrated. It resembled the granite of which Chicago was built, and which crumbled to dust in the great fire which destroyed that city a few years since. This is the point of the taunt uttered by Sanballat (chap. iv. 2): "Will these Jews revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" (*A. J. Griffith.*) *City walls important*:—In the solicitude of Nehemiah over the ruined condition of the walls of Jerusalem we have brought into prominence an element in ancient national life which it is useful to understand, and which is the foundation and keystone of Nehemiah's subsequent action. It was the walls that made the nation in those days. The law which then prevailed upon the face of the earth was the law of might. A town of any size was at the mercy of every roving, plundering horde, if it were unfortified. When once it was surrounded with strong walls, it became possible for the citizens to accumulate property, enact laws for the order and well-being of the citizens, and to elect magistrates to carry these laws into effect. With their erection dated the commencement of civic life. Where the city was large, the citizens became a nation. The Babylonian nation, and, earlier, the Ninevite people, meant really the citizens living within the walls of the immense cities—Babylon and Nineveh. The history of Italy in the ninth century of our era illustrates this law of states. The country was overrun by the armies of rival princes, who disputed for the throne of the Lombard kingdom. The Saracens from the opposite shores of Africa were constantly landing upon the coast, and penetrating inland for the purpose of pillage and massacre. In this condition of the country the large cities were compelled again to erect their walls, which had been levelled to the ground by jealous and tyrannical kings. The great Republics of Italy, the cities which afterwards became nations in themselves, Milan, Florence, Pisa, and others, laid in this way the foundation of their subsequent greatness. "From the time," says Sismondi in his "History of the Italian Republics," "when towns were secured by walls, their power rapidly increased; the oppressed from all parts sought refuge in them from the oppressors; they carried with them their industry and arms to protect the walls that defended them. Everywhere they were sure of a good reception, for every city felt it had strength only in proportion to the number of its citizens; each vied with its neighbour in efforts to augment the means of defence and in the reception given to strangers." Of such supreme importance were the fortifications of a city to national life and progress in those ages of disorder. (*Ibid.*) *Protective walls*:—Have you ever seen a hermit crab? Some day, when you are at the seaside, you will see one. It is a crab which has no hard shell of its own, and consequently is

an easy prey for sea-birds. It therefore gets possession of an empty whelk-shell, and lives in the abandoned house of the whelk, barring the door upon itself with the one great claw, which has grown twice the size of the other, apparently for the purpose. But when his crabship grows too big for his shell, it becomes as uncomfortable as a shoe that pinches, and he has to turn out to look for another. Look at him now! He in a great hurry, because he is in danger, and knows it. He wants just what Jerusalem wanted—a wall of stone and lime about him. That is what a shell is—a wall of stone and lime. Sometimes the hermit crab gets eaten up by a gull or skua before he can find another shell to suit him; sometimes he has to turn out the rightful owner from his home in order to get in himself; but he always knows that he needs a defence. It is a simple comparison; but it gives a true idea of the state of the case to say that Jerusalem, without a stone and lime wall, was a hermit crab without a shell, surrounded by Galilean gulls and Samaritan skuas. (*Sunday School.*)

**Vers. 4–11. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept.—Sad tidings and fruitful grief:—I. THE OCCASION OF HIS GRIEF.** 1. Not personal loss. (1) Men grieve on account of personal loss—failure of business, scarcity of work, pecuniary loss involving personal privation, &c. (2) Men grieve on account of spiritual failure. Neither of these explains the occasion of Nehemiah's grief. 2. But public calamity. (1) He had inquired carefully into the state of God's work. Every good man should thus interest himself in God's work. Men shun this conscientious inquiry for various reasons. (a) Some on account of the peace which ignorance brings. (b) Some dread the painful discoveries which careful inquiry may reveal. (c) Others the sacrifices which such discoveries may demand. (2) He had received sorrowful tidings. To a good man tidings of the Church's desolation are ever sad tidings. (a) It betrays unfaithfulness. A holy and loyal Church cannot be a dishonoured one. The shorn strength, as with Samson, betrays unwatchfulness and worldliness. (b) It furnishes occasion of reproach to the enemies of the Church. II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS GRIEF.

1. It was profound. 2. It was enduring. 3. It was self-denying. Real heart-pain is always ascetic in its bodily aspect. "And fasted." Observe—(1) Fasting is often associated with profound grief in Scripture (2 Sam. i. 12, xii. 16–21; Psa. xxxv. 13; lxix. 10; Dan. vi. 8; Jonah iii. 5). It may be the natural attendant of such grief, or the outward symbol of its presence. (2) Fasting is recognised and commended in Scripture as a religious exercise (1 Sam. vii. 6; Jer. xxxvi. 9; Matt. vi. 17; Acts x. 30; 1 Cor. vii. 5). III. THE ISSUE OF HIS GRIEF. "And prayed before the God of heaven." Herein consists the difference between godly and selfish sorrow. The one invariably finds relief in prayer, the other ends in blank despair. 1. Grief is sanctified by prayer. It then becomes sacred, and softens the heart like showers on the thirsty soil. Rebellious grief is hardening in its effect. 2. Grief is relieved by prayer. Lessons—1. Profound grief on behalf of others is perfectly consistent with personal enjoyment of the Divine favour. 2. Godly grief usually precedes gracious visitations. 3. Burdened hearts find best relief in prayer. (*W. H. Booth.*) *The Church and social evils:—*The accurate dates given in this book show that the period of Nehemiah's brooding sorrow lasted four months. The emotions excited in Nehemiah by his countrymen's sorrows suggest some plain lessons for Christian people. I. THE DUTY OF SYMPATHETIC CONTEMPLATION OF SURROUNDING SORROWS. The first condition of sympathy is knowledge; the second is attending to what we know. How demoralising is the thought that many people seem to entertain, that the universe, and hideous vices and sordid immorality, and utter heathenism which are found down among the foundations of every civic community are as indispensable to progress as the noise of the wheels of a train is to its advancement, or as the bilge-water in a wooden ship is to keep its seams tight. Every consideration of communion with and conformity to Jesus Christ, of loyalty to His words, of a true sense of brotherhood, and of lower things—such as self-interest—demands that Christian people shall take to their hearts, in a fashion that Churches have never done yet, "the condition of England question," and shall ask, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" II. SUCH A REALISATION OF THE DARK FACTS IS INDISPENSABLE TO ALL TRUE WORK FOR ALLEVIATING THEM. There is no way of helping men, but by bearing what they bear. No man will ever lighten a sorrow of which he has not himself felt the pressure. The Cross of Christ is the pattern for our lives. The "saviours of society" have still in lower fashion to be crucified. No work of any real use will be done except by those

whose hearts have bled with the feeling of the miseries which they set themselves to cure. III. SUCH REALISATION OF SURROUNDING SORROWS WILL DRIVE TO COMMUNION WITH GOD. All true service for the world must begin with close communion with God. The "service of man" is best done when it is the service of God. You will never get the army of workers that is needed to grapple with the facts of our present condition unless you touch the very deepest springs of conduct, and these are to be found in communion with God. All other efforts at alleviative work by those who ignore Christian motive is but surface drainage. Get down to the love of God, and the love of men therefrom, and you have got an artesian well which will bubble up unfaillingly. We hear a great deal about a "social gospel." Let us remember that the gospel is social second and individual first. If you get the love of God and obedience to Jesus Christ into a man's heart it will be like putting gas into a balloon—it will go up and the man will get out of the slums fast enough; and he will not be a slave to the vices of the world much longer. It is the work of the Church to carry to the world the only thing that will make men deeply and abidingly happy, because it will make them good. IV. SUCH SYMPATHY SHOULD BE THE PARENT OF A NOBLE SELF-SACRIFICING LIFE. Nehemiah, like Moses, "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" and to turn his back on the dazzlements of a court, than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," while his brethren were suffering. The spirit of this example must still be observed. It is no part of my business to prescribe to you details of duty. It is my business to insist on the principles which must regulate these, and of these principles in application to Christian service there is none more stringent than "I will not offer unto my God burnt offerings of that which doth cost me nothing." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Personal interest leading to importunate prayer*:—The story begins with an account of the condition of Jerusalem. At this time the city was in a bad plight—walls broken down, gateways burned with fire, streets deserted and grass grown. The heathen passed by in scornful derision and said, "Is this the city which was called beautiful, the joy of the whole earth?" Only six months go by, and what a wonderful change! The walls are built and the gateways are secure. Instead of a few people with bent heads and sad hearts, there is a great army of workmen. What had happened? Had God sent some prophet into their midst like Elijah, stirring the hearts of the people? or some mother in Israel like Deborah of old? or another warrior like Gideon or David? Less than that, a great deal less than that, as we count things, but more than that, much more than that, as we ought to count things. One man had taken the sorrows of Jerusalem in upon his heart—that was all. One man had taken the sad state of things in upon his heart, and began to sorrow about it, and weep over it, and thought so much about it that it quite spoiled his appetite. He could not rest by day or night, and at last he had to take the burden right in before God and cast it upon Him. That was all. Ah, but that is all that is wanted! The world's salvation rests not upon organisations, upon means, upon preachers, or upon arrangements, but upon deep personal interest—personal interest leading to importunate prayer, and importunate prayer leading to earnest effort. That is the only way in which the Church can ever be victorious, and can ever be saved. The saddest thing to-day is that men are Christians without being Christlike, that men do not take the sins and sorrows of the world in upon their hearts. Now what are the most of us doing? 1. Here is one who has heard these evil tidings of to-day, and of a thousand other ills that afflict and disgrace our land. "It is sad," he says, "very sad indeed; I do wish I could help you. But you see I can do so very little. I will double my subscription for a year; but of course I am not in a position to do anything more. You see I am not a prophet, or then I might go forth and preach to the people. I am not a priest, and must not take upon myself a task which belongs to others. I am not a warrior, and cannot head a host of soldiers, or no doubt I should fight. I don't see that I can do anything." And the man is going away quite satisfied that he at any rate has done his duty. This is the average Christian of the nineteenth century. Now there comes some simple man who lays his hand upon this man's shoulder, and says, "There is one thing we can do; we can pray about it." Then there comes the amiable smile which we keep for weak, well-meaning people—"Of course, my friend; of course. We all do that, you know." And the adversity continues as it always does when we pray without personal interest. 2. Then I think of another who has heard of the sad condition of things, and he says, "Well, I really am very sorry, indeed; yes, quite distressed. You know, I think that there must be a great deal of mismanagement up in Jerusalem somewhere; Ezra cannot be looking after

it as he ought to be; I feel he is wrong altogether; I think it is a disgrace to him. I wonder whether he thinks David would ever have allowed a condition of things like this to come about?" Personal interest leading people to abuse the workers—that is not a very uncommon thing. "It is dreadful, this condition of things in London. But do you think that ministers are doing their duty?" It is so easy, is it not, when we are disappointed and sad, to fling stones at other people? It is such a relief to be able to find fault with somebody else. Then I think this simple man comes up and says, "Do not you think we ought to pray for them? They have got hard work, and it is difficult to get at." "Oh, pray! yes, of course; pray all day, of course." That is a horrible spirit, the spirit that prays as a matter of course, and finds fault with everybody else as a matter of course, too. If you cannot do good, do not go shooting arrows into the hearts of others. I marvel that the great God of heaven has such patience with those people who criticise every method, who find fault with everybody's failure, and who never in their lives lifted a finger to help souls to Christ—personal interest that can only find fault and blame other people, and that kneels down and prays as a matter of course, but neither has heart, nor earnestness, nor expectation in its prayer. 3. I see another type of character, the man who says, "Well, really, it is very sad indeed." He is a man not given much to weeping; he has a tender heart; he is sharp, definite, exact, likes to have things down in black and white—your typical Englishman. "Come here," he says; "now let us just have it down. You tell me that the walls have been broken down: how many yards of wall will you want? It is a very serious matter; we shall want so many loads of stone; and our gateways? yes, burned with fire; yes, and so many loads of timber. We are practical men. It is very sad. How many men have you got up there? You have got twenty men. We shall want a thousand men to build up that city. It cannot be done; it is no good, it cannot be done." Do not you know that man? It is personal interest stopping short of importunate prayer. 4. I think I see another, who has heard of the condition of the poor, and thinks this is a dreadful city, perhaps can think of nothing else; perhaps, like Nehemiah, he feels that relish for appetite is gone; his tears are falling, and he is haunted by the thought of the homeless and outcast ones and hungry little children—Nehemiah weeping and fasting. God loves hearts that fret because of the sins and sorrows around us. God set such store by men who sighed and cried because of the abominations that He sent an angel down from heaven to put a mark upon their foreheads. Do you know what the angel was doing? I think he was taking their measure for their crowns. It is a great thing in the midst of this London to keep alive a tender heart, and if Christ does not give a man a tender heart I question whether that man knows much about the Lord Jesus Christ. But look! fretting will not mend the evil. Earnest personal interest, passing into importunate prayer, will. Nehemiah got as far as fretting, and then he went to God. That is a grand saying of John Wesley's: "I dare no more fret than I would curse or swear." It would make the fortune of life insurance offices if we could hit upon that happy receipt. He that only frets will do much, but he who cannot fret will not do anything. I think a Christian ought to be a man who frets—frets, mark you, until he gets to God, and gets hold of God sufficiently, and feels: "Great Father in heaven, Thou canst remedy these ills, and Thou wilt!" (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *God provides instruments for His work:*—When God has work to be done He provides suitable instruments and places them in favourable situations to promote His plans. Martin Luther, called to withstand the power of the Papacy, found the God-fearing Elector of Saxony ready to afford him the needed protection, and when the persecuted Waldenses cried for help, Oliver Cromwell so threatened the oppressor that deliverance was wrought. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Compassion as a motive power:*—Some men work because they are urged to it by others, some because it is the fashion with professors or with those among whom their lot is cast; but the true workers because, "moved with compassion," they cannot help working. (*Ibid.*) *And fasted.*—*Fasting:*—I. OCCASIONS OF FASTING. 1. Afflictions of the Church (Nehemiah.) 2. National judgments (Joel). 3. Domestic bereavement (David). 4. Imminent danger (Esther). 5. Solemn ordinances (Paul and Barnabas set apart). II. THE DESIGN OF FASTING. III. THE DUTY OF FASTING. 1. Forms part of general principle of self-denial, essential to true discipleship (Luke ix. 23). 2. Implied, and therefore enjoined, by words of Christ (Matt. xvii. 21). IV. THE MANNER AND DEGREE OF FASTING. 1. Sometimes total abstinence from food for a

time (Esther iv. 16). 2. More often abstinence from superfluous food (Dan. x. 8).

V. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH TO FAST. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Nehemiah's prayer*:—I. TO GIVE NO PLACE TO DESPAIR, HOWEVER DEEP OR PROLONGED OUR GRIEF. No calamity can be so overwhelming as to block our way to the God before whom Abraham and Daniel, and every devout soul, has bowed in fervent petition for help in dire extremity. God does not forsake or forget the lowliest or weakest or most unworthy. The more we need God—for any reason, our misfortune or our fault—the more reason for our seeking Him, and, in some true sense, the more ready is He to be sought and found. II. WE SHOULD NOT OVERLOOK THE SEVERITIES OF GOD'S CHARACTER OR DEALINGS WHEN APPROACHING HIM WITH PETITIONS. Modern ideas of God's fatherhood tend much to put His sterner attributes out of sight. His unquestionable love seems to preclude severities of character or dealings. But our prophet could unite ideas of God as "great and terrible," and also keeping "covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments." By true reasoning we should be wary of views of God which leave out His severity, for there is the side of His character which is the necessary counterpart of love for righteousness and obedience. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPORTUNITY. The prayer of our lesson had lasted for days, attended by fasting. Fasting prepares the way for clear thought and tender feeling. Nehemiah did not say, "God fully understands the situation. I need only refer to it." With familiar urgency he pleads for the "attentive ear" and "open eyes," that God may know his case and care for it. Similar travail of soul has been an element of prevailing prayer in all ages. Why it is necessary we do not fully know. It may be that importunity is the only safe mood to which answers to prayer can be wisely accorded. Without it the desired boon or the answer would not be appreciated. IV. THE FITNESS AND DUTY OF THOROUGH CONFESSION. V. MOSES WAS AN HISTORIC CHARACTER, AND OUR RECORD OF HIM IS TRUSTWORTHY. Nehemiah would not talk with God about a mythical person. VI. NO DEPTH OF FALL OR DISTANCE OF WANDERING CAN INVALIDATE GOD'S COVENANT MERCIES. Though "cast out into the uttermost part of the heaven," their return would be certain if they would but return unto God and keep His commandments. VII. PAST MERCIES AND MIGHTY RESCUES ARE A LOGICAL BASIS OF CONFIDENCE, OF FAITH, AND BOLDNESS OF PETITION. What is the probable logic of the appeal, "Now these are Thy servants and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power, and by Thy strong hand"? This, in part: God had made an investment of grace in these children of His adoption; from true economy He would not wish it wasted. Again, the love that sought them in the beginning proceeded from its own internal impulses; such love cannot be easily exhausted. Being a motive unto itself, that motive abides unchanging in character and sufficiency. Again, these subjects of His grace were more needy than ever; any help based upon that need could not be lacking on occasion. All this can be said of individual cases as truly as of Israel. The individual backslider has been "redeemed by great power, and by a strong hand." The heavenly Father began the work with a full knowledge of the weakness of the material and the possibilities of failure. Let the tender conscience, the sensitive honour writhing in the memory of past mercies that have been abused, grow calm and hopeful in the assurance that redeeming grace does not depend upon dates or any conditions, but genuine brokenness of heart and absolute return to obedience. VIII. WE CAN GO TO GOD IN PRAYER, WITH ONLY A DESIRE TO FEAR HIM. IX. PRAYER SHOULD BE PRACTICAL IN ITS OUTLOOK. Communion with God may well have our time and attention for its reflex influence; for the nobler soul-life gained thereby; but Nehemiah counted prayer a practical reliance in achieving business results. He needed and coveted the king's help. His example, in this respect, may well be copied in all our undertakings. God is not an uninterested spectator of our toils or plans. We may come to Him for help where our own strength ceases. (*S. L. B. Speare.*) *Nehemiah's prayer*:—I. One quality which makes Nehemiah's prayer effectual was ITS IMPORTUNITY. Two considerations inspired this—1. He was burdened with a single great desire. Our praying often lacks at this point. We ask amiss because we ask for nothing—in particular. It is the time for devotion, or the place; so we approach the mercy-seat, because we ought to, rather than because we have any pressing need—coming, sometimes, in so vague a way that it might not be easy afterwards to tell just what request had been presented. Nehemiah's prayer did not have such lack. He was in sore trouble. 2. Another element which gave importunity to his prayer was a conviction that this relief could come

only from God. "Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man." During the civil war a gentleman from New England, travelling in South America, noticed one day a Spaniard reading a paper, and asked him the news. "The news is," replied the other, "that your government is getting beaten. They have taken to praying, and when people have to call on God for help it shows, evidently, they are in a bad way." That is always the reason why men call on God, because they cannot help themselves. This was what made Nehemiah so much in earnest. Dr. Bushnell remarked once in the Hartford ministers' meeting, "Brethren, the thing which I have to struggle against most in my praying is a spirit of submission. I give up too easily. I want to learn how to plead more as Jacob did, with a determination not to let God go without the blessing." He qualified afterwards his words, explaining true submission, but pressed, in his strong way, the importance of persistency. So Nehemiah prayed, not once, but "without ceasing." He wept and mourned, and fasted "certain days," "day and night."

II. A second quality that made Nehemiah's prayer effectual was its SPIRIT OF CONFESSION. He seems to have apprehended, very distinctly, the truth which the Bible urges in many ways, that men must come into right relations with God before they can ask any favour of Him. 1. It was particular. He specified some of the points of his guilt. "We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandest Thy servant Moses." 2. Then his confession was individual. He began with an acknowledgment in behalf of the "children of Israel"; but it occurred to him to bring that nearer home, so he added, "Both I and my father's house have sinned." He was conscious of his own shortcomings. With all his zeal, his loyalty so constant and so brave, he saw that at many points he had failed, and for these shortcomings he asked forgiveness. When David has made his confession that is so particular, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight"; and so individual, "I acknowledge my transgression"; "Have mercy upon me, O God." III. A third quality that made Nehemiah's prayer effectual was its FAITH. Trusting God first in his own behalf for pardon, guidance, strength, he could trust Him in behalf of the nation. He prayed, "Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest." He seemed to know the Divine will by some clear intimation. That appears, at first, to diminish the worth of his example. We say, "Yes, certainly; no wonder he had faith; any one could ask for wonderful blessing if the Lord told him to." But how did God put that purpose into the heart of Nehemiah? by a vision, a voice, some supernatural revelation? There is no intimation of either. It may have been simply by the influence of the Holy Spirit, as we all are moved, through conscience, enlightened by the Word of God.

IV. A fourth quality in Nehemiah's prayer which made it effectual was its SPIRIT OF GOOD WORKS. When he sat down to pray he did not mean to stay in that attitude. He had in his mind a plan to secure permission to go and build the wall. (*Monday Club Sermons*.) And prayed before the God of heaven.—*Nehemiah's prayer*:—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his trouble!" But if this be true of sorrow on one's own account, how much more surely will God hear the petitioner who pleads for others. For selfishness in prayer is no more comely than anywhere else. This man was a layman. He might easily have shifted the responsibility for the present condition of things upon the priests and Levites, on whom God had particularly devolved the religious interests of Jewry. But laymen then were no more absolved from such responsibility than laymen are in these days. Indeed, some of the affairs of Zion belong distinctively to them. Never yet was Zion safely left to her priests alone. There is always something for Nehemiah to do. The prayer of Nehemiah in this instance is given doubtless for our guidance. It is a model of supplication in many ways. Observe—I. ITS REVERENT SPIRIT. It begins with adoration: "O Jehovah, God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him!" In our eagerness to present our requests at the throne of the heavenly grace there is always danger of precipitation. It must not be forgotten that we are approaching the Infinite. Therefore a reverent humility becomes us. II. Nehemiah makes CONFESSION OF HIS SINS: "We have sinned against Thee; both I and my father's house have sinned." This cup-bearer knew that sin lay at the bottom of all Israel's troubles. "Both I and my father's house have sinned." Spurgeon says, "He spelled 'we' with an 'I' in it." His own transgressions and shortcomings loomed up before him. III. HIS CONFIDENCE IN



THE DIVINE WORD. This was the prayer of faith. He casts himself upon the promises of God, which are evermore Yea and Amen. He ventures to particularise: he puts God in remembrance of a certain covenant which He had been pleased to make long before with Moses His servant in behalf of His people. The terms of this covenant are gathered from various passages of ancient Scripture (Lev. xxxvi. 27-45; Deut. xxviii. 45, 67, xxx. 1, 10). A glorious word of promise that for a nation of stiff-necked exiles! And the fact that on the part of the people themselves this covenant had been broken does not prevent Nehemiah from putting God in remembrance of it; for he knows that God is of long suffering and tender mercy. Faith at the mercy-seat conquers all. IV. THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH WAS SPECIFIC. It is the part of wisdom to enter upon all enterprises with prayer. A Roman general would not march to battle until he had first offered a sacrifice. A right apprehension of this principle would keep us always in the spirit of prayer, because no man can estimate the importance of any act. The least thing we do may have momentous and eternal issues. V. HIS PRAYER WAS FOLLOWED BY THE USE OF APPROPRIATE MEANS. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Nehemiah's prayer*:—Nehemiah was evidently a man of high integrity, as appears from the situation which he held, that of the king's cup-bearer. Only a person who was thoroughly trustworthy would be permitted to occupy such a position, inasmuch as the lives of eastern monarchs were in constant danger from the aspiring courtiers; and as one of the most common methods of causing death, in ancient times, was by mixing some poisonous ingredient with the wine that was drunk, it is quite obvious that no one would be intrusted with the above office in the king's household who was likely to be influenced by the bribes of the king's enemies. But, in addition to his strict integrity, he was a man of sincere and fervent piety. Very frequently did he give himself unto prayer, and it is thus we find him engaged in the present chapter. I. THE OCCASION OF THIS PRAYER. It is stated in the first three verses. "The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass," &c. It is said of the Redeemer—"In all their affliction He was afflicted"; and His people are like-minded with Him in this respect. They feel for others. II. THE BEING TO WHOM HIS PRAYER IS ADDRESSED. Those among whom he dwelt were accustomed in their distress to invoke the aid of their heathen deities; but, knowing full well how vain it was to seek relief from such lying vanities, he called upon the God of heaven. In applying to Him he felt assured that he was not praying to a god that could not save. There were two aspects of His glorious character in which he more especially regarded Him. 1. As great and terrible. 2. As faithful and gracious. III. THE PENITENTIAL SPIRIT WHICH IT BREATHES. IV. THE POWERFUL PLEA WHICH IS EMPLOYED. "Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations; but if ye return unto Me," &c. "Remember," says the Psalmist, "Thy word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." And this was the argument of Nehemiah; he pleads that God would accomplish what He had formerly declared (Deut. iv. 25-29, xxx. 1-6.) V. THE EARNEST IMPORTUNITY WITH WHICH IT IS PRESENTED. "O Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Thine ear be attentive," &c. (*The Author of "The Footsteps of Jesus."*) *Religiousness of spirit*:—A large part of the greatness of this man lies in the intense religiousness of his spirit. It is this which constitutes his history so very valuable a study to Christian people. There is no reason beyond this why I should select Nehemiah as a subject for the study of this Church, and not Pericles, or Julius Cæsar, or Charlemagne, or Cavour, or any other great statesman or hero who has raised the position of his country to a front rank amongst the nations of the earth. But this advantage does lie in the careful examination of the lives of the great heroes of the Bible and of the Church. Through their history we obtain an insight, not only into the greatness of the human soul, its capacity for conceiving great plans, its energy and resources in carrying them out to a successful and glorious completion, but also into the measure in which the human soul can depend upon Divine help, into the worth of communion with God as a solace in anguish, and as a stimulus to enterprise, and further into the certainty with which God responds to such communion, and administers fortitude, patience, self-control, and other virtues which make the soul of man strong, brave, and triumphant over obstacles. (*A. J. Griffiths.*) *Intelligent faith in prayer*:—Nehemiah's prayer reveals the great thoughts of which God was the subject, and by which he nourished his courage and determination in preparing himself for his great task. For we must ever remember that the result

of our praying—the comfort, or support, or stimulus we receive from the act of prayer—depend not only upon the fact that we do pray, but also and especially upon the clearness and vividness of our conceptions of God. We must be sure that we are not praying to ourselves, or into the air, but into the ear of a God who will hear us, and whom we can move by our entreaty. Intelligent faith—not faith without intelligence, mere blind, superstitious faith—nor intelligence without faith, a hard, dead knowledge—but both together, intelligence and faith, constitute the very soul and life of true prayer. (*Ibid.*) *Prayer and quiet waiting*:—Some when they have prayed think that they must at once begin to act, and if doors are not open, force them open for themselves. Running before they are sent, such persons usually find that failure ensues. Nehemiah, on the contrary, stayed where he was, pursuing his ordinary course in life, and still waiting on the Lord. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Constancy in prayer*:—A woman who resided on the seashore in the Isle of Wight thought that she heard, during a terrible storm, a cry for help. She listened and the cry was repeated. She could not be mistaken; between the pauses of the storm there it was, the piercing cry of endangered mariners. She dressed hastily, she roused up the beachmen; the lifeboat was launched, and with the blessing of God the storm-beaten crew were rescued. Again and again must we plead in Christ's name, at the mercy-seat, if we would come off more than conquerors. One brief cry is not sufficient. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Patience required in waiting upon God*:—An eminent minister of Christ was laid aside from his work by severe and prolonged sickness. Sometimes he was almost ready to repine and to faint under his chastisement. One morning after unusual suffering he fell into a sweet sleep, and as he slept, he thought he saw a luminous pillar of graceful proportions rise before him. It was so beautiful that it attracted his eye and fixed his attention. Then he thought he saw letters of gold coming out upon the pillar; at first they were very indistinct, and not a little study was required to decipher them. At last the letters shone out in perfect form and order, and he read "Patience" inscribed upon the column. The effort at attention and the joy of discovery awoke him, and he said, "Patience; yes, Lord, I will be patient, and through grace I will yield myself to Thy disposal." God sometimes exercises the faith of His people by long delay, but patient waiting will be rewarded. (*Ibid.*) *Nehemiah or the characteristics of prayer*:—Nehemiah's spirit of prayer particularly appears—I. IN HIS SYMPATHY AND GRIEF FOR HIS COUNTRY. II. IN HIS DESIRE TO PROMOTE HIS COUNTRY'S GOOD. III. IN CARRYING OUT HIS OBJECT THOUGH BESET WITH GREAT DIFFICULTIES. IV. IN REVIEWING HIS WORKS. (*John Patteson, M.A.*) *A model prayer*:—For matter, this prayer is replete with instruction. Let us observe—I. HOW NEHEMIAH ADDRESSES HIMSELF TO GOD. He calls upon "Jehovah, the God of heaven," infinite, supreme, and everlasting. "Great" in power and dominion, and "terrible" in justice and holiness. And withal as a God who keepeth covenant and mercy. As Bishop Reynolds remarks, "God in creation is God around us; God in providence is God above us; God in the law is God against us; but God in Christ is God for us, God with us, God in us, our all-sufficient portion for ever." II. HOW HUMBLY NEHEMIAH CONFESSES HIS OWN SINS AND THE SINS OF HIS COUNTRY. III. HOW HE PLEADS WITH GOD, WHAT WEIGHTY ARGUMENTS HE EMPLOYS! He lays hold upon God's word. This is a firm rock in a troubled sea (*Deut. xxx. 1-5*). Let us come to God with a promise, and reverently remind Him of His own engagement: "Lord, do as Thou hast said; remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." We shall then realise the consolation, happily expressed by a pious negro who said, when he was asked concerning the abiding peace which he enjoyed, "Massa, me fall flat upon the promise, and me pray straight up." IV. OBSERVE THE PARTICULAR REQUEST WHICH HE MAKES. "Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Its matter is very full: its manner very suggestive. 1. How reverent was Nehemiah before God! How just were his views of the Divine majesty! Shall angels thus humbly prostrate themselves before God? Oh, with what "reverence and godly fear" should sinners come to His footstool. 2. How earnest was his prayer: "I beseech Thee," "hear the prayer of Thy servant which I pray before Thee." Many say their prayers, but do they pray in prayer? Prayer is the expression of want: it is not eloquence, but earnestness; not fine words, but deep feeling. To be effectual it must be fervent. Prayer is incense: but if the fragrance is to ascend before the mercy-seat, it must be kindled by holy fire from the altar. Prayer is an arrow, but if it is to travel far and pierce deep, the bow must be bent, and the string must be tense, else our

prayer shall fall at our feet. "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." 3. How constant too was Nehemiah! "Day and night" did he plead. "We ought always to pray, and not to faint." 4. How believing was his supplication! Faith is an important element in prayer; it honours God, it pleads the Saviour's merits, it rests upon the sure promise. Faith laughs at impossibilities, and says it shall be done. 5. How fervent was the charity which dictated this prayer! Nehemiah was a patriot in the best sense of the word. He earnestly desired the welfare of Jerusalem. There was not a particle of selfishness in his prayer. May we not learn to be charitable and large-hearted in our prayers — to intercede for others, our country, and the Church of God, and in this respect to copy the example of Nehemiah? (*J. M. Randall.*)

**The great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him.**—*The majesty and mercy of God*:—From this sublime invocation we gather—

**I. THAT THERE IS PERFECT HARMONY IN THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DIVINE NATURE.**

**II. THAT THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES ARE EQUALLY ENLISTED IN THE WORK OF HUMAN SALVATION.**

**III. THAT THE HARMONY OF THE DIVINE NATURE IS THE ONLY TRUE BASIS OF MORAL GOODNESS.**

1. The contemplation of Divine compassion alone tends to antinomianism. 2. The contemplation of the Divine holiness alone tends to legalism. Hence spring meritorious works, penances, and self-inflicted flagellations and other useless tortures. **IV. THAT THE HARMONY OF THE DIVINE NATURE FURNISHES THE ONLY TRUE IDEAL OF MORAL GOODNESS.**

**V. THAT NOTWITHSTANDING THE HARMONY OF THE DIVINE NATURE, MEN COME INTO CONTACT WITH DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THAT NATURE ACCORDING TO THEIR MORAL CONDITION.** (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

*False views of sin and prevailing immorality*:—It is to be feared that in our day sin is often made light of, and false views of sin lie at the root of much of the evil that we see around us, both in the Church and in the world. Such views are largely caused by an imperfect apprehension of the righteousness of God, and this in its turn usually proceeds from a refusal to bow to the authority of His Word. Thus truths about His judgments are set aside, statements concerning His wrath are explained away, and His mercy is magnified at the expense of His justice. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

**And confess the sins of the children of Israel.**—*Sins of a community confessed*:—Confession of sin is essential to success in prayer. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." Nehemiah feels that God has reason to be displeased with His people. They have been guilty of sins of omission (have not kept) and of commission (transgression). Their privileges have aggravated their guilt: they have sinned against light; the commandments, statutes, and judgments given by Moses bear witness against them. And Nehemiah is conscious that he shares their guilt. He has sinned himself; and he has sinned in their sins. For all of us have a part in the sins of the community. Our influence helps to mould and shape its life. It is a principle in Chinese law to hold the relatives of a criminal in some degree responsible for his crime, so that the whole family is concerned in the conduct of its individual members. That principle is founded on a true conception which applies in both directions. The community has a responsibility for its members, each of whom shares a like responsibility for the life of the community itself. So we need to say "our trespasses," "our debts," in our daily prayer. (*S. S. Times.*)

*Forgotten sins remembered*:—**I. WE ARE ALL CHARGEABLE WITH FAULTS.**

**II. WE ARE LIABLE TO FORGET OUR FAULTS.** Through—

1. Ignorance of the true nature of sin. 2. Self-love. 3. Hurry of business, 4. Elevation in worldly circumstances. **III. VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES ARE ADAPTED TO REMIND US OF OUR FAULTS.**

**IV. WHEN WE ARE REMINDED OF OUR FAULTS WE SHOULD BE READY TO CONFESS THEM.**

**V. CONFESSION OF FAULTS SHOULD ALWAYS BE ATTENDED WITH REAL AMENDMENT.** (*J. Kidd.*)

**Ver. 9-11. But if ye turn to Me, and keep My commandments.**—*The spiritual favourite at the throne of grace*:—"If you turn unto Me, and keep My commandments." There is no promise of mercy but to those that turn. The Scripture is peremptory in denial of mercy to such as go on in their sins. Yet how many are there that bless themselves that it shall go well with them, though they cast off all God's yokes. "If ye turn." The holy man Nehemiah puts God in mind of His promise, and his argument is from the like, and indeed from the less to the greater. Because God would rather of both perform His promises than His threatenings, because mercy is His own proper work. "These are Thy servants." Though sinful servants, yet they are Thy servants. "These are Thy people." Thou hast no other people in the world but these, and "Thou art their God." He pleads from

former favours. "Thou hast redeemed them by Thy great power and strong hand." It is a good argument to plead with God for former favours: because "there is no shadow of change in Him" (James i. 17); He is always like Himself; He is never drawn dry. And it is a great honour to go to Him for new favours upon former, because He hath an infinite supply. We may draw so much from men as they have not afterwards to make good, but we cannot honour God more than to go to Him with a large faith, to fetch large favours from Him. The more He gives, the more He can give, and the more He is willing to give. We may much more take this argument in our mouths, and press the majesty of God. "Thou hast redeemed us," not out of Egypt or Babylon, the land of the north, but "with the blood of Thy Son," from hell and damnation; and therefore Thou canst redeem us from this petty misery, from these enemies. We may allege that grand favour to all other petty redemptions, whatsoever they are. "Let Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servants." It is a prayer; and Thou art "a God hearing prayer." "They be Thy servants, and Thou regardest Thy servants." Here are but a few petitions in this large request: "remember," "be attentive," and "give me favour." It is an excellent skill and art in prayer to have strong arguments. Then the suit comes off easily, as in Psalm xc. Therefore, it is an excellent thing to study the Scriptures, and to study all the arguments whereby holy men have prevailed with God in Scripture, and to see in what case those arguments were used. It is a pitiful thing now for Christians under the glorious light of the gospel to come to God only with bare, naked petitions and have not reasons to press God out of His own Word. They cannot bind God with His own promise, nor with arguments that He hath been bound with before. "They desire to fear Thy name." Empty relations have no comforts in them: to profess one's self a servant, and not to make it good that he is a servant. We must make good the relation we stand in to God, before we can claim interest in the favour of God by our relation. He goes to make it good that he was the servant of God, not from any outward thing, but from his inward disposition, "the fear of God," which I will not now stand to speak largely of. God requires the heart; and religion is most in managing and turning the affections, for they are the wind that carries the soul to every duty. The devil hath brain enough, he knows enough, more than any of us all. But then he hates God. He hath no love to God, nor no fear of God, but only a slavish fear. He hath not this reverential fear, childlike fear. Therefore let us make it good that we are the servants of God, especially by our affections, and chiefly by this of fear, which is put for all the worship of God. How doth he make it good that he feared the name of God? He makes it good from this, that he had had good desires. "We desire to fear Thy name." First of all, out of this, that this desire to fear the name of God is brought as an argument to prevail in prayer, we may observe that—1. Those that will prevail with God in prayer must look to the bent of their souls for the time to come, and for the present. "Regard Thy servants that desire to fear Thy name." For to come to God without such a frame of soul as this, to desire to please God in all things for the present, and for the time to come, it is to come as God's enemy; and will God regard His enemies? 2. Religion especially is in holy desires. The greatest part of Christianity is to desire to be a sound Christian with all the heart. Why are desires such trials of the truth of grace? Because they are the immediate issues of the soul. Desires and thoughts, and such like, they are produced immediately from the soul, without any help of the body, or without any outward manifestation. They show the temper and frame of the soul. Thereupon God judgeth a man by his desires. But how is the truth of these desires known? I will name a few signs. 1. If they be constant desires and not flashes; for then they come from a new nature. Nature is strong and firm. Art is for a turn to serve a turn. When men personate a thing they do it not long. Creatures that are forced to do so and so they return to their own nature quickly; but when a man doth a thing naturally, he doth it constantly. So, constant desires argue a sanctified frame of soul and a new creature. They argue that the image of God is stamped upon the soul. 2. And likewise, if these desires be hearty, strong desires, and not only strong, but growing desires—desire upon desire, desire fed with desire still, never satisfied till they be satisfied. Strong and growing desires argue the truth of desires; as indeed a child of God hath never grace enough, never faith enough, never love enough, or comfort enough, till he come to heaven. They are growing desires more and more. 3. Again, true desires they are not only of the favour of God, but of graces for the altering of our nature; as Nehemiah here, he desires not the favour of God so much as he desires to fear

God's name. Now when desire is of graces, it is a holy desire. You have not the worst men but would desire, with Balaam, "to die the death of the righteous," &c. (Num. xxiii. 10), that they might enjoy the portion of God's people. But to desire grace, that is opposite to corrupt nature as fire and water, this is an argument of a holy principle of grace in us, whence this desire springs, when we desire that that is a counter poison to corrupt nature that hath an antipathy to corruption.

4. True desire is carried to grace as well as glory, and the desire of heaven itself. A true spirit that is touched with grace, with the Spirit of God, it desireth not heaven itself so much for the glory, and peace, and abundance of all contentments, as it desires it that it is a place where it shall be freed from sin, and where the heart shall be enlarged to love God, to serve God, and to cleave to God for ever, and as it is a condition wherein he shall have the image and resemblance of Jesus Christ perfectly upon his soul.

5. True desires are likewise to the means of salvation, and to the means of salvation as they convey grace, as sincere milk; as you have it, 1 Pet. ii. 2, "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word." Where a man hath holy desires of any grace, and hath them in truth, he will desire those means whereby those graces may most effectually be wrought in his heart.

Use: The comfortable observation hence is this, that weak Christians that find a debility, and faintness, and feebleness in their performances, hence they may comfort themselves by their desire to fear God, and to worship God, and to serve Him, if their desires be true. The reason why God accepts them is partly because they spring from His own Spirit. These desires they are the breathings of the Spirit. And because they are pointed to heavenward, to show that a man is turned; for it is put here instead of turning, "Turn ye to Me, saith the Lord" (ver. 9); and he answereth here instead of turning, "My desire is to fear Thy name." "And prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day." Now he comes to his petition, "Prosper I pray Thee, Thy servant this day." He doth not capitulate with God for particular matters much—for he knew he had to deal with an all-wise God—but he commends his petition in general. He comes again with his relation of "servant," to teach us alway when we come to God to look in what relation we stand to Him, whether we be true servants or no. What work we do for Him, in what reference we do what we do; whether we do it to please Him as servants or no. In all our services we should look to God; for our aim in our works shows what they are, whether they come from servants or no. As the stamp upon a token makes it, if there be a good stamp on it; it is not the matter that makes it current. A stamp on silver makes it current as well as gold, though the metal of gold be better. So when things are done, because God commands them, to please God, as a service to Him, this makes it good that we are servants indeed, that the relation is good. When we go about the service of the Church or country, or place we live in, to think I do God service here, and do it as a service to God, who will be honoured and served in our service to others, herein I am a good servant. "Prosper Thy servant this day." What is included in this word "prosper"? It includes not only success, which is the main upshot of all, but all that tends to good success. In that he saith "Prosper Thy servant," it includes these things. First of all, that in ourselves there is neither direction, nor wisdom, nor ability enough for success. We have not power in ourselves to bring things to a comfortable issue. 2. And then again, to attribute to God all, both wisdom and strength, and goodness, and all. Here is a giving to God the glory of all, when he saith, "Prosper Thy servant this day." 3. Then in the third place, here is a dependence upon God, not only acknowledging these things to be in God, but it implies a dependence upon God for these: "Prosper me, Lord." I cannot prosper myself. 4. Again, in the fourth place, here is a recommendation of all by prayer; a recommendation of his inward dependence upon God for all. Now, Lord, "prosper Thy servant." So that when we come to God for any prosperity and good success, let us remember that we bring self-denial, and an acknowledgment of all excellency to be in God, to guide, and direct, and assist, and bless us. Who can see all circumstances that stand about a business? Who can see all circumstances of time, and place, and persons, that are hindrances or furtherances? It must be an infinite wisdom that must foresee them; man cannot see them. So that unless God in a particular business give success, who is infinitely wise and powerful to remove all hindrances, there will be no success. As it is in the frame of the body, it stands upon many joints; and if any be out of tune, the whole body is sick. And as it is in a clock, all the wheels must be kept clean and in order, so it is in the frame of a business. There must all the wheels be set a-going; if one be hindered, there is a stop in all. It is so with us in the

affairs of this world. When we deal with kings and states, if all the wheels be not kept as they should, there will be no success or prosperity. Nehemiah knew this well enough, "Prosper Thou, therefore." He meant not to be idle when he said this, "Prosper Thou," for he after joined his own diligence and waited. Use: It should teach us to make this use of it, when we deal in any matter, to go to God to prosper it, and give success and direction and assistance and a blessed issue. Let us learn by this a direction to piety and holy walking with God; in all things to pray to God for a blessing. And to that purpose we must be in such a condition of spirit as we may desire God to prosper us; that is, we must not be under the guilt of sin when we come to God to prosper us. And we must be humble. God will not prosper a business till we be humble. Do we think that God will give strength to an ill business? This is to make Him a factor for mischief, for the devil's work. Then come with a purpose to refer all to His service. Lord, if Thou wilt bless me in this business, the strength and encouragement I have by it, I will refer it to Thy further service. "Prosper now Thy servant." What is the reason that God blasts and brings to nothing many excellent endeavours and projects? Men set upon the business of God, and of their callings, in confidence of their wit and pride of their own parts. Men come as gods to a business as if they had no dependence upon Him for wisdom, or direction, or strength. They carry things in a carnal manner, in a human manner, with human spirits. Therefore they never find either success, or not good success. Now when we deal with things in a holy manner, we may, without tempting God, trust Him. "And grant him mercy in the sight of this man." He comes more particularly to this request, "Grant me mercy in the sight of this man." We see that, a king is a great organ or instrument to convey good things from God, the King of kings to men. Therefore he prays that God would give him favour in the sight of the king. For a king is the first wheel that moves all other wheels, and as it were the sun of the commonwealth, or the first mover that moves all inferior orbs. Therefore in heavenly wisdom he desires God to give him favour with him; for if he had that, the king could turn all the inferior orbs to his pleasure. And when God means to do good to a Church or state, He raiseth up "nursing fathers and nursing mothers" (Isa. xlix. 23). A wise and holy prayer! He begins at the head; He goes to the spring of all good. Therefore the observation hence is this, that when we have anything to do with great men, with kings, &c., however, begin with the King of kings, and do all in heaven before we do it in earth; for heaven makes the laws that earth is governed by. Let earth conclude what it will, there will be conclusions in heaven that will overthrow all their conclusions. Therefore in our prayers we should begin with God. And when we have gotten what we would in heaven, it is easy to get in earth. You see what great good a good man may do in a state. "The innocent man delivers the land," as it is in Job xxii. 30. (*R. Sibbes.*) *The prayer of Nehemiah*.—I. GOD HAS HIS SERVANTS IN ALL CONDITIONS AND OCCUPATIONS OF LIFE. We behold Zenas the lawyer, Erastus the chamberlain, Paul the tentmaker, Luke the physician, Zaccheus the publican, Peter the fisherman, Joseph the carpenter, Amos the herdsman, Daniel the minister of state, Nehemiah the cup-bearer—all standing in the same relation, swayed by the same influence. Let it teach us two things. 1. Not to condemn bodies and professions of men indiscriminately. 2. Let us not make our business an excuse for ungodliness. II. IF WE HAVE ACCESS TO SUPERIORS, WE SHOULD USE IT FOR GOOD. Let us remember that we are answerable for all our talents, and one of them is—the influence which in various degrees we have over others. How are we using it? III. THE BEST WAY TO SUCCEED IN ANY ENTERPRISE WITH MEN IS TO COMMEND THE MATTER TO GOD. Our intercourse with God will best prepare us for our dealings with men. It will repress every unhallowed purpose; it will give decision and vigour to good resolutions: it will inspire rectitude and dignity in action; it will enable us to bear disappointment or success. When we have thus commended a concern to God, the mind is set at liberty, and feels satisfaction and composure. When we have thus addressed ourselves to God, difficulties vanish. We know that if the affair be injurious, He can easily hinder it; and if it be good for us, He can as easily promote it. "His kingdom ruleth over all." Every event is under His direction, and every character under His control. Solomon has told us, and not without reason, that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." Eastern monarchs were absolute: they consulted nothing but their own pleasure: yet God had them more under His command than the husbandman has a direction of the water in a meadow. There is a twofold dominion which God exercises over the mind of man. The one is by

the agency of His grace. Thus He can enlighten the most ignorant understanding, and subdue the most rebellious will. We see this exemplified in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus. But there is another empire which He exercises over mankind—it is by the agency of His providence. History is full of this. He can give another heart, when He does not give a new one. Where He does not convert He can check. Jacob was convinced of the dominion and influence of God over the affairs, and even the dispositions, of men. IV. HOW NEHEMIAH SPEAKS OF THE GOVERNOR OF ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVEN PROVINCES. "This man." Let us not however suppose that Nehemiah "despised dominion," or "spoke evil of dignities." But Nehemiah was now before the God of heaven and earth; and what is the greatest monarch in the world compared with Him? Less than nothing and vanity. This is the way to reduce worldly impressions; the world strikes and conquers you when it meets you absent from God. Bring it into His presence—view it there—and what is it? What are the smiles of men to the favour of God? V. OBSERVE HOW THIS GOOD MAN CHARACTERISES HIMSELF AND HIS BRETHREN. "Thy servants who desire to fear Thy name." Modest, diffident language best becomes us, especially before God. There are many who must derive their satisfaction from their desires, rather than anything else. They cannot say they do fear Him, or love Him, or depend upon Him—but they "desire" to do it. These desires are proofs of something good and pledges of something better. They are evidences of grace and forerunners of glory. Desires are the pulse of the soul, by which we may judge of our spiritual life and health. In some respects they are more decisive than actions. Actions may be counterfeited, desires cannot; we may be forced to act, but not to will. All the desires of the Christian, in proportion to their degree, will necessarily excite him to strive, to wrestle, to fight, and to use all the means which lead to the end he has in view. Desires are nothing without endeavours, Balaam, &c. (*William Jay.*) Now these are Thy servants, and Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy great power.—*God's doings in grace are as the links of a chain*:—The whole of God's doings in grace are as the links of a chain, not lying apart, but united together, and the first through an unbroken series leading to the last. Hence Nehemiah finds a plea in what the Lord has done for His people, that He will still show them mercy. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Pleading former favours*:—Plutarch tells us that the Rhodians appealed to the Romans for help, and one suggested that they should plead the good turns they had done for Rome. This was a plea difficult to make strong enough, very liable to be disputed, and not at all likely to influence so great a people as the Romans, who would not readily consider themselves to be debtors to so puny a state as that of Rhodes. The Rhodians were, however, wiser than their counsellor, and took up another line of argument, which was abundantly successful. They pleaded the favours which, in former times the Romans had bestowed upon them, and urged these as a reason why a great nation should not cast off a needy people for whom they had already done so much. Nehemiah here pleads God's former favours to His people. (*Signal.*) For I was the king's cup-bearer.—*The king's cup-bearers*:—This is a suggestive text. There is another King, and He, too, speaks of a cup which is His, and a cup which we may bear, not for Him, but from Him to others. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of water only," &c. We are cup-bearers of our King, Jesus. I. CUP-BEARERS OF THE GREAT KING SHOULD REMEMBER WHAT THE CUP CONTAINS. The cup of blessing is communion with Christ. By His Cross He has reconciled the world to God, and now He invites the race to taste and see that the Lord is good. In the East there are various costly drinks. Some were supposed to have a healing, and others a life-preserving, element in them. The world's salvation is in that cup which Christ has filled for the life of the world. II. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING SHOULD REMEMBER THE LOYAL MANDATE THEY HAVE TO OBEY. "Come" is the first word of Christianity. Come to Christ for life, for ourselves. Its next word is "Go." "Go ye into all the world," &c. If we do not believe in the healing water we shall not give it. Have you ever noticed how heartily people recommend their doctors? During the memorable illness of the Prince of Wales hundreds of people from all parts of the empire forwarded their nostrums for the disease; they felt quite sure that if these special remedies were tried the Prince would recover. Selfishness probably lay at the bottom of some of those recommendations, but in the main these people believed in their prescriptions; they had tried them or seen them tried, and had rejoiced in their success. We must believe, then, before we can give. And then we shall each do it in our own way. 1. Quietly, perhaps, as falls the dew, our

influence will rest on others' hearts. 2. Suggestively, perhaps, by a spirit of reverence and a devout habit of daily walk, which tells of a life hid with Christ in God. 3. Communicatively, perhaps, as when we gather our classes in Sunday school, &c. 4. Distributively, perhaps, by means of the printed page. Every cup that God has placed in our hands—whether filled with wealth or knowledge—we ought to raise to the lips of others. III. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING SHOULD REMEMBER THE WORK OF THE ENEMIES OF GOD. We are not the only cup-bearers in the world. Other visitants are here with other cups, which seem as if they ought to hold sweet and satisfying waters: pleasure, beauty, ambition, &c. Some of these cups are filled with deadliest poison. The cup of knowledge—degrading literature, the cup of companionship, the cup of pleasure, are often so many cups of poison presented to the young. IV. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING SHOULD REMEMBER THAT IT IS A POST OF HONOUR. Christians are the representatives of Christ. They are doing what Christ would do if He were here. V. CUP-BEARERS OF THE KING ANTICIPATE THE DAY OF DIVINE REWARD. Let us notice—1. That Christ's rewards are ours now. 2. That the cup-bearer will be rewarded in the redeemed history of those to whom he has borne the living water, and who will welcome him to glory. 3. That the cup-bearer will be welcomed and rewarded also by the King of kings Himself. (*W. M. Statham.*) *The king's cup-bearer:—* I. Now, observe, THIS MUST BE BY DIVINE APPOINTMENT. I presume that this absolute monarch would not have allowed any one to have been cup-bearer to him but the man he approved of; nay, he would give the appointment himself, and insist that it should be so. No man has a right to assume the Christian ministry but by royal appointment. There are thousands of impostors in these days that the King of kings and Lord of lords never appointed to the work. Now this office is one in which both Prince and people are deeply interested. I presume that Nehemiah—and I may turn to him for illustrations as I go on—was concerned, in his official capacity, to present the cup, not only to the prince, but to the people who were guests with the prince. I pass on, just to notice the official responsibility involved in this. A cup-bearer. A very responsible position this. And a cup-bearer must at his peril look well to all that is contained in the cup, as well as to his promptitude in presenting it. So solemn is the responsibility that according to the view we have just taken of the Lord's servants, if there be any foul and poisonous ingredient found in the cup, the blood of the injured person will be required at his hand. Then, if we observe whence this cup-bearer alluded to in the text was taken, I think we shall find a striking correspondence. He was taken from among the captives, by an act of sovereign grace. What say you to this humbling view of the subject? Are you really aware that you were captives, slaves and bondsmen, in the lowest degradation to sin and Satan, when God took possession of you? Now do not talk about your pedigree any more. II. Now let us look at the UNDERSTANDING THE CUP-BEARER OUGHT TO HAVE OF WHAT THE CUP CONTAINS. This is a matter of vast importance. I shall guess after this manner—that the cup-bearer, in the presence of a Persian monarch, would be required to know that the cup contained approved old wine, of the purest and best character. "But how was he to know that?" Why, by tasting it for himself. "Well, but what would be the effect?" Why, there would be a very cheering effect. All must come from the King's own stores. We must get it from above—from the fulness treasured up in the covenant. Bring me the cup that is full of the atoning blood, pressed from the merits of Christ, acceptable before God, and that the eternal cup-bearer Himself has entered into the King's presence to present before God. III. Now let us look at this cup-bearer, AS TAUGHT HOW TO ENTER THE PRESENCE OF THE MONARCH; because this is a very essential part of the business. He must be a living man. It will not do to bring an automaton, much less a putrid corpse; he must be a living man, with the life of God in the soul, whether he be intended for a public pastor or a more private labourer. Then as regards the cleanliness. Oh, how sad that there should be persons pretending to be ministers of Jesus Christ whose lives are impure! And oh, the importance of a steady hand! If the cup be full, and the cup-bearer have a trembling, tottering hand, he is likely to create alarm, at least, as he goes round, and to spill over some of the precious liquor he has to dispense. "What do you mean by this steady hand?" I mean the steadfast confidence of faith. A word more respecting the cup-bearer's qualifications. He must not go to the king vauntingly, "Please, your majesty, see what choice wine I have brought for you"—that would not do at all. Now you know that this must be repeated as often as called for. I presume that Nehemiah was



called for, when he was to bring his majesty the cup. Be sure you are always ready, that whenever you are called for, you may go in, whenever Jehovah-Jesus, the King of kings, summons you. Now this will make the cup-bearer very familiar with his majesty, as well as with his guests. If a man were only admitted once to a large feast, like a hired waiter, and never had anything to say to the company before or after, he could not be supposed to be very familiar with them; but if he is appointed day by day to hand round the same old wine to the same guests, under the same orders, and in the same position, as a graceful cup-bearer, will not he become very familiar? A word more. When the soul has become so familiar with the monarch, has been admitted so frequently into the banqueting-house, and has partaken so freely of this good old wine, his must be an exalted station. (*J. Irons.*) *The king's cup-bearer*:—It is remarkable that Nehemiah performed the great work of his life without receiving any supernatural communication from heaven. Other eminent servants of God, in their labour for the Church of Israel, enjoyed special direction and encouragement from above. Moses heard the voice of God at the bush, and saw His wonders at the Red Sea. Elijah met the Lord in Horeb, and received words of comfort at the brook Cherith. Daniel beheld visions of God in Babylon, and enjoyed the visit of an angel in the hour of his earnest prayer. We have not now inspired prophets among us, to direct us in the trying situations of life. We are appointed to learn duty from studying the Word of God, and considering the operation of His hands. In this dependence on the ordinary means of grace for counsel and help in our way of life, we have Nehemiah for an example of fidelity, of patience, and of wisdom. I. HIS SERVICE. He was "the king's cup-bearer." The monarch whom Nehemiah served in this capacity is generally supposed to have been Artaxerxes Longimanus. Artaxerxes reigned on the throne of Persia forty-one years, from 466-425 B.C. This king had conceded important favours to the Jewish people; and now in the twentieth year of his reign, Nehemiah filled the high office of the king's cup-bearer. It was a situation this of distinguished honour and emolument in the Persian court. It belonged to the person holding it, not only to bear the royal cup to the sovereign on high festivals, but also to introduce all persons who had business to transact into the king's presence. It is a remarkable circumstance that one of the captive people of Judah should be invested with this high dignity in the kingdom of their conquerors. We may regard it as an illustration of God's faithfulness to His promise, and as a testimony to the power of religion in commending its possessors to confidence. Then, while the faithful providence of God is here illustrated, the religion of these Israelites is also signally attested. Their piety must have been instrumental in elevating them to situations of such responsibility and trust. And what is this but an exemplification of the Scripture, "Godliness is profitable for all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." True religion fits its possessors for better performing all the duties of social life; and men find it valuable in the integrity it inspires. Thus was Nehemiah elevated to high office in the Persian court; yet to a man of his lofty principle it was a place of peculiar trial. He was called to serve his royal master in that which is perilous to the character of princes, and to the comfort of all about them. His office was to bring wine before him, and to give it to the king. And who can tell what power for good the pious Israelite thus exerted over the prince whom he served, as well as in the court where he moved as a witness for God. II. HIS SADNESS. It is a mistake to suppose there is any religion in morose or sombre looks. It is true, religion interdicts the frivolous mirth which the world calls pleasure, and it inspires its possessors with a prevailing seriousness of mind. But so far from forbidding any true enjoyment, piety towards God opens the wellspring of all satisfying felicity. Is not this manifest from the blessings it imparts to the soul? While Nehemiah, therefore, here makes mention of his sorrow of spirit, he is careful to note that he had not "been beforetime sad in the king's presence." He owed it in courtesy to his sovereign, and he owed it also in justice to his religion, to stand in his place with a cheerful countenance. But sorrows at time press on the spirit which cannot be concealed; and seasons, too, occur when they should be known to others. Still there was peril in that look of anguish, for no token of grief was allowed in the royal presence. Several reasons may be assigned for this exclusion of all signs of mourning from the royal presence. It is flattering to the vanity of kings to have all looking and acting before them as if the light of their countenance chased away sorrow; and it may therefore be accounted an affront to contravene this fiction of their power. Hence the proverb,

"In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." Then, again, princes and nobles of earth are loath to look on any memento of the evanescence of their grandeur. They are fain to shut out of view sights of sorrow that might send an arrow to their conscience, or constrain them to think of their dying hour. And surely this is the bitterest drop in the cup of the exile and the bondman, to demand from him looks of cheerfulness while his very heart is wrung with anguish. How different it is with our Saviour King! His heart is the seat of compassion for the afflicted, the wellspring of sympathy for the sorrowful in their distress. III. HIS REASONS FOR SORROW. Men are sometimes sad when they cannot give an adequate reason for their sorrow. They perhaps brood over imaginary woes, and sink into melancholy which has no assignable cause; or they fall into distress, the reason of which they dare not allow even to their own hearts. It may be disappointed pride, or vexation at the success of others, that occasions their griefs, and such reasons will not bear to be expressed as the cause of a sorrowful countenance. But the sadness of Nehemiah was a look of sublime sorrow, whose expression was an honour to his heart. Yet we mark his self-possession and wisdom in that trying moment. There is with him no confusion—no undue excitement; he quails not, nor speaks with stammering tongue. He addresses the king with earnest defence, and yet with manly dignity. Having thus conciliated the king's regard, Nehemiah frames his plea for sorrow with consummate skill and delicacy. "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" This is powerful and effective pleading. He speaks not of Jerusalem as the city of the worship of his God, though this view of it rendered it dearest to his heart, and awakened his deepest sorrow over its desolation. The mention of it, however, in this relation, would either not have affected a heathen prince at all, or it might have aroused his anger to find the temple of God so praised above the altars of his own idols. Neither does Nehemiah speak of Jerusalem as the ancient metropolis of a great nation, the capital of a long line of illustrious kings, though the memory of its past greatness made his bosom swell with grief at its overthrow, and inspired his soul with unquenchable desire for its restoration. Any reference, however, to the history of the fame and power of the city of God might have inflamed the jealousy of the Persian king, and fixed his resolution to leave it in its present ruin. But the human heart naturally softens into tenderness at the graves of the dead, and here the appeal is made to the place of the sepulchres of the departed ancestors of the exile. In these touching and powerful words of Nehemiah we remark the almighty aid God gives His servants in pleading for, and bearing witness to, His cause. The man of God here stood up before the Persian monarch a solitary witness for Divine truth; and the welfare of Judah for ages to come seemed to depend on the manner he would testify for the Lord. But the great Counsellor gives him a mouth and wisdom in this trying hour, that honour his fidelity, and crown his petition with success. It has been so with all faithful witnesses for God in every age. When Luther, at the Diet of Worms, was arraigned before the Papal power, and called to retract the truth of the gospel, it appeared as if the whole cause of the Reformation was suspended on his utterance of "Yes" or "No." But there, too, the Lord stood by him, and enabled him to hold fast the profession of the faith without wavering. So, when our own Knox was required to preach before the lords of the Congregation, amid the wavering zeal of some, and the warping policy of others, the very existence of pure religion in Scotland appeared to depend on the courageous faithfulness with which he should preach the Word. IV. HIS REQUEST TO THE KING. V. HIS PREPARATION FOR DEPARTURE. (*W. Ritchie.*)

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## CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-8. And it came to pass in the month Nisan.—*Divine interposition* :—  
 1. WAS OPPORTUNE. 1. That God's plans are worked out with the utmost precision.  
 2. That God often interferes on His people's behalf when they least expect it.  
 3. That God generally interferes on His people's behalf in their most urgent extremity. II. REQUIRED HUMAN CO-OPERATION. III. WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PROVI-

DENTIAL COINCIDENCES. 1. Nehemiah was unusually sad. 2. The king was unusually friendly. 3. The queen also was present. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

*A true patriot* :—That is only a small part of the gospel which leads a man to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" The glorious gospel of the blessed God goes forth with us interested in everything that concerns us as men—at home, in business, in town, in country, in all national affairs, in the whole world. A Christian may thoughtlessly throw himself into political excitement with no other motive than that of party feeling; but because he is a Christian he will be glad to let the light of God shine in upon his aims and motives, and will be glad to see his duty in the quietness and sacredness of this hour. The Bible, which gives us examples of men in every position where duty leads, has given us amongst its most brilliant and noble characters this of the statesman. If any should think such a position inseparable from ambitious craft and party ends, let them note this fact. Nehemiah is living at the court of the king, occupying a position of high rank, of much influence, of great trust. If the chief thing in life is to take care of one's own ease and luxury, and not to trouble much about the wants and sorrows of other people, then here is a man who has all that heart can wish. There are men, thousands of them, who have no thought or purpose in life beyond themselves. Surely that is to degrade our manhood. But what of any man who should call himself a Christian and yet should live all taken up in himself as if nothing were worth a thought but how he may be as happy as possible on earth—and then happier still in another world? Now to the court where Nehemiah dwells come certain Jews from Jerusalem, and he goes forth to inquire about the state of his countrymen and the beloved city. As a man, as a brother, as a servant of the Living God, he is bound to feel the deepest concern in the welfare of his nation. It is easy enough to think of what Nehemiah might have said, if he had been easy-going and selfish, "I really am sorry, very sorry—but I do not see that I can do anything, you know. It is as much as I can do to look after my own duties here without troubling myself about the affairs of the nation." There are some good people who talk so to-day and think it sounds pious. He might have given them a subscription, say of a guinea. And then he could have turned into the palace thankful not to be mixed up in these worldly matters. Or he might have sipped his wine out of a golden goblet and thought what a pity it was that everybody could not be as comfortable as he was. Well, if he had, you may be sure that neither this Book of God nor any other would have found a place for his name. Or he might have pleaded that he was in a very delicate and responsible position, holding office under the king, and that it would never do for him to get mixed up in these matters. Those good people who separate themselves from the duties of citizenship can find no example in the Scriptures. Of all false notions about regenerating the world, the most utterly false, as well as the laziest, is to think that this is the victory which overcometh the world to run away from it. This Book does not teach that the world is the devil's, and the less we can have to do with it the better. No, indeed! "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." The men of the Bible are not monks and recluses; but they are in the very midst of the world and busied with its affairs. Its prophets and messengers are men whose whole life has to do with the councils of kings, with the ways of cities and courts. Surely it is impossible to think of the religion of Jesus Christ as anything but a profound and eager interest in the welfare of our fellow-men—of their bodies as well as their souls; of their work as well as their worship; of their homes on earth as well as their getting to heaven. Nor have any the right to hold themselves aloof from politics because it is mixed up with party strife. We deplore and condemn the bitterness of party politics—but is there not a great deal of nonsense talked about party politics? How are you going ever to have politics at all without party politics? If you want abuses overthrown, and iniquities set right, and the privileges of the few shared by the many, and abominations like the opium trade swept away, and the great curses of drink and lust and gambling cast out, are we to fold our hands because we are Christians, and let the devil have his own way because these things involve strife! Of course they do, and always will. We must expect opposition, excitement, abuse. The blessed Lord Jesus accepted and discharged the duties of citizenship. Together with His holiness, His meekness, His majesty, there is another grace and virtue—there is in Him a perfect patriotism. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate." And this example, sublime it is, is followed closely by the

apostle Paul, whose passionate love to his countrymen prompts that daring utterance (Rom. ix. 1). And now to turn to ourselves. What think you? Can we dare to call ourselves by the name of Jesus Christ and yet be indifferent to the needs, the sorrows, the wants, the burdens of our country? Lastly, see how this brave man served his country. Nehemiah sees that his power to help his country is not mostly in his rank, nor in his influence with royalty; it is in his power to pray. This is the great truth we want to lay hold of. The greatest power to bless this land is in our power to pray for it. Here all are on a level. Women as well as men. We need not wait for Parliament in this matter. Women's rights are as ours at the throne of the heavenly grace. Beginning thus in prayer right speedily a glorious reformation is wrought in the face of plotting foes. In spite of the poverty and fewness of the people the city is rebuilt. So shall the city of God once more be set up in the midst of men, if every Christian man and woman will take in upon their heart the wants, the woes, the wrongs, the sorrows of our land, and will plead with God to send us a parliament that shall seek first in all things His kingdom and its righteousness. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Religious patriotism exemplified in the history of Nehemiah*.—The patriotism of Nehemiah was based on religion; and hence the interest which he discovered in his far distant but afflicted countrymen, and the sacrifices which he made for their welfare. The love of country, because it is the country of our birth, and of countrymen, is no narrow-minded bigotry, as some shallow infidels in their pretended love of universal mankind have imagined. It is a principle of human nature implanted in our hearts for the wisest purposes. There is a patriotism which is quite selfish in its nature. Their own aggrandisement, or that of their friends and partisans, is the sum and substance of their patriotism. True patriotism, like every other great virtue, must be founded in true religion. Had not Nehemiah been a pious man, and loved the God of his fathers with all his heart, and loved his countrymen because they bore the image of God, he never would have relinquished his high advantages in the palace of Artaxerxes, and sacrificed so largely for their benefit. The true way to love man is to begin by loving God. On hearing of the affliction of his countrymen, who he might have expected by this time would have been in prosperous circumstances, Nehemiah betakes himself to prayer. All this shows Nehemiah's acquaintance with his Bible, and also the warmth of his piety. We might have expected that living at a heathen court, remote from the means of grace, with few to strengthen or encourage him, he, though a good man, would have discovered in his piety the disadvantage of the circumstances in which he had been placed. But no—God can and often does compensate in richer effusions of His grace, for an adverse outward situation. And here let us mark the course which he pursued in seeking to relieve and restore his afflicted countrymen. He did not say, as many would have done, in a proud, vaunting spirit, "I am the king's cup-bearer. Backed by his authority, and armed besides with wealth and power, I will soon reduce Jerusalem and its people to a right condition; I will soon quell all opposition, rebuild the wall, and set up the gates, and make the city glorious as of old." This had been the spirit of man flushed with the pride of power; but he had been taught of God, and so begins with humility and prayer. Let us, and let all, follow his example. All are occasionally in the providence of God required to discharge great duties. Important undertakings, involving the glory of God and the good of others, ever and anon call for our services. How should we engage in them? In a spirit of pride and self-confidence? No. But in a spirit of prayer and penitence. We are apt to despair of an undertaking when it is suspended on the will of man, and he is high above us, and we have ground to apprehend his hostility. Let this encourage us to be much in prayer for a good cause, even where it seems to hang upon the will of man, and that will appear hopelessly opposed. Nehemiah having thus prepared himself by prayer, is not slow in setting out in his work. Here we may notice the prudence and piety of this excellent Jew. He showed prudence in addressing a motive to the mind of the king for his journey, which the monarch could understand and appreciate. He did not ask leave to go to Jerusalem for the sake of his religion, but for the sake of his fathers' sepulchres. This was an argument to which even a heathen would defer. With regard, again, to his piety, he did not only pray to God for counsel before making his request, but he strengthened and emboldened himself by prayer at the very time he stood in the presence of Artaxerxes. And then, after he had been successful in the petition, he did not refer the success to his own wisdom, or to his services as a faithful servant, but to the good hand of God upon him. He arrogated nothing to himself; he ascribed all to

God. How much piety is here, and how beautiful is the union between piety and prudence! Considering the difficulties with which Christians have to struggle, well may the Saviour exhort His followers to be wise as serpents, at the same time that they are harmless as doves. It is worthy of notice, that deeply prayerful and dependent on God as Nehemiah was, he was not unmindful of the duty of using all legitimate means to secure the important object which he had in view. Prayer rightly understood does not destroy the use of means; it only strengthens and regulates its application. Prayer without means, and means without prayer, are equally presumptuous. Duty lies in employing both, but keeping both in their right place. This excellent man now set out on his journey, received the aid of the heathen governors upon the way, and soon reached Jerusalem in safety. With his usual prudence he did not, in the first instance, inform any one—priests, nobles, or rulers—what his intentions were. He wished to see the city with his own eyes, and draw his own conclusions, before acquainting them with the object of his mission. This enabled him to speak from personal observation, and so to speak with greater effect. (*J. G. Lorimer*.)

**Why is thy countenance sad?**—*Royal dislike of the sight of suffering*:—A late empress of Russia enacted a severe penalty, if any funeral procession should pass within sight of her palace. A princess of France, on her way to the capital, once ordered all beggars and persons suffering under disease to be removed from the line of her journey that she might not behold them. This Persian monarch notes signs of grief on his faithful servant with signs of displeasure. How different it is with our Saviour King! His heart is the seat of compassion for the afflicted. (*W. Ritchie*.)

**So I prayed to the God of heaven.**—*Effective ejaculatory prayer the outcome of the habit of prayer*:—It is he that cultivates the habit of prayer that will seize the fitting opportunity for such ejaculations. Some think because they may pray in any place and at all times that therefore seasons of prayer may be neglected with impunity; but only he who delights in communion with God, and does not omit set times for such communion, finds that when the emergency arises, and but a moment is given, he can pray as truly and with as much calmness as in his own closet. (*W. P. Lockhart*.)

*Ejaculatory prayer*:—I. THE NATURE OF EJACULATORY PRAYER. It differs from other kinds of prayer, in that—1. It is dependent upon no place. Prayer is founded upon a full conviction of the natural perfection of God; His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. On the conviction that the object of prayer is everywhere present, and that we may in every place make known our request. Artisan, merchant, physician can pray wherever they may be. 2. It is dependent on no particular time. 3. It is dependent on no particular occasion. No need to wait for Sabbath or hour of public worship. II. EXAMPLES OF EJACULATORY PRAYER. Abraham's servant (*Gen. xxiv. 12*); Samson (*Judg. xvi. 28*); Stephen (*Acts vii. 59, 60*); Christ on various occasions. III. NECESSARY OCCASIONS FOR EJACULATORY PRAYER. 1. When suddenly called to important and difficult duties. 2. The Sabbath day and the assembly of the faithful. If hearers were more engaged in ejaculatory prayer, ministers would be more successful preachers. 3. The hour of temptation. 4. The hour of sickness. IV. THE ADVANTAGES OF EJACULATORY PRAYER. 1. It maintains an habitual sense of our dependence upon God. 2. It preserves our minds in a proper tone for the various exercises of devotion. 3. It is a powerful preventive against sin. 4. It makes us bold to contend with enemies or difficulties. 5. It quickens our zeal and activity in the cause of God. (*J. A. James*.)

*Spiritual recollectionness*:—This is a remarkable illustration of religious presence of mind. I. THE OUTCOME OF A CONSECRATED LIFE. II. THE RESULT OF LONG HABIT. III. A MARK OF SELF-DISTRUSTING HUMILITY. IV. A SOURCE OF INCALCULABLE BLESSING. (*Homiletic Commentary*.)

*Ejaculatory prayer*:—It was—I. SUDDENLY REQUIRED. II. SILENTLY OFFERED. III. SUITABLY ADDRESSED. IV. VERY BRIEF. V. COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL. (*Ibid.*)

*Ejaculatory prayer*:—Nehemiah had made inquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem, and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. "Why should not my countenance be sad," he said, "when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap. Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter. The unpractical will plan, arrange, and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thorough-going lover of Zion puts this question to himself—"What can you do?"

Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. He never had it off his mind for nearly four months. When he slept he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was "Poor Jerusalem!" The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man; and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood something will be sure to come of it. Before long Nehemiah had an opportunity. Men of God, if you want to serve God and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam. There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in His service. That opportunity came, it is true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. But you see when the opportunity did come there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid." You want to serve God, young man; you want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. Thus have we traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. **I. THE FACT THAT NEHEMIAH PRAYED CHALLENGES ATTENTION.** He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing you would suppose was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered he prayed to the God of heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause. Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it. We are the more astonished at his praying, because he was so evidently perturbed in mind. When you are fluttered and put out you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if any one had said to you, "You did not pray when you were about that business," you would have replied, "How could I?" So habitually was he in communion with God that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock. 1. His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion, because he must have felt very eager about his object. The king asks him what it is he wants, and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are not you surprised that he did not at once say, "O king, live for ever. I long to build up Jerusalem's walls. Give me all the help thou canst"? But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired object, he withdraws his hand until it is said, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." I would that every Christian's heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. 2. It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then, because he had been already praying for the past three or four months concerning the siffsame matter. Some of us would have said, "That is the thing I have been praying for; now all I have got to do is to take it and use it. Why pray any more?" But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man to pray more. If you are familiar with the mercy-seat you will constantly visit it. 3. One thing more is worth recollecting, namely, that he was in a king's palace, and in the palace of a heathen king, too; and he was in the very act of handing up to the king the goblet of wine. But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of heaven. **II. THE MANNER OF THIS PRAYER.** 1. It was what we call ejaculatory prayer—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at mercy's door. 2. Notice, how very short it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in, sandwiched in—between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer. 3. We know, also, that it must have been a silent prayer; and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood probably within a yard of him. In the innermost shrine of the temple—in the holy of holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber as Daniel did, and open the window. 4. I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was a very intense and direct prayer. That was Nehemiah's favourite name for God—the God of heaven. He knew whom he was praying to. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyhow. 5. It was a prayer of a remarkable kind. I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he did pray it. **III. To recommend to you THIS EXCELLENT STYLE OF PRAYING.** 1. To deal with this matter practically, then, it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer. 2. But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer, namely, the short, brief,

quick, frequent ejaculations of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this, because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. It requires you to go to no particular place. No altar, no church, no so-called sacred place is needed, but wherever you are, just such a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God, and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances. The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always. Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings.

3. These prayers are commendable, because they are truly spiritual. This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. If I see sparks coming out of a chimney I know there is a fire inside somewhere, and ejaculatory prayers are like the sparks that fly from a soul that is filled with burning coals of love to Jesus Christ. Short, ejaculatory prayers are of great use to us. Oftentimes they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all. The habit of offering these brief prayers would also check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God.

4. Besides, they actually bring us blessings from heaven. I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, "Lord, make this a real blessing to me." Do not exclaim with others, "Am I not a lucky fellow?" but say, "Lord, give me more grace, and more gratitude, now that Thou dost multiply Thy favours." When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you, and you are seriously perplexed, when business has got into a tangle or a confusion which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer. Are the children particularly troublesome to you? Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer, "Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies." Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse, where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer. Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, "Lord, hold Thou me up." And when the shadow of death gathers round you, and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray. Oh! that is a time for ejaculation. "Hide not Thy face from me, O Lord"; or this, "Be not far from me, O God," will doubtless suit you. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

*Ejaculatory prayer*:—Such a sudden uplifting of the soul to God is the most real of all prayers. The man who can thus find God in a moment must be in the habit of frequently resorting to the Divine presence. This ready prayer only springs to the lips of a man who lives in a daily habit of prayer. The deliberate exercises of adoration, confession, and petition prepare for the one sudden ejaculation. There we see the deep river which supplies the sea of devotion from which the momentary prayer is cast up as the spray of a wave. We may compare Nehemiah's two kinds of prayer with our Lord's full and calm intercession in John xvii. and the short, agonised cry from the Cross. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

*Ejaculatory prayer*:—

I. THE PERSON NAMED. 1. As patriot. 2. As statesman. 3. As a man of God. Not guided by the policy of the world. He did nothing without prayer.

II. THE OCCASION. A moment needing great wisdom.

III. THE LESSON TAUGHT. The great duty of ejaculatory prayer. Various uses: 1. Throws light on such texts as 1 Thess. v. 17 and 1 Cor. x. 31. 2. Comfort in bodily pain (Psa. ciii. 13, cxix. 2). 3. Helps to victory over sin. (*Canon Titcomb, M.A.*)

*Prayer before choosing*:—

At the outset two things strike us here. 1. A rare opportunity for worldly advancement. Here is a king saying to his cupbearer, "What dost thou want me to do for thee?" What a chance this for any man! Wealth, dignity, influence, all put within his reach, left to depend upon his choice. 2. A rare treatment of such an opportunity. What should we say if our sovereign should speak thus to us? Most would say, "Give us a mansion to live in, lordly estate as our inheritance, dazzling titles and extensive patronage." What said Nehemiah? He paused and reflected, and then he prayed. He would not choose for himself. Man is a choosing creature; his daily life is made up of a series of choices; he has to reject and accept in order to live.

I. GOD ALONE KNOWS WHAT IS BEST FOR US. "Who knoweth

what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life?" Man is constantly making mistakes in this matter. What he wants and struggles for as a prize sometimes turns out to be one of his sorest calamities. Because Moses looked to heaven in such a case, he chose a life which to unregenerate man would be revolting.

II. GOD ALWAYS DESIRES WHAT IS BEST FOR US. He made us to be happy. That He desires our happiness is clear—1. From the capacity of enjoyment with which He has endowed us. 2. From the elements of happiness with which the world abounds. 3. From the mission of His only-begotten Son. III. GOD, IN ANSWER TO PRAYER, IS EVER READY TO BESTOW what is best for us. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." Conclusion: Let us act ever upon the principle that prayer should precede choice. (*Homilist.*)

*The spiritual telegraph*:—I. How great is the PRIVILEGE of prayer. Great indeed is the privilege of all this access to the mercy-seat, but how unspeakable is the joy and the consolation of habitual communion with God, and of taking occasion from duties, trials, or mercies, as they follow one another, to lift up the heart in pious ejaculation. The word ejaculation is derived from the Latin "jaculum," an arrow, and suggests the rapidity and earnestness with which such a prayer can be winged up to the God of heaven. We have seen how Nehemiah interposed a prayer of this kind as a devout parenthesis between the king's request and his own reply. And there is no book of Scripture so remarkable for ejaculatory prayer as the Book of Nehemiah. Such an acknowledgment of God in our ways is no hindrance, but rather a mighty help in business. That which calms the mind, fixes the purpose, and strengthens moral principle, must be a great assistance, whether in duty or trial. As Fuller remarks, "Ejaculations take not up any room in the soul. They give liberty of callings, so that at the same instant one may follow his proper vocation. The husbandman may dart forth an ejaculation, and not make a halt the more. The seaman nevertheless steers his ship right in the darkest night. The field wherein the bees feed is no whit the barer for their biting: when they have taken their full repast on flowers or grass, the ox may feed, the sheep fatten on their reversions. The reason is because those little chemists distil only the refined part of the flower, leaving the grosser substance thereof. So ejaculations bind not men to any bodily observance, only busy the spiritual half, which maketh them consistent with the prosecution of any other employment." The rapidity and brevity of ejaculatory prayer has frequently been illustrated by a reference to the electric telegraph, the greatest achievement of modern science. Christ has opened a pathway down which redeeming mercy may flow into the heart of the sinner, and by which the aspirations and longings of that penitent sinner may climb up to his reconciled God and Father. Christians, however, can tell of something quicker far than electricity. Thought, winging its way by prayer, travels instantaneously from the depths of a penitent's need to the height of God's throne in heaven. Who can estimate the distance thus travelled, or the relief thus experienced? The child cries, and the Father answers. The sinner weeps, and the Saviour draws near to wipe away his tears, and to fill him with an overflowing gladness. II. But if the privilege of prayer be great, HOW INTENSELY JOYOUS IS THE ANSWER. Recurring to the narrative, let us observe in the gracious answer to Nehemiah's prayer that delay is not denial. Four weary months passed before Nehemiah had the opportunity of bringing under the king's notice the desolation of Zion. The answer to prayer is as sure as Divine power, faithfulness, and love can make it. The providence of God concurs sweetly with His grace in this answer. The answer, moreover, to Nehemiah's request, through the good hand of his God upon him, was overflowing and abundant. The utmost, probably, that he had anticipated would be a full permission to resign his duties at court, and to go to Jerusalem. But he received much more than this. He had the large-hearted sanction of his master for all his undertakings. He was provided with a cavalry escort, with letters for safe conduct beyond the river, and ample material for his work. Our God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. (*J. M. Randall.*)

*Ejaculatory prayer in critical junctures*:—This kind is a short petition, hurled like a dart at its mark. I. WHEN? In critical junctures. 1. Before choice. 2. Before sudden action. 3. In danger. (The sinking Peter.) II. WHY? 1. Because critical junctures admit of no other kind. 2. Because it leads to wisdom (Prov. iii. 6). 3. Because it tranquilises the mind. 4. Because it would prevent sudden action. III. How? 1. Do we pray at all? 2. Do we cultivate the spirit of prayer? (1 Thess. v. 17). 3. Do occasions arise for ejaculatory prayer? 4. Would it help us when buying or selling, when making calls and tempted to gossip or tell



“white lies”? (*L. O. Thompson.*) *The praying patriot* :—The true secret of his success was Divine interposition in his behalf. 1. Nehemiah, under God, made the most of this opportunity. He had waited patiently for it; and now, when it came, he did not fail to turn it to the best account. It is not always that this is done. Many, we fear, if they had the chance, would be more ready to injure the servants of Christ than to do them good, and to cripple and damage His cause rather than extend it. And where another spirit prevails, have we not often to mourn over lost opportunities of doing good? or over opportunities of doing good that have been very imperfectly improved? 2. We are reminded that prayer does not supersede efforts in other directions. Nehemiah did not content himself with the thought that he had prayed for Jerusalem, and for its poor inhabitants. He supplemented his praying by using his best endeavours to secure such help as man could render. And did he under-estimate the power of prayer by this procedure? We think not. His conduct showed that he was neither irreligious, on the one hand, nor fanatical on the other. Some objects are best accomplished by prayer alone. Some persons are so placed now that all we can do in their behalf is to pray for them; and some objects are of such a nature that we cannot advance them otherwise than by giving them an interest in our prayers. But, as a rule, we may, and ought, to do something more than this for a good cause. 3. Answers to prayer should be gratefully acknowledged. (*T. Rowson.*) *Ejaculatory prayer* :—In hard havens, so choked up with the envious sands that great ships, drawing many feet of water, cannot come near, lighter and lesser pinnaces may freely and safely arrive. When we are time-bound, place-bound, so that we cannot compose ourselves to make a large, solemn prayer, this is the right instant for ejaculations, whether orally uttered or only poured forth inwardly in the heart. (*A. Fuller.*) *The flame of devotion constant* :—The sacrifices of prayer and praise cannot be always ascending; but the flame of devotion to kindle them, as opportunity may serve, ought never to wax dim. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *The devotional spirit* :—Of all the habits of the new man, there is none more distinctive, none more conducive to his soul's health and happiness, none more essential to his consistency of conduct and beauty of holiness, than the devotional spirit. (*Ibid.*) *Prayer in few words* :—We make a great many mistakes about prayer; and one of them is that we don't think we have prayed properly unless we have prayed a certain time. But a few moments of real prayer are better than many minutes of only formal prayer. “For my own part,” says a friend, “if one may talk of a ‘best’ in the matter of one's prayers, I find that the best prayers I can make are very short ones indeed. Sometimes they have only one sentence, and they are by no means always said upon my knees. They are offered up while I am walking about, or lying awake at night, or riding in the train.” When Bengel, the great commentator, was too weary to pray, all he said was, “Lord, Thou knowest that it is between us to-day as it was yesterday”; and so he went to sleep. A young man, who was worn by sickness and suffering, had only strength to pray in short and broken sentences. His heart was filled with foreboding as Satan whispered that the great God could never listen to such a prayer. Suddenly he came upon these words: “God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few.” “Ah!” he said, “I have found a verse written expressly for me. God will accept the few words I can utter; now I will trust and not be afraid.” If no man is heard for his much speaking, no man is rejected for his little speaking—if compressed into that little be the earnestness of his heart. (*Signal.*) *Prayer in perplexity* :—A little child, playing with a handful of cords, when they begin to get into a tangle, goes at once to her mother, that her patient fingers may unravel the snarl. How much better this than to pull and tug at the cords till the tangle becomes inextricable! May not many of us learn a lesson from the little child? Would it not be better for us, whenever we find the slightest entanglement in any of our affairs, or the arising of any perplexity, to take it at once to God, that His skilful hands may set it right? *Prayer heard in heaven* :—Ejaculatory prayer is like the rope of a belfry; the bell is in one room, and the end of the rope which sets it a-ringing in another. Perhaps the bell may not be heard in the apartment where the rope is, but it is heard in its own apartment. Moses laid hold of the rope and pulled it hard on the shore of the Red Sea; and though no one heard or knew anything about it in the lower chamber, the bell rang loudly in the upper one. (*Williams of Wern.*) *The swiftness of prayer* :—We may, if we please, have a mail to heaven, conveying in a moment intelligence of our condition and concerns, our wants and our desires, to our God and Father, and bringing back to us a gracious answer, with advice and comfort,

protection and help. Prayer is the swift courier, and sighs are the winged messengers. Doves have been trained to fly from place to place, carrying letters in a little casket fastened to their neck or foot. They are swift of flight; but our prayers and sighs are swifter, for they take but a moment to pass from earth to heaven, and bear the troubles of our heart to the heart of God. (*R. Scriver.*) *Ejaculatory prayer possible to busy people*:—The following extract is from a letter addressed by a poor woman to the editor of the *Banner of Faith*: “Poor women with large families often think they have little time for prayer or praise. As I am a poor woman with a large family, and know the value of prayer and praise, I will tell them how I find time for it. Whilst I am cleaning the house I lift my heart to God and say, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me, for Christ’s sake. Amen.’ When I am washing the clothes I say, ‘Wash me in Thy blood, O Jesus; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.’ Then as I get to each of my children’s clothes I pray for them separately, not aloud, but in my heart. Again, if I pick up the shirt of one who drinks, I ask God to change his heart, to show him his state in God’s sight, and to help him to give up drink and become a sober, godly youth. If I am washing the shirt of another who has a horrid temper, that is a terror to us all, I pray to God to break his stubborn temper, to soften his heart of stone, and give him a heart of flesh. If I am washing anything belonging to a girl who is idle, then I pray God to show her her sin, and change her whole nature, by the Holy Spirit. Yes, I pray for each as I know their need. Then when I am sewing I find lots of time both for prayer and praise. When I light or mend the fire, I say in my heart, ‘Kindle, O Lord, a sacred fire in this cold heart of mine.’” (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*)

**Ver. 5. If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour.**—*The man of business*:—Such a man was Nehemiah. His strong practical sagacity is manifest throughout the whole record of his work in Jerusalem. And in his case this business ability was blended with enthusiasm. It is by such men—men combining practical sagacity with noble impulse—that the best work of the world is done. Sometimes we find men of enthusiastic zeal or true piety who have little or no business faculty, who are deficient in powers of observation and management, who lack the tough energy of perseverance, who perhaps scorn tact and prudence, and who have little capability of adapting means to ends. Such men are apt to become either crotchety or fanatical; they waste both time and strength on impracticable schemes; they may have noble aims, but they seek to carry them out by unwise methods; they damage the cause which they have at heart by their own blundering; they isolate themselves from those with whom they ought to work, and alienate those whom they ought to conciliate; they grow impatient of their imperfect instruments and agents; and, failing to realise the best conceivable, they become careless as to realising the best practicable. And, on the other hand, we find men of shrewd sagacity and business ability, of keen observation and ready tact, who lack all the higher inspiration of noble and generous impulse; who are deficient in imagination, affection, and piety; who have no real enthusiasm even in their business; and who carry on their practical work with the successful persistency of a cold, clever, and calculating selfishness. A man of this type might have gone to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem if he had been well paid for the work, and if he had received money with which to hire the labour of the builders; but he would never have gone, like Nehemiah, impelled by the fervours of a pious patriotism, nor could he have roused the people, as Nehemiah did, to voluntary effort and sacrifice. The practical business faculty is a gift of no mean order; but, like all other gifts, it ought to be devoted to the service of God. If a man possesses energy, persistency, tact, quickness in forecasting necessities and results, skill in adapting means to ends, he ought not to regard these powers as mere instruments for the promotion of his own selfish objects. These faculties are part of himself, and he is himself called to live as a servant of God. Then, again, the exclusive development of mere business faculty is attended with the utmost danger. It is, indeed, a faculty for which we may well thank God; but there are other powers of our nature—some of them higher and more important—which ought also to be exercised. The whole spiritual side of our being, looking out on God, on righteousness, and on eternity, calls for cultivation. Nor ought we to neglect the affections and emotions of the heart. Even the culture of the imagination is not to be despised; it furnishes a healthy counterpoise where the practical faculty is keen and strong. If there be no exercise of the imagination, no deepen-

ing of the affections, no quickening of the conscience and the spiritual nature, then a man's practical sagacity may only tend to make him a hard-headed and hard-hearted worldling. His tact will be constantly degenerating into mere manoeuvre, *finesse*, and deceit. His power of managing men will lead him to deal with them as tools. He may thus "get on" in the world, as some people count getting on; he may perhaps gather wealth, and leave it behind him to his heirs. But his own nature will deteriorate; it will become narrow, stunted, and impoverished, and he will never do any of the best kind of work in the world, either for God or for mankind. By all means let a man cultivate practical sagacity; but let him take care to consecrate it to God, and to make it the handmaid of aims that shall be worthy of his spiritual nature. We want neither fanatics nor worldlings, neither unpractical dreamers nor mere selfish tacticians; we want men who, like Nehemiah, are open to the promptings of generous impulse and pure enthusiasm, and at the same time can carry out their projects with wise foresight, patient energy, and prudent self-control. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *The mission of Nehemiah*.—The text harmonises with the historic truth that for every great work there must be an inspired leader. Every great revival has hinged upon the deeds of some one man. The success of Nehemiah depended upon three traits, which must be characteristic of every great leader in human affairs. A lack as to either one of the three would render his undertaking a failure. I. HIS FAITH. There is nothing in this world more sublime than the man of faith, and there is no one more truly ridiculed. Faith, dissatisfied with the present, looks into futurity. The multitudes are content with to-day's attainments. Nehemiah pondered upon the Jerusalem which should be. Plans, at the first, were indistinct. It seemed an impossibility. His were the words of faith and not of sight: "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build." II. HIS SAGACITY. Faith incites to the purest wisdom. The intellect of man is made to be the servant of his faith. His faith was reasonable, yet, after it had become most perfect, in order to attain its object he was compelled to reason out each step of the way. Thus is it many a man works out his prayers. Artaxerxes had chosen a sagacious man for his cup-bearer, and Jehovah said Artaxerxes had chosen wisely. Jehovah needed not only a man of faith, but a shrewd man, to restore Jerusalem to its former greatness. III. HIS COURAGE. Grant him to have been a man of strongest faith, and of shrewdest mind to reason out the successive steps, yet without courage to take each step, he had failed after all. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Nehemiah before Artaxerxes*.—And now it was that the man of piety appeared in the man of patriotism; and admirably does Nehemiah stand forth as an example to those who profess to have at heart their country's good, and to be stricken by its calamities. He did not immediately call a meeting of the Jews, to consult what might be done for their afflicted countrymen. He did not gather round him a knot of politicians, that plans might be discussed, and assistance levied. But Nehemiah "sat down, and wept." But Nehemiah did not count his part done when he had thus, in all humility, confessed the sins of his nation, and entreated the interference of God. He was not one of those who substitute prayer for endeavour, though he would not make an endeavour until he had prepared himself by prayer. Fortified through humiliation and supplication, he now sought to take advantage of his position with the king, and, true patriot as he was, to render that position useful to his countrymen. Nehemiah was sore afraid when Artaxerxes, struck with the sorrow depicted on his features, imperiously asked the cause of the too evident grief. It was the moment for which he had wished, yea, for which he had prayed, yet, now that it had come, he felt so deeply what consequences hung upon a word, that he was almost unmanned, and could scarce venture to unburden his heart. The facts are these: the first, that it was as the city of his fathers' sepulchres that Jerusalem excited the solicitude of Nehemiah; the second, that Nehemiah found a moment before answering the king to offer petition to the Almighty. Now Jerusalem had not yet received its most illustrious distinction, forasmuch as "the fulness of time" had not arrived, and therefore there had not yet been transacted within her circuits the wondrous scenes of the redemption of the world. Nevertheless, to every man, especially to a devout Jew, there were already reasons in abundance why thought should turn to Jerusalem, and centre there as on a place of peculiar sanctity and interest. There had a temple been reared, "magnificent" beyond what earth beforetime had seen, rich with the marble and the gold, but richer in the visible tokens of the presence of the universal Lord. There had sacrifices been continually offered, whose efficacy was manifest even to those who discerned not their typical

import, forasmuch as at times they prevailed to the arrest of temporal visitations, and pestilence was dispersed by the smock of the oblation. There had monarchs reigned of singular and wide-spread renown. Hence, it might easily have been accounted for why Nehemiah should have looked with thrilling interest to Jerusalem. But the observable thing is, that Nehemiah fixes not on any of these obvious reasons when he would explain, or account for, his interest in Jerusalem. Before he offered his silent prayer to God, and afterwards, when he might be supposed to have received fresh wisdom from above, he spake of the city merely as the place of the sepulchres of his fathers, as though no stronger reason could be given why he should wish to rebuild it; none, at least, whose force was more felt by himself, or more likely to be confessed by the king. The language of Nehemiah is too express and too personal to allow of our supposing that he adopted it merely from thinking that it would prevail with Artaxerxes. If we may argue from the expressions of Nehemiah, then, it is a melancholy sight—that of a ruined town, a shattered navy, or a country laid waste by famine and war; but there is a more melancholy sight too, that of a churchyard, where sleeps the dust of our kindred, desecrated and destroyed, whether by violence or neglect. There is something so ungenerous in forgetfulness or contempt of the dead—they cannot speak for themselves; they so seem, in dying, to bequeath their dust to survivors, as though they would give affection something to cherish, and some kind office still to perform. We do not, however, suppose that the strong marks of respect for the dead, which occur so frequently in the Bible, are to be thoroughly accounted for by the workings of human feelings and affections. We must have recourse to the great doctrine of the resurrection of the body if we would fully understand why the dying Joseph “gave commandment concerning his bones,” and Nehemiah offered no description of Jerusalem, but that it was the place of the sepulchres of his fathers. The doctrine of the resurrection throws, as you must all admit, a sacredness round the remains of the dead, because it proves, that, though we have committed the body to the ground, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” that body is reserved for noble allotments, destined to reappear in a loftier scene, and discharge more glorious functions. Then the well-kept churchyard, with its various monuments, each inscribed with lines not more laudatory of the past than hopeful of the future, what is it but the public testimony to all that is precious in Christianity, forasmuch as it is the public testimony that the dead shall live again? We are now to detach our minds from Nehemiah pleading for his fathers’ sepulchres, and fix them upon Nehemiah addressing himself to God in ejaculatory prayer. Under how practical and comforting a point of view does this place the truth of the omnipresence of God. Yet, with all its mysteriousness, this is no merely sublime but barren speculation, no subject to exercise the mind rather than benefit the heart. It should minister wondrously to our comfort, to know that, whether we can explain it or not, we are always, so to speak, in contact with God; so that in the crowd and in the solitude, in the retirement of the closet, the bustle of business, and the privacies of home, by day and by night, He is alike close at hand, near enough for every whisper, and plenteous enough for every want. It is not so with a human patron or friend, who, whatever be his power, and his desire to use it on our behalf, cannot always be with us, to observe each necessity, and appoint each supply. It is not indispensable that there should be outward prostration and set supplication. The heart has but to breathe its desire, and God is acquainted with it so soon as formed, and may grant it, if He will, before the tongue could have given it utterance. The man of business, he need not enter on a single undertaking without prayer; the mariner, he need not unfurl a sail without prayer; the traveller, he need not face a danger without prayer; the statesman, he need not engage in a debate without prayer; the invalid, he need not try a remedy without prayer; the accused, he need not meet an accuser without prayer. We may hallow and enlighten everything by prayer, though we seem, and are, engaged from morning to night with secular business, and thronged by eager adherents. We cannot be in a difficulty for which we have not time to ask guidance, in a peril so sudden that we cannot find a guardian, in a spot so remote that we may not people it with supporters. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) **Unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres.**—*The place of my fathers’ sepulchres*:—Any reference to the history of the fame and power of the city of God might have inflamed the jealousy of the Persian king, and fixed his resolution to leave it in its present ruin. But the human heart naturally softens into tenderness at the graves of the dead. Hence the consummate skill and delicacy with which Nehemiah frames his plea

for sorrow. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Wise musings*:—Men love to think of the honour of their fathers' titles, or of the grandeur of their fathers' habitations. It is wise in us to muse sometimes on the place of our fathers' sepulchres. The graves where they lie are mementoes whither we must follow them, and from their tomb they call us to prepare for entering the narrow house appointed for all living. (*Ibid.*) *God always helps His faithful witnesses*:—In these touching and powerful words we remark the almighty aid God gives His servants in pleading for, and bearing witness to, His cause. He gives Nehemiah mouth and wisdom in this trying hour. It has been so with all faithful witnesses for God in every age. It was so with Luther at the Diet of Worms. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 7. *If it please the king, let letters be given me.*—*Religious prudence*:—**I. THAT PRUDENT FORETHOUGHT IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS IN SPIRITUAL AS IN SECULAR ENTERPRISES** (Psa. cxii. 5; Prov. xi. 29, xii. 23, xiv. 15; Luke xiv. 28). **II. THAT PRUDENT FORETHOUGHT IS NOT OPOSED, BUT HELPFUL, TO SPIRITUAL FAITH.** 1. It furnishes a rational basis for expecting success. 2. It acts upon the supposition that mental powers were given to be employed in the service of God. 3. It takes no step without seeking Divine guidance and approval. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Common sense in religious work*:—When we go about the Lord's work, we must not leave our wits behind us, or forget the principles of business and the rules of daily life. Neither should we ignore difficulties or suppose that they will disappear before some miracle-working power. Although depending solely on the Lord, we need not denude ourselves of judgment and common sense. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Prayer and common sense*:—So I stood and "prayed unto the God of heaven—then I asked the king to give me letters." This is the true model of prayer—to pray to the King of kings and then to accept the ordinary appointments of life; to invoke Omnipotence, and then to use your senses. Have you been praying? Did you sit in your chair and pray that you might be able at the end of the week to make both ends meet, and then fall asleep until the time came, and wake up to find that both ends did not meet? That was not prayer at all. I will pray God to help me to pay every debt I owe, to overcome every difficulty in my way. Now, having said my prayer, let me go out and do it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. *And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.*—*The power of God in the individual Christian*:—The secret of success is to have God with us, and what we want in our day is not more machinery or new methods of work, but more of the power of God in individual Christians. Nehemiah, in his prolonged prayerfulness, shows us how this power is to be obtained, for it is when we know God in His fulness and have enlightened communion with the Lord, that we are fitted to become "workers together with Him." (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *God's hand*:—**I. A SPIRIT OF DEPENDENCE.** There breathes forth a feeling of insignificance. The speaker feels scarcely able to trust himself. 1. Man's technical skill. Having arrived at so high a standard in design, construction, and art, we are very apt to think very highly of ourselves. We gaze on the railway, the steam-engine, the ocean-steamer, the tunnel under the hills, and the canal through the land, and fancy we can do anything. 2. Man's natural conceit. There is a great tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Satan employs this tendency to induce man to lift up his hand against God. **II. A SPIRIT OF TRUST.** This spirit of reliance will save us from many trials. It will prevent—1. Anxious care. If we leave our concerns in God's hand, we shall not be careful and cumbered about many things. It will prevent—2. Worldly-mindedness of disposition. The spirit that leaves its cares in God's hand will leave its joys there also. 3. All bitterness of sorrow. (*Homilist.*) *The recognition of God*:—He recognised God in all. Not to his favourable circumstances, nor to the opportunity of presenting his petition, nor to the good mood the monarch was in, nor to all of these combined, did he ascribe his success. Secondary causes would not explain the result; it must be traced to its true source—God and God alone must have all the glory. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

Vers. 9–20. *Then I came to the governors beyond the river.*—*The initial stages of a great reformation*:—Great reformations often have an insignificant commencement and are slow in developing their true proportions. Reformation work—**I. REQUIRES A VIGOROUS LEADER.** **II. SHOULD NOT BE UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT A DELIBERATE ESTIMATE OF ITS MAGNITUDE AND DIFFICULTY.** **III. IN ITS INITIAL STAGES IS**

ALMOST CERTAIN TO PROVOKE OPPOSITION. IV. CANNOT BE CARRIED ON WITHOUT MUTUAL CO-OPERATION. V. CANNOT SUCCEED WITHOUT THE DIVINE BLESSING. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) **And gave them the king's letters.**—*The king's letters* :—Here is a beautiful picture of the Christian evangelist. When he goes abroad he has no introduction of himself to make—he simply delivers the King's letters. When the preacher appears in the pulpit, all he has to do is to give the people the King's letters; when the student bends his head over his desk in the study, it is only that he may study what is written in the letters of the King. The moment we begin to write letters of commendation for ourselves, we become as other men; our distinctiveness as ambassadors is lost. The King's letters are full of light and love. They are addressed to every man. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **When Sanballat the Horonite . . . it grieved them exceedingly.**—*Secret jealousy* :—There is jealousy—**I. TYRANNICAL IN ITS SPIRIT. II. ANTI-RELIGIOUS IN ITS ATTITUDE. III. COVETOUSLY SELFISH IN ITS MOTIVES. IV. SELF-TORTURING IN ITS EFFECTS.** (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

**Ver. 11. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.**—*Days of quiet* :—Some workers of the present day would have sent round the bellman and summoned the leading inhabitants to a preliminary convention within half an hour of their arrival; but there was no such unbelieving hurry-scurry with Nehemiah, and therefore three days were allowed to elapse. It was necessary to recover from the fatigue of the journey. He who is the God of our bodies as well as of our souls knows full well the limit of our powers, and would not have us outrage physical laws, even in seeking to do Him honour. These three days may have been needful also for further prayer and waiting upon God. It may have been also that God would not have him begin work under mere natural impulse or human excitement. Hence the need of three days of quiet. Men under excitement can do wonderful things, whether in storming a redoubt or in conducting what in modern times is called a "mission"; but God does not want His work done under excitement. Calm and quiet of soul are more favourable to that true reliance upon Him which gives Him all the glory and seeks none for ourselves. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The wisdom of waiting* :—This interval would no doubt be occupied in reflecting on the difficulties of his enterprise—in maturing his course of procedure. Besides, he was probably in doubt how to proceed, till God revealed to him His will; and for this he needed to make his requests known to Him in prayer. This is ever the discipline of a religious life. A pious writer remarks, "I need just as much patience to wait as the lamp needs oil, till the day break, and the shadows flee away." (*W. Ritchie.*) *Preparatory retirement* :—God's servants frequently thus retired for deliberation before entering upon arduous tasks. Moses, Paul, Christ Himself. Nehemiah's retirement—**I. GAVE him time to LOOK ROUND. II. GAVE him time to LOOK FORWARD. III. GAVE him time to LOOK WITHIN. IV. GAVE him time to LOOK UPWARD.** (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

**Vers. 12-20. And I arose in the night.**—*Nehemiah, the model worker* :—**I. HE WORKS THOUGHTFULLY.** Before he commences this tremendous task he spends some time in deliberation. Who can tell the thoughts of Nehemiah as he moved amidst the ruins of Jerusalem this night? Jerusalem was the home of his fathers, the centre of his most hallowed associations. Before we undertake a work we should gauge its magnitude and become convinced of its practicability (Luke xiv. 28-30). Men, from the impulse of the hour, put their hand to undertakings which they have never given themselves time to understand, and for which they are not fitted; and hence, when the excitement is over, they abandon the work in disappointment, if not in disgust. **II. HE WORKS INDEPENDENTLY.** "I arose in the night, I and some few men with me, neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem." It is not thus that we are wont to act in this age. There are but few men who would take up any great work, and set about it themselves, without seeking the sympathy and counsel of their fellow-men. If we have some work which presses on us as a duty of general importance, almost the first thing we do is to call our friends together, get their sanction, and form a committee to aid us in carrying it out. We, in these days, work by organisations. Our individuality in work is scarcely seen or felt. We are the limbs of societies, wheels in organisations. What we want is more individualism in action, more of the independent man, and less of the society. Two things will show the importance of this. **1. The opinions of others cannot determine our duty. Duty is between us and God. It is something**

that is perfectly independent of men's thoughts. 2. The opinions of others may embarrass us in duty. Duty generally comes to us in very legible writing, wants no interpreter, speaks to us in a very distinct voice. Amid the din of human opinion there is danger of its losing its voice. Let us, therefore, cultivate the habit of acting independently; not proudly, not despising the opinions of others, or refusing their co-operation, but working ever from the force of our own convictions.

III. HE WORKED INFLUENTIALLY. The next chapter shows that, under his influence, all classes, male and female, set to work in right earnest. 1. The people saw that he understood the matter. They recognised in him at once a man who knew what he was about, a man of intellectual grasp and might. 2. The people saw that he was thoroughly in earnest. What he said he meant. IV. HE WORKED HEROICALLY.

1. Look at the sacrifices he made. 2. Look at the enemies he encountered. He had, at least, three desperate enemies (ver. 19)—Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. These men showed their opposition—(1) By ridicule (ver. 19, chap. iv. 3). (2) By indignation (chap iv. 7). 3. The labour he effected. He finished the work in fifty-two days, notwithstanding all the difficulties that seemed insurmountable. He overcame the enemies who were malignant, he triumphed over all. V. HE WORKED RELIGIOUSLY. "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was upon me," &c. (vers. 18-20). 1. His impulses to act he ascribed to God. 2. His rule of action he derived from Him (ver. 18). 3. His sacrifices in the work he made for Him (chap v. 15). 4. The spirit with which he performed his work was that of dependence upon Him (chap. iv. 9-12). This religion is the philosophy of his power. He felt himself the messenger and the servant of God. (*Homilist.*)

*Preparation before work*:—We often undertake one thing and another, both in our spiritual and temporal life, without preparation; and for the want of this, failure ensues. Before Dr. Nansen, the Norwegian, started on his Polar expedition, he slept under his silk tent for the double purpose of testing it and acclimatising himself. Other members of the expedition slept in the open air covered with the wolf-skins they were taking out with them. A very famous writer, in order to secure as good a description of a thunderstorm as possible, took up his position during six such storms on the top of a cathedral tower, getting himself drenched to the skin each time. It is not only the doing of a thing, but the preparation for doing it, which in many cases issues in success. No time spent in preparation for what is worth doing is lost. (*Signal.*)

*Purposes not to be prematurely divulged*:—The purposes of ruling spirits are sometimes so grand and daring in their character as to be incapable of deriving support from other minds; and were they to be prematurely divulged, they would be ruined in their execution. Lord Clive was wont to say that he never called a council of war but once, and if he had acted on the advice given, the battle of Plessey would not have been fought, and India would have been lost to the British Empire. (*W. Ritchie.*) *A time for silence*:—Learn—Good intentions are best kept secret.—I. UNTIL THEY ARE ASCERTAINED TO BE PRACTICABLE. II. UNTIL THEY CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITH DECISIVE ENERGY.

III. FROM THOSE WHO ARE LIKELY TO OPPOSE THEM. IV. UNTIL THE CO-OPERATION ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS CAN BE RELIED ON. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

*The Divine visit to the soul*:—In this visit of generous sorrow to a scene of temple desolation we are reminded of the first approach of the Holy Spirit in mercy to our ruined souls. (*W. Ritchie.*)

*Personal exploration*:—Take your own measure of the destitution of the world. Every Christian man should go about in the world, so far as he is able to do so, by the aid of reports—to take his own measure of the situation—steal out by night and see what the devil has done with this human nature of ours, and he should say, "God helping me, I will do my utmost to undo this mischief and to repair the shattered house of the Lord." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*The midnight horseman*:—I. My subject impresses me with the idea WHAT AN INTENSE THING IS ATTACHMENT TO THE HOUSE OF GOD. It is through the spectacles of this scene that we discover the ardent attachment of Nehemiah for that sacred Jerusalem which in all ages has been the type of the Church of God, our Jerusalem, which we love just as much as Nehemiah loved his Jerusalem. What Jerusalem was to Nehemiah the house of God is to you. Infidels may scoff at the Church as an obsolete affair, as a relic of the dark ages, as a convention of goody-goody people, but all the impression they have ever made on your mind against the Church of God is absolutely nothing. You would make more sacrifices for it to-day than for any other institution, and if it were needful, you would die in its defence. II. THE RUINS MUST BE EXPLORED BEFORE THE WORK OF RECONSTRUCTION CAN BEGIN. The reason that so many people in this day, apparently converted, do not remain con-

verted, is because they did not first explore the ruin of their own heart. There was a superstructure of religion built on a substratum of unrepented sins. The trouble with a good deal of modern theology is that, instead of building on the right foundation, it builds on *débris* of an unregenerated nature. They attempt to rebuild Jerusalem before, in the midnight of conviction, they have seen the ghastliness of the ruin. A dentist said to me a few days ago, "Does that hurt?" I replied, "Of course it hurts. It is in your business as in my profession—we have to hurt before we can help; we have to explore and dig away before we can put in the gold." You will never understand redemption until you understand ruin. A man comes to me to talk about religion. The first question I ask him is, "Do you feel yourself to be a sinner?" If he says, "Well, I—yes," the hesitancy makes me feel that the man wants a ride on Nehemiah's horse by midnight through the ruins—in at the gate of his affections, out at the gate of his will, by the dragon well; and before he has got through with that midnight ride he will drop the reins on the horse's neck, and he will take his right hand and smite on his heart, and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

III. My subject gives me a SPECIMEN OF BUSY AND TRIUMPHANT SADNESS. If there was any man in the world who had a right to mope and give up everything as lost, it was Nehemiah. You say, "He was a cup-bearer in the palace of Shushan, and it was a grand place." So it was. But you know very well that fine architecture will not put down home-sickness. Although he had a grief so intense that it excited the commiseration of the king, yet he rouses himself up to rebuild the city. He gets his permission of absence; he gets his passports, he hastens away to Jerusalem. By night he rides through the ruins; he arouses the piety and patriotism of the people, and in less than two months Jerusalem was rebuilt. That's what I call busy and triumphant sadness. The whole temptation is with you, when you have trouble, to do just the opposite to the behaviour of Nehemiah, and that is to give up. You say, "I have lost my child, and can never smile again." You say, "I have lost my property, and I can never repair my fortunes." You say, "I have fallen into sin, and I can never start again for a new life." If Satan can make you form that resolution, and make you keep it, he has ruined you. Trouble is not sent to crush you, but to arouse you, to animate you, to propel you. Oh, that the Lord God of Nehemiah would arouse up all broken-hearted people to rebuild. Whipped, betrayed, shipwrecked, imprisoned, Paul went right on. I knew a mother who buried her babe on Friday, and on the Sabbath appeared in the house of God, and said, "Give me a class; give me a Sabbath-school class. I have no child now left me, and I would like to have a class of little children. Give me really poor children. Give me a class off the back street." That is beautiful. That is triumphant sadness. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

*An inspiration for workers*:—It was like the magic horn that awoke the inmates of the enchanted castle. The spell was broken. The torpor of the Jews gave place to hope and energy. Nehemiah brought with him no new labourers; but he brought what was better, the one essential requisite for every great enterprise—an inspiration. This is the one supreme need at present. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

*Nehemiah's appeal*:—I. THE APPEAL TO THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM. The distress under which the city was then groaning was the result—1. Of the opposition of enemies. 2. The indifference of friends. II. THE INVITATION IN CONNECTION WITH THE APPEAL. It was an invitation—1. To laborious and self-denying exertion. 2. To immediate exertion. 3. To individual, to combined, to persevering exertion. III. THE CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THE INVITATION IS ENFORCED. 1. He appeals to their sense of shame. 2. He notices the encouragement which was afforded them by God. 3. He appeals to the encouraging circumstances of the times. IV. THE EFFECT WHICH ALL THIS HAD UPON THE MINDS OF THE PEOPLE. 1. It raised their enthusiasm. 2. It led them to exertion. 3. It led to mutual excitement and co-operation. 4. It led to final success. (*W. Orme.*)

*The call to build*:—I. A TYPE OF ALL GOD'S TRUE REPAIRERS. Think of our English Church alone. Ridley at Cambridge, musing in his walks over St. Paul's Epistles; Wesley in days when our pulpits were too much filled with "apes of Epictetus," brooding over the gospel of grace and the sweetness of the name of Jesus; Simeon, maturing the views which stirred so many stagnant parishes, and gave a fresh spring to missionary work; in the last few years Aitken, often spending six hours in prayer within his church upon the Cornish cliff, and then going out with his soul on fire to speak to sinners of redeeming love—what are these and many others but Christian Nehemiahs? Such men began with prayer their survey in solitude and silence of the wall which was broken down. They ended by crying with a voice that went forth with the



winds, and entered with the power of God into hundreds of spirits—"Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem." II. LESSONS FOR ALL SUCH REPAIRERS. 1. The builders worked under arms. Those who at this crisis would do a real work of spiritual restoration in the English Church, must "every one have his sword girded by his side," and "so build." Those who seek three great ends—a more reverent worship, a ministry fuller of individual consolation, and a tenderer devotion—must, even while they build, be equipped and vigilant against a hostile influence. (1) They must guard against a Romanising ritual, and, I will add, a sentimental ritualism. (2) They should be vigilant to resist other and far subtler invasions of principles hostile to the spirit of the English Reformation. (a) We are often told that we must have among us habitual private confession, and absolution, and systematic spiritual guidance. I hold with Mason, who says, "We have not only a public absolution in our Church, but a private one also, for there are many who want particular comfort. And therefore we use a private absolution in the visitation of the sick, and so often as the broken hearts and wounded consciences of particular persons do require it." But if any desire to go further—to change confession from a medicine for the morbid into a good for all—they are aiming at that which the genius of Teutonic Christianity, the character of the English people, and of the English Reformation, render an impossibility. (b) A second point, in which our builders need to wear the sword while they repair the wall, concerns the form of the devotions which they may introduce or recommend. Let me instance that of which so much has lately been heard—the worship of the Sacred Heart. 2. The builders worked under the harmonious co-operation of priesthood and laity. Ezra and Nehemiah combined in the restoration. (*Abp. Alexander.*) *A desolate city*:—A desolate city tells a tale of past greatness, past resources, past life. Who can look upon the nations of China and India and not mourn over their moral and spiritual desolation? There are God's gifts in abundance, but superstition reigns supreme. The teeming millions are in a state of moral ruin. Shall we not feel compassion for them? Let us arise and restore the breaches made by sin, Satan, and superstition. (*J. M. Randall.*) *The ruins of Jerusalem*:—Nehemiah is for us an example. Like him, we would build again the walls of Jerusalem. I. LET US SEE IN WHAT WAY OUR SITUATION RECALLS TO US THE TIMES OF NEHEMIAH. 1. Jerusalem, for us, is the Church. I use the word in the wide and yet exact sense that the Scripture does. The Church, according to the expression of Paul, is the spiritual house of God, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. The Church, according to the expression of Peter, is that building to which we ought to belong as living stones in order to be a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. The Church is that family whose members are known to God alone; it is that great city of souls of which our various Churches are but imperfect realisations. If the house in which we have grown up is dear to us above all, what then will be the Church, especially when it has transmitted to us with the treasures of the gospel examples of heroic fidelity? Let us then love the Church we belong to—love it more than others; it is our right, it is our duty; but above this, let us maintain the grand reality which is called the universal Church, and which must be to us an object of faith. 2. "The wall of Jerusalem is broken down," said the fugitives to Nehemiah. Is not this the message that many voices bring to us to-day from all parts of Christendom? The Protestant Church has been surprised. Protected heretofore by the rampart of the authority of the Scriptures which the Reformation had built up, and behind which, no doubt, were sheltered many intestine struggles, it was unanimous in rushing to the breach when it was necessary to defend its liberty against Catholicism, its faith in the God of revelation against infidelity. To-day that rampart has been forced; criticism has penetrated into the place like a vast and impetuous torrent. The authenticity of the sacred books, facts, and doctrines, all have been shaken; and, after having denied the reality of a supernatural revelation, it sees itself outstripped by a philosophy which, enlarging the breach which it has forced open, destroys even the religious sentiment itself, well knowing that nothing will have been accomplished so long as the voice within the recesses of the human soul, which calls for succour and pardon from the living God, has not been stifled. II. LET US NOW SEE WHAT HIS EXAMPLE OUGHT TO TEACH US. Notice—1. His sorrow. Do you understand such sorrow as Nehemiah's? Do you know what it is to groan as he did over the desolation of Jerusalem? Our age has signalled sorrow; its poets have sung of the secret melancholy of the soul with a vivid emotion; but in the sadness which inspects itself, which analyses itself with complacent curiosity, which exhibits itself to the world, what egotism is there,

what bitter pride or trivial vanity! How rare is sorrow for the cause of God. Curious about everything, even of evil, diverted by everything, distracted from the one thing needful, we are hardly able to comprehend the sorrow of an Elijah making lament over erring Israel, of a Nehemiah shedding heartfelt tears over the ruins of Jerusalem, or a Paul full of holy bitterness in the presence of Athenian idolatry, of a Calvin consumed with sadness at the sight of the persecuted Churches.

2. His spirit of sacrifice. Nehemiah does more than lament. He acts, and to act he knows how to sacrifice all. To the peace which he enjoys he prefers the dangers of a struggle without a truce; to the brilliant future which awaits him, the reproach of his people. It is this spirit which always distinguishes those who wish to serve God here below. In every age they must be separated from the world. I have seen, in another denomination, young men and maidens, at the age when life promised them its enchantments, giving all up, even their very name, putting on the serge or the cassock, and for ever enlisting themselves in the service of the poor, in school or hospital. We like an easy religion. They alone are able and worthy to raise the walls of Jerusalem who, as Nehemiah, will know how to sacrifice all for God.

3. His earnestness in the work he has undertaken. Notice here the greatness of his faith, as measured by the paucity of his resources and by the vast obstacles which he encounters. Possibly more than one person in this assembly has felt his zeal paralysed by the spectacle of the Church, by the smallness of our resources compared with the vastness of the obstacles! You also, like Nehemiah, have passed dark nights in which you have reviewed one after another all the ruins which our century piles up. Old beliefs, holy, venerated traditions, which mingle in a far-off recollection with the prayers of the cradle, scouted, abandoned to the derision of the multitude! Have you not seen in those souls which are dear to you the hopes and consolations of the gospel wear away one by one? Have you not heard from lips which once prayed as yours the cold denials of a pitiless criticism? Once they heard, when beholding the skies, the song of worlds praising their creator God; now they catch nothing more than the inevitable evolution of an eternal mechanism. Once it was Providence, without whose permission not a sparrow falls to the ground, and who counts our tears; now it is man, who stands solitary in face of the cold immensities of space, where God is no more. Alas! before such ruins I understand how the heart shudders. But it is the very magnificence of these ruins that fills us with hope. Between the living God of Christianity and the nullity of fatalism there is nothing which remains standing; not one system which keeps together even sufficient stones to build a piece of wall or a shelter. Now humanity does not live upon nothing. It sins, it suffers, it dies; it has need of pardon, of consolation, of hope; and if, before those supreme questions which we can shun to-day, but which will return to-morrow, science must confess its entire ignorance; if, to the spirit which has a thirst for the absolute, to the heart which has a thirst for love, to the conscience which has a thirst for righteousness, it replies, "Leave those reveries; I acknowledge nothing but what I touch and what I see"; if such are its latest words, as we are given to understand, humanity must go away elsewhere to seek for repose, peace, certitude. May it then find opened before it the Jerusalem of the living God! Come then, I say to you, come, and let us raise again the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. To the work, in days of difficulty; to the work, notwithstanding the want of success. "O God," said a great Christian, "success is Thine affair; as for me, give me obedience." (*E. Bersier, D.D.*)

And they said, **Let us rise up and build.—Prepared hearts:—**There are moments when human hearts are so prepared by God that great truths require only to be addressed to them to meet an immediate reception. They are as the paper made ready by the photographer for receiving the impress of a likeness; the object has only to be presented before it in a proper light, when it takes on its exact image. It was so in this instance with these men of Judah. They readily responded to Nehemiah's appeal. (*W. Ritchie.*)

**Enthusiasm:—**The power of enthusiasm, the worth of an enthusiastic man, is the lesson here impressed upon our minds. 1. Nehemiah comes all on fire for his undertaking. He is not only enthusiastic, but wise. Enthusiasm without forethought is blind force. It is like the ocean foaming away its power in battle with an iron-bound coast. United with prudence it is like the stream of a broad, deep river fertilising the soil, bearing on its breast the ships of merchants, giving an impulse to industry, to enterprise, and to the spirit of adventure and discovery.

2. Christianity is a feeble power if it is not enthusiastic. It is the amazing spectacle of the great Redeemer of the world laying down His life for the world

which has created the Church, and which is the life and energy of her every message and mission. 3. Enthusiasm is the need of the Church of God. Hearts with fire, souls with passion glowing within them. Before such men the mountain becomes a plain, the rough places smooth, the impossible possible. It is humanity's true cleansing stream and motive power. The enthusiasm of Christ is for us all the safeguard of conduct, the mightiest inspiration to a holy and useful life. (*A. J. Griffith.*) *Leaders wanted*:—Often what people are waiting for is simply a leader—a man of courage, energy, and hopefulness, who can stimulate their zeal by the contagion of his own, and who, at the same time, has practical ability to marshal their powers and to organise and direct their resources. Such a man was Nehemiah. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The strength of unity*—I. CONSISTS IN ITS POWER TO PROTECT INDIVIDUAL WORKERS AGAINST DISCOURAGEMENT. 1. Isolated workers are always liable to depression. 2. Mutual sympathy and conference relieve mental strain, and renew exhausted energy. II. CONSISTS IN ITS POWER OF RESISTING COMBINED OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT. III. CONSISTS IN ITS POWER TO COPE WITH THE INHERENT DIFFICULTIES OF THE WORK, WHICH OTHERWISE WOULD BE INSURMOUNTABLE. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *The rebuilding of Jerusalem*:—I remember a saying of Edward Irving's which proved a guiding light to so great a man as Frederick Maurice, when he was in doubt and darkness. It was this: "The Old Testament is the dictionary of the New!" We can use the Old Testament reverently as such to-day, and may find the meaning and motive of modern service in this story of earlier days. Let us try to look, then, under the surface and see—I. THE NATURE OF THIS WORK—the rebuilding of Jerusalem. 1. It was for religious ends that it was undertaken. Babylon and Shushan were noble cities; but the work of erecting others like them would not have inspired Nehemiah with this self-sacrificing fervour. Some cities are the creatures of commerce, and grow, as London grows, by the numbers who come to it for work or speculation; and then they decay, as many a city has done, because the highway to the sea gets closed up by the mass of matter poured down by the river and silted up by the tides. Other cities are planted by a conqueror for military purposes, to dominate some disaffected district, or to guard a threatened frontier—as Metz was fortified in modern days, and as most Roman towns were erected in our own country. But Jerusalem was not a military centre; it was on no great highway, and its site would have been ill chosen for commercial enterprise. That city was pre-eminently a sacred city, containing a temple whose ritual enshrined truths which the world could not have done without. If you read the subsequent history of this rebuilding you will see the uses to which the city was put directly it was safe against attack. And those were the purposes the builders contemplated. The law of God was read to the people by Ezra; the Feast of Tabernacles was kept, as it had not been for many a year; the Day of Atonement was solemnly observed; and the former covenant with Jehovah was renewed. And then righteous laws were enforced, and justice was done to all the people. This teaches us that all our undertakings, as God's people—even though they are as material as building a city or enlarging a church—are to be begun and carried on with such ends in view. 2. Again, the good work these Jews had to do was amid the ruins of what had been noble. Every dislodged stone, every chiselled capital, every broken pillar, every charred fragment of carved woodwork was an evidence of the beauty and glory which had been. Ruins! we Christian workers see them everywhere. Heathen sacrifices and penances—what are these but the fragments, the dimly-remembered traditions, of a nobler faith? And inspiring utterances from the lips and pens of great thinkers, who doubt or deny the existence of God, are only the shattered columns which tell us of what has been given of God, though now marred by human folly. Aye, and in the Church are ruins of theological systems which once imperfectly set forth the Divine ideal, now broken up, not to be destroyed, but to be rebuilt in statelier and nobler forms. And, sadder far, we see around us ruins of manhood, ruins of womanhood, ruins of childhood, faces besotted by drink, bodies debased by impurity, living temples defiled and desecrated, till the very angels might weep over them. God help us to do a little upbuilding, and give us grace to this end to undertake the lowliest work. 3. Such labour is called for by God. II. THE ADVANTAGES OF SUCH WORK. 1. Its tendency is to increase strength. I have seen some Churches ruined by rust, through lying by like a disused plough in fallow ground; but I never saw (or heard of) one broken down by overwork. So long as there is a spirit of enterprise, a longing to do greater things—not from a desire for self-glorification, but from a sincere wish

to advance the cause of the Master—so long there is life, and life which becomes more abundant. Use develops and improves living things and living gifts always. There is more muscle in the ironworker than in the student; more keenness of sight in the Highland gillie than in the shopman; more intellectual power in the student than in the ploughman—because in each the gift has been developed by exercise. Let a Church transmute its feeling of love for the brethren into actual service for the poor, and its love will abound yet more and more. 2. Its tendency is to make more real fellowship among the workers. III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH ALL WORK FOR GOD SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN. 1. In the spirit of earnestness. How seldom we pause to ask, "Is this the best I can do?" Is this "the most I can afford"? Nehemiah sacrificed ease and wealth, but our Lord sacrificed Himself; and in the presence of Christ's Cross how poor our offerings and services seem! Yet men who do not profess what we do sometimes put us to shame. Did you read, in your newspaper, about that terrible accident at the Clifton Colliery, near Manchester, whereby about one hundred and fifty men and boys lost their lives? It seemed going down to certain death to descend the shaft; yet when there was a call for volunteers there was eager competition for the honour of risking life to save the men entombed below. And one of the men down there at the time—Thomas Worrall, the surviving underlooker—knocked to the ground by the force of the explosion, recovered consciousness only to devote himself to the guidance and the deliverance of the frightened men and lads about him; and when he reached the main shaft he sent up all the injured, and then the uninjured, himself remaining in danger till the last. In another part of the pit was a fireman, George Hickson, whose duty it was to manipulate the signals between the bottom of the shaft and the engine-house above. He stood there at the post of duty, refusing to leave, whatever happened; for he was the appointed means of communication between the rescuers up in light and those to be rescued down in darkness. We admire and praise the earnestness and devotion of such heroes in humble life; but should we not emulate them if we profess to be the disciples of Him who gave His life for the world? Standing as we do, like that poor collier, between the living and the dead, the mediators—holding God with the hand of faith, and holding man with the hand of love—let us realise our responsibility and be true to our duty. 2. In the spirit of hopefulness. 3. In the spirit of prayerfulness. (A. Rowland, LL.B., B.A.) They laughed us to scorn.—*Derision*:—A poor, godly man was the subject of much profane ridicule amongst his neighbours. On being asked if these persecutions did not sometimes make him ready to give up his profession of religion, he replied, "No. I recollect that our minister once said in his sermon, that if we were so foolish as to permit such people to laugh us out of our religion, till at last we dropped into hell, they could not laugh us out again." *Fortified against derision*:—Admiral Colpoys relates that when he first left his lodgings to join his ship as a midshipman, his landlady presented him with a Bible and a guinea, saying, "God bless you, and prosper you my lad; and as long as you live never suffer yourself to be laughed out of your money or your prayers." This advice he carefully followed through life. *Open derision*:—The sin of mocking—

I. WEAKENS EVERY VIRTUOUS RESTRAINT. II. STRENGTHENS VICIOUS PROPENSITIES. III. GIVES GREAT ADVANTAGE TO YOUR WORST ENEMIES. IV. EXPOSES TO PECULIAR MARKS OF GOD'S DISPLEASURE (2 Kings ii. 23). V. TERMINATES IN REMEDiless WOE (Isa. lxvi. 3, 4; Prov. i. 25, 26). (J. Kidd.) *Ridicule confronted*:—There are some natures—and these by no means the most ignoble—that are peculiarly sensitive to ridicule. They could meet a blow better than a sneer, and would rather be persecuted than despised. If we hold certain views on political questions, let us, indeed, make sure that we are holding them on good grounds; but let us not give them up, or be ashamed of them, merely because we may be sneered at as being "behind the age." There is an intellectual self-conceit which shelters its own ignorance behind the authority of great names, and all but exhausts its own shallow powers in flippant sarcasm and clever scorn. Or, again, if we take an interest in Christian missions, or try to teach a few children in a Sunday-school, or aim at lifting some of our companions into a more thoughtful life, let us not give up our endeavours merely because some Sanballat or Tobiah may jeer at us. If our work is one which the God of heaven is likely to smile upon and prosper, we can afford to despise all this foolish scorn. Or, again, if we are seeking to build up our own character into true godliness, let us learn to confront all ridicule with calmness. (T. Campbell Finlayson.) *The God of heaven, He will prosper us.—Confidence in God an incentive to work*:—Because—I. IT SUGGESTS ALMIGHTY PROTECTION. II. IT SUGGESTS

PROVIDENTIAL DIRECTION. III. IT SUGGESTS DIVINE BENEDICTION. IV. IT ANTICIPATES ULTIMATE SUCCESS. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Signs of prosperity* :—We are not called to build a wall; but to raise something more noble than that. We are called of God to go and search amongst the rubbish of our poor fallen humanity, and find our precious stones that shall be polished after the similitude of a palace. We are called to build a city of living stones that shall be a habitation of God through the Spirit. The times in which we are doing this are no whit better than they were in Nehemiah's day. The men who scoffed in that day sent their spirit flitting through the ages, and in their children they scoff still. I hear them sneer, and say, "What are these poor people trying to do? Do they presume to tread upon our domain, and think of building on our ruins? Why, if a fox comes against their work it will fall." Well, what is our answer? "The God of heaven, He will prosper us." I. SIGNS OF PROSPERITY. 1. A bold independence of the world. 2. A total dependence upon God. 3. A third sign of prosperity is the spirit and power of prayer in a Church. This is the great secret of her strength and success, and the power that moves all her machinery. My little child wants to know what makes the hands of my watch go round and tell me the time. I explain the power of the spring, and assure her that is the secret of the hands going round. I want to know the secret of so much prosperity in some Churches. I see it is there in abundance, and wonder if the secret is in the learning and eloquence of the preacher, or the wealth of the deacons, or the respectability of the congregation. I have found out the secret. There is a crowd of earnest men, and in the crowd the spirit and power of prayer. 4. When the work of conversion goes on in the congregation. II. THE SOURCE OF PROSPERITY. III. THE CERTAINTY OF PROSPERITY. (*W. Cuff.*) *The worker's watchword* :—I. THE HONOURABLE NAME NEHEMIAH APPROPRIATES TO HIMSELF AND TO HIS FELLOW-LABOURERS: a servant of God. To know God is the highest aim of science; to be like God, the highest ideal of humanity; to serve God, the joy of angels. A child of God is a more precious designation than that of servant of God. Yet there is a resemblance between them, for true liberty, greatness, salvation consists in this—serving God. II. THE HOLY PURPOSE Nehemiah had before him. "We will rise and build." The true servant of God must be building the house of God. 1. In his own heart. 2. In his home. 3. In society. 4. In the state. 5. In the Church. 6. In the world. III. HIS SEVERE STRIFE. His work does not prosper without conflict. The world and the kingdom of God are as opposed to one another as the Samaritans and Jews were of old. Ethics they hold to be of value still, but care nothing for the revelation of the saving grace of God to sinful men. IV. THE TRUE SUPPORT. V. A CONSCIOUS FIDELITY. Nehemiah was conscious of his own fidelity. The Lord still knows those who preserve their fidelity. For their fidelity they are responsible, not for the results. VI. A GLORIOUS TRIUMPH. The Lord causes the work to succeed. If we build and trust, pray and work, the like success will be ours. (*J. J. Van Oosterzee.*) *A well-grounded resolution* :—I. THE ANSWER TO THE ADVERSARIES. II. THE CONFIDENCE EXPRESSED. III. THE RESOLUTION TO WORK. (*J. Wells.*) *Nehemiah's answer to his reproachful adversaries* :—I. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF NEHEMIAH'S ANSWER AND WHAT IT TEACHES us. It reminds us—1. Whence all true prosperity and success in the Lord's work are to be looked for and obtained. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord." It is "God that giveth the increase." What the Word of God thus plainly teaches, providence abundantly illustrates, and human experience amply confirms. 2. That this ought to have the effect of stirring us up to earnest united exertion, and of keeping us ever actively engaged in the Lord's service. II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS ANSWER WAS MADE. 1. It was made in a strong, unwavering confidence in God, with the humble assurance of Divine help and success in the work. 2. It was the spirit of enlightened zeal for the cause of God and the Divine glory. 3. It was the spirit of fearless determination to prosecute the work on which he was entering at all hazards. 4. It was one of self-denying patriotism. Conclusion: We ought to cultivate the spirit and imitate the example of Nehemiah—1. In the work of our own individual salvation. 2. In furthering the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. (*J. Sturrock.*) *Inspiring mottoes for Christian workers* :—There was an excellent missionary who, from his conversion to his death, adopted three texts as his daily mottoes. 1. Personal hope: "Looking unto Jesus." 2. Personal strength: "My grace is sufficient for thee." 3. Personal service: "Whose I am, and whom I serve." (*J. M. Randall.*)

## CHAPTER III.

**VERS. 1-32. Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren.—The builders at work:**—Unity in diversity seems to be the principle on which God works both in the natural and spiritual world—a truth which is capable of almost endless illustration. I. We see it, for instance, IN AN INDIVIDUAL CHURCH. What a variety of mental constitution and habits of thought; what difference in training, in education, and, consequently, in apprehension of spiritual things, and also in time, opportunity and social influence, among individual members. Yet where there is the quickening breath of the Spirit of God, there will be unity in the work while there is diversity in the operations. Thus one man is called to preach, another to take charge of the finances; while each takes his own part and seeks by God's help to discharge his individual responsibility, there must be a chord of sympathy between all the workers, for they "are members one of another." II. The same is true of THE DIFFERENT SECTIONS INTO WHICH THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS STILL UNHAPPILY DIVIDED. III. We may go farther and apply this truth to THE MANY EFFORTS THAT ARE NOW BEING PUT FORTH ALL OVER THE WORLD. Among the nations of Europe there are zealous workers, and we must bear them up before God in believing prayer. They are working on the same wall, though on different parts of it. And there are indirect workers, too, whom we must not fail to recognise. The philanthropist, the temperance reformer, those engaged in educational, charitable, and other movements which tend to benefit the masses of the people—they also are engaged in building the wall. We must enlarge our sympathies and rejoice in every man who seeks to do honest work for God. We must not forget, however, that while there was oneness in the work, there was individuality in its different parts. The work being great, it was subdivided, and each man had a special portion allotted to him, generally that which lay nearest to his own dwelling. There is work there if he will only look for it under the guidance of God's Spirit. About twenty years ago a youth in whose heart lay the fervent desire to preach to the heathen, stood in a crowded assembly listening to a popular preacher. "You think," said the speaker, "of a group of blacks gathered under the wide-spreading banyan tree, and you imagine how you could discourse to them of the wondrous love of Christ. Ah! my brother, begin at home; try it in the streets of London first." It was a word in season; the young man began to build over against his house; God blessed him to the conversion of hundreds of souls, and He is blessing him still. In Christian work, too, we may see that the selfish instinct is recognised—not the selfishness which robs God and glorifies self, but that which leads a worker to be interested in his own department of work as he can be in no other. In this sense there is a selfishness which is not sinful, and which we may almost say is not selfish. If kept in due subordination to thoughts of the oneness of the work, it is commendable and ought to be cultivated. How often in conversation with a brother worker have we failed to gain his close attention while we spoke to him of our work or the work of other brethren! But when we asked about his congregation, his mission-room, or his Sunday or ragged school, what a change! His tongue was loosed, and his whole face glowed with animation as he told us how the Lord was helping and blessing him. It is both natural and right that it should be so. He is building before his own door, and while not ignoring others, he thinks of the work over against his house as he can of no other part of the wall. His heart is specially there. From the portions of work allotted to the individual citizens, we may learn also the importance of concentration in Christian effort. Had a man put a brick here, and a daub of mortar there, and laid a beam yonder, the wall would have made but slow progress; but as one man built before his own door, and another before his, and so on all round the city, the attention and energy of each were concentrated upon his special portion, and the wall rapidly approached completion. Now, concentration is an important principle in Christian work as well as in the building of a wall, and if we look back on the history of the Church, we shall find that the greatest results have been achieved by men who have continuously bent their energies towards a given point. It is the fashion in our day rather to decry "men of one idea." This fashion is much promoted by men of no idea, who are jealous of brethren more fortunate than themselves. This principle is important in reference not only to the object of life, but to the sphere of labour. It is of greater consequence to do one thing well than many things indifferently. Diffusion seems to be the aim of many workers in this restless age, and breadth rather than depth is characteristic of their

efforts. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The repairer of the breach*:—I. THE BUILDERS. The patriots have expressed their purpose to build the wall, and they proceed immediately to carry this good resolution into effect. We know nothing in all history like the scene here portrayed. We have read, indeed, of ancient Rome, when burned by fire, being rebuilt by her citizens; but these were still rich and powerful. We have heard, too, of ancient Carthage, when almost razed to the ground by foreign invaders, being repaired and fortified by the patriots of the nation; but these were yet numerous and wealthy. We know nothing, however, like this in the annals of the world, where the small remnant of the captives of Judah, with simple trust in God, set themselves to rebuild their fallen capital, while they were few in numbers, poor in resources, and surrounded with hosts of enemies frowning on their enterprise.

1. They were all Israelites in the land of Judah. In the book of Ezra we learn that aliens from the commonwealth of Israel were not permitted to join in rebuilding the temple, even though for sinister ends they proffered their services. They could not enter with spirit into the undertaking, and the labour of the hand was not accepted when unaccompanied with the love of the heart. And it is the spiritual Israel still who can labour in promoting Christ's cause and truth in the earth. They alone can effectually advance religion who love and exemplify it. They alone can truly know the truth so as to speak it and spread it. It is a profound observation of Pascal, "that natural things must be known to be loved, but Divine things must be loved in order to be known." Saving truth is not discerned by the mere power of natural reason, or through the acquirements of human learning; it can be perceived only through the illumination of the Holy Ghost. Believers of the word of salvation can alone declare that word with living power. It is a feeble, as well as a heartless thing, for a man to speak truth for the faith of others, that he does not believe in his own soul. It is in vain to expect earnest effort for the conversion of souls from those who have no mercy on themselves, and who have never repented of their own sins.

2. They were of diversified stations and gifts. It deserves remark, that those mentioned here not only gave contributions in money, that the work might advance, but they laboured by personal effort in the building of the wall. This is worthy of high praise, as showing a heart for the good cause, and wisdom in advancing it. Money can, no doubt, do much to procure or sustain effort in promoting the work of God; but there is a power in living activity, in the warm sympathy, in the personal influence, of the present believer helping forward a religious enterprise, that donations of gold can never secure. It is, hence, to the honour of those saints of Judah that they not merely gave their money, but they gave themselves, in life, in love, to labour with their hands in this work of God for building their city walls. In the narrative of these diversified personal efforts we observe—(1) The priests and Levites joined in the work. "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate" (ver. 1). And "after him repaired the Levites" (ver. 17). But the lowliest act done for the cause of God receives glory from its connection with Him; and the ministers of the sanctuary should be foremost in effort to build up the cause of truth in the earth. (2) The governor and nobles laboured at the wall. There is, indeed, one notable exception to this patrician work. Respecting the nobles of the Takoites it is said, "But their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord" (ver. 5). (3) The daughters of Judah shared this honourable toil. "Shallum, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters" (ver. 12). (4) The young united in this sacred employment. "And Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another piece" (ver. 30). Youth are often tempted to think religion a gloomy thing, and that to embrace it in their early years would be to lose all the pleasures of life.

3. The builders here belonged to different parts of the Holy Land. They were there from Jericho, and Gibeon, and Keilah, and Mizpah, and Tekoa. These were not men of Jerusalem, but they loved the public interests of religion connected with the city of God, and, as true Israelites, they laboured for its restoration. The extension, the purity, the revival of the Church in every part of the world, is the common cause of all who name the name of Christ. Christians, then, should never be so absorbed with their own party interests as to forget the great cause of His glory, and the good of man. If they really love the Lord Jesus their regard for His honour must be tested by their active effort to overthrow the reign of sin, and advance the empire of righteousness.

II. THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK. In the call of Divine judgment for the overthrow of the city God commanded, "Begin at My sanctuary"; and so we remark, this work of restoration commences beside the temple, proceeds north, and westward, till it completes the circuit of the

wall. "The priests built the sheep gate, and they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it." Through it the sacrifices were brought into the holy place, and the patriots first repaired it, that they might defend the house of God from all assaults or danger. They were the ministers of religion that performed this part of the work, and they thus teach their brethren that everything connected with Divine worship is to be guarded with religious care. From them, too, we learn that our first concern in all reform, as well as in the activities of life, should be for the safety and prosperity of the Church of God. But if the Church of Christ is dear to the hearts of her members, and is prosperous through their works of faith, the cause of humanity and of truth is secure in the earth. The work here was carried on by the labourers where each of them was most deeply interested. It is recorded of several of the householders of Jerusalem that "he repaired over against his house" (ver. 23), and respecting one who seems to have been only a lodger, it is said, "he repaired over against his chamber" (ver. 30). Labour near their respective dwellings was most convenient for the persons engaged, and it was necessary for their own safety that the wall there should not be broken down. Religion ever appeals to the instinct of self-love, and the strength of domestic affection in the human heart, to animate zeal for its advancement. Christian parent! your own children are dear to you, and you are appointed to labour and pray for their salvation. Christian philanthropist! your own country is the object of your love, and you are required to give your foremost endeavours for the religious welfare of your brethren, your kinsmen according to the flesh. This work, moreover, was prosecuted with varied zeal. The enterprise required co-operation of effort; and we find sometimes two persons united in setting up one gate. There was need, too, for diversity of zeal, for while one part had only to be repaired, another had to be entirely rebuilt; but the diversity of grace demanded was perseveringly displayed. To the honour of one we read, "Baruch earnestly repaired" (ver. 20), as if his diligence was such as to be manifest to all beholders. To the praise of others, we are given to understand that when they had raised up one part they proceeded to restore another. "Meremoth," and the "Tekoites" (vers. 21, 27), after finishing the work first allotted to them, undertook a second portion of labour, as if they felt there should be no remission from toil so long as any part of Jerusalem remained broken down.

III. THE OPPOSITION OF ENEMIES. It is not good that the spiritual life should flow on without trial, or that a great work should progress without admonition of its constant dependence on God. Long seasons of repose or prosperity are apt to produce self-complacency in the heart; God therefore subjects His servants to humbling reverses, and pours them from vessel to vessel, lest they should be settled on their lees. In the performance of a good work the encounter of difficulties is salutary, and it is permitted in profound wisdom. He that sits in the seat of the scornful seldom needs to sit long there alone. Here we observe the leading mocker is soon joined by a humble imitator, in the same strain of ridicule at the works of earnest piety. "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." And so it has been in all ages. The most solemn scenes and venerable characters, the greatest actions and the grandest enterprises, have encountered the derision of bad men, sitting in the seat of the scorner. The leading infidel of the Continent in the close of last century vented his malicious jests at the sublime verities of the Christian faith, and sneered at the redemption of the world by the blood of God's Son. Thus, too, the profane wits of the time laughed to scorn the commencement of the great enterprise of modern missions to the heathen, and derided the proposal to convert the world to the Christian faith, while only a few pounds were as yet in the treasury, and some illiterate artizans were consecrated the apostles of the gospel to India. All such mockers overlook this one thing, that the cause of truth has God for its author, and therefore faith in effort for its advancement rests on Omnipotence for success. It requires but little talent to raise a laugh against the affections and works of piety.

IV. THE DEVOTION OF JUDAH UNDER NEHEMIAH. In narrating the zeal of the builders, Nehemiah makes no mention of his own great service in the common cause. He was the soul of the whole undertaking—planning, animating, and sustaining it, at every point; yet he never once refers to himself among those whose names are recorded with honour. In the outset of the enterprise, while it still prospers, this truly great man narrates the progress of the work in the third person, as if he had had no share in the honourable toil. But so soon as difficulties occur, the style of the history is changed, and he takes his place under the term "we," among the sufferers for the cause of truth. It is a beautiful example of



modesty and humility to all the servants of God. Nehemiah in this hour of trial displays great forbearance under wrong. The proud scorn he encountered might have provoked his resentment to inflict punishment on its despicable authors. He was high in favour with the king, and it would probably have been easy for him to obtain power to chastise these adversaries of his country; but he is as distinguished for patience as for courage. There is not a Christian that suffers reproach in serving Christ, but the Lord feels it as done to Himself; and unless mercy is asked to pardon the affront, it will be visited with the wrath of the Lamb for evermore.

V. THE ZEAL OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE WORK. Derision and discouragement drive multitudes from the support of a good cause. Many have begun to run well in their religious course. How many, too, are frightened away from a good work by the sneers and opposition directed against those who are zealous in its promotion. They believe the enterprise to be right in itself, they are persuaded it is fraught with blessings to men; but they cannot bear the jests or banter which open adherence to it entails. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Honourable mention*:—It was natural that the Pasha should thus make "honourable mention" of those who came to the front, and threw their energies into this patriotic work. Nehemiah was doubtless anxious to hand down to posterity the names of all who were leaders in the movement; he did not wish to take to himself the whole credit of the work; we may be sure that he wrote down this register of names with both pleasure and pride. We find that priests, rulers, merchants, and tradesmen all took a share in this enterprise; and, where the work of the Lord is concerned, it is only becoming that there should be this unity of spirit and division of labour. Often, in our modern Christian Churches, too much is left to the ministers of religion; and sometimes one man is expected to do a work which ought to be shared by a whole congregation. The merchant and tradesman will sometimes plead the engrossing claims of business or the pressure of "bad times" as a reason for holding aloof from the varied efforts of Christian benevolence; and it is to be feared also that some of our modern aristocrats are prevented by the haughty and foolish pride of rank from throwing their energies and influence into the activities of the Christian Church. (*T. C. Finlayson.*)

*A godly ancestry*:—To us Nehemiah's catalogue of the builders may now seem to be little more than a dry register of names. But it is not difficult to imagine how interesting it may have been for generations after it was written. As Jerusalem began to grow again in power and splendour, men would scan with eager interest the list of those who had engaged in such a brave and self-denying work. We can imagine how, centuries later, the eye of some young boy might kindle with pride and enthusiasm when he read here, in one of the sacred books, the name of some ancestor of his own, who had nobly borne his part in building up the walls of Jerusalem. It is a grand thing to come of a patriotic or godly lineage. (*Ibid.*) *At work*:—Words have given place to deeds. I. In looking over this list of workers we are struck with the fact that THEY ARE DRAWN FROM ALL CLASSES OF SOCIETY. 1. The priests took a prominent part in this work. "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep-gate." We fear that, as respects the high priest, what he did in this way was not a work of love. Some years afterwards, much to Nehemiah's regret, this same Eliashib acted a very unworthy and unpatriotic part: and we suspect it was more for the sake of appearances than from any real wish to promote the success of the enterprise that he was found among the builders mentioned in this chapter. Again, it was quite right the priest should be active on this occasion, for it was owing in a great measure to their unfaithfulness—to the unfaithfulness, that is, of the priesthood prior to the time of the Babylonian captivity, that the city was laid in ruins. In Jeremiah we read, "The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew Me not; the pastors also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit." 2. The rulers, too, or princes of the house of Israel, took a leading part in repairing the wall, and, as in the case of the priests, it was proper they should; for their misconduct, their evil practices, had contributed greatly to bring about the downfall of the city (*Micah iii. 9, 12*). The advantages of co-operation were thus secured. By means of this combination the work was done quickly, simultaneously, and economically. Here, certainly, was a remarkable spectacle: all classes of the community concentrating their energies on a common object. Difference of opinion and rivalries might exist among them, but for the nonce these were sunk in the achievement of a purpose dear to every patriotic heart. II. THAT THE WORK REFERRED TO WAS UNDERTAKEN BY PARTIES FROM VARIOUS LOCALITIES, AND NOT BY THE CITIZENS OF THE CAPITAL

ALONE. Thus we read, "And next unto him builded the men of Jericho." The Tekoites are also named, and the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, and the inhabitants of Zanoah, and the rulers of Bethhaccerem—these and others from places round about are represented as co-operating with the residents of the city in repairing the wall. It was a work of national importance, and as such it was regarded by those just named. III. On further examining this register we find INCIDENTAL REFERENCES in it that should not be overlooked. 1. The first of these I will name relates to the aristocracy of Tekoah, and is evidently not intended to be complimentary to them. The Tekoites, as a people, were not backward, "but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord." They dishonoured themselves by standing aloof as they did at this crisis. Their conduct, it is true, might have been worse. If they were not active in it, we cannot say of them that they were active in their opposition to it. You have known persons not content with a passive attitude towards what is good. What restless—yea, raging opponents Christianity in its early days had to encounter! 2. In striking contrast to the supineness of the nobles of Tekoah was the conduct of Baruch the son of Zabbai. Nehemiah says of him that he "earnestly repaired" his section of the wall. He specially commends the zeal of Baruch. Luther, Wesley, Whitfield, these also are names with which, among other high qualities, will ever be associated an unflinching zeal, as attested by their more abundant labours. Did the keen glance of Nehemiah note the zeal of Baruch? and shall the eye of God pass over unnoticed one earnest worker for Him anywhere, or at any time? 3. The third and last incidental reference to which I shall call your attention informs us that there were those engaged in this wall-building whom we should hardly have expected to find thus employed. At ver. 12 we read, "And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters." All honour to them. We think of others of their sex who have toiled right worthily, and in some instances heroically, in the service of Christ. The case of Sister Dora of the Walsall Cottage Hospital occurs to us. We think too of some who are thus labouring to-day; ladies by birth and education who have consecrated their property and their lives to the Lord, for whose dear sake they shrink not from menial tasks, and repulsive ministries, and risks and dangers, to face which requires a loftier courage than nerves the soldier for the battlefield. (*T. Rowson.*)

*Individual labours:*—The workman is always the world's true nobleman. To pay others to do some portion of our work for us does not absolve us from the duty of personal labour. Every merchant knows that for him to pay a manager and a staff of clerks to conduct his business, while he himself goes away into the country to live and enjoy himself, means, in nine cases out of ten, the decline of his receipts, the breaking up of his trade connection, and presently, the ruin of his business. Every lady knows that to engage servants is not sufficient to secure the order and wholesomeness of her rooms, the regularity of meals in the house, nor the comfort of her husband, herself, and her children. The master, the mistress, must themselves think, and plan, and labour. In Church-work the same law is in force to its utmost jot and tittle. (*A. G. Griffith.*)

*Life's masonry:*—More than one figure in Scripture represents the work of life as a building (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5; Matt. xvi. 18; 1 Cor. iii. 10–15). I. EVERY ONE TO CONTRIBUTE HIS LIFE-TOIL TO THE BUILDING UP OF THE CITY OF GOD. II. EVERY MAN HAS HIS OWN APPOINTED SPHERE AND KIND OF WORK. 1. Every one must find his own task. 2. Every one must be content with his own task. III. EVERY MAN CONTRIBUTES BUT A FRAGMENT TO THE GREAT WHOLE. IV. EVERY MAN TO WORK IN HARMONIOUS AIM WITH HIS FELLOW-BUILDERS. V. THE UNITED WORK IS SUPERINTENDED BY THE GREAT ARCHITECT. 1. He only understands the whole of the great intricate plan of life. 2. He is near us with directions. 3. Let the thought, "Thou God seest me," animate us at our toil. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

*A suggestive Church record:*—I. THE POTENCY OF PERSONAL INFLUENCE. Nehemiah created a spirit of enthusiasm which set all this train of exertion in motion. II. THE FORCE OF EXAMPLE. The priests took the lead in the common labour. III. ADVANTAGES OF SYSTEMATIC ORGANISATION. Each volunteer made responsible for some limited portion of work. IV. THE GIANTIC RESULT ACHIEVABLE BY INDIVIDUAL ACTION. Like coral insects at work, the multitude of builders each did his part of the whole. V. THE DIVERSITY OF DISPOSITION REVEALED BY THE GREAT EMERGENCY. 1. Enthusiastic work. 2. Refusal to put the neck to the yoke. VI. THE CONSENTANEITY OF PURPOSE AND EFFORT WHICH A GREAT EMERGENCY DEMANDS AND IS CALCULATED TO BRING ABOUT. VII. THE DIVERSITY OF GIFTS WHICH A GREAT EMERGENCY CALLS INTO REQUISITION. (*Ibid.*) *Associated*

*labour*:—A single bee, with all its industry, energy, and innumerable journeys it has to perform, will not collect more than a teaspoonful of honey in a single season, and yet the total weight of honey taken from a single hive is often from sixty to one hundred pounds. A very profitable lesson to mankind of what may arise from associated labour. (*Scientific Illustrations, &c.*) *The building of the wall*:—Learn—I. THAT WHILE GOD GRANTS SUCCESS TO EARNEST EFFORT, THAT VERY SUCCESS WILL OFTEN AROUSE OPPOSITION. II. OPPOSITION TO EARNEST WORK GENERALLY COMES FROM "THE MIXED MULTITUDE" WHO HOVER ROUND THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD. III. WHAT ONE MAN DARE NOT DO ALONE, HE IS EMBOLDENED TO DO BY ASSOCIATION WITH OTHERS; and often men of diverse opinions and tastes are banded together to oppose God's work, their only bond of union being a desire to have it stopped. IV. TIMID AND FEARFUL ONES THERE ARE IN EVERY COMMUNITY WHOSE HEARTS READILY FAIL THEM, and who often think that the good cause is about to be worsted. V. IN ALMOST EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH THE ARDOUR OF THE FEW IS MORE OR LESS DAMPED BY THE APATHY OF THE MANY. VI. WE MUST WATCH AS WELL AS PRAY. A Russian proverb says, "When in a storm, pray to God and row to the shore." VII. THE OPENNESS OF THE WORKERS, AND THAT THEY SHOULD ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER WHEN BESET BY FRIEND OR FOE. VIII. STEADY AND PERSISTENT WORK TELLS BEST IN THE LONG RUN. IX. THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF ARDUOUS LABOUR FOR THE LORD, THE DECENCIES AND PROPRIETIES OF LIFE ARE IN NO WISE OVERLOOKED. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Ministers should be leaders*:—The ministers of Christ must not only give good exhortation to their flocks, but also put their own shoulder to the work. Example is mightier than precept. The roads in the Ban de la Roche were soon levelled and put in order when the good pastor Oberlin set the example of manual toil to his parishioners. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Merchant workers*:—In our own country, the names of Henry Thornton, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Sir Francis Crossley, and Samuel Budget, will occur to many. Our merchants and tradesmen have indeed glorious opportunities for extending the Redeemer's name, if they had but a mind to the work. (*Ibid.*) And next unto him buided the men of Jericho.—*System and detail in work*:—A great work—I. CAN ONLY BE PLANNED BY A GREAT MIND. II. CAN ONLY BE CARRIED OUT BY A DIVISION OF LABOUR. III. CAN ONLY BE ACCOMPLISHED BY ATTENTION TO DETAILS. "Bars and locks." IV. BRINGS OUT SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS. V. MUST HAVE REGARD TO PRACTICAL UTILITY. The fish-gate as necessary as the repairing of temple wall. VI. MUST BE INSPIRED BY A LOFTY PURPOSE. VII. MUST LOOK ON TO THE FUTURE. It must have in it the element of permanence. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Ver. 8. And they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall.—*The broad wall*:—I. THE SEPARATION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD FROM THE WORLD IS LIKE THAT BROAD WALL SURROUNDING JERUSALEM. An actual separation is made by grace, is carried on in the work of sanctification, and will be completed in that day when the saints shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air. 1. Christians should maintain a broad wall of separation between themselves and the world. The distinction ought not to be one of dress or of speech, the separation ought to be moral and spiritual. (1) A Christian ought to be more scrupulous than other men in his dealings. He must never swerve from the path of integrity. He should be one whose word is his bond, and who having once pledged his word, sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not. (2) The Christian should be distinguished by his pleasures. We are not quite ourselves, perhaps, in our daily toil, where our pursuits are rather dictated by necessity than by choice, but our pleasures and pastimes give evidence of what our heart is and where it is. (3) Such separation should be carried into everything which affects the Christian. When a stranger comes into our house it should be so ordered that he can clearly perceive that we have a respect unto Him that is invisible, and that we desire to live and move in the light of God's countenance. (4) This broad wall should be most conspicuous in the spirit of our mind. There should be about a Christian always the air of one who has his shoes on his feet, his loins girded, and his staff in his hand—away, away to a better land. 2. Reasons why this wall should be very broad. (1) If you are sincere in your profession, there is a very broad distinction between you and unconverted people. (2) Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ had a broad wall between Him and the ungodly. (3) A broad wall of separation is abundantly good for yourselves. When a Christian gives way to the world's custom he never feels profited thereby. Ask a fish to spend an hour on dry land, and I think did he comply the fish would find that it was not much to its benefit, for it would be out of its element. And it

is so with Christians in communion with sinners. (4) To keep up the broad wall of separation is to do most good to the world. A Christian loses his strength the moment he departs from his integrity. Although the world may openly denounce the rigid Puritan, it secretly admires him. You young man in the shop—you young woman in the workroom—if you keep yourselves to yourselves in Christ's name, chaste and pure for Jesus, not laughing at jests which should make you blush; not mixing up with pastimes that are suspicious; but being tenderly jealous of your conscience at all times, then your company in the midst of others shall be as though an angel shook his wings, and they will say, "Refrain from this or that just now, for So-and-so is there." They will fear you in a certain sense; they will admire you in secret; and who can tell but they, at last, may come to imitate you? II. THE BROAD WALL ROUND JERUSALEM INDICATED SAFETY. The Christian is surrounded by the broad wall—1. Of God's power. 2. Of God's love. 3. Of God's law and justice. 4. Of God's immutability. 5. Of the work of the Holy Spirit. 6. Almost every doctrine of grace affords us a broad wall, a mighty bulwark, a grand munition of defence. III. THIS BROAD WALL SUGGESTS ENJOYMENT. These walls were used as promenades, and were utilised—1. For rest from toil. 2. For communion. 3. For prospects and outlooks. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver 10. **Even over against his house.**—*Repairing the house*:—We are all temples, buildings of the living God, and some of us are sadly out of repair; some among us have fallen into absolute ruin. Our bodies, instead of being the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, are inhabited by evil lusts, cruel tempers, foul passions. Others, although not in such a sad case, are yet grievously out of repair. There is much in their lives which needs altering, mending. Our own carelessness and neglect have allowed our lives to fall into decay, and the rubbish to accumulate. A restored congregation is ever more important than the restored fabric of the church. Let Nehemiah teach us how these repairs can best be carried out. 1. In the first place, before he undertook the work at all, Nehemiah prayed unto the God of heaven—"Lord, undertake for me." "Unless the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it." We must ask God to restore in us all that the fraud and malice of the devil have decayed in us. 2. The next thing which Nehemiah did, after praying to God, was to set to work, and to set others to work, at repairs. Work and prayer must go together; pray most earnestly, work with a will. 3. Nehemiah made each worker wear a sword by his side, because of the enemies around them who would try to hinder them. That teaches us that whatever our work may be, we must have our religion with us. We must have the sword of the Spirit beside us. Our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—are sure to attack us, and woe unto us if we are unarmed! There was a drummer-boy in the great American war who lost his Bible, a book which he valued above all things. So he set to work to repair his loss as far as possible. He remembered many texts which he had learnt at Sunday-school, and these he wrote on the parchment of his drum. Thus, on the march, in the field of battle, or wherever he did his work, God's Word was before his eyes. Like Nehemiah's builders, he had the sword by his side. Before the work of repairs actually began, Nehemiah made a careful examination of the state of the ruins, that he might know exactly what was wanted. Let us survey the ruins, the breaches in the walls, the rubbish that has accumulated, the weak points in the building. And where shall we begin? 1. For the most part, he set each of his workers to repair "over against his own house." In trying to repair the mistakes and faults and failures of our lives, let us begin over against our own house. Let us survey the ruins there, not those of our neighbour. Mending our own ways is the surest and best plan to fit us to help others to repair theirs. Let us look boldly into the neglected corners of our life, and see what repairs are needed. 2. Let us examine the ruins again; is there no need of repairs in our business life? Is our way of doing our work, whatever it is, quite satisfactory, quite true, and honest, and straightforward? 3. Then is there no need of repairs in the home circle, remembering that we must begin over against our own house? The children are often unruly, selfish, troublesome. The servants are frequently a source of discomfort. One husband sees much need of repairs in his wife. The wife says the same of the husband. Well, let us begin over against our own house. Are we doing our best to set a good example in the family? 4. Is there no need of repairs in our praying? I think many of us feel that our prayers are sometimes neglected, often hurried, formal, cold, unreal. Then there is Bible-reading. Some of us neglect this altogether, others read without interest or under-

standing. Is there not something to be mended here? (*H. J. Wilmot-Buxton, M.A.*) *Building over against one's own house*:—This suggests—**I. THE CARE OF ONE'S OWN SOUL.** Is it saved? Is it prospering? **II. A DEEP INTEREST IN THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF THOSE WHO LIVE UNDER THE SAME ROOF.** **III. LABOUR FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL WHO IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD ARE BROUGHT INTO CLOSE OR FREQUENT RELATIONS WITH US.** (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Work at each door*:—The principle on which a great part of the work was done is indicated in several places in this chapter. Charles Reade says: "This may seem a small thing to busy readers, but it was a master stroke of genius. Not only was it a grand division of labour, but it animated the work with a noble emulation and a personal pride." Nehemiah made use of a method which is generally regarded as an outgrowth of our modern civilisation, and anticipated the managers of our great industries in the use of the principle of division of labour, which in our day is carried to so great a length. Every man over against his own house is the principle that should be applied in all work for the moral and spiritual elevation of the community in which we live. **I. THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE AT OUR VERY DOORS.** There is still plenty of work to be done in our own hearts. The best wall we can build for the protection of our own homes is the structure of a Christlike life. It is as real a defence to our homes to have them surrounded by pure-hearted men and women as was to Jerusalem the wall that Nehemiah raised. The reason that so many missionaries send their children is not always for the sake of the superior education to be had in our schools, but oftener, perhaps, because it would not be safe to allow their children to grow up in the midst of the moral miasma of a heathen land. In the ruined characters and worse than wasted lives of many of the men and women among whom we live, we see the broken wall, and the work of repair consists in the efforts we make to Christianise them. Here there is work at every one's door. **II. EACH MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BIT OF WORK THAT LIES NEAREST TO HIS OWN HOUSE.** A minister is placed over a congregation, not to do the people's work for them, but to induce each of them to do the work that God has laid at the door for each to do. I know a successful minister who attributes much of his success to the fact that he will not do anything himself that he can get one of his people to do. (*A. Soutar, M.A.*)

**Ver. 12. He and his daughters.**—*Worthy women*:—We know not how these ladies wrought; probably it was not in a way of manual labour, but rather by words of kindness and acts of consideration towards the builders. We need not tarry to show how worthily the women of England fulfil their mission in the sweet offices of charity. Some of them make the noblest sacrifices from love to their Redeemer. A poor woman sought admission to one of our great missionary meetings in Exeter Hall. The young man who acted as porter demanded her ticket. "I have none," was the reply; "I cannot afford to subscribe." "You cannot enter without a ticket," was the curt rejoinder. "I think, sir," said the widow, "that I have given more than ever you have to the society; I have given an only son, and he is now labouring for your society in India." The widow was cheerfully admitted on this statement. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Family zeal*:—**I. NOTABLE WOMEN.** 1. Within the circle of Biblical story. 2. In history. **II. WOMAN'S INFLUENCE.** 1. For evil. Jezebel; Solomon's wives; devotees of fashion, &c. 2. For good. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

**Ver. 15. By the king's garden.**—*The king's garden*:—There are six of these "king's gardens" to which I shall conduct you, but we shall not have time to tarry in more than one of them. **I. The garden of PARADISE,** which was situate in the midst of Eden. **II. The garden of GETHSEMANE.** **III. The garden of THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION.** **IV. The garden of THE HUMAN HEART.** The heart is meant to be a garden for God. By nature it scarcely deserves the name; it is rather a tangled wilderness of all manner of noisome things. What must be done to this neglected garden? The rough plough of conviction must be dragged through it. The spade of trouble must break up the surface, and smash in pieces the clods, and kill the weeds. Into this prepared soil the Holy Spirit must put in the seeds of faith, and love and hope, and patience and perseverance, and zeal. Then there must be drained out of us much superfluity of naughtiness and excess of carnal confidence, or our heart will be a cold swamp, a worthless plant-killing bog. And in addition to all this, there must be constant hoeing and raking and digging. After a garden is made, the flower-beds are never left long alone; if they were left to themselves they would soon breed weeds again, and return to the old confusion. So

with the garden of the heart, cleansing and pruning must be done every day, and God must do it through ourselves, and we must do it through constant examination and repentance. V. The garden of THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. Follow me in each word of the text. 1. What is it? A garden. So it is called in the book of Solomon's Song. Many thoughts are gathered in that one metaphor like bees in a hive. (1) It implies separation. I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the Church and the world made broader and stronger. Christians should always wear their regimentals as Christ's soldiers. They are to go forth without the camp bearing His reproach. "Be not conformed to this world." (2) It is a place of order. You do not, when you go into a garden, find the plants arranged anyhow, but the wise gardener arranges them according to their tints and hues, so that in the midst of summer the garden shall look like a rainbow that has been broken to pieces and let down upon the earth. Let us all try to maintain order in all things as the servants of Christ. We seek not the order which consists in all sleeping in their places, like corpses in the catacombs, but we desire the order which finds all working in their places for the common cause of the Lord Jesus. (3) A garden is a place of beauty. Such should the Christian Church be. If there be no holiness, no love, no zeal, no prayerfulness outside in the world, yet you should see these things in the Church. (4) It is a place of growth. (5) It is a place of retirement. When a man is in his garden, he does not expect to see all his customers walking down between the beds to do business with him. So the Lord Jesus would have us reserve the Church to be a place in which He can manifest Himself to us as He doth not to the world. 2. Whose is it? It is the King's garden. He chose it for Himself. He bought it. What a nobility this gives to Christ's Church? 3. What does it need? (1) It requires labour. In every Church there should be—(a) Planters. I had a letter last week from a young woman. She says she has been here for two years, that she has been very anxious about her soul, and she has often wished that somebody would speak to her, but nobody has done so. Somebody has been negligent, very negligent. We want planters who can get the young slips and put them where they will grow. (b) Some to watch over those who are planted. (c) Some to collect the straggling. (d) Some to burn up the rubbish and sweep up the leaves. In the best Church there will always be some falling leaves. Whenever a brother sees any mischief he ought to sweep it up and say nothing about it. Whenever you find that such and such a brother is going a little amiss, talk to him quietly; do not spread it all over the Church and make jealousies and suspicions. Pick up the leaf and destroy it. When a brother member has offended you, so that you feel vexed, forgive him. If every one would seek to make peace, there never could be much accumulation of discord in the King's garden to annoy Him. (2) It wants new plants. (3) It wants rain and sunshine; the dew of the Holy Spirit and the sunshine of the Divine favour. 4. What does it produce? "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." VI. The garden of the PARADISE ABOVE (Rev. xxii. 1-5). (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The garden of the heart:*—Very often when I am going through a garden I come to some little bit marked off from the rest by a stick or a row of stones, and some lad or some little maiden comes running up; "This is my garden," they say, "my very own, to do whatever I like with." Now each of us has a garden, our very own, and yet it ought to be, and must be, the King's garden. It is the garden of the heart. I should like you to remember THAT GARDENS ARE MADE OUT OF WASTE PLACES. We want our heart to be nice and kind, and like a king's garden ought to be; and we look at the brambles and the waste places, and fear sometimes that it never can be made into a garden. "I never shall be good," you say; "I never shall be like so-and-so." When I was a little boy I learnt drawing, and one day when I had tried again and again, and couldn't do it right, I flung down the pencil and said angrily, "I never shall be able to draw." The master was a very kind and a very wise man. He laughed pleasantly, and said, "Come—never is a long time. I couldn't draw any better than you can when I was your age." That put new life into me. He who could draw anything with his pencil, and could make it exactly right with just a touch—to think that once he could not draw any better than I could! I went at it again then, and never felt inclined to give up afterwards. And so with all good people that ever lived—their hearts were wild and waste before they became the King's garden. II. BEFORE THE KING CAN MAKE A GARDEN HE MUST OWN THE LAND. Jesus says to us, "My son, give Me thine heart." He wants the heart, not because it is a garden, but that He may make a King's garden of it. III. IT MUST BE CLEARED AND PLANTED. "Ah," you say, "this is hard work." The

weeds will grow so fast when you've pulled them up. But suppose you could get some one to come and change the ground, so that instead of bringing forth weeds it should bring forth flowers and fruits. That is just what we can do. Jesus has come on purpose to create clean hearts. IV. WE HAVE TO KEEP THIS GARDEN FOR THE KING. 1. We must plant it well. "The seed is the Word of God." 2. We must water it twice a day, and prayer is the watering. 3. We must watch against enemies. When I was a boy we used to set little heaps of "grains" to attract the slugs and snails, and then creep out at night with a lantern and take these mischievous creatures, that otherwise would have spoiled all the fruit and many of the flowers. Take care of these, of habits that spoil all the fruit; of little neglects and forgetfulnesses that ruin the King's garden. The peach-trees and plum-trees have a matting or net hung in front of them—in winter to keep off the frosts, or in summer to keep off the busy birds. We must be watchful against all things that hurt the King's garden. We must be on our guard against bad companions, bad books, and bad influences of all kinds, and also of hasty words, thoughtless ways, and little harmful thoughts and feelings. V. IF IT BE THE KING'S GARDEN THE KING HIMSELF WILL COME TO IT. Cyrus used to say, "I take so much interest in my garden because I have planted every plant, and have sown every seed in it." So it is that Jesus loves His garden. He turned it from a waste into a garden, and has sown the good seed and planted the trees. I have heard of a poor man who lived in a very poor cottage far away from everybody else. One day somebody called to see him and said, "My friend, you must be very lonely here." "Lonely!" he replied, "ah, so I might be, but Jesus is such blessed company!" He had been walking in the King's garden with the King, and this made him so happy. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Ver. 28. From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house.—*How to sweeten the life of great cities*:—I take these words mainly as suggesting some thoughts applicable to the duties of Christian people in view of the spiritual wants of our great cities. Consider—I. THE RUINS THAT NEED REPAIR. If I dwell rather upon the dark side than on the bright side of city life, I shall not be understood as forgetting that the very causes which intensify the evil of a great city quicken the good—the friction of multitudes, and the impetus given thereby to all kinds of mental activity. Most of us have got so familiarised with the evils that stare us in the face every time we go out upon the pavement, that we have come to think of them as inseparable from our modern life, like the noise of a carriage wheel from its rotation. And is it so, then? Must it be that the shining structure of our modern society, like an old Mexican temple, must be built upon a layer of living men flung in for a foundation? If it be so, then I venture to say that to a very large extent progress is a delusion, and that the simple life of agricultural communities is better than this unwholesome aggregation of men. The beginning of Nehemiah's work of repair was that sad midnight ride round the ruined walls. So there is a solemn obligation laid upon Christian people to acquaint themselves with the awful facts, and then to meditate upon them, till Christlike compassion, pressing against the flood-gates of the heart, flings them open, and lets out a stream of helpful pity and saving deeds (Prov. xxiv. 11, 12). II. THE RUIN IS TO BE REPAIRED MAINLY BY THE OLD GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. Far be it from me to put remedies against each other. The causes are complicated, and the cure must be as complicated as the causes. Intemperance has to be fought by the distinct preaching of abstinence, and by the invoking of legislative restrictions upon the traffic. Wretched homes have to be dealt with by sanitary reform. Art and music, pictures and window gardening, &c., will lend their aid to soften and refine. I say, God speed to all these, but I believe that I shall best serve my generation by trying to get men to love and fear Jesus Christ the Saviour. This will produce new tastes and new inclinations, which will reform, sweeten, and purify faster than anything else does. III. THIS REMEDY IS TO BE APPLIED BY THE INDIVIDUAL ACTION OF CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN ON THE PEOPLE NEAREST THEM. If you want to do people good you must pay the price for it. That price is personal sacrifice and effort. A loving heart and a sympathetic word, the exhibition of Christian life and conduct, the fact of going down into the midst of evil, are the old-fashioned and only magnets by which men are drawn to purer and higher life. That is God's way of saving the world—by the action of single souls on single souls. "The priests repaired every one over against his own house." Possession involves responsibility. We get the grace for ourselves that we may pass it on. "God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ." There is nothing so mighty as the confession of personal experience. If, like Andrew, you have found the Messias, you can say so. All can preach who can say, "We have found the Christ." The existence of a Church in which the workers are as numerous as the Christians ought to be something more than an Utopian dream. There are people in your houses, people that sit by you in your counting-house, on your college benches, who work by your side in mill or factory or warehouse, who cross your path in a hundred ways, and God has given them to you that you may bring them to Him. Oh! if you lived nearer Christ, you would catch the sacred fire from Him, and like a bit of cold iron lying beside a magnet, touching Him, you would yourselves become magnetic, and draw men out of their evil and up to God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Personal revival sought*:—Once upon a time many Christians gathered to pray for a revival in the great city in which they lived. For a week they prayed, "O Lord, revive the city!" but the heavens were as brass. For some weeks they continued to pray almost as broadly and indefinitely, until one friend, who felt the need of individual quickening, exclaimed, "O Lord, revive Thy work in my heart! O Lord, revive me!" There was a general breaking at the conclusion of this prayer. Personal revival was sought and vouchsafed, and the work soon became widespread and deep. A Baptist Church in New York once sought for the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, but there was no consciousness of response or blessing till a coloured brother, devout and earnest, respected and beloved by all, got down upon his knees, and, with choked utterance, prayed in the language of the 51st Psalm.

#### CHAPTER IV.

**VERS. 1-4. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we bullded the wall, he was wroth.**—*Sanballat: a study in party spirit*:—You must clearly understand, to begin with, that Samaria was already, even in that early day, the deadly rival of Jerusalem; and also that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. And Sanballat was a man of this kind, that he was not content with doing his very best to make Samaria both prosperous and powerful, but he must also do his very best to keep Jerusalem downtrodden and destroyed. And thus it was that, when Sanballat heard that Nehemiah had come from Shushan with a commission from Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the exasperating news drove Sanballat absolutely beside himself. And thus it is that such a large part of Nehemiah's autobiography is taken up with Sanballat's diabolical plots and conspiracies both to murder Nehemiah and to destroy the new Jerusalem. We see in Sanballat an outstanding instance of the sleepless malice of all unprincipled party spirit. 1. Now, in the first place, diabolically wicked as party spirit too often becomes, this must be clearly understood about party spirit, that, after all, it is but the excess, and the perversion, and the depravity of an originally natural and a perfectly proper principle in our hearts. It was of God, and it was of human nature as God had made it, that Sanballat should love and serve Samaria best; and that Nehemiah should love and serve Jerusalem best. And all party spirit among ourselves also, at its beginning, is but our natural and dutiful love for our own land, and for our own city, and for our own Church, and for those who think with us, and work with us, and love us. 2. But then, when it comes to its worst, as it too often does come, party spirit is the complete destruction both of truth and of love. The truth is hateful to the out-and-out partisan. We all know that in ourselves. As many lies as you like, but not the truth. It exasperates us to hear it. You are henceforth our enemy if you will insist on speaking it. It is not truth that divides us up into such opposed parties as we see all around us in Church and State, it is far more lies. If is not principle once in ten times. Nine times out of ten it is pure party spirit. And I cling to that bad spirit, and to all its works, as if it were my life. I feel unhappy when you tell me the truth, if it is good truth, about my rival. And where truth is hated in that way love can have no possible home. Truth is love in the mind, just as love is truth in the heart. Trample on the one and you crush the other to death. Now the full-blown party spirit is utter poison to the spirit of love as well as to the spirit of truth. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love rejoiceth not in iniquity, &c. But party spirit is the clean contradiction of all that.



3. By the just and righteous ordination of Almighty God all our sins carry their own punishment immediately and inseparably with them. And party spirit, being such a wicked spirit, it infallibly inflicts a very swift and a very severe punishment on the man who entertains it. You know yourselves how party spirit hardens your heart, and narrows, and imprisons, and impoverishes your mind. You must all know how party spirit poisons your feelings, and fills you with antipathy at men you never saw, as well as at men all around you who never hurt a hair of your head, and would not if they could. 4. Another Divine punishment of party spirit is seen in the way that it provokes retaliation, and thus reproduces and perpetuates itself till the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate the truth and murder love. And, inheriting no little good from our contending forefathers, we have inherited too many of their injuries, and retaliations, and antipathies, and alienations also. And the worst of it is that we look on it as true patriotism, and the perfection of religious principle, to keep up and perpetuate all those ancient misunderstandings, and injuries, and recriminations, and alienations. 5. Who, then, is a wise man, and endued with wisdom among you? Who would fain be such a man? Who would behave to his rivals and enemies, not as Nehemiah, good man though he was, behaved to the Samaritans, but as Jesus Christ behaved to them? Who, in one word, would escape the sin, and the misery, and the long-lasting mischief of party spirit? Butler has an inimitable way of saying some of his very best and very deepest things. And here is one of his great sayings that has helped me more in this matter than I can tell you. "Let us remember," he says, "that we differ as much from other men as they differ from us." What a lamp to our feet is that sentence as we go through this world! And then, when at any time, and towards any party, or towards any person whatsoever, you find in yourself that you are growing in love, and in peace, and in patience, and in toleration, and in goodwill, and in good wishes, acknowledge it to yourself; see it, understand it, and confess it. Do not be afraid to admit it, for that is God within your heart. That is the Divine Nature—that is the Holy Ghost. Just go on in that Spirit, and ere ever you are aware you will be caught up and taken home to that Holy Land where there is neither Jerusalem nor Samaria. There will be no party spirit there. There will be no controversy there. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) **What do these feeble Jews?—Feeble agencies not to be despised:**—When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse, we should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms. It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will pass again, every few years, through the bodies of worms. The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before he existed the land was, in fact, regularly ploughed by earth-worms. It may be doubted whether there are any other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly organised creatures. Some other animal, however, still more lowly organised—namely, corals, have done far more conspicuous work in having constructed innumerable reefs and islands in the great oceans; but these are almost confined to the tropical zones. (*Charles Darwin.*) **Intrinsic energy not to be gauged by magnitude:**—Remember that lofty trees grow from diminutive seeds; copious rivers flow from small fountains; slender wires often sustain ponderous weights; injury to the smallest nerves may occasion the most agonising sensation; the derangement of the least wheel or pivot may render useless the greatest machine of which it is a part; an immense crop of errors may spring from the least root of falsehood; a glorious intellectual light may be kindled by the minutest spark of truth; and every principle is more diffusive and operative by reason of its intrinsic energy than of its magnitude. (*J. Gregory.*) **Censure should not interfere with duty:**—Be not diverted from your duty by any idle reflections the silly world may make on you, for their censures are not in your power, and consequently should be no part of your concern. (*Epictetus.*) **Fool's-bolts should be disregarded:**—What action was ever so good, or so completely done, as to be well taken on all hands? It concerns every wise Christian to settle his heart in a resolved confidence of his own holy and just grounds, and then to go on in a constant course of his well-warranted judgment and practice, with a careless disregard of those fool's-bolts which will be sure to be shot at him, which way soever he goes. (*Bp. Hall.*) **Petty criticism should be disregarded:**—It is often more difficult to endure the stinging of insects than to face the gravest perils. Explorers in tropical

countries find these tiny, noxious creatures much more destructive of their peace and comfort than the larger and more deadly animals which sometimes beset them. Many a man faces courageously a grave peril who becomes a coward when a set of petty annoyances have worn his nerves out and irritated him to the point of loss of self-control. Every man who attempts an independent course of life, whether of thought, habit, or action, finds himself beset by a cloud of petty critics, who are, for the most part, without malice, but whose stings, inspired by ignorance, are quite as hard to bear as they would be if inspired by hate. The misrepresentations and misconceptions which good men suffer are a part of the pathos of life. The real answer to criticism is a man's life and work. A busy man has no time to stop and meet his critics in detail; he must do his work, and let that be his answer to criticism. (*Christian Age*.)

Ver. 6. So we built the wall.—*Fellowship in Christian service*:—1. They built it notwithstanding sneers. "What do these feeble Jews?" Sanballat said. All the Sanballats are not dead yet. Often, when you would attempt some new or difficult work for Christ, there are a good many modern Sanballats ready to stand about and say, "You can't do anything; you are not strong enough; you are not experienced enough; you haven't money enough; the idea of your attempting such a thing!" 2. They built the wall, notwithstanding active opposition. They kept right on steadily building. Said the great William Carey—who wrought such wonders, and against such opposition, in modern missions—to his son Eustace, "Eustace, if they say I am a genius, it is not true; but if they say I can plod, that is true. Yes, I can plod, I can plod." And a plodding persistence, in the face of almost any opposition, is sure at last to triumph. 3. They built the wall, notwithstanding despairing friends. I have been reading how General Washington, only a little time before the battle of Yorktown, was in the very darkest time of the long, hard struggle. Friends on every side were despairingly saying, "You can't do it; you might just as well give up." But the great Washington would not let himself despair. Whoever else might, he would not. He would keep at it; and, keeping at it, notwithstanding the despair of friends, a nation's independence was achieved at Yorktown. 4. They built the wall by prayer. I asked Mr. Spurgeon once how he prayed. He answered, "I go to the Bible and find a promise applicable to my need, then I reverently plead that promise before the Lord, asking Him to keep it for Jesus' sake; and I believe God will, and He does." That is the prayer of faith—the prayer of great grip on the Divine promise. 5. They built the wall by working together. Did you notice that "we"? "So 'we' built the wall," our Scripture says. Even one is worth something, but two are worth more, and many striving together are worth immeasurably more. Associate others with yourself, or yourself with others. It was because the Rough Riders rushed up the heights of San Juan together, and because the coloured regiments rushed up together, and together with them they were enabled to plant Old Glory on the summit. Fellowship is better than individualism in all noble service. 6. They built the wall by willingness on the part of each to do whatever he could. Sometimes they bore burdens; sometimes they grasped swords and spears; sometimes they stood sentinel. There was no selfish picking and choosing. There was no mean declaring "I will do this, but I won't do that." Each one was ready to do anything; the thing which seemed just then the thing best to be done. It is no wonder that the wall went steadily and triumphantly up. 7. They built the wall by courageous trust in God. Said Nehemiah, "Be not afraid of them; remember the Lord." (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) For the people had a mind to work.—*Conditions of success in Christian work*:—The chief characteristics displayed by Nehemiah and his fellow-citizens in prosecuting their work were—1. Earnestness. Earnestness is an important factor in all Christian work and consists—(1) In a thorough persuasion of the truth of the message we make known—the efficacy of the remedy we convey to men. (2) A deep sense of the value of those we seek to save. (3) An intense conviction that it is God's work and not our own we are seeking to do. 2. Persistency. 3. Union. 4. Courage. 5. Prayerfulness. Summing up these characteristics, we may say to the Christian worker, "Add to your work earnestness, and to earnestness persistency, and to persistency union, and to union wisdom, and to wisdom courage, and to courage prayer"; "for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 8). (*W. P. Lockhart.*) A mind to work:—This implies—

I. A RECOGNITION OF THE DUTY OF WORK. II. A RECOGNITION OF THE PRIVILEGE OF WORK. III. AN EARNEST SYMPATHY WITH, AND LONGING FOR, THE RESULTS OF WORK. (*The Church.*) *A mind to work* :—I. THE WORK. Circumstances have changed, and the methods are altered, but the work is the same. You are entitled to ask me, "What are we to do?" 1. Bear the insignia of your religion before the world. Let all men know that you are the followers of Christ. 2. Maintain His public worship. 3. Christianise the world. II. THE MIND. This implies—1. Readiness. 2. Heartiness. 3. Cheerfulness. 4. Thoroughness amid discouragement and opposition. (*T. Davies, M. A.*) *A mind to work* :—I. THE WORK THE JEWS HAD TO PERFORM. The work they had undertaken was one in which it was natural to suppose they felt the deepest possible interest. It will be admitted that the work they had undertaken was a great work. Then as to the magnitude of the work, it is indescribable—it is, in a word, to seek the present and eternal salvation of a guilty, ruined, and perishing world. Nor must good men lose sight of the fact, that this glorious work is to be accomplished, not by miracle, nor by a Divine power or agency in the abstract, but by the feeble, and of itself powerless, instrumentality of Christian men, as accompanied with the sanctifying and saving influences of the Holy Spirit of God. II. THE OBSTACLES WHICH, IN THE PROSECUTION OF THEIR WORK, THE JEWS HAD TO ENCOUNTER. The Church, then, must never forget that her adversaries are both numerous and powerful. But have not the Church's greatest difficulties often proved her greatest blessings? It has led the Lord's people both to see and to feel more of their dependence upon Him. III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE JEWS CARRIED ON THEIR WORK. They had their minds, that is to say, their souls, in it, and they were determined to accomplish it. They loved their Master, their work, and each other. IV. THE SUCCESS OF WHICH THEIR LABOUR WAS PRODUCTIVE. 1. Are there any of us who are engaged in the Lord's service, but whose hearts are not in it? 2. Are there any who have no disposition to labour for the Lord Jesus Christ? (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *A mind to work* :—We have here—I. CO-OPERATION. "The people had a mind to work." Nehemiah was, of course, the ruling spirit. He was only one man, but he was one of those men who count for thousands. He was one of those men who not only embody but create the spirit of an age and lead it on to victory. He was only one man, but in this world men have not to be counted but weighed; and it is when men are weighed—weighed as to their intellect, their convictions, their courage, their principles, their self-denial—that it is seen that one man is not as good as another. All the great epochs of the world have gathered around one man, just as the restoration gathered around Nehemiah, and so filled his soul that the electric power of his patriotic purpose enkindled the hearts of the people with a flame that never expired till the work was done. Then as ever, it was seen that the world's work must be done by a combination of men who toil with the brain and who toil with the hands. Nehemiah was architect, clerk of the works, diplomatist, general, all in one. But he could have done nothing unless he had been able to secure the co-operation of the people. There is here a lesson on the value and the necessity of co-operation in work for Christ. Success in war is due to two principles—the one is divide your enemy, and the other is unite yourselves. On these two conditions success is certain. Real and vital co-operation in Church work will be equally successful. There may be a Church and no co-operation. It may be a mass, but not a body. Many individual men do far more than a society, because the individual men work, and the society does not, but thinks that it has fulfilled all its duty when it has appointed a committee, with its usual complement of officers. You would think that an army had strangely misconceived its mission if because it saw its staff-officers it lay down and left the fortunes of battle to be settled by them. But this is just what is done by societies which devolve on committees the whole work. II. CHEERFUL RESOLUTION. There is a great deal of work done in our world, and has always been, in which there has been no mind at all, either in the shape of intelligence or goodwill. I suppose that some of the greatest structures of the world were so built—the Pyramids, the great aqueducts of Rome and the Coliseum. The slaves had not a mind to work, but had an eye to the rod of the taskmaster. You will search this book in vain for the trace of a taskmaster. They had a mind to work, and not to criticise or cavil. This is a suggestive warning to all such characters in our day. Many have a mind only to think, and not to work. You ask them to come and set their shoulder to the wheel, but they prefer to spend their time in solving, so far as they can, sundry theological or religious riddles. If by their thinking they accomplished anything, then they might think on, but they are like a corn-mill, the

stones of which are perpetually revolving, but there is no corn between them, and so they only grind themselves. More doubts are removed and more difficulties are solved by working than by thinking. "If any man will do the will of God," &c. Some people have a mind to speak, but not to work. Speech is good enough in its place. The end of all talk should be action. As a rule most work is done where there is least noise. When a machine goes noiselessly, it means that the friction is reduced to the smallest possible quantity, and that the force is not wasted on the process, but comes out in the accomplished work. At the building of Babel there was far more noise than at the building of the temple, but the temple was the successful work. Their heart was in their work, and by their heart we mean chiefly their purpose and their cheerfulness. He that works without a will is nothing better than a machine, and may be worse. When people have a mind to work there will be no unseemly ambitions, no quarrels for posts of honour. The man who can lighten labour with a song is likely to be a good worker. He will be like a soldier, who marches best to the rhythmic throb of the drum, and to the sounds of inspiring music. As to Christian work, none can be entitled to such a name unless it be cheerful. God loveth, we are told, not a giver, but a "cheerful" giver. If we show mercy we are to show it cheerfully. We are to serve the Lord with gladness. We are to come into His presence with songs. Saints are to be joyful in the Lord.

**III. WORK CROWNED WITH SUCCESS.** (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*) *The secret of success in the work of the Lord*:—I. THAT WE HAVE A GREAT AND AN IMPORTANT WORK DEVOLVING UPON US: to aid in raising the world from the ruins of the fall, and restoring it to something of its former order and beauty, that the Lord may dwell among us. This work has been committed to the Church. It is her high commission. This work must commence with our own hearts. II. THAT THIS WORK MUST BE ENGAGED IN WITH CONSECRATED ZEAL AND ACTIVITY. III. THE DILIGENT USE OF ALL APPOINTED MEANS. Nehemiah having set his heart upon his work, judiciously employed every means calculated to promote it. 1. Let us stimulate each other to engage vigorously and unitedly in this work. Generally speaking, there is only a small fraction of every Church that engages actively in the great purposes of religion. 2. Having brought all the truly pious up to a proper point, we should then address ourselves, every one to his proper sphere of labour. IV. THAT IN THE USE OF MEANS THE WORK MUST BE FOLLOWED UP WITH FORTITUDE AND PERSEVERANCE. Such was the perseverance of the Jews in rebuilding the walls, that they never pulled off their clothes, except for the means of cleanliness, during the whole of the work; but continued night and day working. There was no time for delay or indulgence. V. THAT TO INSURE THE SUCCESSFUL ISSUE OF THE WORK, THERE MUST BE AN ENTIRE DEPENDENCE ON THE BLESSING OF GOD. Here was the grand secret of Nehemiah's success. He first sought Divine direction, then employed the means, and then implored the Divine blessing. In no other way can we account for the rapid progress of the work, and its successful issue in so short a time. (*G. Richards.*) *Rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem*:—Consider—I. THE PERSONS BY WHOM THE WORK WAS MAINLY PERFORMED. II. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED. In a great multitude of instances the work of conversion or reform is begun too near the surface. You ask the hand to work, and what is wanting is the mind to work. What we want is, not a new power but a new disposition, to have the mind newly cast in the image and character of God. It is in vain to change the hand of the watch if the mainspring is defective; it is in vain to heal the muscle or the sinew if there is no life's blood in the heart; it is in vain to mould the mere image of a man if the spirit of life is not communicated. All these typify the man without the mind, without the will. (*J. W. Cunningham, A.M.*) *Advance in solid column to Christian work*:—When General Grant was in front of Richmond, and his army had been repulsed in the Wilderness, he called together his co-commanders and held a council, and asked them what they thought he had better do. There were General Sherman and General Howard, now leading generals, and all thought he had better retreat. He heard them through, and then broke up the council of war and sent them back to their headquarters; but before morning an orderly came round with a despatch from the General directing an advance in solid column on the enemy at daylight. That was what took Richmond and broke down the rebellion in our country. Christians, let us advance in solid column against the enemy; let us lift high the standard, and in the name of our God let us lift up our voice, and let us work together, shoulder to shoulder, and keep our eye single to the honour and glory of Christ. (*D. L. Moody.*) *Absorbing work is successful*:—A gentleman who recently visited Mr. Edison's great laboratory, at Menlo Park, and whose

son was about to enter upon business life, asked the Professor to give him a motto for his boy, so that he might remember it as a guide and stimulus in after-life. Mr. Edison laughed a little at the novel request, and then said, "Well, I'll give him this—tell him never to look at the clock!" Which means this—that the man who succeeds to-day is not the man who does just what he has contracted to do and no more, but the man who throws his heart into his work, feels a genuine interest in it, and does not grumble if he has to work ten minutes after office hours. *Putting heart into work*:—An employer, pointing to two men working side by side in his shop, said, "Though I pay them the same wages, one of them is worth twice as much to me as the other, because he puts his heart into everything that he does. He is interested. He is always anxious to do his best. His neighbour, on the contrary, thinks only of his wages. He will shirk whenever he thinks that he can do so and not be found out. I cannot trust him. I have to watch him closely, or he will send out work that is imperfect, and will injure the reputation of the shop." "Well, what does the man you commend gain by putting his heart in it, if you pay the same wages?" "Nothing at present except the satisfaction one feels in trying to do his duty."

Vers. 7-18. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls . . . conspired all of them together.—*Foes of the faith*:—It is well we should know our enemies, and then we can better resist them. I. THINK OF THOSE FOES OF THE FAITH Nehemiah had to withstand. 1. There was Noadiah the prophetess. She would have put Nehemiah "in fear." She used a sacred position and the name of God to check the efforts of a good man. Noadiah could threaten, instil doubts, and arouse dread. The Church to-day lacks courage. Too many Noadias are prophesying evil things, and leading others to believe that Christian missions, Christian social efforts, Christian gospel preaching, and Christian hopes of the final triumph of truth are only doomed to disappointment, but the Noadias are often wrong. Pessimists, philosophical or ecclesiastical, are all the prey of paralysis. 2. Then there was Shemaiah (chap. vi. 10), who was "shut in the temple." He pretended that great danger approached. He sought to allure the Reformer into a state of inactivity. He said: "Let us shut the doors of the temple, for they will come and slay thee; yea, in the night they will come and slay thee." However, Shemiah had his price. He had been "hired." Money dictated his actions as it does that of many mercenary hinderers of the truth, especially the men who say, "We exist for the benefit of the people." 3. Then there was Sanballat the Horonite. He was a most dangerous enemy. He had a position at Samaria, the nearest strong city. He had special influence also with the garrison. Of him it is said, "Sanballat was very wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews and spake before his brethren (relations), and the army of Samaria." He said, "What do those feeble Jews? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish that are burned?" He raged. His anger was like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, heated seven times hotter than usual. It was like the fires of the Inquisition that did put out evangelical truth throughout Spain, and nearly through France. Sanballat was most irritating to Nehemiah, for he taunted him bitterly. He sought in every way to check the work by abuse of the courageous leader. Sanballat, indeed, was a bitter east wind. 4. Tobiah, who lived at Ammon, was another enemy. He had power over a province. He had probably reached his post by flattering when a slave in the imperial court. Nehemiah calls him the slave (chap. ii. 19) (where servant should be rendered slave). He was a sprung-up, conceited opponent of the truth. He assumed that wisdom would die with him. This Tobiah was acquainted with the internal state of Jerusalem, and had shown contempt for the efforts of Nehemiah. He said, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (chap. iv. 3). He ridiculed their aims, and kept up a constant intrigue with those within who were disaffected (chap. vi. 17). This man, even after the temple was finished and the walls built, managed to establish himself in the sacred place itself, because he had relationship with the chief priest (chap. xiii. 8). This man may represent those who are traitorous betrayers, and who now cast ridicule upon the truth, or on efforts after the truth—those who, pretending to help Protestant truth, are its betrayers. 5. Another enemy was Geshem or Gashmu an Arabian (chap. vi. 6). Geshem and Gashmu seem to have been identical. He was an Ishmaelite. He was a wild, characterless man—

"an idle chatterer." He had nothing to lose and everything to gain by opposition. He brought false charges against Nehemiah as one who only wished to set up a sovereignty, and to be independent of the central power at Susa (chap. vi. 6). Most dangerous of all enemies was this Geshem, or Gashmu, for he could insinuate that mean motives were the spring of holy efforts. He was a whisperer. Oh, how very many Gashmus there are even now! They are of no importance, save that they can spread reports, and do much damage. Gashmus will say that they pretend to be anxious about the cause of God, when they are only anxious to gratify their own ambition. Or Gashmu will say that Christians only desire advance in material prosperity. The Gashmus are too indifferent to understand the enthusiasm of Christians. 6. Noadiah, Shemaiah, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gashmu were united. They were cunning and cruel. They had allies within Jerusalem. Some were half-hearted. Individually we have traitorous tendencies to indifference and ease in our souls. We have many enemies whom we find represented by the Ammonites and Arabians. They are such as these—doubts as to whether we are converted, or unbelief as to Christ's acceptance of us, or superstitious and self-righteous leanings, seductions of the world, of pleasure, of wealth, of fame, desire to have the good opinion of the world, desire to be known rather as "good fellows" than good Christians. To be without temptation would be to be without that element that goes to form character. "Better have the devil's war than have the devil's peace."

II. Nehemiah teaches us how to resist the enemies of the truth. 1. He resisted by establishing sentinels, setting the watch to give warning; he resisted by placing weapons into the hands of all. Our weapons of defence are God's commands, God's promises, God's love. Nehemiah resisted by teaching the people to keep behind their defences. We, when assaults on our faith or temptations come, should get behind the walls, should keep within conscience—keep within the Word. 2. Nehemiah resisted his foes by pressing all into service. "None were despised." 3. Nehemiah resisted his foes by inspiring his people with confidence in God. God is mightier than our foes. 4. Nehemiah resisted also by insisting that there should be no parleying with the enemy. "Answer him not again." He resisted by leading the people to be as unrestful in toil as unceasing in outlook. "They laboured, and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared" (chap. iv. 21). He inspired his followers with courage, saying, "Be not afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." And again, "Our God shall fight for us" (chap. iv. 14, 20). Words these worthy to be the battle-cry of the Church. Moreover, Nehemiah resisted best by setting an example of courage. "Should such a man as I flee?" All Christian life should be courageous. Shall we, in view of the value of our souls, yield to evil? The more we work for Christ and watch against evil, the stronger we shall become. Soldiers are not kept idle while in garrison; work of some kind is always found for them. If unemployed they would soon become flabby, weak, and without muscle. There is ever something in Christian life to develop the watchful and the heroic. Persistency prevailed. We are told that "when his enemies heard of the fact that the wall was finished they were much cast down in their own eyes" (chap. vi. 16). Walls had risen which they could not batter. Crestfallen, the enemies had to depart. Chroniclers might have said of them, as it was written of Charles VIII. of France, and his expedition against Naples, "They came into the field like thunder, and went out like a soft shower." So went away, in the time of Nehemiah, the enemies of God's struggling Church. "God brought their counsel to nought." (*F. Hastings.*)

**And to hinder it.—The builders interrupted:—**I. THE WORK NEHEMIAH WAS COMMISSIONED TO DO. II. HOW NEHEMIAH'S WORK WAS HINDERED. 1. By ridicule. 2. By weariness (ver. 10). 3. By fearfulness (ver. 12). Many now feel that there is danger in building the walls of Zion. (1) In social life. (2) In politics. (3) In business. 4. By bribery. No other cause so weakens the Church as defection in her own membership. III. THE MEASURES BY WHICH NEHEMIAH ACCOMPLISHED HIS WORK. 1. Prayer. 2. Sagacious efforts. 3. Singleness of aim. Nothing could divert him. 4. Enthusiasm. Zeal in one heart sets other hearts burning. There is a suggestive legend of the venerable Bede which tells us that when he was old, with eyesight almost gone, one of his scholars led him to a heap of stones, and told him they were people; this was enough. The aged servant was true to his commission. With fiery tongue he preached the gospel. He ended as usual with the doxology, "To whom be glory through all the ages." Then from that heap of stones a voice rose, "Amen venerabilis Bede!"

True zeal springs not from impulse, but from conviction. 5. His securing the co-operation of the people. "Every one to his work." When Wesley was asked the secret of his success, he replied, "To my voice in the pulpit on the Sabbath the people add a thousand echoes during the week." (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Hinderers*:—Nehemiah had enemies and hinderers in his great undertaking. I. Those who said, "YE SHALL NOT DO IT." Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, &c. These are the least to be dreaded. II. Those who said, "YOU OUGHT NOT TO DO IT." Those were the Jews who dwelt by these Samaritans. They were near neighbours to them; so near as to be influenced by their threats and their derision. This was a danger far more serious than that which came directly to the good governor from the wicked Sanballat. The solicitation of friends was far more likely to weaken his forces than the intimidation of foes. This would tend to consolidate the people for defence, while that would draw them off little by little, a few to this village and a few to that, until a considerable part of them would be found to have melted away. The pleas of friendship are stronger than the threats of enmity. This kindly interest shown in their welfare, this fear in their behalf, and the possible need of them at home—these were strong inducements to them to desert and go back to their various villages. This is a plea, too, which can be repeated many times. So while the threats are recorded as repeated twice, this call to return to those who loved them was made in one form or another as many as ten times. Let the Church of Christ and let the Christian man beware of these friendly voices which urge them to withdraw from the service on which they have entered, or from some special part of it, because it may involve some danger or some sacrifice. It is those who live near the enemy who reinforce his threats with their friendly entreaties; who add to their "You shall not do it," their own "Please do not do it." Especially if we are in any way building the walls of Jerusalem, helping the cause of God and His kingdom, we will be wise to beware of the call of those we have just left to enter on this service when they say, "Ye must return to us." III. Those who said, "WE CANNOT DO IT." This was the most pressing peril that could befall Nehemiah and his mission. A deserter is more demoralising than a dozen foes. One taken from the helpers and added to the hinderers makes a difference of at least two. Their complaint is twofold. 1. They find that their strength has given out. 2. That there is much "rubbish," in the midst of which they had to build. Out of the past city came the obstacles to the building of the future city. Some of the worst hindrances to the accomplishment of our work as Christians and as Christian Churches are those whose origin is in our own past selves, lives, habits—the rubbish which has fallen from the neglected walls of our own living. For the future, daily penitence and prayer will prevent the accumulation of so much rubbish that we cannot build. (*George M. Boynton.*) *Rebuilding the wall*:—The enemies of the Jews felt that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was a menace to their own welfare and local supremacy. They must arrest it. I. THEY TRIED LAUGHTER. God's people at work on the walls of Zion are continually told that it is no use, they shall have their labour for their pains. A hundred years ago William Carey was dubbed "the consecrated cobbler" for proposing the evangelisation of India, but to-day all Christendom delights to do him honour. God crowns the heroism that can face an epithet. All efforts at political and social betterment are met in the same manner. The same is true of the rebuilding of personal character. It is hard work to rebuild the walls of manhood out of the rubbish-heaps of mislived years while old comrades stand by pointing their fingers and cracking jokes, but by God's grace it can be done. II. THEIR OPPOSITION ASSUMED THE FORM OF THREATENING (chap. ii. 19). A good work is always in the realm of danger, because it is in the nature of *lèse majesté*—rebellion against the prince of this world. A reformer never goes scot-free. Loss of business or social standing, ostracism, political decapitation, are some of the penalties which a true man is ever called upon to confront in the discharge of duty. III. THEY PROPOSED A COMPROMISE (chap. vi. 2). Duty knows no compromise. The only way to serve God is unreservedly. The only way to avoid evil is not to tamper with it. The apparently innocent diversions of Vanity Fair gave the Pilgrim more trouble than all the giants and lions along his way. Diluted theology and limp morals will sap the vitality of the most vigorous man or Church. Right is right; to dilute it makes it wrong. Truth is truth; to adulterate it makes it error. Duty is duty; to ally it with disobedience makes it sin. Conclusion: Observe how these efforts were met. 1. By prayer. John Knox is said to have bedewed the walls of his closet with his tears of supplication. George Washington

was glad to profess his dependence upon God. Abraham Lincoln, when asked if he was accustomed to pray, answered, "The man who would assume to perform the duties of the Presidency without seeking Divine guidance must be a blockhead." No man can ever afford to spend a prayerless day. 2. A watch was set. The countersign was given; it was the same that long afterwards rang from the lips of the Roundheads in their struggle for English freedom, "God with us" (ver. 20). The authorship of the famous maxim, "Trust in God and keep your powder dry," may be traced to Nehemiah. No enterprise fails that is backed by faith and works. 3. Nehemiah and his men kept on working. Prayer, vigilance, and patient continuance in well-doing can work wonders. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The soldier builders*:—I. COMBINATION OF PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS. II. COMBINATION OF PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE (vers. 14, 15, 18.) III. EVERY BUILDER WAS ALSO A SOLDIER. IV. A MUTUAL CO-OPERATION WENT HAND IN HAND WITH PERSONAL WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY. (*J. M. Randall.*) *A bold and united front to the enemy*:—It was therefore necessary to present a bold and united front to the enemy, and to be soldiers as well as builders; and it was only by similar zeal, diligence, and unity that they could hope, under the blessing of God, to encircle Jerusalem with walls and bulwarks. Nelson, the day before the battle of Trafalgar, took Collingwood and Rotherham, who were at variance, to the spot where they could see the fleet opposed to them. "Yonder," said he, "are your enemies; shake hands and be friends like good Englishmen." Let Christians learn to cultivate unity in spirit, and as far as possible unity in action. Let us ascend from the minor specialities in which we differ, the narrowness and jealousy of sect and party, to the grand platform of truth, wherein we are all agreed. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 9. We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch.**—*Watch and pray*:—

I. THE DUTY OF PRAYER. 1. Prayer implies trust. 2. It implies acknowledged weakness. 3. It realises Divine power. Hence in the Christian life that man is only safe, prosperous, or happy who is constantly on his knees. II. ACTIVE VIGILANCE AND DUTY. God's help is not intended to favour indolence, but to encourage exertion. The husbandman knows that God gives the increase, and therefore ploughs and sows. A man may talk, says Jay, about casting his care upon God, and may sing "Jehovah-Jireh" with all his energy as long as he pleases, but if he is idle, dissolute, foolish, he only tempts God, not trusts Him, for if a man will not work neither shall he eat. We have to carry on a greater work than Nehemiah. An enemy is endeavouring to prevent us building our eternal habitations, to hinder our work of preparation for heaven. Let us give our mental, moral, intellectual ability to working out our own salvation, knowing that God worketh in us to will and to do. (*Homilist.*) *Piety and prudence*:—I. THE APPEAL OF THE CHURCH OF GOD. 1. Recognising their weakness and dependence, they prayed unto God. 2. In spite of discouragements these men prayed. "Nevertheless." 3. They must have been encouraged by remembering what relation God sustained towards them. "Our God." 4. They united in supplication. II. THE RELIANCE OF THE CHURCH UPON ITSELF. "Set a watch." 1. There are enemies all around us. 2. God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. 3. Our enemies are vigilant and untiring. 4. Our enemies conspire together. There is an unholy alliance of the forces of evil. (*The Study.*) *The union of prayer and watchfulness*:—This union is equally pleasing and profitable. It keeps our devotion from growing up into rank enthusiasm, and our diligence from sinking into the wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God. The life of the Christian is held forth as that of a warfare. What, then, can be more reasonable than to betake ourselves to prayer and vigilance? I. LET US MAKE OUR PRAYER TO GOD. 1. It is recommended by God Himself—"Call upon Me in the day of trouble," &c. 2. The very exercise of prayer is useful. 3. Prayer is the forming of a confederacy with God. II. SET A WATCH, BECAUSE OF OUR ENEMIES, NIGHT AND DAY. 1. Impress your minds with a sense of your danger. 2. Study your constitutional weakness and failings. 3. Observe how you have already been foiled or ensnared. 4. Guard against the beginnings of sin. 5. Avoid the occasions of sin. Nothing is more dangerous than idleness. Our idle days, says Henry, are the devil's busy ones. Stagnant waters breed thousands of noxious insects; but this is not the case with living water. (*William Jay.*) *The model of a Christian warrior*:—I. HIS PRAYERFULNESS. II. HIS WATCHFULNESS. Watchfulness without prayer is presumptuous pride, but prayer without watchfulness is presumptuous sloth. Confidence in the help of God must not prevent the use of all proper means for safety and



deliverance. God promised Paul the lives of all on board the ship in which he sailed; but they were to use the means of safety. "Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship; and so it come to pass that they escaped all safe to land." While the Christian is surrounded with a powerful conspiracy of all the principalities of evil, he should aim at a military discipline of his heart and his thoughts. His conscience, like the trumpeter at Nehemiah's side, should be always awake.

III. HIS INDUSTRY. IV. HIS EXALTED COURAGE, ASSOCIATED WITH A HOLY CAUTION.

V. HIS CHEERFULNESS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS ARDUOUS DUTIES. (*R. P. Buddicom.*) *Nehemiah's devotion*:—The hardest devotion is the healthiest. The devotion of the cloister is for the most part like the ghastly light that hovers over decomposition and decay; the devotion which characterises the diligent, spiritually-minded man of business resembles the star which shines on in the storm as in the calm—when the sky is clouded as when it is serene. (*Ibid.*)

*Praying and doing*:—I. PRAYING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP OF LIFE. If a bad man would be good, the first step should be that of prayer. And our last breath when we leave this earth for the other world is prayer. II. If our prayers are to bless us, we must PRAY EARNESTLY. III. MOREOVER, WHEN WE PRAY WE ARE NOT TO NEGLECT THE MEANS OF MAKING OUR PRAYER EFFECTUAL. We are to do as Nehemiah did—pray to God, and set a watch. I am not afraid of thieves; but while I pray to God to let His angels encamp about my house and guard it, I do not expect the angels to come into my lobbies and lock the doors. I can do that. While we pray we are not to neglect any means at our hands for doing the work for which we pray. In the same way, a working man who earns a couple of pounds a week may pray, "O Lord, provide for me, and keep me from debt." It is right thus to pray, but then let not the working man neglect the means which are in his power to fulfil the prayer; let him put by two or three shillings a week to provide for any time of need. Some people seem to think that religion is a kind of spiritual charm, like the horse-shoe that our superstitious forefathers nailed behind the front door to keep out the "bogies." They think that religion is for them to say prayers and go to church, and then God will keep them from hell. Oh, no. IV. While we pray for success, let us take heed to WATCH FOR OPPORTUNITIES OF DOING GOOD. A wealthy farmer, whose haystacks were numerous, and whose barns were full of corn, on reading in the newspapers about the great distress in the time of the cotton famine, prayed earnestly at the family altar that the poor might be fed and clothed, but he did not send any donation to the fund, and the next Sunday he uttered the same prayer. On the way to church the little son said, "Father, I wish I had your corn." "Why, my boy, what would you do with it?" "Father, I would give it to the hungry people for bread." It is no use praying that the hungry may be fed if you will not help to feed them from your full cupboard. The purpose of prayer is—asking God to give you power to do good, and then seeking opportunities to exert that power. (*W. Birch.*)

*The two guards, praying and watching*:—In the text I see two guards. I. First guard, PRAYER. 1. It was a prayer that meant business.

2. It was a prayer that overcame difficulties. 3. It was a prayer that came before anything else. 4. It was a prayer that was continued. 5. It was a prayer that was home-made. 6. It was a prayer that went to the home of prayer. 7. It was a prayer saturated with faith. II. Second guard, WATCHFULNESS. This setting of a watch was—1. A work appointed. 2. A work carefully done. 3. A work continued. 4. A work quickened by knowledge. (1) We ought to set a watch against the enemies of our holy faith. (2) We must set a watch against our personal adversaries. (a) Ungodly relatives. Be patient, gentle, loving towards them. Do nothing that will give them occasion to blaspheme. (b) The evil tendencies of our corrupt nature. (3) We must watch against the beginning of sin. (4) Watch for what God has to say to you. 5. Watch for yourself when you see another fall, lest you should fall in the same place. III. I finish by PUTTING THE TWO GUARDS TOGETHER. Neither is sufficient alone. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

*Watchfulness needed*:—An old writer, speaking of men as stewards of God, urges upon them as wise traders and servants to look to themselves carefully, and take care of four houses which are under their charge. 1. Their warehouse, or heart and memory, wherein they should store up precious things, holy affections, grateful remembrances, &c. 2. Their workhouse, or their actions, wherein they retail to others, for God's glory, the grace entrusted to them. 3. Their clock-house—their speech—which must always, like a well-tuned bell, speak the truth accurately; and meaning also their observance of time, redeeming it by promptly doing the duties

of every hour. 4. Their counting-house, or their conscience, which is to be scrupulously kept, and no false reckonings allowed, lest we deceive our own souls. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Watchfulness and prayer*:—A believer's watchfulness is like that of a soldier. A sentinel posted on the walls, when he discerns a hostile party advancing, does not attempt to make head against them himself, but informs his commanding officer of the enemy's approach, and leaves him to take the proper measures against the foe. So the Christian does not attempt to fight temptations in his own strength: his watchfulness lies in observing its approach, and in telling God of it by prayer. (*W. Mason.*) *At rest, but ready*:—At Christmas-time soldiers are in the habit of decorating their barrack-rooms, and are fond of putting mottoes cut out of gilt paper amongst the holly on their whitewashed walls. Last year I noticed in one room these two. Over the door there was, "At peace, but still on guard"; and in another place, "At rest, but ready." Are not these equally applicable to spiritual life? If we have left our sins at the foot of the Cross, we should be at peace and rest, but on our guard against temptation, watching for the coming of the Lord. (*The Quiver.*) And there is much rubbish.—*The hindrances of rubbish*:—I. THAT THERE IS TOO MUCH "RUBBISH" IN THE PULPIT. Carlyle, in giving a whimsical instance of the importance attached to etiquette at the Court of Louis XVI., while the infuriated mob were demanding entrance to his private apartments, compares it to the house-cricket still chirping amid the pealing of the trump of doom. And so, too, when the ambassador for Christ doles out to souls perishing for the Bread of Life the vain speculations of metaphysics and philosophy, he ought to be held accountable for the spiritual slumber which such narcotics are certain to produce. II. Another reason why the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem are not built up with more rapidity is because of the "RUBBISH" ABOUT THE FONT. The minds of multitudes are bewildered and turned aside from the pursuit of the one thing needful by unprofitable discussions concerning the modes of baptism and the disposition to magnify unimportant things into essentials. III. The heaps of "RUBBISH" ABOUT THE LORD'S TABLE is another reason why the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem are built up so slowly. IV. Then there is the "RUBBISH" OF FLIMSY EXCUSES WHICH BLOCKS UP THE PATH OF LIFE. (*J. N. Norton.*) *Removing rubbish*:—The ancient Jerusalem was but an imperfect type of the true city of God, which through the ages prophets have panted for and poets have sung, a city of truth, and righteousness and love; of liberty, equality, and fraternity, in a far fuller sense of the words than Rousseau dreamed of. For ages men have been building against opposition malignant and persistent, and with sure if slow progress. And we are building to-day. In a moment of pause we look round and still we say, "There is much rubbish." What rubbish do you meet with.—I. IN ENGLISH LAW. II. IN ENGLISH SOCIETY. III. IN ENGLISH LIFE. IV. IN CHURCH LIFE. V. IN OUR LIBRARIES. VI. IN NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES. VII. IN OUR MINDS. VIII. IN OUR HEARTS. (*David Brook, M.A.*) *Rubbish*:—We have to build the wall of the Church for God, but we cannot build it, for there is so much rubbish in our way. This is true— I. OF THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH, WHICH IS THE JERUSALEM OF GOD. 1. When the apostles began to build for God, there lay before them towering heaps of rubbish. (1) Rabbinical. (2) Pagan. (3) Philosophical. 2. Soon after apostolic times came the old Roman rubbish. 3. At present there is still much rubbish coming from the world, the flesh, and the devil. II. THIS IS EQUALLY TRUE OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD, WHICH IS TO BE BUILT IN EACH ONE OF OUR HEARTS. There is oftentimes in Christian people the old rubbish—1. Of legal thought, of legal acting, of legal fearing. 2. Of old habits. 3. Of worldly associations. 4. Lofty thoughts of ourselves, engendered by worldly prosperity and spiritual acquisitions. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Rubbish*:—But in our text we read of an unexpected difficulty pleaded by the men of Judah—a weary, trying, and depressing task, entailing much toil and little show of progress. So in the Christian's inner life; there lies in his way a heap of broken resolutions, of former good intentions never carried out; a ponderous mass of indolent excuses for doing nothing; a rubbish pile of petty procrastinations, promising that some day we will improve, but putting off that day from time to time! It does indeed need Divine help and aid to summon up energy and to commence, beginning at once, that arduous work of removing the rubbish and ruins and starting afresh. So, also, those who would do good to others, who would rebuild God's Zion and populate the kingdom of Christ with souls, must expect to find in their way a heavy and inert mass of ignorance, apathy, and opposition. We shall find at first disappointments and

failures heaped up high in our path, but, like the faithful men of Jerusalem of old, let our answer be, "We will rise up and build," and the encouraging voice of the true Nehemiah, the real Restorer of the Heavenly Zion, will greet us with the promise, "The God of heaven will prosper" you! (*W. Hardman, LL.D.*)

Ver. 11. **And our adversaries said, They shall not know.**—*The craft and cruelty of the Church's adversaries*:—I. A STRONG COMBINATION AGAINST THE CHURCH OF GOD. II. A WICKED DESIGN THEY WERE COMBINED IN. III. A BLOODY MEANS PROPOUNDED. IV. A SUBTLE WAY PROJECTED FOR THE AFFECTING OF THIS. (*Matthew Newcomen.*) *Satanic subtlety*:—I. In this serpentine, crafty, and malicious dealing of these wicked men appeareth THE OLD SERPENTINE NATURE AND MALICE OF SATAN. II. The next property of the serpent that appeareth in them is that THEY MERCILESSLY WOULD MURDER THEM WHEN THEY HAD ONCE THUS SUDDENLY INVADIED THEM. III. The last property of Satan appeareth here in these wicked men, IN THAT THEY WOULD GLADLY OVERTHROW THIS BUILDING OF JERUSALEM, THAT IT SHOULD NEVER BE THOUGHT OF ANY MORE. (*Bp. Pilkington.*)

Ver. 14. **Remember the Lord, which is great.**—*The power of memory*:—Consider—I. THE POWER OF MEMORY. II. THE APPLICATION OF THE TEXT TO OURSELVES. 1. Parents should remember that God regards them as stewards, to whom are committed the care, the instruction, and the discipline of their offspring. 2. Children should remember that forgetfulness of the claims of home, of a father, of a mother, is a forgetfulness of God. 3. Employers should "remember the Lord" in the example which He furnishes of gentleness, patience, kindness, forbearance, and deep humility. 4. Servants should "remember the Lord," that He "took upon Him the form of a servant." Conclusion: Remember the promises He has made, the deliverances He has wrought, the blessings He has conferred, the invitations He has given, and the relations He now fills. Remember Him—in calamity to trust Him, in prosperity to praise Him, in danger to call upon Him, in difficulty to expect His interference. Remember Him, for it is your duty, it is your privilege. Remember Him, for He never forgets you. (*W. Horwood.*) *God is on the field*:—Always believe that God is on your side. "He is on the field when most invisible." In one of the great continental cities the regalia are not kept behind iron bars as in the Tower of London, but lie upon an open table. It might appear an easy thing for some thief to snatch a diamond or a jewel from the glittering array, and yet no man dare put out his hand to take one, for that table is charged with electricity, and woe to the person who touches it. The protection is complete; you cannot see it, but there it is. Only live in daily—hourly communion with Christ. Don't break the spiritual connection, and you are as safe from Satan and sin as the jewels from the devices of the thief. Greater is He that is for us than all enemies that can be against us. (*E. Abbott.*)

Ver. 15. **Every one unto his work.**—*Specialty of work for each man*:—There is something beautiful to me in the thought that there is a specialty of work for each man. In work, as in character, disposition, history, and destiny, there is a specialty; and when the Church arises to the New Jerusalem, it will not be to sit there as one vast photographic likeness, nor shall one be able to say of its members, "I have heard their history," when the story of one has been told. The history of the Church will be made up of individual histories; and each one shall possess its own peculiar interest. Your history will be none the less interesting when mine has been told, nor mine when you have related yours. Your head and heart will not be as mine, nor mine as yours; we shall not be mere fragments of a universal Church; but we shall be fully, roundly, and conspicuously ourselves, in the Church of which we make a whole, and perfect, and unexampled individual. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Every man at his place*:—In that fearful national catastrophe which befell England, *i. e.*, the loss of the ironclad *Victoria*, the staunch steadfastness of our British sailors was grandly illustrated. When the crash came, instead of a wild rush on deck of all below, every man remained true to his post. All knew that a serious collision had occurred, yet the most perfect order was maintained. The engineers kept their eyes on the indicator and moved their levers as directed, in spite of the fact that their lives were in imminent danger. Even when it was seen that the vessel was settling down, and all were called on deck, the men ranged themselves in line, and the order, "Right about face," was obeyed, though while

in the act the vessel heeled over, and all were precipitated into the sea. *Our personal duty*:—The only way to regenerate the world is to do the duty which lies nearest to us, and not to hunt after grand, far-fetched ones for ourselves. If each drop of rain chose where it should fall, God's showers would not fall as they do now on the evil and the good alike. (*Charles Kingsley*.) *Our own duty to be attended to*:—There is a story with which many of the present generation have been made familiar in our reading books which has an important application to Christian life. The story is that a German, with an ear sensitive to music, one day entered a church, and, being distressed by the discords of the singing, put his fingers in his ears; but there penetrated through them a single clear, rich soprano, singing in such perfect tune, that he was moved to listen. The singer never faltered because of the jarring notes, nor increased the volume of her voice to drown them. She kept steadily on till one after another came into accord with her sweet tones, till she brought the entire body of singers into harmony.

Vers. 17, 18. **Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.**—*The work and warfare of life*:—Life is work, and life is warfare; and these are ever commingled. Our text is but an epitome and sample of that larger and longer work which fills the broad area of all human history. I. **THIS LIFE IS TO MEN A SCENE OF TOIL.** "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" is the universal and unchanging law of human life. Inaction is no blessing. The spirit of man stagnates and sickens under it, and it issues in a weariness which is worse than the fatigues of labour. Activity is needful to the true enjoyment of life. Adam was not inactive in paradise (Gen. ii. 15). Heaven is a rest, but not a rest of indolence. There "His servants do serve Him." The true labour of life involves self-denial, apprehension, patience, fatigue, disappointment. Every man has a work that is specific and peculiar to him. The great Taskmaster never set two of His creatures the same task. Amid much general sameness, there is the strictest individuality. Life's work is twofold. 1. The secular department. How great is the number of human avocations! And in each of these avocations what a number of workers! And each one has a task given him to do which is as distinct as himself, which no one can do but he, and which is defined by his circumstances, his relations and his endowments. 2. The spiritual department. The work of the soul and of eternity; the end of which is—"to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." II. **THIS LIFE IS ALSO A SCENE OF CONFLICT.** We have to fight—1. Against ourselves. As internal wars are ever fiercest and most painful, so the battle-ground of a Christian's own heart is that on which he is called to wage the severest fight and win the hardest victory. We have to overcome our sluggishness, our unbelief, our sensuality, our concupiscence, the heavy clog of sense, and the fierce impulse of corruption. 2. Against men. This enemy is called the world. And by it we mean that vast mass of maxims, opinions, beliefs, pursuits, ways, habits, opposed to the mind and service of God, which characterise human society. 3. Against spirits. The devil and his angels, numerous, powerful, malignant (Eph. vi. 12). (*R. A. Hallam, D.D.*) *Construction and contention*:—We have here illustrated two principles—I. **CONSTRUCTION.** Each of us is put into the world to be a builder, and himself is the building. Each separate disciple is a "habitation of God, through the Spirit." If your faith, your work, your prayers, your watchfulness shall ever succeed in edifying you into anything like a completed Christian, your character will be an edifice where God's glory will be more distinctly manifest than it is over any altar, where His praise will resound more acceptably than from the grandest organ, and where His truth is more effectually preached than from the most eloquent pulpit of any cathedral in the world. 1. Because character is a building it is not therefore to be understood that there is no need in the Christian life for an instant change, or conversion. That comes before the building can be begun to any purpose, or on any right plan. All must be sound at the base. If any man should try to build on a false foundation his work would come to nought. No outside clamps would hold it up. Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. 2. We must not take the impression that the formation of Christian character consists in putting pieces of moral propriety together—a patchwork of merits without any all-controlling Divine principle. In all buildings there must be one "design," an organising principle held clearly in the builder's mind. In the structure of character this organising principle is the inworking life of Christ. It is the will of God. The spiritual laws are just as necessary, in order to success in a righteous life, as the mechanical laws

in order to architectural success. The first of those laws is that God is the centre and object of all religious affections; the second, that Jesus is the way to the Father. Hence—self-renunciation—yielding the heart—submission to the Heavenly Will is the inmost necessity of a Christian character. To the question how we shall build character fair and strong, the answer is—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Into every particle of life must run this secret power of the Holy Christ—like the builder’s invisible design spreading through all the beams and braces and apartments of the house, or else it will be no “habitation of the Spirit.” Christian character means a righteous will, a purpose consecrated to God, and acting in all well-doing for man. You may grow in character by doing, thinking, and feeling more vigorously for God and your brother-man. Construction, then, is the multiplying of that inward spiritual energy out of which right outward deeds will be sure to come. It is replenishing the stock of life in the heart. It is making conscience quick, watchful, unbending. It is cultivating loyalty to the voice of God in the soul. It is the increase of humility, sincerity, temperance, integrity, patience, sweetness of temper, submission, benevolence. Additions to these, by whatever means, by Bible and prayer, and sacrament and labour, by the study of them in the lives of heroic saints, are the positive building of character.

**II. CONTENTION.** In the positive process of achieving good, hindrances are met. It has been said, “There is nothing real or useful that is not a seat of war.” Take construction without resistance. If I ignore the fact of sin and forget temptations and simply go on cultivating good, as if there were no opposite, presently I shall find these sins are making assaults on me from behind: my work will be undermined, my pious pains spoilt; I shall be no true builder. On the other hand, take resistance without construction. This will produce a hard, censorious, belligerent type of piety. The sword will crowd out the gentle arts of peace. It makes soldiers against Satan, but not tillers of the soil of God. We become clever disputants, but not good, trusting, patient, loving, holy men and women. Looking out so sharply for the Ammonites and Ashdodites the walls do not go up. We want the watchful eye of the old anchorite, without his austerity. We want the practical activity of the modern reformer without his blindness to the personal foes in his own heart. We want one hand for service, one for battle; when this is understood Christ’s Church will be filled with consistent believers and fearless soldiers. (*Ep. Huntington.*) *The sword and the trowel*:—The stirring incident suggests lessons to the workers in God’s cause to-day. **I. THE CHURCH OF GOD HAS STILL A GREAT WORK TO DO FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD.** The walls of many a Jerusalem are down and need building up. Injustice, oppression, and wrong are found in many places. **II. HOW IS THE CHURCH TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THIS WORK?** Consider the people named in the text. 1. They had a wise and skilful leader. It is said that Alexander the Great was strolling among the tents of his soldiers on the eve of some great battle. Hearing some of his men engaged in conversation in one of the tents, he stopped to listen. The men were losing courage and heart, and said so. As they deplored their insufficiency for the task of the morrow, he slipped up to the door of the tent, and swinging back the canvas, said, “Remember that Alexander is with you.” Nehemiah told the people of a greater than Alexander. In all aggressive movements there must be aggressive leaders. 2. All the people were willing to help. The danger in these days is to leave the work to a few, to recognised leaders and officers. This is always foolish; in the Church of God it is fatal. 3. Each one had a work and did it. God has a piece of work for each one of us to do. Some have to stand in the front; others have to stand in the rear. Some work in the blaze of day, and others work out of sight. I sometimes admire the bridges which cross the Thames. As I have sailed under them, I have thought about the divers who had to work below the surface of the water to lay the foundation of some of the strong work which carries the weight of the whole. The work these divers did out of sight was all-important. If they had done it badly the whole would have suffered in consequence. It may be so with our work. 4. They did the work in dependence upon God. They did their secular work in a religious spirit. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) *The work of a Christian*:—This is well set forth by the occupations of a builder and a soldier. 1. There are heaps of rubbish to be removed. There must be a true repentance, a confessing and forsaking of sin. 2. Foundations deep and strong must be laid. Christ the one Foundation. 3. The wall must be carried up, little by little, &c. There must be a growing up into Christ, an advance in grace day by day. 4. This must be done according to the settled plan, by rule and square. Our rule is the written Word. 5. The Christian

has to carry on his work in troublous times. He must stand bravely at his post, like a sentinel on watch. He must stand where his Captain has placed him. Obedience to Christ is the glory of the Christian soldier. We must believe where we cannot see, and trust where we cannot trace. The end will justify all His dealings with us and by us. In the Peninsular War, the captain of a division was placed by Wellington at a point remote from the field where a battle was about to be fought. He was expressly ordered to remain there, and on no account to quit his post. When the battle was raging fiercely the captain could no longer endure the inaction of his position, and so left it and joined in the fight. The enemy were driven from the field, and fled in the very direction that Wellington had anticipated, and where the captain with his men had been posted. The general felt confident that their flight would be cut off; but great was his anger when he found that his orders had been disobeyed, and the post vacated. It is said that he never again employed the captain in any important affair, and that the latter died of a broken heart through the loss of his reputation as a soldier. (*J. M. Randall.*)

Vers. 19, 20. **The work is great . . . and we are separated upon the wall.**—*The common work of the Master*:—In time of war you visit the camp. There is flying from the flagpole in the sun the stars and stripes. You look upon the men in their scattered avocations. A few men are playing, a few men are cleaning their guns, a few men are cooking, here and there a sentry is pacing back and forth, some men are lying on the grass asleep, there is no common life, there seems to be no common purpose, there appears to be no common endeavour, or action. But suddenly the bugle sounds the call, or the drum its roll, and instantly the men spring to their feet, drop their cards, awake from their slumber, leave their cooking utensils, and stand ready to meet the enemy, ready to do the bidding of their commander. Deep down in their hearts there is a common purpose, and that flag that floats at the topmost pole and over their camp indicates what that purpose is. So Christians are to gather in the name of Christ—you, merchant—you, lawyer—you, physician—you, minister—you, teacher—you, parent, each in your several place, each doing your several work. Whenever the drum shall beat its roll-call, you are to be ready, not merely to do your own work, but to stand shoulder to shoulder in serried ranks, to do the common work of the Master, in fulfilment of the common aim which has really united you. (*Lyman Abbott.*)

Ver. 20. **So we laboured in the work.**—*Perseverance*:—The builders not only began well, but they persevered to the end of their work. Perseverance is a great element of success. It was George Stephenson's motto, "Persevere"; and the celebrated mathematician, Arago, tells us that his master in mathematics gave a word of advice which he found in the binding of one of his text-books. Puzzled and discouraged by the difficulties he met with in his early studies, he was almost ready to give up the pursuit. Some words which he found on the waste leaf used to stiffen the cover of his paper-bound text-book caught his eye, and interested him. It proved to be a short letter from D'Alembert to a young person disheartened, like himself, by the difficulties of mathematical study, and who had written to him for counsel. "Go on, go on, sir," was the counsel which D'Alembert gave him. "The difficulties you meet will resolve themselves as you advance." This maxim followed out made him one of the greatest astronomers of his day. And Christians must persevere in the work of God. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Perseverance*:—A Christian negro was once asked the meaning of perseverance, and he said, "Massa, me think it mean hang on, hold fast, and no let go." And when some one questioned John Wesley on the remarkable success of his followers, "Sir," he said, "they are all at it, and always at it." (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 23. **None of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.**—*The necessary and the unnecessary*:—Some people waste all their energy in putting off and on their clothes: their whole life is a question of clothes; they cannot do anything until their clothes are right. Nehemiah showed how he distinguished between the necessary and the unnecessary. We must attend to health if we are to attend to successful toil. Time is not wasted that is spent in obeying the laws of life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

## CHAPTER V.

**VERS. 1-13. And there was a great cry of the people.—The friend of the poor:—**

**I. THE COMPLAINT OF THE POOR.** It is sometimes alleged the poor have a morbid disposition to complain of their indigence and sufferings; and this may be true of certain classes of them. The ignorant and vicious, the idle and intemperate, are prone to bewail their hardships in querulous words. They complain bitterly of the miseries of their lot, and perhaps charge those with having a hard heart who do not give them the relief they desire. They try thus to excite the pity of the benevolent, or to extort the gifts of charity which they do not deserve. But it is altogether different with the industrious and pious poor. The poor of the children of Judah are manifestly brought to the very extremity of suffering before they disclose their sorrowful circumstances; and when they are compelled to make them known, it is in language remarkable for dignified sobriety and true pathos. The complaint of these poor Israelites unveils their varied load of sorrow. 1. Some complained of the extent of their necessities. "We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live." The calls of hunger were many; the means of supply, on their own inheritance, were small; and they required to purchase corn for bread from others. Their straits, too, were increased by the present dearth. It is one of the many glories of the religion of the Bible that it makes a benevolent care of the poor a paramount duty in all who have it in their power to relieve their necessities, and enforces this duty by threatenings for its neglect, and by promises of reward for its observance. 2. Some of the poor here also complain of the severity of public burdens. They were still subject to the Persian king, and to secure the continuance of his favour to Jerusalem they had made every possible effort to pay his tribute. Their more wealthy countrymen met this tax without abridging their home comforts, but the burden was heavy on the poor. 3. The sorrows of the poor were in this case deepened by the thought that they were occasioned by the ungenerous conduct of their own brethren. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, neither is it in our power to redeem them." They possessed a common relation to the covenant inheritance. They had left the land of their exile animated with the same faith, and embarked in the same enterprise. Many of them had quitted comforts in that foreign land, out of love to Jerusalem, and were now enduring the first trials of returned captives. They had laboured, too, by their united endeavours, to restore the city of their fathers, instead of seeking every man his own things in the care of his patrimonial inheritance. It might have been expected that, thus labouring for a common object, they would have shared a common sympathy, and been free from the grasp of selfishness. 4. How mysterious are sufferings like these, especially of the poor people of God engaged in His service. We do not wonder that those Jews who remained in the land of idols, after they were free to return to Judah, might suffer adversity. They despised the Lord's goodness in offering deliverance from exile, and preferred ease in a strange country to spiritual blessings in the holy land. It is not wonderful though they might be visited with trials in providence, and be made to read their sin in their suffering. But here those endure affliction who willingly left the land of the heathen, and they are involved in deep trouble while doing a service to the city of God. Shall we think that they disprove either the wisdom or goodness of God's providence to His people? Do they not rather show His thoughts to be far above our thoughts, and His procedure in carrying out His great plan to be too high for us to understand? Do they not clearly indicate that He tries the faith of His servants in the very moment of accepting their love, and rewards their affection, not in the comforts of earth, but in the glories of immortality? It is thus that the world in which we dwell is still a place of weeping, where the poor and needy pour out their tears in floods. Thousands of righteous ones languish in poverty, or are persecuted for their fidelity to the truth of God.

**II. NEHEMIAH'S EXPOSTULATION WITH THE NOBLES.** The promptitude with which he listens to the complaint of the poor does honour to his heart, and the courage with which he proceeds to redress their wrongs sheds a lustre on the justice of his administration. The cry of the lowly for relief from distress or opposition is often disregarded, yea, proves the occasion of augmenting their misery. And in his very first step for reform of these abuses in Judah he evinces again the self-

reliance of a great mind. "Then," says he, "I consulted with myself." To this, indeed, he was shut up by his peculiar and trying circumstances. 1. He "rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother." To see the full force of this charge, it must be borne in mind that the Israelites were forbidden in the law of Moses to lend money to the poor on interest. With strangers, or perhaps with the rich, they might trade in this way; but this is the law interdicting such a practice with their poor brethren:—"If thou lend money to any of My people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury." This, then, is a grave charge against the nobles of violating the Divine law; and it falls on ears not accustomed to such plain words. Men of rank and affluence seldom hear this language of remonstrance addressed to them, and they can ill bear such reflections on their honour. But no earthly station exempts wrong-doers from just reproof; and Nehemiah's zeal for God, as well as his love to His people, inspires him with faithfulness. True kindness to them, not less than compassion for the lowly objects of their exactions, prompted his faithful expostulation. The reproof here was administered with firmness, yet it was accompanied with the prudence of wisdom, adopting a course fitted to fortify remonstrance, and to secure its desired effect. "I set," says he, "a great assembly against them." What was the object of this concourse? We cannot suppose that the servant of God intended, through this means, to overawe the nobles by numbers, or to constrain them to a decision contrary to reason. He appears rather to have convened this assembly to allow the free expression of sentiment on the evil complained of, and to bring all under the salutary influence of public opinion. In no free community can public opinion be set at defiance with either justice or safety. It may, indeed, be sometimes corrupted by designing men, and it may for a season be swayed by impulses perilous to the common-weal. It requires, then, to be corrected and regulated by the power of truth. But a healthful public opinion, wisely formed, rightly guided, freely expressed, is the bulwark of national liberty, and an essential condition of the progress of mankind. 2. Nehemiah addressed to the rulers of Judah persuasive argument. The arguments he employed are threefold. He first of all pleads the efforts already made to redeem Judah from captivity. And on this ground he asks if it is right they should be again sold into bondage. "We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, who were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren?" This appeal reminds believers in Christ of their duty, not to come again into bondage to sin. "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Nehemiah, moreover, pleads the exposure of the common cause to the reproach of the enemy as a reason for the nobles ceasing their oppression. "Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" This is a powerful argument for watchfulness and consistency in all who love Zion. Many are jealous for their own reputation, and quick to wipe off any reproach from themselves, while they have little care for the honour of God. Nehemiah, once more, appeals to his own conduct as an example of a generous spirit to his poor brethren. He, too, might have exacted money and corn, but he freely surrendered his private rights for the sake of the public good. It is not in a boastful spirit that he thus refers to himself and the course of self-denial he pursued. Perhaps, also, he wishes to suggest that he gained far more in enjoyment than he gave up in substance. The powerful and persuasive appeal was crowned with complete success. The result of this appeal also proves the power of religious motive in remedying social evils. These often grow and spread in face of all arguments deduced from considerations of humanity and justice. But here, in Jerusalem, religion pours the oil of love on the troubled waters; she addresses a winning appeal to open hearts, and at once the grasp of oppression is relaxed. If any great social evils are allowed to prevail where religion is professed, it is only by neglecting or denying its power. Christianity will either destroy every iniquity that abounds in a land, or itself will decline and depart from a people who will not hear its voice, to break off their sins by righteousness. III. NEHEMIAH'S TESTIMONY TO HIS OWN DISINTERESTED CONDUCT. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Brave compassion*:—Now Nehemiah, as we have seen, was a business man—a man of great energy and prudence; and it would not have been strange if he had postponed the consideration of the complaints thus brought before him. He might naturally enough have been afraid lest, by now finding fault with the nobles and rulers, he should alienate them from himself, and thus hinder the completion of his great



enterprise. And so he might have said to these poor people, "You see that my hands are full of work; I cannot attend to this matter now—one thing at a time. No doubt you have a grievance, but let us get the walls finished first, and then I will see what can be done." It is thus that many men of business act in daily life. Their very energy leads them to brush aside everything that threatens to interfere with their present work. They cannot bear interruptions, and are so eagerly bent on reaching their end that they cannot pause to do good on their way. But Nehemiah was more than a mere man of business; he was a man with a tender heart. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *A great schism averted*:—I. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE MAY EXIST EVEN AMONGST FELLOW-WORKERS IN A GREAT AND GOOD CAUSE. II. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE, IF NOT CORRECTED, WILL UNDERMINE THE STABILITY OF ANY CAUSE, HOWEVER RIGHTEOUS. III. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE SHOULD BE REGARDED BY ALL GOOD MEN WITH FEELINGS OF RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION. IV. THAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE, WHENEVER DISCOVERED, SHOULD BE CALMLY, YET PROMPTLY, DEALT WITH. V. THAT CONCILIATORY APPEALS ARE SOMETIMES MORE EFFICACIOUS THAN COERCIVE MEASURES IN DEALING WITH SOCIAL INJUSTICE. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *The accusing cry of humanity*:—I. THE UNENDING STRUGGLE. Wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, brain and brawn, capital and labour—when in all ages have not these come into collision? II. ELEMENTS OF BITTERNESS IN THIS STRUGGLE. 1. On the side of the oppressors there is power (ver. 7). 2. The oppressed are the brethren of the oppressors. 3. They were engaged in a common cause. III. LIGHT IN DARKNESS. 1. Christ came to proclaim the brotherhood of humanity. 2. Signs of the times. The teacher is abroad. Society is tending towards redress. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 3-5. We have mortgaged our lands.—*The miseries of debt*:—I. MENTAL UNREST. II. SOCIAL DEGRADATION. III. FAMILY RUIN. IV. A DISREGARD OF A DIVINE COMMAND: "Thou shalt not steal." Application—1. Christians should set the world an example. 2. Watch the beginnings of extravagance. 3. In small things as well as in greater act on Christian principle. (*Ibid.*) *The blessing and curse of mortgages*:—The history of the mortgage would be the history of the domestic, social, financial, political, and ecclesiastical progress of all ages. It will be useful if I can intelligently and practically speak of the mortgage as a blessing and as a curse. There is much absurd and wholesale denunciation of borrowing money. If I should request all those who have never asked a loan to rise, there would not out of this audience be one get up unless it were some one who had acted so badly at the start that he knew no one would trust him. At the inception of nearly all enterprises, great or small, a loan is necessary. Years ago an Irishman landed with fifty cents in his pocket on the Battery, asked the loan of one dollar from an entire stranger, and now is among the New York princes. A mortgage is merely borrowed strength of others to help us in crises of individual or national life on the promise that we will pay them for the help rendered. But what is true in secularities is more true in ecclesiastical affairs. If churches had not been built till all the money could be raised, tens of thousands of our best churches would never have been built, and millions of those who are now Christians on earth or saints in heaven would never have been comforted or saved. The old Collins's line of steamers went into bankruptcy, but that does not change the fact that they transported hundreds of passengers in safety across the sea; and if all the churches in Christendom to-morrow went down under the thump of the sheriff's hammer, that would not hinder the fact that they have already transported thousands into the kingdom, and have done a stupendous good that all earth and hell can never undo. All consider it right to borrow for a secular institution. Is it not right to borrow for a religious? It is safer to borrow for the Church than for any other institution, because other institutions die, but a Church seldom. When the Israelites of my text wanted to rebuild their homes, and wanted to borrow money for that purpose, the mortgagers did well to let them have it, though I wish they had not asked twelve per cent. But after a while the mortgage spoken of in the text ceased to be a blessing, and became a plague. It had helped them through a domestic and ecclesiastical crisis, but now they could carry it no longer, and they cried out for rescue. If a blessing lies too long, it gets to be a curse. At the first moment the farmer can get the mortgage off his farm, and the merchant the mortgage off his merchandise, and the citizen the mortgage off his home, and the charitable institution the mortgage off its asylum, and the religious society the mortgage off its church, they had better do it. I have heard people argue the advantage of individual debts and national debts and Church debts; but I could

not, while the argument was going on, control my risibilities. It is said that such debts keep the individual and the Church and the State busy trying to pay them. No doubt of it. So rheumatism keeps the patient busy with arnica, and neuralgia keeps the patient busy with hartshorn, and the cough with lozenges, and the tooth-ache with lotions; but that is no argument in favour of rheumatism, or neuralgia, or coughs, or toothache. Better, if possible, get rid of these things, and be busy with something else. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 7. Then I consulted with myself.—*Precipitate anger avoided*:—But, though very angry, he nevertheless “consulted with himself.” Even righteous indignation is often too precipitate in its expression, and vents itself in a fuming and storming which does little or no good. But the fervid feeling of Nehemiah was blended with practical wisdom. He took counsel with himself as to what was best to be done. (*T. C. Finlayson.*) And I set a great assembly against them.—*An assembly convoked against sinners*:—I wish to show impenitent sinners how great an assembly may be set against them. That so large a majority of mankind are on the side of irreligion, tends powerfully to preserve a majority on that side, for a large proportion of the youth in each successive generation will enlist under the banner of the strongest party. The same circumstance operates to weaken the force and prevent the success of those means and arguments which God employs for the conversion of sinners. When the man who neglects religion looks around him and sees wealth, rank, power, and influence all ranged on his side, he secretly says, “I must be right, I must be safe. If I fare as well as the great mass of my fellow-creatures, I shall fare well enough.” This being the case, it is important that sinners should be made to see what a great assembly may be set against them. Among those who are against them, we mention—**I. THE GOOD MEN NOW IN THE WORLD.** God has not a servant, Jesus Christ has not a friend on earth who is not against you. Their example is against you, their testimony is against you. **II. ALL THE GOOD MEN WHO HAVE EVER LIVED IN THE WORLD,** the spirits of just men made perfect. **III. ALL THE WRITERS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.** With one voice they cry, “Woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” **IV. THE HOLY ANGELS.** **V. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** Every doctrine which He promulgated, every precept which He enjoined, every threatening which He uttered, every action of his life, is against you. Christ meets all the impenitent, and says, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” He meets the unbelieving, and says, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” He meets all the unholy, and says, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” He meets all the unregenerate, and exclaims, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye be born again, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” **VI. GOD THE FATHER.** (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Witnesses against you*:—Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow-men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear, and the gentle rebuke of some one faithful friend they will despise; but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side, when many are seen to be its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left, and they yield to right demands because they see them not only to be just, but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort, and we turn the scale if, like Nehemiah, we “set a great assembly against them.” I set a great assembly against—**I. THE UNCONVERTED.** 1. The great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you. (1) By their consistent life. (2) By their joy in God. (3) By their very horror at your sin. They cannot bear to think of that which awaits you. Holy Whitfield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, cry, “The wrath to come! the wrath to come!” It was too much for him. He could not repeat those words and there cease. 2. All the inspired writers of the Bible. 3. The departed saints. 4. The whole company of the angels. 5. God Himself. “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” 6. Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **II. THOSE WHO SAY THAT SIN IS A VERY PLEASANT AND PROFITABLE THING.** Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly hell from their sins! Go over the casual ward, enter the union-house, spend an evening in a low lodging-house, and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen, of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors, who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extrava-

gance and sin to eat the bread of pauperism. III. THOSE WHO SAY THAT TRUE RELIGION MAKES PEOPLE MISERABLE. I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present, and I know also about as much depression of spirit at times as any one; but my Master's service is a blessed service, and faith in Him makes my soul leap for joy. I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world, if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ. It is a blessed thing to be a Christian and all God's people will tell you so. By the living saints that do rejoice, and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 9. Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?—*Jealousy for the honour of God*:—There was much good sense and Christian wisdom in the reply which was once given to a dignitary of our Church by a simple rural pastor. The latter had said to the former, "If you act so, what will the people say?" The reply was, "Do you care what the people say?" The rejoinder of the plain man was, "I care as little as any man what the people say; but I care a great deal what the people have a right to say." How just the distinction! Human opinion ought to have no weight with us when it contravenes duty; but it ought to weigh much with us when we incur its censure by the violation of duty. The ungodly will judge chiefly of Christianity by those who profess it, and be largely won or scandalised by the manner in which it is adorned or disgraced by them. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*)

Ver. 10. Let us leave off this usury.—*Wise rebuke*:—He did not stand on a pedestal and look down on them with scorn and contempt; he rather placed himself alongside of the offenders, that he might lift them to a higher level. Let us learn from this beautiful example how best to rebuke and restore an erring brother or sister. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

Ver. 15. But so did not I, because of the fear of God.—*A motto for a manly life*:—I. THE SELF-REGULATIVE POWER OF A MANLY MOTIVE. "The fear of God"; "the love of Christ"; "religious principle"; "conscience"; "the sense of duty"; "the instinct of right," are all variations of expressions of the same motive. II. THE COURAGE TO BE SINGULAR IS HERE IMPLIED. III. APPLICATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE TO THE COMMONPLACE LIFE OF ALL MEN. 1. To himself a man must say, "No!" 2. To the world a man must say "No!" 3. This is the motto for youth. IV. THE SIMPLICITY AND DIRECTNESS OF THIS LIFE-MOTTO. V. THIS MOTTO IS OUR GUIDE IN DOUBTFUL MATTERS. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *The fear of the Lord*:—I. WHOLE-SOME SELF-RESTRAINT. There is always a temptation to run with the multitude. It was particularly so with Nehemiah. 1. His superiors were evil. A man is fain to follow his employers or masters. 2. His surroundings were evil. A person gets his tone from his surroundings. 3. His temptations were to evil. He would have gained the applause of his fellows by sinning. 4. He was singular in his convictions, also almost alone in an idolatrous land. II. AN ALL-POWERFUL MOTIVE. "Because of the fear of the Lord." All the more powerful because unseen—the mightiest forces are those the eye cannot trace. The fear of the Lord is—1. A safe guide. It is sure to be right. 2. A powerful incentive. He has power to cast into hell, and He will reward. 3. A plain directive. The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Men who are independent in their purpose of rectitude are earth's true nobility. Learn to stand alone for the cause of truth. (*Homilist.*) *Nehemiah's master principle*:—The religion of the Bible is not a sickly plant which requires the forcing-house to keep it alive. It is a hardy tree which flourishes best in the open field. The servant of God anywhere is the servant of God everywhere. Few notions have done more mischief than the imagination that godliness belongs to the closet and sanctuary, the cloister and the cell, and that it is too ethereal to be interused into the occupations of secular life. To refute such fallacies nothing is more effectual than holy example. Example shows what can be done, and at the same time points out the way in which it may be accomplished. For those occupied in the busy pursuits of the world there is no more appropriate example in the Scriptures than that of Nehemiah. I. HIS RULING MOTIVE. The whole tenor of his conversation bespoke the supremacy of the fear of God in his soul. This chapter contains an impressive exercise of this principle. Of those returned from

the captivity, many were destitute and distressed; their poverty made them a prey to their richer brethren. Nehemiah's predecessors were most rigorous in their exactions, and failed to let mercy temper justice. Nehemiah, on the contrary, not only refrained from oppression, but did not even require his dues. Had he not disclosed the principle which actuated him, we might have filled up the blank in this way: Because of the promptings of generosity; or because of my high sense of honour; or because of the patriotism that fired my breast; or because of the compassion which melted my heart. Thus, however, spake not Nehemiah, but he said, "So did not I, because of the fear of God." This gave the character of godliness to his conduct; this transmuted what would otherwise have been no better than fair tinsel into the fine gold of the sanctuary.

II. THE NATURE OF THE FEAR OF GOD. The fear of God in the Old Testament is equivalent to the love of God in the New. The former indicates the severer aspect of the one economy as compared with the more gracious aspect of the other. What viewed in one light is love viewed in another is godly fear. They are but different aspects of the same principle. If there be genuine love of God, there cannot fail to be a holy fear of offending Him. This fear is therefore the beginning of wisdom; the guardian of holiness; the seal of adoption. What need there is for this principle to pervade the mercantile world! Examined in the light of Scripture, the morals of that world, even in our own favoured land, would be found to be fearfully faulty. Along with much that is honourable and of good report among our merchant princes, if you penetrate into the recesses of commerce, you will frequently detect a low and shifting standard of equity—you will discover that a thousand practices are connived at and pass current in business which when in the balances of the sanctuary are found utterly wanting.

III. THE SALUTARY EFFECTS OF THE FEAR OF GOD. It gives to mercantile morality—

1. Intrinsic worth.
2. Strength.
3. Stability.
4. Universality.

(1) Taking the morality of the commercial world at the highest, how much of it is genuine? If men are upright in their dealings merely because they have a conviction that honesty is the best policy, and that fairness will answer better than fraud, or if they act justly simply from a sense of honour or from a pride which raises them above being guilty of a low and disgraceful transaction; or if they do right because they instinctively recoil from all that is base and equivocal, from whatever would degrade and disturb their mind, then all their imposing array of mercantile virtues are after all of the earth earthy, hollow at the core and unprofitable in the sight of God. It is the fear of God alone which can impart to mercantile morality its intrinsic worth.

(2) Even the virtuous qualities which exalt men in the commercial world must lack reality and consistency when they rest on a lower ground. Hence it is no uncommon thing to find a man who was at one period distinguished for honour and integrity at another period making utter shipwreck of character; whilst his barque glided along in smooth water and his sails were filled with prosperous gales, he steered an undeviating course, but when storms arose and his vessel drifted among quicksands and shallows, he soon abandoned the compass of honesty and yielded himself to the force of the current. His rectitude was the creature of circumstance: sustained by success, with success it fell. Fragile at best are the virtues which spring from the unregenerated heart.

(3) The energy of this principle will exert a strength and universality of influence which nothing else can command. God being everywhere, the man who fears Him will fear Him everywhere. It is impossible to delineate fully the breadth and expansiveness of this principle of action. It will go with a man into the little as well as the great, into the hidden as well as the open; it will tell upon him with equal force whether others dissent from or concur in his course of conduct. It will elevate him to freedom and independence of character. He will not be like the sundial, useless save in the light; but he will be like the timepiece, which keeps the tenor of its way alike in the shade as in the sunshine. The saint, like the sunflower, owns the centre of attraction when clouded as well as when clear.

(a) It will keep a man undefiled amid the defilements of public life like the pure stream that is said to pass through the salt lake and yet retain its freshness. It is a safeguard against the tone, the spirit, and the practices of business, and it will prevent compliance with the expedients, manoeuvres, and subtleties of trade.

(b) A trying ordeal for a godly tradesman is to be reputed soft and behind the age because he will not overreach his neighbour. When he sees competitors prospering by doubtful expedients, or hears them glorying in their equivocal gains, his reflection and joy will be, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

(c) It will restrain from the unhallowed indulgences of worldlings.

(d) It will guard against the desecration and profanation of the ordinances of the Lord's

Day. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *Uprightness in dealing*:—If you wish to apply a touchstone to character, take this as the most searching—the exercise of those graces which a man is most tempted to neglect, and the eschewal of those iniquities which a man is most tempted to indulge. He who can stand this test is sterling in the sight of God. Consider—I. SOME GREAT PRINCIPLES WHICH OUGHT TO OBTAIN IN ALL MERCANTILE TRANSACTIONS. 1. A Christian tradesman ought to love his neighbour as himself. 2. “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” This is a code of morals condensed into a sentence. 3. You must be faithful in the little, even as in the great. II. SOME OF THE LESS OBVIOUS DEVIATIONS FROM THESE PRINCIPLES WHICH PASS CURRENT IN THE MERCANTILE WORLD. 1. How common is it for men to defraud society by idleness and self-indulgence! 2. By selfish extravagance, or rash speculations, what numbers subject themselves to liabilities which their resources do not warrant, or plunge into debts which they have no prospect of discharging! 3. How diversified the deceptions practised in trade for the purpose of taking advantage of the purchaser! (*Ibid.*) *The fear of God*:—A few principles, realised in the heart, will generate this blessed fear. Let us consider—I. God’s majesty, and this will provoke the fear of REVERENCE. II. God’s providence, and this will induce a fear of DEPENDENCE. III. Our advantages, and this will induce a fear of DIFFIDENCE. IV. Our obligations, and this will induce a fear of GRATITUDE AND LOVE. (*J. M. Randall.*) *The fear of God a real principle of life*:—It puts a difference between the world and the servant of God—I. As it regards CHOICE. II. As to SERVICE. III. As to WORSHIP. IV. As to AFFLICTION. The worldly man will fret and murmur; not so the godly. V. As to THE PRACTICAL CONDUCT OF DAILY LIFE. (*Ibid.*) *So did not I*:—I. Let me put the main principle that lies here in these words: NOTHING WILL GO RIGHT UNLESS YOU DARE TO BE SINGULAR. “So did not I.” Howsoever common the practice, howsoever innocent and recognised the source of gain, the multitude that approved it, and adopted it, was nothing to me. Everything will be wrong where a man has not learnt the great art of saying, “No.” Resolute non-compliance with common practice should be exercised—1. In the field of opinion. If we are building on traditional opinion, we have really no foundation at all. Unless the word received from others has been verified by ourselves and changed, as it were, into part of our own being, we may befool ourselves with creeds and professions to which we fancy that we adhere, but we have no belief whatsoever. 2. In the daily conduct of life. There are many beckoning hands and enticing voices that seek to draw us away. Sturdy resistance is necessary—(1) From the very make of our own natures. There is a host of inclinations and desires in every man which will hurry him to destruction unless he has a strong hand on the brake. “God gave them to thee under lock and key,” and it is at our peril that we let them have sway. (2) From the order of things in which we dwell. We are set in the midst of a world full of things which are both attractive and bad, and which are sternly prohibited and lovingly forbidden by God. And if you go careering among the flowers and fruits that grow around you in the life that is opening to you, like town children turned loose for a day in the woods, picking whatever is bright, and tasting whatever looks as if it would be sweet, you will poison yourselves with nightshade and hemlock. (3) From the fact that every one of us is thrown more or less closely into contact with people who themselves are living as they should not, and who would fain drag us after them. For us all, then, in every period of life, the necessity is the same. We must learn to say, “No.” Like Joseph, like Daniel, like the three Hebrew youths, like Nehemiah, we must dare, if need be, to be singular. (4) Non-resistance or compliance is in itself weak and unworthy. What a shame it is that a man possessed of that awful power which, within limits and subject to conditions, God has given him, of shaping and determining his character, should let himself be shaped and determined by the mere pressure of circumstances and accidental associations! What a shame it is that a man should have no more volition in what he does and in what he refrains from than one of those gelatinous creatures that float about in the ocean, which have to move wherever the current takes them, though it be to cast them on the rocky shore with an ebbing tide. That “circumstances make character” should have its vindication in the actual lives of the great bulk of men is only another proof of the weakness and depravity of humanity, in which the will is paralysed, and the conscious choice is so seldom exercised, and a man lets the world do what it likes with him. (5) Vigorous non-compliance with the temptations that are around us is enforced by the remembrance of what a poor excuse for wrong-doing they will be

found to be at last. II. CONSIDER THAT YOU CANNOT RESIST THE EVIL AROUND YOU UNLESS YOU GIVE YOURSELVES TO GOD. No man will ever for a lifetime resist and repel the domination of evil unless he is girded about with the purity of Jesus Christ, as an atmosphere in which all poisonous things fade and die, and through which no temptation can force its way. The only means for steadfast resistance is a steadfast faith in Jesus as our Saviour. 1. In Christ we have an all-sufficient pattern. The one command which contains the whole of Christian duty, the whole law of moral perfectness attainable by man, is—"Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk as Christ walked." 2. That fear of God which is all transfused and mingled with the love of Him, gives us next an all-powerful motive. Love delights to please; fear dreads to disobey. 3. The fear of God strengthens us for resistance, because it gives us an omnipotent power within ourselves whereby we resist. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Resistance to evil*:—Nehemiah is an illustrious example of a courage that is within reach of us all, a courage that dares to be true when truth is unpopular, and to do that which is right when right is scorned. Like some unfailing river which defies the heat and the drought of the longest summer because its sources lie on the margin of perpetual snow, this courage in its noblest form is independent of circumstances because it has its spring in the presence of God. I. WHY SHOULD WE DARE TO STAND ALONE, and to say to evil, "So will not I"? 1. Because in the end it is the safest course. Life is a probation and an education. None of us can escape temptation. It moulds and tests our character and fits us for service. There are but two courses open—compliance or resistance. Many a man makes shipwreck on the very verge of manhood for the want of courage to say, "No," and of the resolution to stand alone. 2. It is the manliest course. What do we think of one out on a wide sea in an open boat who, when the storm gathers and the waves run high, drops his oars, fastens up his helm and lets himself drift. He is the brave man who, undaunted by the dark sky and the angry waves, toils at the oar and makes for the land. And he who, caught by sudden and sharp temptation, allows himself to drift helplessly with the tide, excites only scorn and compassion, while he who, like Nehemiah, faces the temptation in the strength of God, and cries, "So will not I," is a true man, a real hero, and a worthy follower of Jesus Christ. 3. It is the wisest course. We escape thereby the consequences of sin, and the very temptation we resist becomes the means of strengthening our character. II. THE SECRET OF THIS COURAGE: "So did not I, BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF GOD." In the realisation of the Divine presence Bishop Latimer forgot his fear of the King of England, and spoke brave and strong and faithful words of warning and remonstrance. In the fear of God lived Lord Lawrence, the great British Pro-Consul as he has been called, who saved India in the day of mutiny, and his marble in Westminster Abbey tells us "He feared man so little because he feared God so much." (*F. J. Chavasse.*) *Singularity*:—1. Our text contains the regulative spring of a noble life. The words mean most to the young. Will the coming generation prefer conscience and convenience and make God the pole-star of their life? Every one of us is important to God, and the consciousness of this is the parent of virtue and the inspiration of heroism. God wants us. When Augustine was in disquiet of mind, he said, "Soul, what aileth thee?" And he seemed to hear a Divine voice within answer, "Look above." Turning upward and noting the stars looking down on him, he said, "Stars, can you tell me the meaning of my unrest?" And the stars whispered, "Look above." Remembering the angel-hosts of God marshalled for service or watchfulness, Augustine cried, "Ministers of God, can ye minister to a restless mind?" And they chanted, "Look above." "Maker of all things," said the reverent though unabashed inquirer, "tell me the meaning of this unsatisfiedness?" And God responded, "I have made thee for Myself, and thy soul can find no rest till it find rest in Me." When Samuel Webster was asked, as he sat at dinner, what was the most formative influence that entered his life, he replied, "The greatest influence that ever touched my life was the sense of my responsibility to God." 2. Doing right means sometimes being unfashionable. A business man died the other day. Writing to his travellers, he was accustomed to add a sentence like "Go straight." He knew that both right and wrong doing were contagious. Dr. Bushnell said to a young man who was consulting him as to the calling he should pursue, "Grasp the handle of your being." Your taste or fitness is as a handle to your faculties. Find your course and go right ahead in the teeth of opposition, in spite of the stings of sarcasm or the bitterness of temporary forsakenness. Remember Him who said, "I

am alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." 3. The power of numbers is magical, and we are so often bidden to do as others do. Said an avowed and educated infidel to a Christian apologist. "Let the final issue be what it may, the majority is against you, and I go with the majority." But the world has not always been saved by majorities. Reformers, statesmen, saints, singers, prophets, priests, believers in God and duty—these have been the saviours of society. 4. It is a moment of moral victory when a young man dares to say, "I cannot afford it." 5. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth, nor in the outward success of his noblest efforts; it does consist in his harmony of conscience with the fear of God, in the peace that is born of obedience. Whitfield and a companion were much annoyed one night by a set of gamblers in a room adjoining that in which they slept. Their clamour and their horrid blasphemy so excited Whitfield that he could not rest. "I will go and reprove their wickedness," said he. His companion remonstrated in vain. His words of reproof were apparently powerless. His companion asked him, "What did you gain by it?" "A soft pillow," he said, and soon fell asleep. Duty looks upward; duty implies God. Jesus Christ incarnated duty. Duty is the minister of heaven. This prayer was found in the desk of a schoolboy after his death: "O God, give me courage to fear none but Thee." (*John H. Goodman.*) *The fear of God*:—I. WHAT IT IS TO FEAR GOD.

1. In general it is a passion of the soul whereby a man doth flee from imminent evil. 2. In particular it is—(1) Servile. (2) Filial. II. THAT A MAN WHO FEARS GOD WILL NOT DO AS OTHERS DO. 1. In the matter of their choice (Matt. xiv. 7, 8; Heb. xi. 25). 2. In the matter of their worship (Josh. xxiv. 15). 3. In their business calling. 4. In what they are entrusted with. 5. In their refreshments. 6. In their afflictions. 7. In their right and propriety. Lot would not let Abraham have his right, though it was his right, yet Abraham, because he feared God and for peace sake, gives up his right. III. WHAT IS THERE IN THIS FEAR OF GOD THAT SHOULD BALANCE THE SOUL, AND CAUSE IT NOT TO DO AS OTHERS DO. A man that fears the Lord—1. Has different ends from others. 2. Has a tenderer conscience. 3. Has different restraints. IV. WHAT IS THE ISSUE AND CONSEQUENCE OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD? 1. God deals well with the man who fears Him (Psa. i.; cxli. 6-8). 2. God will delight in him. Conclusion: If you would fear the Lord in truth—1. Be humbled for the want of it. 2. Ask God to fulfil His promise, "I will put My fear into their hearts." 3. Observe what that is that is nearest and dearest to you, and give it up. 4. Worship God according to His own appointment. 5. Take heed of sinning when you have the opportunity. 6. Labour to strengthen your love to God. 7. Live much in and study much upon dependence wholly upon God. If a man be upon a high tower, and another holds him from falling by the hand only, he will certainly be very fearful of offending him that holds him so. 8. Use the world as not abusing it. Deal with men as in the presence of God. 9. Labour after more communion with Him. We used to say, "Too much familiarity breeds contempt"; but here it is not so, for by familiarity and communion with God we shall have more sweetness and more delight in His ways, more strength in His service, more comfort in our afflictions. (*W. Bridge.*) *The fear of God the touchstone*:—

I. THAT IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IT IS THE MOTIVE THAT GIVES WORTH TO THE ACTION. II. Nehemiah here ascribes his own conduct to the MOTIVE FROM WHICH EVERY ACTION MUST SPRING THAT OBTAINS THE APPROVAL OF GOD. He might have displayed the same absence of self on quite a different principle. 1. Patriotism. 2. Desire for popularity. But his refusal of the emoluments of office was "because of the fear of God." This is a kind of summary of character which includes the various features of spiritual excellence. It is a Divinely implanted principle which makes Christ the motive and God the end of every particular of conduct. The man that fears God labours to act up to the measure of the revelation with which he is favoured; to appropriate the privileges, to act upon the motives, and to perform the duties of the dispensation beneath which he is placed. A fear such as this cannot subsist unless there be a consciousness that "now are we the sons of God." It may have been through "the terror of the Lord" that we were first brought to serious thoughts, earnest resolutions, and fervent supplications, yet when we have felt somewhat of the consciousness of danger there will be a thousandfold more motive to us to strive after holiness, in the love and grace exhibited on Calvary. III. SOME PROMINENT INSTANCES OF THIS GENERAL TRUTH. No action can be approved in God's sight which may not be traced to His fear. 1. Attention to the outward duties and forms of religion may arise from, the custom of society, the mere force of habit, compliance with the wishes of friends, or the desire of setting an example to others,

without there being the slightest vestige of vital Christianity. 2. When we tell the man of high morals and unflinching integrity and high generosity, but who is a stranger to Christ, that he can no more be saved in his present condition than one of the worst profligacy, we are not representing morality, integrity, and generosity as things to be dispensed with by the inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; we are simply affirming that they are of worth only as fruit of a Divinely implanted principle, and that if they have any other origin, they may indeed be beneficial to society, but they cannot promote salvation. Who knows not that there is in many men a kind of philosophical sense of the beauty and dignity of virtue, a native repugnance to what is gross and dishonourable, and a fine sympathy with suffering, which will go far to the producing what is regarded as exemplary in character, although there may be at the same time an utter ignorance, and even contempt, of the doctrines of Christianity? We must begood on good principles. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*)

*Principle*.—I. THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF NEHEMIAH'S CONDUCT—THE FEAR OF GOD. 1. The fear of God, as a principle of action, is at once simple and potent. Look at the machinery in some of your mills. You have there a forest of shafts, an army of wheels, a perfect maze of cunningly invented instruments requisite for carrying out the various processes of manufacture. But how simple and how mighty the power which moves and controls the whole machinery—the power of steam! How immensely superior to any other motive power as yet brought into general use! What steam is in this relation, so is the fear of God to morals. The religious principle in its influence on this complicate mechanism termed man, and on these intricate and bewildering human affairs, has a simple efficacy not only unsurpassed, but with which no other principle can vie. 2. The superiority of this principle appears also in its wide-reaching sphere of action. This sphere comprises everything great and small that relates to human conduct. It embraces life in all its aspects. We cannot thus speak of other principles of action which men acknowledge. Take public opinion, for instance. If it be this which influences us in the course we pursue our morality may prove a very precarious thing. A life regulated by the opinion of one's fellow-creatures is likely to be well-ordered only so far, and for so long, as it shall be under the public eye; whereas the fear of God affects us as truly in the gloom of night as in the brightness of meridian day; affects us as really when remote from the city's hum and the crowded mart as it would in the midst of them; affects us as powerfully in mountain solitudes and on watery wastes as when the gaze of assembled thousands is upon us. "The morality," says a writer previously quoted, "the morality that is based upon self-interest or the opinion of men, will not endure the severest tests. For what if a man should be beset by a temptation so great as to buy over his supposed self-interest, and render it in his view more profitable to defraud than to be honest?" II. THE OPERATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE AS SEEN IN THE CHAPTER BEFORE US. It impelled Nehemiah to rectify abuses. Nehemiah discharged a disagreeable duty with all fidelity. "I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them," &c. Hitherto the fear of God has acted on Nehemiah as an impelling principle. We come now to the incident with which the text stands immediately connected, and we see the operation of this principle as a restraining force. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." It held Nehemiah in check. (*T. Robson.*) *An ancient Nonconformist*.—The words that I have read are a little fragment of his autobiography which deal with a prosaic enough matter, but carry in them large principles. When he was appointed governor of the little colony of returned exiles in Palestine, he found that his predecessors, like Turkish pashas and Chinese mandarins to-day, were in the habit of "squeezing" the people of their government, and that they requisitioned sufficient supplies of provisions to keep the governor's table well spread. It was the custom. Nobody would have wondered if Nehemiah had conformed to it; but he felt that he must have his hands clean. His religion went down into the little duties of common life, and imposed upon him a standard far above the maxims that were prevalent round about him. I. THE ATTITUDE TO PREVALENT PRACTICES. That non-compliance with customary maxims and practices is the beginning, or, at least, one of the foundation-stones, of all nobleness and strength, of all blessedness and power. Of course, it is utterly impossible for a man to denude himself of the influences that are brought to bear upon him by the circumstances in which he lives, and the trend of opinion, and the maxims and practices of the world, in the corner, and at the time, in which his lot is cast. But, on the other hand, be sure of this, that unless you are in a very deep and not at all in a technical sense of the word "Nonconformists," you will come to no good. It is so easy to



do as others do; partly because of laziness, partly because of cowardice, partly because of the instinctive imitation which is in us all. Men are gregarious. A great many of us adopt our creeds and opinions, and shape our lives, for no better reason than because people around us are thinking in a certain direction, and living in a certain way. Now, I ask you to take this plain principle of the necessity of non-compliance and apply it all round the circumference of your lives. Apply it to your opinions. There is no tyranny like the tyranny of a majority in a democratic country like ours. "What everybody says"—perhaps—"is true." What most people say, at any given time, is very likely to be false. Truth has always lived with minorities. If you have honestly thought out the subject to the best of your ability, and have come to conclusions diverse from those which men like me hold dearer than their lives, that is another matter. But I know that very widely there is spread the fashion of unbelief. So many influential men, leaders of opinion, teachers and preachers, are giving up the old-fashioned, evangelical faith, that it takes a strong man to say that he sticks by it. It is a poor reason to give for your attitude, that unbelief is in the air, and nobody believes those old doctrines now. An iceberg lowers the temperature all round it, and the iceberg of unbelief is amongst us to-day, and it has chilled a great many people who could not tell why they have lost the fervour of their faith. On the other hand, let me remind you that a mere traditional religion, which is only orthodox because other people are, and has not verified its beliefs by personal experience, is quite as deleterious as an imitative unbelief. It is no excuse for shady practices in your trade to say, "It is the custom of the trade; and everybody does it." Nehemiah might have said: "There never was a governor yet but took his forty shekels a day's worth"—about £1,800 of our money—"of provisions from these poor people, and I am not going to give it up because of a scruple. It is the custom, and because it is the custom I can do it." "Oh," but you say, "that involves loss." Very likely! Nehemiah was a poorer man because he fed all these one hundred and fifty Jews at his table, but he did not mind that. It may involve loss, but you will keep God, and that is gain. Do not be tempted to follow that multitude to do evil. Unless you are prepared to say "No!" to a great deal that will be pushed into your face in this great city, as sure as you are living you will make shipwreck of your lives. II. THE MOTIVE THAT IMPELS TO THIS STURDY NON-COMPLIANCE. Now, my point is this, that Jesus Christ requires from each of us that we shall abstain, restrict ourselves, refuse to do a great many things that are being done round us. I need not remind you of how continually He spoke about taking up the cross. I need not do more than just remind you of His parable of the two ways, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for strait is the gate." Just because there are so many people on the path suspect it, and expect that the path with fewer travellers is probably the better and the higher. But to pass from that, what did Jesus Christ mean by His continual contrast between His disciples and the world? Society is not organised on Christian principles; we all know that. And until it is, if a man is going to be a Christian he must not conform to the world. "Know ye not that whosoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God?" I would press upon you that our Christianity is nothing unless it leads us to a standard, and a course of conduct in conformity with that standard which will be in diametrical opposition to a great deal of what is patted on the back, and petted and praised by society. Now, there is an easy-going kind of Christianity which does not recognise that, and which is in great favour with many people to-day; and is called "liberality" and "breadth," and "conciliating and commending Christianity to outsiders," and I know not what besides. Well, Christ's words seem to me to come down like a hammer upon that sort of thing. Society does not think much of these trimmers. It may dislike an out-and-out Christian, but it knows him when it sees him, and it has a kind of hostile respect for him which the other people will never get. III. THE POWER WHICH ENABLES US TO EXERCISE IT. "The fear of God," or, taking the New Testament equivalent, "the love of Christ," makes it possible for a man, with all his weakness and dependence on surroundings, with all his instinctive desire to be like the folk that are near him, to take that brave attitude, and to refuse to be one of the crowd that runs after evil and lies. Christ will enable you to take this necessary attitude because, in Himself He gives you the example which it is always safe to follow. The instinct of invitation is planted in us for a good end, and because it is in us examples of nobility appeal to us. He makes it possible for us, because we have the strongest possible motive for the life that He prescribes. As the Apostle puts it, "Ye are bought with a price, be not the servants of men." There is

nothing that will so deliver us from the tyranny of majorities, and of what we call general opinion and ordinary custom, as to feel that we belong to Him because He died for us. Jesus Christ being our Redeemer is our Judge, and moment by moment He is estimating our conduct, and judging our actions as they are done. The servant of Christ is the master of all men. "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas—all are yours, and ye are Christ's." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

*Fear expels fear*:—How often we see fear expel fear. The fear of being burnt will nerve a woman to let herself down by a water-pipe from the upper storeys of a house in flames. The fear of losing her young will inspire the timid bird to throw herself before the steps of a man, attracting his notice from them to herself. Oh! for that Divine habit of soul which so conceives of the majesty, and power, and love of God, that it does not sin against Him, but would rather brave a world in arms than bring a shadow over His face. (*F. B. Meyer.*)

*The Christian in commerce*:—It is a noble sight to see a man, moved simply by religious considerations, departing from customs sanctioned by society; going against the tide of opinion and practice; foregoing worldly profits; deaf to the pleas that satisfy the multitude, meekly asserting a spiritual independence; silently rebuking the sinfulness and servility of the times; only careful of acquitting himself to God, and realising his ideal of moral integrity. He is like a spring in an arid desert. He is like a star shining brightly amid dark clouds. Our subject is, "The Christian in commerce." The Christian tradesman must assume the attitude of Nehemiah. His principles must take the form of reform and opposition. Consider—

**I. WHAT CHRISTIANITY REQUIRES OF A MAN IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS FELLOW-MEN.**

1. The most rigid adherence to the principles of moral integrity in commerce. (1) Truth. This is the basis of all intercourse; society would be impossible without it. Truth is a most comprehensive virtue. It takes in far more than the literal statement of the fact. It condemns—(a) All positive misrepresentations. (b) All the arts by which one thing is palmed off for another. (c) All deficient scales and measures. (d) All pretences, when unfounded, of special bargains, &c. (e) All promises which cannot be or are not meant to be kept. And on the part of the purchaser it condemns all pretences—(a) That what is wanted is not wanted. (b) That it has been purchased more cheaply elsewhere. (c) That it is very inferior to what it really is. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer, but when he is gone his way he boasteth." (2) Honesty. This involves the meeting of all equitable claims, the fulfilment of all engagements voluntarily undertaken or assumed, the most rigid respect for the rights of property.

2. The exercise of love and kindness in commerce. This will preserve from exclusive dealing, &c.

3. That a man should preserve his soul in peace and patience in commerce.

4. That commerce should be consecrated and elevated by the spirit of holiness.

**II. WHY THIS CONDUCT IS NECESSARY IN COMMERCE.**

1. Commerce is a most important part of our life.

2. Commerce is a most influential part of our life.

3. Commercial holiness is imperatively required by the character and temper of the times. (*A. J. Morris.*)

**Ver. 16. Neither bought we any land.**—*Nehemiah an example of unworldliness of mind*:—The people of God maintain a certain unearthly peculiarity throughout all their relationship to earth; they do not become assimilated to the crowd through which they hold the tenor of their way. Like that limpid stream of which we are told that, entering a salt and bituminous lake, it clears its way through the ungenial waters, untainted and uncommingled, so that it issues forth below as pure as when it entered, so the current of God's people, passing through the dead sea of this world, does not blend with its waters, but speeds on undefiled to the clear ocean in heaven. Consider how this unworldly spirit will tell on your every-day course. **I. IT WILL RESTRAIN YOU FROM INTIMACY, THOUGH YOU CANNOT AVOID INTERCOURSE, WITH THE UNGODLY.** **II. YOU WILL BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE WORLD BY THE MODERATION WITH WHICH YOU WILL FORM YOUR PLANS AND PROSECUTE YOUR UNDERTAKINGS.** **III. YOU WILL SHOW "ANOTHER SPIRIT" IN THE FRIENDSHIPS WHICH YOU FORM AND THE ASSOCIATIONS WHICH YOU CHOOSE.** **IV. YOU WILL BE RESTRAINED FROM THAT GREEDINESS OF GAIN WHICH, MORE THAN EVER, CHARACTERISES THE WORLD IN THIS PRESENT AGE.** **V. YOU WILL HAVE A LARGE AND OPEN HAND FOR THE CLAIMS OF GOD, THE SERVICE OF HIS CHURCH, AND FOR THE RELIEF OF THE POOR AND NEEDY** (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*)

**Ver. 19. Think upon me, my God.**—*The saint's support*.—**I. THE PERSON**

PETITIONED. 1. General title: "God." 2. Special relation: "My." II. THE POINT PRAYED FOR. Lessons: 1. God the support of His saints. 2. Peculiar God to believer: "My." 3. God hath remembrancers. 4. God is soonest drawn to His own. 5. Prayer proper for one's own good. 6. Works may be pleaded before God. 7. Man's works are the rule of God's reward. 8. Everything well done shall be rewarded. 9. Good done to God's people is most acceptable. (*Wm. Gouge.*) *The remembrance of good deeds a pillow of rest for a good man:—I. LIFE'S REVIEW WILL BE A REVIEW OF THE WHOLE OF LIFE. II. LIFE'S REWARD WILL BE RENDERED ACCORDING TO ITS DEEDS. (Homiletic Commentary.)*

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## CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1-19. Now it came to pass, when Sanballat.—*The witness to the truth:—*  
 I. HIS TRIAL, FROM THE STRATAGEMS OF ENEMIES. The circumstances of his trial were peculiar. Faith and prayer and pains had now achieved great things in Jerusalem. For many days the patriots had persevered, with unremitting toil, to rebuild the wall. And now their enterprise was ready to be crowned with triumphant success. This, to them, was a time of joyous anticipation, mingled, no doubt, with solicitude, lest their work should be marred on the very eve of completion. But to the enemies of Zion it was a moment of vexation and dismay. "They heard," says Nehemiah, "that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein." In spite of their vaunting words and feeble arms the good work had advanced, and, unless they could instantly crush it, they plainly saw that all would be lost. Yet what shall they do to arrest the sacred enterprise? They have tried mockery already, but have found, to their chagrin, that these men of Judah will not be driven by ridicule from what, to them, is a work of conscience and religion. They have, moreover, attempted force; but they have learned, to their dismay, that the Israelites are ready to resist unto blood the invasion of their liberty to serve God in the city called by His name. Foiled, therefore, in these modes of attack, they are compelled to resort to stratagem in order, if possible, to gain their wicked purpose. This desperation of the enemies of Judah is just a picture of the rage of the great adversary at the progress of the Church and the growing sanctification of each believer in Christ. More than once in the history of the Church's advance has the devil come down in "great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time." But trials in the religious life often prove the occasion of higher manifestations of mercy than could have been experienced without them. Trial, therefore, here comes to Nehemiah; and what is the form in which it assails him? 1. He is first tried by the wiles of enemies to draw him from his work and involve him in danger. As if for the purpose of consultation, they sent unto him, saying, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." The object of these crafty foes was to get possession of the person of Nehemiah; and in all probability to take away his life. But the noble Israelite answered after this manner, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Who can but admire the wisdom and fortitude of the servant of God in this hour of trial? Is not this a grand example to imitate in Christ's service and our own salvation? Our life on earth is so transient, and our work for eternity so arduous, that we have no time to waste. "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." 2. Further, Nehemiah is tried by the false accusations of enemies, designed to undermine his character. "Sanballat sent his servant the fifth time with an open letter in his hand." And why was the letter sent "open"? It was no doubt intended to give all the people opportunity to know its contents, that their jealousy might be aroused at the alleged ambitious aims of their leader, or their fears be excited of incurring the wrath of the king by continuing their work; but it was meant, moreover, thus to offer an insult to Nehemiah. It might have been thought that a life singularly blameless and disinterested as his would have been exempt from reproach. But who may expect to be free from the assaults of malice and envy, since the Son of God, the holy, harmless, undefiled One, did not escape the shafts of calumny? And so here, one of the lowliest and most upright of good men is falsely accused of ambition and rebellion. How striking an instance is this

of misrepresentation and craft in the enemies of truth to thwart a servant of God in a Divine work. It often happens, as here, that the sacred form of friendship is assumed to seduce the children of faith into a betrayal of their trust; and they who would draw them aside from duty pretend a regard to their welfare. Yet under the guise of affection there lurks a deadly hostility that seeks only their hurt and the ruin of their good name. II. HIS TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH. Men in high place are little to be envied. They are often exposed to special dangers, both in principle and person. He bears testimony to the truth by fidelity to his trust in midst of imminent danger. He was fortified by a good conscience, while beset with wiles and accusations; and he possessed his soul in patience through the hour of trial. He looks on the field of danger with the eye of an eagle, and walks over it with the heart of a lion. He combines a clear perception of the plots of the enemy with a heroic courage to confront all their power. How quickly the adversary shifts his method of assault! and the good soldier must alter his manner of repulse in order to overcome. The enemies of Nehemiah here follow the same crafty course. They found they could not draw him into the country for counsel, and now they seek to drive him into the temple for safety. This was a mean as well as a wicked device of the heathen; but it is melancholy to reflect that men were found in Judah base enough to abet their machinations. It was not among the common people that the treacherous spirit appeared, but among the professed prophets and messengers of God. Noble things are always most vile when they become corrupt; and in this case these so-called ambassadors of heaven debase their high vocation by lending all its influence to the work of the enemies of religion. But these arts, employed to intimidate and seduce Nehemiah, were all in vain. He bore testimony to the truth by steadfast adherence to duty, even in face of threatened death. Much as he may value life, and wish to preserve it till the work is done which is so dear to his heart, yet he loves God and a good conscience far more. This is a noble example for our imitation. What faithful care does this man of God exercise to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good! III. HIS TRIUMPH OVER ALL OPPOSITION. It is instructive to remark the means by which Nehemiah achieved this victory. He was first of all careful to ascertain facts, and to detect the plots of enemies through all the mazes of their falsehood. For this purpose he gave his mind to weigh evidence, to examine character, to balance circumstances, that he might arrive at the truth. But we note, as his chief means of success, effectual fervent prayer to God. His labours were now crowned with triumphant success. "So," he writes, "the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days." This was the hour of Israel's triumph, and of their enemies' humiliation. "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes." They were much cast down, as persons who have staked their full strength and reputation on a bad end, and yet have utterly failed in its attainment. They suffered the humiliation of those who boast of their power, put it forth to the utmost, and, after all, feel themselves completely defeated by the people whose might they had despised. It is not given to all witnesses for God to bear testimony for Him amid great works and conflicts like these; but He appoints each of us our duty here to stand by His truth, and to contend earnestly for the faith against all assaults on it. The dominant forms of opposition to Bible truth in these days are unbelief, or error in creed, and worldliness, or error in conduct; and in face of both God calls us to be witnesses for His cause. Whenever you profess your faith in the Bible, the whole Bible, as the Word of God, your creed is pronounced antiquated, and regarded with wonder or an ill-dissembled sneer. Yet all is surrendered if the integrity, the infallibility, the inspiration of the whole Bible is given up. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Nehemiah's heroism*:—Well, to come to the history, when Nehemiah was coming to an end, and thought he had got through all his difficulties, Sanballat and the others came wheedling and coaxing, and they said, "Come, Nehemiah, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." And they sent messengers four times to try, if they could, to prevent the thorough fulfilment and accomplishing of God's work and Nehemiah's design. Anything they would do, the enemies of Nehemiah, as our enemies also would do, to diminish our zeal for God and truth and righteousness. Thus we might paraphrase the arguments used, "Now, Nehemiah, you really are a most excellent man, and, though we say it ourselves, we too are excellent men; and if we can only just meet together in a quiet little spot, we shall soon settle everything. You see, Nehemiah, we have misunderstood one another—a very common thing among good people. You

thought we were against you, but there never was a greater mistake. We were misrepresented. Come now, and let us shake hands; and when we have looked into each other's faces, we shall discover amidst apparent diversity of purpose that our hearts, our aims, were really one, that we are seeking the same object." After such fashion, we can imagine they thought to draw Nehemiah from his purpose. "But they thought to do me mischief," says Nehemiah. Nehemiah says, "Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" And you will find the more you buckle to God's work—that is to say, to strive to be first of all a sterling, righteous man in lip and life, in thought, in word, and deed—and the more you try to recover the blight and disaster in London or round about you, the more you will find opposition of different kinds, and perhaps to-day the secret, sly, and cunning opposition which is to be dreaded far more than the open, the overt. I wonder how many invitations you will get to parties this week? because I want you to work for God in this coming ten days' mission. Very likely never so many as this week. "We have a nice little party this week. Come down; don't be righteous overmuch. Don't spoil yourself, and take all the pleasure out of life." Let us make up our mind and heart to work, work, work. "Why should I let the work cease, and come down to you?" Let them answer that. Why should God's work cease while I leave it, and come down to you; so as to weaken my interest in God's work, and hinder my pace in the actual doing of God's work? Here is the test and touchstone. How do these things tell upon the work? Do they lower my temperature, and take away my energies from God's work? Then they are of the devil; and to see that is to be kept right. From Nehemiah's answer (ver. 3) we see the great blessing of having pure motives and clean hands. Oh, for this whole-heartedness in the cause of God! Nehemiah said, "I will not cease doing the work, for I am sure it is not for my own personal ends, it is not for my own aggrandisement, my own vainglory. There are no such things as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." They shot sore at poor Nehemiah, when they said, "Nehemiah, it is your own glory that leads you on in this work, not zeal for God." And don't think Nehemiah did not feel this; that message came with a thump to him. And what preserved him? His integrity and innocence. He could lift up his voice, and say, "It is a lie; it is not true. Do as you like! Say what you like! I know whom I am serving. You may try all manner of means, but you will never shake me from this, that God has sent me here, given me this work to do; and in His name I give myself to it, with singleness of heart and effort." If God promote you, and make you prominent in His work, remember it is He who does it; and you must stay at your post, do your day's work and leave your reputation in the hands of the Lord. Then comes another temptation (ver. 10). I think this man, this Shemaiah, was a man who had a particular reputation for wisdom and prudence. "Oh, Nehemiah!" he would say, "now you are wrong. You will allow me to speak plainly with you. No one rejoiced more than I did when you came from Persia, and I rejoice to see what is going on at Jerusalem. But the position is far different from what you think. And I have been here longer than you; and I know the currents of thought and feeling, which you don't know anything about. And, believe me, that sometimes the roundabout road is the nearest; and sometimes to go straight tramping on, you know, is the way never to reach what you want. You are carrying things, they think, with too high a hand. But if you would take time, stop, and let things blow over a little, you will get it done far more easily. Believe me, Nehemiah, I know the temper of this people" (and here he spoke truly), "and I tell you they are against you, and are going to seek your life. Now let us meet together in the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come and slay thee." And Nehemiah said to him, "Should such a man as I flee?" He virtually stood up and said, "What, Nehemiah fleeing after all he has gone through! Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou savourest not of the things that be of God, but those that be of men." The same temptation came to the greater than Nehemiah, to the greatest Worker that ever God sent to work and to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," even the Lord Jesus Christ. And as with the Master, so with the servant. The servant will be tempted and seduced in every way, that the work may cease, that the temperature, the heat of our zeal may go down, and the worse may appear the better reason, and carry us away from our post. Some men go to the temple, but to them it is simply a coward's castle. This is about all that God gets from some of us. We go sneaking into our churches on the Sunday, but not to do God's work. God pity you! You never stand up for Him out there on

London wall. Exactly! Well, this invitation from Shemaiah to go into the temple was not good enough for Nehemiah—and he was about as devout a man as most of us. He was a man who feared God with all his heart, didn't he? But they were going to make the temple a coward's castle. Listen! I will bring it nearer to us. There is some young fellow here hard beset with his surroundings. You are set there on that commercial bit of the wall, to be true, to be honest, to unfurl the flag there, and to work with and for God there. And the battle is thickening, and coming to you in your business; the devil as an angel of light is trying to get you to leave your work and go and study for the ministry! Go into the temple to save your life. It was that kind of thing that was happening to the early Church. Men and women were going to leave the conflict and struggle, to run away into cloisters and convents, with their "dim, religious light." And so you would go and shut yourself up, and give yourself up to a life of contemplation, you say. It is a delusion; it won't do. Let us see how Nehemiah acted when asked to go into the temple. He would have been spoiled if he had yielded to that temptation. He no doubt loved the house of God, the worship of God as we do. We love all its regular services. How sweet it is to us to meet together, to hold communion, to join in our solemn feasts and hymns of love and praise! But that is on Sabbath days. And the end for which we meet is to strengthen us for the work of testifying for God and Christ. What is that? I think I see Nehemiah with his note-book in his hand after the work was all finished, and he is turning over and going through in his mind all that he had done and suffered. And he is thinking over it all, and wondering what made all the opposition to the building of these walls. "I never could rightly understand," he would say, "why that was such a tough job, and why there were continually things coming against my legs to trip me up from unexpected quarters. I felt some one was not fighting fair, that the enemy had got into our own camp and was fighting against me unfairly." And it was the mother-in-law that was the whole secret. They—families of God's people and their enemies—were married and intermarried with each other; and so they had their grappling-irons on the Israelitish vessel. And they pulled the vessel close by this intermarriage relationship, and they got on board, and could not be kept off. By this marriage relationship Tobiah had got in with the very chief of them, and so struck hard and constantly at Nehemiah. And it was through this marriage relationship they tried to get at Nehemiah and pull him down, and thus cause God's work to cease. Says Christ, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword; to set the father against the son, and the daughter against the mother, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law: and a man's foes shall be those of his own household." Indeed, you will oftentimes be fairly perplexed. You say, "I feel the devil at my elbow, and he is whispering in my ear with my own flesh and blood, and would overcome me unless I set watch with vigilance." This same thing is working to-day. Now, for example, I know a young fellow, he started with great vigour in the cause of God, he started with great vigour to build the wall, especially to build the total abstinence wall. But by and by he married a daughter of a wine merchant, and that brought the building to a stop. Yes. He says now he thinks there are a great many excellent people among the brewers. Was not that the kind of thing they said to Nehemiah? "Moreover, they reported Tobiah's good deeds," and they said this and that about him. Very innocent-looking things may seduce you and take the backbone out of you. Once upon a time your friends called you old-fashioned and Puritanical. But lately you got married, and that has brought you into close contact with a class of people with whom you had little or no dealings before. You had nothing in common. And to make a long story short you were at the theatre the other evening—with your mother-in-law. She has soon called you in off the wall! Everything is altered now. And instead of your going over to carry war into the enemy's camp, they have come unto you, and have overcome you; and you have purred like a pussy-cat where before you were bold and outspoken: and the reason is the marriage, the mother-in-law; and the marrow of principle is being thereby sucked out of some of you. You need to be spoken to, and I would that my words were like fire, and would burn. Oh! that some of you would come back to your earlier faith, enthusiasm in God's work, and the blood-heat of your early zeal. For now you are as namby-pamby as the devil could wish. "I used to think," says another, "very harshly of those who didn't hold my views. But now I have learnt to be charitable. I have discovered that many things which I thought were essential are only accidental." Softly, my friend: 'twas the mother-in-law made the discovery. You have gone off on that charitable dodge. Ah,

God's Word has an eye in every direction. "Also they reported his good deeds before me," and as good as said, "We know Tobiah; and, Nehemiah, you are wrong about him altogether. He is an excellent man, and he gave five shillings to this, he gave ten shillings to that; and he is a wonderful fellow altogether. He is wonderfully like yourself." Really it is such a pity that two such good men should not meet together and shake hands. But they never could, and Nehemiah kept his hands behind his back and said, "I choose my own company. I know the hands of these fellows too well." (*John McNeill.*) *Persistence* :—We have here persistence of opposition, persistency of endeavour. I. THIS PRINCIPLE OF PERSISTENCY IS ILLUSTRATED IN ALL THE CIRCLE OF NATURE AND LIFE. 1. Everywhere there is exhibition of hostile force. All natural forces, all life, all energy creep to their goal as the wave creeps to the shore after many a rebuff, and after many a spurning. 2. It is so with man in all social life. 3. The Bible represents all moral victory as against deep and persistent hostility. II. THIS PRINCIPLE OF PERSISTENCY IS ILLUSTRATED IN THE GENERAL HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. III. THE SAME PRINCIPLE IS ILLUSTRATED IN INDIVIDUAL SALVATION AND WORK. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Hinderers* :—How strange it is that no good work can be attempted without exciting opposition, and the better the work the more intense its hindrances! No beneficent measure has ever been propounded without obstacles being put in its way, oftentimes by the very people it is intended to benefit. The promulgation of Christianity is a notable example. Some of the means of hindrance are—**I. THE RESTLESS ACTIVITY OF EVIL.** Sin is essentially aggressive. It cannot let well alone. **II. THE JEALOUSY OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS.** They cannot bear to see anything prosper in which they are not the leaders. They will never attempt any good work, but when they see it in progress they would hinder and destroy. **III. THE VINDICTIVE SPIRIT OF SATAN.** (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 3. **A great work.**—*A great work* :—A story is told of an old man who lived long ago. A friend asked him the cause of his complaints, since in the evening he so often complained of great weariness and pain. "Alas," answered he, "I have every day so much to do: I have two falcons to tame, two hares to keep from running away, two hawks to manage, a serpent to confine, a lion to chain, and a sick man to tend and wait upon." "Why, this is only folly," said the friend; "no man has all these things to do at once." "Yes indeed," he answered, "it is with me as I have said. The two falcons are my two eyes, which I must diligently guard, lest something should please them which may be hurtful to my salvation; the two hares are my feet, which I must hold back lest they should run after evil objects, and walk in the ways of sin; the two hawks are my two hands, which I must train and keep to work, in order that I may be able to provide for myself and for my brethren who are in need; the serpent is my tongue, which I must always keep in with a bridle, lest it should speak anything unseemly; the lion is my heart, with which I have to maintain a continual fight in order that vanity and pride may not fill it, but that the grace of God may dwell and work there; the sick man is my body, which is ever needing my watchfulness and care. All this daily wears out my strength." The friend listened with wonder, and then said, "Dear brother, if all men laboured and struggled after this manner, the times would be better, and more according to the will of God." (*J. M. Randall.*) *Determination of purpose* :—The ancient Greeks had an aphorism which is worthy of remembrance: "He is formidable who does one thing." A man must have a fixed design, or he will not have a steady course. As the instrument tuned to no key-note, so is the man whose spirit is strung to no commanding aim. In vain does the vessel launch forth from the harbour if she have no haven for which to steer and no helm by which to shape her voyage. Take a just view of your life, and all is but dung and dross in comparison with your final acceptance with God. This is the object, the one object which you must enterprise, prosecute, and secure. What a work is before us! (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *A great work in the face of strong antagonism* :—The Christian has a great work to do for himself, working out under gospel influences his own salvation with fear and trembling. It is great in regard of others. We are not merely children of God going home to glory; but we are fellow-workers with God—keepers of beacons to imperilled mariners in a dark night of storms—oarsmen of a lifeboat out on the wild ocean saving drowning souls from destruction. Yea, we have a great work in regard of our glorious God and Saviour. We may not understand it, yet we are assured by God Himself of the truth that more than in all His works of creation and providence is there manifes-

tation made of His manifold wisdom in this work of salvation. Every soul saved on earth by our human instrumentality is a radiant diadem in the many crowns of Jesus. Moreover, like Nehemiah, we are doing this great work in the face of strong antagonisms, and against the insidious opposition of enemies striving to hinder us. Alas! how many are the Sanballats and Tobiahs of the world! I am not railing at the world itself, for it is a good world for Christian work—a world whereof we are to make the most; and the pleasures and honours and riches of it, when accepted as gifts of God and used for His glory, are among our mighty means of grace, whereby our own souls may be edified and Christ's kingdom enlarged. I am thinking now of the world as used by Satan to hinder Christian work—those scornful words or seductive arts of temptation, and, I repeat, they are many. Pleasure comes to the scene of Christian labour with all-bewitching beauty and bewildering blandishments, and she pleads for sensual indulgence, and would draw the worker for Christ forth and down to the fair plains of Ono. Avarice comes with jewels of great price, and keys offering coffers of untold wealth in the stronghold of Mammon. Ambition comes, in the pomp and glory of an archangel, fallen from heaven, and points to a perspective of surpassing splendour, with shining palms and triumphal processions, outflashing diadems and uprising throne. With these and many other specious beguilements come the great adversaries of the soul and the Church. They plead with the Christian worker as he builds the walls of Zion, crying eloquently and earnestly, "Oh, come down and meet us in some plain of Ono!" And to all this our reply should be just that of Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down." Oh, fellow-worker with God in this glorious salvation, take to your heart as the inspiration of your lives this strong argument; rise to a comprehension of the magnificent part you are acting in the face of the universe; of the vastness of the issues you are working out for God! Say to the assaulting tempter, "Let me alone. I am working—working. I am working out my own destiny. I am striving for a guerdon in the skies grander than the Conqueror's. I am working for others—for the beloved of my own household—my child, my parent, my brother, my friend. Oh, do not hinder me! I am working for a world—a world for which the Son of God bled in the garden—died on the Cross! See! see! that world rolls like a shattered wreck on the stormy seas of time, and I am keeping the beacon aflame! Oh, hinder me not! Nay, more, I am working for Jehovah—that God who, when I was lost, sent His own Son to save me." (*T. L. Cuyler.*) *Nehemiah, the model man of business* :—In studying Nehemiah as a man of business we notice—**I.** He was a model of **EARNESTNESS**. **II.** He was a model of **UNSELFISHNESS**. **III.** He was a model of **FAITHFULNESS**. **IV.** He was a model of **PRAYER**. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *A good man in a great work* :—This narrative illustrates—**I.** THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT WORK. It has—**1.** A high purpose. It was—**2.** Beset with difficulties. A true work will have generally to surmount—**(1)** Men's scorn. **(2)** External hindrances. **II.** THE TEMPTATIONS THAT BESET A GREAT WORK. **1.** Temptations from armed enemies. **2.** Temptations from professed friends. **III.** THE SPIRIT OF A TRUE WORKER. There will be—**1.** Prayer for the work. **2.** Earnest prosecution of it. **3.** Resistance of all temptations to leave it. (*Urijah R. Thomas.*) *The great work* :—We learn from these words—**I.** THAT NEHEMIAH WAS "DOING A GREAT WORK." **II.** THAT THERE WERE THOSE WHO ENDEAVOURED TO HINDER HIM. **III.** THAT THE MAGNITUDE OF THE WORK REQUIRED THAT HE SHOULD NOT CEASE OR ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE HINDERED FROM PROSECUTING IT. **IV.** We may learn from the context THAT NEHEMIAH SUCCEEDED IN ACCOMPLISHING THE WORK BY PRAYER AND PAINSTAKING DILIGENCE. (*James Shore, M.A.*) *The great work* :—**I.** THAT THE WORK OF RELIGION IN GENERAL IS A GREAT WORK. This will appear when we contemplate it as being—**1.** God's work. It originated with God; its foundations were laid in heaven; it emanated from the throne of the Eternal; it is the product of infinite wisdom, love, and truth. It bears on its countenance the image of its immaculate Author, and it is every way worthy of its great Original. Unmistakable traces and manifestations of its Divinity are seen in the loftiness of its character, in the purity of its principles, and in the efficiency and permanency of its influences. Nothing is worth the name of greatness compared with the system God has devised to heal the sorrows and cleanse the pollutions of the soul. And is there not a glory and majesty about it immeasurably great? God appears great in the works of creation. If, then, God is so great throughout the wide range of creation, how great must He be in restoring man to His favour, in giving life, vigour, and beauty to souls once dead in trespasses and sins! That religion is a great work is evident—**2.** From the importance attached



to it in the Bible. The Bible, God's holy book, is pregnant with it, its glory and beauty being reflected from every page. This book was written expressly to portray religion, its doctrines, principles, and duties. Let the question be settled in our minds—religion is the "principal thing"; it is emphatically the world's great blessing; so the sacred penmen estimate it. They speak of it as "God's salvation"; as the "great salvation"; as the "pearl of great price"; as the "one thing needful"; as the "good part"; the "more excellent way"; "the bread of life"; and "life eternal." That religion is a great work is evident from—3. The qualifications necessary to engage in it. A high state of intellect is not essential to it. The most gigantic intellect is no qualification for God's service, if not renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The qualifications necessary to engage in this work must have their seat in the heart rather than in the head. Right moral emotions cannot be dispensed with. 4. That religion is a great work appears from its blessed results on human character and conduct. The history of the past in relation to God's work unfolds a series of wonderful achievements and glorious results. Its widespread influence amongst the various nations and tribes of men has told a marvellous tale. II. THE GOOD MAN IS ENGAGED IN THIS WORK. This expression denotes—

1. Decision of character. In a world like ours fixedness of purpose is invaluable, whether it relate to the active duties of every-day life or to the more lofty and ennobling duties of religion. It is essential to success. The man whose movements are changeable, and who is never steady to one point or purpose, brings nothing to a good issue. What a paralysing influence indecision has upon the soul in relation to religion! Men dream and talk about their future course of action, and yet they are never found at the starting-point. They are decided for the future, but not for the present. The diligent man says, "I am doing a great work"; I am in it; it forms part and parcel of my very being." The Scriptures furnish us with specimens of the decision we plead for. We see it in Joshua, when he says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." So, too, David said, "O God, my heart is fixed"; "I have chosen the way of truth." 2. Labour. "I am doing a great work." Religion is essentially active; it has no sympathy with sloth and inactivity. III. THE SPIRIT OF PERSEVERANCE IS REQUIRED IN THIS WORK. The good man engaged in this work cannot come down, because—1. The work requires close and constant application. To acquire anything like an approach to perfection or completeness in religion is no easy task. The world, with its blandishments, its false maxims, and glittering snares, says, "Come down." The flesh, naturally in favour of indulgence and ease, and opposed to self-denial, joins in the cry, and says, "Come down." Satan, whose malice breaks out more bitterly as he sees the wall rising higher, repeats the order, "Come down." Thus every new stone added to the building is the subject of dispute. The builder cannot leave his work, because—2. Shame and misery would be the result. A more pitiful sight than that of a good man "cast down from his excellency" is certainly not to be found. My reason, my judgment, my conscience, all concur with the inspired admonition, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." IV. "WHY SHOULD THE WORK CEASE, WHILST I LEAVE IT, AND COME DOWN TO YOU?" We must not suppose that God's work would entirely cease, even though a thousand such men as Nehemiah were to desert it. 1. All the infidelity and wickedness of men cannot stop this work. Observe, finally, that—2. Were it possible that His work should cease, it would be the greatest calamity the world ever knew. (*A. Twiss.*) *The pre-eminence of God's work:*—I. GOD'S WORK IS STILL A GREAT WORK. It resolves itself into two parts—1. Work in relation to one's self—faith in the Redeemer, progressive holiness and final glory. 2. Work in relation to others. II. GOD'S WORK MUST BE DONE FIRST. To Sanballat's complimentary note Nehemiah replied by his conduct, "God's work first, compliments next." III. GOD'S WORK PRESERVES FROM MISCHIEF AND MISERY. IV. GOD'S WORK SHOULD BE LOVED FOR ITS OWN SAKE. V. GOD'S WORK SHOULD BE BEGUN, CONTINUED, AND ENDED WITH PRAYER. (*Homilist.*) *Safety in Christian work:*—Christian work is—I. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST VICE. All honest work, indeed, is an antidote to vice, but Christian work is especially so. 1. It fills up those leisure hours that so often prove fatal to the unguarded soul. 2. By its very nature it supplies positive motives against temptation. (1) It strengthens all one's Christian principles. (2) It keeps one constantly under the play of Christian influences. (3) It prevents the spiritual life from dying of disuse. II. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST SPIRITUAL DECLENSION. Our spiritual life depends in the first instance on the work of Christ for us; but its continuance is dependent on activity—on the work we do for Christ. 1. Physical

growth is dependent on activity. 2. So, too, with intellectual life. 3. So in a still higher degree it is in spiritual life. Selfishness is the greatest spiritual poverty. Life loses in the proportion in which it withholds itself, and gains by all it gives. According to the width of my sympathies and the self-forgetting ardour of my zeal is the true power and opulence of my being. If it be lawful or possible to enlist the higher selfishness in the service of unselfishness, as you value your religious life, as you would protect it on the one hand against innate tendencies to declension, and on the other against the sapping and undermining influences of the outer world, give your sympathies, your energies, your substance to the cause of God and man. It is not enough for your religious safety that you abstain from evil—you must engage in positive good. III. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST SCEPTICISM. Not that scepticism cannot be met in the field of argument. But argument is not, in every case, the best way to meet the native scepticism of the heart. Christian truth is of such a nature that to understand it fully you must live it. "If any man will do God's will he shall know of the doctrine." There was a minister who at an early period of his life was in doubt about the truth of Christianity. He had almost lost his faith, when hearing this text he resolved to make trial of it. He went and gathered a number of boys together from the streets and taught them as best he could; from that he went to something else as opportunity offered, with the result that he found the text to be true; that in doing God's will, especially in doing good to others, his doubts had all fled and never troubled him more. He found, as Carlyle says, "that doubt of whatever kind can be ended by action alone." As a rule it is not from the great class of Christian workers that scepticism draws its recruits, but from those who stand aloof from all Christian activities, and in many cases look down on them with contempt. IV. A SAFEGUARD AGAINST DESPENDENCY. It is an old saying and true that while the water flows and the mill-stones revolve unless the grain be thrown between them to be ground, the stones will grind each other. So the heart and mind which are inactive, which have no subjects of interest, to engross them, turn their force inward and prey upon themselves. The water that is stagnant soon loses its freshness of colour and of flavour, and engenders the worthless weed, the green scum, the foul mud and noxious exhalations; so the man or woman who leads a useless, purposeless, inactive life not only degenerates in inward character, but loses the freshness and brightness of life, becomes restless, discontented, and a prey to melancholy. To a woman of the desponding type who was wont to bewail her spiritual poverty in the language of the prophet, "My leanness! my leanness!" a shrewd and faithful friend, well-known for her good works, administered the needed and merited reproof, "Nay, but it would better become you to say, 'My laziness! my laziness!'" (*Robert Whyte, D.D.*) *Hindrances to revivals*:— I. A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS A GREAT WORK. II. SEVERAL THINGS MAY PUT A STOP TO A REVIVAL. A revival will cease—1. Whenever the Church believes it is going to cease. 2. When Christians consent that it should cease. 3. Whenever Christians suppose the work will go on without their aid. 4. When Christians begin to proselytise. 5. When the Church in any way grieves the Holy Spirit. 6. When Christians lose the spirit of brotherly love. 7. When Christians are frequently reconverted. III. THINGS WHICH OUGHT TO BE DONE TO CONTINUE A REVIVAL. 1. Ministerial humiliation. 2. Churches which have opposed revivals must repent. 3. Those who promote the work of revivals must repent their mistakes. (*G. Finney.*)

Vers. 6, 7. *Gashmu saith it.—Detraction*:—I. WHAT IS DETRACTION? 1. In general it is an unjust violation of another's reputation or that good report which is due to him. (1) It is a sin against God. (2) It is a wrong to man. (3) The causes it proceedeth from are—(a) Malice and ill-will. (b) Uncharitable credulity, whereby men easily believe a false report, and so propagate and convey it to others. (c) Rashness and unruliness of tongue. (d) Carnal zeal, which is nothing else but passion for our different interests and opinions. 2. In particular. (1) Whispering, which is privy defamation of our brother, to bring him into disfavour and disrespect with those that formerly had a better opinion of him. (2) Backbiting, which is a more public speaking evil of our brother, to the impairing of his credit. II. THE HEINOUSNESS OF THE SIN. (*T. Manton.*) *Gashmu*:—I. MARK THE CHARACTER OF GASHMU. His history we know nothing of. Parentage, training, chieftainship, whether inherited or won, life's events, end—all are secret from us. But it is not secret that he was in friendship with Nehemiah's enemies Sanballat and Tobiah. These three were one in their desire to keep Jerusalem weak. What- ever Gashmu thought of Sanballat, we can see that Sanballat thought much of

him. "Gashmu says it." That must, thinks Sanballat, carry conviction of peril even to Nehemiah and bring him to a stand. 1. Gashmu evidently was a man with a great reputation. His word had weight. It was the word of a superior person—of one who perhaps spoke but little, but who took care when he did speak to put a sting into what he said. He took care not hastily to commit himself. He not only thought before he spoke, but chose the words in which to pack most strikingly the thought. His was a quoted opinion. It went on long journeys. "A wise word that! A fine remark that! Whose?" "Gashmu says it!" Men looked up to Gashmu. From silent heights he spoke down to them. He despised most of them, as one of a loftier race, and yet strangely loved their reverential attention, prompt praise, and their homage to his wisdom in quoting far and wide his opinion. He was great in criticism. If there was a fault in anybody, he could spot it. No number of excellences, however bright, could blind him to that fault. He could not only see it, but could excel all others in speaking disagreeably about it. Who could expect such a superior person to have pity on human infirmities? It is not a difficult thing for a man to build up to-day such a reputation as Gashmu's. Let him be blind to all that is good in others. Let him darken and exaggerate the faults he sees, and when he cannot see them, imagine them. Let him pick the keenest and most poisonous words. Never commend anybody. Let him have a clever tongue, with a bad heart, and he would be a great man among pigmy souls. Let Christian men and women be on their guard. In the effort to live purely, and to serve God by serving their generation, they will meet with Gashmu. Let not such hinder you from Christian life and labour. Answer not this railing with railing; answer it only with a more devoted piety, and a larger Christian service. 2. Gashmu was a man without sympathy with goodness. Nehemiah was a patriot. From love to his country and his God he had given up an honourable and lucrative office at the Persian Court. If Nehemiah is dependent upon outside sympathy for the prosecution and completion of his work, he had better at once get his retinue together and go back to Babylon! No sympathy for him from clever and oft-quoted Gashmu! Welcome to all the inspiration of sympathy. The kindly eye, the warm-grasping hand, the love-kindling appreciation, how welcome! Difficult duty becomes easier, the burdened life is lightened of its load. But do not live on this; don't look for this. Live a life that lives above it. Live in God. Then let not their opinion dishearten you. Does Gashmu say it? Who is Gashmu? A man who, whatever his worldly shrewdness and reputation, is in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. What judge can he be of the quality of Christian labour, of the beauty of a holy and Christian life? 3. Gashmu had keen hatred of religious enthusiasm. Nehemiah's religion was the root of his patriotism. He lost no time in carrying out the rebuilding of the ruined wall. He allowed not the quickened and responsive zeal of the people to flag. He was as ready to fight as to build. No specious pretence could call him from the work. On it went—on till done. This was gall and wormwood to Gashmu. If Nehemiah had only talked, however loudly, of his intentions, it had not mattered. Gashmu could not tolerate enthusiasm. He is still alive, though in English garb. The earnest Christian is certain to meet with him. He hates earnestness, and enthusiasm he cannot away with. 4. Gashmu was a man skilful to read motives. Or so he deemed himself. He could not only look at the rising walls of the city, but right through them. He could not only see Nehemiah on the wall inspiring the armed masons; but he could see into Nehemiah's heart. He knew the secret meaning of all this rapid labour. "What do you think, Gashmu, about it?" He knew, and soon the report is flying abroad among the surrounding heathens, that the Jews intend to rebel against the Persian power, and that Nehemiah means to be their king—King Nehemiah. So the lying rumour goes on its journey, and "Gashmu saith it" gives it wings. Not an atom of truth in it! But Gashmu smiled and nodded, and calmly whispered into willing ears the lie that no amount of confidence and conceit and cleverness could make true. But his lie is written here. "Gashmu says it!" And for that lie Gashmu is remembered to-day. Live to God—do any brave stroke of work for Him, and some present-day Gashmu will know all about your motive for doing it. He will know more about you than you know about yourself. Engage in work for Christ, and Gashmu will say, "I know pride is at the bottom of this; he wants to show how much better he is than anybody else. He wants to be talked about. Anything to make headway. Anything to build up a business. He knows that Sunday will help Monday." Slanderous Gashmu!

Is he not alive to-day? II. IMITATE NEHEMIAH'S TREATMENT OF GASHMU. He would not be hindered. He kept to prayer. He kept to work. He would not go down. Are you seeking to build up your character in truth, purity, holiness? This is God's work. Be not hindered in it. Be not diverted from it. Are you seeking to build up some other—some neglected, broken-down, and ruined character? Do the work—finish it. (*G. T. Coster.*) *Gashmu*.—I. WHO GASHMU WAS. Personally we do not know Gashmu from the ten thousand men of his era. He was Gashmu the Arabian, and that is all. But his real identity is not centred on the year of his birth, or who was his father, or how much he was worth. When our life begins, our name is almost everything; but when our life is ended it has been heavily freighted with good or evil, and is what the things are to which it gives personal identity. What we do know about Gashmu is that he came out square against a man who was determined to do good, and was earnestly doing it, and tried to put him down. II. WHAT HE TRIED TO DO. A good man was doing a good work and bad men tried to stop him. They tried to hurt his person. Gashmu was above that, yet he will sit there and nurse his dislike, and be glad to hear the petty stories that float like thistledown in the neighbourhood against the innocent man. One story in particular gets credence. This man means to be a king. Gashmu hears the floating absurdity. On any other subject he would pronounce anything so empty as this silly; but when this man is the subject of the rumour, he would rather believe it than not. He goes and sees for himself, and when he returns, ready ears listen, and the fatal word is uttered: "That man certainly means to be a king." Before night it is repeated by twenty tongues: "He intends to rebel; Gashmu says it." Gashmu has permitted his prejudices to grow into a lie. He is the representative man of unprincipled gossips and narrow bigots. 1. There are Gashmus in the Church, and "Gashmu said it" is at the bottom of nine-tenths of all the differences in Christendom. 2. There are Gashmus in social life. Your social Gashmu means well on his own estimate of things. Perhaps he is on the whole a good man, lives a life that wins the respect of a whole town; tells the truth so constantly that his word is as good as gold. But some one man does not train with him, he does not like that man at all; does not understand him; and so cultivates a little feeling of dislike, until it bulges into a receptiveness of idle rumours, that would be like mere straws if they were reported of a man he loves. Yet he will nurse them and cherish them, and at some moment his dislike will come to a head, and he will say, "I have no doubt it is true." Then "Gashmu said it" clips that man's margin at the bank, draws the sunshine out of half the faces he meets on the street, and puts him in a position that, it may be, brings the very tendencies for which Gashmu has spotted him. How many grown men and women regret bitterly to-day some such misjudgment on another—the hasty word of a single moment, that we could never recall and never atone for, by which the life of the man or woman about whom we said it has been darkened and injured past redemption! It was a small matter of itself, but Gashmu said it, and that was like sowing the thing in black prairie loam, insuring to us a harvest of bitter regrets, and to our victim a harvest of bitter memories. 3. There are Gashmus in the nation and the public life. III. WHAT CAME OF IT. It came to nothing. It was common rumour, and Gashmu on the one side, and God and the right on the other; and alas for Gashmu when he is found fighting against God! Conclusion: To every earnest man and woman I would say—1. Keep true to your task, whatever it may be, and never mind Gashmu. 2. When Gashmu comes and begins to say this and that to annoy you, do not come down to talk to him. 3. If you come across Gashmu in the Church, or in society, or in any way whatever, keep out of his way as much as you can—have nothing to say to him. 4. Let us take care that we are not Gashmus. 5. We must pity Gashmu. (*R. Collyer.*) *An ancient school for scandal*.—That some people will say things about their neighbours is a great evil. That some persons will repeat what others have said is a greater evil. That some persons will be disturbed by what other persons report that other persons have said about them or their friends, and will permit themselves to be turned aside from useful service, to be embittered in their personal feelings by such reports—this is the greatest evil of all. We hear a great deal about bigotry, intolerance, and persecution. These things have ever withstood the onward march of truth and righteousness. But no fiercer blast of persecution, no form of open antagonism, has ever injured the Church or hindered its work to such a degree as the secret and unrecorded workings of gossip and slander. The power of these evils lies in their very uncertainty and elusiveness. Whoever would

fight them finds himself beating the air. Who tries to hold them fast closes his fingers upon a shadow. Do you wish to know all about the spirit of gossip and the method of its working? Then read the sixth chapter of Nehemiah. It antedates Sheridan's "School for Scandal" by more than twenty centuries, and surpasses it in quality even more than in age. It is a drama from real life. Toward every case of slander or gossip four relations may be sustained. In the completing of the chain four persons may be involved. These relations and persons are represented by Sanballat, Gashmu, Shemaiah, and Nehemiah. First is Sanballat. He is not the originator of the slander, but he is the originator of the mischief, for he reports what he has heard, or professes to have heard, from another. Here is your typical scandal-monger. Who among us is so fortunate that he does not know Sanballat, yes, many Sanballats? The tribe of Sanballat is numerous. They are the persons who tell you so much, not on their own responsibility, but on the authority of others. They are dealers in cast-off testimony, traders in biographical second-hands. They keep no new goods, but they are master hands at polishing up that which is old and giving it a fresh lustre. They are the real mischief-makers, I say, for it is chiefly by this process of polishing and revamping that stories or statements become injurious and acquire unpleasant sharpness of venom. The most innocent and well-meant utterance falls into the hands of one of these repeaters and it is quickly transformed into a poisonous shaft. Some little modification of emphasis or inflection, an added or omitted word, and it becomes a source of heartburnings and bitterness and pain, a wedge that may sunder the strongest ties of affection and friendship. We are wont most severely to denounce the careless speaker, to lay all the blame of gossip and slander on the heads of those who say things about their fellows. And far be it from me to excuse or justify unkind speech even at first-hand, or to minify the sinfulness of "idle words." But I insist that he is a greater sinner who repeats what others say, especially if in the repetition he gives it the slightest change of form or emphasis. It is the Sanballat who comes to you with some story and tells you that "Gashmu saith it" who deserves the severest rebuke. He is the real pest of society, the enemy of all good. We may almost say, with Carlyle, that he "is among the most indubitable malefactors omitted, or inserted, in the criminal calendar." But what of Gashmu, the originator of the story? Who was Gashmu? A most important question, and one that has never been satisfactorily answered. The name occurs nowhere else except in this verse. The preceding narrative speaks of "Geshem the Arabian," and all the commentators assume that Gashmu is Geshem. Every reader assumes that the two are one. In fact, nobody doubts it. But it is worthy of notice that the names are not identical. Sanballat does not say, "Geshem saith it," but "Gashmu saith it." Why? He wants Nehemiah to understand the source of his information, but he does not propose to get caught by an exact statement. Nehemiah might take it into his head to trace the slander, and that would be extremely awkward for Sanballat. Is it not true to life? Is not Gashmu about as near as the modern retailer of gossip ever comes to Geshem? How often has one come to you with some injurious tale and left on your mind a very distinct impression as to its source without exactly telling you? How many a spicy bit of personal news is laid on the shoulders of the general public in the words, "They say." It matters little that you think you know Gashmu. Try to identify him and make him a responsible author of stories, and he will elude you every time. Go to Geshem with the stories that are attributed to Gashmu, and he will know nothing whatever about them. He will be utterly surprised that you could have imagined him to be their author. He will probably be very indignant that any one should have had the hardihood to invent such tales. Now this Gashmu, unreal though he may be, is an absolutely essential link in every chain of gossip. Gossip could not live without him. It were easier to spare the Prince of Denmark from the play of Hamlet than to omit Gashmu from the real School for Scandal. That is to say, there must be some point on the way which gossip has travelled where the trail becomes lost. Authority must vanish into impersonality. You attempt to follow up any bit of gossip or slander that you hear, and if you do not come to Gashmu sooner or later, your experience will be unique, not to say marvellous. The third person in this drama is Shemaiah. Shemaiah is the man who is afraid of gossip and runs away to hide himself, turning aside from good work and letting duty go by default. His invitation to meet in the house of God has a very pious sound, but, after all, it is only the expression of cowardice. Not for worship, but for safety, does he

wish to enter the sanctuary. Now this, I submit, is a greater evil than gossip—this minding of gossip. You say that people will talk about you. Well, what if they do? Did talk ever kill anybody yet? Did it ever seriously hurt anybody when he was hard at work minding his own business and the Lord's? Keep a clear conscience, then, and you need have no fear of gossip, however venomous. Now listen to Nehemiah, the last of this quartet: "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life?" That is the secret of it all. Get so thoroughly absorbed in work for God and man that the work shall seem great, and you will not mind gossip and slander any more than you mind the buzzing of flies outside the screen. Gossip may be afloat, but we are not obliged to hear it, still less to flee from it, or to pay it respectful attention. Our hearing is for the most part a matter of choice as well as our speaking. We are as truly responsible for the right use of our ears as for the right use of our tongues, though we seldom look at the matter in that light. "Take heed what ye hear." (*G. H. Hubbard, D.D.*)

*Serene indifference to slander*:—A young clerk's eyes flashed as he read an article in the morning papers. It was an outrageous attack upon the gentleman at the head of his department for a course of action which was represented as both base and cowardly. All the correspondence relating to the affair had passed through the young man's hands, so he knew that the published statements were false and most damaging to the reputation of his beloved chief. Carrying the paper to the gentleman assailed, he asked if he might write a reply. The elder man read the paragraphs calmly, smiled, and shook his head. "What will you do?" the clerk asked. "Live it down," was the reply, "as I have done so many other calumnies. Talking back is the most futile and undignified exertion in the world. If you succeed in cutting up one falsehood, each part will begin to wriggle against you. Let it alone, and it will die of starvation." Frederick the Great looked with serene indifference on all that his enemies might say of him. One day, as he rode through Berlin, he saw a crowd of people staring up at something on the wall, and, on sending his groom to inquire what it was, found it to be a caricature of himself. The placard was put so high that it was difficult to read it, so Frederick ordered it to be placed lower in order that the people might not have to stretch out their necks. The words were hardly spoken when, with a joyous shout, the placard was pulled down and torn into a thousand pieces, while a hearty cheer followed the king as he rode away. (*Christian Age.*)

**Ver. 9. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.**—*God's various ways of strengthening His people's hands*:—He sometimes does it by infusing into them an extraordinary measure of wisdom and knowledge. Joseph and Daniel appear to have been thus enriched, the faculty of interpreting dreams being conferred upon them, at a momentous juncture, to qualify them for a great and special work; our Lord promised His disciples that, in the critical moment, though not before, they should be supplied with the mouth of wisdom, that might answer all their adversaries. Sometimes the hands of such believers are strengthened by a strange alteration in the feelings of powerful foes towards them, or by an unexpected accession of friends from quarters where, perhaps, they have expected the least. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even His enemies to be at peace with him." Laban shall be arrested in a dream by night, with the stern command, "See that thou speak not to Jacob good or bad"; the gaoler's heart shall be softened, that he bring forth Paul and Silas "out of their dungeon," and "wash their stripes, and set meat before them"; and the Pharisees, those determined foes of the gospel, moved by their hatred of the Sadducees, take the part of the preacher of the resurrection. God may add to our strength by confounding and debilitating our enemies; as He acted by David, when on his behalf He "turned the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness"; when He struck the inhabitants of Sodom with blindness; when He poured terror on the Syrian army that invaded Judea; and when the host of the Midianites fled in dismay before the lamps and pitchers of Gideon, and not a sword was drawn. And now that miracles are not wrought, we must still recognise in thousands of instances the overruling providence of God, working under the cover of natural causes to strengthen His people's hands. (*J. N. Pearson, M.A.*)

**Vers. 10-13. Should such a man as I flee?**—*Panic*:—I. PANIC. Unreasoning, helpless fright. 1. National panic. 2. Business panic. 3. Personal panic.

4. Spiritual panic, II. THE EFFECT OF PANIC. All of these forms are commonly groundless; the wave is not so high as it seems to the retreating bather who hears its hiss behind him. It gathers all the selfishness of man to a focus. It substitutes a brief madness for calm thoughtfulness and decision. It makes a man behave unworthily—1. Of himself. 2. Toward his fellows. 3. Of his God.

III. THE CORRECTIVES OF PANIC. Remembrance of—1. A man's own dignity. 2. Others. 3. God. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Christian firmness*:—I. THE SUBTLETY WITH WHICH OUR GREAT ADVERSARY WILL ASSAULT US. 1. To neglect our social duties to further our spiritual welfare. 2. To conform to the world with a view to conciliate their regard. 3. To use undue means with a view to obtain some desirable end. II. THE FIRMNESS WITH WHICH WE SHOULD RESIST HIM. We should set the Lord ever before us, bearing in mind—1. Our relation to Him. 2. Our obligations to Him. 3. Our expectations from Him. 4. The interest which God Himself has in the whole of our conduct. (*C. Simeon.*) *Courage*:—1. In the prosecution of this work, whilst building the spiritual wall of Zion, there are many artifices to be resisted. Our enemies will seek to draw us away from our work. We shall be invited to enter into friendly conformity with the world, and we shall be told that conciliation on our side will be met by concessions on theirs; but this is a mistake, for the world will take all and give none. 2. Our spiritual enemies will resort to intimidation. If they cannot draw they will drive. What fair offers were made of seeming friendship to the noble army of martyrs, and when these failed, intimidation followed. The offence of the Cross has not ceased. It is "through much tribulation" we must enter the kingdom, and the Christian will be threatened with the loss of caste or of business if he determine to maintain his consistency. Evil motives will be ascribed to him, wicked reports will be propagated concerning him. Ridicule and reproach are weapons of great severity. "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." Let the earnest Christian resist the solicitations of evil in a similar manner. 1. Consider your relation to God. Say to yourself, "I am a child of God, a disciple of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost, and 'should such a man as I flee,' give way to temptation, dishonour my high calling, disobey my blessed Captain, and grieve the Spirit of grace?" 2. Consider your obligations to redeeming mercy. Say to your heart, "O Christian, I have been loved with an everlasting love, called by sovereign grace, washed in the blood of Jesus, and comforted by innumerable tokens of goodness and mercy, and 'should such a man as I flee?'" 3. "Consider your expectations. You are a candidate for eternity. Say to yourself, "O Christian, life is short and uncertain; death may be near; my Lord Himself may come in His glory. In that day of His boundless mercy He will call me His brother, His own, and He will bestow upon me an inheritance of surpassing lustre; and 'should such a man as I flee?' shall I be guilty of base cowardice or perfidious ingratitude?" (*J. M. Randall.*) *Faith, courage, and prudence*:—We may consider this blending of faith, courage, and prudence in Nehemiah as worthy of admiration and imitation. 1. Sometimes we find a brave man who lacks both faith and prudence. In this case his courage is very apt to degenerate into a foolish bravado; and possibly he may do more harm than good by his unwise daring. 2. When prudence is the marked feature of a character it is apt to degenerate into selfish cunning and calculating cowardice. 3. Even when courage and prudence are found united, the character is still sadly defective if there be no spiritual faith—it is apt to fall into an unbecoming and dangerous self-sufficiency. 4. On the other hand, faith without prudence may degenerate into fanaticism, or into a "quietism" which cultivates the passive to the neglect of the active virtues. (*I. Campbell Finlayson.*) *Fortitude in duty*:—Holy courage is not that natural bravery which belongs to some men constitutionally—this is little more than strength of nerve and robustness of animal spirits, and in thousands of instances is found to exist apart from Christian principle; it is rather the bravery of the lion than the bravery of the mind and the man. Some of the most valorous have been the most depraved; and some who dragged their enemies at their chariot-wheels have themselves been dragged through the mire of pollution by their own appetites and passions. As water cannot rise higher than its level, neither can a moral quality rise higher than its principle. Holy courage springs from the fear of God, from "seeing Him who is invisible." Hence the soldier of Christ is the fearless to do right, fearful to do wrong—afraid to sin, but not afraid to suffer. In considering the scope for this virtue, notice—I. HE THAT WILL BE A FOLLOWER OF GOD MUST TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST HIMSELF. It was finely

said by Richard Cecil that "a humble Christian, battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil, is a greater hero than Alexander the Great." II. IT REQUIRES A COURAGEOUS SPIRIT TO HAVE RESPECT TO ALL GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. III. IT REQUIRES GREAT COURAGE TO OVERCOME THE WORLD. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *The higher self-appeal*:—When I lived in the country years ago, I remember one of our friends was a great smoker, and used to smoke morning, noon, and night, and his friends used to say it was a very bad practice, and inconvenient and expensive, and all those arguments with which we are familiar. He always used to smile one of those tranquil smiles which come from parties of that kind. That man could not give up his pipe, and declared that he could not, and that he would smoke till he died. One day there was a mouth trouble. He went to a distinguished physician, and he told him that he was afraid the excessive smoking was inducing cancer. That put his pipe out. It did; he dropped it that very day. It was marvellous; he had done with that. It is one thing when it touches your shillings; one thing when it is a question of convenience and inconvenience; it is another thing when it touches you. And I say to you, when the day of darkness, the day of temptation, when all the sorcery and besetment of evil is around you, don't say, "Iniquity will mar my health or cloud my reputation or shorten my days"; say with Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I do this evil"—such a man as I, with reason and conscience, the heir of the ages, the master of the planet, redeemed with the blood of the Son of God, called to a great destiny—should such a man as I do this mean thing, this base thing? Appeal in the sight of God to your own greatness, and He shall strengthen you in the day when the worst comes to the worst. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Valour is sometimes the soul of discretion*:—We are constantly being reminded that discretion is the better part of valour; but there are occasions, and those not a few, when valour is the very soul of discretion, when at all hazards we must stand our ground and face the foe, that the work be not stopped. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

Ver. 13. Therefore was he hired.—*Bribery*:—I. ITS EXISTENCE AND VARIETIES.

1. In statecraft. 2. In trade. 3. In morals and religion. II. ITS EFFECTS.
1. Personal degradation. 2. General disorganisation. 3. Hindrance of all good.
- III. ITS CURE. 1. Self-denial. 2. Resolute unmercifulness to the briber.
3. Trust in God and faith in right. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

Ver. 15. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day . . . in fifty and two days.—*Fifty-two days' work*:—Let us make a parable of the story and use the text as a motto of a deeper theme. Fifty-two Sundays and their work. I. HOW QUICKLY THEY PASS. II. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES THEY FURNISH. 1. Of rest. 2. Of spiritual friendship. 3. Of Divine instruction. 4. Of moral renewal. III. WHAT RESULTS THEY LEAVE. 1. In memory. 2. In life. 3. For judgment. Application: 1. Thank God for the day of days. 2. Use each day as it comes. 3. Determine upon a rounded result for each cycle of fifty-two. (*Ibid.*) *Finished work*:—1. The work of human redemption. Yes, the work was done. The atoning sacrifice was offered and accepted, as was demonstrated when Jesus rose again from the dead. 2. And is there ground for hope that the great and blessed work of renewal, begun in the believer's heart, will be perfected? 3. The progress of the Church at large is also assured. (*T. Rowson.*) *Success*:—There was great exultation when Lesseps completed the Suez Canal, by which the communication between Europe and the East has been materially expedited. There was great exultation when the favourite project of Count Cavour for a tunnel through Mont Cenis was brought to a successful termination, by which Paris and Turin have been approximated within a few hours of each other. There was great exultation and loyal thankfulness when, in 1873, the Prince of Wales put the topstone to the Portland Breakwater. The foundation-stone of this work had been laid twenty-three years before, by his august father; and it was an interesting moment when the Prince completed the magnificent undertaking by adding to the words by which he formally announced the fact, "These are imperial works, and worthy kings"; and echoing shouts of joy went up, from two hundred thousand spectators. Similarly, it was a great day for Jerusalem when her walls and bulwarks were commended to the blessing of the Almighty. (*J. M. Randall.*)

Ver. 16. For they perceived that the work was wrought of our God.—*The crown of Christian evidence*:—Christianity does not stand in any merely literary defence,



although its literary defence is complete; it stands rather in its beneficent accomplishments, in its regenerated hearts, its elevated lives, its new spirit of consecration, its broad unselfishness, its generous sympathy—"Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The world's acknowledgment of God*:—I. **WORLD'S PAST ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD.** 1. Biblical instances. 2. Later instances. II. **WORLD'S PRESENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD.** 1. Unconscious acknowledgments. Think of the way in which Christianity penetrates the life of the modern world. 2. Unwilling acknowledgment. 3. Frank acknowledgment. III. **THE WORLD'S FUTURE ACKNOWLEDGMENT.** 1. Willing. 2. Enforced. Application: 1. Make acknowledgment of God. 2. Now. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Nothing succeeds like success*:—It is amazing sometimes to find how many there are who heartily endorse a good work when it has arrived at or is approaching success, however much they may have frowned at it, or even opposed it, when it was struggling with difficulties. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *God acknowledged in results*:—In the present day there is an impatient craving for immediate results which comes perilously near to mistrust of God. But verily there are results, and when such results are seen, then even enemies are constrained to admit that God's hand is in the work. The faith of converts must always be evidenced by their works, otherwise the world will not, cannot, perceive that God is working with us. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 19. Also they reported his good deeds before me.**—*The bad men praised*:—I. **BAD MEN DO GET PRAISED.** 1. Sometimes this praise is real. 2. Sometimes this praise is mistaken. 3. Sometimes this praise is fictitious altogether. II. **BAD MEN ARE ANXIOUS FOR PRAISE.** 1. In this there is a sentence of condemnation. 2. In this there is an indirect homage to virtue. III. **BAD MEN ARE NOT HIDDEN BY THE PRAISE OF THE WORLD.** 1. Good men detect. 2. God detects. Application: 1. Do not be discouraged by this misdirected praise. 2. Do not be deceived into any lowering of the standard of righteousness. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

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## CHAPTER VII.

**VERS. 1-7. Now it came to pass, when the wall was built.**—*The guardian of the holy city*:—I. **HIS CARE FOR JERUSALEM'S PROTECTION.** It is a beneficent law of our nature that the more true affection is exercised it increases in strength, and knits the heart to its object in firmer bonds. This beautiful law, of the growth of affection by its exercise, is still more exemplified in the labour of love for Christ's name sake, and for the promotion of His truth in the earth. Thus it was that the suffering and sacrifice which Nehemiah had endured for Jerusalem bound him to it by stronger ties, and drew him to seek its good with deepening affection. He had wept over its desolation in the night; he had toiled, through many days, for its restoration; and, when its walls were now rebuilt, how could he but cherish a tender solicitude, lest any danger should befall the home of his heart? Was it not enough to fill him with sorrowful apprehension that false men were within the walls of Zion, and that, under the name of Israelites, they were ready to betray the dearest interests of their nation into the hands of the heathen? Then, as strong walls are no sufficient protection without faithful watchmen, he set apart true men, to keep guard in the common danger. 1. We remark the character of the men to whom he committed this high trust. "I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem." "My brother Hanani." The expression of fraternal relation is simple and dignified, but warm and affectionate. The brother's heart speaks the word, and utters in it a brother's love, glowing with a brother's pride, over one so dear, ready to help in a work so Divine. It is deeply interesting to observe how often, in the procedure of grace, God hallows the social affections, by grafting on their stock a Divine love; and how large a portion of the inspired history of the religious life is a record of kindred dear in the same households, united in the same faith, walking together to the better country. Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Aaron, James and John, Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus, with many more revered names in Scripture story, united in the bonds of nature and also of grace, prove how true God is to His promise—"I will take you one of a city, and two of a

family, and I will bring you to Zion." Hananiah, the other patriot, here entrusted with charge over the holy city, receives this high encomium, "He was a faithful man, and feared God above many." There was special need for this superior fidelity and piety in the watchmen of Zion then; and the same necessity demands such graces still in all who have charge in the Church of God. 2. We notice the nature of the charges given to these faithful men. Walls and gates are set around the city of God, not to foster indolence, but to aid active defence, and by this means to secure the guardian care of Omnipotence. This Divine help is ever sure to those who are willing by God's grace to help themselves, and who stand on their watchtower, in the attitude of vigilance. This is an operation of faith, and an effect of that wisdom that is from above. Sound principles of truth are believed, not for the purpose of lying in the mind as a dead letter, or to be in themselves a certain defence against danger, but they are embraced to be used as a shield in times of assault, to be applied to the practical conduct; and if they are loosely held, the enemy will break through them to wound the heart, as surely as these foes of Jerusalem would have entered it by the gates or walls, had these been unguarded. The word is, "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand." Faith everywhere sets on this enterprise its indubitable seal. The city, we are told, "was large and great; but the people were few within, and the houses were not builded." It was reared in the sure confidence of a future increase, according to the promise, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited, as towns without walls, for the multitude of men and cattle therein." In like manner, everything devised and done for the kingdom of Christ may be planned on the largest scale, to accord with the amplitude of the purpose of grace. There is room in the heart of God for all sinners of mankind, would they but trust His love. II. HIS EFFORT FOR JERUSALEM'S PURITY. In a work of God, the completion of one service to His honour makes way for the commencement of another. A holy heart feels no desire to rest in complacency after the labour of one enterprise is finished, as if enough were done for a while to come. 1. We remark in this the means he adopts to secure the purity of Jerusalem. He owns, with grateful humility, the Divine source of all his plans of wisdom for the good of Jerusalem. "My God put into mine heart." All holy desires, all good counsels, all just works are from God; and it is right to ascribe to Him the glory of these precious gifts. The great thinkers of the world—the men whose vocation it is to exercise thought for the instruction of others—are under paramount obligation to give honour to the Father of lights for every grand or good idea He discovers to their mind. God is specially the author of all gracious purposes in the hearts of His children, and of every good counsel for the advancement of His kingdom. It is in this frame of exultant gratitude to the Lord for all good counsels that Nehemiah says, "My God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy." Recent events, no doubt, suggested reasons for making sure who belonged to the tribes of Israel; and God, by opening His servant's mind to the force of these reasons, rendered the path of duty plain. False men had lately appeared in the congregation of the Lord, claiming a place in it, who were not of it, but were proving traitors to its dearest interests. At this time, then, when much depended on the possession of a true heart in the children of Zion, the heads and people of Judah were convened, that all might be reckoned by genealogy. 2. We notice the fidelity Nehemiah evinces to secure the purity of Jerusalem. Many went up to the holy city who could not show their father's house, whether they belonged to Israel or no. Some of them would prove in their conduct they were the people of God; but they could not as yet produce evidence of their genealogy as the seed of Jacob. In like manner, want of assurance of personal salvation bars the way of no sinner in applying to Christ; and if any follow on to seek Him, He will in no wise cast them out, though they may not be able for the present to express their sure hope of eternal life. Some at this time in Jerusalem were friends of Zion, of this description, truly belonging to Israel in spirit, but unable, meanwhile, to prove their relation. But others were there of a different class, and, perhaps, also of a different character. Some of the priests "sought their register among those who were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found" (ver. 64). In the fidelity, therefore, of these patriots to purify from alloy the congregation of the Lord, we have an example for the imitation of the universal Church of Christ. Purity of communion in a Church is essential to its healthful condition, and to its success in spreading religion in the world. A diseased member in the natural body may gradually destroy the vital functions of the entire frame;

and so, in the mystical body of Christ, one member unsound in heart will impair the spiritual action of the whole, just as one Achan in the camp occasioned the defeat of all the army of Israel. This register, used by the servant of God to ascertain who were the children of Zion, may suggest to us the joyous assurance that God knows all His true Israel, and will take means, in due time, to make them known. Oh! what a privilege to find your name in the Lamb's book of life in that day! On the other hand, what a dismay to discover then it is not there! (*W. Ritchie.*)

Vers. 2, 3. For he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.—

*Faithfulness* :—I. CONSIDER THE MEANING OF FAITHFULNESS. It is the reverent and constant acceptance of those duties springing out of the relations in which I inevitably stand. Man is a being set in relations. When the ivy climbs up ruins and binds lovingly the fallen stones together, and wraps them in its green, it clambers and winds about and helps and beautifies because of the feelers it thrusts out, laying hold, by them, of the crumbling stones. It is the nature of the ivy to force these feelers out. So forth from every man there are shooting feelers of relations. They are part of his life-endowment. 1. Man is bound into relation with God. God is Creator—Father—Providence and Sustainer—King and Judge. 2. Men and women are bound to each other in the relation of father and mother, and child and relative, and fellow-citizen, and so on endlessly. Springing out of these relations there are forced upon us certain duties. Faithfulness is accepting and steadily discharging them. II. FAITHFULNESS IS A CHANCE OPENING RIGHT AT THE FEET OF EVERY MAN FOR A NOBLE LIFE. III. FAITHFULNESS IS AN OPEN DOOR FOR A RIGHT AMBITION—to develop a noble character. Thus we may lift humdrum from our daily life. There is nothing so invigorating as the consciousness of recognising and accepting duty. The peace of a quiet conscience is in it. 1. Thus I am sure of setting a right example. 2. Thus I shall certainly make my life tell in all directions. IV. A REWARD OF FAITHFULNESS. Nehemiah gave Hananiah charge over Jerusalem because “he was a faithful man.” V. THE REAL SOURCE AND INCITEMENT OF FAITHFULNESS. He “feared God.” Think of Milton as holding himself “as ever in his great Taskmaster’s eye.” Policy, expediency, self-interest may seem to hold a man to duty in fair weather. The only lasting motive for faithfulness for all times is God. (*Wayland Hoyt, D.D.*) *Piety and faithfulness* :—We are here taught :—I. THAT THE FEAR OF GOD—real, Scriptural piety—IS THE SOLID FOUNDATION OF ALL FAITHFULNESS BETWEEN MAN AND MAN. II. THAT THE INDISPENSABLE EXPRESSION AND PROOF OF THE FEAR OF GOD IS TO BE FOUND IN A MAN’S FIDELITY AS TO THE AFFAIRS AND TRANSACTIONS WHICH TAKE PLACE BETWEEN HIM AND HIS FELLOWS. III. THAT PERSONS OF EMINENT PIETY AND GREAT FIDELITY WILL BE HONOURED BOTH BY GOD AND MAN. (*J. Taylor.*) *Eminent piety* :—I. THAT FAITHFULNESS IN RELIGION IS ESSENTIALLY CONNECTED WITH EMINENCE OF ATTAINMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. II. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMINENT PIETY. 1. It consists in the habitual maintenance of a close walk with God. 2. It comprises a high and enlightened estimate of the character and work of Christ. 3. It is connected with an exquisite spiritual and moral sensibility. 4. It is always most powerfully swayed by spiritual motives and considerations. 5. These characteristics show the baselessness of the claims and pretensions to the possession of exalted religious attainments that are sometimes advanced. III. MOTIVES WHICH MAY LEAD CHRISTIANS TO ASPIRE AFTER EMINENCE OF PERSONAL PIETY. 1. The honour of religion. 2. It is a great preservative against apostasy. 3. Regard to personal enjoyment. 4. Its relation to usefulness. 5. Its bearing upon our future blessedness. 6. The enduring nature of the distinction it confers. 7. The adequate provision that has been made to aid in its attainment. (*W. Hurd.*) *Eminent piety* :—I. THE NATURE OF EMINENT PIETY. 1. It involves a habit of serious reflection. 2. It is consistent and comprehensive. The man who exemplifies it believes the doctrines of revelation, is awed by its threatenings, animated by its promises, and controlled by its laws. He is at once sober, righteous, and godly. 3. It endures severe tests. It resembles a robust constitution, which can pass through all varieties of climate, while a sickly constitution demands careful restriction to one. 4. It is active and laborious. 5. It is piety that grows. II. CONSIDERATIONS THAT ENFORCE EMINENT PIETY. 1. The effects it produces on those who exemplify it. (1) They manifest that they are born of God. (2) They are fitted for every spiritual conflict. (3) They are provided with all needful consolations. (4) They are qualified for an advantageous approach to Divine

ordinances. (5) Their anticipations are bright and triumphant. 2. The effects it produces on those who witness it. Conclusion: 1. Eminent piety is very rare. 2. The means of acquiring and promoting eminent piety are invaluable. Inter-course with good men—attendance in a Christian sanctuary—reading, meditation, and prayer. 3. Real piety is indispensable. (*Joseph Hughes.*) *A faithful man*:—

I. THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF HANANIAH'S CHARACTER. "He was a faithful man." If we suppose with some that Hananiah is the same as Shadrach mentioned in the Book of Daniel, we see how brightly this trait of his character shone forth in him in Babylon. "A faithful man" is perhaps the most distinguished commendation that can be passed upon any mortal. It refers to that attitude under which God Himself has been pleased to allow His people to regard Him. "God is faithful"; "the Lord is faithful"; and it is in the faithfulness of God that His people hope and confide. "A faithful man"—1. Is one that can be depended on, who performs all his promises, executes all trusts confided to him, one who is punctual and unwavering in all his engagements, and whose uprightness and integrity are transparent to all. 2. He is one who has been made the recipient of a gracious and Divine principle that is—(1) Saving in its nature; (2) justifying in its character; (3) purifying in its results. 3. He is a godlike man (2 Pet. i. 4). II. THE CONDUCT WHICH HANANIAH SHOWED—he "feared God." The fear of God is—1. A reverential awe of the majesty of God. 2. An implanted principle (Jer. xxxii. 40). 3. A governing principle—Obadiah (1 Kings xviii. 12, 13); Nehemiah (chap. v. 15). III. THE DISTINGUISHED POSITION ASSIGNED TO HANANIAH. (*Francis Wills.*) *An example of excellent piety*:—I. HE WAS A FAITHFUL MAN. To serve God acceptably we must be faithful. 1. By believing what God has revealed, on His testimony (2 Chron. xx. 20). To the exercise of this faith we are urged by the best example, as that of Abraham (Gal. iii. 9; Rom. iv. 20), and that of Barnabas (Acts xi. 24). Under the influence of this faith, we shall be led to seek God in the way He prescribes. 2. By conscientiously performing those duties which arise from our relations to God; as His servants, stewards, and soldiers. As His covenant-servants, we must devote ourselves to His service (Jer. i. 5; 1 Cor. iv. 19, 20). As His stewards, we must employ His gifts for His glory (1 Pet. iv. 10, 11). This faithfulness is required in stewards (1 Cor. iv. 2). As His soldiers, we must be valiant for His revealed truth (Jer. ix. 3). We must be faithful—3. By steadfast adherence to the required worship and service of God. Like the Church at Pergamos, we must not deny Christ through fear of suffering for righteousness' sake (Rev. ii. 13, xvii. 14). 4. By seriously realising the invisible things of God (Heb. xi. 1). We should realise God's presence with us, as our Master, Helper, and Observer (Psa. xvi. 8, xlvi. 1; Heb. xi. 27). We should realise the general judgment, when we must all appear before Christ (2 Cor. x. 7, 9, 10). II. AND HE FEARED GOD ABOVE MANY. 1. By the fear of God, in this place, is meant the whole of personal religion, including the principles and practice, the dispositions and the conduct of its subject or possessor (Psa. xxxiv. 11, cxi. 10; Prov. xix. 23; Eccles. viii. 12). 2. He feared God above many. This implies that there are different degrees of piety among those who truly fear God. This is intimated by our Lord, in His parable of the Sower (Matt. xiii. 8). It is admitted by St. Paul, in his doctrine of future rewards (2 Cor. ix. 6). This difference in pious attainments is also evident from the present state of the religious world. Of some eminent Christians, who are now the salt of the earth and the lights of the world, it may be said with great truth that they fear God above many. They acknowledge God more than many in their secular concerns (Prov. iii. 6; Phil. iv. 6); they are more careful than many to allow themselves in those recreations only which are consistent with, and favourable to, their advancement in holiness (1 Cor. x. 31); they converse more spiritually and profitably than many (Eph. iv. 29); and they are more zealous than many, in employing all their talents for God's glory and the benefit of mankind (Acts xiii. 36). With respect to reputation; some have a good report from them that are without the Church, while the good that is in others is evil spoken of, through their indiscretions. With respect to usefulness; some are general blessings to their respective connections, while others are not visibly instrumental in bringing scarcely any souls with them to Christ and heaven. 3. The honourable mention of Hananiah's distinguished piety should excite us to imitate him, by endeavouring to excel in piety also. To excel in piety is—(1) Our privilege. This is incontestable from the prayers which the Holy Spirit has dictated for our adoption (Eph. iii. 14–21; 1 Thess. v. 23, 24; Heb. xiii. 20, 21). (2) Our

interest. For this will be conducive to—(a) Our greater happiness (Isa. xlviii. 18); (b) our greater safety (2 Pet. i. 10); (c) our greater glory in heaven (2 Pet. i. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 51). (3) Our duty. (a) God calls us to this (1 Pet. i. 15, 16); (b) God will hereby be glorified (John xv. 8); (c) herewith He will be pleased (Psa. xxxv. 27). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

*Placed in trust:*—It was a State appointment made on moral and religious grounds. Hananiah was put in “charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.” Without discussing in detail the merits of the principle, let us inquire, What would be its effects as a passport to office? 1. In the first place, it would shut out atheists from the Legislature of the country. 2. It would exclude from power all immoral or ungodly persons. 3. Such recognition would show that the profession of religion is not incompatible with, nor a disqualification for, the duties of public life. 4. The appointment was on Scriptural lines. It was strikingly in accord with the advice of Jethro to Moses: “Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth hating covetousness, and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.” (*T. Robson.*)

*Eminent of character:*—It is not the first thousand feet, but the last, that give a mountain its name and fame. There is not a vast difference, for example, between Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc, but the latter is celebrated owing to those few extra feet. It is not so much ability, or learning, or diligence which differentiates Christian men as nearness to heaven and God. Those few extra hours spent in prayer, the additional steps of approach to Christ—these raise above the level of average piety and impart sanctity to the character. (*Sunday Companion.*)

*Religious sentiment the most refining:*—It is the property of the religious sentiment to be the most refining of all influences. No external advantages, no good birth or breeding, no culture of the taste, no habit of command, no association with the elegant—even no depth of affection that does not rise to a religious sentiment—can bestow that delicacy and grandeur of bearing which belong only to a mind accustomed to celestial conversation. (*R. W. Emerson.*)

*Men loyal to God:*—Martin Luther used to say, “God needs strong men as much as strong men need God,” and it was true. Let men seek to escape from the responsibilities of labour and law, and the freedom won by patriots and martyrs would soon fall, superstition would soon reassert its sway, and passions would leap forth again which would throw civilisation back into barbarism. If the Apostles had trusted the men of their age there would have been no true Christianity. If John Knox and others had trusted to such there would have been no Reformation. Let them bestir themselves in every noble way. They could each, at least, give to God one life that was true and faithful, one loyal to the core to truth and duty. It was not enough to contribute their criticism, they must contribute themselves—be willing to perish that others might live. That was what was meant by Christianity. (*John Hunter.*)

*Coherence in character:*—What is the cause which makes one life so full to us while another has no meaning? What is it that constitutes the articulateness or the inarticulateness, the significance or the insignificance, of human lives? One very simple thing—coherence, that is all. The reason why these letters spell something is because they cohere together according to a certain law, and express something. The reason why these notes are sweet and inspiring to your ear is because they blend together according to the codes of harmony. And so are human lives bound together by something which brings coherence and signification, harmony and force. Look at the lives which strike us; look at the imperious and imperial personalities amongst us. What made Bismarck such as he was? Coherence—one purpose! The difference between a life which is insignificant lies precisely in the word “coherence.” Why was Newton great? Why, because Newton, like all great men, said, “This one thing I do,” and he forgot his food in the earnest contemplation and pursuit of science. It is coherence which makes greatness in life. (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*)

*Every one in his watch.*—*Every one in his watch:*—This book may almost be called the Book of the Busy Man, telling as it does of the multifarious duties and responsibilities of one who acted as governor of the Jewish people in a very difficult and anxious time, and who had the rare and excellent faculty of leading every one else to work also. The picture which this book presents is almost that of a beehive, the murmur of whose work rises from every page. It is in entire sympathy with the general strain and tenor of the book that our text speaks when it shows us “every one in his watch.” Consider—I. THE INDIVIDUAL DEALING OF GOD WITH US—“every one in his watch.”

We often resist the thought of having to do individually with God ; it becomes too solemn, too oppressive, too terrible for a soul that is not reconciled to Him. This is partly at the root of the preference which many have for the Church life rather than the individual life, for the idea of the multitude in which we may hide rather than that of solitude in which we must be seen. There is much in which we can have no companionship. We are born alone; every great disease or pain finds us in the deep places of a loneliness which none can share with us; and it is in utter solitude that each of us dies. In all such cases it is individual dealing between the Lord and us. We never come right, we never come to the Pardoner of sin, or the trust of daily life, or real work for Christ, till we have had the individual dealing with God which brings us into the position of those whom God has accepted for Christ's sake, and for whom henceforth He will provide. II. THE TEXT IS ALSO UNIVERSAL IN ITS REACH. EVERY MAN MEANS ALL MEN, which gives us the thought that there is a post for every man which God has appointed for him. III. THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN may be regarded as military service. In this aspect of life three things are required. 1. Strict discipline. 2. Instant obedience. 3. Perfect obedience. IV. THE PART OF MILITARY SERVICE WHICH FALLS TO US ALL IS SENTINEL DUTY. V. THE OBJECT OF THE WATCH WHICH IS LAID UPON EVERY CHRISTIAN. 1. It is a watch against attack. 2. It is a watch for reinforcement and succour. (T. Elder Cumming.)

Ver. 67. **And they had two hundred forty and five singing men and singing women.**—*Church music*:—The captives in the text had music left in them, and if they could find, amid all their trials, two hundred and forty and five singing men and singing women, then in this day of gospel sunlight and freedom from all persecution there ought to be a great multitude of men and women willing to sing the praises of God. All our churches need arousal on this subject. Those who can sing must throw their souls into the exercise, and those who cannot sing must learn how, and it shall be heart to heart, voice to voice, and the music shall swell jubilant with thanksgiving and tremulous with pardon. Have you ever noticed the construction of the human throat as indicative of what God means us to do with it? In only an ordinary throat and lungs there are fourteen direct muscles that produce 16,383 sounds, and thirty indirect muscles that produce 173,741,823 sounds, and the human voice can produce seventeen trillion, five hundred and ninety-two billion, one hundred and eighty-six million, forty-four thousand, four hundred and fifteen different sounds. What does that mean? It means that you should sing! Do you suppose that God, who gives us such a musical instrument as that, intends us to keep it shut? Suppose some great tyrant should get possession of the musical instruments of the world, and should lock up the organ of Westminster Abbey, and the organ of Lucerne, and the organ at Haarlem, and the organ at Freiburg, and all the other great musical instruments of the world—you would call such a man as that a monster; and yet you are more wicked if, with the human voice—a musical instrument of more wonderful adaptation than all the musical instruments that man ever created—you shut it against the praise of God. I. MUSIC SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN BORN IN THE SOUL OF THE WORLD. The omnipotent voice with which God commanded the world into being seems to linger yet with its majesty and sweetness, and you hear it in the grain-field, in the swoop of the wind amid the mountain fastnesses, in canary's warble and in thunder-shock, in brook's tinkle and in ocean's pean. There are soft cadences in nature, and loud notes, some of which we cannot hear at all, and others are so terrific that we cannot appreciate them. The animalculæ have their music, and the spicula of hay and the globule of water are as certainly resonant with the voice of God as the highest heavens in which the armies of the redeemed celebrate their victories. When the breath of the flower strikes the air and the wing of the firefly cleaves it, there is sound and there is melody; and as to those utterances of nature which seem harsh and overwhelming, it is as when you stand in the midst of a great orchestra, and the sound almost rends your ear because you are too near to catch the blending of the music. II. MUSIC SEEMS DEPENDENT ON THE LAWS OF ACOUSTICS AND MATHEMATICS, AND YET WHERE THESE LAWS ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD AT ALL THE ART IS PRACTISED. There are to-day five hundred musical journals in China. Two thousand years before Christ the Egyptians practised this art. Pythagoras learned it. Lasus, of Hermione, wrote essays on it. Plato and Aristotle introduced it into their schools; but I have not much interest in that. My chief interest is in the music of the Bible. The Bible, like a great harp with innumerable strings, swept by the fingers

of inspiration, trembles with it. So far back as the fourth chapter of Genesis you find the first organist and harper—Jubal. So far back as the thirty-first chapter of Genesis you find the first choir. All up and down the Bible you find sacred music—at weddings, at inaugurations, at the treading of the wine-press. The Hebrews understood how to make musical signs above the musical text. When the Jews came from their distant homes to the great festivals at Jerusalem they brought harp and timbrel and trumpet, and poured along the great Judæan high-ways a river of harmony, until in and around the temple the wealth of a nation's song and gladness had accumulated. All through the ages there has been great attention paid to sacred music. Ambrosius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, gave it their mighty influence, and in our day the best musical genius is throwing itself on the altars of God. Handel, and Mozart, and Bach, and Durante, and Wolf, and scores of other men and women have given the best part of their genius to Church music. A truth in words is not half so mighty as a truth in song. Luther's sermons have been forgotten, but the "Judgment Hymn" he composed is resounding yet all through Christendom. III. While there may be great varieties of opinion in regard to music, it seems to me that the GENERAL SPIRIT OF THE WORD OF GOD INDICATES WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE GREAT CHARACTERISTICS. 1. A prominent characteristic ought to be adaptiveness. Music that may be appropriate for a concert-hall or the opera-house or the drawing-room may be shocking in church. Glees, madrigals, ballads may be as innocent as psalms in their places. There is no reason why music should always be religious music. So I am in favour of concert-halls as well as churches. But church music has only one design, and that is devotion, and that which comes with the toss, the song, and the display of an opera-house is a hindrance to the worship. From such performances we go away saying, "What splendid execution! Did you ever hear such a soprano? Which of those solos did you like the better?" When, if we had been rightly wrought upon, we would have gone away saying, "Oh! how my soul was lifted up in the presence of God while they were singing the first hymn; I never had such rapturous views of Jesus Christ as my Saviour as when they were singing that last doxology." There is an everlasting distinction between music as an art and music as a help to devotion. Though a Schumann composed it, though a Mozart played it, though a Sontag sang it, away with it if it does not make the heart better and honour Christ. 2. Correctness ought to be a characteristic of church music. God loves harmony, and we ought to love it. There is no devotion in a howl or yelp. 3. Another characteristic must be spirit and life. Music ought to rush from the audience like the water from a rock—clear, bright, sparkling. If all the other part of the church service is dull, do not have the music dull. With so many thrilling things to sing about, away with all drawing and stupidity. Let our song be like an acclamation of victory. You have a right to sing. Do not surrender your prerogative. If, in the performance of your duty, or the attempt at it, you should lose your place in the musical scale and be on C below when you ought to be on C above, or you should come in half a bar behind, we will excuse you. Still, it is better to do as Paul says, and sing "with the spirit, and the understanding also." 4. Again, I remark, church music must be congregational. This opportunity must be brought down within the range of the whole audience. A song that the worshippers cannot sing is of no more use to them than a sermon in Choctaw. Let us wake up to this duty. Let us sing alone, sing in our families, sing in our schools, sing in our churches. I never shall forget hearing a Frenchman singing the "Marseillaise Hymn" on the Champs Elysées, Paris, just before the battle of Sedan. I never saw such enthusiasm before or since. As he sang that national air, oh! how the Frenchmen shouted. Have you ever in an English assemblage heard a band play "God Save the Queen"? If you have, you know something about the enthusiasm of a national air. Now, I tell you that these songs we sing Sabbath by Sabbath are the national airs of Jesus Christ and of the kingdom of heaven, and if you do not learn to sing them here, how do you ever expect to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 72. **And that which the rest of the people gave.**—*The rest of the people gave*:—It is a great misfortune when any Christian effort is supported by the contributions of the few and not of the many. All should be encouraged to contribute so far as they are able. Workers, too, should, as their means admit of, subscribe towards the expenses of work. "What people pay for they will pray for, and what they pray for they will pay for." (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

## CHAPTER VIII.

**VERS. 1-12. And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street.—The instructor in the law :—**God has evermore blessed His own Word as the chosen instrument of all revival and progress in His Church. It was in this faith of the power of Bible truth in the hand of the Holy Spirit that Nehemiah here sought to instruct the remnant of Judah in the Divine law. His past labours for the good of Jerusalem had chiefly tended to inspire his brethren with patriotic love, and to surround the holy city with a material defence. But his affection for Zion had, from the beginning, higher aims than these; and henceforth his endeavours move in a loftier sphere. He rises now above the work of setting dead stones into a strong wall around the city of God, and labours to place holy affections in the hearts of its people, that they may be adorned with the beauties of the Lord's own Israel. To secure these great ends, the first and highest means he employs is the diffusion of the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. He perceived, no doubt, that many of the children of Judah needed much this instruction in the law of the Lord. They had been long scattered abroad in strange lands, far away from temple privileges, and were on this account sadly defective in their knowledge of the Divine Word. **I. THE ASSEMBLY OF ISRAEL CONVENED.** The persons who presided in this assembly deserve our notice. When God raises up a great man to perform an important work He usually associates another with him of a kindred spirit, who, though endowed with different gifts, is a helper in the good cause. The defects of the one are thus counterbalanced by the graces of the other, and religion is promoted by their mutual co-operation. In the redemption of Israel from the house of bondage Moses and Aaron were united in the common enterprise. And so, in this revival of Judah, Nehemiah and Ezra are joined together; and, through means of the energy of the man of action, coupled with the influence of the man of sacred study, God blesses Zion with His quickening and restoring grace. It is an honour to the youthful Nehemiah that, though invested with ruling power in the holy city, he gives place to the ministers of the sanctuary in their proper work of teaching. These two servants of God, presiding in this great congregation of Israel, differed much from each other in age, in office, in rank, in character; but they were one in heart, and they join here in complete harmony of action for the revival of their beloved Zion. God in nature makes full provision for diversity of elements and forces co-operating together for a common result. And God in the Church also provides for different men looking on revealed truth with free thought and honest heart, where the shades of belief may vary like the colours of the rainbow, but all blend under the power of love, into a pure white ray as from the parent orb. The time at which this assembly was held also merits our consideration. "They gathered themselves together on the first day of the seventh month" (vers. 1, 2). This was emphatically the sacred month of the Jewish year, during which the most touching and impressive ceremonies of their law were observed. **1.** It was a full assembly. "All the people gathered themselves together as one man." They were all there, and they were there all of one heart. In times of spiritual indifference and decay the ways of Zion mourn because few come to her solemn feasts. The Great Physician is present to heal them, but they, the dying patients, are not there to be made whole. **2.** It was an earnest assembly. "They spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel." **3.** It was an attentive assembly. "Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, and read therein from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." This deep attention to His truth is demanded as an act of reverence to God who speaks it. It is reckoned an affront for any one to turn his back on an earthly sovereign or converse with others while the king is addressing words of importance to all in his presence. Besides, men require to give earnest heed to the Word of life in order to derive saving benefit from it! Alas! many give attendance on the Word who do not give attention to it. Gospel truth is a means of persuasion to repentance, but if attention to the Word of conviction is suffered to waver the blessing will in all likelihood be lost. It is difficult with an arrow, however well aimed, to strike a bird on the wing that rapidly changes its flight in the air; and so it is not easy to fix the arrow of conviction in the heart that flits meanwhile from thought to thought, inattentive to the Word. **4.** It was a devout assembly. "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.



And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." This devout frame of mind is essential to full spiritual profit in Divine worship for hearing the truth. II. THE DIVINE KNOWLEDGE CONVEYED. Ezra was chief among the teachers of Israel in this great assembly, and his eminent gifts fitted him for this position. He is elsewhere distinguished as "a ready scribe in the law of Moses"; he possessed a true love for it, an intimate acquaintance with it, and a profound knowledge of it. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." 1. The instruction here embraced an exposition of the law. "So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." 2. The instruction comprised exhortation to present duty. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." "For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." These, with them, were tears both of alarm and compunction—of apprehension for the consequences of their sin and godly sorrow on account of it. It was an expression of deep anxiety, in view of their spiritual danger, as revealed in God's Word. Some men insinuate that all such agitation about the state of the soul is questionable, and not consistent with rational piety. Shall it be deemed reasonable that tears may freely flow on account of temporal bereavements and losses and no sorrow be expressed in fear of everlasting ruin? Observe, then, how nobly Nehemiah here appears to give direction and counsel to his people, mourning all of them for their iniquity: "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep." It is not implied that their sorrow was altogether wrong or without foundation, but it was out of time and defective in its views of the Divine mercy. It might not take too lowly a view of their own sinfulness, but it was wanting in a believing apprehension of the loving-kindness of the Lord, their covenant God. This is needful caution for awakened ones, to make sure that they exercise the full look of faith upward to grace as well as downward to guilt. This counsel to Judah not to weep prepares the way, and then follows this threefold call for relieving their sorrows: "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry: for the joy of the Lord is your strength." This is first a call to assuage their griefs in social enjoyment of the gifts of Providence. It is not best always to seek to cure sorrow by reasoning against it; it is often more effectual to meet it with a counteracting joy; and this is the course here followed by this "son of consolation." This is a call, moreover, to relieve sorrow by the exercise of benevolence to poor brethren. "Send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." To inherit the full blessing of life it is not enough to partake of the comforts of Providence; there requires to be joined with this a compassionate charity to the needy and the destitute. This compassion of the needy sanctifies all the enjoyments of life. It possesses a wonderful power of removing the load of sorrow from the giver's heart and of chasing the cloud of sadness from his brow. (*W. Ritchie.*) *The open-air meeting:*—We see here— I. THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS THE GREAT MEANS FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF HIS PEOPLE. II. THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT ONLY TO BE READ, BUT UNDERSTOOD. III. THAT IT MUST BE READ WITH PRAYER. IV. THAT THIS WORD WILL OFTEN REBUKE US AND LEAD US TO MOURN AFTER A GODLY SORT. V. THAT IT WILL ALSO ENCOURAGE US, AND IN THE END BRING US MUCH JOY AND GREAT GLADNESS. VI. THAT THE SOURCE OF JOY AND THE SECRET OF STRENGTH IS DIVINE. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation.*—*Hearty appreciation of God's Word:*—1. The people of Jerusalem, like the disciples at Pentecost, were "of one accord, in one place." Their hearts were inclined to God's testimonies. 2. The standing position is one of respect. Men stand before their superiors. Moses before Pharaoh, Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar. 3. The messages of a king are entitled to respect. I once witnessed the reception of a royal message by the Parliament of Prussia. As the messenger entered the hall and the royal seal was broken "all the people stood up." Officers, members, and visitors by one impulse rose to hear the writing of their king. A like impulse moved the people before whom Ezra brought the law. 4. A proper appreciation of God's Word is necessary to spiritual success. 5. Respect for God's Word involves respect for His day. It is interesting, in this age of Sabbath desecration, to notice that in the revival of Jewish institutions the observance of the fourth commandment was enforced both among Jews and unbelievers. 6. Respect for God's Word also involves respect for His worship (vers. 14-16). Worship will be a delight. 7. Re-

ligion is not only joyous, but unselfish. 8. Respect for God's Word involves respect for all His commandments. 9. A proper appreciation of the Bible is possible only as its Divine authorship and object are recognised. 10. The object of the Bible is to reveal God and the duty He requires of men. 11. How are we to show our appreciation of the Bible? Our duty is to receive and use it. The whole mind and soul must lay hold of and appropriate its truths. It must be esteemed above all books, and its decisions recognised as final. A wealthy gentleman, having built him a library, placed in it, on a pedestal high above all the shelves, a copy of the Bible. We should do for the sacred volume what he signified by this act. We should give it also a place in our affections—such a place as it had in the heart of the Scotch girl, who, when driven from her burning home, cared first for her copy of the Scriptures. 12. We do appreciate the Bible. We read it at family prayers, and in our closets, and learn verses, and hear it on Sabbath from the pulpit. I have heard that when, in a long war, the city of Haarlem had been desolated by fire and sword, the news of peace was a long letter, which a feeble old man read from a window. His voice could scarcely be heard, yet the people gave profound attention. When the Bible is read men should listen as those burghers listened. 13. The best acceptance of such news is an acceptance of the relief it brings. So the best appreciation of the Bible is an acceptance of its salvation in Christ. 14. Respect for God's Word places it above all creeds and criticism. 15. Respect for God's Word also demands that it be handled reverently. This condemns all trifling with God's truth. All puns, parodies, and riddles based upon mis-quotation of the Scriptures are hereby condemned. (*F. C. Monfort, D.D.*) *Reading the law* :—

I. A NEGLECTED DIVINE ORDINANCE MAY BE RESTORED AS A CHANNEL OF DIVINE GRACE. Is there not a suggestion in this incident of how we may often return to methods of service, to means of grace that have been passed by, as useful for the present time? Certain truths have been allowed to remain in the background for a time which may be wisely pressed at another. Currents never carry all that floats on their surface to the sea. Much is left on the banks of the channel. So currents of thought in any age or time do not carry forward all that is valuable. There are cargoes of flotsam and jetsam that will reward the wreckers along the shore. II. RELIGIOUS QUICKENING MAY RESULT FROM MORAL REFORMS AND WISE MEASURES OF CIVIC RULERS. III. ALL DIVINE ORDINANCES, AS WELL AS PROVIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES, ARE CHANNELS FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Reading the law* :—Concerning "the book, in the law of God," and the giving of the sense to the people, we remark in explanation—

I. THE ACTUAL SPEECH IN WHICH THE GOSPEL WAS FIRST UTTERED BY JESUS AND PROCLAIMED BY THE APOSTLES AMONG THE ISRAELITES IS HERE, PROBABLY FOR THE FIRST TIME, PUBLICLY PUT TO SACRED USE. The old Hebrew language in which the law was written had become, when the exile was over, the tongue of the learned. It was unknown to the common people, as that of Spencer and Chaucer is unknown to us. Interpreters were necessary. Ezra knew the need, and provided for it. The Levites gave the sense and caused the people to understand the reading. II. IN THIS EVENT WE BEHOLD THE RISE OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND OF SYSTEMATIC BIBLE STUDY. From the time of Ezra the temple gradually retired into the background, and the synagogue came into prominence. The pulpit and sermons were institutions. The soul was nurtured by Bible study. Less and less did the priests wield power in the regions beyond Jerusalem, and more and more did the congregations or synagogues become like our best modern prayer-meetings, where speech and devotional service are free. When Christianity spread over the world the synagogue was its cradle. Everywhere the apostles found first welcome here and the place and privilege of preaching Christ. In the substitution of prayer for sacrifice, in the triumph of moral over mechanical functions of worship, we see a tremendous advance, and read for our times an inspiring lesson. (*W. Elliot Griffiths.*) *The reading of the law* :—In this scene are suggested—

I. SOME SOURCES OF POWER IN PREACHING. 1. The simple proclamation of the law of God. 2. The statement of God's work in human history. 2. The earnest utterance of intelligent faith. II. THE CONDITIONS FOR PROFITABLY HEARING THE WORD OF GOD. 1. An aroused interest. 2. A prayerful spirit. 3. Listening with the resolve to obey. III. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. Love for the law makes noble men. 2. Honouring the law insures the prosperity of the Church. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Ezra expounding the law* :—

I. A LARGE GATHERING. There are two important advantages connected with a numerous congregation over one that is thinly attended. 1. It gives an opportunity for more extensive usefulness. We grant that there is not a little to encourage even

those whose hearers are few, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." "A sportsman," says Jay, "has fired into a flight of birds and not killed one, and he has killed one when he had only one to aim at." That may be true; but on the other hand, if two anglers went forth with rod and line to spend a day in fishing, it would be naturally expected that the largest number would be caught by him who had secured a pond where fish were abundant, rather than by the other, who had toiled from morning till night in a place where they were scarce. 2. Large congregations possess a peculiar power of stimulating those who have to address them. Probably the man has never yet lived who could long be an orator before a small assembly. Even Cicero could not deliver his famous oration in behalf of the poet Archias, though addressed to a single man, without having all that was learned and great in Rome to listen to him. Those who love the means of grace should do all they can to induce their friends and neighbours to attend. II. AN OPEN-AIR GATHERING. III. A PROTRACTED GATHERING. IV. AN ATTENTIVE GATHERING. V. A DEVOUT, EARNEST, AND REVERENTIAL GATHERING. To stand in awe of God's holy Word, whenever it is read and expounded in our hearing, indicates a right state of mind; and those who are thus influenced are regarded by God with approval and delight (Isa. lxvi. 2).

VI. AN INTELLIGENT AND WELL-INSTRUCTED GATHERING. (*Expository Outlines.*) *The Scriptures related to revivals of religion:*—Every great revival of religion has had its beginning in this hunger for the Word, and has been permanent and widespread exactly in proportion as it has been rooted in the Scriptures. There is Wickliffe, frightened like the rest of the nation by the plague that had swept from Asia to Europe, and now had burst upon England, sounding in the ears of men like the trump of the judgment day. Lying in his cell poring over the pages of an old Latin Bible, he finds the truth that fills his soul with the sweetness of God's peace and the music of heaven. At once he began to translate passages of the blessed book into English, and sent them forth by his "poor priests," as they were called, to be read as best they might amongst the peasants of England; and so came the dawning of the day of God upon our land. Thus, too, was it that the later reformation had its birth. Erasmus had sent to Cambridge his new translation of the Greek Testament; and a copy of it comes into the hands of "Little Bilney," who tells us how that on the first reading of it he chanced on these words, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "These words," says he, "by God's inward working did so lift up my poor bruised spirit, that the very bones within me leapt for joy and gladness." Then forthwith, he, unable to keep the sweet secret to himself, goes to confess his soul to Father Latimer, and pours out the story of his great discovery, how that being justified by faith he has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ; and thus Latimer was led into the light, and became the great preacher of the English Reformation. And Luther, more slowly, but no less surely, is led by the study of the Word of God to the great truth which comes back again to him, as from the lips of God, whilst crawling up the steps of the sacred stairs in Rome, "The just shall live by faith." It was two hundred years later that a little meeting was being held in Aldersgate Street, London, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Romans; and amongst the company was one who, as he listens, tells us that he felt his heart strangely warned: "I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation," says he, "and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine." So was it that John Wesley went forth to claim the whole world for his parish, and uplift the nation by the Word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. (*Sunday School.*) *Improper hearing of the Scriptures:*—Suppose a company of people coming, not to an elbow, but to a working goldsmith's shop; one buys a chain, another a diamond ring; this buys a jewel, that a rich piece of plate; and that there should be one amongst them so self-conceited, should take up a coal from off the floor, and handle it so long, till he had all besmeared his fingers, refusing what the shop afforded, so as he might but have that coal along with him. Were not this great absurdity? Yet such and more is the condition of those captious hearers of God's Word, that while others carry away good and wholesome doctrine, precious promises, such as is food for their souls, they come only to carp and catch at their minister, that so they may more easily traduce him, and brand him with the black coal of infamy and disgrace. (*J. Spencer.*) *All the Bible wanted:*—A little blind girl in Cairo, who had read a copy of the Psalms in Arabic, by the aid of Dr. Moon's "Alphabet for the Blind," sent a message by a gentleman who was coming to

England, "Please tell Dr. Moon, when you see him, I am so hungry, I want all the Bible." (*Great Thoughts.*) *Familiarity with the Bible; its danger*:—There were no listless or indifferent ones among them. They had been so long without the Word of God that their appetites were whetted. We are so familiar with it that possibly we are not as sensitive to its Divineness as we should be. Our familiarity induces a measure of indifference. The settlers of Arizona walked over their fields for years without knowing that untold treasures of precious ore lay just below the surface. Thus we treat our Bibles as we treat other books; but other books are mere pasture-land, while this is a goldfield. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) **And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.**—*Constant attention*:—One of Mr. Browning's particular pleasures was to lie beside a hedge, or deep in meadow grasses, or under a tree, and there to give himself up so absolutely to the life of the moment that even the shy birds would alight close by, and sometimes venturesomely poise themselves upon his body. I have heard him say that his faculty of observation would not have appeared despicable to an Iroquois Indian. He saw everything—the bird on the wing, the snail dragging its shell up the woodbine, the bee adding to his golden treasure, the green fly darting hither and thither like an animated seedling, the spider weaving her gossamer from twig to twig, the woodpecker scrutinising the lichen on the gnarled oak, the passage of the wind across the grass, the motions and shadows of the clouds. And his own words are "Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on!" (*William Sharp.*) *Attention and retention of Divine truth*:—It is related that Gotthold had for some purpose taken from a cupboard a phial of rose-water, and, after using it, inconsiderately left it unstopped. Observing it some time after, he found that all the strength and sweetness of the perfume had evaporated. Here, thought he, is a striking emblem of a heart fond of the world and open to the impression of outward objects. What good does it do to take such a heart to the house of God, and there fill it with the precious essence of the roses of paradise, which are the truths of Scripture? What good to kindle in a glow of devotion, if we afterward neglect to close the outlet—that is, keeping the Word in an honest and good heart? (Luke viii. 15). How vain to hear much, but to retain little, and practise less! How vain to experience within us sacred and holy emotions, unless we are afterward careful to close the heart by careful and diligent reflection and prayer, and so keep it unspotted from the world! Neglect this duty, and the whole strength and spirit of devotion evaporates and leaves only a lifeless froth behind. (*Christian Age.*) **And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood.**—*The oldest pulpit*:—We offer three remarks upon this old pulpit. I. IT WAS OCCUPIED BY DULY QUALIFIED MEN. Ezra the priest and scribe, with thirteen other Levites, occupied this pulpit. They were the recognised teachers of Israel. Who is the duly qualified preacher of the truth? The man who is superior to the people in mental capability, spiritual intelligence, and practical godliness, having the power to convey his thoughts acceptably, and with propriety and force. II. THIS OLD PULPIT WAS ATTENDED BY AN EXEMPLARY CONGREGATION. 1. It was a congregation disposed to hear. 2. It was a congregation competent to understand. 3. It was a congregation deeply interested in the discourse. 4. It was a congregation inspired with religious reverence. III. THIS OLD PULPIT ACCOMPLISHED THE GRAND END OF PREACHING. 1. It imparted spiritual instruction. 2. It made a deep religious impression. 3. It stimulated a practical godliness. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 6. **And all the people answered, Amen, Amen.**—"Amen" in public worship:—The subject is: That it is a lawful and laudable practice for people, in the conclusion of public prayer or praising God, to pronounce an amen. I. I WILL EXPLAIN WHAT IS MEANT BY "AMEN." 1. There is an amen substantive. And that is God Himself (Rev. iii. 14). 2. There is an amen affirmative—a phrase used in the beginning of any momentous truth, as an asseveration (Matt. xvi. 28; Luke ix. 27). 3. There is an optative amen—"Let it be so" (Jer. xxviii. 6; 1 Kings i. 36; Num. v. 22; Deut. xxvii. 15-26). II. SHOW WHAT WARRANT THERE IS FOR THE PRACTICE. 1. Assent to repetitions is essential unto prayer, and it is not signified publicly but by our amen. 2. We have the practice of the Old and New Testament believers for our example. Moses in Numbers and Deuteronomy; David (Psa. li. 13, cvi. 48); Jeremiah (Jer. xi. 5); Paul (1 Cor. xiv. 16; Eph. iii. 21); Christ Himself (Matt. vi. 9-13; Rev. v. 14, vii. 11, 12, xix. 1-6, xxii. 20). 3. Amen after prayer and praise is the man's consent, judgment, and approbation of what is offered unto God. 4. This vocal amen is, as it were, the epitome and sum of all our petitions

and praises to God. It is the centre which all those lines are drawn towards. It is all the duty virtually reduced to one word and point. It is the repeating and echoing, or redoubling of all over again. As the mercury behind the glass, it reverberates the lively image of all preceding devotion. It is the drawing the arrow to the pile by a strong ejaculation in Bellarmine's phrase, "Whereby the whole heart is darted up to God." It is a "stirring up of ourselves to take hold of God" (Isa. lxiv. 7). It is taking aim, and "directing our prayer to Him and looking up" (Psa. v. 3), as if they would hand up God's praises to Him, and stand ready to receive His mercies with open hands and mouths. It winds up all together in one bundle. 5. Amen, rightly pronounced, is an intensive act of faith, or it involves a strong faith. (1) That God is firm and immutably true in Himself and His Word. (2) That we will not only believe His truth, but trust to His veracity and build upon it (Jer. xi. 5). The Jews say "amen" hath three kernels; the one is of an oath, the second of faith, the third of confidence. 6. The unanimous pronunciation of amen is an assurance that God will accept our praises and answer our prayers (Matt. xviii. 19; Mark xi. 23). 7. This unanimous amen of faith strikes terror in the enemies of the Church, whether devils or men. When the Romans had conquered Philip and the Grecians, and Flaminus caused peace to be proclaimed to the Grecians, "there was such a shout," says Plutarch, "that the very crows and other birds fell down to the ground." Our amens must not drop like a cold bullet of lead out of the mouth of a musket, bowing to the ground; but they must be fired by preparations of the heart and warm affections, they must be discharged and shot off with the utmost vehemency of the soul and fervency of the spirit. When God's people can unite in one voice, God gives His voice with them and for them. (*Thomas Woodcock A.M.*) Amen.—St. Jerome tells us it was the custom in his days to close up every prayer with such a unanimous consent that their amen rang and echoed in the church, and sounded like the fall of waters or the noise of thunder. The Chinese have no word which will compare with our English word amen. They say instead: "Sin yenen ching sing"—"The heart wishes exactly so."

Ver. 8. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense.—*The Bible ought to be intelligently understood*:—It is to be feared that nowadays there are some Christians who, although they almost worship the Bible, care little for an intelligent understanding of its contents. The sacred Scriptures are useful to us in proportion as they help us to worship God more reverently, intelligently, and spiritually; and therefore we truly honour them by diligently seeking to understand their real sense, and to profit by their meaning. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The mission of the pulpit*:—The pulpit of Ezra was the place for the unfolding of the law of God. It was the place of a new religious departure. Formerly the temple had filled the whole religious horizon of the Jew. It was the Alpha and Omega of his faith. The temple was a place for sacrifice, not instruction. It was the home and sphere not of the scribe or prophet, but of the priest. Its chief object was not a pulpit or a desk, but an altar. In it the law was not unfolded, but the victim slain. But before us we have the introduction of a new element into the religious realm. The altar falls into the background, the pulpit comes to the front. The priest is shadowed by the scribe. It is the beginning of an order of things which has quietly gone forward ever since. The modern pulpit is connected by subtle, mental, and spiritual associations with that of Ezra. Our worship of instruction is the gradual outgrowth of that begun by this scribe of old. This desk is consecrated to a like purpose. It is the place where the law of God may be read and expounded; not of course within the narrow limits imposed upon Ezra. Before him lay only the scroll of the law. It was but the beginning of the sacred oracles. The hazy lamp of the olden time which Ezra held has grown clear and clearer until its light is as the sun in the perfect day. But it is still a law, not in the sense that it is one long list of commandments, but in the far higher sense—that it is the unfolding of the eternal mind to men. God's thoughts ought to be man's law. There is a law higher than that of commandment. Commandment can only work in the lowest realm. I can bid my child to do or leave undone certain things, but higher than these are my thoughts of what he might be and my longings for what he should be. I can't put these into commandments, or into law. They are too high for that. And yet they ought to be my child's highest law, moving him far more strongly than my mere commands. Here we have "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." The very centre of God's purpose for us—His highest commandment. Such is our law. How has it to be treated? 1. It is the duty of the pulpit

to give the sense of Scripture. It is no part of that duty to make nonsense of it, to wrest it, to handle it deceitfully. This has too often been done. Even by learned men—*e.g.*, Augustine insisted that the Psalms ascribed in their titles to Korah are descriptions of the Passion, and that the sons of Korah are Christians because Korah in Hebrew and Calvary in Latin may be translated "baldhead," and because Elisha was derided under that name. Gregory the Great saw the twelve apostles, and therefore the clergy in the seven sons of Job, and the lay worshippers of the Trinity in his three daughters. Scripture is not to be played with in that style. "We must give the sense." 2. Not only was the sense given, but it was given in the language of the people, their common, every-day speech. It is our duty to set forth God's law in language that will be intelligible to the people. It is possible to put it into English and yet be unintelligible. If the law be made known in the technical language of theology, or even of literature, it may utterly fail of its purpose. The law of God may be spoken in speech understood of the people, and yet not adapted to their needs. It must be spoken not only in the language of our time, but suited to its present wants. In his *Aids to Reflection*, S. T. Coleridge says "that there is one sure way of giving freshness and importance to the most commonplace maxims, that of reflecting on them in direct reference to our own state and conduct, to our own past and future being." When you think of those whose high functions are discharged in the pulpit there is no prayer more necessary to be offered than this, that they may be "men having understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do." 3. It may be still further worthy of remark that Ezra and his disciples spoke to the people the law of God. Printed will never take the place of spoken words. Christ said to the disciples, "Go and preach the gospel to every creature." The word "preach" means to make known as a herald. The herald's voice is more powerful than a printed proclamation. The voice carries feeling better than the printed page. Life expresses itself more fully through the voice than by paper or book. The world has caught its highest inspiration through spoken words. Great changes, political, social, moral, religious, have been brought about by the speech of mighty men. The Corn Laws would never have been repealed by books on the subject. Slavery would never have been abolished by anti-slavery literature. (*W. Garrett Horder.*)

Vers. 9, 10. **This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep.**—*True penitence and spasmodic emotion*:—Observe the profound wisdom of Nehemiah's injunction. The distress of the people was not unnatural; neither was it excessive. It might, however, through indulgence of it, have become excessive and unreal. The surest test by which to distinguish between true penitence and spasmodic emotion is to set a man about the common duties of life. If, amid the distractions of these things, he loses his contrition, it is evident that he never was earnestly contrite; that his was mere excited sensibility and not inward feeling. And even a true emotion requires to be directed into wholesome channels. There was hard work for these Jews to do; the whole task of religious reformation lay before them. Their penitence needed to be husbanded for future motive, not wasted in floods of tears and the ecstasy of a common weeping. It may seem strange to us that a cold external commandment should have been the consideration by which they were bidden to self-restraint. But when people have lost their self-control it is only by an external influence that they can be recovered. If you have to do with hysterical persons, it is not along the line of their feeling you restore them, but by definitely settling yourself against it; not by sympathising with their emotion and words of tenderness, but by the quick, sharp rebuke, "Enough of this; you must not give way." You recover the widowed mother to composure by bidding her, not indeed forget her dead husband, but remember her living children. We always draw back stricken mourners to hope and usefulness by reminding them of imperative and healing duty. (*A. Mackenall.*) **Go your way, eat the fat . . . send portions . . . for whom nothing is prepared.**—*Christian sympathy*:—I. THE CHARACTERS SPECIFIED IN THE TEXT. They are said to be those "for whom nothing is prepared." The Scriptures, when speaking of man's condition by nature and practice, in the sight of God, very pointedly state the matter. The language of the text speaks of our poverty, destitution, starvation, and ruin. II. THE "PORTIONS"—these blessings. Behold the grace and mercy of God! If God meted out to us mere justice, where should we be? and if God left us in our condemnation and ruin, where should we go? If God neglected us, in what condition should we be? Was God under any obligation to us? And yet we are in mercy spared, and instead of vengeance, behold

our text speaks of "blessings." And these are not only worthy of God to give, but blessings suitable to us. III. THE COMMAND: "Send." (*H. Allen, M.A.*) For the joy of the Lord is your strength.—*The joy of a Christian*:—Let us bear in mind three things—I. A BRIGHT AND HAPPY WALK IS ONE OF THE GREATEST ORNAMENTS OF OUR CHRISTIAN PROFESSION. II. INDULGENCE OF SIN, CARELESSNESS OF WALK, INCONSISTENCY OF CONVERSATION, WILL SURELY BRING A CLOUD OVER THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY. III. IN CHRIST ALONE MUST WE PLACE ALL OUR HOPE AND CONFIDENCE. (*J. M. Randall.*) *Pure joy an inspiration*:—It refreshes and exhilarates the whole nature. It helps to fortify the soul against the assaults of the devil. See how the joy of a human affection will often lift a young man right out of the range of low, sensual temptations, and fire his soul with noble and worthy ambitions. Can we wonder then, that it should be true of the joy which springs from the revelation of God's protection and favour? (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *Spiritual joy*:—I. BELIEVERS IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ARE CALLED UPON TO REJOICE. Would that this were more remembered by us, and experienced by us, and gloried in! 1. None but the believer ought to rejoice. I do not deny that there is such a thing as natural joy in natural objects. There is such a thing as natural joy oftentimes stirred up on spiritual subjects. It is like the arrow that passes through the air; it is like the early frost—the sun arises and it is gone. Oh! no one can rejoice but the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; the worldly man does not know what true joy is. You cannot explain it to him; he cannot receive it; he calls it enthusiasm, fancy, and imagination. A Christless man, a graceless man, a prayerless man, a thoughtless man, a godless man, a hopeless man, how can I expect him to rejoice. In this one thing thou canst rejoice: thou canst rejoice that the door of mercy is not closed. For their own sakes, the Lord will have His people to rejoice. He loves them; and therefore He commands them to be happy. For the sake of others, He would have them to rejoice. He would have them bring the grapes, to show the fruit of the land. And not only so, but for His own great name's sake, for His glory's sake, He would have His people rejoice. As He is Himself infinitely happy in Himself, He would have His people reflect Himself. II. AS THIS JOY IS NOT A NATURAL JOY IN NATURAL OBJECTS, SO IT IS NOT A NATURAL JOY IN SPIRITUAL OBJECTS, BUT IT IS "THE JOY OF THE LORD." 1. It is pre-eminently and peculiarly the joy of which the Holy Ghost is the author. Nature gives it not; nature maintains it not. It is the fruit of the Holy Ghost: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." 2. But observe, it is not only the joy of the Lord, but it is joy in the Lord. That which made the eunuch's heart rejoice was Jesus. And if you and I see Him with the eye of faith at this moment, we shall rejoice and be glad too. Oh! there is everything in Jesus to make the soul to rejoice. What is there not in His work, to make the soul to rejoice? The completeness of His atonement. Is there not enough cause in the matchless, majestic, glorious righteousness to make the soul rejoice? III. THAT THIS "JOY OF THE LORD" IS NOT FOR OUR OWN ENJOYMENT MERELY, NOR FOR OUR SELF-GRATIFICATION, BUT TO STRENGTHEN US. There are two passages of Scripture, to which I would direct your attention here. In the first place, remark in the first of the Epistle to the Philippians, the twenty-fifth verse—"And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith." See how "furtherance" stands connected with "joy of faith"; joy springing from faith, and that joy furthering, advancing, leading onwards and forwards, in the Divine life. Observe too in the third of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the sixth verse, there is that same rejoicing, "the rejoicing of hope," and see how it stands connected with the confidence of hope: "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." We have some precious instances in the Word of God, to show the strengthening power of joy. Observe one in the thirtieth of the first of Samuel. David was, as you and I often are, "greatly distressed," "for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons, and for his daughters; but"—ah! that "but," it is a volume, it is a folio—"but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Observe how that strengthened him. Do you ask, What is that which strengthens for service? It is "the joy of the Lord." Take the instance of the prophet Isaiah. Now observe—"Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." "Then" said I. "The joy of the Lord was his strength": "whithersoever Thou wouldst send me I go." And now there are some few remarks I would make by way of conclusion. 1. In the first place, I would say, that the believer is placed by his covenant God and Father in that position that he requires day by day

fresh accession of strength. 2. Then the question now arises, How comes it to pass that there is so much feebleness amongst many of the real children of God if the "joy of the Lord" is our strength? May we not at once answer, Because they do so little enjoy "the joy of the Lord"? 3. Remember that this is a joy which the Holy Ghost alone can give; ask it, then, of Him; wait on Him for it; use every means for it. (*J. H. Evans.*) *Joy of the Lord*:—There is a joy that enervates one's powers. The joy of the miser, the joy of the worldling, the joy of all carnal gratification. The strength of a good man is "the joy of the Lord." Observe—I. THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS JOY. 1. It is pure. 2. It is elevating. 3. It is solid. 4. It is durable. 5. It is heavenly. 6. It is Divine. II. THE CONDITIONS OF RELIGIOUS JOY. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Religious joy*:—I. THE JOY HERE SPOKEN OF IS SAID TO BE "OF THE LORD," AND IT IS SO IN A TWOFOLD SENSE. 1. God imparts it—it is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. v. 22; Rom. xiv. 17). 2. God Himself shares in it (Isa. lxxv. 19; Jer. xliii. 11, xxxiii. 9; Zeph. iii. 17). II. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS SAID TO BE A STRENGTH; AND IT IS SO. 1. Because it is of God. 2. Because, as such, it enables us to bear up against the ills and disappointments of life (Psa. iv. 7). Witness what it did for David, Daniel, Paul, and Silas. 3. Because, when earthly joys fail, the "joy of the Lord" remains ("your joy no man taketh from you"); and on the very ruins of the former the latter oftentimes finds the soil most fitted to its growth. III. TO WHOM THE "JOY OF THE LORD" IS GIVEN. It is imparted to those only—1. Who are in union and communion with Jesus Christ; this is its true source. 2. Who ask for it by earnest prayer. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John xvi. 24). 3. Who love God, and keep His commandments (Psa. xix. 8). IV. FOR WHAT PURPOSE IT IS GIVEN. It is imparted—1. To be as "oil to the wheels of our devotion." Joys are our wings, sorrows are our spurs. 2. To be an inward testimony to ourselves that we have the smile of God's approval coming down upon our efforts to do what is "pleasing and acceptable in His sight"; and—3. To be an outward testimony that our religion is not the "joyless" service that the world judges it to be; but that all its crosses and calls for penitence and self-denial lead, even in this life, to an inward joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. (*C. G. E. Appleyard, B.A.*) *Joy our strength*:—THE JOY OF THE LORD IS THAT SENSATION OF GLADNESS AND HAPPINESS WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVEYS TO THE SOUL, AND MAINTAINS IN THE SOUL, THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN HIS TRUE CHARACTER TOWARDS US. 1. It has nothing to do with worldly joy. It is substantial, eternal, shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day of its consummation in the saints around God's heavenly throne (Gal. iii. 22; Rom. xiv. 17). 2. It belongs to the people of God to rejoice in a sense of their reconciliation; to know their salvation is sure through Christ's life; to rejoice in the glorious Creator Himself (Rom. v. 11). II. MANY A TIME HAVE THESE SHORT WORDS DELIGHTED THE BELIEVER'S EAR, AND CHEERED HIS HEART. 1. Mark their excellency. Sound like a sentence uttered in the full knowledge of the gospel rather than under the law. Weak and helpless in yourselves, the Spirit can strengthen you, and supply you with new motives and ability to please the Lord. God has given His only Son to be our joy and our strength. We have a strong city (Isa. xxvi. 1; Heb. vi. 18; Eph. vi. 10). 2. But how does joy act in rendering us strong—strong to deny ourselves, to suffer, to labour in the cause of Christ? We know our privileges in Christ. This makes us joyful and happy. 3. The Christian rejoices in the past work of Christ, who died; in the present work, intercession; in the future work, returning again in majesty, to endow His servants with eternal bliss (Rom. viii. 32). 4. Again, joy in the Lord will enable the Christian to accomplish works for the glory of God and the good of others. We know that "heart" or "spirit" will enable the competitor for a prize to go through extraordinary exertion. It is the same with the soldier, the labourer, all who have to exert themselves with their bodies or minds. So with the Christian. (*F. Trench.*) *Christian joy*:—That few men are profoundly happy is but too true. Nor is it difficult to account for the universal failure on man's part to compass the desires of his soul. 1. The sources on which he draws may be drained dry. 2. The satisfaction which these resources yield is a measurable quantity. 3. Men are not happy, because they seek happiness as an end, and not as a means. Now, if Christianity be Divine, it will accomplish for me what I cannot do for myself. It claims to give men true lasting happiness, because it opens a perennial fountain. In other words, the source of Christian joy is God. This joy is the secret of Christian strength. I. THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN JOY IS GOD. Not without significance that one of Divine attributes is "blessedness." God is absolutely happy in Himself, and happy in relation to His creatures. 1. We can



tell something of a man's character and disposition by his works. Now God's works are full of gladness. There is joy in the streams, the woods, the meadows, the cornfields. 2. As in nature, so in grace. The Bible, from cover to cover, warrants the conclusion. The Old Dispensation a much brighter and more beautiful scheme than many superficial students will allow. Law, Prophets, Psalms are full of declarations that God's people are a happy people. Moses: "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved of the Lord!" David: "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound!" Isaiah: "With joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation." And when we turn to the New Testament the witness becomes overwhelming. The "Man of Sorrows" went to the house of feasting to hallow it with the sunshine of His presence, and to the house of mourning to make it radiant with His everlasting joy. One of His last bequests was this: "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." II. THE JOY OF GOD IS STRENGTH. 1. The joy of the Lord is our strength for service. No man can work well unless his heart is in it. The three essential elements of successful service are fitness, enjoyment, enthusiasm. God has a work for all that is in harmony with the best powers of each. 2. The joy of the Lord is our strength against temptation. We are tempted to doubt, but the joy of the Lord will afford a sufficient answer to all anxious questions. We are tempted to fear, but fear is the child of doubt or suspicion. We are tempted by the pleasures of sin, but God's ways are the ways of pleasantness. 3. The joy of the Lord is our strength for endurance. Christ: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer," &c. (John xvi. 33). Paul: "I am filled with comfort," &c. (2 Cor. vii. 4).

III. THE JOY OF THE LORD, THEREFORE, BECOMES A CHRISTIAN LAW OF LIFE. Ingratitude not to accept rich provision God has made for profoundest needs of human spirit. And, further, this provision stands in relation to our duty as means to an end. To neglect our joys is to leave our work undone. But it may be said that our emotions are the creatures of circumstances. But then we are not the creatures of circumstances. The man who turns his thoughts in upon himself creates for himself an atmosphere in which there can be no joy. Look away from self to God. "Walk in the light, as He is in the light." Or if you must look at self, let it be as "accepted in the Beloved"; if at the past, as forgiven; if at the present, as full of Divine favour; if at the future, as bright with all the promises of God. (*J. W. Burn.*)

*Strength and joy.*—The physical strength of a man as a labourer is not unfrequently regarded as the measure of his worth; but mental strength is as much superior to the physical as the soul is to the body. Physical weakness often co-exists with mental might; but both bodily and mental strength may be found in combination with the utterest spiritual weakness. I. HUMAN JOY IS IDENTICAL WITH DIVINE JOY. 1. The joy of atonement with God. God and man atoned by Christ's death, *de facto* as well as *de jure*, produces joy in God and man. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement." 2. The joy of reciprocated love. Antecedent to reconciliation with God, His love to us is love of pity and compassion; but atoned in Christ, God's love to us is that of moral esteem, and our love to Him is the re-percussion of His love to us. "We love Him because He first loved us." "If any man love Me," &c. (John xiv. 23). 3. Joy of assimilated character. As an element of the kingdom of God joy is a Divine attribute, inherited by those who are "one with Christ." "That they might have My joy fulfilled" (John xvii. 13). "That they all may be one," &c. (John xvii. 21). Divine strength and joy are our everlasting inheritance. II. HUMAN STRENGTH IS GENERATED BY DIVINE JOY. 1. As experienced in freedom from man-fear. "Only fear the Lord" is one of the first lessons of Christian manliness. God-fear annihilates man-fear, which ever "bringeth a snare." 2. As experienced in freedom from death-fear. Really in birth we take up death; but in Christian decrease death dies. "That through death He might destroy," &c. (Heb. ii. 14, 15). 3. As developed in all holy action and endurance. The strength of health must be operative. To use is to gain strength. "They go from strength to strength" (Psa. lxxxiv. 7). (*Homilist.*)

*Strengthening influence of Christian joy.*—A morose man is generally morally weak. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine," and medicates itself. Men weary with sombre thoughts, and are disposed to get rid of them; hence the danger of lapsing from harsh theology into infidelity. Christ came with "glad tidings." Strengthening influence of Christian joy shewn in the elements of it. 1. The joy of faith is strengthening. Faith is enlargement of mind, seeing man in relation to the Creator, a system of providence, redemptive love, immortality, &c. It is intellectual patience—the "truss-beam"

of the soul. 2. The joy of a free conscience is strengthening. No man has courage for high duty who does not know of a forgiven past. The Cross has done more for building up character than did the law. 3. The joy of Divine companionship and help is strengthening. Dependence upon God does not destroy the courage of self-reliance; just the reverse. Bismarck said that without his faith in God's purpose with him, he would not have courage to keep the German portfolio a single day. Read Froude's "Calvinism" for the influence of Divine faith upon the enterprise of nations. Gibbon explains the fulfilment of prophecies by assuming that the belief in God's presence and plan for them gave men the ability to accomplish the predictions. 4. The joy of love to Christ is strengthening. We always serve willingly, patiently, unswervingly, according as we put our hearts into the duty. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The duty and utility of Christian joy*:—In all human systems of theology the terrible has preponderated over the lovable, the severe over the kind, in the conceptions of the Divine nature. The outlines of the Eternal face, as imaged by the creature, have been stern; as disclosed by the Creator, they are unspeakably gracious. Hence in the Bible descriptions of heaven, the increase of happiness and of nearness to the Almighty go hand in hand. Hence again, joy, not grief, is the frame of mind in which we are encouraged to come before the Lord. The connection between gladness and God is strikingly brought out by Nehemiah. A reunion with God must not be sullied with weeping, for God is a God of gladness; and the gathering in His presence on earth is to be a forepart of the heavenly meeting. Therefore does he, who in Babylon at the king's table could not repress his own tears—what a strange shadow of a great truth was that heathen tradition that no sign of grief must be shown in a monarch's presence-chamber?—therefore does he allow no weeping in Jerusalem. I. THE JOY OF THE LORD—WHAT IS IT? II. HOW DOES IT CONSTITUTE THE MORAL STRENGTH OF A MAN? It has been well remarked that even cheerfulness of animal spirits is of great aid to virtuousness. There are certain temptations to which a joyous temperament is at once a bar. For example, hardness in judging others, malice, pride, can scarcely coexist with brightness and cheerfulness of heart. Many temptations at once flee away when cheerfulness is enjoyed within. The power of exertion revives after sorrow from the habit of looking at the brighter side. There is one special way in which gladness in God is essentially strength. What, it may be asked, is to be the uneducated man's guard against unbelief? What shall garrison his soul against the infidel tract? I reply, the "joy of the Lord," that secret complacency which he consciously gathers from the practice of the commandments of Christianity, and from the resting in the doctrines of Christianity. Teach a man to find a happiness in his Sundays, a gladness in the going up to the house of God, knitting the pleasures of his life with the mysteries of his faith, and the wave of unbelief will only break itself upon him. It is when you separate pleasure and duty; giving to the things of time all the bright colours, and to the things of eternity all the dark; calling men away from what they like, to pay the debt of a dull, forced uninteresting homage to God, instead of making the rendering such homage in itself a delight—it is then that you create a temptation to withhold the homage, and a temptation to the unbelief which comes in secondly to justify such withholding. When the lamp is gone out in the temple of the Lord, what marvel if the world stands aloof? (*Bp. Woodford.*) *Sources of happiness*:—Happiness in the highest sense of the word is not a quality brought into the soul from without, but music that flows from qualities already existing within the soul. Circumstances, environments, possessions, and pursuits may affect the harmony, but it is the attuning of the soul's capacities to the key-note of the music of heaven that is the secret source of happiness. There can be no happiness without religion. The most truly religious man ought to be the happiest man. The object of the religion of Christ is sanctified service; the end of that religion is nobility of character, honesty of conduct, purity of heart, veracity, self-sacrifice, high aims, Godlike pursuits. All the happiness of a Christian man will come from the exercise of his faculties, in the attuning of all his capacities and energies to the Divine will and to the eternal laws of truth, rectitude, justice, and righteousness. Thus the music of life is evolved by our own fingers from capacities that we ourselves possess. To ensure the highest happiness— I. HAVE HIGH AIMS AND PURSUE THEM WITH AVIDITY. Our faculties are only productive of happiness when they are in motion, just as the string of the harp only makes music when it vibrates. Many lives, therefore, are wretched because they are passed in indolence; many more are tuneless and musicless because they are

frittered away in unworthy pursuits. II. **CHERISH THE SPIRIT OF CONTENTMENT.** III. **ALWAYS MAINTAIN AN ABIDING FAITH IN GOD AND IN THE PROVIDENCE WHICH GOVERNS THE WORLD.** (*W. J. Hocking.*) *Joy* :—The goodness of God in His providential dealings with us, and in the general economy of the world, is shown not so much by the supply of what is necessary as by the provision of what is in excess of the bare necessities of life. To call creatures into existence, and then to make no sort of provision for their existence, would argue not so much want of benevolence as despotic inconsistency and capricious ineptitude. In our Zoological Gardens, with their regulation allowances to the animals, there is just enough to meet the claims of necessity; but God makes that wonderful environment in which, when left to themselves, these animals find not only a bare sufficiency that makes life possible, but a profusion of favourable conditions and features that makes life worth living. The lark soaring heavenward; the herd of hippopotami disporting themselves in an African river; the school of whales shooting up their foam-fountains, or placidly basking on the sun-warmed surface of the bay—these and a thousand other objects all seem to bear the same witness that God has made provision, not only for the maintenance, but for the enjoyment, of His creatures. If He shows His goodness towards the lower animals by surrounding them with all that seems necessary for their enjoyment of life, it is only reasonable to suppose that He will make a similar provision for man. Such provision is made in the gospel revelation. Man asks for happiness, and God proposes to give him joy; he asks for security, and God proposes to give him peace; he asks for permanence, and God proposes to give him eternal life; he asks for satisfaction, and God offers him nothing less than Himself. If men could be persuaded that there is more real happiness to be found in serving God than in serving self, in doing right than in doing wrong, Satan would be robbed of his favourite weapon, and we should soon see the whole world transformed. But how is this to be brought about? Happy lives that are happy because they are holy are more likely to speak forcibly to the hearts of the children of this world than any amount of theological theorising. This was one of the mightiest arguments employed by primitive Christianity. Real joy in religion—a joy that followed men into their daily life, and lit up all their experiences; a joy that was unspeakable and full of glory—all this was entirely new in the history of the world, and it must have seemed just what the world wanted. What a weary world wants as much as anything to-day is the testimony of bright faces and bounding hearts as well as joyful tongues, to the fact that the kingdom of God is not only righteousness, but peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. The Church of Christ is weak to-day because there is so little joy in it. Joy, then, is designed to play an important part in Christian experience. We shall do well to consider—I. **THE SOURCE FROM WHICH IT PROCEEDS.** 1. Joy is mentioned next to love amongst the fruits of the Spirit, and this order is usually illustrated in spiritual experience. Joy is one of the earliest signs of the new life; if there is joy in heaven over the sinner saved, no wonder that there is joy on earth in the sinner's consciousness of salvation. 2. It is also the product of the new and wondrous influence which stirs the soul to its depth when we are restored to our proper relations to the Divine, the mighty impulse of renewed vitality. There is always something essentially joyous in the bursting forth of new life. As in nature, so it is in grace. The new life that is born is indeed an Isaac—a child of laughter. When the Divine Spirit enters and takes possession of our quickened nature He necessarily brings His own joy along with Him. II. **THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT BELONG TO IT.** 1. As joy flows from a renewal of our proper relations with God, so it is dependent upon the maintenance of those relations. St. Peter tells us that it is in Him “whom having not seen we love” that we “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,” and Paul, “Rejoice in the Lord.” Twice he speaks of joy in the Holy Ghost. 2. There is always something in God that we may rejoice in (Hab. iii. 17, 18). It is this characteristic of true spiritual joy that raises those that possess it superior to the circumstances with which they may be surrounded, and which makes it possible for them to realise in their experience what may seem a paradox—“sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” 3. This joy is enhanced by all that is in accordance with the mind and will of God. What causes joy to Him, causes joy naturally enough to those whose joy is in Him. Thus we have—(1) The joy of calm acquiescence in the Divine will. (2) The joy of co-operation in the Divine work. 4. The intensity of this joy will be in proportion to its purity. Conclusion: It may be asked, How are we to get this joy? I answer—1. Cease to seek joy for its own sake. Self-abnegation is the condition of the higher joy, and when we are pursuing joy for its own sake, we are not

complying with this condition. 2. Remember that joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and you can't make fruit grow. It is the life that produces the fruit; but you must see to it that the life has fair play. Beware of loss of communion. Guard against disobedience. Exercise yourself in contemplation, in praise, and in adoring worship. The tree needs to be bathed in sunshine if its fruit is to be ripe and perfect; and nothing must come between us and the light of His face if our joy is to be perfected. In heaven it will be all joy, because in that fair land God has His way. (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*) *On religious joy, as giving strength and support to virtue*:—I. THAT IN THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS DUTIES THERE IS FOUND AN INWARD JOY, here styled "the joy of the Lord." 1. Joy is a word of various signification. By men of the world it is often used to express those flashes of mirth which arise from irregular indulgences of social pleasure. It will be easily understood that the joy here mentioned partakes of nothing akin to this; but signifies a tranquil and placid joy, an inward complacency and satisfaction, accompanying the practice of virtue, and the discharge of every part of our duty. 2. In order to ascertain this, let us consider the disposition of a good man with respect to God. When we consider in what manner religion requires that a good man should stand affected towards God, it will presently appear that rational enlightened piety opens such views of Him as must communicate joy. It presents Him, not as an awful unknown Sovereign, but as the Father of the universe, the lover and protector of righteousness, under whose government all the interests of the virtuous are safe. With delight the good man traces the Creator throughout all His works, and beholds them everywhere reflecting some image of His supreme perfection. Amidst that Divine presence he dwells with reverence, but without terror. Conscious of the uprightness of his own intentions, and of the fidelity of his heart to God, he considers himself, by night and by day, as under the protection of an invisible guardian. He listens to the gracious promises of His Word. With comfort he receives the declarations of His mercy to mankind, through a great Redeemer. All the various devotional exercises of faith and trust in God, all the cordial effusions of love and gratitude to this Supreme Benefactor in the acts of prayer and praise, afford scope to those emotions of the heart which are of the most pleasing kind. But it may here be objected, Are there no mortifications and griefs that particularly belong to piety? What shall we say to the tear of repentance, and to that humiliation of confession and remorse which may, at times, be incumbent on the most pious, in this state of human infirmity? To this I reply, first, that although there may be seasons of grief and dejection in a course of piety, yet this is not inconsistent with the joy of the Lord being, on the whole, the predominant character of a good man's state; as it is impossible that, during this life, perpetual brightness can remain in any quarter, without some dark cloud. But I must observe, next, that even the penitential sorrows and relents of a pious heart are not without their own satisfactions. A certain degree of pleasure is mingled with the tears which the returning offender sheds. 3. When we consider, next, the disposition of a good man towards his fellow-creatures, we find here the joy of the Lord exerting its influence fully. That mild and benevolent temper to which he is formed by virtue and piety; a temper that is free from envious and malignant passions, and that can look with the eye of candour and humanity on surrounding characters, is a constant spring of cheerfulness and serenity. With respect to that part of religion which consists in the government of a man's own mind, of his passions and desires, it may be thought that much joy is not to be expected, for there religion appears to lay on a severe and restraining hand. Yet here also it will be found that the joy of the Lord takes place. To a person just reclaimed from the excesses of sensual indulgence, the restraints imposed by virtue will, at first, appear uncouth and mortifying. But let him begin to be accustomed to a regular life, and his taste will soon be rectified, and his feelings will change. In purity, temperance, and self-government there is found a satisfaction in the mind similar to what results from the enjoyment of perfect health in the body. A man is then conscious that all is sound within. There is nothing that gnaws his spirit; that makes him ashamed of himself, or discomposes his calm and orderly enjoyment of life. His conscience testifies that he is acting honourably. He enjoys the satisfaction of being master of himself. He feels that no man can accuse him of degrading his character. From this slight sketch it plainly appears that there is an inward satisfaction, justly termed "the joy of the Lord," which runs through all the parts of religion. This is a very different view of religion from what is entertained by those who consider it as a state of perpetual penance. But what it concerns us at present

to remark is, that some experience of this joy of the Lord which I have described enters as an essential part into the character of every good man. In proportion to the degree of his goodness, to his improvement and progress in virtue, will be the degree of his participation in the pleasure and joy of religion. II. TO SHOW IN WHAT RESPECTS THE JOY OF THE LORD IS JUSTLY SAID TO BE THE STRENGTH OF THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. In the first place, it is the animating principle of virtue; it supports its influence, and assists it in becoming both persevering and progressive. Experience may teach us that few undertakings are lasting or successful which are accompanied with no pleasure. If a man's religion be considered merely as a task prescribed to him, which he feels burdensome, it is not likely that he will long constrain himself to act against the bent of inclination. It is not until he feels somewhat within him which attracts him to his duty that he can be expected to be constant and zealous in the performance of it. Was it ever found that a person advanced far in any art or study, whether of the liberal or mechanical kind, in which he had no pleasure? A sense of duty may sometimes exercise its authority, though there be no sensations of pleasure to assist it. Belief of those religious principles in which we were educated, and dread of future punishment, will, in cases where no strong temptation assails us, restrain from the commission of atrocious crimes, and produce some decent regularity of external conduct. But on occasions when inclination or interest prompt to some transgression of virtue, which safety or secrecy encourages, and which the example of the world seems to countenance, is it to be thought that conscience will then stand its ground with one who never was attached to virtue on its own account, and never experienced any joy in following its dictates? But these are the occasions when the joy of the Lord proves the strength of the righteous man. Accustomed to take pleasure in doing his duty; accustomed to look up to God with delight and complacency, and to feel himself happy in all the offices of kindness and humanity to men around him; accustomed to rejoice in a clear conscience, in a pure heart, and the hope of heavenly bliss, he cannot think of parting with such satisfactions for the sake of any worldly bribe. There is something within his heart that pleads for religion and virtue. 2. In the next place, the joy of the Lord is the strength of the righteous, as it is their great support under the discouragements and trials of life. From the view which we have now taken of the subject, it must clearly appear, that to every one who wishes to possess the spirit, and to support the character of genuine goodness and virtue, it is an object most desirable and important, to acquire a prevailing relish for the pleasures of religion. To attain this spirit, of considering the discharge of our duty as our pleasure and happiness, is certainly not incompatible with our present state of infirmity. It is no more than what good men have often attained, and have testified to it, that their delight was in the law of God; that His statutes were sweet to their taste; that they had taken them as an heritage for ever, for they were the rejoicing of their heart: "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy law is within my heart." It is therefore of high importance, that all proper means be employed to form our internal taste to a proper relish for this joy of the Lord. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *The gospel of joy*:—The first work of the Holy Spirit is to convince of sin, but that is by no means His only work. It is only in preparation for another and more blessed work. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE JOY OF THE LORD. 1. Much is said of the joy of the Lord in sacred Scriptures; sometimes the Lord Himself is said to rejoice over His people; of Christ it is said, "For the joy that was set before Him," so also in prospect of His death, He rejoiceth over the truly repentant sinner. When the Lord assures His people of their salvation from every danger and every enemy, He says, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy." In like manner they also are exhorted to joy in Him: "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Indeed, the gospel itself is a gospel of joy. As such it was announced by the angel to the shepherds: "Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." And we find that the preaching of that gospel was a matter of joy to the poor sinners to whom it was sent. Philip, we are told in the Acts, "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them," and the consequence was that there was great joy in that city. Now we shall find that their joy arose from a threefold source—1. What the Lord had done for them. The Lord had brought them back from a miserable and degrading captivity. He had brought them from under the yoke of Babylon; they had been protected and delivered in a more marvellous manner; they were restored to Zion, the city of their solemnities; the king's heart had been

softened towards them, and under his authority and protection they were obtaining a secure settlement in their own land. Surely this was a cause for joy. When they looked at the difficulties that stood in their way, and the steps by which the Lord had led them, they could not but rejoice. 2. What the Lord would do for them. Why, even before they took possession of the land of Canaan, while they were under the guidance of Moses, and under the Lord's special care in the wilderness, in the foresight of their future dangers and sins, the Lord had declared, even in their greatest straits and most pressing difficulties, though those very straits and difficulties were occasioned by their sins, that He would never forget His covenant, and would still receive them with mercy (Lev. xxvi. 40-45). 3. That the people understood all this. When Ezra read in the book of the law of God, he did it "distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (ver. 8). II. ITS HAPPY EFFECTS. When Nehemiah called upon the people thus to joy in the Lord, he told them at the same time what effect it would produce in them. It would be their strength. 1. It will support the Christian under all difficulties. This world is not one of ease and prosperity to the children of God. 2. It will sustain him in all his temptations. 3. Encourage him for the performance of all duties. It will make duties which without it would be burdensome and irksome, pleasant. 4. It will encourage him in prayer. He who has the joy of the Lord for his strength, does not live upon his joy, nor upon his strength. His life is in the Lord, and in proportion as he lives upon Him, he has joy and strength both in and from the Lord. 5. Incite him to hold on to the end. He who has the joy of the Lord for his strength will not rest in present attainments. The joys that are in store for the people of God are far greater than those already tasted. (1) How greatly are many people mistaken as to the nature of true religion. (2) Learn what you should be anxious to obtain. No man can joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ till he has received the atonement. (3) What a vast difference between the empty joys of the world and the solid joys of the gospel! (*G. Maxwell, B.A.*) *The joy of the Lord is your strength*:—I. Our joy in the Lord is the effect of His joy in us. As, for example, the brightness of the stars of night is derived from the unseen sun, so the light of our joy beams from the face of the Sun of Righteousness, which is the God-Man, Christ. Now, God's joy in His people is most wonderful, as we find in the hundred and forty-seventh Psalm, the eleventh verse. In the moral world all happiness and joy are but reflections of heaven's light. Peace and order are but the echoes of His Holy Spirit, amidst the tumultuous tossings and confusions of this world. Again: other and unfallen worlds might cause joy to God; for remember, God must rejoice in His own image, which is reflected more perfectly in unfallen creation; for example, angels are a perfect mirror, in which His image is reflected. They have larger capacities for comprehending God's perfections. But mark the littleness of man's mind. If we compare our own modes of feeling towards one another, we shall find that the philosopher delights not in the company of the unlearned, but rather despises it, and seeks the companionship of those who move in a more congenial element. Hence it is wonderful that God should delight in us, fallen sinful creatures. But the measure of God's joy in us is the more wonderful when we come to consider the language of David in the hundred and thirty-fifth Psalm and the fourth verse, wherein it is written of His rebellious children, "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure." God's people are also called His portion, as we read in Deuteronomy, the thirty-second chapter and ninth verse—"For the Lord's portion is His people. God's joy in His people, as we read in Ephesians, the first chapter and the tenth and eleventh verses, is the cause of the rich inheritance which He has provided for them—"that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." But we must remember also the other and numberless sources of glory to God, namely, the glory of the kingdom of nature stretching along infinity which is only filled with the beauty and majesty of the Deity itself. But it is not wonderful that God should joy in us, when we reflect upon it, for He is more glorified in us than in any other portion of His creation, considering that the work of redemption stamps a value upon us; for human nature, and none other, was taken up into the Godhead, so that our fallen condition opened up a way for glorifying God. Whether we consider His mercy or His justice, His long suffering or His love, all of which were exercised and glorified

by the redemption scheme, God rejoices over the theatre where His own glory is exhibited amongst His redeemed children rather than over angels, just as a parent rejoices more over the sick child restored to health than he does over the naturally robust and strong one. God blesses other worlds through the medium of ours. II. Let us now consider OUR JOY IN THE LORD. We have greater cause to rejoice in the Lord than the Jews, for our deliverance is from a worse captivity, namely, from the bondage of sin. Nehemiah could not set before his people anything but a distant hope of things to come. For how indistinct must have been their views of the promised Saviour compared with ours! III. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH. A broken spirit disqualifies us for action. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth up the bones"; while, on the contrary, a joyous spirit disposes man for action, as may be seen in Psalm fifty-one, and the twelfth and thirteenth verses—"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit: then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." The condition of the animal spirits is admitted to have a powerful influence upon all our faculties. Sorrow and dejection unnerve the body as well as the mind, and take away the power of exertion. The discharge of our several duties depends upon the spirit in which they are conducted; for an earthly servant, brooding over his misfortunes, would be unfit for his position in life. The soldier entering the battlefield must have a spirit and courage to encounter the enemy. So likewise must a Christian feel competent for the encounter with his spiritual duties and enemies. No man can diligently and cheerfully apply himself to any duty unless he has the hope of success in the performance of it. In conclusion, let us consider, how this strength is to be attained. It is not to be procured by any intellectual process of reasoning, nor is it the creature of imagination. We must move into an atmosphere of holiness in order to secure it; for the Christian's joy is the fruit of another clime. We must embark for a foreign land. It is the fruit of the tree of life, and must be plucked by the hand of faith. We must yield ourselves up to the guidance of the Holy Ghost; our souls must be tuned and re-tuned to heaven's harmonies by Him. Joy is the voice of order, and peace, in the soul; and God the Holy Spirit, who moved over creation's dark waters, must breathe over the angry passions of our fallen nature to produce this result. (*G. F. Galaher, M.A.*) *God's joy our strength:*—The truth to which I would call your attention is this: that notwithstanding the misery, the shame, the conflict of human life—a misery and shame and conflict which are keenly felt by Him whose nature is sympathy, and whose name is Father—there is in God a deep, abiding, essential joyousness; and that this joyousness is the strength of His people. I. THE ESSENTIAL JOYOUSNESS OF GOD. This is seen—1. In nature. All simple things in nature are joyous—flowers and fruits, woods and streams, the meadows and the breezes, the song of birds, the movements of animals, the irrepressible mirth of children. All the strong things of nature are magnificently joyous. The sun, the sea, the tempest, &c. What are we to think of Him, what must He be like, who has so constituted man that the very aspect of the world in which he lives furnishes him with quenchless impulses of gladness. The maker is known by his work; his thoughts will be in it; as he is so it will be. 2. In the Christian revelation. The Jewish system enters into the history of the Christian revelation. This system was in the main a festal, joyous service. Its restrictions were for the well-being of the people, and added comfort to their life; its festivals were more numerous than its fasts. If anywhere we should find an incident typical of Jewish history, we should find it in our text, where we see a grave preacher calling on remorseful and broken-hearted penitents to be more glad for God's sake than they were mournful for their own, because the Lord was still joyous, and the joy of the Lord was their strength. Christ is the Christian revelation; the Son and manifestation of God. Although we call Christ a "man of sorrows" yet it should be impossible to speak of Him as an unhappy, a wretched, a miserable man. "He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows"; but He was not daunted by them, not worn down by them. Sadness oppressed Him, but never gloom; care, but not despondency. He was a welcome guest at feasts. Mothers brought their children to Him; little ones sang around Him, and He was glad to hear their singing. There broke from Him signs of a quenchless joy: "At that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit." He has no better thing to leave His disciples than His own joy. He was sustained under the tribulation of His mission by the deeper joy of His achievement. The deep, unquenchable joy of Christ is itself a revelation of the essential joyousness of God. 3. In the spiritual life. Speaking doctrinally,

joy is the "fruit of the Spirit," and a direct result of the gospel: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." God intended to give to the penitent the joy of pardon; to the defiled the joy of holiness; to the feeble the joy of strength. God intended by His promises to lift our hearts to exultation; and therefore He sent His Son for our acceptance. Christian history and experience confirm the testimony. Witness the writings of Paul to the buoyancy of his spirit. Strong Christians are always glad some men; they find inspiration in their mission, bliss in their work. "The voice of rejoicing and thanksgiving" is in their "tabernacles"; they "rejoice in the Lord always"; they "rejoice with them that do rejoice," and thus give full play and scope to the spirit of their Father who dwelleth in them. The inspirations of the indwelling Spirit declare the essential joyousness of God. II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF APPREHENDING THE ESSENTIAL JOYOUSNESS OF GOD. It is too much forgotten that joy equally with sorrow enters into a true human development. "'Tis held that sorrow makes us wise"; but it needs a strong soul to endure the discipline. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Joy is the tonic of the mind. There are some households into which it does us good to enter; the inmates are so happy, so frank, so loving, that only to be with them refreshes the weary spirit. We thus see how the joy of others may be our strength. It is a refuge for the distressed, a hiding-place from the storm, as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." And "the name of the Lord" is above all others the "strong tower" into which "the righteous runneth and is safe." To turn from the contemplation of a smiling world, and smiling men and women, to the thought of a joyous God: what inspiration is here! (*A. Mackennal*.)

*On religious joy*:—A few years ago a fierce and violent dispute was carried on between the chief physicians of Europe concerning antimony. And while some maintained that this mineral was a most valuable medicine, and extolled it to the skies, others asserted that it was injurious, and ought to be classed among the deadly poisons. The debate at length subsided; and it is now admitted that the article in question may be useful when administered with sound judgment. The opinions of men have always been greatly divided on the subject of religious joy—some extol it in the highest strains; others reprobate and condemn and labour to extinguish it. I. THE NATURE AND SOURCE OF RELIGIOUS JOY. An able writer on the passions says, "Joy is the vivid pleasure inspired on our receiving something peculiarly grateful; something evidently productive of advantage, or something which promises to contribute to our present or future happiness." The worldly man exults in the acquisition of wealth, power, titles, and honours. When religion enters the mind it both informs the understanding and moves the passions. Among the passions joy holds a conspicuous rank. 1. Religious or holy joy arises from a sense of the free favour of a merciful, covenant God. 2. Religious joy arises from a sense of the special presence of a merciful, covenant God. (1) While he contemplates the grand and beautiful scenes of visible nature. (2) In the ordinances of His worship. II. HOLY JOY TENDS TO INVIGORATE AND SUSTAIN THOSE WHO ARE THE PARTAKERS OF IT. There are certain states of mind which we are accustomed to express in figurative terms and in the form of maxims. Thus we say knowledge is power, and ignorance is imbecility; hope braces, and fear relaxes the soul. If there be any aptness in such contrasts, we may assert, that as melancholy is weakness, joy is strength. Joy has a manifest tendency to invigorate and sustain—1. The Christian's resolutions, in prosecuting all the arduous labours of virtue and piety. 2. The Christian's faith under the afflictions and trials he is called to endure (*Hab. iii. 17-18*). Conclusion: We have an express warrant to rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord always." 1. Our personal interest is wrapt up in this duty. 2. The welfare of our brethren is in a certain degree involved in this duty. 3. The honour of our Master is implicated in the right discharge of this duty. (*Congregational Remembrancer*.)

*The strength of Divine joy*:—Christianity asserts with great emphasis and illustrates with all its light the old doctrine of Nehemiah and the priests, that Divine gladness is power. I. ITS NATURE. There is a broad distinction between mere gladness and spiritual joy. Spiritual joy rises from within the soul, and does not depend on the outward circumstances of its life. It wells like a fountain from the inner soul. It is confined to no place. It is bounded by no time. It may grow where earthly gladness would perish. It is a joy springing from the inner communion of the spirit with its God. 1. It is the joy of self-surrender to God. True joy can only begin when the self-life has been surrendered. Until this surrender has been made the consciousness of a guilty past hangs like a burden on the heart. Men know that their



gleams of joy are only like flowers growing on the edge of a dark volcano, which when they are alone and outward excitements have passed away will waken in lurid glare and thunder, and distract their repose. They want a joy that shall pierce deeply into the region of self and rise from the consciousness of self-surrender and forgiveness. At the Cross of Christ the burden of the past falls, for at the Cross he yields himself. 2. The joy of fellowship with the Father. All profound gladness springs from sympathy with a spirit or a truth higher than ourselves. Why do our hearts bound on spring mornings with the joy of nature? Why does the beauty of a summer evening calm us? Why do we feel a "glory and a joy" as we tread the mountain sides? Why do we feel a deepening peace as we walk amid the splendours of the golden autumn? Is it not because we realise the presence of a spirit of beauty surrounding us, and inspiring us with an emotion which no words can describe? Or why is it when a truth breaks in upon us through clouds of doubt, and a clear vision of its beauty is gained after long and fruitless searching, that we feel a thrill of joy deep and unspeakable? Have we not after communion with some greater soul felt our own darkness dissipated and our own isolation broken down? In that hour has not the touch of a greater Spirit made us feel nobler, stronger, wiser? And if this be true of earthly communion, must it not be supremely so when we realise the fellowship of God as our Father? It is this which makes "our joy full." II. THE POWER OF THIS JOY OF THE LORD. We may trace it in three ways. 1. It is power to resist temptation. It forms in itself the fulness of emotion, and surrounds us with a heavenly atmosphere in which the assaults of evil fall powerless away. 2. It is strength for Christian action. 3. It is strength for patient endurance. We are too weak to endure the discipline of life unless we have joy—the present earnest of the future reward. (*E. L. Hull, B.A.*) *The joy of the Lord*:—George Whitfield, it is said, once addressed a great gathering of colliers. As he discoursed to the rude, rough men who stood there in their working garb, and with unwashed faces, the Spirit of God touched their hearts. Tears filled their eyes and ran down their faces, making channels for themselves through the coal-dust there. And so here. As the priest made plain the Word of God, the people wept and could not help it. As Nehemiah saw them weep, he exclaimed, "Weep not," &c. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." I. THERE IS JOY AND HAPPINESS IN LIVING WITH AND FOR GOD. I can well remember the first time I saw an engraving of the picture, "The Pursuit of Pleasure." In the picture was the beautiful figure of a woman, with butterfly wings gliding through space. Following hard after her were all ranks and conditions of men, so arranged by the artist as to suggest many forms of enjoyment and excitement, but all eager to get the goddess. In the haste and whirl, and rush, some had fallen and were trampled, but all who could were pressing on, eagerly on, to the abyss. Men pursue that goddess still, forgetting that peace, joy, real happiness, must arise from within, from the state of the mind and heart, from union with God and all that is purest and best men rush blindly off into a thousand outward diversions, all which fail to give rest to the troubled conscience, ease to the sore heart, or anything of the nature of permanent joy and happiness. This is only realised by those who will live with and for God. II. THERE IS JOY IN WORKING FOR GOD. 1. All work for the good of man is work for God. 2. Those have greatest joy who work in a godly spirit, and put heart into their work. 3. God has a work for us all, and can give us joy in it. I know what it is to have the good word of one's fellow-men, to have the confidence of one's companions and helpers in toil, to have some of the honours which men have to bestow, to enjoy the comforts of home and to share the advantages and blessings of travel, but not all these equal the blessing which God gives me when I am used as the instrument to make one sad heart happy. III. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH. 1. In temptation. 2. In suffering and loss. 3. In all your life. (*Charles Leach, D.D.*) *The joy of the Lord*:—All deep religion ought to be joyful, and all strong religion assuredly will be. I. JOY IN THE LORD IS THE NATURAL RESULT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH. 1. Because of what it gives us. (1) A sense of acceptance with God. (2) God for the rest of our spirits. (3) Communion with Him. 2. Because of what it takes away from us. (1) The fear that lies before us. (2) The strifes that lie within us, the desperate conflict between conscience and inclination, our will and our passions. (3) The sense of sin. Faith in Christ naturally works gladness. It also produces sorrow—solemn, manly, noble, and strong. This is not contradictory. All great thoughts have a solemn quiet in them, which is not unfrequently merges into a still sorrow: "As sorrowing, yet always rejoicing." These two states of mind, both of

them the natural operation of any deep faith, may co-exist and blend into one another, so as that the gladness is sobered, and chastened, and made manly and noble; and that the sorrow is like some thunder-cloud, all streaked with bars of sunshine, that go into its deepest depths. The joy lives in the midst of the sorrow; the sorrow springs from the same root as the gladness. They blend into one another; just as, in the Arctic regions, deep down beneath the cold snow, you shall find the budding of the early spring flowers and the fresh green grass; just as some kinds of fire burn below the water; just as in the midst of the undrinkable sea there may be welling up some little fountain of fresh water that comes from a deeper depth than the great ocean around it. The Christian life is all like one of those spring showers in early April, when the rain-drops weave for us a mist that hides the sunshine, and yet the hidden sun is in every sparkling drop, and they are all saturated and steeped in its light. The joy of the Lord is the natural result of Christian faith.

II. JOY IS A CHRISTIAN DUTY. It is a commandment here and also in the New Testament. It follows from this that the degree to which a Christian life shall be a cheerful life is dependent in a large measure upon our own volitions. By the selection or the rejection of the appropriate subjects which shall make the main portion of our religious contemplations we can determine the complexion of our religious life. Just as you inject colouring matter into the fibres of some anatomical preparation, so a Christian may, as it were, inject into all the veins of his religious character and life, either the bright tints of gladness, or the dark ones of self-despondency. If your thoughts are chiefly occupied with God, and what He has done and is for you, then you will have peaceful joy. If, on the other hand, they are bent ever on yourself and your own unbelief, then you will always be sad. It is only where there is much faith and consequent love that there is much joy. If there is but little heat around the bulb of the thermometer, no wonder that the mercury marks a low degree. If there is but small faith there will not be much gladness.

III. REJOICING IN THE LORD IS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH. All gladness has something to do with our efficiency; for it is the prerogative of man that his force comes from his mind, and not from his body. If we have hearts full of light and souls at rest in Christ, work will be easy, endurance will be easy, sorrows will be bearable, trials will not be so very hard; and above all temptations we shall be lifted and set upon a rock. If the soul is full, and full of joy, what side will be exposed to any temptation? If it appeal to fear, the gladness that is there is the answer. If it appeal to passion, desire, wish for pleasure of any sort, there is no need for any more—the heart is full. Christian gladness, like the magic shield of the old legends, invisible in its crystalline purity, will repel all the “fiery darts of the wicked.” (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

*The joy of God the strength of men:*—I. EZRA FELT THE UNIQUE POWER OF THE NATION'S LITERATURE. For him it contained all that is best for men to do, and happiest to desire. Therefore, he and his fellow-reformers were “the men of the book” of the law of the Lord, using it as “the man of their counsel” a fount of refreshing, a goad to penitence, and a stimulus to faith, generosity, and joy.

II. GOD IS INFINITE, AND NO MAN, NAT, NOR ALL MEN, CAN EXPRESS HIM; BUT EVERY TRUE SOUL MAY SAY SOMETHING ABOUT HIM, and every nature He trains by His spirit may either add something of freshness of setting and force of applicability to an old truth, or open for some soul new glimpses of His wondrous fulness. High thoughts do not disdain lowly minds. The ascent to the loftiest ranges of light and power is given, not to a prophet like the seraphic Isaiah, nor to a singing poet like David, nor to a great leader like Moses, but to Nehemiah, a courtier and a statesman, a politician and a reformer. Nehemiah is for the moment lifted to the highest grade of teachers, and placed by the side of Christ when He says, “These words have I spoken to you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” He has fellowship with Paul, when he rejoices that he is counted worthy to preach “the glorious gospel of the happy God.” He anticipates Christianity in its most vital and essential element; links together in natural sequence the two economies; shows that God is a Being not coldly impressive, stolidly majestic, without sympathy, but tender-hearted, forgiving, delighting in mercy, and plenteous in redemption; a God whose joy is strength for troubled men.

III. TO ME IT APPEARS LIKE A STROKE OF TRUE GENIUS AS MEN CALL IT—a breath of inspiration from God, as I would name it—THAT NEHEMIAH DELIVERS THIS HIGHER AND RICHER MESSAGE CONCERNING GOD AT THE MOMENT WHEN THE PEOPLE ARE PROFOUNDLY STIRRED BY THE RECENTLY REDISCOVERED MESSAGE OF THE ANCIENT LAW, AND OVERWHELMED WITH DEJECTION AND SORROW for their newly-revealed sins. The law is not a goal, but a light and a goad; a light

on the way to God, and a goad to petition for His pardon. This disclosure of sin and penalty is intended, like the flames out of the mountain, to hurry the approach of the pilgrim to the wicket-gate of repentance. IV. "GOD'S JOY A STRONGHOLD" (marginal rendering). Who can tell the immense strength infused into a soul to whom God is an ever-present, ever-bright consciousness of infinite joy? Such a consciousness of the presence of the joyful God flings around us an all-protecting shield from the shafts of doubt and care; builds about us a defensive tower from obtrusive fears; delivers us from the world, with its ceaseless din, low ideals, &c.; from the flesh, with its blinding passion, base motive, and thwarting caprice; and from the devil, with his insinuations of the necessity of evil, the selfishness of the good, and the folly of righteousness. 1. This consciousness of God's presence makes to us this world of nature a new creation, instinct with a new significance, and potent with an evangelical energy. We know we are under law. We accept the teachings of science as the teachings of our Father God, and rejoice in its demonstrations of the Abiding Order and Fixed Law of this world because we know the Lawgiver Himself is not a stern Draco, imaged only in the desolating earthquake, fire-belching volcano, and fierce tornado; but a Father, yea, our Father and Redeemer, and that we belong to Him and not to the house in which He has put us. 2. This consciousness makes us feel that the bitter and painful experiences of life are part of the Divine order and plan of a loving and rejoicing Father. A poor fellow said to me after thrusts and stabs of bewildering pain that almost made him reel, "Still, we know it's all right, don't we? We know whom we have believed, and are persuaded we are not going to lose anything we have given over to Him." Such testimonies show how the consciousness of God changes the very face of sorrow; that grief is a joy misunderstood; that the burdens of life are its benedictions; that the old gospel is still new, and that though in the world men may have tribulation, in Christ they have peace. Such testimonies interpret to me the rapturous experiences of persecuted and afflicted men that in my earlier years I was tempted to think over-weighted and unreal: Samuel Rutherford, Payson, Doddridge, Erskine, Robertson, F. R. Havergal, Mrs. Prentiss, and many others. 3. This pervading consciousness of the happiness of God invests death itself with a new mission, forces it to take its place amongst the servants of the Father and the friends of His children. "Absent from the body, we are at home with the Lord." V. THE JOY OF GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR ACTIVE, SELF-FORGETTING GENEROSITY. "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions for whom nothing is prepared." Whatever God is, He is for us. Whatever God is for us and to us, it is that we may be the same for and to others. Joy in the Lord is strength, positive actual power for ministry. It creates around us the most favourable atmosphere for evoking our resources; raises our entire nature to the highest pitch of energy, and gives unwonted elasticity and capacity of tension to all our faculties. As bodies expand under heat, so the soul enlarges under the genial influence of joy. Indeed, men never reach their best before they have mastered the whole gamut of joy, from the lowest note of cheerfulness to the highest of rapture. As some men do business without obtaining a fiftieth part of the profit gained by others, so some Christians never "nett" the "great gains" that flow from a cheerful piety. Vast is the difference between working for God from a sense of responsibility and from a delight which springs out of fellowship with Christ. Responsibility is a goad. Joy is a magnet. One pricks and urges forward by a sense of painfulness that reduces all work to the severe limits of obedience to imperative and resistless orders. The other is life; and such is its magic it converts even hard toil into play, and makes it as welcome as song to the merry birds, or sport to romping children. The joy of God is strength for the suppression of all life's evils, the solace of all sad hearts, and the service of all for whom nothing is prepared. Conclusion: 1. The God of the Hebrews is no mere object of worship seated coldly apart and awaiting the homage of men; He is a radiant presence, inspiring the mandate, "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous." 2. Remember, too, that the joy of our friends is our strength. The bare sight of some men is an instant dismissal of despair. The arrival of another is as the report of a disaster. A light heart dissipates gloom as the sun lifts fog. The joy of friends is a flowing fountain of perennial strength. 3. What an exhaustless fund of gladness is a free, healthy, simple, and natural child; how unspeakably indebted many of us are to the irrepressible joy and strange, heaven-sent wisdom of children for the loss of our moroseness, acerbity, and misery. The joy of children is our strength. 4. It is a common experience, this contagion of joy—

this conversion of joy into power. Rejoice, then, in the God of joy, and minister to those for whom nothing is prepared. Pour out your gladness for other hearts. Restrain it, and you destroy it. Cage your lark, and it will not sing. Open the door, give it access to the wide heavens, and away it goes merrily chanting its music up to heaven's gate. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *The joy of the Lord the strength of His people*:—The people here bidden to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief, "for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." As certain fabrics need to be damped before they will take the glowing colours with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedewing of repentance before they can receive the radiant colouring of delight. The glad news of the gospel can only be printed on wet paper.

I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN.

1. It springs from God and has God for its object. 2. It springs from a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God. 3. It springs from an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by Divine goodness. 4. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian when he comes into actual fellowship with God. 5. Another form of "the joy of the Lord" is the honour of being allowed to serve Him.

II. THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH.

1. It is so because it arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the gospel for spiritual meat, as they were meant to be used. 2. "The joy of the Lord" within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. The warmth of the South of France does not spring from soft, balmy winds, but from the sun; at sunset the temperature falls. A man who walks in the sunlight of God's countenance for that very reason is warm and strong. 3. It fortifies him against temptation. 4. It makes him strong for service. 5. A joyous man such as I have in my mind's eye is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm, restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed.

III. THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS.

1. Great praise. 2. Great sacrifice. 3. Other expressions of joy. When a man has the oil of joy, then in his business and in his family the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously. 4. Family happiness. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." I dislike much that Christianity which makes a man feel, "If I go to heaven it is all I care for." Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel—a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney.

IV. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Joy in the Lord a source of strength*:—There is strength in joy, and a sense of adequate security is an element of joy. If a man deem himself certain of triumph at last, he will be joyful, whether that triumph be achieved by himself or another. The joyful man is a strong man because he is a confident man, and the dejected man is a weak man because he distrusts his cause, himself, or some one else upon whom he depends. Two armies, with numbers equal, are mustering for battle. They are well matched in war materials, both brave, both earnest, eager for battle. But one side are exhilarated by repeated successes; they have won a terrible name; the general who leads never knew defeat. On the other side is the humiliation of repeated failures; again and again with lowered standards they have retreated. They have lost all confidence in themselves and their commanders. Now, who deems the conflict doubtful? Triumph is written in the joyful confidence of one, and defeat in the deep dejection of the other. The assurance of the army expectant of success is worth ten regiments and a hundred guns; and it may be truly said of them, "In the joy of victory is their strength." Let us—I. ASCERTAIN WHAT IS THE JOY OF THE LORD. The joy of the Lord is that sweet and holy gladness which springs from and originates in a calm, humble faith that we are the recipients of the Divine favour, under the Divine protection. In the followers of the Lord it is a holy cheerfulness founded on the belief that they are the children of God by Jesus Christ. That their Substitute has paid the debt and accomplished the work of redemption; that they are saved now. Just in proportion as you make salvation a contingency you undermine the basis of Christian joy. Dr. Doddridge once succeeded in procuring the pardon for one condemned to die. As the cell-door was thrown open the poor man cast himself down, and clasping the feet of his deliverer, exclaimed, "Every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have saved them all." This was the joy of salvation realised as a fact. II. LET US SEE HOW THIS JOY OF

**THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH.** 1. It strengthens us negatively in the removal of anxieties. 2. It imparts assurance of final victory. 3. It permits a concentration of the whole life force upon a single point. The Christian who believes himself saved trains all his guns in one direction, the end of which is his Master's glory. 4. It reinforces all other motives by the power of gratitude, and puts us under the sweetest and holiest of obligations. (*W. T. Sabine.*) *Joy in Christ Jesus our Lord*:—I. **THE NATURE OF JOY IN CHRIST.** 1. It is the joy which springs from the knowledge of the reconciliation of God to His sinful creatures; by which our lives are saved from destruction, and we are brought into a condition to enjoy His presence and favour. 2. It is such a joy as arises from the possession of a perfect revelation of the character and will of the Most High, and consequently of our interest, duty, and destination. Before the coming of Christ idolatry reigned, and with it necessarily prevailed a general depravation of morals, and a total want of those spiritual excellences and comforts which exalt and bless the human character. Some few sages, indeed, shed by their researches a dubious light on the path of life. But they were like the scattered and glimmering stars of a cloudy midnight. They could neither impart the warmth nor give the light which the wretched traveller needed. Their occasional twinklings only rendered the darkness more apparent and oppressive. This darkness was dispersed by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. The gospel makes us acquainted with all that it is necessary for us to know of God and with all that He requires of us. 3. It is the joy which springs from the well-grounded hope of inheriting heaven and immortality. 4. It is the joy which arises from our knowledge of the exalted character of our Redeemer, which furnishes a peaceful assurance of the sufficiency of the atonement and of the greatness of the Almighty's love. II. **THIS JOY IS OUR STRENGTH.** 1. It is the foundation of our encouragement in approaching our Maker. 2. This joy which we have in the character, instructions, and achievements of Christ animates us in the performing of the duties of life. 3. It is our strength in bearing up under life's troubles and adversities. 4. It gives us comfort in the approach and will give us victory in the conflict with death. 5. It is the principal source of composure and hope when we contemplate the final judgment. (*Bp. Dehon.*) *The nature and effects of a true believer's joy*:—I. **THE NATURE OF A TRUE BELIEVER'S JOY.** It is "the joy of the Lord." Why? 1. Because God is its author. This joy is no mere animal sensation. It is not the same thing as what we call "good spirits." It is not that flow of lively feelings and sensations which spring up themselves in a man's heart when things are grateful and agreeable. Such feelings are of nature only, and never hold. Religion has no root in them (*Matt. xiii. 20, 21*). The joy of true believers is a spiritual gift (*Gal. v. 22*). 2. Because God is its subject. True believers "joy in the God of their salvation." (1) They joy in the freeness of His great salvation. (2) They joy in the imputation of His justifying righteousness. 3. They joy in God as the Giver of their present privileges and the Preparer of their future glories (*2 Cor. v. 21, xii. 9, 10; Isa. lxi. 10; Rom. v. 5; Phil. iv. 7; Prov. iii. 17; Jas. i. 2*). II. **THE EFFECT OF THIS JOY UPON THE BELIEVER'S HEART AND LIFE.** 1. It strengthens him for duty. How beautifully is this exemplified in the case of the Churches of Macedonia (*2 Cor. viii. 2-5*). What made them so warm, so zealous in their duties? "The abundance of their joy." The joy of the Lord was their strength. 2. It strengthens him for suffering. See this exemplified: David (*1 Sam. xxx. 6*); the apostles when they were beaten before the Jewish council (*Acts v. 41*); Paul when he calls his heavy trials "light afflictions" (*2 Cor. iv. 17*); Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi (*Acts xvi. 25*); the victories in the dying hours of true believers (*Psa. cxlix. 5, 6; 2 Cor. iv. 16*). (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *God's tonic of gladness*:—The man I am thinking of had been born in a Christian home, but had gone away and tramped the world. The story of the prodigal or some other lyric of salvation is read. And, as the old forgotten sanctities sweep over his memory and are sung into his neglected heart, the crust of careless habit is broken, the founts long closed are reopened, and he is bent and swayed with surging recollections of the good and beautiful in the Christian life which has passed out of his existence. Such emotions sweep over the hearts of the Jews as they hear the long-neglected Law while Ezra reads it from his extemporised pulpit of wood. They had returned from the captivity of Babylon. Now is the opportunity for Ezra to introduce the neglected Law. The Levites go about among little groups answering questions and expounding what is read. The effect is that the multitude are swept, as only an Oriental people can be swept, with a wave of feeling and

lamentation. Why these outbursts of distress? Because the ancient covenant of God with their race had almost dropped out of memory. When they hear again what God did for their fathers—the story of Egypt and Sinai, of the tabernacle, the temple, the shechinah and the pledges of sheltering mercy—it comes upon them as the revelation of a new discovery. The sins and faithlessness of the past bow them low. “Grieve no longer,” cry Nehemiah and Ezra to the distraught people; “do not waste your hearts with sorrow.” Put away tears of distressful memory, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” 1. Listen to God’s comfortable words of reassurance to hearts filled with shame and sorrow. “Grieve not, grieve not”; and it is said over and over again. Such comfortable words can only be spoken to men and women already softened. To most people the trumpet call is rather, “Grieve and lament for your sins; abase yourselves for your follies and self-willed lives.” But here the people’s hearts have been made soft. Encrusting callousness has been broken through; a wave of tender feeling is passing over them. And God is quick to speak peace to them and offer them “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” When men’s hearts are moved and softened, when at last they let all the barricades of feeling give way and the long pent-up sin and the hunger for good and love Divine pour out in the hidden chambers of the soul, then God hastens to them with His generous assurances. “Do not lay waste your hearts with grief. Take comfort to yourselves. Rejoice that now at last the dead and careless years are gone, and that the words of life and love ring in your ears once more.” In every company of people there are some whose shame and grief over past folly and misbehaviour is a sore that runs perpetually, they cannot get over it nor escape its anguish, the dark burden on memory paralyses them. Yet, if only they could get the records on the table of the heart wiped clean they would be strong men of God. Let me echo the generous comforts of Divine compassion. Oh, let the Divine heart bear away these curses that lie heavy on you. Yield to the goodness that has come into your life. Let sheer goodness and love swamp all self-accusations. Then will you enjoy the sacrament of forgiving grace. Your life will be given back to you as a new and clean thing. Many, I feel sure, are going cold and comfortless, wearing out their spirit in secret regrets that are never salved and soothed away with love. The one thing they need most is a bit of gladness in their life, sun’s warmth in enveloping love. 2. The proper Christian note is gladness of heart. What a piece of irony is the laughter and merry-making of the careless, unforgiven man! Underneath the mirth and free play, what a region of unpurged evil deep down within them in their tastes, memories, and habits! How dare men sing and take the delight of life while they are moribund with sin’s leprosy and going forward to face the last reckoning unprepared? But Christians—they have the heritage of Christ, the peace that makes the singing heart. True, you cannot ignore the inevitable hardships and pains of living, which are no respecters of persons; and the Christian is as open as any one to the cut of unkindness, the depression of dark times, and the heartache over others’ wrongdoing. Yet so far as the inevitable will allow, you are entitled and required to accept the good and joy of your days, to delight in all beauty, all the cheer of human love, all stimulating influences and glad hopes. The common delights of human life are all the more yours because you have the diviner reasons for happiness. I am certain that numbers of Christians have never accepted the full gladness of their high calling in Christ. What is the reason? Is it that they think it unbecoming to let their hearts swell with natural joy? Has religious seriousness overpowered their natural good spirits, a tradition of sombre piety suppressing their buoyancy? It is a false conception of the Christian mind. Take joy in, and let radiance suffuse your life. Yes, I know there is a heartless element in the unmitigated delight of some people. There is a heartless mirth which is careless of mankind. And it is possible for us to take the pleasure of our days without regard to the sore problems of the world and the sins of men. Christian music must have its minor as well as its major notes. Yet we are not meant to surrender our hearts much or long to the oppressing burden of human sin and distress. We are to feel it so far that we shall “send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared,” to better the hard lot of such as we can reach and assist Christ to gladden the whole race. That is an essential condition of a joy that is Christian. But, having done this, we are to take the sun. If we took all the world’s misery into our hearts it would crush us, spoiling our personal influence, without doing any good. We must leave the most of it to Almighty God to bear, who alone has the almighty heart. The sun of righteousness is not sinking in the sky, but ascending over the world.

In spite of evil we rejoice by faith, by anticipation of what God in Christ is in process of achieving, because of the entrance of Divine power into the world in Christ. Even our sins which sadden us will be overcome if we remain faithful.

3. There is God's tonic for our hearts in this devout gladness. Happiness is a bracing tonic in its own time and place. I do not forget—it is often enough said—that suffering and sorrow are bracing forces, and they, too, are required to make men sterling and strong in virtue and godliness. Shadow and discipline have their indispensable work to do in forging Christian character. The paler hues of character, the sombre greys of meekness and gentleness, are not the sole Christian colours. Those who suffer prolonged discipline are apt to lose the warmer tints which brighten the Christian faith, and to miss the elasticity of spirit which helps us to rise from our errors and press toward the mark. If we could get some rays of luminous sunshine transmitted into our hearts we should take a new lease of life; new springs would be opened in us for the refreshment of others. (*R. E. Welsh, M.A.*)

*The joy of the Lord the Christian's strength*:—Here observe that the parties to whom these words were originally addressed were in the act of expressing deep sorrow for sin. Nehemiah had no intention to make light of sorrow for sin, nor to represent it as aught else than a necessary ingredient in the composition of genuine repentance. The sin that is not lamented will hardly be forsaken; and though there may be grief which does not issue in amendment, we may doubt whether you will find the amendment which has not been preceded by grief. There is a point beyond which sorrow being carried, will neither constitute nor prove repentance. The grief cannot be such as God demands which hides from man the attributes of God and the arrangements Divinely made for the pardon of sin. A man who sorrows for a sin with a sorrow that seems to say that sin is unpardonable draws for himself and presents to others a picture of God which is altogether unscriptural. In the light of the gospel there is a point at which sorrow for sin becomes itself sinful, and that is the point at which we sorrow "even as those who have no hope"; when we lament as if there were no remedy. Looking at the text with special reference to ourselves, we observe that "the joy of the Lord is our strength"—

I. IN RENDERING EFFECTIVE OUR SORROW FOR SIN. Sorrow alone and by itself can produce no genuine repentance; but "the joy of the Lord"—the assurance of a free and unqualified forgiveness—must be mixed with the sorrow to produce such a result. We understand by repentance, not only the lamenting sin, which is a part, but the forsaking sin, which is a greater part. It is the pleasure of God, the joy of God, that men should forsake their sins and receive salvation at His hands without money and without price. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked shall die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his wicked way and live?" God joys in nothing so much as in welcoming transgressors who trust themselves to the suretyship of His Son. It is right to tremble at the wrath of God. It is right to mourn over your sins. But you must do more than tremble and mourn—you must "eat the fat and drink the sweet." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"—here is the fat. "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—there is the sweet.

II. IN ENCOURAGING US AND HELPING US TO WRESTLE WITH TEMPTATION. The assurance of Divine help is "the joy of the Lord," and in this joy does the true Christian's strength consist. The encouragements of the gospel are encouragements to strive, encouragements to labour—to resist evil, to mortify passions, and to cultivate holiness. They are encouragements to hold on through a course of temptation in the assurance that the Redeemer will furnish help proportionate to the attack. The slave may be kept in awe by the scourge, but the affectionate son is best ruled by a smile; and as soon as the believer has been admitted into the very family and household of God, he will derive from "the joy of the Lord" his best strength for the mastery of evil. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

*The Christian in his spiritual joys*:—Let us contemplate the Christian—I. IN THE DIVINITY OF HIS JOY. II. IN THE UTILITY OF HIS JOY. 1. In the profession of his religion. Joy is the very strength of this. 2. In his concern to recommend religion to others. 3. In the discharge of his duties. 4. In his perils. 5. In his sufferings. 6. In death. (*W. Jay.*)

*Joy a strength*:—Go out of your cares, and your fevers and perils, by going nearer to your Saviour. Catch that glance of His gaze, the very rest of God. The sky is blue above the bleak and barren ground; the heavens smile above the storms. All things seem to die; but God is over all, blessed for ever. His joy will comfort your sorrows. It will conquer your fears. It will neutralise your bereavements. It will negative your death. You are on a vessel, and it seems to you that the storm

is awful; the waves run mountains high; the ship pitches, and shudders, and creaks. "Captain," you say, with pale face and staring eyes, "this is a terrible peril. We shall go down; she never will weather this gale!" "Gale!" says the captain, "I call this a good breeze. If we had a little more of it we should soon make land." Then you turn and look with wonder in the captain's eyes; they are full of smiling satisfaction, and his heroic face is mild and calm. The captain says, "All is well." He is not disturbed. And the captain's calm is your strength. He ought to know. So Jesus knows. (*Hugh S. Carpenter, D.D.*) *The joy of the Lord in the hour of death*:—When I was about fifteen years of age I sat up one night with one of my class-mates, an aged man, who had suffered from spasmodic asthma for a number of years with great resignation and patience; and about the noon of night he called me to his bedside, and with difficulty articulated a few words, which were these: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." He then closed his eyes, gathered up his feet, and slept with his fathers. I have blessed God a hundred times, a thousand times, that when I was so young in the way I saw a Christian die. "In the joy of the Lord" was his "strength"—the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. (*J. Entwistle.*) *Conspicuous Christian joy*:—Let your face shine with love to God and to men. The expression of one's countenance speaks more eloquently sometimes than words. When Murray McCheyne died there was found on his desk an unopened letter, which proved to be from a man in Broughty Ferry, who wrote that he was converted, not by anything Mr. McCheyne had said, but "By your look, sir, as you entered the pulpit." Christ's joy should be in all who love and serve Him. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice" (*Psa. cxlix. 2; Phil. iv. 4.*) (*Dr. Fergus Ferguson.*) *The joy of the Lord our strength*:—George Stephenson and a friend were once looking at a train which was rushing along. The trains in those days were not so common as they are now, and George asked his friend what he thought propelled the train along. His friend answered, "Probably the arm of some stalwart north country driver." "No," said George, "it is the heat and light of the sun which shone millions of years ago, which has been bottled up in the coal all this time, and is now driving that train." In the same way the joy of the Lord, the sun of our spiritual lives, is the power that works in us and gives us our strength. *The joy of the Lord continues in sorrow*:—The joy the Holy Spirit gives lives on in the heart when all earthly sources of gladness have failed. It hides like a rainbow in the bosom of the darkest cloud, and shines out in the gloom. There is a legend of a wondrous golden organ that was in some ancient monastery, which once, when in danger of being stolen, was cast by the monks into a deep river, to be hidden from the robbers; and, in the waters, buried out of sight in the floods, it still played on, pouring out its sweet music. This legend illustrates the heart which has in it the secret of Christian joy. Floods of sorrow may roll over it, but in the depths its song is not silenced. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*) *Religious happiness*:—Mr. Haslam told how "Happy Peter" was in the habit of saying he had been happy for thirty-seven years. One who visited him, and noticed the appearance of his sickly wife and humble home, said, "Have you no clouds?" "Yes," replied Peter, "but if there were no clouds there would be no sweet rain." Dwelling on common mistakes about the gloom of a religious life, Mr. Haslam added: "I have a friend in Norfolk who was converted seventeen years ago. He is a magistrate and chairman of the Local Board. People said when he was converted, 'It's all over with him'; and a cousin of his said to me, about the same time, 'My cousin has become serious.' 'No,' I said, 'he hasn't.' 'Well, well, he has become religious.' 'No, he hasn't. A Hindoo, a Mohammedan, a Jew is religious, and your cousin might be that and be going to hell.' 'Then he must be going to die.' 'No, he isn't, for I've got hold of the same thing, and am stronger far than I was thirty years ago.' There are many people like that; and to one and all of them I give the same answer." *The joy of religion*:—Christ never means us to stay in shadowland; He desires us to substitute His joy for the less permanent joys of earth; and it should be our wish to please Him by apprehending the deep and solemn joyousness which is the very soul of His religion. It is joy to know Christ, to love Him, to serve Him, to follow Him. It is joy to meditate on the Divine grace in redemption; it is joy to know that we are being sanctified; it is joy to share with others our spiritual heritage. It is joy to look forward to that fair season when conflict and struggle shall be over, and the best we have loved on earth will reunite with us in a joy that



shall never be broken or shadowed any more. Compared with this vision, what has the world to offer? No kind of gratification that the world gives ever lasts very long. There is a law of diminishing returns in our earthly joys. Our tastes alter, our wishes change, all pleasures and successes pall in time. There is, as Professor Romanes has said, only one joy which, instead of diminishing, continually increases in intensity and power while life remains: it is the joy of religion. A grand, exalted sentiment it is, but never an unreal or fictitious one. (*R. J. Campbell.*) *Christian joy an inspiration to others*:—There was a young lad who had a great ambition to learn to play on the bugle, and to that end he practised continually. As the practice went on night after night without intermission, his mother, after hearing it as long as she could, got thoroughly disgusted and finally suggested that he should get out of the house and practise in the open-air. The boy took his bugle and went to the top of a hill and there practised the one tune that he could play. When he had thoroughly mastered it, he went one evening to his favourite spot on the top of the hill and there started a grand solo concert. He could not see any one, but unobserved by him, down towards the valley, seated upon a dyke was an old man, with his face buried in his hands. He was very much down-hearted; everything seemed to be going wrong with him. He had lost all his life's savings; he had not heard for a long time from his only son; and his daughter had just gone and left him. Just when down in the deepest depths of despair the sound of the bugle caught his ear as it poured forth the strains of "The march of the Cameron men," the one tune the boy could play. Somehow it seemed to put new life into the old man. His spirits rose, and rising from his seat he started homewards with new vigour. Everything seemed to be brighter. Oh! we should be cheerful Christians. How much good Christian happiness does not only to ourselves, but to others! How it cheers them on in life's dark and steep places! (*J. Robertson.*) *Increasing joy*:—I remember, when an undergraduate at Oxford, being invited to breakfast by one of the city clergy. The good man showed us three photographs of himself, taken at different times, remarking, "Don't I look happier as I grow older?" It shall be even so with every one who drinks at the fountain of all joy, and thirsts no more. (*F. Harper, M.A.*) *Joy in Jewish worship*:—It is remarkable how largely feelings of joy characterised Jewish worship. The abjectness and terror that were often such marked features of idolatrous worship were altogether absent. Heathen worship was never joyous except when it took the form of a licentious orgie. It is true the Jewish festival was also a sacrificial feast, but the feast was only a form of public entertainment for a multitude who had been brought from their homes and needed some kind of hospitality. These feasts were not occasions for riotous excess. The sternest of the prophets utter no reproach of this kind. Even the social character of the festivals is scarcely more than indicated in the psalms that were composed for them. They are gladsome very, but with a religious joy, a joy of faith.

Vers. 15-18. **So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths.**—*The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles*:—I. WE ARE REMINDED HERE THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS BURIED TRUTH. True reformations and revivals of religion have always consisted in people's minds being directed to some portion of truth which, though contained in the Word of God, has for a time been lost sight of. II. WE OBSERVE THAT IN THIS INSTANCE THE JEWS DARED TO FOLLOW GOD, APART FROM AND IN SPITE OF THE TRADITIONS OF A THOUSAND YEARS. It is not a valid argument against a view of truth that it has found no acceptance for long, or even that the testimony of successive generations is against it. III. WEAK AND DESPISED INSTRUMENTALITY IS OFTEN USED OF GOD TO RECOVER LOST TRUTH. "It was reserved for the feeble remnant that returned from the Babylonish captivity to do what had not been done even in the bright days of Solomon." The Waldenses bearing dogged testimony against Rome for centuries. The Gospellers of Wycliffe's and other days in our own land. George Fox and his noble band of "Friends." IV. IT WAS AFTER BITTER CHASTISEMENT OF CAPTIVITY THAT THE NATION WAS THUS MADE "WILLING AND OBEDIENT." (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Religion in booths*:—It is a grand festival. It is the Feast of Tabernacles. The people celebrate the deliverance of their fathers from desert travel, where they lived in tents. And it is also typical of our march to heaven—pilgrims in a temporary booth on the way to Canaan. So that I say to you in a figurative sense what was said to the Jews in a literal sense, "Go forth into the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make

booths." I. THE "OLIVE" BRANCH IS ALWAYS USED AS A SIGN OF PEACE. The olive-tree grows in warm climates to the height of about twenty-five feet, has an upright stem, and many out-shooting branches which can easily be stripped off. If a twig of this tree, in time of war, is handed from one general to another, it means the unsaddling of cavalry horses and the hanging up of the war knapsacks. After hostilities have ceased, these branches are placed over doorways, and they are built into triumphal arches, and they are waved in processions. They spell out in verdurous letters that heaven-born word of "Peace!" Now in this gospel arbour which God sends us to build we must have two of these olive branches. 1. Peace with God. 2. Peace with each other. II. My text, in the next place, suggests that in this arbour for our soul, on the way toward glory, WE OUGHT TO HAVE A GOOD MANY "PINE BRANCHES." Now, pine is healthful, aromatic, and an evergreen. It has often been the case that invalids have been sent into the regions where the pine grows, and they have come back thoroughly well. It is a frequent prescription, on the part of physicians, to say, "Go for a few weeks amid the pines, and you will be better." Now we want in this gospel arbour pine branches. We want something that means health, aroma, and evergreen. This is a very healthy religion. I have known an old Christian, with no capital of physical health, and carrying about him all the respectable diseases that one can carry, and yet kept alive by nothing at all but his religion. But this gospel is evergreen. What does the pine forest care for the snow on its brow? It merely considers it a crown of glory. You cannot freeze out the pine forest, and this grace of God is just as good in the winter of trouble as it is in the summer of prosperity. It is the religion you want—not dependent upon weather or upon change. III. My text suggests still further that this arbour of Christian grace ought to have in it A GOOD MANY "PALM BRANCHES." You know that it is a favourite tree at the East. The ancients used to make it into three hundred and sixty uses. The fruit is conserved. The sap becomes a beverage. The stones are ground up as food for camels. The base of the leaves is twisted into rope. Baskets and mats are made out of it, and from the root to the tip-top of the palm it is all usefulness. It grows eighty-five feet in height, is columnar, its fringed leaves sometimes four or five yards long, and the ancients used to carry it in processions as a symbol of victory. Oh, for more palm branches in our gospel arbour! Usefulness and victory! Head, heart, tongue, pen, money, social position—all employed for God. Counsel is often given on worldly matters—about investments—that you must not put all the eggs in one basket; but in this matter of religion I wish that we might give all to God, and get in ourselves. "Oh," says some man, "my business is to sell silks and calicoes." Then sell silks and calicoes for the glory of God. Says another man, "My business is to edit a newspaper." Then edit a newspaper for the glory of God. Anything that a man cannot do for the glory of God he has no right to do. The vast majority of professed Christians in this day do not amount to anything. You have to shovel them off the track before the chariot of God's grace can advance. What we want in the Church now is not weeping willows, sighing and weeping by the water-courses, admiring their long fringes in the glass of the stream; not hickories full of knots; not wild cherry, dropping bitter fruits; but palm-trees, adapted to three hundred and sixty purposes—root, trunk, branch, leaf, producing something for God and man and angels. IV. My text demands that in the making of this gospel arbour we shall get "BRANCHES OF THICK TREES." You know that a booth or arbour is of little worth unless there be stout poles at the corners, or the wind will upset the booth; and you will be worse off than without shelter unless you have strong branches of thick trees. A gospel that is all mellowness and sweetness will have no strength to withstand the blast of temptation and trial and trouble. We want a brawny Christianity. We want a gospel with warnings as well as with invitations. While olive branches are good in their places, and the palm branches, and the myrtle branches, we want the stout branches of thick trees. The tempest of temptation will come down after a while; the hurricane of death will blow; and alas! for that man who has not his soul sheltered under the stout branches of the thick trees. (*T. De Witt Talmage*.) **Also day by day, . . . he read in the book of the law of God.**—*Daily Bible-reading*.—I. WHY? 1. Because of its infinite preciousness and value. 2. Because of its tendency to build up the inner and spiritual life. 3. Because all great revivals of the power of religion have been associated with high reverence for the written Word. 4. Because by this Word you must be judged. II. HOW? 1. With reverence. 2. With special affection and prayerfulness. 3. Take time. 4. Keep the end in view. (*S. Thodey*.)

## CHAPTER IX.

**VERS. 4-38. And cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God.—The suppliant:**—The true test of the good received in religious ordinances is their sanctifying effect on the life. Many a tree is gay with blossoms in spring that yields no fruit in autumn; and so many gospel hearers, who appear full of promise in the time of ordinances, show no decided piety in their subsequent conduct.

**I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PRAYER.** It is often easier to act for God than to pray to Him—to work in His vineyard than to wait at His throne. Activity may afford occasion for excitement, and scope for display, and opportunity to attract the admiration of others; while prayer calls to the exercise of faith, to cultivate humility, to live under the eye of God. Spiritual work, indeed, might be expected to draw the servant near to the Master for communion and help. It soon discovers human weakness and want, and dependence on almighty power for strength, for supply, for all blessing. But, instead of proving an incentive to prayer, it is often made a substitute for it; and the labourer feels as if too busy in service to find time for unceasing supplication. And thus the people of Judah here set a high value on prayer. They have laboured to restore the walls and temple of Jerusalem, and success has crowned their efforts. But activity in these sacred undertakings, so far from cooling their devotion, inspires them to growing fervour in prayers and supplications to God. In reference to the circumstances of this prayer, it may be remarked—1. It was offered immediately after the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month this festival commenced, on the twenty-second it was closed; and “on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled” for this prayer. The time of meeting is proof of the ardour of their devotion. Formal worshippers are soon wearied in spiritual exercises, and ask, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” It is a frame of devotion much to be desired. Protracted meetings like this, for religious exercises, may be expedient only on extraordinary occasions, but habitual love of communion with God is both the strength and joy of a holy heart. It is not one intense momentary influence, flowing from the summer sun, that covers fields with corn and trees with fruit, but the daily glow of his genial beams; so it is not a single hour in the presence of Christ, receiving one full manifestation of Him in the soul, that saves it from the fears of guilt, and beautifies it with His image, but it is an abiding in Him, a “looking unto Jesus,” a “coming unto God by Him.” “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” Further, this prayer was offered in a season of solemn fasting (ver. 1). In the pilgrimage to the better land, the valley of humiliation lies near the delectable mountains; and the goodly prospects of Emmanuel’s land obtained from the one prepare for walking in safety through the rugged paths of the other, while the same life of faith is maintained in both. Moreover, the prayer was offered amid earnest desires after new obedience. “The seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers” (ver. 2). This sincere desire to put away sin, and to obey the Divine Word, is essential to effectual prayer. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

**II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PRAYER.** 1. An adoration of the Divine majesty (ver. 6). 2. A review of past mercies. The mercies celebrated are—God’s choice of Israel; His deliverance of them from bondage; His guidance of them through the wilderness; and His bestowal on them of spiritual privileges. 3. We notice in the prayer confession of numerous sins (vers. 16-35). The light of Divine mercy here shows the dark cloud of their iniquities. They confess their obstinate disobedience to God (vers. 16-19). They hardened their necks, and hearkened not to the Lord’s commandments. They confess their slighting of almighty goodness (vers. 20-26). They confess their refusal of Divine warning (vers. 27-30). They confess they did not glorify God in His gifts (vers. 34, 35). 4. We observe in the prayer a plea for sovereign mercy (vers. 32, 36, 37).

**III. THE LESSONS OF THE PRAYER.** 1. The duty of prayer in public distress. The people of Judah were here in public distress, and they offer united prayer to God for His help in their time of need. 2. The blessing of prayer to a community. This prayer for Jerusalem was succeeded by times of prosperity in the holy city, and all it represented. 3. The power of prayer for the revival of the Church. (*W. Ritchie.*) Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone; Thou hast made heaven.—*The Te Deum:*—In this we have perhaps the fullest setting

forth of the glorious and manifold character of Jehovah which is to be found in any single passage of Scripture, and in it also is brought out in striking contrast the sinful conduct of His chosen people. The Almighty is here recognised as—1. The God of creation. 2. The God of the covenant. 3. The God of redemption (vers. 9–11). 4. The Leader of His people. 5. The Lawgiver. 6. The Sustainer of His people. 7. The God of compassion and the hearer of prayer. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The purpose of the rehearsal of national shortcomings:—*I. To ENCOURAGE THEM TO EXPECT FURTHER HELP FROM GOD. II. To CONSTRAIN THEM TO ENTER INTO CLOSER COVENANT WITH HIM. (*Ibid.*) Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram.—*God's choice:—*My strength during all my life has been precisely this, that I have made no choice. During the last thirty-six years God has twelve times changed my home and fifteen times changed my work. I have scarcely ever done what I myself would have chosen. (*Dean Farrar.*) And hast performed Thy words.—*The certainty of God's promises:—*All means are in His hands. A father may promise his son that he will make something of him when he grows up, but his business declines, he is made bankrupt. But the great Father will never become bankrupt, never fail; His power is infinite. Many a sea captain has had, during a storm, to tell the passengers, "I have done all I can; there is now nothing but the boat." God has never to tell His people that. (*Thomas Jones.*) *The Divine promise sure:—*Corporations may be disfranchised and charters revoked. Even mountains may be removed, and stars drop from their spheres; but a tenure founded on the Divine promise is inalienably secure, and lasting as eternity itself. (*Hervey.*)

Ver. 9. And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt.—*The path of duty the path of trial:—*I. THAT THE PATH OF HUMAN DUTY HERE RUNS THROUGH GREAT TRIALS. 1. Sometimes it involves the sacrifice of endeared friendship. Lot had to separate from Abraham, Barnabas from Paul, Paul from Mark. 2. Sometimes it involves the sacrifice of worldly prospects. 3. Sometimes it involves the endangering of life itself. 4. Sometimes it involves an outrage on our tender sentiments. Abraham offering up Isaac. II. THAT GREAT TRIALS THROUGH WHICH THE PATH OF DUTY HERE RUNS SERVE TO TEST THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PILGRIMS. 1. It reveals the bad principles of the heart. The Jews at the Red Sea revealed their ingratitude, meanness, apostasy, cowardice. 2. It reveals the good principles of the heart. III. THAT UNBOUNDED FAITH IN GOD IS ESSENTIAL TO CARRY US SAFELY THROUGH THE PATH OF DUTY WITH ALL ITS GREAT TRIALS. (*Homilist.*) *God our helper:—*The following is an extract from Stanley to Sir William Mackinnon: "You, who throughout your long and varied life have steadfastly believed in the Christian's God, and before men have professed your devout thankfulness for many mercies vouchsafed to you, will better understand than many others the feelings which animate me when I find myself back again in civilisation, uninjured in life or health, after passing through so many stormy and distressful periods. Constrained at the darkest hour to humbly confess that without God's help I was helpless, I vowed a vow in the forest solitudes that I would confess His aid before men. A silence as of death was round about me; it was midnight; I was weakened by illness, prostrated with fatigue, and worn with anxiety for my white and black companions whose fate was a mystery. In this physical and mental distress I besought God to give me back my people. Nine hours later we were exulting with a rapturous joy. In full view of all was the crimson flag with the crescent, and beneath its waving folds was the long-lost rear column." Mungo Park was comforted by the Lord by a tiny morsel of moss, and Livingstone was preserved by Him when most people gave him up for lost: and now, from the awful gloom of endless forests, Stanley cries unto the living God, and lives to bear witness to the faithfulness of the prayer-hearing Jehovah.

Ver. 12. Moreover Thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar.—*The pillars of cloud and fire:—*The people who for forty years followed that fire-cloud have left footprints in the sands of time which serve us as an alphabet of life. The march of the Israelites is an allegory of the life of man. Like a providence palpable to the very eyes of man, the fire-cloud indexed that will of God which it is the longing of true hearts in every age to fulfil. This fire-cloud suggests—I. THAT MAN'S LIFE ON EARTH IS A DIVINELY-CONDUCTED DISCIPLINE. The Israelites emerged from Egypt a huge bee-swarm of humanity making for another hive. From the dark superstitions of life and the coarse immoralities of antiquity they went into the wilderness

to learn the rudiments of life. Outside the sphere of man's natural resources Israel had to learn faith in the supernatural environment of man. Their wilderness journey was the drill of a nation destined to be the vehicle of Divine revelation to a world. Our life on earth is mainly a prolonged and various discipline, and its significance lies in the finally resulting manhood. The main matter is not how long it takes us to cross this strip of earth, or how much we have while we travel, but what the journey makes of us as regards the naked, moral character of us all. Very suggestive, if you will ponder, is Israel's inability to comprehend the meaning of a great deal of their march. Why they should lie still, and why move, were not always plain. We cannot readily comprehend the zigzag ways of life. Looking at our things, and not at our soul, we sometimes seem to be moving in a very resultless way—marking time rather than marching. Said a good and active man whose work is his life, "By this sickness I have lost a month." How so? Through every day of his life henceforth he will carry a reverent thoughtfulness of God, and in all his character there will be the tinge of a mellow tenderness, the results of that "lost month's" meditative realisations. Was the month lost, then? God leads and leaves us not where we would like to be, but where we have need to be. There is wisdom in every stage of life's march and countermarch. Life's roughest mile is "ordered of the Lord," and its darkest place is illuminated by the pillar of fire. It is wisdom to store the lessons of experience. Child-like, we forget the back lessons. The teachings of sorrow's school are forgotten in the playground of our joyfulness. II. THAT THROUGHOUT OUR LIFE-JOURNEY WE FOLLOW A GOD WE NEVER SEE. That fire-bordered cloud was not God. The cathedral window ablaze with its mingled glories hides the sun, while it is at the same time a many-coloured witness of his living radiance. Life leaves room for doubt, and gives worldliness its chance. Herein lies much of our probation. Those tokens of God which are evidence of things not seen are frequently familiarised into comparative powerlessness over the soul. 1. Some of the Israelites sinned under the very shadow of the pillar of fire. The sentiments of reverence and wonder are in danger of exile from the mind. 2. Nature, with its transformations of the seasons. 3. The Sabbath. 4. The house of God. 5. Prayer; our prayers may become like the winding of our watches—acts we do, scarcely sure whether they are done or not. We often see most of God in the night of experience. III. THAT PROTECTION WHICH GOD'S PRESENCE INSURES TO THOSE THAT FOLLOW HIM. Over the sleeping camp the cloud lay like a golden warrior-shield. Yet how slowly was Israel trained to courage! Every new danger created a coward hubbub in the camp. Their foes could do them no harm; but their imaginations were terrible to them as an army with banners. Their minds were made nervous by their own delusions. The Parisians have exhibited what they call a "Panorama of the War." Climbing what appears to be a kind of tower, you seem to see the country around Paris alive with the grim activities of war. Nearest the spectator are placed real cannon and the like, and these shade off into painted forms beyond so perfectly as to produce an illusion like that of the painter who attracted the quick-eyed birds to his painted grapes. The illusion is wonderful, and you can all but smell the gunpowder. But there is no movement—the soldiers are still as stones, the bursting shell remains in the act of explosion, and the flame-flash continues from the cannon-mouth. That breaks the spell. It is but picture, after all. Thus we go at times up the tower of apprehension, and see besieging armies of trouble. Near to us are some real objects of fear, and from them we go on to paint a long perspective of morbid fancies, until life seems ringed round with innumerable foes. After awhile we find it is mostly picture—"the very painting of our fear." Let the chief anxiety of all be to follow the great Leader of life's pilgrimage. (*Samuel Gregory.*)

Ver. 13. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven.—*Go by the directions* :—I saw a picture once which has stuck to my memory for years and years. It was a picture of a dark, wild, stormy night, and a traveller was standing up in the stirrups of his horse at a parting of the way, trying to read the directions on the finger-post. How eagerly he is looking! I can see him yet—holding the lighted match carefully in his hands lest the wind should blow it out before he had read the directions! It was a good thing for him that there were directions, and it is a good thing we have them too. Where are our directions? They are—the Bible. That is God's Word to us, telling us which road to take when we come to the parting of the way. Go by the directions. Do what God says, and you will never go wrong. (*J. Reid Howatt.*)

Ver. 16. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks.—*Hardened by sin*:—Dr. Manton says: “As a delicate constitution is more capable of pain than a robust and stubborn one, and the tender flesh of a child will sooner feel the lash than the thick skin of a slave, so the children of God, having a more serious apprehension of things, and a more tender spirit, soonest feel the burden of their Father’s displeasure, and do more lay it to heart than careless and stupid spirits, who laugh at their cross, or drink away their sorrows.” Tenderness of heart is thus an attribute of the child of God, and a very precious attribute, too. Hard-hearted men are not men after God’s own heart. In proportion as feeling declines, life has declined. Spiritual men are sensitive men. Ossification of the heart is a fatal disease. Declensions in grace are a searing of the soul. When water is warmed by the summer sun, the smallest stone sinks into it; when it is frozen in the northern blast, a huge block will be borne up upon the surface of it, and will never penetrate to its depths. So, when the soul grows cold with distance from God, it will sustain an enormous weight of sin; but when grace returns, and the soul is in a right spiritual condition, an ounce of sin will be more than the soul can bear. Oh, for more of this holy sensitiveness! (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 17. But Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful.—*Divine forgiveness*:—I. WHAT IS NECESSARY TO RENDER THE SUBJECT INTERESTING. 1. A conviction of guilt. 2. An apprehension of our danger as transgressors. 3. A discovery of the privileges of a pardoned state. II. THE PROOFS WHICH ESTABLISH THE TRUTH OF THE DOCTRINE. 1. The provision He has made for the exercise of pardon. 2. The promptitude with which He pardons on our return. 3. His earnestness to excite us to seek after the blessing. 4. The character of those who have received pardon. 5. The number of those who obtain forgiveness. III. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS SUBJECT MAY BE ABUSED. 1. When it leads us to deny any disposition in God to punish. 2. When it encourages us to hope for pardon in ways not warranted by the Word of God. (1) Without a reference to the work of Christ. (2) Without repentance. (3) By delaying an application for it to the close of life. (4) By expecting to find this pardon in another world if we fail to obtain it in this. IV. IMPROVEMENT. 1. It should yield encouragement to the broken-hearted. 2. It should afford consolation to those who have believed through grace. 3. The subject demands our admiration and praise. 4. It also calls upon us not only to admire, but to imitate (Eph. iv. 31, 32, v. 1). (W. Jay.) *Pardon of sin*:—I. THE CERTAINTY OF THIS READINESS TO PARDON. This may be discerned—1. In the plans which He devised for its bestowment consistent with His honour as a sovereign, and compatible with His character as a just and moral Ruler. 2. In the repeated assurances and urgent entreaties with regard to the facts which are furnished in His Word. 3. In the efforts He makes to effect it, and so frequently recorded in the pages of history. II. THE CONDITIONS OF THIS READINESS TO PARDON. 1. A vivid apprehension of personal guilt. 2. A full consciousness of personal danger. 3. Repentance and faith. (W. S. Edwards.) *The pardon of sin*:—No attribute of the Deity is so calculated to afford encouragement and relief to the distressed and penitent sinner as that of His mercy. His justice and holiness make him tremble. The Divine mercy is the only fountain from which all our hope is derived. If God were unmerciful—if He were unable and unwilling to forgive, how awful and desperate would be our condition! I. SOME OF THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVINE PARDON. Respecting this blessing, we observe that it is—1. Gratuitous in its bestowment. Had it not been perfectly free, it would be for ever beyond our reach. As fallen man is altogether destitute of all inherent and acquired righteousness, he can never obtain it on the ground of his own merit. Conscious of his utter unworthiness, and that he was destitute of all merit, the psalmist cried, “For Thy name’s sake, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.” In the forgiveness of sin, God acts like the creditor towards his two debtors; one owes him five hundred pence, and the other fifty; and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly (freely) forgave them both. It is true that there are certain duties which must be discharged by the sinner; he must repent and believe; but these acts can never merit forgiveness. The pardon of the penitent flows from the free and sovereign grace of God, and is conveyed through the channel of the Redeemer’s atoning blood. 2. Unlimited in its extent. The pardoning mercy of God is not confined to any degrees of guilt or amount of transgression. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases.” The pardoning mercy of God extends to the most flagrant

transgressions, and transcends all human conception. There is no sin so heinous which God cannot forgive, and no guilt of so deep a hue which He cannot remove.

3. **Permanent in its enjoyment.** II. **PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE DECLARATION.** God's readiness to pardon is manifest—1. From the provisions made for this purpose. Before sinners could be pardoned and saved, there were certain barriers that must be removed. As God was the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of the world—the Protector of righteousness and goodness—it became Him not to pardon the guilty without the punishing of sin, and that in such a manner as would satisfy His injured justice, and vindicate the honour of His despised law, and at the same time declare His greatest hatred to sin. Had there been no Mediator, the justice and holiness of God would have stood as everlasting obstructions to the exercise of pardoning mercy. 2. The express declarations of Scripture. Listen to the exulting and triumphant language of the prophet Micah: "Who is a God like unto our God, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." See how earnestly does God exhort the careless and impenitent, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil way, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, O Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?" Observe the grand commission of the apostles, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." 3. Recorded facts. This glorious truth is not only declared by the voice of inspiration, but also by the loud and impressive testimony of experience. What multitudes have already obtained forgiveness! The Scriptures abound with the most astonishing and striking instances of this delightful truth. But if we look into the New Testament, we shall see this truth shining forth with greater lustre still. The first instance that strikes us here is Peter. How great and dreadful were his sins! He denied his Divine Lord and Master, and that with oaths and curses; and yet repenting, he was forgiven. In the same list we behold Mary Magdalene, "out of whom seven unclean spirits were cast." (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) **Pardoning mercy:**—These words—I. **PREFER AN IMPORTANT CHARGE.** "And refused to obey," &c. Though this charge was primarily brought against the Jews, it is substantially applicable to all impenitent sinners. Here is—1. A charge of obstinate disobedience. We are guilty of the same charge. We are under infinite obligations to the Divine Being. He is the Creator, Sovereign, Benefactor, Redeemer, Saviour, and Judge of mankind. 2. A charge of criminal forgetfulness. "Neither were mindful of Thy wonders" (Psa. lxxviii. 10-17, cvi. 21-26). God has crowned each of us with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and wrought wonders in our creation, preservation, redemption, and salvation. We have too often unfaithfully forgotten His innumerable benefits, and ungratefully murmured against His kind dispensations (Isa. i. 2, 3). 3. A charge of hardened impenitence. "But hardened their necks," &c. This is an awful state (Prov. xxix. 1; Rom. ii. 5, 6; Heb. iii. 15).

II. **CONTAIN A GRACIOUS DECLARATION.** "Thou art a God ready to pardon." This is manifest from—1. The perfections of the Divine character. 2. The glorious scheme of human redemption (Isa. liiii. 5, 6; Rom. iii. 25, 26; 2 Cor. v. 18, 21). 3. The testimonies and promises of Scripture. III. **SUGGEST APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION.** (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) **A God ready to pardon:**—I. **THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL SINGULARLY ILLUSTRATES THE READINESS OF GOD TO PARDON.** II. **IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THE LORD AT ALL TIMES IS A GOD READY TO PARDON.** 1. It is true of Him by nature. Mercy is an essential attribute of God. 2. He Himself removed the impediment which lay in the way of forgiveness. 3. He sends His message of love to sinners while they are yet in their sins. 4. He makes no hard conditions with sinners. 5. What He demands of man by the gospel He also works in Him by His Spirit. 6. He accepts even the very lowest grade of the necessary graces. Repentance, &c. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **A pardoning God:**—I. **THE NATURE OF THIS PARDON.** It is—1. Free. Pardon must be so. It is no objection to say that Christ has purchased it. True, He has purchased, but it is free in its bestowment on us, because we could not merit it, nor claim it as a right. 2. Complete. Do not mean that it refers to the future. Some say when once pardoned all done. Not so Scriptures. Complete because it refers to all; complete because it is full. 3. Present. Some say not until death. Not so Scriptures. 4. Righteous. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren," &c. Righteous because bestowed on righteous principles; because of Christ's atonement. 5. Discriminating. If Christ died for all, how is it that all are not pardoned? Remedy

only available for those who apply for it. Hence—II. THE CONDITIONS. Scriptures teach us duty of forgiveness if offender repents and asks. So with God our confession must be—1. Frank. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." 2. Penitent. "The sacrifice," &c. Many frankly confess, but not penitently. True penitence seen in the publican. 3. Believing. III. EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS READY TO PARDON. 1. From scheme of redemption. Love in scheme, end of scheme; and if pardon not dispensed, end defeated. 2. From His relation to the Saviour. As Father He could not furnish a greater guarantee. 3. From means He employs to bring to Him. Sends Spirit—Providence—Word. Characterised by love. 4. From receptions others have met with. Manasseh—dying thief—Saul. Shown in Prodigal. Lessons: 1. Subject does not imply God will not punish. 2. Subject shows only way of deliverance, and that way to be taken now. (*E. R. Derry.*) *The joy of pardon*:—A man named John Welsh lay in prison in Chicago under sentence of death. His friends tried to get his sentence commuted to imprisonment for life. The day before that fixed for the execution arrived without any favourable reply being received. The prisoner sat in his cell listening and longing earnestly for a respite. Presently he heard the rumbling of the wheels of a car. It brought the materials for his scaffold, and soon he heard the strokes of the hammers, and pictured himself hanging on the scaffold which he could hear them raising. The sound almost drove him frantic, and he sent for the governor, and begged that he might be taken away anywhere from that dreadful noise. He was taken to a distant cell, and there he sat on the edge of his bed, haunted with gloomy thoughts, all hope gone. He was startled from his reverie by a hurried step along the corridor. The key was thrust into the lock, and one of the officers of the prison stood before him. He held a paper in his hand signed by the Governor of the State of Illinois. It was a commutation of his sentence. . . . How the truth burst on his mind! When the paper was handed to him he could not read it for tears; but it was a paper bringing him his life, and he hugged it, and clasped it, and kissed it. (*H. W. Taylor.*)

Vers. 26-29. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against Thee.—*Provocations and punishment*:—I. HOW JUSTLY WE MAY BE CHARGED, AS THE JEWS ARE IN THE TEXT, WITH HAVING WROUGHT GREAT PROVOCATIONS. This will be manifest if we consider—1. To what a prodigious height all kinds of iniquity are raised amongst us. Atheism, infidelity, blasphemy, intemperance, impurity, commercial immorality. 2. What engagements we are under to abstain from all transgressions of the laws of God. 3. That our sins have been committed against the most prevailing attempts of the Spirit of God to restrain and reclaim us from them. 4. That our sins have been committed against many and great mercies. 5. That our sins have been committed against the discipline of God's rod and those many judgments He hath sent to teach us righteousness. II. THAT WE HAVE GREAT REASON TO FEAR THAT OUR GREAT PROVOCATIONS MAY BE PUNISHED BY GOD AS THOSE OF THE JEWS WERE. Conclusion: What is the most effectual means to prevent the punishment our great provocations threaten us with? (*Lilly Butler.*) *And testifiedst against them, that Thou mightest bring them again unto Thy law.*—*God's laws*:—Some years ago I was enjoying a ramble on the Portsdown Hills, a favourite resort of the Portsmouth people, and commanding a delightful view of the sea. They are all open to the public, except a few places which are carefully fenced off. Are these the most luxurious spots, where the grass is softest and the moss most green? No, indeed, these are the broken and precipitous parts, where serious accidents might occur. God's laws are just like these fences. God's love has placed fences there to keep us from hurting ourselves. (*F. S. Webster.*) *Danger signals*:—In travelling along our great railroads we pass many signal stations. In connection with each of these there is a man appointed, one of whose duties it is to see that the way is clear. If a bridge should be broken, or any obstruction is on the road, he is expected to ring a bell, wave a flag, or make a signal of some kind, so that the driver of any train coming along the road may know in time to stop his train before any harm is done. And the flag the man waves, or the signal he puts out, is the warning given to approaching trains to save them from injury. In the journey that we are pursuing through this life we are sure to meet with many dangers. The Bible is the guide-book which God has given us to use on the journey. And the warnings found in this book are the signals to tell us of the dangers that lie along our path in order that



we may avoid them. We cannot be safe in our journey through the world unless we are careful to mind these warnings.

Ver. 33. **Howbeit, Thou art just in all that is brought upon us.**—*The miseries of life; their origin and remedy*:—The miseries of life have been a fruitful theme to writers in all ages. Some have endeavoured to engage us in their contemplation for a wise and good end. Others have taken occasion from them to dispute the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God. Such notions, thus derogatory from the providence of God, tend, even in the best of men, if not timely eradicated, to weaken those impressions of reverence and gratitude which are necessary to add warmth to devotion and vigour to virtue. The teaching of Scripture is, that God is not to be charged with disregard of His creation. He created man for happiness, and this happiness was forfeited by a breach of the conditions to which it was annexed. Physical and moral evil entered the world together. To avoid misery we must avoid sin. Consider—I. **HOW FEW OF THE EVILS OF LIFE CAN JUSTLY BE ASCRIBED TO GOD.** We must carefully distinguish that which is actually appointed by Him from that which is only permitted, or that which is the consequence of something done to ourselves, and could not be prevented but by the interruption of those general laws which we term the course of nature or the established order of the universe. If we examine all the afflictions of mind, body, and estate by this rule, we shall find God not otherwise accessory to them than as He works no miracles to prevent them, as He suffers men to be masters of themselves, and restrains them only by coercions applied to their reason. 1. In making an estimate of the miseries that arise from the disorders of the body, we must consider how many diseases proceed from our own laziness, intemperance, or negligence; how many the vices or follies of our ancestors have transmitted to us. 2. Nor are the disquietudes of the mind less frequently excited by ourselves. (1) Pride is the general source of our infelicity. (2) Immoderate desires. (3) Undue solicitude about future events which gives rise to harassing fears and anxieties. 3. Poverty is not always the effect of wickedness—it may often be the effect of virtue; but it is not certain that poverty is an evil. II. **HOW FAR A GENERAL PIETY MIGHT EXEMPT ANY COMMUNITY FROM THOSE EVILS.** A community, in which virtue should generally prevail, of which every member should fear God with his whole heart and love his neighbour as himself, where every man should labour to make himself “perfect even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect,” would find these evils practically non-existent. III. **HOW MUCH IN THE PRESENT CORRUPT STATE OF THE WORLD PARTICULAR MEN MAY, BY THE PRACTICE OF THE DUTIES OF RELIGION, PROMOTE THEIR OWN HAPPINESS.** (*John Taylor, LL.D.*) *God has done right*:—I. **RIGHT AS TO WISDOM.** It is of great importance for us to know, and to feel, especially when tossed on the billows and enveloped in the darkness of some heavy affliction, that God is infinitely wise, and that His wisdom can and will conduct all the circumstances of His people to a happy issue. This is absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of anything like calm security amidst such scenes. It is so in the common affairs of life. The soldier trusts in the wisdom of his general, and is calm in battle. The sailor trusts in the wisdom of his captain, and is calm in the tempest. The traveller has confidence in the wisdom of his guide, and pursues his course in peaceful security. And so, if believers would enjoy a calm and cheerful assurance in fighting the battles, braving the storms, and pursuing the pilgrimage of their present probation, they must have a settled and solid repose in the infallible wisdom of God. And they must seek this, not so much from the deductions of human reason, or the better lights of their own experience in relation to providence, as from the operations of faith in the Scripture revelations of God and His government. II. **RIGHT AS TO JUSTICE.** Amidst the afflictions of life, not only must we recognise and trust the infinite wisdom of God, but we must endeavour, by the lights of revelation and experience, to reconcile the justice of God with the afflictions of the righteous, and thus justify the ways of God to men. Men who only look on the surface of things and events, and judge from that, often charge God with being rigorous, unjust, and unrighteous in the operations and issues of His providence. All temporal sufferings are the righteous consequence of original or actual sin, and are frequently merited by the best of men. None can affirm that they are free from human frailties and sinful defects, and therefore they have no right to complain of the punishment of their sins. Our afflictions, generally, fall far below the guilt which we have contracted. The time is hastening on when the wisdom and justice of providence will be convincingly evident to all. III. **RIGHT**

AS TO GOODNESS. "Thou art good, and doest good." Such was the testimony of the psalmist; such is the uniform testimony of revelation; and such, notwithstanding its mysteries, is the acknowledgment of universal providence. And it is very necessary for us to be convinced of this, and live under the perpetual and growing influence of it, amidst the tribulations of life. Else how can we be calm, secure, and happy? 1. Strive to understand God in your afflictions. From the absence of this intelligent view of God's providence in affliction the greatest mischief often springs. Ignorance here, as everywhere else, is ever attended by distrust, fear, dissatisfaction, and wasting anxiety; while, on the other hand, intelligence produces confidence, serenity, contentedness, and a delightful peace and repose. 2. Learn to avoid a spirit of envy and murmuring. If God acts wisely, justly, and mercifully, in often permitting the wicked to live and prosper and the righteous to fall into great afflictions, then resign yourselves to His will, be satisfied with the dispensations of His hand, envy not the condition of others, neither murmur at your own. Consider well the folly, vanity, and misery of sinful prosperity, which rather needs your pity than your envy. 3. Learn to be firm and faithful in the service and cause of God. Afflictions have driven many from Christ and His kingdom. (*W. Gregory.*) *God's proceedings in His justice sometimes inexplicable*:—Take a straight stick and put it into the water, then it will seem crooked; why? because we look upon it through two mediums, air and water. There lies the *deceptio visus*; thence it is that we cannot discern aright. Thus the proceedings of God in His justice, which in themselves are straight, without the least obliquity, seem unto us crooked. That wicked men should prosper, and good men be afflicted; that the Israelites should make the bricks, and the Egyptians dwell in the houses; that servants should ride on horseback, and princes go on foot—these are things that make the best Christians stagger in their judgments. And why? but because they look upon God's proceedings through a double medium of flesh and spirit, that so all things seem to go cross, though indeed they go right enough. And hence it is that God's proceedings in His justice are not so well discerned, the eyes of man alone being not competent judges thereof. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 38. And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it.—*Covenanting with God*:—It may be asked, Are Christians of the present day expected to enter into such covenants? To this we reply both yes and no. Yes, if regard be had to true heart-consecration to the Lord. No, if it be a mere matter of form, a source of bondage or a minister to spiritual pride. If we mistake not, some of the Churches of New England have a form of covenant which each new adherent is required to sign, and we know that the esteemed President Edwards advocated the making of written covenants between individual Christians and the Almighty. In reference to this each must exercise his own judgment as before God. (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

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## CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1-39. Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah.—*Covenanting with God*:—**I. THE PARTIES ENTERING THE COVENANT.** 1. Nehemiah the governor. This is true greatness in the sight of God, to be foremost in consecration to the service of religion, and to stand among His people in trying times. 2. The priests. It is remarkable that the name of Eliashib, the high-priest does not appear in this list. It is honourable to the rest of the priests that notwithstanding this defection of their chief, so many of them set their hands to this holy bond. 3. The Levites. We observe among them almost all the names of those who took part in the previous solemnities of this memorable day. It is well, when those who are eminent in devotion are also eminent for devotedness. It sometimes happens that those who are gifted in prayer are not distinguished for holy practice. 4. The chiefs of the nation. This fidelity to the cause of truth adds a lustre to all earthly glory, and sets an ornament of grace on the noblest brow. 5. The rest of the people. It is a blessed thing when whole families thus unite together in the faith of Christ and the life of religion. **II. THE ENGAGEMENTS OF THE COVENANT.** 1. Sins to be

renounced. It is vain to make loud profession of spiritual experience, and of devotion to the Saviour, unless besetting sins are abandoned and a new course of obedience begun. 2. Duties to be performed. (1) To give to God. (2) To work for God (ver. 34). All vow to work for God, each in his own place, according to the Divine will, at the appointed times, and unwearied in well-doing. Henry Martyn wrote: "With resignation and peace, I can look forward to a life of labour and seclusion from earthly comforts, while Jesus stands near changing me into His holy image. How happy and honoured am I in being suffered to be a missionary." And Levi Parsons testified: "I can subscribe with my hand to be for ever the Lord's, to be sent anywhere, to do anything, to endure any hardship, to live and die a missionary." (3) To wait on God. III. THE INFERENCES DEDUCIBLE FROM THE COVENANT. 1. We here see the propriety of religious covenanting. 2. The obligation in covenanting established. When you devote yourself to the Lord in covenant, to obey the precepts of His Word, your essential obligation is not strengthened or altered; it is merely recognised by you, and promised to be fulfilled. 3. The benefits from covenanting illustrated. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Covenant comfort*:—Christmas Evans, after being sorely tried, was led to enter afresh into personal covenant with God; and such was the joy in God which followed, that he said of it, "After forming this covenant I felt great calmness and peace. I had the feelings of a poor man who has just come under the protection of the Royal Family, and has obtained a pension for life, the dreadful fear of poverty and want having left his house for ever. I felt the safety and shelter which the little chickens feel under the wings of the hen." (*The Thinker.*) *A national covenant*:—On February 25, 1638, a memorable scene was witnessed in the churchyard of Greyfriars, Edinburgh. The National Covenant to maintain Presbyterianism, and to resist contrary errors, having been numerously signed within the church, the parchment was subsequently placed upon the flat tombstone, still extant, of Boswell of Auchinleck, where many others, to show their determination to die rather than yield, signed it with blood from their arms. History testifies that numbers of them endured much suffering rather than violate their pledge. If frail men will so keep their promise, much more must the Omnipotent God honour His covenant. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 28-30. **And all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God.**—*A genuine revival*:—1. The crucial test of any revival is the extent to which it actually purifies and reforms the lives of those who come under its influence. 2. This is the kind of revival which ever and again we all need. For we are constantly liable to fall below the level of our Christian privileges. We are also apt to grow blind to our own defects, and to under-estimate the extent of our own shortcomings. We have need to bring our lives into the light of God's holy law, and into the light of the life of Christ, that our consciences may be awakened to a truer and deeper penitence. 3. A repentance which is the fruit of a true revival of the religious life naturally goes into the details of conduct. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) **And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land.**—*Marriage and purity*:—Wherever I find a purely savage life, which means life eaten up by impure sin, there I also find no capacity in the life to advance and grow. You have an instance in the case of Africa, the life of which has not moved for a couple of thousand years, simply because it is soaked with impurity. Turning to the earliest efforts of civilisation, as recorded in the Bible, I find men making effort after effort, getting a little way, and then each effort vanishing in a sink of impure sin. Life ought to grow if natural, but if impurity is natural, it is natural to stagnate, never to grow, to fall to pieces, and for civilisations to be swept out by weakness and impotence. The history of our European civilisation is the history of the gradual rise in the idea of marriage and purity. (*Canon Scott-Holland.*)

Ver. 31. **And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to all.**—*The profit of Sabbath-keeping*:—John Brand was an old Cornish fisherman. The fishing had not been good for some days, the water had been wild and stormy; but at length, on the Sunday, the weather became fine, and the other fishermen said, "We would keep Sunday—but—we have had so few fish lately; and we are sorry to go out to-day—but—the weather is so good. It is a pity; we would not go if we were not so poor." "What!" said honest John, "are you going to break God's laws with your ifs and buts? Better be poor than

be wicked. My religion is not the kind that shifts with the wind. 'Thou shalt remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy'—that is enough for me." So he persuaded them, and they took his advice, and spent the day in worshipping God. And it was well they did so; for that night, just when the boats would have been coming back, a terrible storm suddenly burst over the deep, and lasted two days. Any boat out in that weather would certainly have been wrecked. But two days after the beautiful weather returned, and more fish were taken than had been caught for weeks before. No; no one ever yet lost by obeying God. Be you like John Brand; be thorough, honest, and God-fearing in and out; do not have a religion like a weathercock that shifts with the wind, or one that can be broken with an "if" or a "but." (*J. Reid Howatt.*) *The Sabbath beneficial*:—In a prize essay on the Sabbath written by a journeyman printer in Scotland, there appears the following striking passage: "Yoke-fellows, think how the abstraction of the Sabbath would hopelessly enslave the working-classes with whom we are identified. Think of the labour thus going on in one monotonous, and continuous, and eternal cycle—limbs for ever on the rack, the fingers for ever plying, the eyeballs for ever straining, the brow for ever sweating, the feet for ever plodding, the brain for ever throbbing, the shoulders for ever drooping, the loins for ever aching, and the restless mind for ever scheming! Think of the beauty it would efface, of the merry-heartedness it would extinguish, of the giant strength it would tame, of the resources of nature it would exhaust, of the aspirations it would crush, of the sickness it would breed, of the projects it would wreck, of the groans it would extort, of the lives it would immolate, of the cheerless graves it would prematurely dig! See them toiling and moiling, sweating and fretting, grinding and hewing, weaving and spinning, sowing and gathering, mowing and reaping, raising and building, digging and planting, unloading and storing, striving and struggling—in the garden and in the field, in the granary and in the barn, in the factory and in the mill, in the warehouse and in the shop, on the mountain and in the ditch, on the roadside and in the wood, in the city and in the country, on the sea and on the shore, on the earth in days of brightness and of gloom. What a sad picture would the world present if we had no Sabbath!"

Vers. 32-39. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel.—*Voluntary taxation*:—Not to enter upon the thorny path of endowed or voluntary religion, nor to inquire whether tithes are coeval with the first man, and binding upon the present age, let us maintain—I. THAT THE CHURCH SUPPOSES AN EDIFICE. God may be worshipped in any house. Experience has taught the convenience and value of a house of God. The edifice must be built and maintained. II. THAT A CHURCH REQUIRES A MINISTER. "No man can rightly labour in the Word and doctrine without diligent and habitual Biblical study; no man can conduct such study without the renunciation of secular pursuits; no man can abandon such pursuits without an adequate and guaranteed salary from the Church in which he teaches, for which he labours." The ministry must be sustained. III. THAT A CHURCH IS A BROTHERHOOD. "The rich and poor meet together." "The poor ye have always with you." In a Church sense, "if any provide not for his own house, he hath denied the faith." IV. THAT A CHURCH IS A MISSIONARY ORGANISATION. It has duties both at home and abroad. The Word of God must be translated, the masses evangelised, society leavened. A true Church must of necessity be a generous Church. It gets to give (*Homiletical Commentary.*)

Ver. 35. And to bring the first-fruits of our ground.—*A fruit-service*:—We notice in this text—I. WILLINGHOOD. "And to bring." It was no tax. Love is its own tax-liever, and it ever gathers the richest, the ripest, and the best fruit. When a Church or a community is filled with love you need have no fear for revenue. II. PRECEDENCE. "First-fruits." In all things Christ must have the "pre-eminence." He must be Alpha. III. UNIVERSAL LORDSHIP. First-fruits of "all trees." He is Lord of all. So it is with the fruit of our souls. Jesus claims tribute from all provinces of our nature. He is not satisfied with actions. He claims the captivity of our thoughts. He wants not only the first-fruits of our emotions, of penitence, but also of our gratitude, our adoration, our trust, and our love. Let us see that His flag is waving over every province of our nature, and that we give to Him the first-fruits of conscience and meditation, of imagination and memory, of ardent love and submissive will. IV. ANNUAL OFFERING. "Year

by year." We should lose the consciousness of advancing time if it were not for our birthdays. We should miss much of occasions for gratitude if it were not for seed-time and harvest, summer and winter. The living earth reminds us of the living God, who supplies all we need. (*W. M. Statham.*)

**Ver. 37. And the tithes.**—*Tithes* :—Without inquiring into the reason for which the number ten has been so frequently preferred as a number of selection in the cases of tribute offerings, both sacred and secular, voluntary and compulsory, we may remark that numerous instances of its use are found both in profane and also in Biblical history, prior to, or independently of, the appointment of the Levitical tithes under the law. In Biblical history the two prominent instances are—1. Abram presenting the tenth of his property, according to the Syrian and Arabic versions of Heb. vii., but as the passages themselves appear to show, of the spoils of his victory, to Melchisedek (Gen. xiv. 20; Heb. vii. 2-6). 2. Jacob, after his vision at Luz, devoting a tenth of all his property to God in case he should return home in safety (Gen. xxviii. 22). These instances bear witness to the antiquity of tithes, in some shape or other, previous to the Mosaic tithe system. But numerous instances are to be found of the practice of heathen nations, Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Arabians, of applying tenths derived from property in general, from spoil, from confiscated goods, or from commercial profits, to sacred, and quasi-sacred, and also to fiscal purposes, viz., as consecrated to a deity, presented as a reward to a successful general, set apart as a tribute to a sovereign, or as a permanent source of revenue. (*Smith's Bible Dictionary.*) *Giving as a means of character culture* :—God carries on His cause in the world by the aid of His people. He is constantly calling on us to give, now to this cause and now to that. Why so? Surely He to whom the silver and gold belong has no need of us to help forward His work. He could, if He would, do it much more efficiently without us. But He is striving to educate us into resemblance to Christ and meetness for heaven. If a father could place his child where he would be habitually giving, giving, in the expression of a benevolent sympathy and helpfulness, he would be putting him under the most efficient of all means for the development in him of a truly Christian, or Christlike, spirit. He would be conferring on him one of the richest possible blessings. This is the blessing which our heavenly Father is trying to bestow upon us, in surrounding us as He does with those who need our sympathy and help. If we gratefully recognise our Father's wise and loving design, and, so far as we can, give our help with a truly Christian spirit, our contributions will do more good to us who give than to those who receive them. Every such expression of Christian love will leave an impress on our character which we shall carry with us for ever. It will develop into augmented power and more absolute supremacy within us that Christlike spirit without which we can never walk the golden streets. We need, then, to cultivate the habit of giving as much as the habit of praying.

**Ver. 39. And we will not forsake the house of our God.**—*Zeal for the sanctuary* :—Why should we say of "the habitation of God's house," "We will not forsake it"? 1. God has clearly ordained public worship. He made man to be social—social in virtue of his sorrows, joys, wants, affections, and relationships. He also made man to be social in things spiritual. The isolation of selfishness is sin. Union is cherished by communion, and communion strengthened by public worship. Jesus honoured the temple. The faithful in every age have desired to dwell in the house of the Lord. 2. The special manifestations of the Divine presence, vouchsafed in the congregations of the saints, ought to endear to us such privileged scenes. 3. As the sanctuary has been the place of the Lord's rest, so has it been the scene where He has imparted the richest gifts to His worshippers. 4. The servant of God will love the courts of the Lord, and not forsake them, because in them he tastes most of heaven below. You cannot form a better conception of heaven than by fixing on the happiest Sabbath, and the happiest hour of worship on the happiest Sabbath, you ever enjoyed in the assembly of the saints. (*Canon Stowell.*) *Zeal for God's house expressed in a holy resolution not to forsake it* :—1. A RESOLUTION WELL BECOMING CHRISTIANS THEMSELVES. This resolution comprehends the following particulars : 1. That we will never cast off the profession of our faith, nor make a defection from the truth and ways of the gospel, for any cause, nor upon any account whatsoever. 2. That we will not neglect the ordinances of Divine worship, nor be wanting in our attendance on them whenever

we are called, and have an opportunity of appearing before God in His house. (1) Jesus Christ, as Lord of His own house, has appointed divers ordinances to be observed. (2) There must be an assembly of people meeting together for the public administration of these holy ordinances. (3) There must be some proper and convenient places appointed and agreed upon for such religious assemblies where they can be had. (4) There are particular times and seasons for the holding these religious assemblies. (5) There are certain persons whose work and duty it is to go before others in these holy administrations. 3. That we will promote as far as in us lies the interests of religion, and spread the kingdom of Christ in the world. II. IT IS NOT ONLY LAWFUL, BUT MAY BE USEFUL AND EXPEDIENT, FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETIES TO ENGAGE THEMSELVES TO GOD, AND THE DUTIES THEY OWE TO HIM AND ONE ANOTHER. III. OFFER REASONS BOTH FOR MAKING THIS RESOLUTION AND OBLIGING OURSELVES TO MAKE IT GOOD. 1. Because it is God's house. (1) To forsake God's house would be to forsake our own mercies. (2) To leave this house is to forsake the place which God Himself hath chosen and where He delights to dwell. (3) To forsake this house is to forsake God Himself. We cannot quit the inheritance of the Lord but in effect we go and serve other gods. 2. Because our particular good is lodged in the public interest. 3. This is the noblest way of imitating the great God Himself, and conforming to the example of our blessed Saviour. 4. This makes men real blessings to the world. Such men really are the strength and security of a nation. For their sakes God sometimes preserves others from those judgments which their crying sins would otherwise pull down upon their guilty heads. Sodom had been preserved for the sake of ten righteous men, could so many have been found in the place. 5. This will be our rejoicing and comfort another day. Application: Having made this resolution, we must oblige ourselves to make it good. Because of the inconstancy and deceitfulness of our hearts. Such engagements will help to fix us more firmly in the interests of religion, and make us more successful in resisting all temptations to apostasy. Hereby we are rendered more capable of serving the interests of religion. A force when united becomes the stronger. The joint concurrence of many gives a great advantage to a design, and a better prospect of success. (*Matthew Clarke.*) *Attachment to God's house*:—Consider—I. THE RESOLUTION ITSELF: "We will not forsake," &c. This resolution includes—1. Constant and regular attendance. 2. A lively interest in its welfare and prosperity. II. THE GROUNDS OF THIS RESOLUTION. 1. Our gracious union with God. All connected with God should be dear and sacred to us—His Word, ordinances, people; therefore His house. 2. Our clear and imperative duty. Public worship is of His own appointment. 3. Our public profession. 4. The special advantages we shall derive from it. Exaltation of desires; soul elevation; enlargement of mind; soul enrichment with all spiritual blessings in Christ. "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand," &c. "They that wait upon the Lord," &c. 5. The connection of the house of God with the celestial world. It is "the gate of heaven." Application: 1. Where professors are indifferent to the welfare of God's house, it is an unfailling indication that the heart is not right with God. 2. Let the subject inspire the sincere friends of Christ to more ardent zeal for the diffusion of the Divine glory. 3. How suited is God's house to every description. The reckless here are warned, the supine aroused, the inquirer directed, the mourner comforted, the faithful established, &c. (*J. Burns, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER XI.

VERS. 1-19. *And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem.—The holy city replenished*:—Jerusalem is called here the holy city, because there the temple was, and that was the place God had chosen to put His name there. Upon this account one would think the holy seed should all have chosen to dwell there. They declined, however. Either—1. Because a greater strictness of conversation was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others, which they were not willing to come up to; or—2. Because Jerusalem, of all places, was most hated by the heathen, their neighbours, and against it their malicious designs were levelled, which made that the post of danger, as the post of honour uses to be, and therefore they were not willing to expose themselves there; or—3. Because it was more for

their worldly advantage to dwell in the country. We are here told—I. BY WHAT MEANS IT WAS REPLENISHED. 1. The rulers dwelt there. The "mighty are magnetic." When great men would choose the holy city for their habitation, it brings holiness into reputation, and their zeal will provoke very many. 2. There were some that "willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem," bravely postponing their own secular interest to the public welfare. The people blessed them. They praised them, they prayed for them, they praised God for them. Many that do not appear forward themselves for the public good will yet give a good word to those that do. 3. They, finding that yet there was room, concluded, upon a review of their whole body, to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem, and who they should be was determined by lot; the disposal they all knew was of the Lord. The proportion of one in ten seems to refer to the ancient rule of giving the tenth to God. And what is given to the holy city He reckons given to Himself. II. BY WHAT PERSONS IT WAS REPLENISHED. 1. Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt there. Originally part of the city lay in the lot of those tribes and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin; hence more families of that tribe abode in the city. 2. The priests and Levites did many of them settle at Jerusalem. Where else should men that were holy to God dwell, but in the holy city? (*Matthew Henry.*) *Repeopling the capital*:—This was altogether worthy of Nehemiah's practical sagacity. The restored walls of Jerusalem could not do much to promote its security and welfare so long as it was inhabited by a mere handful of people. It would be well if some of our modern statesmen were to grasp the principle of this policy, and open their eyes to the fact that the chief wealth and strength of any nation must ever lie, not in massive fortifications or colossal armies, but in the numbers, the character, the patriotism, and the prosperity of its people. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The holy city*:—The two leading thoughts connected with the holy city in this phase of her history are singularly applicable to the Christian community. I. ENCLOSED WITHIN WALLS, THE CITY GAINED A PECULIAR CHARACTER AND PERFORMED A DISTINCTIVE MISSION OF HER OWN. Our Lord was not satisfied to rescue stray sheep on the mountains only to brand them with His mark and then turn them out again to graze in solitude. He drew them as a flock after Himself, and His disciples gathered them into the fold of Christian fellowship. This is of as vital importance to the cause of Christianity as the civic organisation of Jerusalem was to that of Judaism. The Christian City of God stands out before the world on her lofty foundation, the Rock of Ages—a beacon of separation from sin, a testimony to the grace of God, a centre for the confession of faith, a home for social worship, a rallying-point for the forces of holy warfare, a sanctuary for the helpless and oppressed. II. THE PUBLIC DUTY OF CITIZENSHIP. The reluctance of Christians to accept the responsibilities of Church membership may be compared to the backwardness of the Jews to dwell in Jerusalem. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Ver. 16. Had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God.—*The secular in sacred service*:—I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO SECULARISE THE SACRED. When sacred service is entered upon from secular motives; when it is performed in a perfunctory manner; when any object less than God is regarded in its performance. An unhallowed hand may not bear up an ark. A cowl does not make a monk. High office cannot elevate a base man. II. IT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE THE SECULAR SACRED. "He can who thinks he can." Application: 1. The secret of contentment. "Self-humiliation is full of truth and reality." 2. The law of growth. Be thy ambition to become pure in thought and feeling, strong in resolve and deed. Serve. Care not how, mind not where. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *Outward business*:—We have prayed about that house, we have thanked God that the crumbling walls of our little houses lean against the foundations and the walls of God's dwelling-place. Do we catch the music, do we see the vision of the house of God? Do the words balance well? "House" is a familiar word, "God" is the most awful of all words; yet here we find them together in sublime unity and relation. What is the house of God? "A church." "A chapel, a sanctuary, a tabernacle, a temple." Not necessarily. You may have a cathedral without a house of God, and you may find in some little thatched cottage or chapel on the hillside all the cathedrals out of heaven. Hence it is that we must not look at magnitudes, sizes, revenues, apparatus, but at the ideal. "I never go to the house of God." How do you know that? Have you ever been really out of it? Let us go to Jacob for an answer. What said he when he awoke after the delight and yet the torment of the dream? He said, "This is none other than the house of

God." There are those who only know houses by architecture, by walls, stones, bricks. Well, now, what was Jacob's environment at that time? Churches, chapels, institutions? Not one. Yet he was in a walled place, walled in with light, and ministered to by ascending and descending angels. We must get the house of God and many other things back from little definitions and narrow and petty localisations, and regard the universe as God's house. Of course Jacob, having seen all these things, could have said, "Nightmare!" That is all the answer some men can return to the universe. Let us so live as to make the house, even though a little one, grand, tender in all its ministries, a nest in the heart of God. Let us be careful how we divide things into outward and inward. The time will come when we shall get rid of even Scriptural uses of outward, alien, strange, foreign. All these words are doomed to go. "I saw no temple therein," said John. Why did he not see a temple in heaven? Because heaven was all temple. He who lives in light does not even see the sun; he who lives in God has no moon, for he has no night. But men are crafty and expert almost at making little definitions, parties, separations, and the like. Some men divide music into sacred and profane. I never heard any profane music; I do not believe there is any. I have heard sacred music, and I have heard music profaned, perverted, taken away to bad uses, made a seduction on the road to hell. But we must get back to real definitions and proper qualities, and see things as God meant them to be seen. I have also heard of profane history and sacred history. There is no profane history. History truly written, and true to human experience, is an aspect of Providence, an elucidation of that marvellous mystery which penetrates all life, and that whispers to us in many a moment of unexpectedness, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Who is it that rises up amongst us and splits up history into sacred and profane? What right has such a man to define and separate and classify? I would follow the historian who sees God in everything, in the defeat as well as in the success of the battle. And there are persons who have carried their defining powers, if powers they be, into what are called ecclesiastical matters, so that now we have "the temporalities" and "the spiritualities." What man devised so insane a distinction? There is a sense, but a very poor, narrow sense not worth considering, in which the work of the Church may be divided into the temporal and the spiritual, but, properly regarded, in the spirit of Christ and in the spirit of the Cross, the gift of the poor man's penny may be as true an act of worship as the singing of the anthem. There is nothing secular, or if there is anything that we call secular it is only for momentary convenience. He that made all things is God; He built the wall of the Church, and He will take care of the roof; it is His place. (J. Parker, D.D.)

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## CHAPTER XII.

**VERS. 1-23. Were written in the book of the chronicles.—A book:—I. A BOOK UNITES THE AGES.** Brings the past into the present; borrows the future to give the present significance. The "sceptred spirits of history" rule us still. With books the poorest enters the highest society: the loneliest need not be solitary. **II. A BOOK REVEALS LIFE'S IMPORTANCE.** It gives permanence to thought. Life is a writing. **III. A BOOK SILENTLY ANTICIPATES THE JUDGMENT.** A record may be appealed to: "Is this thy handwriting?" God's "Book of Remembrance." (*Ibid.*) **Books:—**"The commerce of books," says our gossiping Montaigne "has the constancy and facility of its service for its own share: it goes side by side with me in my whole course, and everywhere is assisting to me: it comforts me in my age and solitude; it eases me of a troublesome weight of idleness, and delivers me at all times from a company that I dislike: and it blunts the point of griefs, if they are not extreme, and have not got an entire possession of my soul . . . books do not mutiny to see that I have only recourse to them for want of other more real, natural, and lively conveniences; they always receive me with the same kindness."

**Ver. 24. According to the commandment of David the man of God.—Posthumous influence:—**A man's influence after he is dead. He is still present with his people. **I. BY HIS WILL.** "The commandment of David." The grip of the dead is on our



fields and churches, our schools and hospitals. II. BY HIS WRITINGS. Immortality of genius. David's psalms. Solomon's proverbs. The writings of Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, and many others. III. BY HIS EXAMPLE. "David the man of God." For good or evil a man lives. For good or evil his deeds will live after him. "The memory of the just is blessed." (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

VERS. 27-43. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.—*The dedication of the wall.*—In this dedication—I. IT WAS DESIGNED TO OFFER THANKS TO GOD FOR THE COMPLETION OF A GOOD WORK. II. IT WAS INTENDED TO SET APART THE HOLY CITY FOR ITS SACRED ENDS. III. IT WAS DESIRED TO INVOKE THE DIVINE BLESSING AND GUARDIANSHIP ON THE CITY OF GOD. IV. IT IS BEAUTIFUL TO OBSERVE HOW FULLY THE DOMESTIC AFFECTIONS ARE CHERISHED AND DISPLAYED. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." (*W. Ritchie.*)

Ver. 30. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people.—*Beginning at the right place.*—I. A PURE CHURCH MAY MAKE A SOUND COMMONWEALTH. "They purified themselves." Like priest, like people. Cleric and laic act and react on each other." Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." Eli's sons. Uzzah may not sustain the ark. II. TO A PURE PEOPLE ALL THINGS ARE PURE. "They purified the people and the gates and the wall." Citizens and city; sanctuary and house; God's work and their own.

"All things are sacred;  
The eye of God is on them all,  
And hallows all."

Jesus revealed God in the minutest. Peter's vision. The present preparatory. "I think our fathers had a better, grander, a diviner idea even of common life than we have when they spoke of the trades and professions of men as being their calling. There is a great thought in this word. It makes all the men, streets, shops, and warehouses to me as I walk along Divine objects. I feel that I am in a Divine place when I think of the men about me as following their calling. I feel that there is a God above men; that there is a God in human society; a God in the shops and counting-houses of London, touching and teaching every human being; and that every man is occupying the place, and putting his hand to the work to which God has called him. Sometimes you may see a man at a certain calling which is but preparatory. He is meant for something else. Providence opens the way, and he goes up higher and does another thing. God has given us a spiritual vocation—a Divine calling in Christ Jesus—and we are to walk worthy of that vocation here, doing all worldly things in a spiritual manner, preparatory to a higher calling which shall come one day, when we shall enter upon other forms of duty and service, to which the present inferior forms of duty and service faithfully fulfilled shall gradually prepare and fit us. (*T. Binney.*)

Ver. 43. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced.—*A great rejoicing.*—A great rejoicing as it should be. I. ASSOCIATED WITH THE RITES OF RELIGION. II. THE OUTCOME OF A GREAT DELIVERANCE. From captivity to freedom: heathen surroundings to heaven-chosen city and Divinely-built temple. The memory of God's great goodness should awaken joy—a joy that all may share. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." III. THE PREPARATION FOR STRONG ADHESION TO A GREAT CAUSE. Sacred festivals not an end, but a means to an end. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *True joy.*—I. ITS RIGHT. The God who has given us life wishes also that it shall move joyfully; the God who always anew overwhelms us with favours wishes that they should fulfil their mission; that is, make us happy, in the end holy. II. ITS OCCASION. God's grace, which has strengthened, protected, assured, and elevated our lower or higher life. III. ITS KIND. It raises itself to God, is a joy in Him; that is, becomes a service to God and our neighbours. (*Dr. Schultz.*) *The joy of Christian work.*—Notice—I. THAT GREAT SACRIFICES ALWAYS PRECEDE GREAT JOY. God's best gifts never increase by saving, but by scattering. The sea is in a constant state of evaporation. The mist rises, there are clouds above the hills, there are streams running into the valleys, there is life and greenness everywhere. There are some men who do not believe in evaporation. They believe in getting all they can and keeping all they get. But they are never joyful. There is no joy in selfishness. It is against the great law of God, the law

of sacrifice by His own Son. What is the meaning of these sacrifices mentioned in the text? 1. The sin-offering. This shadowed the great sacrifice. Morality alone will not save any man, and if you will only admit sin, you admit half the Bible, and the rest has to do with God's way of getting rid of it. 2. The burnt-offering. This means that we give ourselves up to God entirely; and the happiest men I have met in my life have been men who have handed the keys of every room in their soul up to Christ, without keeping one closed to hide a loved sin. 3. The peace-offering. This was a peculiar offering in Israel. It was a free-will offering. When a man brought the peace-offering, God gave him a feast there and then in his house. A part of the offering was given back to the offerer. This peace-offering is very much like your contributions to-day. You can keep your offerings, but if you do God will keep the feast from you. We in Wales have two sermons in one service very often, and the collection comes before the second sermon. I have watched a man drop the smallest coin into the plate from a richly gloved hand. I have seen a poor old woman unwrapping a two-shilling piece from a paper, from another paper, from a third paper, in which she had wrapped it in order to keep it for the collection. And I have watched them through the second sermon. The tears of joy are coursing down the wrinkled face of the poor Christian woman, but the man who dropped his miserly coin is as dry as Gilboa. It is a remarkable fact that the Almighty never accepted a wild animal as an offering in the olden time. A man was always obliged to offer something he had taken trouble with: the fruit of his own garden, the fruit of his own farm, or from his own flock. I have heard a man say sometimes, "If I succeed in this speculation now, I will give to the cause of Christ." Ah! that is a wild hare.

II. GREAT WORK FOR GOD BRINGS GREAT JOY FROM GOD. Charles Kingsley has said that every man ought to thank God every morning because he has something to do that must be done that day. Work is the greatest blessing. I was once struck down with complete nervous prostration, and a medical man told me that I must do nothing for a twelvemonth, and that was the hardest work I ever did in my life—to do nothing. I see gentlemen come up along the Menai Straits in their yachts fighting the tempest. On they come like sailors on the ocean-wave, because it is easier to do that than to do nothing. You may see the room in which Louis XVI. worked as a common blacksmith, because it was easier to do that than to do nothing. Prisoners have come to the gaoler many a time, when confined in a room to do nothing, asking him for permission to pick oakum, or anything rather than do nothing. It is possible to do the most common work to God, to Christ, and when every one will do his work to Christ, that is the time when this world will be full of happiness and song. There is joy in serving Christ. Just think, for instance, of the erection of a place of worship: what an investment it is to contribute towards that.

III. THIS RELIGION OF GREAT SACRIFICE AND GREAT JOY WILL TELL ON OUR FAMILIES. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." Joyful religion repeats itself to others. Parents should let their children see that they value religion. 1. By making sacrifices for it. 2. By letting them see that they are most anxious for them to become decided Christians. IV. THAT THE RELIGION OF GREAT SACRIFICES AND GREAT JOY WILL BE HEARD OF AFAR OFF. "Then joy was heard afar off." It is the names of self-sacrificers that live—Abraham—Abraham Lincoln—Florence Nightingale—Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. (*E. Herber Evans, D.D.*) *Sacrifice, a condition of joy*:—The principle of sacrifice stands at the very threshold of the ever-fascinating study of life, and is found at every turn of the bewildering maze which marks life's upward pathway of struggle and survival. In merely physical processes, as well as in many vital functions of vegetable and animal life, there are clear foreshadowings of the part which sacrifice plays in the great tragedy of existence. The primitive rock, when subjected to the disintegrating action of the atmospheric agents, yields up its characteristic compactness, and crumbles into soil, which, in turn, surrenders its richness to promote the welfare of multitudinous forms of vegetable growth. In the lower species of animal life the death of the parent is the essential condition of the life of the offspring, and in the higher grades of creatures there is invariably a parental sacrifice in favour of the well-being of the progeny. Notwithstanding that these functions are nothing more than compulsory obedience to the stern mandates of nature, Mr. Herbert Spencer calls them acts of unconscious sacrifice, and so distinguishes them from those voluntary surrenders of self which spring from love to others, and which, strictly speaking, can only be termed sacrifice. The helpless infant survives merely on account of the care which the maternal love lavishes upon it. Let the attention of others be withdrawn, and the child must perish. It lives

by the sacrifices which others make for it. The bond of family life is kept intact by a succession of beautiful deeds, springing from the ever-growing tendency to sacrifice the immediate interests of self to promote the good of others. The capacity to enjoy purely egoistic pleasures is heightened by ministering to the wants of others. Indulged selfishness, by producing satiety, defeats itself. But a nobler truth than that is this—that the deepest satisfactions and most lasting joys of life are blossoms on the tree whose roots derive nutriment from the soil of sacrifice. (*S. S. Chronicle.*)

VERS. 45-47. **And both the singers.**—*Thanks-giving and thanks-living.*—We have here the effects of the joy that was at the dedication of the wall. I. THE MINISTERS WERE MORE CAREFUL THAN THEY HAD BEEN OF THEIR WORK. II. THE PEOPLE WERE MORE CAREFUL THAN THEY HAD BEEN OF THE MAINTENANCE OF THEIR MINISTERS. The surest way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is to wait on their ministry, to be humble and industrious, and to mind their business; when these did so, the people thought nothing too much for them to encourage them. 1. Care is here taken for the collecting of their dues. 2. Care is taken that, being gathered in, it might be duly paid out. (*Matthew Henry.*) For in the days of David and Asaph of old.—*The good old times:*—I. NOTHING IS NECESSARILY GOOD BECAUSE IT IS OLD. “Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden?” Habit, education, tradition, prejudice, play an important part in history. II. THAT WHICH IS OLD IS PRESUMPTIVELY VALUABLE. Good lasts. Truth is as old as the hills. Application: Prove all things. Despise nothing. The present is a huge borrower from the dead past. (*Homiletic Commentary.*)

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### CHAPTER XIII.

VER. 2. **Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.**—*The curse turned into a blessing:*—This was just like God, whose name and nature are love. 1. The devil turns the blessing into a curse. When God created man He endowed him with the power of choice, made his will free, so that he might choose good and evil. The creature was thus endowed with an inestimable blessing. The devil, by the subtlety and force of temptation, turned man's dignity against himself and effected his ruin, and through successive generations he has sought to turn the blessing into a curse. 2. Man often turns the blessing into a curse. Physical strength, intellectual endowments, social position, wealth, opportunities for usefulness—things good in themselves—are often transformed by man's depraved nature into instruments and occasions of evil. Of all the plots and assaults of the devil, all the mischievous purposes of wicked men, all the disasters of life, all the forms of evil we may have to encounter we may say, “Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.” I. GOD HAS TURNED THE CURSE OF SIN INTO A BLESSING. The existence of sin is an awful and mysterious fact, permitted by God for wise and gracious issues. We can conceive of no greater curse. It separated man from God. It destroyed his original righteousness. It cut him off from happiness. It brought upon him condemnation and death. God comes to man in this state with the blessings of His grace. 1. The fall of man furnished an occasion for the exercise of the restoring grace of God. Sin prepared the way for salvation. “Paradise Regained” is more than “Paradise Lost.” 2. The curse of sin has supplied an opportunity for such an exhibition of the character and glory of God as we nowhere else behold. God's brightest glory shines in the method of man's salvation. God in Christ is more glorious far than God in creation. In the Saviour of the world we have the most perfect manifestation of God. 3. Throughout the earth, following in the track of the destroyer, God bestows the blessings of His great salvation. God is still “in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” II. GOD TURNS SORROW INTO A BLESSING. 1. Sorrow is a teacher. Sorrow seems sent for our instruction as we darken the cages of birds when we would teach them to sing. As the night brings out the stars, so trouble reveals to us many truths that would otherwise remain unseen. It clears our visions, so that we get new views of God and ourselves, of truths and duty, of

this world and the next. 2. It awakens thoughtfulness. 3. Under this gracious ministry and discipline the noblest characters have been perfected. Poets, it is said, "learn in suffering what they teach in song." Sorrow is one of the best nurses of godliness. Some plants thrive better in a poor than in a rich soil; so some virtues come to speedier and fuller perfection in grief than in gladness. When spices are crushed, then they emit their odours. After the diamond is ground and polished on the wheel, its facets flash with lustre. It is said that when growers of roses want to develop the bloom of a favourite tree in special richness and beauty they sometimes deprive it for a season of light and moisture. In this condition its leaves fall off. But while this process is going on, and the tree is almost leafless, a new life is springing, from which come in due season a tenderer foliage and a choicer and more abundant bloom. This suggests some of the sweet uses of sorrow. 4. In the gracious arrangements of God sorrow is often succeeded by joy. 5. God is preparing the way for the extinction of sorrow on the earth. III. GOD TURNS THE CURSE OF DEATH INTO A BLESSING. To the Christian man death ceases to be the king of terrors, and becomes a friend to call him home. He delivers him from the infirmities of the flesh, the corrutions of sin, the temptations of Satan, and the sufferings and troubles of life. Death is the gate of life. In conclusion—1. The subject teaches us the benevolence of God. 2. Learn the loving confidence you may cherish in God. Let us learn to imitate God. Let us endeavour through life to turn the curse into a blessing. (*William Walters.*) *Sorrows turned to blessings*.—We might tell of the blessed effects of the captivity of Joseph—the means of preserving his father's household and the lives of the thousands of Egypt. We might speak of the happy results of Israel's national calamities; how they were led to seek the Lord in their sorrow, and the Lord hearkened and heard them. We might tell of Paul's imprisonment issuing in the conversion of his jailor and his household; or we might speak of John's banishment to the lonely Isle of Patmos, where his spirit was refreshed with those wondrous discoveries of God's doings and purposes that form the last book in the Canon of Sacred Writ. In these instances sorrow is not to be denominated a curse, but a blessing—not a punishment, but a medicine. True it is that sorrow has been styled the winter of the soul, because it freezes up the streams of comfort, and ices the soul over with the frosts of sadness; but, like as that season, rough and stormy and bleak as it is, is conducive to the ultimate fertility of the earth, so the moral winter at once prepares for the fuller enjoyment of the coming spring of peace, and is productive of a richer harvest of righteousness to the praise and glory of our God. Affliction has been styled the storm of life; but, like as those tempests that agitate the bosom of the ocean serve alike to overpower the shattered bark, and to urge forward others more speedily to their desired haven, so these moral tempests, while they may overwhelm the wicked and impenitent, are ever conducive in speeding forward the journey of the children of the kingdom to heaven and to God. (*J. Macnaughton, A.M.*) *Curses and blessings*.—Nehemiah sees God at work in this transformation, and openly, gladly, gratefully acknowledges that the transformation of the curse was not the work of human good-will or of human genius, but a direct operation of the Divine almightiness itself. We lose so much by not seeing God immediately. Why do we allow God to go so far away from our consciousness and appreciation and love? Why do we not cry for Him, and bid Him come to us, and give Him no rest until He draws near? This is the true religion; this is the noble piety. I. TO BE CURSED OF MAN IS REALLY NO PROOF OF GOD'S DISAPPROBATION. II. HE OUGHT TO BE A VERY GREAT MAN, AND A VERY PURE, LOFTY, AND GODLY SOUL, WHO UNDERTAKES TO CURSE ANYBODY ELSE. III. TO BE BLESSED OF MAN IS NO PROOF OF GOD'S FAVOUR. IV. THE VANITY OF TRUSTING IN ANYTHING WHICH CAN BE TURNED INTO A CURSE. Application of these truths to your personal experience: 1. The frowns of society. 2. Wronged in business. 3. The seeming opposition of nature. God is willing and able to turn all curses into blessings. But the blessing will not be given without action on our part. Art thou suffering? Go to thy knees; tell God thy sin; then the film shall be taken from thine eyes—thou shalt see the great, mighty, redeeming Cross of Christ, and He shall say, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." The curse will be turned into a blessing, and thou shalt be the better for the abasement. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Sorrows keeping from worldliness*.—An evangelist tells of a young lad who left his father's home to be a sailor. He was absent for three years, and on the return voyage, just as he was thinking of how soon he should see all the dear ones at home, his ship was

wrecked off the coast of Norway. Many were lost, but he and some others managed to get into a boat. They tried to row for the shore, but the men being wet, and the cold so intense, many of them were frozen to death. The first mate had command of the boat, and the lad being a favourite of his, he was afraid that he should fall a victim to the cold, and whenever he saw him dozing, or showing any signs of sleepiness, he thrashed him with a rope's-end. In vain the lad expostulated, the thrashing continued until all drowsiness was gone. At length they reached land, and were hospitably entertained by the natives, and in time were forwarded home. That young man often says he owes his life to the mate who administered to him that timely discipline. The sufferings and sorrows which God puts upon His people are like that thrashing. Only to keep them from falling into the sleep of worldliness that leads to death, to keep them alive in grace, and looking unto Him, does He afflict them. *God's providences not to be feared:*—We ought never to be afraid of God's providences when they seem to break up our lives and crush our hopes, and even to turn us away from our chosen paths of usefulness and service. God knows what He wants to do with us, how He can best use us, and where and in what lines of ministry He would have us serve. When He shuts one door it is because He has another standing open for our feet. When He breaks our lives to pieces it is because they will do more for His glory and the world's good broken and shattered than whole.

Vers. 7-31. **And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did.**—*The religious reformer:*—Remark—I. THE STATE OF JERUSALEM DURING NEHEMIAH'S ABSENCE. II. THE REFORMS HE ACHIEVED. 1. His purification of the temple. 2. His renewal of the observance of Divine ordinances. 3. His promoting the sanctification of the Sabbath. 4. His setting apart Judah from mingling with the heathen. (*W. Ritchie.*) *Personal purification of the believer:*—We must never forget that the Christian is now what the temple was of old, the dwelling-place of the Most High (1 Cor. vi. 19). Luther observes: "A Christian may be compared with the tripartite temple of Solomon. His spirit is the holy of holies, God's dwelling amid the darkness of faith (he believes what he neither sees, nor feels, nor grasps); his soul is the holy place, where are the seven lights of the golden candlesticks; his body is the fore-court exposed to general view, where every one can observe how he lives and what he does; in the fore-court stands the altar of burnt-offerings, whereon we are to lay our bodies as living sacrifices unto God. How sad when the temple in any part of it is desecrated! When the heart in which Christ should dwell is occupied by the world, many things must be cast forth, in order that it may become the abode of the King. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *The devoted patriot:*—The story commences with the return of Nehemiah to Babylon. Either through the reports that his enemies had sent to the court, or the leave of absence having expired (chap. ii. 6), Nehemiah returns to the king to report himself, and to seek permission for a further sojourn in Jerusalem. The fact that Ezra is absent at the same time strengthens the opinion that the misrepresentations of those about them moved the jealousy of the king and led to their recall. It is scarcely possible to think of the swift and complete destruction of the religious life of the city apart from a deeply-laid plot on the part of the foes who saw in the recall of Nehemiah their own opportunity, and whose plans were carefully laid and boldly carried out as soon as he had left. The building of the walls and gateways of the city had been followed by a yet bolder effort for the security of Jerusalem. Taking advantage of the fervour of the new religious life which had sprung up amongst them, Nehemiah had gathered the people together and got them to enter into a very solemn covenant, which they had signed and sealed. The list of those who signed this covenant is given—in itself a suggestion that it was not signed by all. The first name is that of Nehemiah; and next to his we should naturally look for that of Eliashib, the high priest, and of Jehoiada his son. But these two are conspicuously absent. So then it is plain that before the departure of Nehemiah there were two parties whose antagonism could only be fierce and bitter; a party which had surrendered itself to the strictest observance and enforcement of the law, and another party which had entangled itself by heathen relationships; and of this latter party the first and foremost was Eliashib, the high priest. As soon as Nehemiah has gone this Eliashib at once becomes the head and ruler of the city. Now comes the collision of the two parties; on the one side a people like the Puritans of old—stern, resolute, exclusive, hateful of everything that swerved a

hair's breadth from the letter of the law. On the other side was the party of the court—hand in glove with the wealthy "people of the land"; eager for their own advancement and position. Eliashib, the leader of the courtiers, had nothing to expect from the covenanters but a stern and bitter opposition. To strengthen his position, and perhaps for his own personal security, he gathers about him these from the outside, intending doubtless to draw the line sharply as soon as they had served his purpose, but finding, as such men always do, that he has to yield step by step, until everything that the law held sacred was broken down before the influx of "the people of the land." A swift and terrible reaction followed the high-pitched fervour of the great revival. First to be swept away were the reforms that Nehemiah had introduced in the matter of mixed marriages. That which the high priest himself had sanctioned by the example of his own family was speedily imitated, until it seems to have become a rage amongst the people, many of the Jews putting away their own wives for these women of Ammon and Moab and Ashdod. The Book of Malachi throws a lurid light upon the condition of things in this as in other respects (Mal. ii. 11, 14, 16). Eliashib seeks further to strengthen his position and to weaken his opponent's by a concession to the greed of the people, as he had previously indulged their lust. The tithes and offerings which were claimed by the priests and Levites were withheld from them, or the people brought only that which was diseased or torn by the wild beasts; the people robbed God, as Malachi says. Thus the temple came to be neglected, as the priests had to go "every one to his own field." With this must have fallen every barrier for the protection of Jerusalem. When things had reached such a pass it was evident that the heathen had everything their own way. The occupations of the people went on as if there were no Sabbath day. The wine presses were trodden; the corn was carried; the asses were laden; through the city gates came the men of Tyre with their fruit and fish for sale; foreigners filled the streets with their cries, and the place rang with the noisy chaffering of those who stood to sell and those who came to buy. With them these strangers brought their evil ways, and their foul idolatries—the sorceries of which Malachi speaks (Mal. iii. 5). Such is the state of things which Nehemiah finds on his return to Jerusalem. Perhaps his coming was unlooked for, the enemy hoping to keep him still at the court of the king. We have thought perhaps of Nehemiah as the graceful courtier, the stately cupbearer, whose appearance would have much to do with his high position. But here is a very different man. He seems to stand before us with knitted brows and flashing eyes—a man who does not hesitate to lay hands upon the offenders, and whose words terrify the city. Nehemiah's indignation is kindled first by the tidings of the desecration of the House of God; and hastening thither he faces Eliashib on his own ground, and with his own hands he flings out the "household stuff" of the intruding Tobiah, and has the chambers cleansed from the defilement, and the holy vessels set again in them. That Eliashib and his party should have submitted to such a high-handed proceeding may seem surprising; but the conscience of the people was with Nehemiah, and they felt that it was useless to resist one of such resoluteness, backed by such authority as he possessed. Then the priests and Levites were again set in their places, and the provisions were duly delivered, treasurers being appointed to receive and distribute the offerings of corn and oil and wine. Meanwhile the rulers had gathered themselves together, as they did when Christ came to the temple. The interference with the hope of their gains stirred their resentment; for to those nobles a working day was not to be lightly parted with, since others did the work of which they reaped the advantage. Nehemiah orders the gates to be shut at sunset on the Sabbath eve, and that none shall enter bearing burdens until the day is done. Yet more difficult and involved was the matter of the mixed marriages. But in this as in everything else Nehemiah would tolerate no half measures. When the people gathered to protest, he tells us that "I contended with them, and cursed them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves." Jehoiada, the son of the high priest, and the son-in-law of Sanballat, thought doubtless to screen himself behind these high relationships. But instead of defence it added to the wrong, and the indignant governor chased him out of the city, and forbade him to return. Taking refuge in Samaria with others who resented the action of Nehemiah, he set up there a rival temple and service, and thus cleared the way for the reforms which were established in Jerusalem. Looking back over the chapter, we see a lesson for all time and for us: that we can never loosen the law of God in

one particular without loosening it in all. The law of God is one, and to break it in any point is to endanger it in all. The thickening of the ills about Eliashib one by one until everything is lost, is the story of the destruction of the individual and the nation. (*M. G. Pearse.*)

Ver. 11. Then contended I with the rulers.—*Work and worship* :—Then the topic is not new. It is a question which propounds itself in every age. The particular aspect of the question we have to deal with at present is this, Why does the working man forsake the house of God? Many of the reasons given arise out of the industrial conditions of the working classes. 1. One of the reasons given by working men is that the conditions of their industrial existence afford them no leisure time. Is this a reason or an excuse? It is true that there is a considerable number of working men who are doomed to drag on a weary, dreary, grinding, rayless life. They have no leisure. The only rest they have is the unconscious rest of sleep. The system that perpetuates this state of things is unrighteous, inhuman, and hostile to the teachings of the Bible. But this is not true of the majority of working men; their absence arises not from want of leisure, but from want of inclination. 2. Another reason assigned is that the Christian ministry is in league with the employers. I am not here to hold a brief for the ministry, but I am here to defend the interests of truth, and I wish to ask where this weak and effeminate ministry is to be found? I venture to believe that there never was a time when the pulpits were ringing with a clearer and more unambiguous note, when there was more straight and wholesome teaching on the obligations of power and the responsibilities of wealth. I believe that to-day there is far more preaching to the rich than there is to the poor, and this charge of sinful silence and sinful flattery cannot be sustained. 3. Another reason advanced is that ministers do not take their rightful position as leaders of secular progress, and that they are not to be found in the van of social and political reform. This is a more reasonable objection. I wish to confess candidly and frankly that in my opinion the pulpit has been too speculative, too abstract, too unpractical, too other-worldly. But this reproach is now being rapidly rolled away, and the ministry are giving both hands to the neglected work of social reform. 4. Working men further complain that when they do come to church they meet with a cold and unfriendly reception. In the church there is "respect unto persons." It is charged against us that our profession of brotherhood is a mere pretence. It is said that men will sit by their fellows in the house of God for years, will pray and sing of their brotherliness and love, and then outside the church will ignore and pass them by without so much as recognition. Against such conduct no word can be too outspoken or too severe. 5. Another reason is that the church is not democratic, and that the workman has no voice or influence in its affairs. This reason has been confirmed and emphasised by the editors of our daily press. But it is a statement altogether too sweeping. If the working man wants democratic churches he need not seek far to find them. 6. One speaker at a meeting convened to consider this question, declaimed against the pulpit because it treats of such topics as the restoration of man and the forgiveness of sins. He declared that there is no practical value in such teaching, and that the working man does not hold to it or believe in it. Here there is no room for compromise. Oh! fellow-men, the Nazarene wears many crowns, and among His crowns is that of Social Reformer. But there is another crown brighter by far than that of Reformer, the crown of Redeemer. The gospel we have to preach is not a mere uprooter of social wrongs, an equaliser of men's estates; it is a regenerator of the human heart. The supreme aim of the gospel is not to beautify man's circumstances, but to beautify man's life. The Master Himself told us how useless it is to reform a man's house unless you redeem the man. The gospel is preached, then, that man may be rectified, and that rectified man may transform the world. The work of the Redeemer includes the work of the Reformer, but redemption is the first and dominant note in the Church's song. On the other hand, if we are truly Christ's we are genuine reformers. The Church of Christ should be the centre of all the reforming agencies of our time. All true reformers get their weapons from Christ. (*J. A. Jowett, M.A.*)

Vers. 14–22. Remember me, O my God, concerning this.—*The mercy of God the origin of the reward of good works* :—*Learn*—I. THAT TO MAKE PROVISION FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF GOD'S WORSHIP AND THE MINISTERS THEREOF IS A WORTHY WORK, AND

OF HIGH ESTEEM AND FAVOUR WITH GOD (1 Chron. xxix. 17, 18; Deut. xii. 19; 2 Kings iv.; Luke vii. 3-5; Matt. x. 41; Phil. iv. 18; 2 Tim. i. 16-18). II. THAT GOD REWARDETH THESE AND ALL OUR OTHER GOOD DEEDS AND WORKS NOT FOR ANY MERIT OR WORTHINESS THAT IS IN THEM, BUT OF HIS FREE MERCY AND GOODNESS. 1. The Scriptures encourage us to work in hope of reward (Psa. xix. 11; Prov. xi. 18; Matt. v. 11, 12, x. 41, 42; Luke vi. 35; 2 John 8). 2. Whence this reward cometh. "According to Thy great mercy" (Hos. x. 12; Rom. vi. 23; Psa. lxii. 12). III. THAT IT IS LAWFUL TO DO GOOD WORKS WITH RESPECT TO THE RECOMPENSE OF REWARD. It is plain Nehemiah here did so. So did Moses (Heb. xi. 25, 26). (*Joseph Mede, B.D.*) *The law of reward*.—Nehemiah's prayer occurs thrice in this chapter, at the close of each section recounting his reforming acts. In the first instance (ver. 14) it is most full, and puts very plainly the merit of good deeds as a plea with God. The same thing is implied in its form in ver. 22. But while, no doubt, the tone of the prayer is startling to us, and is not such as should be offered now by Christians, it but echoes the principle of retribution which underlies the law. "This do, and thou shalt live," was the very foundation of Nehemiah's form of God's revelation. We do not plead our own merits, because we are not under the law, but under grace, and the principle underlying the gospel is life by impartation of unmerited mercy and Divine life. But the law of retribution still remains valid for Christians in so far as that God will never forget any of their works, and will give them full recompense for their work of faith and labour of love. Eternal life here and hereafter is wholly the gift of God; but that fact does not exclude the notion of "the recompense of reward" from the Christian conception of the future. It becomes not us to present our good deeds before the Judge, since they are stained and imperfect, and the goodness in them is His gift. But it becomes Him to crown them with His gracious approbation and to proportion the cities ruled in that future world to the talents faithfully used here. We need not be afraid of obscuring the truth that we are saved "not of works, lest any man should boast," though we insist that a Christian man is rewarded according to his works. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Nehemiah's sincerity*.—Paul assures the believing Hebrews that God will not forget "their work of faith and labour of love," and this prayer of Nehemiah's is nothing more than a petition that God will be pleased to fulfil His own promise regarding him. It was not the dictate of a self-righteous spirit. There is no self-righteousness in the humble prayer that God would look upon him in love; that He would deign to accept of his feeble services as proof and evidences of a religious spirit; that He would be pleased to verify His promise, that "it shall be well with them that fear the Lord," and that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." Consider—I. A sketch of Nehemiah's history. II. Nehemiah's CHARACTER. 1. His steady religious principle. Dwelling amid scenes very uncongenial to the progress of piety in the heart, he displayed a firmness of principle and an ardour of religious feeling truly admirable. Amidst the enticements of a splendid and licentious court he sought the glory of God and not the gratification of vanity, ambition, or worldly desire. Surrounded by the ensigns of a gross and impious superstition, he reared a standard for the true God, and stood forth as a witness for Him, in the midst of His enemies. Confidence in God kept him steady in the scene of danger; and the lofty aims of a devoted spirit raised him above the grovelling pursuits of sense. 2. His self-denial. This is one of the best evidences of sound religious principle. When the will is subjugated to the will of God; when the mind feels itself completely satisfied with the wisdom and goodness of the Divine economy; when self is thrown into the background, and a noble disinterestedness gives its tone to the character, then we have some good proof that our religion is sincere. Nehemiah improved his advantages at the Persian court not for his individual good, but for the good of his countrymen. He lost sight of selfish considerations, and feeling for the humblest of the people, he gave them the full value of his labours, without the slightest remuneration. That which he asked not from man he knew God would bestow; hence the prayer of the text. 3. His zeal for the worship and ordinances of God. This is specially displayed in his anxiety to vindicate God's ordinances from abuse, and to enforce their punctual observance. The public reading and expounding the law, for the edification of the people, testified his regard for God's Holy Word. The exactness with which the appointed rites in the feasts of trumpets and tabernacles were gone about, under his superintendence, testified his reverence for the law, in all the minuteness of its requisitions. His zeal for the sanctification of the Sabbath proved the high sense he entertained of



its value. 4. His enlightened and consistent perseverance in the discharge of personal and official duty. (*Robert Burns, D.D.*)

Vers. 15-22. In those days I saw in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath.—*Keeping the Sabbath*:—In reforming the evil of Sabbath desecration Nehemiah—I. **CONTENDED WITH THE NOBLES, OR JEWISH ARISTOCRACY.** It was their trade that kept the marts open. Were they to hold aloof, the Sabbath-breakers would fail for want of patronage. II. **HE ENFORCED THE LAW.** III. **HE DEALT PARTICULARLY WITH THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO EVADE THE LAW.** IV. **HE TOOK MEASURES TO PERPETUATE THE REFORM.** Conclusion: Reflect on the considerations which underlie the duty of Sabbath rest. 1. The institution of the Sabbath is coeval with the race. Adam in paradise kept the holy day. This is evidenced by the primitive division of time into weeks. The word “remember” in the fourth commandment shows that this injunction was but the revival and re-emphasising of one which had all along been binding upon them. 2. It is based upon a ground which in the nature of the case makes it perpetual. The Lord “rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” 3. The Sabbath law was interwoven with the nerves and sinews of the human constitution before it was inscribed on the tables of stone. 4. The injunction, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” when placed in the Decalogue, received the formal sanction of Jehovah as an essential part of the moral law. 5. Christ came to fulfil the ceremonial law; at His coming it vanished as shadows do before the sun. But as to the moral law, He came to fasten it more and more permanently on the hearts and consciences of men. 6. The change from the seventh to the first day was in no wise a violation of the original injunction, but rather in pursuance of it. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ, and thus a new and living branch of joy was engrafted upon it. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Keeping the Sabbath*:—The several points suggested by this narrative are specially suited to times like our own. I. **IT REMINDS US OF THE BLINDING AND HARDENING POWER OF WORLTLINESS.** It blunts conscience, deadens spirituality, and estranges from God. II. **IT REMINDS US OF THE RISKS OF ASSOCIATION WITH CARELESS AND IRRELIGIOUS NEIGHBOURS.** III. **IT REMINDS US OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MEN IN HIGH POSITION FOR PREVAILING EVILS.** IV. **IT REMINDS US THAT NEGLECT TO KEEP THE SABBATH IS AN EVIL WITH WHICH GOD CAN NEVER BE OTHERWISE THAN SORELY DISPLEASED.** V. **IT REMINDS US OF THE RESOLUTE FIDELITY REQUIRED TO SAVE THIS DAY FROM GENERAL PROFANATION.** (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Keeping the Sabbath*:—I. **SABBATH OBSERVANCE HAS TO CONTEND WITH THE GREED OF MEN WITH WEALTH.** II. **SABBATH OBSERVANCE SECURES THE COMMUNITY AND NATION FROM PERIL.** Divine requirements have always a wise and loving purpose in them. A God-fearing nation is strong because it has learned, in its several elements, to exalt those things which have abiding power in them. Charity and integrity, reverence, purity, intelligence, and self-control are mighty forces. Against these immorality, intemperance, extortion, ignorance, surge like a desolating flood. The Sabbath is a protecting dyke raised across their path, so clear and effective that they each hate and would abolish it. A million soldiers under arms cannot defend us as sixty million citizens without other weapon than recognition of God's claims and their fellows' rights will do. The former may be defeated as Rome's numerous legions were. The latter are invincible. III. **SABBATH OBSERVANCE MAY BE DECREED BY PUBLIC STATUTE AND ENFORCED BY THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE.** The State may, and must, maintain itself. It may, and should, forbid those practices which threaten its life. It must respect the religious nature and requirements of its citizens. Its province is, not to say how any shall observe the hours of rest, but simply to guarantee that they shall have them. (*De Witt S. Clarke.*) *The benefit of the Sabbath*:—Consider it—I. **AS AN ACCEPTABLE REST FROM THE TOILS AND LABOURS OF LIFE.** II. **AS A HIGHLY USEFUL AND CIVIL INSTITUTION.** III. **AS A NECESSARY RELIGIOUS ORDINANCE.** IV. **AS A SIGN BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.** (*J. Venn, M.A.*) *Sabbath desecration*:—The last page of many a reformer's history has been, like Nehemiah's, a sad account of efforts to stem the ebbing tide of enthusiasm and the flowing tide of worldliness. The heavy stone is rolled a little way up hill, and, as soon as one strong hand is withdrawn, down it tumbles again to its old place. The evanescence of great men's work makes much of the tragedy of history. Our lesson is particularly concerned with Nehemiah's efforts to enforce Sabbath observance. I. **THE ABUSE CONSISTED IN SABBATH WORK AND TRADING.** It is easy to ridicule the Jewish Sabbath and “the Puritan Sunday.” No doubt there have been and are well-meant but mistaken efforts to insist on too rigid observance. No doubt it has been often forgotten by

good people that the Christian Lord's Day is not the Jewish Sabbath. Of course, the religious observance of the day is not a fit subject for legislation. But the need for a seventh day of rest is impressed on our physical and intellectual nature; and devout hearts will joyfully find their best rest in Christian worship and service. The vigour of religious life demands special seasons set apart for worship. Unless there be such reservoirs along the road, there will be but a thin trickle of a brook by the way. It is all very well to talk about religion diffused through the life, but it will not be so diffused unless it is concentrated at certain times. They are no benefactors to the community who seek to break down and relax the stringency of the prohibition of labour. If once the idea that Sunday is a day of amusement takes root, the amusement of some will require the hard work of others, and the custom of work will tend to extend, till rest becomes the exception and work the rule. There never was a time when men lived so furiously fast as now. The pace of modern life demands Sunday rest more than ever. If a railway-car is run continually, it will wear out sooner than if it were laid aside for a day or two occasionally; and if it is run at express speed, it will need the rest more. We are all going at top speed; and there would be more breakdowns if it were not for that blessed institution which some people think they are promoting the public good by destroying—a seventh day of rest.

II. THE VIGOROUS REMEDIES APPLIED BY NEHEMIAH WERE ADMINISTERED FIRST TO THE RULERS. He sent for the nobles, and laid the blame at their doors. "Ye profane the day," said he. Men in authority are responsible for crimes which they could check but prefer to wink at. Nehemiah was governor for the Persian king, and so had a right to rate these nobles. In this day the people have the same right, and there are many social sins for which they should arraign civic and other authorities. Christian principles unflinchingly insisted on by Christian people, and brought to bear, by ballot-boxes and other persuasive ways, on what stands for conscience in some high places, would make a wonderful difference on many of the abominations of our cities. Go to the "nobles" first, and lay the burden on the backs that ought to carry it.

III. THEN NEHEMIAH TOOK PRACTICAL MEASURES BY SHUTTING THE CITY GATES ON THE EVE OF THE SABBATH, AND PUTTING SOME OF HIS OWN SERVANTS AS A WATCH. The methods adopted may yield suggestions for all who would aim at reforming abuses or public immoralities.

1. One most necessary step is to cut off, as far as possible, opportunities for the sin. There will be no trade if you shut the gates the night before. There will be little drunkenness if there are no liquor-shops. It is quite true that people cannot be made virtuous by legislation, but it is also true that they may be saved temptations to become vicious by it.

2. Once more, the guard of Levites may suggest that the execution of measures for the reformation of manners or morals is best entrusted to those who are in sympathy with them. Levites made faithful watchmen. Many a promising measure for reformation has come to nothing because committed to the hands of functionaries who did not care for its success. The instruments are almost as important as the means which they carry out. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

*An argument for Sabbath-keeping*:—"I tell our directors that if they compel conductors to break the fourth commandment they have no right to expect them to keep the eighth." That was the Hon. William E. Dodge's business way of putting to railroad companies the argument for Sabbath-keeping.

*Loyalty to the Sabbath*:—A ferry company, with a fine prospect of a lucrative business, desired the late Governor Gamble to make an investment in their stock, which he declined, because they ran their boats on the Sabbath. "We are obliged by law to do so," was the excuse offered. "Yes," he replied; "I know that the law requires your company to run its boats on the Sabbath, but the law does not require me to invest my money in your stock."

*Profanation of the Sabbath*:—Consider—I. WE ALSO HAVE A SABBATH WHICH OUGHT TO BE OBSERVED. II. SOME OF THE PREVALENT ABUSES OF THE SABBATH. III. PRACTICAL REMEDIES. Nehemiah is here our pattern. 1. He took no part in the sin himself. 2. He made a public protest. 3. He promoted active measures for the suppression of Sabbath profanation. (*J. Hambleton.*)

*Sabbath observance*:—This passage contains a detailed statement of the transgressions of the Israelites in this particular, as well as of the testimony of God through Nehemiah against them; and as it distinctly indicates certain transactions on the Sabbath as grossly sinful, the guilt of which is by some considered as at least questionable, it will be profitable to closely examine the sacred writer's words, in order to evince the iniquity of such practices. I. IN WHAT CONSISTED THE ABUSES THEMSELVES. 1. Agricultural work on the Sabbath. "In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses, and bringing in

sheaves," &c. The feeding of cattle and similar labours on the Sabbath are clearly permitted, because the life or health of the beast depends on its nourishment; but all other sorts of work are plainly evil, and as much just subject of rebuke from the Christian minister as the labours of the Jews were from the Jewish.

2. Sabbath traffic (ver. 16). The pleas of opposition, convenience, and such-like, cannot be allowed even in palliation; for the law of God must not be bent or modified to suit the will and caprices of man. Here no subterfuge, or sophistry, or excuse, is permitted. II. THE PROPHET'S PROCEEDINGS CONSEQUENT UPON THESE PRACTICES. 1. He testified against them. It is the duty of ministers on any symptoms of irreligion in their respective districts to rebuke and raise their voices against it. For that purpose they are appointed as sentinels and guardians. Now this word "testify" is a comprehensive term, and will signify, first, that he indicated the evil—that he expressed his dislike of the practice—that he showed them its sinfulness, and the punishment surely consequent upon it. He then charged them with it. "Ye do it." "What evil thing is this that ye do?" The better sort were not sellers, but buyers; they connived at the practice, and encouraged it. The prophet accordingly accuses them with being accessories, and casts on them the major part of the guilt. "Ye do it," he says, because but for their purchases the markets would have been shut. He censures them, moreover, on the ground of bad example. The people naturally took their tone from them, and when they saw the Sabbath traffic of the nobles, they, also, profaned the Sabbath day. He rebukes them, too, for contempt of God and want of patriotism. "What evil thing is this that ye do," &c. Now this instance of the destiny of Israel proves the fact, that God does not reserve His wrath against the Sabbath-breaking nation for the next world, but here inflicts at least a part of the retribution. 2. He exerted his authority to prevent the entrance of the traders into the city. "I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath," &c. The authority he exercised was exclusively secular. Therefore, though the state should be cautious of interfering in matters purely ecclesiastical, yet with this case before us it is evident that the magistrate may interpose to carry out the Divine ordinances. The authority, then, vested in magistrates or others by the state for this purpose is a legal authority, according to Divine law; and the conduct of Nehemiah in this case sets a proud example to officials of every time and place, with equal zeal and prudence to execute their functions. (*John Budgen, M.A.*)

Ver. 22. Spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy.—*Nehemiah's appeal to God's mercy*:—The bird which soars the highest builds the lowest nest. The more a man is lifted up in communion with Heaven the deeper is his abasement in his own eyes. The holiest are the humblest. Those who bear most fruit have least "confidence in the flesh." How interesting to observe that, though the conceptions of believers under the old dispensation respecting the exact mode of salvation were dim, yet they themselves clung as earnestly to the mercy of the Lord as more privileged believers do now! (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *Increasing holiness means increasing sensitiveness to the need of mercy*:—The more holy a man's spirit becomes, the more sensitive will it become; and the more sensitive his spirit, the deeper and livelier will be his sense of sinfulness. Shut up an individual in a dark room, hung round with cobwebs and defiled with dust, and he will be insensible to its condition; then admit a little light, and he will begin to suspect its state, and the more clearly the light shines, the more clearly will he discern the impurities which were hidden before. (*Ibid.*) *Nehemiah*:—Here is—I. AN APPEAL TO GOD'S APPROBATION. Nehemiah often makes appeals of this kind. This was an appeal to God—1. From man's judgment. He had engaged in an undertaking which was likely enough to appear contemptible in the eyes of his Persian acquaintance. But what then? It was for God's honour, and therefore he despises this shame, casting himself upon the approbation of God. This principle it was that influenced Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Paul. It is the principle of faith rendering an unseen God visible. Such men look for a future "recompense of reward" promised by Him who cannot lie. 2. From man's enmity. While one party satisfied themselves with despising, there was another party in Jerusalem itself who hated and opposed his proceedings. It is in reference to their enmity that the appeal of the text is made. Modern enmity. 3. From man's ingratitude. It was here that he found his greatest trial. How painful, when the very persons whom in God's name he sought to benefit were cold, reluctant, unfeeling! Nehe-

miah's was no solitary case. You find in connection with this appeal—II. A CONTRITE PRAYER FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS. 1. After all he has done for God's service, Nehemiah cannot forget that there is a load of original and actual sin recorded against him for which no subsequent obedience can make satisfaction. 2. He finds even his religious actions so stained with sin that though he may appeal from man, he cannot make them a plea for merit before God. 3. He casts himself, with a steadfast faith, on the free grace and covenanted mercies of the Lord. Application: If the despised believer may thus appeal from man to God, what hope can there be for those who compel him so to do? (*Joseph Jowett, M.A.*)

Ver. 26. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?—*Solomon*:—1. It may appear remarkable that one who fell so grievously should contribute at all to the Book of God, nor is there any other instance of the kind; but his sad history adds a peculiar weight of warning to his words; nor are there any books more strongly marked by the finger of God. 2. Solomon was chosen of God, and afterwards rejected as Saul had been; he was full of wisdom and understanding, and what is far more, of holiness and goodness. There is perhaps no one of whom the early promise of good seemed so decisive. 3. It has been said, as by St. Augustine, that Solomon was more injured by prosperity than profited by wisdom. Yet we may observe that his falling away is not attributed in Scripture to his wealth, his power and honour. 4. We cannot conclude that Solomon himself did not at last repent, but this has always been considered by the Church as very doubtful, to say the least. All we know is that Scripture has fully made known to us his falling away from God, but has said nothing of his repentance. The very silence is awful and impressive. 5. What more melancholy than the fall of one so great—so wise! What words could have been spoken to him more powerful than his own! What eloquence could describe his fall with more feeling and beauty than his own words! What could more powerfully paint the loveliness of that holiness from which he fell? what the overpowering sweetness of that Divine love which he has consented to give up to feed on ashes! Who can describe the temptations to those very sins by which he was ensnared in a more searching manner than he has done? It is very awful to think how God may use men as instruments of good that His Spirit may teach them, and through them teach others, and guide them to the fountain of living waters, yet they themselves at last fail of the prize of their high calling. What a warning for fear! (*Isaac Williams.*)

*Solomon's restoration*:—I. THE WANDERINGS OF AN ERRING SPIRIT. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" 1. That which lay at the bottom of all Solomon's transgressions was his intimate partnership with foreigners. "Did not Solomon sin by these things?"—that is, if we look to the context, marriage with foreign wives. The history of the text is this—Nehemiah discovered that the nobles of Judah, during the captivity, when law and religious customs had been relaxed, had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; and then, in his passionate expostulation with them, he reminds them that it was this very transgression which led to the fall of the monarch who had been most distinguished for God's favour. Exclusiveness was the principle on which Judaism was built. Everything was to be distinct—as distinct as God's service and the world's. And it was this principle which Solomon transgressed. The Jewish law shadowed out an everlasting truth. God's people are an exclusive nation; God's Church is for ever separated from the world. This is her charter, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. We are to be separate from the world. Mistake not the meaning of that word. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. Our world is not that. The world is that collection of men in every age who live only according to the maxims of their time. The world may be a profligate world, or it may be a moral world. All that is a matter of accident. Our world is a moral world. The sons of our world are not idolaters, they are not profligate; they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dulness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. The brilliant, dazzling, accomplished world—what Christian with a mind polished like Solomon's does not own its charms? And yet now, pause. Is it in wise Egypt that our highest blessedness lies? Is it in busy, restless Sidon? Is it in luxurious Moab? No. The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the

Israel of God. 2. The second step of Solomon's wandering was the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure. And a man like Solomon cannot do anything by halves. No man ever more heartily and systematically gave himself up to the pursuit. There are some men who are prudent in their epicureanism. They put gaiety aside when they begin to get palled with it, and then return to it moderately again. Men like Solomon cannot do that. No earnest man can. No! if blessedness lies in pleasure, he will drink the cup to the dregs. But let us mark the wanderings of an immortal soul infinite in its vastness. There is a moral to be learnt from the wildest worldliness. When we look on the madness of life, and are marvelling at the terrible career of dissipation, let there be no contempt felt. It is an immortal spirit marring itself. It is an infinite soul, which nothing short of the Infinite can satisfy, plunging down to ruin and disappointment. That unquenched impetuosity within you might have led you up to God. You have chosen instead that your heart shall try to satisfy itself upon husks. There was another form of Solomon's worldliness. 3. It was not worldliness in pleasure, but worldliness in occupation. He had entered deeply into commercial speculations. He had alternate fears and hopes about the return of his merchant ships on their perilous three-years' voyage to India and to Spain. He had his mind occupied with plans for building. The architecture of the temple, his own palace, the forts and towns of his now magnificent empire, all this filled for a time his soul. He had begun a system of national debt and ruinous taxation. Much of this was not wrong; but all of it was dangerous. It is a strange thing how business dulls the sharpness of the spiritual affections. It is strange how the harass of perpetual occupation shuts God out. There are writers who have said that in this matter Solomon was in advance of his age—enlightened beyond the narrowness of Judaism, and that this permission of idolatry was the earliest exhibition of that spirit which in modern times we call religious toleration. But Solomon went far beyond toleration. The truth seems to be, Solomon was getting indifferent about religion. He had got into light and worldly society, and the libertinism of his associations was beginning to make its impression upon him. He was beginning to ask, "Is not one religion as good as another, so long as each man believes his own in earnest?" There are few signs in a soul's state more alarming than that of religious indifference; that is, the spirit of thinking all religions equally true, the real meaning of which is, that all religions are equally false. II. GOD'S LOVING GUIDANCE OF SOLOMON IN THE MIDST OF ALL HIS APOSTASY. In the darkest, wildest wanderings a man to whom God has shown His love in Christ is conscious still of the better way. In the very gloom of his remorse, there is an instinctive turning back to God. It is enumerated among the gifts that God bestowed upon Solomon that He granted to him "largeness of heart." Now that largeness of heart which we call thoughtfulness and sensibility, generosity, high feeling, marks out for the man who has it a peculiar life. You look to the life of Solomon, and there are no outward reverses there to speak of. His reign was a type of a reign of the power of peace. No war, no national disaster, interrupted the even flow of the current of his days. No loss of a child, like David's, pouring cold desolation into his soul—no pestilences nor famines. Prosperity and riches, and the internal development of the nation's life—that was the reign of Solomon. And yet, with all this, was Solomon happy? Is there no way that God has of making the heart grey and old before its time without sending bereavement, or loss, or sickness? Has the Eternal Justice no mode of withering and drying up the inner springs of happiness while all is green, and wild, and fresh outwardly? We look to the history of Solomon for the answer. The first way in which his aberration from God treasured up for him chastisement was by that weariness of existence which breathes through the whole Book of Ecclesiastes. Another part of Solomon's chastisement was doubt. Once more turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not." In this you will observe the querulous complaint of a man who has ceased to feel that God is the ruler of this world. A blind chance, or a dark destiny, seems to rule all earthly things. And that is the penalty of leaving God's narrow path for sin's wider and more flowery one. But the love of God brought Solomon through all this to spiritual manhood. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." In this we have the evidence of his victory. Doubt, and imprisonment, and worldliness have passed away, and clear activity, belief, freedom, have taken their place. It was

a terrible discipline, but God had made that discipline successful. I speak to those who know something about what the world is worth, who have tasted its fruits, and found them like the Dead Sea apples—hollowness and ashes. By those foretastes of coming misery which God has already given you, those lonely feelings of utter wretchedness and disappointment when you have returned home palled and satiated from the gaudy entertainment, and the truth has pressed itself icy cold upon your heart, "Vanity of vanities"—is this worth living for? By all that, be warned. Be true to your convictions. Be honest with yourselves. Learn from the very greatness of your souls, which have a capacity for infinite agony, that you are in this world for a grander destiny than that of frittering away life in usefulness. Lastly, let us learn from this subject the covenant love of God. There is such a thing as love which rebellion cannot weary, which ingratitude cannot cool. (*W. F. Robertson, M.A.*)

**Ver. 31. Remember me, O my God, for good.**—*Simplicity and power* :—Consciousness of religion cannot be of necessity wrong, and it is only a false estimate of human nature with regard to God which enables men to take another view with regard to such acts. With boldness and without hesitation Paul says he has run a good course and fought a good fight; and he based upon this declaration that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness. In the same way we find constant recognition by David of his own good conduct throughout the Psalms; and Samuel protests his innocence in the sight of the congregation. Hezekiah upon his sick-bed narrates the better acts of his life as a reason for God to prolong his term of years; while more than one of the apostles reminds our Lord of their self-denying adherence to His cause. While Nehemiah's consciousness of certain acts that he knew he had done to please God shines with a soft and mellowed lustre on his figure whenever he comes into notice, the evident simplicity of his purpose and sincerity of his mind, and the utter absence of anything like censoriousness or boastfulness, prevent him from being in the least degree shadowed by vanity or presumption. A view like Nehemiah's of those acts which are performed with a pure intention of pleasing God is justified, because—1. The doing so involves truthfulness in our estimate of moral action. 2. Of the very direct encouragement that we receive from the consciousness that we have done what is pleasing to God. In our intercourse with our fellow-creatures nothing so encourages in the effort to please as the fact of having pleased; nothing so discourages as the consciousness of not having given satisfaction, or what is worse, the impression that we have dissatisfied. (*E. Monro.*) *Prayer for God's blessing* :—The Rev. Dr. Brock, of Bloomsbury, when about twenty-one years old (1828), and just out of his apprenticeship, left Devonshire for London. "He had not gone far from his home before he stopped, and sat down under a hedge, in a lane, and opening his Bible at the 13th chapter of Nehemiah, his eye fell upon the 31st verse: 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' Kneeling down upon his knees under that hedge, with his hand upon the passage, he put up a fervent prayer that God would befriend him by remembering him for good in his metropolitan life. How strikingly was that prayer answered! Dr. Brock himself used to say, 'Who can tell how much of the success of my after-life may be traced back to that prayer?'"

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*ESTHER*



NEW YORK      CHICAGO      TORONTO  
Fleming H. Revell Company  
Publishers of Evangelical Literature



## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

**CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE BOOK.**—In considering the characteristic features of this work, it is necessary first to decide upon its date, lest we should get this book confused with the Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which immediately precede it in our Canon. Their historical range does not reach later than about 420 B.C. Ezra and Nehemiah both lived in the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. Dean Stanley dates Ezra 459 B.C. and Nehemiah 445 B.C. But the story of Esther belongs to an earlier period, and to the reign of Xerxes, who was the king before Longimanus. Dean Stanley dates the story of Esther 485 B.C. It has therefore nothing to do with the restored Jews, who had at the time settled in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, but is wholly concerned with those scattered Jews who remained behind in the various provinces of the Persian Empire.

**THE DATE OF THE COMPOSITION OF THIS WORK AND ITS AUTHOR** cannot possibly be known. It is but an effort to get out of a difficulty to affirm the authorship of Mordecai. It is quite possible—as we find historical records were preserved at the Persian Court of a previous attempt on the life of the sovereign—that official records were made of the incidents which led to the death of Haman and the preservation of the Jews from the scheme laid for their destruction, and that some Jewish officer, cup-bearer or other, found these records, and transcribed them.

Modern critics think the book was written as early as the third century, 300–200 B.C. In their view it is not an authentic historical writing. It is a question whether it contains a nucleus of facts, or is simply a romantic tale. In any case, its object is simply to commend the observation of the Feast of Purim.

The Book of Esther is distinctly Persian, and it must surely have been written in Persia. Its place is properly outside the characteristic Jewish literature. It classifies rather with the works that now form the Apocrypha. There is no feature more strongly marked in the whole Jewish literature than the association of God with every person and every event, every prophecy and every word. In this Book of Esther the very name of God is wanting, and the relativity of God to events is never indicated or suggested. "It is the one example in the sacred volume of a story of which the whole scenery and imagery breathes the atmosphere of an Oriental Court as completely and almost as exclusively as the 'Arabian Nights.' . . . Even the names which most closely connect the story with the history of Israel are not Hebrew, but Chaldean or Persian. 'Mordecai' is 'the worshipper of Merodach, the war-god of Babylon.' 'Esther' is the 'star of the planet Venus.' The 'Purim,' from which the Festival of Deliverance took its name, is the Persian word for 'lot,' and has even been supposed to be the name for an ancient Persian solemnity."

Ahasuerus has, with some confidence, been identified as Xerxes, whose other name, Achashverosh, sounds very similar to Ahasuerus; and whose character as known in history is in precise keeping with his conduct as described in this work.

In his time Egypt revolted from the Persian rule, and was re-conquered; and some five years later occurred the battles of Thermopylæ, Artemis, and Salamis. It may help to fix the period in our minds if we remember that 477 B.C. is given as the death of Confucius, and 475 as the death of Gautama, the Buddha. At this time Rome was quite a second-rate Italian commonwealth.

**VERIFICATION OF THE STORY.**—It must be admitted that we have no verification of the story of Esther from any independent sources whatever. Neither such Persian annals as have been found, nor any Jewish memorials, contain any records of such a peril and deliverance of the scattered Jews in the Persian provinces as is narrated in this book.

But the fact remains that the Festival of Purim began to be observed about this time, and that tradition associated some remarkable deliverance with it, of which it was treated as a perpetual memorial. Probably the genesis of this festival needs some further research. It is quite possible that it really bears relation to the deliverances of the Maccabæan period, and the love of making mysterious origins for things led to the invention of a tale associated with earlier times. In the Second Book of Maccabees the festival is spoken of as the "day of Mordecai," and Josephus also refers to it. In favour of its historical genuineness, mention may be made of the appeal of the writer to the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia" (chap. x. 2), which certainly indicates that the author regarded his work as verifiable.

**PURIM.**—The Jews appear to have given the name Purim, or Lots, to this festival because Haman had thrown lots to ascertain what day would be auspicious for him to carry into effect the bloody decree which the king had issued at his instance. But the uncertainty of the origin, or even date of beginning, of this festival have led to a variety of conjectures in connection with it. EWALD, in support of his theory that there was, in patriarchal times, a religious festival at every new and full moon, conjectures that Purim was originally the full moon feast of the month Adar. KEPLER identified the "feast of the Jews," in John v. 1, with the Feast of Purim, and in this he is supported by Alford and Ellicott. The festival lasted for two days, and was regularly observed on the 14th and 15th of Adar. It was not a Divine institution, and there was no obligation to keep it at Jerusalem.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF Esther are so familiar to Bible readers that they need not be even outlined. On the whole it may be safe to decide that the main facts of the story are genuinely historical, and that such a peril for the scattered Jews and such a deliverance did actually occur in the reign of Xerxes; but it may also be admitted that some later author, of the period of the Apocryphal books, has worked up the materials at his command into the elaborate and descriptive story which we now have in our hands.

# THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

## ESTHER.

### CHAPTER I.

**VERS. 1-4.** Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia).—*Artaxerxes* :—By almost universal acknowledgment now, the sovereign here referred to is Artaxerxes, surnamed Longimanus, or the long-handed ; the term Ahasuerus being, like that of Pharaoh, expressive of the kingly dignity, and not the name of an individual. In his time the Persian empire was of vast extent, comprehending all the countries from the river Indus on the east to the Mediterranean on the west, and from the Black Sea and the Caspian in the north to the extreme south of Arabia, then called Ethiopia. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *God liberal to sinners* :—What rich gifts hath God often bestowed on men who know Him not! Think not, however, that God is more liberal to His enemies than to His friends. Some of the vilest of men possessed all the great and large dominions of the Persian empire. But if God has bestowed on you the least measure of true faith, of unfeigned love, of unaffected humility, He hath bestowed on you treasures of inestimably greater value than all the possessions of Artaxerxes Longimanus or of Nero. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Prosperity cursed* :—A curse is mingled with all the prosperity of sinners, because they know not how to use or to enjoy, but are disposed, by their corrupt tempers, to abuse everything which they possess. (*Ibid.*) *A great want in the soul of man* :—There is a want in the soul of man which all the wealth of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces cannot supply. There is a want which the best social arrangements cannot supply. There is a craving in the heart of man beyond all creature power to satisfy. Guilty man needs to be placed in a right relation toward God. Money cannot purchase for him peace and pardon. Artaxerxes was as poor as the humblest serf in his dominions in this respect, and far poorer than the poorest of the children of Judah, dispersed through his empire as exiles, but knowing Jehovah. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Character of Ahasuerus* :—First to come before us in the story is the king, Ahasuerus, more familiar to us as Xerxes. Cruel, passionate, capricious, his character as set forth in contemporary history is wholly in keeping with all that we see of him here. This is the man who was hospitably entertained by Pythias of Lydia when on his way to Greece, and helped by an enormous contribution ; but when the old man, who had given all his other sons to the service of the king, pleaded that the eldest might stay with him, Herodotus tells us that Xerxes in a fury commanded that the son should be slain, and he made his whole army pass between the severed body. Of him it is told how that when a storm destroyed the bridge by which he would cross into Greece, he commanded the engineers to be slain, and then had the sea beaten with chains to subdue it into better manners. He comes near to us by his association with the famous Greek heroes. Marching in his pride with a host of five millions, with which he would subdue the world, he is stayed by three hundred Spartans, whilst his vast fleet is destroyed by the skill and courage of the Greeks at Salamis, a victory that secured the deliverance of Europe from Oriental despotism, and preserved for us the literature and art which have uplifted and beautified our civilisation. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) Which was in Shushan the palace.—*The palace at*

*Shushan* is presented before us. *Shushan* was the metropolis of Persia, a magnificent city of about fifteen miles circumference, and the residence of the kings. In winter the climate was very mild, but in summer the heat was so excessive that an old writer says the very lizards and serpents were consumed by it on the streets. It was probably on this account that the seat of government was at *Ecbatana* in summer, and only in winter at *Shushan*. (*T. McEwan*.)

**Vers. 3-9. In the third year of his reign, he made a feast.**—*The occasion of the feast*:—It was the third year of the reign of Xerxes. Now we know from the Greek historian Herodotus that in that very year Xerxes “summoned a council of the principal Persians, as well to hear their opinions as to declare his own,” on the matter of the invasion of Greece. At first, on his accession to the throne, we are told that “he showed little disposition to make war against Greece, and turned his thoughts to the reduction of Egypt”; but after he had succeeded in Egypt, he was all the more inclined to listen to the advice of his cousin Mardonius, and seek to punish the Athenians for the defeat of his father at Marathon. Accordingly, at the council assembled in *Shushan*, he declared his purpose “to lay a bridge over the Hellespont, and to transport an army into Greece, that he might punish the Athenians for the injuries they had done to the Persians and to his father.” Nay, not content with that, he added, “I intend, with your concurrence, to march through all the parts of Europe, and to reduce the whole earth into one empire; being well assured that no city or nation of the world will dare to resist my arms after the reduction of those I have mentioned.” He was opposed by his uncle, *Artabanus*, but ultimately, under the influence of Mardonius and some illusory oracles which fell in with his own ambition, the die was cast, and the decision was made to prepare for and carry out the invasion of Greece with such an army as the world had never before seen. Now it was in connection with this determination, and in order, as I believe, to give the greatest possible impulse to the carrying out of the enterprise so resolved on, that this long-continued fête was held. He wanted to produce the conviction that, with such resources as he had at his command, it was impossible that he should fail. This accounts for the magnificent scale on which everything was done. It looks supremely foolish, but it is a folly that keeps its ground to this day even in western lands, where it is still the fashion for men to banquet themselves into enthusiasm for some great railway enterprise or some party campaign. (*W. H. Taylor*.) *Feasting not favourable to valour*:—There is good reason to suppose that this feast was held on the occasion of his projected invasion of Greece. To fill the minds of his captains with confidence, and to fire his soldiers with military ardour, he makes all this vain display and provides this munificence of self-indulgence. If this be so, with how little favourable result when the brunt of the struggle came! Yet what other result than that which actually came could be reasonably expected? Real courage and endurance are bred of much harder conditions than these. How are real men made? and how are they made ready for any manly thing of more than common difficulty? By feasting on rich viands? By drinking wine and looking on it when it is red in the cup? By nights of revelry? By gazing on the outside shows of life? By sinking into voluptuous ease? Never since the world began have manhood and courage sprung of such things as these, although in a few rare instances they may have passed through them unbroken and not much defiled. The Greeks were comparatively few and comparatively poor; and their country had no vast harvest-bearing plains. They were fighting for rocks and mountains and seas. But those mountains and seas were the symbols and the guardians of their liberty. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Pride spoils hospitality*:—He has ordained a feast for them. But the feast is really to his own power and pride. (*Ibid.*) *The vanity of worldly grandeur*:—1. There is unlimited power. The man presented to our view is “reigning from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces.” 2. His power was supreme. The life of every subject in his kingdom depended on his word. He ruled without resistance and without control. The wealth, the productions, the inhabitants of the greatest empire of the earth, were thus his undisputed right. Here was one great object of human ambition completely gained. What struggles are made on earth for the attainment of office and personal dominion! The lust of power has waged the deadliest wars of earth, excited the cruellest murders of men, and deluged nations with blood. Among ourselves we see this lust of power on a smaller scale, in all the political efforts and contested elections of our own day, and in our own land. 3. There is a

peaceful and secure possession of this unlimited power. The view is given to us "in those days when Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom." Ahasuerus possessed his father's dominions in perfect peace. He had nothing to do but to govern peacefully and to enjoy abundantly. What blessings he might have dispersed abroad! What monuments of usefulness to men he might have established! The peaceful possession of power is a great privilege, as well as a great temptation. It enables man to be a benefactor to his race. He may sit as king among the mourners and make a thousand weary hearts to sing for joy. But it is a great temptation to the sensual cupidity of man. The history of the world is filled with the stories of human power, oppressive and destructive. 4. There is the possession of vast wealth and outward glory. Ahasuerus gathered around him "all his princes, his servants, the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him, when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty." No condition could appear to an earthly mind more desirable or tempting. We know something of the struggle for wealth. It is the great object for contest in the peaceful walks of business and commercial enterprise. To be rich, in modern society, is to be influential and exalted. What a vast privilege is the possession of such wealth! What happiness it may communicate when it is faithfully dispensed and employed as an instrument for human benefit! How great is the honour and the joy of being thus a public benefactor to mankind! But the responsibility is also great. Alas, how opposite to all this is the habitual use of wealth! It leads the selfish mind to a forgetfulness and neglect of the wants of others. It persuades sinful men that they have the right to live for their own indulgence and pleasure, and are not to be held responsible to others for the way in which their own acquisitions and means of influence are employed. 5. There is also splendid display. Wealth is often hoarded with a covetous grasp for mere accumulation. Man wants even the openness of heart for its display. But in the picture by which the Holy Spirit will illustrate for us the emptiness of the world there shall be no such defect. The wealth which has been amassed shall have the opportunity of the utmost manifestation. How we follow after pageants and exhibitions of the lowest kind! The gilded tinsel of such scenes, whether military or dramatic, funereal or joyous, is always exciting and attractive to the giddy, silly minds of the multitude. 6. There is not only all this power, wealth, and display combined; there is also here boundless actual indulgence and hospitality. What could have been more grand or satisfying in earthly things? Doubtless the whole multitude applauded the magnificence and hospitality of the youthful monarch. If the world can give man happiness in sensual indulgence, here was a scene of its perfect joy. No element of delight is wanting in such a picture. All these provisions are unsatisfying still. (1) They are all unsuitable. The soul has other views and needs, which none of these outward provisions of the earth can ever reach. There is still the burden of inward sin. There is still the want of reconciliation to God. (2) They are temporary. They are the things of a day at the best. The whole of a worldly life is but a day's dream of pleasure. To-morrow it will be over. To take you off from this vain pursuit of earth is the purpose of such a scene as the one we have considered. Look at it, not to desire it, but to discern its vanity. Behold how empty, how unsatisfying, how unsuitable, how transitory it is! Cease to look there for your joys. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Ahasuerus*:—I. The king of Persia at this time was *ANASTERTUS*. We read in Scripture of four grand earthly empires, of which this was one—and the second in the order of succession. The Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman all passed away as a dream—they crumbled to dust, and their glory is long ago departed! Notwithstanding the strength and celebrity of these ancient kingdoms, they came to nought and "their dominion was taken away." But there is a kingdom which passeth not away. Its King will remain in honour and glory for ever, and its subjects shall be blessed with everlasting happiness. 1. Great as was the extent of these kingdoms, His is inconceivably more extensive. 2. It is also more durable. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion." Let us be anxious to be numbered among the subjects of this kingdom, for they are all "kings and priests" for ever. With Christ on His throne we shall stand before His throne and that of His Father in the celestial city; we shall see His face, and His name shall be in our foreheads; we shall need no candle nor light of the sun, for the Lord God will give us light, and we shall reign for ever and ever! II. This mighty potentate, *Ahasuerus*, WISHED TO MAKE A DISPLAY OF HIS GREATNESS. Seldom, alas! is that expression, "Where much is

given, much will be required," practically in their remembrance! Oh! let us beware of glorying in anything of our own—of "sacrificing unto our own net, and burning incense to our own drag." Man at his best state is altogether vanity, and possesses nothing of any value but what God has given him. Where providence has bestowed much of earthly wealth and authority, it requires much grace not to be unduly elevated by them, and to keep ever in mind that they are given for usefulness. The weighty responsibilities which they bring with them are seldom considered. Let us beware of pride. "The proud in heart is abomination to the Lord." Crush the first risings of vanity and self-importance. Dread every high thought of yourselves, every towering imagination, every exalted idea of your own moral excellency, remembering that God knoweth the proud afar off, but giveth grace to the humble. III. At this feast, though a heathen one, THERE WAS ONE THING WHICH CONDEMNED THE PRACTICE OF MANY WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS. "And the drinking was according to law; none did compel, for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure." Intemperance is an abomination to God and a degradation to man. Hereby the creature, which is inferior only to the angels, makes himself lower than the beasts of the field! The bounties of providence are continued evidences of God's tender care toward us, His undeserving creatures, and are to be thankfully and humbly received and used piously and in moderation. They are given for the support of our nature, to enable us to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits: let us not, then, render ourselves incapable of doing so by drowning our rational powers in intoxicating liquors, and throwing our bodies out of health and comfort by a worse than beastly abuse of God's mercies. IV. But though the feast of Ahasuerus was free from the disgrace of compelling the guests to proceed to drunkenness, YET DID VERY EVIL CONSEQUENCES RESULT FROM IT; indeed, it is but seldom that such meetings are free from such consequences. We read of Belshazzar's feast, and that it was not without its grievous impieties. We read likewise of Herod's feast, and of the deed of darkness which gave it its notoriety. Our Lord, too (Luke xiv.), teaches us that, though the entertaining of our friends in this way is not entirely prohibited, the money thereby expended would be much better laid out, against the day of reckoning, in consoling the miserable and relieving the distresses of the indigent and needy. V. Let us consider THE EVIL WHICH WAS OCCASIONED BY THE FEAST. 1. It behoveth us to lead exemplary lives, and the higher we are placed in community the more ought this to be the object of our ambition. 2. It behoveth us to regard the duties which appertain to the relations of life in which we are placed. (*J. Hughes.*) *The short-lived treasure*:—The apostle Paul speaks of the world as if it were a pageant which has been exhibited and is over; a procession which is on the march and has passed by; a scene-picture which drops for a moment and then gives way to another which succeeds it. Here there is no continuing city for man. If he would have a kingdom which cannot be removed, he must seek it beyond the limits of the present world, among the things which are unseen and eternal. 1. Our first reflection must be, the world passeth away. It has gone. All its indulgences and all its glories have come to their appointed end. Nothing of them remains. Ahasuerus feasted and Vashti suffered. All is silent and dead. No single voice of the glory or of the sorrow remains. Where is the splendour of Shushan? Not one stone remains upon another of all the palaces of its glory or the portals of its majestic display. How wonderfully contrasted are the works of God and the works of man! The one has perished. The others remain. But is not this equally true of earth in all the relations and displays of its glory? Look where you will, you see the same history continually repeated. The bloom of youth, the gaiety of health, the boast of riches, the clarion sound of triumph and power, all, all pass away. They live a moment; they shine for a day; and they are gone. Man tries in vain to prolong their enjoyment and their being; or even to recover their shape, and perpetuate their memory. He is doomed to disappointment in them all. The retrospect is sadness and self-condemnation. There at least we may say, "My heart and my hope shall not be fixed. Something better than this I must have and will have. The joys that fade so rapidly and so certainly are not for me. This world, and all the things which are in this world, shall never be the treasure of my choice." 2. As our second reflection upon this accomplished scene, the manner of its passing has been most remarkable. In the lesson we have considered, God has been pleased to show us this experiment on the grandest scale. The world began with every possible advantage for its working and its display, and in every succeeding step it went downward



until it came to nothing. Its first scene was its brightest one. The morning rose when the tide was at his full and the surface calm as the molten silver. Every hour marked its rapid ebb, till the evening closed upon a full accumulation of defilement and disgust which the preceding show had vainly covered for a season. It was a sad experiment indeed. In the manner of its passage and trial it was a universal type. In all our possessions of the world, in the whole scheme of mere worldly enjoyment, the first is always the best. The clock of this world still strikes backward. It begins at twelve, runs rapidly round to one, and then stops. Thus its circle is complete, larger or smaller as it may happen to be. How many have I seen, starting in all the pride of inherited wealth, closing their career in neglect and poverty! How many have I beheld the centre of personal admiration in the world of fashion, of earthly pomp and folly, living to be forgotten and abhorred! Thus this present world repays its votaries. And when the result comes in age, or sickness, or poverty, or neglect, and the whole machine has run down and stopped, bitter and disgusting indeed is the remembrance of the world which has gone. But what a contrast there is between this passing worldly portion and the reality of that treasure which stands in opposition to it! The heavenly portion ever grows more and more compensating and satisfactory. The heart never grows old or dull in the faithful pursuit of it. 3. In this passage of the world you may see what are the elements of its short-lived power to please—what are the facts which make up the necessity of this rapid rush of all that sinful man has sought and desired on the earth. Ahasuerus had everything which a mere sensual mind could ask. What formed the necessity of his wretchedness in the midst of it all? We may answer at once, because nothing of all that he had was adapted in itself to give him satisfaction. This is the first difficulty. You have a spiritual nature, a soul within which can never be satisfied with the mere shams of an earthly life. The soul looks out in the midst of all the joys of earth unmet and unhappy, unable to be contented thus, because there is no real proportion between the two. There is here an original and inseparable defect in the things of the world, which no multiplication of them can supply. These joys and treasures are all short-lived and perishing in themselves. They have the sentence of death within themselves; and you cannot prolong the period of their power. They corrupt and decay in your hands while you grasp them. The appetites which desire and seek these joys pass away with them also. There soon comes the time when there is no longer a susceptibility to their power. Their invitations find no longer a response in the heart to which they are offered. The voices of singing men and singing women can be heard no more. And this with no reference to a change of principle or heart. No, it may be we would willingly prolong their power if we could; we would gladly renew our former gratifications in them if it were possible. But all their power to please, and all our facility to be pleased by them, have passed away and cannot be recalled. The whole scene of which these earthly joys make up a part also goes, and cannot be arrested or recalled. Friends are gone; families are broken; homes are lost; companions have departed. We stand here to contemplate this inherent fading character in the world which has passed. What a contrast are all its provisions to the joys and advantages of real religion! 4. We may look at the result of this passage of the fashion of the world. What does it leave behind? Ah, this is the worst of all. We have seen the evidence in the experiment before us. Nothing in memory. There is no remembrance of benefit or pleasure. The past gives no satisfaction. There is no room for delight in retrospection. A wasted life, enfeebled powers, conscious degradation, are all the residuum of a life of sensual enjoyment in the world. Added to this, there is extreme regret, often the bitterness of unappeased remorse. Nothing in actual possession. What of all the array of human pleasures outlasts itself? Youth, gaiety and wealth successively pass by. Man goes out of one vain indulgence into another, but carries nothing away with him. The soul is empty. He presses on in this vain succession to the end. The fact of the result remains the same. He has nothing. Pleasure has gone; time has gone; indulgence has gone; means have gone; appetites have gone; life has gone. And of the whole pageant as it has passed nothing remains. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Self-glorification*:—I. THE MONARCH WAS ABLE TO MAKE A PROUD DISPLAY AND TO GRATIFY THE ORIENTAL TASTE FOR MAGNIFICENCE. II. BUT THIS PROUD DISPLAY WAS A CONTEMPTIBLE EXHIBITION. IT SHOWED—1. THE MATERIALISM OF HIS NATURE. 2. THE NARROWNESS OF HIS VIEW. 3. THE CHILDISHNESS OF HIS SPIRIT. III. THIS PROUD DISPLAY HAS A SORROWFUL ASPECT. THE DISPLAY ONLY LASTED FOR "DAYS" AFTER ALL. Let our wealth—material, intellectual, or moral—speak for itself. Let us see the warning word "days" inscribed

on all our possessions. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of his wealth*:—The whole struggle of modern life is exactly after the first chapter of Esther and the first chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Every Ahasuerus thinks he could do better than his namesake, and every new Solomon says that he would never play the fool as the old one did. What little toy houses are ours as compared with this palace; and yet we will persist. Why do we not believe history? Why do we not accept the verdict that it is not in time or sense, in gold or precious stones, to make a man great or happy? When we have built up our little toy houses, Ahasuerus looks down upon them, and smiles at the little honeycombs. His "beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble." Yet it was an elaborate tomb, a magnificent sarcophagus! When will men come to learn that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth; that he is most jewelled who has no jewellery; that he only is great who is great in soul? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The honours of the world should not elate*:—Alcibiades was one day boasting of his wealth and great estate, when Socrates placed a map before him, and asked him to find Attica. It was insignificant on the map; but he found it. "Now," said the philosopher, "point out your own estate." "It is too small to be distinguished in so little a space," was the answer. "See, then," said Socrates, "how much you are affected about an imperceptible point of land." Your bags of gold should be ballast in your vessel to keep her always steady, instead of being topsails to your masts to make your vessel giddy. Give me that distinguished person who is rather pressed down under the weight of all his honours than puffed up with the blast thereof. (*Abp. Secker.*) *Waste of wealth*:—I am no advocate for meanness of private habitation. I would fain introduce into it all magnificence, care, and beauty, when they are possible; but I would not have that useless expense in unnoticed fineries or formalities—cornicing of ceilings, and graining of doors, and fringing of curtains, and thousands of such things—which have become foolishly and apathetically habitual. . . . I speak from experience: I know what it is to live in a cottage with a deal floor and roof, and a hearth of mica slate; I know it to be in many respects healthier and happier than living between a Turkey carpet and a gilded ceiling, beside a steel grate and polished fender. I do not say that such things have not their place and propriety; but I say this emphatically, that a tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaninglessly lost in domestic comforts and encumbrances, would, if collectively afforded and wisely employed, build a marble church for every town in England. (*J. Ruskin.*) *The royal feast*:—Let us draw a comparison between the great Persian feast and the feast of the gospel. I. THE ONE WAS PROVIDED BY THE KING; THE OTHER BY THE KING OF KINGS. II. THE ONE FEAST IS LIMITED TO NOBLES AND PRINCES; THE OTHER IS MADE FOR ALL NATIONS. III. IN THE ONE WE SEE THE FADING GLORIES OF MAN; IN THE OTHER WE SEE THE UNFADING GLORIES OF GOD. IV. THE ONE FEAST CONTINUED FOR SIX MONTHS; THE OTHER CONTINUES THROUGH ALL TIME. V. IN THE ONE CASE SOME WERE OBLIGED TO FEAST IN THE COURT OF THE GARDEN, AS THERE WAS NOT ROOM FOR THEM IN THE PALACE; THE CHURCH OF GOD IS FOR ALL CORNERS. VI. IN THE ONE CASE THERE WAS A SEPARATION OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES; BUT IN THE OTHER BOTH ARE WELCOME TOGETHER. VII. THE ONE FEAST ENDED IN CONSTERNATION AND SORROW; BUT THE OTHER SHALL CONTINUE IN JOY AND HAPPINESS. Learn, in conclusion—1. The insufficiency and instability of all earthly things. 2. The rich grace and goodness of our God. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty.—*Despotism occasionally generous*:—Despotism, while it has its caprices of cruelty, has also its occasional fits of generosity and kindness. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Extravagance*:—Every one is to live, and to entertain his friends, according to his rank and circumstances; but those who are of a liberal spirit are in danger of indulging in extravagance, to gratify their vanity and passion for show. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Unsatisfying splendour*:—What was there in all that to satisfy the soul's hunger and thirst, its craving and longing? One morsel of the bread of life would be better, one drop of the wine of the kingdom more blessed and exhilarating, than it all. So that when we look abroad upon the scene of Persian magnificence and luxury, the glitter and splendour of it seems to dissolve and fade away when there is brought into prominence our Lord's solemn inquiry, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (*T. McEwan.*) *Temperance best*:—Epicurus himself, who placed happiness in pleasure, enjoined temperance as a necessary means of this pleasure. An author of our own nation justly observes

that when a great multitude of alluring dishes are set upon a table a wise man may see palsies, apoplexies, and other grievous or mortal distempers lurking amongst them. Poor men, who are unable to provide for themselves anything beyond the bare necessities of life, are apt to envy those who have it in their power to fare sumptuously every day. Be persuaded, if you desire to be content with your condition, that happiness does not lie in the abundance of the things which a man possesseth, or in the rich entertainments which he is able to furnish out for himself or his friends. Could not Jesus have furnished out as elegant an entertainment for those whom He fed by miracles as Ahasuerus to his noble guests? And yet He fed them only with barley loaves and fishes. Could not God have brought wine as easily as water out of the rock for the refreshment of His people? (*G. Lawson.*)

*The expense of feasting* :—Poor man! Little did he know wherein true riches, and glory, and royalty consisted. It is said of the father of Louis XV., king of France, that when his preceptor one day was speaking of this feast of Ahasuerus, and wondered how the Prince of Persia could find patience for such a long feast, he replied that his wonder was how he could defray the expense of it. He was afraid that the provinces would be compelled to observe a fast for it. *The majesty of the Divine Ruler* :—From the tinselled splendour of the Persian court it may be well for us to turn that we may contemplate the majesty of Him who is the true King of kings and Lord of lords; of Him whom Isaiah represents as “sitting upon the circle of the earth, and all the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them as a tent to dwell in.” To acquire adequate conceptions of His majestic greatness is an impossibility. That which surrounded Ahasuerus was no doubt such as to inspire awe. And were it possible that a human potentate should hold sway over the several planets constituting the solar system—ruling subjects innumerable by his uncontrolled will—what majesty in the eyes of millions would centre around his person and government! He, however, into whose majestic presence we shall one day enter, and at whose footstool we ought now to bow in reverence, is the Ruler, not alone of earth, nor simply of the solar system, but He whose government is coextensive with the universe, whose presence fills immensity, whose sceptre when lifted in mercy bestows life, when in anger consigns to wretchedness. The inconceivable majesty of God ought to impress us with a becoming sense of our own insignificance. A proper conception of the majesty of God is fitted to induce the inquiry, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” It should prompt the desire for some humble part in enhancing God’s glory, the inclination to do something toward accomplishing the work He is carrying forward in the earth and is willing to effect in our own hearts. He whose ambition it is to conquer the kingdom of evil within himself and who accepts Christ as the Captain of his salvation is destined to no such disappointment as crushed the spirit of Xerxes, forcing him to feed upon the ashes of crushed hopes and to surrender to self-indulgence that he might drown the memory of former anguish. (*J. Van Dyke, D.D.*)

Where were white, green, and blue hangings.—*The beauty of nature* :—Every day we behold a more glorious scene in the canopy of the heavens spread over our heads. The roses and lilies which adorn our gardens are more beautiful than any of the productions of art which royal wealth can call forth. The earth is full of God’s riches. The heavens show forth His glory. Those who delight to have their eyes and their minds at once entertained can be at no loss, though they are far from royal palaces, when the earth displays her beauty and the stars their glory. (*G. Lawson.*)

And gave them drink in vessels of gold.—*An absurd drinking custom* :—What a miserable thing it is that we hear sometimes that a man cannot do his business without drinking! “Come and have a drink!” is the beginning of business, and “Come and have a drink!” is the completion of it. What a glutton and a beast a man should be if before he could begin or finish any business he must say, “Come and have a meal!” And is he any better who must always drink something? Surely, when competition is so keen, it is needful that he who buys or sells should keep his wits as clear as God made them. To muddle one’s own brain with drink is to play the fool; to muddle another’s is to play the knave. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Ver. 8. **And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel.**—*Political prudence* :—It is not entirely, however, in moral recoil that sanction is thus given in law to the better practice. There is a touch of political prudence in it. For here at the feast are princes from all parts, with their retainers and tribes. There are men here from the mountains who are famous for their temperance and for the

strictness and simplicity of their manners. Such men would not be won, but disgusted rather and alienated from the royal cause, by anything like Bacchanalian excess. In prudence, therefore, as well as from possibly higher motive, the principle of temperance must have the reinforcement of public law. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *God not to be insulted by the abuse of His creatures*:—Did an absolute prince pay such regard to the laws of his country, and to the liberty of his subjects, and shall not Christians pay an equal regard to the laws of their religion? Are these laws less obligatory upon us at feasts than on other occasions? Shall we requite the liberal Giver of all good things with insults on His authority, at the very time that our table is covered by His bounty? (*G. Lawson.*) *The compulsion of our drinking customs*:—Whether we do not, on a wider scale, as a people in fact, and with the force of law, practise compulsion still, and that on the weakest and most helpless part of our people, is a very serious question, and one which, to say the least, we cannot answer with the same confidence. If places where drink is sold to the common people are multiplied much beyond the reasonable needs of the community; if exceptional privileges are given to the sellers; if their houses, with many exits and entrances, are planted in the most conspicuous spots; if they burn the brightest lights in the streets, and are allowed to keep open long after other trades and industries are closed and silent, does not all this and more of the same kind amount to a sort of compulsion to working-people, and trades-people, and thoughtless young people of both sexes? (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *No compulsion to drink*:—The statement here made reminds us of an incident which is said to have occurred at the table of Queen Victoria in one of the early years of her reign. The temperance movement was just beginning to make its way into the upper classes of English society, and on the occasion to which I refer a British nobleman, well-known for his activity in all good causes, declined to comply with the request of one of his fellow-guests that he should drink wine with him, whereupon the appeal was made to her Majesty that she should exert her authority in the case; but she nobly replied, in the spirit of this Persian law, "There shall be no compulsion at my table"; and that reply did much to discountenance the old custom of badgering, and browbeating and insisting upon guests drinking out of regard for their hosts, until they felt themselves in a position where it was difficult to refuse, and were virtually compelled either to act against their better judgment or to do that which was considered rude and unmannerly. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

**Ver. 10. When the heart of the king was merry with wine.**—*Intoxication*:—There is a difference between not being intoxicated and being sober. A person may be able to speak and to walk, and yet may be guilty of excess in the use of strong drink. He may not have lost the use of his senses, and yet have lost the sound use of his senses. He may lose his guard, and expose himself defenceless to the attack of temptation. Reason is the glory of a man, and whatever tarnishes or dims the lustre of this crown is criminal. Next to reason, speech is man's glory, and everything which causes it to falter is sinful. Whatever makes a man slow to hear, swift to speak, swift to wrath—whatever makes him rash in counsel, and precipitate in action—whatever makes him say or do what is unbecoming his character, and what he would be ashamed of at another time—cometh of evil, and may be the source of great vexation to himself and injury to others. (*T. McCrie.*) *Drunkness does not destroy responsibility*:—The worst effect of the vice of drunkenness is its degrading influence on the conduct and character of men. It robs its victims of self-respect and manliness and sends them to wallow in the mire with swinish obscenity. What they would not dream of stooping to in their sober moments they revel in with shameless ostentation when their brains are clouded with intoxicating drink. It is no excuse to plead that a drunkard is a madman unaccountable for his actions; he is accountable for having put himself in his degraded condition. The man who has been foolish enough to launch his boat on the rapids cannot divert its course when he is startled by the thunder of the falls he is approaching; but he should have thought of that before leaving the safety of the shore. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The drunkard's excuses and the drunkard's woe*:—**I. THE DRUNKARD'S EXCUSES.** 1. Good-fellowship. But can friendship be founded on vice; especially on a vice which impairs the memory and the sense of obligation, leads to the betrayal of secrets, and stirs up strife and contention? 2. It drains care. But the drunkard's care must arise either from the ill state of his health, the unfortunate position of his worldly affairs, or the stings of a guilty conscience; and in either case his temporary oblivion is purchased at the cost of an

aggravation of the evils which cause him to desire it. II. THE DRUNKARD'S WOE. This is made up of the miserable effects. 1. Temporal. (1) Poverty. (2) Contempt. (3) Ill-health. (4) An untimely death. 2. Spiritual. (1) The understanding is depraved and darkened. (2) The will is enfeebled and dethroned. (3) Regard for men, reverence for God, are destroyed. Drunkenness travels with a whole train of other vices, and requires the whole breadth of the broad way to give it room. (*Clapham's Selected Sermons.*) *Afraid of drink*.—Stonewall Jackson, "Jeb" Stuart, and a large number of the most distinguished of the Confederate officers imitated the example of their chief, and were strict temperance men. Upon one occasion Jackson was suffering so much from fatigue and severe exposure that his surgeon prevailed on him to take a little brandy. He made a very wry face as he swallowed it, and the doctor asked, "Why, general, is not the brandy good? It is some that we have recently captured, and I think it very fine." "Oh, yes!" was the reply, "it is very good brandy. I like liquor—its taste and its effects—and that is just the reason why I never drink it." Upon another occasion, after a long ride in a drenching rain, a brother officer insisted upon Jackson's taking a drink with him; but he firmly replied, "No, sir, I cannot do it. I tell you I am more afraid of King Alcohol than of all the bullets of the enemy." *The battle with drink*.—And drink is such a degrading enemy to the intellectual man: the foe is unworthy of his steel. The battle of drink is not like the old contests of chivalry, when knight assailed knight with unblemished shield, and there was such a grace and elegance about the conflict that even defeat was not dishonourable. It is more like a battle with a chimney-sweep falling foul of you, rolling on you his heavy bulk till he has you sprawling in the mud, and so smearing you that you become an object of loathing—to yourself, if you have any sense of shame, and certainly to all who pass by. Could any humiliation be deeper? (*G. W. Blaikie.*) *The safety of temperance*.—Suppose there were two lines of railroad; on one of them was an accident regularly once a week, sometimes on one day, and sometimes on another; and on the other there never had been an accident. Suppose your only son wanted to go the journey traversed by the respective lines, and he were to come to you saying, "Which road shall I take, father?" would you dare to tell him to take that upon which the accidents were so frequent, because it was the most fashionable? You would say at once, "Take the safe road, my boy." And that is just what we temperance folks say. (*John B. Gough.*) *Wise abstinence*.—There was a half-witted boy in one of the southern counties of Scotland who was known as an "innocent" or "natural." Upon one occasion he was enticed into a public-house where a company of young men were drinking. Some of them offered spirits to this supposed simpleton, whereupon he instantly and absolutely refused them, saying, "If the Lord Almighty has given few wits to Daft Davie, He has at least given him sense enough to keep the little that he has!" (*Sunday School.*) All's well that ends well; but wine never ends well. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

Vers. 11, 12. To bring Vashti the queen before the king.—*Vanity*.—Whatever be the ruling passion of a man, whether it be pride, vanity, or anger, or lust, or impiety, or even benevolence, it will display itself when he is inflamed by strong drink. Vanity was the ruling passion in the breast of the Persian monarch. He had feasted his nobles for weeks to "show the riches of his glorious kingdom"; and now he would bring in the queen, to "show the people and the princes her beauty." He was vain of Vashti; and having displayed "the honour of his royal majesty," he would now exhibit the beauty of her royal majesty. We are hurt by the ebullition of pride—but ready to laugh at the display of vanity. It is true that it makes its subject ridiculous, but it is a vice as well as a weakness, and is often productive of great mischief. The female sex is commonly supposed to be most addicted to vanity; but men are not free from it, and, if they have nothing to be vain of themselves, are sometimes fain to shine in borrowed feathers. (*T. McCrie.*) *Vashti's refusal*.—What the reason was that swayed her to this bold step we are not told. Her motives may have been mixed. Perhaps she was tired with her own exertions. Perhaps she felt that for the time she was not beautiful, and would not look queenly. Perhaps she thought the summons too peremptory, and the bearers of it not dignified enough to come to her with such a message. We cannot certainly tell. All human motives are more or less mixed, and so were hers—but one feels bound to say that by far the most probable cause of her refusal was a deep sense of injury done to her womanhood, and of course to her queenliness, in this sudden call to show herself in such a company, at such a time. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *The pride of Vashti*.—Bad

as the conduct of the king was in issuing the order, it does not follow that the queen was right in disobeying it. If the action had been in itself positively immoral, then it would have been her duty to have resisted, whatever the consequences might be. No authority can bind, and no danger should constrain, a woman to do anything which is vicious or essentially immodest. Had Vashti of her own accord gone into the company, had she sought the opportunity, or embraced it joyfully, she would have been convicted of immodesty; but had she complied merely out of respect to authority, and to prevent her husband from being dishonoured by her refusal, in the presence of his subjects, her conduct would have appeared in a very different light in the eyes of all reasonable persons. She was a subject, as well as a wife; and if her royal husband had, when heated with wine, issued an order which reflected on her honour, she, being perfectly sober, might have consulted his. But Vashti was as proud as Ahasuerus was vain, and determined that if he was imperious, she would be haughty and unyielding. She was piqued that such a message should be sent to her in the presence of her maids of honour and the great ladies of Persia, and resolved to show her spirit by setting at nought the request of the king her husband. Instead of making a modest excuse, or sending "a soft answer which turneth away wrath," she gave a flat and peremptory refusal. (*T. McCrie*)

*Vashti obeyed the higher law*:—Thus the question was publicly forced on all, Is this man, who rules from India to Ethiopia, really a great man, after all? For Vashti disobeyed him; and Vashti was right. There is a higher law than even the will of a king and a husband—the law that gives a woman right to guard her own modesty when those who should guard it for her do not. Vashti obeyed that higher law written by the Creator in the nature of men and women; and we can think nothing but good of her in the matter. Had force been used, her responsibility would have ceased, but she had no right to yield; and the crown royal was a cheap price to pay for her own self-respect. *Selfishness is unfeeling*:—Did he send a message to Vashti to ask if she would be willing? When was woman ever honoured out of Christ, who redeemed her out of her social estrangement and solitude, and set her forth invested with the queenliness of a God-given beauty and modesty. Hear the king: "Fetch Vashti now, and make a show of her beauty, for she is fair to look upon." All this is in natural order. Selfishness never considers the feelings of others. Selfishness will be gratified at all costs and hazards. When a man's heart is merry with wine all that is most sacred in humanity goes out of him. Who can withhold anything from a ravenous beast? Who should stay his power and say be quiet, be self-controlled, be contented? None. This is human nature when left to itself. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*Amestris*:—If Ahasuerus is to be identified with Xerxes, it is probable that Vashti is the same as the Amestris who is spoken of by the Greeks as the wife of Xerxes, and whom he must have wedded before his accession to the throne. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

*Vashti right*:—But for my part I consider it worthy of all praise, and hold that she was entirely right in what she did. It is true that by the appointment of God the husband is the head of the wife, but the headship is not absolute and autocratic. Here, too, the government must be constitutional and within limits which have been fixed by the Lord Himself. No husband has a right to command a wife to do that which is wrong, and liberty of conscience ought to be as sacred in the home as in the State. (*Ibid.*)

*Vashti had good reason to be excused*:—Vashti had good reason to beg to be excused from appearing in a company where too many were merry with wine, and it is probable that if she had sent her humble request to the king to spare her modesty he might have recalled his orders. (*G. Lawson.*)

*Disobedience of Vashti*:—She was in no danger of being insulted by indecent words or wanton glances in the presence of her royal husband, whose frown was death to his subjects. She thought she was supporting the honour of her sex. But did not she see that she was affronting her husband and her king not only before his chamberlains but before all his people? If he suffered his own family to trample upon his authority his respectability amongst his other subjects must have been greatly lessened. The queen is the first subject in the kingdom; she ought, therefore, to go before all the other subjects in showing a becoming deference to the king's pleasure. If men expect due obedience from their wives, let them be always reasonable in their commands, otherwise half the guilt of the disobedience of their wives will remain with themselves. Never impose a burden upon your wife which either female delicacy or her particular temper, which you ought to know, will render too heavy for her to bear. Ahasuerus hoped to show to all his princes and people in Shushan how

happy he was, and only showed them his misery. (*Ibid.*) *Worldly indulgence disappointing*:—Was Ahasuerus contented with what he had so richly enjoyed? We stand in this chamber of the world to witness a remarkable scene of its madness and folly. 1. Behold the thorough dissatisfaction which attends its joys. See the conscious wretchedness which limits all its pleasures. Man finds an inherent and inseparable element of dissatisfaction in all the scenes of his earthly joys. They do not, they cannot meet his wants. He awakes always to find that his soul is empty, and sad in the consciousness of the fact. Ahasuerus is just as unsatisfied with all his magnificent display and with his six months' pompous festival as the poorest subject of his realm is with his own hard lot. Unlimited opportunity of indulgence is nothing, while there is a limited capacity to enjoy and an unlimited craving for enjoyment. Such was Ahasuerus. His heart was empty of joy though filled with madness. He imagines a new spectacle which will awaken a new admiration. He commands his seven chamberlains "to bring Vashti the queen before the king, with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty, for she was fair to look on." But he is not alone. Where is the feast or where the provision of the world for human gratification in which there is nothing left for the heart to desire? Ahasuerus is but a specimen. His folly has been multiplied in myriads of instances, and in every variety in the scale of imitation. It only shows what emptiness there is in the whole of this scheme of sensual gratification. 2. Behold the bitter disappointment. "Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains." Refused to come!—what a disappointment to morbid, vulgar curiosity! What a fall to intoxicated pride! But it was a noble specimen of woman's dignity, modesty, and virtue. All his indulgence is forgotten—the happiness of his palace has passed away. The worldly heart is empty and vexed with itself. His dream of glory has vanished. Its beauty and splendour have withered completely for him. One "dead fly" has destroyed the fragrance of the whole provision. But is this a peculiar case in the disappointment which it describes? Was Ahasuerus the only victim of such conscious mistake in the midst of indulgence? You see the madness, the disappointment in the sensual heart which worldly indulgence everywhere produces. Go where you will, as far as you will, still desire and imagination press further on. Something is yet demanded to complete your attainment. This is the inevitable law of the result in human pleasure. The brightest portion leaves something still to ask. The highest attainment is as unsatisfying as the lowest. 3. Behold the degradation to which this disappointment has brought its victim. The king is wretched in the presence of them all. Ahasuerus is degraded, but he has degraded himself. The man who has sacrificed his virtue, his integrity, his self-respect, may be sure that, sooner or later, his sin will find him out. But this is another lesson in the chamber of worldly indulgence. This is the habitual end of a life of mere sensual gratification. Personal degradation is its habitual result—in some shape or other its final, inevitable result. Moral, outward degradation frequently! Intellectual, conscious degradation, social degradation! what can be more degrading than such a subjection? What can be more degrading than such a slavery to brute appetite and sensual display? It is the defiling and destroying of a mind that might be elevated to God and educated for glory. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Vashti*:—1. In the first place I want you to look upon Vashti the queen. A blue ribbon rayed with white, drawn around her forehead, indicated her queenly position. It was no small honour to be queen in such a realm as that. Hark to the rustle of her robes! See the blaze of her jewels! And yet it is not necessary to have palace and regal robe in order to be queenly. When I see a woman with stout faith in God, putting her foot upon all meanness and selfishness and godless display, going right forward to serve Christ and the race by a grand and glorious service, I say, "That woman is a queen," and whether she comes up from the shanty on the common or the mansion of the fashionable square I greet her with the shout, "All hail, Queen Vashti!" When Scarron, the wit and ecclesiastic, as poor as he was brilliant, was about to marry Madame de Maintenon he was asked by the notary what he proposed to settle upon Mademoiselle. The reply was, "Immortality; the names of the wives of kings die with them; the name of the wife of Scarron will live always." In a higher and better sense upon all women who do their duty God will settle immortality! Not the immortality of earthly fame, but the immortality celestial. And they shall reign for ever and ever! Oh, the opportunity which every woman has of being a queen! The longer I live the more I admire good womanhood. If a man have

a depressed idea of womanly character he is a bad man, and there is no exception to the rule. The writings of Goethe can never have any such attractions for me as Shakespeare, because nearly all the womanly characters of the great German have some kind of turpitude. 2. Again, I want you to consider Vashti the veiled. Had she appeared before Ahasuerus and his court on that day with her face uncovered she would have shocked all the delicacies of Oriental society, and the very men who in their intoxication demanded that she come, in their sober moments would have despised her. As some flowers seem to thrive best in the dark lane and in the shadow, and where the sun does not seem to reach them, so God appoints to most womanly natures a retiring and unobtrusive spirit. God once in a while does call an Isabella to a throne, or a Miriam to strike the timbrel at the front of a host, or a Marie Antoinette to quell a French mob, or a Deborah to stand at the front of an armed battalion crying out, "Up! Up! This is the day in which the Lord will deliver Sisera into thy hands." And when women are called to such outdoor work and to such heroic positions God prepares them for it. When I see a woman going about her daily duty—with cheerful dignity presiding at the table; with kind and gentle but firm discipline presiding in the nursery; going out into the world without any blast of trumpets, following in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good—I say, "This is Vashti with a veil on." But when I see a woman of unblushing boldness, loud-voiced, with a tongue of infinite clitter-clatter, with arrogant look, passing through the streets with a masculine swing, gaily arrayed in a very hurricane of millinery, I cry out, "Vashti has lost her veil." 3. Again, I want you to consider Vashti the sacrifice. Who is this that I see coming out of that palace gate of Shushan? She comes homeless, houseless, friendless, trudging along with a broken heart. Who is she? It is Vashti the sacrifice. Oh, what a change it was from regal position to a wayfarer's crust! Ah! you and I have seen it many a time. Here is a home empalaced with beauty. All that refinement and books and wealth can do for that home has been done; but Ahasuerus, the husband and the father, is taking hold on paths of sin. He is gradually going down. Soon the bright apparel of the children will turn to rags; soon the household song will become the sobbing of a broken heart. The old story over again. The house full of outrage and cruelty and abomination, while trudging forth from the palace gate are Vashti and her children. Oh, Ahasuerus, that you should stand in a home by a dissipated life destroying the peace and comfort of that home! 4. Once more, I want you to look at Vashti the silent. You do not hear any outcry from this woman as she goes forth from the palace gate. From the very dignity of her nature you know there will be no vociferation. Sometimes in life it is necessary to make a retort; sometimes in life it is necessary to resist; but there are crises when the most triumphant thing to do is to keep silence. Affliction, enduring without any complaint the sharpness of the pang, and the violence of the storm, and the fetter of the chain, and the darkness of the night—waiting until a Divine hand shall be put forth to soothe the pang and hush the storm and release the captive. An Arctic explorer found a ship floating helplessly about among the icebergs, and going on board he found that the captain was frozen at his log-book, and the helmsman was frozen at the wheel, and the men on the look-out were frozen in their places. That was awful, but magnificent. All the Arctic blasts and all the icebergs could not drive them from their duty. Their silence was louder than thunder. And this old ship of the world has many at their posts in the awful chill of neglect, and frozen of the world's scorn, and their silence shall be the eulogy of the skies, and be rewarded long after this weather-beaten craft of a planet shall have made its last voyage. I thank God that the mightiest influences are the most silent. The fires in a furnace of a factory or of a steamship roar though they only move a few shuttles or a few thousand tons, but the sun that warms the world rises and sets without a crackle or faintest sound. Travellers visiting Mount Etna, having heard of the glories of sunrise on that peak went up to spend the night there and see the sun rise next morning, but when it came up it was so far behind their anticipations that they actually hissed it. The mightiest influences of to-day are like the planetary system—completely silent. Don't hiss the sun! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Therefore was the king very wroth.**—*Self-control the highest attainment* :—"Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him." Literally, he frothed at the mouth and became as a wild boar. The strength of manhood is in self-control. The Oriental king could not brook that his will should be resisted. It is the very highest attainment of Christian education that a man shall accept the resistance of his will as an element in his culture. No man will



seek to force his will; he will reason about it, he will be mighty in argument, tender and gentle in persuasion, and if he cannot win the first day or the second day, he may be successful on the third day. But mere force never won a true victory. Conquer by love and you will reign by consent. Let men feel that your wisdom is greater than theirs, and they will say, "God save the king!" The time is coming when every man will have to prove his kingliness not because of the insignia he keeps in the tower, but because of a wise head, a noble heart, and a hand that never refused its offices to an honest cause. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

**Anger:—I. THE DEFORMITY OF ANGER.** What an ugly thing is anger. II. **THE DISGRACE OF ANGER.** III. **THE DANGER OF ANGER.** (*J. Trapp.*) *The batteries of passion:—*Regular ill-temper is altogether a different thing from passion. The one corrodes incessantly like an acid or metal, the other discharges desperate shocks like the electric shocks of the gymnotus, and spends itself. Do not get in the way of passionate men until their batteries are discharged. The exhaustion of these batteries is only a matter of time and opportunity. And you may watch the process calmly, and be instructed by Humboldt's description of the way in which the gymnotes use their batteries, and see if you discover therein any resemblance to and lesson for passionate persons. He tells us that the gymnotes abound in the vicinity of Calaboza in South America, and the Indians, well aware of the danger of encountering them when their powers are in vigour, collect from twenty to thirty horses, drive them into the pools, and when the gymnotes have exhausted their electric batteries on the poor horses they can be taken without risk. Time and repose are needed before the batteries are ready to act again. The first assault of the gymnotes, says Humboldt, was chiefly to be dreaded. In fact, after a time the eels resembled discharged batteries. Their muscular motion continued active, but they had lost the power of giving energetic shocks. When the combat had endured for a quarter of an hour the horses seemed to be less in fear. They were no longer seen to fall backwards, and the gymnotes, swimming with their bodies half out of the water, were now flying from the horses and making for the shore. The Indians then began to use their harpoons, and by means of long cords attached to them drew the fish out of the water. When the batteries of his passion have been discharged many a passionate man has also afforded a similarly easy conquest to those who have just watched and waited. (*Scientific Illustrations, &c.*)

*The passionate character:—*The panther rarely attacks man without being provoked; but it is irritated at the merest trifle, and its anger is manifested by the lightning rapidity of its onset, which invariably results in the speedy death of the imprudent being who has aroused its fury. Avoid passionate people, for they are like the panther. (*Ibid.*)

*Beautiful surroundings may be inoperative for good:—*Surely a palace will be a sanctuary. The palace of this man was worse than a stable. Surely in the presence of beauty men must grow beautiful! This man looked on beauty but did not see it, and perpetrated the irony of living amongst beautiful things until he became ghastly and hideous. Never did Pleasure hold such carnival; never were such Saturnalia known in all the earth. Yet the men did not retire from it heroes and chief of virtue and beneficence; they staggered away half beast and half devil. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*Character is not in circumstances:—*Sometimes we say, looking upon the abodes of poverty, "What can we expect here of decency, moral education, and progress? See how the poor are huddled and crowded together! What can be looked for here but a hotbed bringing forth a most evil harvest?" All that is right. But if there is any argument in it at all it is an argument that covers a large space. Here is a man who has room enough, he has everything at his command; if he wants gold or silver or precious stones he can have them by a nod of his head, what can we expect here but piety, contentment, thankfulness, moral progress? Family life under such a canopy must be a daily doxology, a sweet, hallowed thing more of heaven than of earth. We must beware of the sophism in both sides of this popular argument. Character is not in circumstances. The poorest people have, in no solitary instances easily numbered, most vividly illustrated the purest and noblest character. There are kings who are paupers, there are paupers who are kings. We owe everything to moral education—we owe nothing to kingly splendour. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 15. What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law.—***The great advantage of laws:—*Here let us remark the great advantage of laws. Law is mind without passion; and it is better to have a code of laws, however bad, than to have none but the will of a man. Had the king on this occasion acted according

to his passion, it is more than probable that the scene might have terminated more tragically; but he acted "according to law." Secondly, we see the great advantage of counsel. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," says the wise man. This is more especially the case with those who have the lives, the property, and even the religion of others, to consider and determine upon. What an advantage is it to have for counsellors good men, who hate covetousness, who have the welfare of their country at heart, and especially those who act under the fear of God! (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 16-26. **And Memucan answered before the king.**—*Hasty counsellors* :—If they had been wise, as counsellors ought to be, they would have been in no haste to give judgment in a matter so important as that which was submitted to them. They would have delayed till passion had cooled, and right reason had been restored. But, half-intoxicated they proceeded to give judgment at once, falling in with the humours of royalty, and hastening to do what could not afterwards be recalled. (*T. McEwan.*) *Flatterers* :—It is the punishment of despots to be surrounded by flatterers, and the words of counsellors are but the dicta of their whims and conceits. (*Ibid.*) *Flatterers* :—There is a general lesson suggested by what passed between the king and his counsellors as to the danger of flattery. It is natural to all men to desire to have their opinions confirmed and approved by others. The feeling of self-approbation, which forms one element of happiness, is gratified and strengthened when several persons give their verdict in favour of a choice which we have made or a course of action which we have judged it right to pursue. But then, when men occupy exalted stations, and have it in their power to reward richly those who are in any way instrumental to the advancement of their comfort and happiness, they are exposed to the very serious calamity of having counsels and opinions poured into their ear for the purpose of pleasing them, and not of presenting truth to them or guiding them rightly through difficulties. There is hardly any one, indeed, who is exempted from the influence of flattery. It is less and less exercised as wealth and power diminish; but when a man is possessed of anything that can afford gratification to others, he will find some to fall in with his wishes and approve of his opinions, until all he has is expended. Perhaps it is in the condition of absolute poverty alone that the voice of flattery is not heard. Whether we have or have not wherewithal to bribe others to our way of thinking and feeling, and to secure their approval of our conduct, certain it is that we have a flatterer in our own hearts whose insidious attempts to mislead us we should guard against most anxiously. In every man there is a conflict between inclination and the power of conscience. This conflict arises and is carried on without reference to a man's religious knowledge or belief. The heathen were as conscious of it as those are who possess the oracles of God. When unlawful desire prompts in one direction, there is another influence, the natural conscience, which points in a different way, and has its strong arguments to repress the cravings of desire. Now all the reasonings against the conviction of what is right are just so many self-flatteries by which we are seduced into sin. And their strength is too great. They put a false colouring upon the objects of human pursuit, they make what is wrong appear right and what is hurtful seem innocent, and thus the maxim is verified, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." We may wonder at the folly of Artaxerxes in allowing himself to be guided by the judgment of men who only spoke what they supposed would please him! But all men have as good reason—yea, Christ's own people have as good reason—to wonder at the strange flatteries by which at one time their progress heavenward is interrupted, and at other times their will is enlisted on the side of what is positively evil. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The result of sensual indulgence* :—1. The flattery and the falsehood of the world. The king is surrounded by admirers and friends. They are "wise men who knew the times." One faithful but persecuted woman is the object of their hostility and the subject of their counsel. But ah, where is the faithful man among them all? Why is there no one to take the side of persecuted innocence and injured virtue? What an aspect this council exhibits of the mind and motives of guilty men! How rarely do the rich and great listen to the voice of truth or find the fidelity of real friendship! To maintain the side of truth and virtue against wealth and pride and power in the world is a signal mark of the great and noble mind. Thus hand joins in hand in the perpetration of human sin. Is this peculiar? Nay, this is the transgression with which the world aboundeth. What swarms of flatterers hang about the path

of self-indulgent youth! See that daughter of wealth and fashion. How is she led on from step to step in the blandishments of her career. There is none to restrain, none to warn, and she has no real friend to whom she can be induced to listen. Memucan's grand fear alleged is that all the wives in Persia will prove either too virtuous to be degraded or too rebellious to be governed. Nothing marks a debased and consciously criminal mind more clearly and habitually than its suspicion and incredulity of the virtue and integrity of others. This painful and disgraceful fact is brought before us in our present illustration. It is the family relation of which Memucan speaks. What is it that maintains in our households the spirit and dominion of mutual confidence? I answer, not the world or the pursuit of the world, but the power of true religion. Take this great principle of life and truth from the household, let the world rule there in its pride of covetousness, or in its lust of indulgence, and how soon and how thoroughly are domestic happiness, dignity and peace sacrificed and cast away! Mutual suspicion, recrimination, alienation, separation, divorce, hatred, persecution, murder, all follow in the legitimate train of succession as natural and too often habitual results. Half the talent and ingenuity of the world is exercised in plans for counterworking and overreaching the schemes of other people, or in self-defence against their violence or fraud. What an exhibition this makes of human sin! The children of the world expend their life and time and powers in suspecting, watching, guarding, forestalling each other. 3. The actual crime to which this course of indulgence in sensuality must lead. The king assents at once to the cruel and unjust advice which he receives. "The saying pleased the king and princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan." The self-indulgent monarch finds himself involved in the grievous injustice and wrong which has been the result of his own sin. This is the regular process through which the worldly and the ungodly habitually travel. I do not mean to say that they are all allowed to attain this result of open crime. The providence of a gracious God often interposes to keep men back from the results of their own choice. Merciful indeed is this interposition. Who can tell to what an extent of wickedness a rebellious world would run but for the interference of this unseen Divine restraint? But such a restraint is a special and peculiar interposition in the case of individuals. When intemperance sinks into poverty and rejection—when fraud and robbery bring the victim to a felon's cell—when vanity and indecorous exposure prove the destruction of female virtue—when anger and revenge result in bloodshed and murder—men are not astonished. They recognise in all these the natural issues of the principles we have traced. 4. See how surely the day of regret must come to human guilt. The king has finished his purpose and the advice of his attendants. But he is far from peace. Sin can never satisfy the sinner. "After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her." Human wrath cannot last for ever. The whirl of the excitement passes, and then comes the bitterness of the memory of sin. The soul is filled with remorse—literally, a biting, gnawing of itself. It is the fearful result of human sin. This is the chamber of the world. In all these there comes the question that will be answered, "What fruit had ye then of those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of these things is death." This is ever the result. What remembered follies crowd upon the mind! The soul looks inward and holds communion with itself. A thousand Vashtis are remembered, what they have done and what they have suffered. It is a deeply convincing hour. New and wonderful light is poured in upon the conscience. This is the end of the sensual indulgence of the world. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Courtiers forsake a failing cause:—*

I. THE COURTLY ORATOR. II. HIS CUNNING FLATTERY. III. HIS VICIOUS REASONING. IV. HIS TIME-SERVING POLICY. V. HIS UNFEELING NATURE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The folly of trusting in man:—*Ahasuerus was guilty of it. Remark that this practice—

I. IS IDOLATROUS IN ITS PRINCIPLES. II. IT IS GROVELLING IN ITS AIM. III. IT IS UNREASONABLE IN ITS FOUNDATION. IV. IT IS DESTRUCTIVE IN ITS ISSUE. Learn—1. There is no safety in man. 2. To put your trust in the Lord. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Counsel needed:—*Not only kings, but also private persons, often need wise counsels, especially when they are hurried away by their passions. But

our loss is, that at such times we are uncommonly unfit to receive counsel. (*G. Lawson.*) *Fit counsellors few*:—Every man is not fit to be a counsellor. (*Ibid.*) *For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women.*—*Fashions travel downward*:—Fashions and maxims usually go downward from one class of society to another. Customs, adopted by the higher orders as their rule, gradually make their way until at length they pervade all ranks. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Evil actions do not terminate in themselves*:—"What the queen doth will be done by all," was his statement, and we must feel the truthfulness of it. It embodies a maxim peculiarly applicable to the followers of Christ. They are supposed to be separate from the sinful world by the very circumstance of their being Christ's. Then, if they become worldly—if they act inconsistently—their acts do not terminate in and with themselves. What they say and do produces effects far beyond their own calculation and their own sphere. A word spoken for Christ may bear fruit where they would not have been prepared to look for such a result. (*Ibid.*) *Among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered.*—*Unalterable judgments foolish*:—He who prides himself on never reversing his judgments should be extremely cautious about forming them. Obstinacy may refuse to change its opinions; wisdom will be guilty of no such rashness. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *And let the king give her royal estate unto another.*—*The vicissitudes of life*:—Perhaps you look back upon scenes different from those in which now from day to day you mingle. You have exchanged the plenty and luxuriance of your father's house for privation and trials known to God and your own heart. The morning of life was flushed with promise. Troops of calamities since then have made desperate charge upon you. Darkness has come. Sorrows have swooped like carrion birds from the sky, and barked like jackals from the thicket. You stand amid your slain, anguished and woe-struck. Rizpah on the rock. So it has been in all ages. Vashti must doff the spangled robes of the Persian Court, and go forth blasted from the palace gate. Hagar exchanges Oriental comfort for the wilderness of Beersheba. Mary Queen of Scots must pass out from flattery and pomp to suffer ignominious death in the Castle of Fotheringay. The wheel of fortune keeps turning, and mansions and huts exchange, and he who rode in the chariot pushes the barrow, and instead of the glare of festal lights is the simmering of the peat fire, and in place of Saul's palace is the rock, the cold rock, the desolate rock. But that is the place to which God comes. Jacob with his head on a stone saw the shining ladder. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Unjustifiable divorce*:—We cannot but remark upon the facility with which divorce took place in that land of Persia. We cannot be too thankful that we live not where such unjust laws obtain. Nor can we too zealously guard the sacred obligations of wedded life. Perhaps many cases of unhappiness might be traced to a similar cause to that which brought about the separation of Ahasuerus and Vashti. Any mere trifle becomes sufficient as an excuse for separation. We have heard of a quarrel and divorce taking place because one asserted that there were a certain number of windows in a house opposite and the other denied it. Each maintained their point with obstinacy, and neglected to settle their difference by counting them. (*F. Hastings.*) *The Nemesis of absolutism*:—The character of Ahasuerus illustrates the Nemesis of absolutism by showing how unlimited power is crushed and dissolved beneath the weight of its own immensity. The very vastness of his domains overwhelms the despot. He is the slave of his own machinery of government. But this is not all. The man who is exalted to the pedestal of a god is made dizzy by his own altitude. Absolutism drove Caligula mad; it punished Xerxes with childishness. The silly monarch who would decorate a tree with the jewellery of a prince in reward for its fruitfulness, and flog and chain the Hellespont as a punishment for its tempestuousness, is not fit to be let out of the nursery. When the same man appears on the pages of Scripture under the name of Ahasuerus, his weakness is despicable. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Vers. 20. *All the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.*—*Wives to honour their husbands*:—All the wives too are included, for they are all "to give honour to their husbands, both to the great and small." Well, the great, the really great, will get the honour easily, and could do very well probably without the helpful edict. Where there is real greatness, which, in Christian speech, we may translate into real goodness, it is the wife's joy to render what it is the husband's pride to wear. But the honour is to be given "both to the great and small!" "Ay, there's the rub." If this insurrectionary torch should go through

the land, what will become of the small ones?—the selfish, the spiteful, the meddling, the rude, the mean, the silly, the helpless, the good-for-nothing? They are all to have honour! As if a decree could really get it, or keep it from them. Wouldn't the better plan be, in that case, and in many a case besides, that the small shall try to grow larger? Let them be ashamed of their littleness, and rise out of it into something like nobleness. Let them love and help their wives, and care for their children, and honour will come as harvest follows sowing. But unless they do something like that, one fears that all the edicts that can be devised and promulgated will leave them as it finds them—"small." (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Love is the law*:—1. And does not this history teach us that the great law of domestic happiness is love? No Persian decrees are required to execute the mandates of love, nor can any royal commandment make a household happy without it. The true way for all queens to rule is to "stoop to conquer." Let their husbands call themselves as much as they please "the lords of creation," and let them seem to hold the reins, but it is theirs to tell them how to drive. This is the more excellent way. The dispute about the sphere of the sexes is as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural. It is God's will that man should be the head and woman the heart of society. If he is its strength, she is its solace. If he is its wisdom, she is its grace and consolation. Domestic strife is always a great evil, but it becomes doubly so when it occurs before company, as happened with the king of Persia, and when professed friends come in and make bad worse. It is then the wound becomes incurable. 2. Let us learn to guard against all excesses, not only in feasting and in the loss of time, but of feeling and passion. How inconsiderate, how rash, how sinful was Herod's oath and terrible decree against John the Baptist! And scarcely less wicked were the king's unjust and cruel proceedings against his wife. It was a maxim with General Jackson to take much time to deliberate—to think out the right resolution—but when once the resolution was taken, then to think only of executing it. 3. How emphatic a lesson is here of human vanity! The great monarch of such a vast empire is not able to govern himself. And all the grandeur of half a year's feasting is spoiled by the disobedience of his queen. This was the dead fly in his pot of ointment. 4. Alas! that so lovely a place as a garden should have been the scene of such revelry and sinning. A garden is associated with some of our holiest and saddest thoughts. Sin fastened on our race in a garden. It was in a garden the curse was pronounced, and there too the great promise of a Redeemer was given. And it was in a garden the Messiah entered the lists of mortal combat to bruise the old serpent's head. Instead, then, of making our gardens the scenes of sinful mirth and dissipation, as did the Persian king, let us make them oratories for pious breathings to heaven—let them give us thoughts of God and of the love and sufferings of His Son Jesus Christ. It is to Him we owe all our pleasures in the creatures and gifts of providence, as well as the hope of eternal life. And so also let the garden be a preacher to us of our frailty. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *The husband to bear rule in his house*:—This is truly a Divine appointment, but it is not made in an arbitrary manner, like, for instance, a positive institution of the Jews, which might be this way or that way with equal propriety—the thing deriving its sacred character chiefly from the fact of the appointment. Even a Divine appointment could not make the wife supreme, human nature continuing what it is. For one thing, woman is weaker than man physically, and supremacy goes with strength. All kinds of force have their ultimate source in God, and when He makes man permanently stronger than woman, no doubt He means some corresponding authority to rest where the permanent strength does. No doubt strength may be abused, is most shamefully abused in some instances, by the husband. But the way to prevent the abuse of strength is not, surely, to attempt to transfer its proper responsibilities to weakness? Weakness may be abused as much as strength, and in some ways even more. Again, there are many things of less or more importance which come to require a single ultimate decision. One must say how this thing is to be. Practical action must be taken one way or other. Who shall decide? Is the husband to submit to the wife? He decides with whom God has lodged the responsibility. But the truth is that in a properly regulated, or rather a properly inspired home, the question of authority in its bald form never arises. The husband's rule and the wife's obedience are alike unconscious, and alike easy. The sweet laws of nature, the good laws of God, make them one. This leads us to say, on the other hand, with equal emphasis, that the authority of the husband is clearly a limited authority. Common sense ought to teach a man that there is a

large sphere of the practical family life where he ought to leave the wife and mother practically supreme. His interference at all (whatever may be the abstract right) will not help the industry, the order, the peace of the household. But, rising higher, look at the grand fact that the authority of the husband over the wife has, and must have, clear and strong, and altogether impassable limits. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) **Bear rule in his own house.**—*Houses should be homes*:—"In his own house"—who has a house of his own? The house is a prison until somebody else shares it. The house belongs to all the people that are in it—part to the husband, part to the wife, part to the children, part to the servants, right through all the household line. Develop the notion of partnery, co-responsibility; let every one feel a living interest in the place: then the house shall be built of living stones, pillared with righteousness, roofed with love. It is here that Christianity shines out with unique lustre. Obedience is right for all parties, but the obedience has to be in the Lord; it is to be the obedience of righteousness, a concession to wisdom, a toll paid to honour, which is to be returned in love and gratitude. Christianity has made our houses homes. We owe everything that is socially beneficent to Christianity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *His own house*:—A man living at a hotel is like a grape-vine in a flower-pot—movable, carried around from place to place, docked at the root and short at the top. Nowhere can a man get real root-room, and spread out his branches till they touch the morning and the evening, but in his own house. *The overruling providence of God*:—The important thing, in order to our understanding the story, is that we should keep these first links in our hand, and should mark the working of "another King." Into the administration of our Lord Jesus Christ no mistake can creep, and so perfect is His grasp that mosaic pavements, golden couches, throngs of noblemen, fawning courtiers, excess of wine, swelling vanity, and a woman's firmness, are all, without the slightest knowledge on the part of any actor in the drama, made to bring about a purpose of His, the execution of which is more than four years distant. Had Ahasuerus not been the proud voluptuary he was; had he not made his great feast; had he not in the last day of it let slip or thrown away the reins of sound reason and run his head against a first law of nature; had his vanity taken any other direction than that of wishing to parade the queen's beauty; had Vashti been less of a true woman; had the courtiers been honest than they were—then there would have been no vacant place for Esther to fill, and the plot of Haman might have thriven. But we have this song, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

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## CHAPTER II.

**VER. 1.** *After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti.*—*Acting under the impulse of rage*:—The king had given full sway to his passion and wounded pride, and treated his wife with great severity. In his moments of cool reflection he probably repented of the harshness of his proceedings towards her. Excitement is a bad guide in human affairs. He who acts under the impulse of rage is sure to be driven astray, even as a vessel in a storm is driven to situations of embarrassment and peril. Man in wrath speaks freely and eloquently, but never wisely, and he works with decision and energy, but who is benefited by his operations? He doeth much, but uniformly to a bad purpose. (*J. Hughes.*) *Arenging memories*:—O, memory! thou art a bitter avenger. (*T. McEwan.*) *Bitter memories*:—Ah! these bitter memories of earth will be ingredients in the future cup of the penal suffering of the lost. (*Ibid.*) *Too late*:—Repentance may come too late. Ahasuerus could not retrace his steps. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Vain remembering*:—I. THE REGRET OF THE KING FOR HIS RASH AND UNWARRANTABLE ACT. He was sensible that he had committed injury and that he had not only wronged Vashti, but also made himself a sufferer. 1. He could not devise a remedy. There are wishes that even the most powerful despots cannot get gratified, and limits to their will that even they cannot pass over. 2. The law of the Medes and Persians must stand. II. THE EXPEDIENT WHICH HIS COUNSELLORS SUGGESTED TO FREE HIM FROM HIS DIFFICULTY. Learn—1. When men suffer themselves to be carried away by the impulse of any violent

passions, they may commit acts which cannot afterwards be remedied, and which they themselves may have especially to lament. 2. It forms no excuse for sin committed, that the transgressor had reduced himself to a condition in which he ceased to retain his full consciousness of the distinction between right and wrong. Take an illustration from the history of Saul. He failed to improve his privileges; the Spirit of the Lord departed and the evil spirit took possession of him—slew prophets, &c. He was held responsible because he had laid his heart open for the reception of the evil spirit. 3. Repentance may come too late. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 2-17. **And let the king appoint officers.**—*The weak and lowly*:—Poor, helpless, feeble, may be the earthward aspect of true religion. Beggars shall be taken from the dunghill, to set them among princes. God will be indebted to no outward help or influence. We see how God is pleased to overrule the very sins and passions of guilty men for the accomplishment of His own designs. The banishment of Vashti has left Ahasuerus solitary and self-reproaching. Some scheme must be adopted by those who counselled her overthrow, to supply her place. "Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan, the palace. And let the maiden that pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king, and he did so." How perfectly natural was all this arrangement and plan! And yet it was but one part of God's Divine arrangement to bring about His own plan, a plan of which they knew nothing. Thus He leaves men to act out their own purposes and accomplish their own ends, and yet overrules their whole scheme for the attainment of the results which He has already determined. This is His providence; this is the wise and perfect government of the Most High. 1. We see a youthful female, a poor girl. Her very sex betokens weakness and exposure. But yet woman is called "the weaker vessel," and is so, as the crystal vase is a weaker vessel than the oaken cask, more easily overthrown, more surely injured, more irreparably destroyed, by the power of vicious habit or sinful temptation. To her, exposure to evil is far the heavier, and far more dangerous. Upon her, sorrows press with a far more grievous load. To her, misfortunes come with a far more sharpened power. The wrongs of women have filled every age and every history. But here, when the illustration of rising, conquering piety is brought before us, the subject is a woman; and a woman in her weakest and most forlorn position, a lonely girl. It is enough for us to see and know that God is there, the Father of the fatherless and the God of the widows in His holy habitation. 2. She is an orphan girl. "She has neither father nor mother." What a privilege are parents spared to bless and cheer our maturity! What a joy and cause for thanksgiving is it to be permitted even to shelter and cheer their age in our own home! What solitude, separation, want of confidence, fear, distrust, yea, anguish, often fill up the orphan's heart! Few can sympathise; and even to those few it is impossible to pour out the secret sorrows which are the burden and distress within. But imaginary as the causes may be, the sorrows which they produce are real and abiding. Yet, when we add poverty to the orphan's lot, what increased bitterness do we throw into the cup! An orphan boy may struggle. The very poverty which oppresses him may excite his energies and call out his powers of endurance and of action. His self-dependence is aroused. But an orphan girl in poverty! what human case is habitually harder? Everything in her sex, and everything in her condition, is against her. Her exposure to the wickedness and the arts of the corrupt is the subject of constant observation and of constant dread. (1) That God loves the lowly. Let every imagination which exalteth itself against God be cast down. Be content to allow Him to take you from the dust in all your sinfulness and unworthiness, and to wash and cleanse and save you by His own grace and power alone. (2) Forget not that your honour and happiness will always be promoted by gaining the mind of God in this relation. This surely is the path of happiness for us. The world says, "Happy are the rich, the luxurious, the self-indulgent." God says, "Happy are the poor in spirit, the meek." The weak things of the world, if He choose them, and love them, will confound the things that are mighty. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Esther the queen*:—In this chapter we find illustrated—I. PROVIDENCE. We must not judge the heathen court of Persia by our standard of morality. Rather let us see how God overrules all these arrangements for the accomplishment of His own purposes. II. ADOPTION. In ten thousand things the strongest and wisest of us is but a lonely orphan, needing some strong hand to protect us, the pity of some

loving heart for our comfort. How blest is he who has learned to say, "Our Father." III. RECOMPENSE. Think of the joy of Mordecai as he sees his adopted daughter thus uplifted. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *Esther at court*:—There is, unquestionably, a difficulty connected with this 8th verse. 1. If Mordecai, of his own accord, presented Esther as a candidate for the royal favour, then he acted in opposition to the law of Moses, which forbade that the daughters of Israel should be given to the heathen. It would be no apology for his conduct that he designed by what he did to advance the interests of his nation. What is forbidden by the law must not be done that good may come of it. 2. Many interpreters suppose that those who were commissioned to select the virgins for the king's seraglio executed their office without respect to the feelings of the parties interested. Esther was taken, therefore, without there being any choice left, either to her or Mordecai, in the matter. 3. Others that, as the whole was so manifestly providential, Mordecai may have received special intimation from heaven to bring his orphan cousin under the notice of the king's officers. There is nothing in the history to warrant this opinion; therefore we embrace the first supposition as the most probable account of the affair. 4. But whatever may have been the feelings of Mordecai and Esther, we see the special workings of providence in her behalf. She obtained favour of the chief of the eunuchs above all the other maidens who had been committed to his care, so that, without solicitation on her part, not only was there more than ordinary indulgence toward her, but she was even treated with a degree of respect that seemed, as it were, the prelude to yet higher advancement. The commencement of Esther's life in the palace gave promise of a prosperous issue. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The beginning of true prosperity*:—Our study is in the chamber of true religion. There we see a solitary girl, and she an orphan. She hath "neither father nor mother." On the doctrine of earthly chances, everything is against her. But in the scheme of the Divine government, we shall see that she has an Almighty Friend. Her beginning is small indeed, and disastrous enough; her latter end shall greatly increase. But there are other discouraging circumstances also, which seem completely to forbid the latter end of advancement which is promised. 1. She is a stranger. We find her in a land not her own, though perhaps she was born upon its soil—among a people with whom she has no affinity and no bond of affection. A girl, an orphan, and a stranger. To wander among multitudes with whom we have no connection and no sympathy is often a depression to the brightest spirits. But this poor girl is not a stranger in voluntary journeying—she is a captive. She is a servant of the true God in a land of dark idolatry; a pure, praying girl amidst a people whose licentious profligacy made the most wasting crimes to be no dishonour. But if piety can be made triumphant under circumstances so completely opposed to it, and a child of God can glorify her Father's name, and keep His commandments amidst temptations and difficulties so numerous and pressing, how great will be the responsibility of those who are exposed to no such contests! 2. This orphan stranger, this lonely girl, is also beautiful in person. "The maid was fair and beautiful." This is a gift which all naturally, perhaps not unreasonably, prize. It is God who hath given to the youthful form and face their attractions and their loveliness. One of the marks of His benevolence is here seen. His goodness shines in all these aspects of His power. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Yet the beauty of our daughters is but too frequently a snare. Sin in the heart perverts and corrupts it. It is welcomed as a merchandise for gain. It is nourished as the food for vanity. It is perverted to awaken an earthly taste, and to encourage a carnal mind. It brings an attending exposure to peculiar temptations. Her parents delighted over her childish promise, and called her Hadassah, their myrtle, their joy. They looked forward to great parental delight in her coming bloom, when as a fragrant myrtle they should see her blossoming at their side. But this, alas, they were not to see. She was to bloom for the gaze of other eyes, but not for theirs. Could I lead you off from this outward beauty to think of the fair beauty of the Lord—how much more precious and desirable is that pure and obedient mind which we find united with Hadassah's loveliness of person! Outward beauty we cannot all have. But this higher and more enduring beauty of the Spirit you may all possess. 3. The sole earthly protector of this beautiful orphan was poor and unable to defend her. "In Shushan, the palace, there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai. And he brought up Hadassah," &c. When her father and her mother were obliged to forsake her, the Lord took her up, by providing her a faithful friend in her father's nephew. He took her for his own



daughter. But she was really one of God's hidden ones, chosen in His love, to be protected and loved by Him. Never forget this highest security of His protection and His presence. There you are secure for ever. No one can be poor who is rich in faith toward God. No one can be deserted who has the Divine friendship and fellowship. 4. This lonely orphan girl was grateful and obedient: "Esther did the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him." Happy indeed is such a manifestation of grace as this! You may build with confidence any hope of usefulness and any desired attainment of human excellence upon a character so true. A spirit thus pure, subdued, affectionate and sincere, what may it not do that is lovely, honest, and of good report? It spreads happiness for others around its path. It converts the cares and trials of life into pleasures and delights. It crowns the whole personal walk with loveliness and attractions. But Esther's gratitude to her earthly benefactor was founded on her still deeper gratitude to God. This poor and lonely, but faithful and beautiful girl, God means to raise up to be an eminent blessing and restorer to His people. Her latter end is to be in great prosperity. This is our great lesson now. We are witnessing the purpose and the work of God. He is exalting a child of His own, and showing what He can do with His own, and by His own power. No condition is beneath His notice. No child of grace is below His care. None who love Him can be forsaken or destroyed. We see here a low beginning; none could be more so; but it is a very lovely one. And as we study the course through which God is pleased to lead this child of grace, we shall see Him to be justified in His whole course, and to come forth completely victorious in the work which He hath undertaken. How great is the advantage of having God upon your side, and of being under His special protection and care! (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *The mysterious beginning*:—This is a most important truth for us to study. Man proposes, but God disposes. The eyes of the Lord are in every place. The government of the world is on His shoulder.

1. We may consider the object of this exaltation. This poor Jewish orphan is to be made the Queen of Persia. The change of position is as wide and wonderful as earth can illustrate. Why did God thus select and elevate her? He designed to give to all His people a great illustration of His power and goodness. He would have them see, He would have all to see, how certain and adequate is His protection to those who love and trust Him. But He had further designs in this work. He not only intended to show His goodness to Esther in protecting and rewarding a child whom He loved, He also purposed to make her an eminent blessing to others. She was to be a restorer to her people, a great blessing to her own captive nation. No one is exalted in this world for himself alone. Whatever gifts, or gains, or influence we have, they are for the benefit of others. No man liveth for himself. But how clearly and with what peculiar power does God teach us this truth in the whole plan of Divine redemption. Why has the Lord Jesus lived and died? And why is He still living as a mediator at the right hand of God? "For us," is the only answer to the question. He is exalted on high that He may bestow gifts upon men. This important truth God equally teaches us in our own enjoyment of the blessings which redemption brings to us. He enriches us with all our gifts that we may be made the instruments of enriching others. We should look around and ask, "Whom can I bless? Whom can I serve? To whom can I give even a cup of cold water in my Master's name?" We can never tell how wide may be the appointed influences of such a spirit. We see the end of the Lord, that He is faithful and very gracious, and we may learn from it to understand and to confide in the loving-kindness of the Lord. When the gracious purpose of God comes out in the result of His dispensation, we have no longer any doubt or darkness resting upon His Word.

2. We may consider the circumstances of Esther's exaltation. They were painful and repulsive to her in an extreme degree. Such was the subject of violent compulsion. Such is the true meaning of the term "brought," literally, "brought by force." In this exaltation of the captive orphan, God remarkably overruled and employed the wicked passions of men. The king consulted only his own corrupt desires. His officers combined to minister to his wicked tempers and gratifications. No happiness of others, no peace of violated households, no wretchedness of ruined and discarded youth, was to be considered as an obstacle in the path. The king's commandment and decree must be obeyed. This does not lessen the wickedness of men. However God may restrain and employ them, their purpose is only to sin. And whatsoever results God may bring out of their wickedness, they must bear the guilt of their sin in the same condemnation. God's mercy may compel them to bless His people, and to glorify Himself, while His justice punishes

their transgression, and overthrows their own plans of personal gain and glory. Henry VIII. was a monster of crime. His motives appeared to be his own wicked passions alone. He murdered and he married at his pleasure. Yet God overruled the whole result for the establishment of His truth. This glorious Reformation has been often reproached for Henry's crimes. It would be just as reasonable to reproach the deliverance of the Israelites and their subsequent prosperity with the crimes of Pharaoh. God can make even our own pardoned sins and follies to become a blessing to us, and to bring honour to Him. (*Ibid.*)

*The important friendship* :—What principle of Divine providence can be more important than this? To have the friendship of God is to have all that men can ask. If He is on our side, it is of little consequence who may be against us. But He is always on the side of those whose ways please Him. Esther's history shows us this. In all its aspects her exaltation was most remarkable. 1. Mark the simple cause of this exaltation. It was the Divine tribute to her character. Because her ways pleased the Lord, He made her enemies to be at peace with her. Do you ask for success, for happiness, for final triumph? Do you desire a result of blessedness for this life and for the life to come? Embrace the hope which the gospel gives. Go to the fountain which the gospel opens. Enter into the Saviour's ranks and belong to Him. He will carry you safely through every trial and every contest.

2. Mark the way in which this exaltation was accomplished. God gave her favour in the sight of others. An unseen influence and power preceded her in the path through which she was led and prepared her way before her. And now we see the beginning of the turning tide. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." The maiden pleased Hegai, the keeper of the women, and she obtained kindness of him. Everything now is to be in her favour. "The best place in the house of the women" is assigned to her. "Seven maidens meet to be given to her out of the king's house" are appointed her attendants. So easily can your gracious heavenly Father change and order the minds of others concerning you. He can make all your enemies at peace with you. Thus He prepared Pharaoh's daughter to be the defender and the royal nurse for the infant Moses. Thus also He dealt with Daniel and his companions. He gives a pleasant and attractive aspect to religious character, adorns it by His Spirit with traits of meekness and spiritual beauty, makes its influence agreeable and pleasant to those who become connected with it, and in this way makes His servants acceptable to others and a real blessing to many. This system of His gracious government lays out the line of personal duty for you. It is your duty to be a blessing to all persons and at all times. 3. Mark the state of mind which true piety will display under the most trying circumstances. This was beautifully exhibited in Esther as she passed through the trying ordeal which was to lead to her exaltation. Esther showed great self-respect. What is so dignified and refining as true piety? It habitually clothes the character with grace and purity, and the manners with delicacy and elegance. We see the poorest daughters of earth exalted by the transforming power of true religion to a hold on the reverence of all, and often to the admiration and delight of many. True piety is patient, quiet and unassuming. Esther showed a quiet submission to the will of God. She asked for nothing. She desired nothing of all that she saw around her. All the state and magnificence of her new condition were nothing to her. Her mind could find repose only in God. How beautiful is such an example! Remember that Divine promise (Isa. xxvi. 3): "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Esther showed entire indifference to worldly display. But "when the turn of Esther was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, appointed." She was contented to leave her whole influence and prospects in her Father's hands, and therefore "she required nothing." This was true modesty, as well as a simple and pious trust in God. Her mind and thoughts were directed to Him, not to herself. What an example was this to youth in the midst of the snares and artificial glare of the world! True adorning is "not the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel, but it is in the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." What attractive beauty there is in a heavenly temper, a lowly spiritual mind! This is a jewel of the Lord's preparation and appointment, and eminently becomes and adorns the children of God. Esther showed a simple and entire trust in God. In the bitter-

ness of her heart's sorrow she had no other protector. (*Ibid.*) *The myrtle that became a star*:—I. Hadassah, THE ORPHAN. Mordecai took the little tree, growing without shelter from the storm, and planted it by his own hearth. II. Look next at Hadassah, THE CAPTIVE. III. Then at Hadassah, THE BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN. Nobody should despise beauty of face; but bad character spoils beauty, whilst beauty of soul may supply the lack of physical beauty. IV. Last of all, at Esther, THE QUEEN. V. Let us conclude with a TWOFOLD WISH. 1. May you grow like a myrtle, and resemble it in two qualities: in that it is an evergreen, and always fragrant. Be thou lovely in the dark days as well as the bright; and do thou always cheer thy dwelling with the fragrance of godliness. 2. May you glow like a star, which God has clothed with light and placed so high in the heavens. Do thou walk in light—Christ's light—the light of truth, and love, and holiness; and, finally, shine as a star in heaven, your home for evermore. (*J. Edmons, D.D.*) *Beauty*:—Esther, in addition to her outward comeliness, was modest, engaging, contented, and possessed all those amiable qualities which adorn the individual, while they make him useful to society. Beauty is one of the gifts of nature; but if it consist only in symmetry of form and fineness of colouring, it is no more than a beautiful statue; it can only gratify the eye. That which reflects as a mirror the good qualities of the mind can alone form an object of rational attraction. (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 5-20. **Whose name was Mordecai.**—*Mordecai*:—Providence opens avenues through which merit may attain elevation. I. MORDECAI WAS KIND TO HIS ORPHAN COUSIN. He brought her up, adopting her as his own daughter. He was intensely solicitous for her welfare. He was her counsellor, guardian, friend. He seems to have possessed respect for womanhood—what Charles Lamb in one of his Essays of Elia designates, “reverence for the sex.” Are we not justified in affirming that this is indicative of nobility? Love of woman, as woman, produces beneficent results, which few can afford to dispense with. It aids in developing perfection of character. II. HE POSSESSED GOOD JUDGMENT. He advised Esther not to reveal her kindred. He did not enjoin her to deny her nationality, much less to become alienated from her suffering countrymen; but he exhorted her to maintain silence in reference to her descent. He will await deliverance from Israel's God, carefully watching the indications of providence, and endeavouring, meanwhile, to induce Esther to strengthen her influence with the king. “The prudent man looketh well to his going.” III. HE WAS HUMBLE. He sat as porter at the royal gate of the palace and was contented. IV. HE WAS LOYAL TO JUSTICE. When two of the chamberlains sought to lay hands on the king he disclosed the plot to the queen, who, by reporting it to the monarch, delivered the culprits over to the vengeance of law, and “they were both hanged on a tree.” V. HE WAS CONSCIENTIOUS, and to a right-minded person the approval of conscience is the richest reward, one which depends upon himself and of which no other can rob him. Mordecai refused to bow before Haman. “If the monkey reigns, dance before him,” is a proverb which evidently had little force with Mordecai. If Haman does not deserve respect, he shall not receive reverence from him. Kind, prudent, humble, just and conscientious, need we marvel that Mordecai rose from lowly station to become chief minister of State? Though he has saved the life of the king, he is not promoted. He returns to his humble duties. By the simple fact that a record is made of the services of a porter, preparation is made for the stirring events of the future. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *Tried fidelity*:—Here we have the fact demonstrated in a striking illustration that no man can serve God for nought. He will never be a debtor to any of His creatures. The path of truth and goodness, of love to God and love to men, will always advance in light and purity to a perfect day. This is the illustration we have in the character and history of Mordecai. Ahasuerus, Esther, Haman, and Mordecai, in their relations make a perfect dramatic exhibition. Their paths cross each other, and their interests mingle. Their conditions and responsibilities are in constant close connection, and are continually intermingled. Each character is a separate living principle. And in each the operation and result of this peculiar principle is distinctly and very beautifully displayed. 1. In this fidelity in duty we first see this path of duty beginning in the very lowest circumstances of life. Enrich and exalt the indulgence of the world by every imagination of its wealth and pleasure, and yet He shows its end to be vanity and vexation of spirit. He will show the reward of fidelity in duty. He will display the history of its certain triumph, and perfect security and success. Begin as low as you will in

human condition; make the sphere as limited as you can; multiply difficulties around its strait and narrow path as you choose, and He will show you how easily and how certainly He can exalt and honour it, and that by the very instruments which have been collected to oppose it. Thus Mordecai begins a poor captive Jew, perhaps a beggar, certainly a menial at the king's gate. Men often think it of little consequence what one does who is so concealed and so little known. But, ah, never forget that there is no such distinction before God between duties great and little, or sins venial or mortal. Whatever God requires or forbids is great. Every station which His providence has assigned and ordered is necessary and important. Virtue must always be tried by little things. The beginnings of all temptations are small, and the question of resistance or compliance with them is always settled in very narrow contingencies of trial. It is far easier to perform higher duties, and to resist greater temptations. The real trial of human principles is in unknown and secret dangers. When everybody is watching, it is easy to walk uprightly. The soldier on parade will be sure to keep time and step. But when our walk is unobserved, our conduct unnoticed, our position in life of no consequence in human sight, then are our difficulties and our temptations always the greater and the more dangerous. "No one will know; no one sees; example is nothing; it is of no consequence what I do; it is impossible for me to do much good in any way." Ah, not thus did Mordecai argue, though in these very circumstances of narrow influence Mordecai begins. 2. We see this poor and faithful man perfectly contented with his low estate. He is uncomplaining though poor. If you would have larger and higher responsibility, gain it and be prepared for it, by earnestly and contentedly fulfilling the obligations which are laid upon you now. 3. We see him affectionate and liberal in his social relations. Though poor, yet making others rich. Though poor himself, he cheerfully adopts his orphan cousin, and divides his comforts, whatever they might be, with her. "He brought up Hadassah, his uncle's daughter." The largest generosity is often among the most straitened in earthly condition. But it is an indispensable characteristic of true virtue. Obedience to God is imitation of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. A covetous, harsh, narrow, selfish temper can never have tasted that God is gracious, or have known anything of the Saviour's transforming love. He was delicate and refined in his liberality. There is much in the way in which kindness is bestowed to make it either acceptable or a burden. The little orphan Mordecai "took and brought up for his own daughter." There is nothing in the religion of the New Testament to encourage bluntness, coarseness, or assumption of superiority. But Mordecai's tenderness was watchful as well as delicate. "To know how Esther did, and what should become of her," was the dearest interest he had on earth. And for this "he walked every day before the court of the women's house." 4. We see him faithful in every claim as a subject. In his solitude he overheard the counsel of two conspirators against the life of the king. He sought the opportunity, therefore, to preserve the life of the king, and he succeeded. This also is an eminent example. The virtuous, religious man is always an orderly and peaceful man. 5. We see in Mordecai especial fidelity to God. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) For she had neither father nor mother.—*Religion promotes benevolence*:—Now there are some remarks very obviously suggested by this part of the narrative. I should say that here we have a fine example of the practical power of true religion, in leading to a benevolent regard for the comfort and well-being of the unprotected. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Personal benevolence*:—It is an easy matter for the wealthy to be charitable when their gifts, administered by others, involve no sacrifice of time or labour, and no care and anxiety to themselves. But the noblest exercise of charity is exhibited when we take an interest personally in the well-being of the unprotected, and when they can look to us as their friends and counsellors, to whom they can have recourse in their sorrows and troubles and difficulties. (*Ibid.*) *Mordecai's tenderness in adopting Esther*:—We Christians have not always been ready to give the Jew credit for such tenderness, such ready pity, such gentle helpfulness. Let us ask ourselves if we are willing to come up to the standard of this Jew? What is the good of any religion unless it do make us pitiful, loving, eager to help the poor world about us? I heard a very beautiful story some time since. A friend was telling me that one Sunday he was preaching at some little country chapel, and went to dinner at the house of a labourer, where he found eight children. He was struck with the fact that they seemed to run in pairs, as if they were all twins. After dinner the good woman said, "I saw you looking at the children, sir, as if you could not quite

make them out." "Well, yes," said he, "I could not help wondering if they were all twins!" The good wife laughed. "No," said she, "they are not twins. You see they are all ours, so to speak, and yet four of them are not. When we came into this house the man and woman who lived here before us had just died and left four little children just the age of our four. They had to go to the workhouse, and the van was at the door to take them just as we came in. Three of them were in the van; but the fourth little fellow would not go. He had got hold of the door, and was screaming with all his might. The man was trying not to hurt him, and yet of course he wanted to make him let go. I felt very, very sorry for them all, and said, 'You can't take him screaming like that. People will think that you are murdering him. Put the three back again and come again to-morrow. We will look after them for the night.' The man was very glad to do it, so they all came in again. Well, then you see our children began to play with them, and we all sat down together at supper, and managed to get them off to bed. Well, that night I could not sleep for thinking about them. I could not get it out of my mind what I should like anybody to do for mine if they were left like that. As I lay tossing, John said to me, 'I can't help thinking about those children.' 'Well, John,' I said, 'what do you think about them.' 'Well, Mary, do you think if we pinched a bit that we could manage to keep them?' 'I am sure we could,' I said, and then we went to sleep. The guardians gave us six shillings a week towards their keep, and it went on all right until John began to think that we ought to have a Sunday-school for the children about here. 'We have eight to start with,' said John. So the school was started. But there was a gentleman that set himself against the school, and tried to put it down. However, John would not have that; so this gentleman went to the guardians and got them to stop the six shillings a week. We could not let the children go, for to us it was just as if they were our own. But it was hard work, for John fell ill and was in bed for six weeks. And when he got about again he had to try and find a new place, for his had been filled up. At last he got a job at hedging and ditching, and that meant a stout pair of boots and a pair of leggings and a bill-hook. I had saved a few shillings for the children's shoes, but now I had to give all that to John, and away he went to buy what he wanted. But as soon as he came back I said, 'You must go again to get the children's shoes, John,' and I put two sovereigns in his hand. He looked at me wondering. I told him how that the gentleman's daughter had called to say how sorry she was for us, and she gave us this to keep the children. And since then we have managed to get on right well, sir." (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

*Worldly exaltation*:—Providence and grace have two separate dominions. The providence of God rules over outward things for the welfare of His children. The grace of God redeems, renews, governs and preserves their own inward heart and character. Both are the subjects of covenant and earnest promises to them. One part of this gracious work we have seen in Esther's case. God protected and preserved the captive orphan by His own power. And all the elements of her own character are the evidences of the grace and power of her Lord. There is something extremely beautiful and even grand in this exhibition of youthful piety. Few will be carried through the extremes of Esther's trial. Now we are to look upon Esther, the queen of Persia, and see how God fulfils all His promises, and protects and maintains in usefulness and happiness the souls of His servants. I. In this view we see **TRUE PIETY IN WORLDLY EXALTATION**. This exaltation has been brought about by a remarkable train of circumstances in the good providence of God. Every probability was against it, and nothing could be more unlikely than the result which was thus produced. "The king loved Esther above all the women," &c. Remarkable as this result was in itself, the reason given for it is yet more worthy of our attention. "She obtained grace and favour in his sight." Her exaltation is ascribed to a far higher power than any that outwardly appeared. God was ruling and ordering it in His own way. You may carry out this principle in all your expectations and plans of life. Your youthful hearts desire earthly success. God may surely give it to you. But He would have you realise that it is His gift. The wise and the only sure way to make the earth a blessing to you is to seek His favour with it. But it will also, which is far more, make the earthly substance which you do gain a real and permanent blessing to you. But surely there is a higher exaltation than any which is wholly confined to earth. There is a throne above all earthly thrones for those who conquer in the Saviour's host. This God reserveth for those who love Him. Seek this throne and kingdom, the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is the more excellent way. Make

your possession of it sure. The king of Persia made a royal feast at Esther's exultation. It was a feast of far different character from that which preceded the downfall of Vashti. "The king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts according to the state of the king." The former feast was distinguished by abounding selfish, sensual indulgence. This was marked by releases, gifts and acts of favour to the destitute and the suffering. The people of God are always made a blessing to men in the influence which they exercise, and in their final exaltation among men, when the kingdoms of the earth shall be given to the saints of the Most High, the most abounding gifts and mercies shall be showered upon the world around. If God shall give you the high places of the earth, so improve and employ your influence here that others may have reason to bless God in your behalf. II. We see here THE EMPTINESS OF EARTHLY CONTRASTS. No earthly contrast could be greater than between a poor Jewish captive orphan, amidst the oppressions of a heathen land, and the queen of all the provinces of the kingdom of Persia. Yet all this is nothing when viewed in relation to the power and greatness of God. Man looks upon the outward appearance. God looketh upon the heart. Let us seek to gain His mind, and learn to value others, and to think of ourselves according to the reality of character, and not according to the mere appendages and aspects of the outward condition. The vain mind of youth delights in worldly elevation and grandeur. But Esther's trials of character will be far greater in her new condition than in her former one. Few can bear great earthly prosperity with advantage. It is here that the principle of our text comes in, "He preserveth the souls of His saints." He delivers them from the destructive influence which surrounds them. He carries them safely through the hour of trial. Prosperity brings in the claims of worldly fashion, the examples of the exalted wicked, the hostility of a world which at the same time tempts to transgression and scoffs at fidelity. It introduces a multitude of new thoughts and new relations which corrupt the character and entangle the soul. The life of piety declines. The spirit of prayer grows dull. The modesty of dress and personal appearance is laid aside. The purity of the outward walk is disregarded. III. We see in Esther's case that under the Divine guidance and grace TRUE PIETY MAY PASS UNINJURED THROUGH EVERY STATE. Esther's sudden exaltation had no effect on her fidelity to God, or on her attachment to His people. We see the same guarded self-respect, and the same love for Mordecai afterwards as before. The proportioned usefulness of individual piety in different stations in human life it would be very difficult to decide. God often selects the feeblest instruments as the most important agencies to promote His glory. We may, therefore, dismiss all anxiety about the influence of our appointed station. He will give the blessing according to His own will. But what can show more beautifully the reality of the work of God in the heart than the constant exercise and display of the same kindness, tenderness, and simplicity in a high estate as in a previous low condition? One of the most striking facts in Esther's character is this repeated assertion of her faithful remembrance of Mordecai and of her permanent regard to his instructions. Ah, what a blessing do we confer when we succeed, under the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit, in laying up in the youthful mind the principles of true religion and real love for God! This is something real; a gift that will abide. IV. WE SEE ESTHER'S EXALTATION MARKED BY SINCERE GRATITUDE AND AFFECTIONATE CARE FOR THE APPOINTED INSTRUMENT OF IT. A low and upstart mind hates to acknowledge obligations; nay, often feels a new hostility towards those from whom benefits have been received. But a truly great and exalted mind forgets no benefits that have been conferred, and esteems it a high privilege to be able to pay them directly back to the person who has bestowed them. Esther acknowledges her twofold obligation, while she gives the information which saves the life of the king, and gives it in the name of Mordecai, that it might in some way be the instrument of promoting his advantage, and of rescuing him from the poverty of his condition. This gratitude for kindness from our fellow-men is always characteristic of true piety. A religious heart is ashamed of no obligations. Shun that sinful pride which hates the feeling and the acknowledgment of dependence. A joyful and pleasant thing it is to be thankful. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house.—*Mordecai's loving solicitude*.—The histories of Mordecai and Esther run side by side, like the two differently-coloured rivers—the Arve and the Rhone. But the course of the one is from time to time being crossed and coloured by the course of the other. Esther played a leading part in

the deliverance of the Jewish nation, but she owed much to the teaching, influence, and directions of Mordecai. She was the seen and he the unseen worker. These latter often do the most important work. I. MORDECAI'S LOVING SOLICITUDE. II. THIS LOVING SOLICITUDE WAS OF DIVINE ORIGIN. God makes use of human passions for the promotion of His merciful purposes. Human reasons may be given to account for Mordecai's love for Esther, but there were also Divine reasons. III. THIS LOVING SOLICITUDE QUICKENED MORDECAI'S DISCERNMENT. IV. THIS LOVING SOLICITUDE TAUGHT MORDECAI A TRUE CREED. Love is light. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in a clear apprehension of Divine truth and of Divine methods. "Although he trusted God with his niece, yet he knew that an honest care of her might well stand with faith in God's providence. God must be trusted, but not tempted by the neglect of careful means" (Trapp). V. MORDECAI'S LOVE MADE HIM WATCHFUL. VI. MORDECAI'S LOVE MADE HIM SELF-FORGETFUL. VII. MORDECAI'S LOVE CONCERNED ITSELF ABOUT ESTHER'S HIGHEST WELFARE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) **She required nothing.**—*Simple attire*:—It seems to be implied in the text that while the other maidens endeavoured by dress and ornament to make an impression upon the heart of the king, Esther had recourse to no such artifice. If she was to gain the royal favour, which no doubt she desired to do, she trusted to her native graces and accomplishments as the means of obtaining it rather than to the splendour of her attire. And such will always be the procedure of true beauty and modesty. Excessive attention to the decoration of the person, and the lavish use of gaudy ornament, indicate the consciousness of some personal defect, and are inconsistent alike with good taste, with female delicacy, and with the law of Scripture. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Reality versus superficiality*:—She had grace in her heart, humility in her deportment, and the high attractions of gentleness, meekness, and pity. These would speak to the heart in look and gesture, and obtain favour for her "in the sight of all them that looked upon her." There was realness in contrast with superficiality, true-heartedness in opposition to mere pretension, and the heroic love of the right and the noble over against all that is hollow, hypocritical, and base. Even in a heathen court spiritual excellences such as these, rarely to be found there, were sure to command respect and win the affections. (*T. McEwan.*)

Vers. 17–20. So that he set the royal crown upon her head.—*The elevation of woman*:—Gloss it as you may, this is not pleasant reading, and yet not unprofitable, having much to say to us, and especially to women, of what we owe to Christianity for the elevation of woman. Telling of a despot and sensualist, and how he claimed his country's fairest beauty for his insatiate pleasure. But it is purely told us. It can be read without dulling the conscience or staining the imagination. What nation of antiquity looked not upon woman as a decorated toy or an abject drudge? There was one exception. Among the Jews her position was relatively high as compared with that assigned to her in adjacent nations. She had larger liberty than even now is allowed her in Oriental countries, with greater variety and importance of employments. She headed, like Miriam, the bands of women who celebrated, with triumphant song, the overthrow of enemies. She led armies, like Deborah, and was, like her, a prophetess and a judge. In the free grace of an unconfined maidenhood she went out to meet her father with timbrels and dances. Her hymns were included in sacred records, as was the song of Samuel's mother. She was consulted, like Huldah, by high-priest and king. And while the effect of polygamy was disastrous, so far as that obtained before the captivity, and while it was obvious that the husband, not the wife, was the acknowledged head of the household, in independence of whom the wife could enter on no engagements, the dowry was given for the wife, not with her. The modern harem was unknown, the maïron walked abroad unveiled, her husband's house was esteemed her "rest," she had a large authority in the family, and the grace and force of her character and mind were honoured, cultured, and allowed opportunity. (*R. S. Storrs.*) *Esther's advancement* from low estate to share the throne of Persia reminds us of what God does for His people in raising them from the miry clay to sit with Christ upon His throne. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. For Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.—*Repaying parental kindness*:—Then I would say that there is a lesson here for the young. How can they repay in any measure—for fully

they can never repay—the tenderness of their godly parents to them in their youth, and the anxiety which has been felt on their account as they advanced toward maturity? In one way only—by endeavouring to pursue the path which leads to present respectability and usefulness, and which Christ in His Word has marked out as that which His disciples must tread. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 21. **Two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh . . . sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.**—*Traitors*:—Besides flatterers, despots are apt to have traitors and assassins about them, such as Bigthan and Teresh. Mordecai detected their villainy, and no doubt ran considerable risk in exposing it. But he was not one of those who are honest only when honesty appears to them to be the best policy; he did the right because it was the right, faithfully and fearlessly. (*A. M. Symington.*) *Crafty foes*:—There are crafty spiritual foes who wait for the opportunity to kill the soul. (*T. McEwan.*) *Danger of great men*:—I. THE DANGER OF GREAT MEN. II. THE FIDELITY OF THE GODLY MAN. III. THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL FIND US OUT. (*J. Hughes.*) *Danger and service*:—History is full of examples of plots and assassinations in the palaces of Eastern princes. Favouritism, founded usually upon mere caprice, is one of the characteristics of a despotic government. Then envy and hatred are naturally excited in consequence of this, among such as think themselves as well entitled to preferment as those on whom it has been bestowed. We have no means of knowing what led the two chamberlains to conspire against the king. An angry word, or some apparent slight or insult, may have provoked them to revenge, or they may have been bribed by other parties whom the king had injured. The narrative in the text is given so briefly that we are not told how Mordecai came to discover the plot. He may have been requested to become an accomplice, in order that by his assistance the actual perpetrators of the bloody deed might the more easily effect their escape. But whether in this way, or by overhearing the conspirators as they were speaking together of the time and manner of carrying out their purpose, he became aware of it—he immediately took measures to counteract the dark design. There are three topics suggested by them, to which we may briefly advert. 1. In the first place, we cannot read this narrative without drawing from it a lesson as to the uncertainty of life. The destroying sword may be hanging as by a single hair over the head of the ruler of a vast empire, making his life as contingent as that of the mariner when the storm suddenly bursts forth upon him, or of the soldier when he is under the thick fire of the enemy. Humanly speaking, those who occupy the middle class of society, whose wants are supplied without any danger or painful toil, and who have nothing to dread from the envy and enmity of others, live in greatest security, and have least occasion to fear what is usually called accident, as affecting their life. And the practical use which we should make of the uncertainty of the present life is to have a sure interest in Christ, which will render the life to come all certainty and blessedness to us. 2. In the second place, the narrative before us teaches us that whatever station in providence men are called to fill, they may be instrumental in conferring important benefits on others. Mordecai, a man of humble rank, saved the life of the king. But the remark which we have just made may be transposed to services more important than those which have reference to the present life and its concerns. What an immense power, for instance, is possessed by the nurse to whose care the children of a family are committed, and who, by the faithful execution of her trust, may implant the seeds of truth in the youthful heart so deeply that no worldly influence will afterwards efface them. There is something higher here than the mere saving of life. Every follower of Christ, in whatever sphere he moves, may do incalculable good to those around him, even to those who are placed high above him. If you cannot do so much as you would, a consistent and faithful life, spent in all the unobtrusiveness of true humility, will be a lesson to some that may be productive of vast benefit. 3. In the third place, from the narrative under review we are led to think of a record of unrequited deeds. Mordecai's information saved the life of the king, and was duly noticed in the annals of the kingdom; but it lay there for a considerable time, apparently as a dead letter. There is evidently a twofold application that may be made of this particular. The acts of wicked men are all recorded, and will be brought into judgment. The hand of justice does not always follow the perpetration of the evil act. Yet the retribution, if it be slow, is certain. But it is not so much this aspect of the question that is presented to us in the text as the more pleasing one, that the services of God's people are recorded, and are not suffered



to pass unrewarded in the end. The reward, indeed, may not come in the present life. The faithful disciples of Christ have often been left to contend with the world's opposition, and to fall victims to the world's enmity, just on account of their steadfast attachment to the truth. But they are all recorded, and the record will be produced hereafter. The Scripture teaches us this very plainly. "God is not unrighteous," says the apostle, writing to the Hebrews, "to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister." (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

### CHAPTER III.

**VER. 1-6. After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman.—The prosperous wicked man.**—Matthew Henry says: "I wonder what the king saw in Haman that was commendable or meritorious? It is plain that he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage or steady conduct, but proud and passionate and revengeful; yet he was promoted and caressed, and there was none as great as he. Princes' darlings are not always worthies." **I. THE WICKED MAN IN PROSPERITY.** Haman is typical. He is the progenitor of a long line that by skilful plotting rise above the heads of superior men. In this world rewards are not rightly administered. Push and tact get the prize. **II. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN IS SURROUNDED BY FAWNING SYCOPHANTS.** "The king had so commanded." A king's commandment is not required to secure outward homage towards those in high places. Clothe a man with the outward marks of royal favour, and many are at once prepared to become his blind adulators. Imperialism is glorified in political, literary, and ecclesiastical spheres. Power in arms, push in business, skill in politics, success in literature, and parade in religion are the articles of the creed in which modern society believes. **III. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN IS SURROUNDED BY MEDDLING SYCOPHANTS.** Even admirers may be too officious. If Haman had known and seen all, he might have prayed, "Save me from my friends." The king's servants, in their selfish zeal, frustrated their own purposes of aggrandisement. How often in trying to grasp too much we lose all. **IV. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN FINDS THAT FALSE GREATNESS BRINGS TROUBLE.** That greatness is false which is not the outcome of goodness. The course of wicked prosperity cannot run smooth. Haman meets with the checking and detecting Mordecai. **V. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN MAY LEARN THAT AN UNRESTRAINED NATURE BRINGS TROUBLE.** Haman was intoxicated with his greatness. He was full of wrath. Wrath is cruel both to the subject and the object. **VI. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN UNWITTINGLY PLOTS HIS OWN DOWNFALL.** Haman's wrath led him to dangerous extremes. Poor Haman! Already we see thee treading on a volcano. Thy hands are digging the pit into which thou shalt fall. Thy minions are preparing the gallows on which thou thyself shalt be hung. Learn—1. Prosperity has its drawbacks. 2. "Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud." 3. That our greatest troubles often spring from our own depraved natures. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) **Mordecai and Haman.**—**I. THE INSECURITY OF EARTHLY GREATNESS.** The king in this story was exposed to the plot of Bigthan and Teresh. From it he was saved by the intervention of Mordecai, though by and by to fall beneath the assassin's blow. Great are the perils of the great. Their lives often, behind all the splendour that takes the public eye, a sad story. **II. THE DIVINE FORESIGHT OF AND PREPARATION FOR COMING EVIL.** The plotters, Bigthan and Teresh, paid the penalty with their lives. But what had that plot to do with the great story of this book—Israel's deliverance from Haman? Much, for mark, the plot was detected by Mordecai. The news was conveyed to Esther, and by her to the king. Thus God's design for Israel's deliverance precedes Haman's design for Israel's destruction. Oh! the Divine preparations! How God goes before us! Does Jacob look round upon famished Canaan? Lo! by the hand of long-lost Joseph, God has prepared for him a house in Egypt. Do we come into peril? Before we reach it God has been preparing for us a way of escape. His love is older than our sin—than all sin. **III. THE DIGNITY OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS IN LITTLE THINGS.** Mordecai would not bow to Haman. Not from disloyalty. He had stood by the king and saved him from the plotted death. Because—this is the reason he gave—because he was a Jew:

and Haman, he knew, was the Jews' enemy. Others bowed—he could not. A little thing, do you say, to bow to Haman? but a little thing may have much effect on others, as this had on Haman—on ourselves; and, often repeated, is not little in its influence. He had conscience in this matter, and to defile it had not been a little harm. Conscience can appear in little things, but it deems nothing little that affects it, that expresses it. The early Christians would rather die than cast a few idolatrous grains of incense into the fire. Many an English martyr went to the prison and the stake rather than bow down to the water-god of Romanism. In little things, as some would deem them, we can take a stand for Christ. IV. THE WICKEDNESS OF REVENGE. Had Haman a just grudge against Mordecai? Let him have the matter out with Mordecai alone? No; that will not suit him. He would punish a whole nation. The proud became the revengeful. If a man is humble and has a lowly estimate of himself, he will bear in silence the contempt and unkindness of men. But pride is easily wounded—sees slights often where none were intended. On a great platform we see, in the case of Haman, to what sin wounded pride will hurry a man. And to what a doom! We need to beware. Are none of us ever tempted harshly to judge a whole family because of the conduct of one of its members? to say, in the spirit of Haman, he is bad—the whole lot is bad? “Hath any wronged thee?” says Quarles, “be bravely revenged; slight it, and the work is begun; forgive it, and the work is finished.” V. THE PATIENCE OF FAITH. The king's life had been saved by Mordecai. But no honour had come to him for the service—no reward. And now an edict is out against him and his nation, dooming them all to death. And does he regret the stand that he has taken? Does he loudly complain of the king's ingratitude? He keeps silence. God will think on him for good. Oh, troubled one! oh, darkened life! oh, soul tempest-tossed, “only believe.” The clouds will pass—will melt into the eternal blue! (*G. T. Coster.*) *Haman and Mordecai*:—1. It shows in a lurid but striking manner the diabolical character of revenge. Pride is pride, and revenge is revenge in quality, although they only show themselves in words with little stings in them, and by insinuations that have no known ground of verity. If we do not make it our business to chastise our spirits and purify them from the seeds and shadows of these vices, in the forms in which they can assail us, can we be quite sure that if we were on the wider stage, and had the ampler opportunity, we should not be as this devilish Amalekite? 2. A lesson of personal independence. What meanness there is in this country in bowing down to rank! in letting some lordly title stand in the place of an argument! in seeking high patronage for good schemes, as men seek the shadow of broad trees on hot days! in running after royal carriages! in subservience to power, and adulation of wealth! Rise up, Mordecai, in thy Jewish grandeur, and shame us into manliness, and help us to stand a little more erect! 3. Finally, a lesson of patience and quietness to all the faithful. Obey conscience, honour the right, and then fear no evil. Is the storm brewing? It may break and carry much away, but it will not hurt you. A little reputation is not you. A little property is not you. Health even is not you, nor is life itself. The wildest storm that could blow would only cast you on the shores of eternal peace and safety. But more probably the storm may melt all away in a while and leave you in wonder at your own fears. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. But Mordecai bowed not.—*Decision for God*:—But why did Mordecai not obey the commandment of the king? It may have been because he had a personal dislike to Haman, but that would not have justified him in contradicting the will of the sovereign. Or it may have been that, being a Jew, he regarded himself as exempted from doing honour to one of a race which God had cursed. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua, for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” But so long as Mordecai was a captive in Persia he could hardly be excused, on this account, from resisting the law of the land. The ground of this righteous Jew's refusal must be sought for deeper than either of these things. There can be little doubt, we think, that the homage commanded to be paid to Haman amounted, in this Jew's estimate, to that which should be rendered to God only. The stand which he took had its foundation in religion—a foundation which the men of the world have ever failed to comprehend. (*T. McEwan.*) *Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman*:—But on what ground did Mordecai refuse to bow to Haman and do him reverence? The only answer which comes clearly out of the chapter to that question is, that the position which he took was

one that was common to him with all his people, so that it was sufficiently accounted for to others when he said, "I am a Jew." It was a matter of religion with him. But, that being admitted, the question still arises, What was there in such a command as this of Xerxes to offend the conscience of a pious Jew? Some have answered that, as the Persian monarch was regarded as an incarnation of Ahura-Mazda, and therefore entitled to Divine honours, the act of prostration before him was understood to imply worship; and so homage paid to Haman as the king's representative would be a virtual giving of Divine honour to a human creature. This is confirmed even by heathen writers—for Herodotus tells us that certain Greeks, on being pressed to prostrate themselves before the king, when they were introduced into his presence at Susa, declared "that it was not their custom to worship a man, nor had they come for that purpose"; and Curtius has said, "The Persians, indeed, not only from motives of piety, but also from prudence, worship their kings among the gods." Now, if that explanation be adopted, the act of Mordecai takes its place beside the refusal of the early Christians to sacrifice to the Roman emperor, and puts him on the honour roll among those whose rule of life in all such cases was, "We ought to obey God rather than men." But while it would fully justify Mordecai, this explanation is in itself not without difficulty. For did not Joseph's brethren make similar obeisance to him? Would not Mordecai after his own elevation to Haman's place be required to bow before the king? and must we condemn Nehemiah for rendering to Artaxerxes the homage which Mordecai here refused to Haman, though Xerxes himself had commanded that it should be rendered? It is possible, of course, that Mordecai was right, and that all the rest were wrong; but it is not absolutely incontrovertible that the reverence here required was of the nature of religious worship. Others, therefore, have sought for the reason of Mordecai's disobedience to the royal mandate in the nationality of Haman. Taking Agagite as equivalent to Amalekite, they remind us that the Amalekites were the first to attack the Israelites after their escape from Egypt, and that after his victory over them on that occasion Moses said, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." They recall to our remembrance, also, the fact that it was for sparing some of the Amalekites that Saul was first rejected by God from being king over Israel, and that the only time that Samuel wielded a sword was when he "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord." Now if Haman was indeed an Amalekite, it would be easy to find in that a reason for Mordecai's conduct as well as for Haman's purpose of revenge; for these descending feuds between races in the East are both undying and envenomed, especially when they are rooted in religious differences. But then we have no other case in Scripture where a royal title like Agag becomes a public patronymic, so as to be the name of a tribe; and it is hard to account for the appearance of one of the hated race of Amalek here, at this late date, in Susa. So there are difficulties connected with both solutions, and it is not easy to choose between them. Perhaps the first, all things considered, is the more satisfactory.

(*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Strong conviction*:—The commandment of the king was very express, and Mordecai manifestly exposed himself to imminent danger by disregarding it. If, indeed, his objection to pay homage to Haman was founded upon a conviction that such homage amounted to something like idolatry, then we might regard his refusal as ranking him with the three illustrious youths who braved the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar rather than they would submit to worship the image which he had set up. But we can scarcely take this view of the matter, as it is not likely that Mordecai would have withheld from the king himself the outward reverence which the law and usage of the country required. But if it was because Haman was of the seed of Amalek, that the Jew would not bow to him nor do him reverence, then intense must have been the detestation of that race, when he would rather run the risk of incurring the displeasure of the king than pay respect to one of them who stood so high in the royal favour. Yet we conceive that he might feel himself fully vindicated in his own conscience for acting as he did. It was, after all, a high religious scruple by which he was influenced. By the law of Moses the Amalekites were condemned to perpetual infamy. No earthly rank or station could blot out or modify that sentence. In this view of the subject, Mordecai would have supposed himself an apostate from his religion had he done reverence to Haman, and therefore he refused to do it, whatever might be the consequence to himself. We cannot but respect such a feeling as this, generated as it was by regard for the Divine law. It could not be appreciated by the other servants of the king, who may have attributed Mordecai's

conduct to a sullen and haughty temper; but, although the matter in itself was apparently unimportant, it was an evidence of real heroism of character in this man to obey the dictate of conscience at the hazard of personal suffering. True religion does not interfere with the discharge of the ordinary courtesies of life, nor does it forbid our rendering that honour to rank and station which is their due. But when vice and real infamy are shrouded under high rank, the Christian must beware of acting so as to make it supposed that the rank forms an apology for the vice and infamy, or renders them less hateful than they really are. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *A little matter*:—All was going well with this man. His rivals had been crushed, his seat had been set above the seats of all the noblemen at court, the king had made him his boon companion, and had issued orders that the palace servants should bow before him and do him reverence. He was as nearly happy as a man can be whose ruling passion is vanity; but such men hold their happiness by a very frail tenure. It does not look altogether well that Ahasuerus should have needed to give special orders about his servants bowing to Haman. Darius had not needed to do this in the case of Daniel. Had the favourite been respected and liked, men would have given him all seemly honour unbidden. "But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." It does seem a very small matter; but when such a man as Mordecai attached importance to it we must pause and consider whether the matter was really so small as it seemed. For it is an unsafe way of reasoning to say about anything, "It is only one little act; why scruple over it? If it does no good it can do no harm"; and so forth. By such reasoning habits of untruth and intemperance have many a time been formed, and what was perhaps little in itself, if it had been possible to separate it from all else, has been found to be anything but little in its results. The truth is, we cannot separate any single action from the rest of our lives; so that the importance of an action depends not on its greatness or its littleness, but on many other circumstances, such as how often we do it, the effect it has on others, particularly its influence on our own consciences. In this case it so happened that what Mordecai did—rather what he determined not to do—proved to be of very great importance to the whole Jewish people and the whole Persian empire; but he could not know that. What he did know was that, if he had once bowed to Haman, his conscience would have been defiled, as surely as Daniel's would have been if he had eaten the king's meat; and a polluted conscience is no trifle. A man has to carry it about with him all day, to go to sleep with it if he can, to encounter it again when he awakes, until God purges out the stain. But why should Mordecai have feared that, by bowing to Haman as the rest did, he would bring on himself this worst evil, a bad conscience? We do not need to suppose that the homage enjoined was idolatrous; it may have been nearly so; but Mordecai knew the character of the prime minister, and he knew the fifteenth Psalm: in his eyes "a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." In addition to the knowledge Mordecai could not but have of Haman's character, he knew him to be of the seed-royal of Amalek; and a man with the spirit of Moses and Samuel in him would not recognise the advancement of "the Jews' enemy." The point might be small in itself, but the principle involved in it was to Mordecai more important than life. The day was not far off when Ahasuerus and all Persia agreed with Mordecai in his estimate of Haman. But persons who act on high principle must be content to find that few on earth understand them at the time. Angels understand and smile on them, but the smiles of angels are not seen. Possibly some of Mordecai's Jewish brethren might hint to him that his conduct was rather extreme (that terrible word!)—savouring more of bigotry than of pious charity. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *The difference between right and wrong shown in little things*:—The difference between right and wrong may be shown in a little matter, but it is not therefore a little difference; and they who are determined to be thorough in their allegiance to God will make no distinction in their conduct between small things and great. Very noble, too, was Mordecai's firmness in resisting the entreaties of his fellow-servants, for he shut up the whole controversy with the simple confession, "I am a Jew." He will not needlessly publish his religion on the house-top, but neither will he be ashamed of it in the "king's gate." It might cost him much to make the confession, but he knew that sin would be still more costly, and so he did not shrink from saying, "I am a Jew." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Limits to the claims of official civility*:—In Mordecai's adherence to his religious principles we see that there are limits to the claims of social and official civility—bounds that duty does not allow us to pass in

our respect for our superiors. The Word of God is the standard of respectability and manners as well as of faith, and it forbids all lying and deceit, all flattery and all mean compliances with the wishes of others, however exalted. It does not allow us to do anything that is contrary to good breeding and the chivalry of right. It does not allow us to neglect our duties, waste our time or injure our health, merely to please a friend or a potentate. Let it be remembered, to the honour of one of the Presidents of the United States, General Jackson, that he never allowed any visitors to keep him from the house of God on the Lord's day. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?—*Mordecai's companions* :—But yonder come his fellow-servants of the palace; what have they to say? Why they say to him, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" And verily, aged man, why? Is it that all eyes may be turned upon you? It is true, indeed, that he is the observed of all observers who does not go with the multitude, even though they go to do evil. Any one that dares to think and speak for himself is sure to be condemned by the many that he differs from; for his position and principles are a running commentary of condemnation upon them. It has ever been so, and perhaps it will always continue to be so, for it is not for the man that lives in the cellar to say what he sees who dwells on the house-top. Some men are before their times, and some men never catch up with the age in which they live; and some men have not moral courage enough to hear themselves breathe honestly and freely. We see this daily as to the press and the pulpit. Is not the daily bread of the printer put in jeopardy if his journal does not meet the popular taste? And have we not seen large bodies of business men combine to starve newspapers to death by withholding their patronage unless the said papers would defend their conduct? And is it not true that if one pulpit has the courage to utter an honest opinion, that does not happen to coincide with the rest of the pulpits, that then all the pulpits and papers that have neither capacity to understand nor the moral honesty to comprehend the poor dissenter open their batteries upon him? (*Ibid.*) *Principle seems impolitic* :—And again his fellow-servants say, "Friend Mordecai, consider well what you are going to do. Remember, it is not Haman merely, but his master also, that you offend. Is it wise, then, for you to peril the forfeiture of your place and your life upon a question of mere etiquette or courtesy? It is extremely impolitic and dangerous for you not to do homage to so great a prince. And besides, if you will not bow with us, then you will have to suffer alone." "Yes, friends," says he, "I have considered all this; and I am content to meet the consequences. It is not a mere question of courtesy. I am a Jew. My religion is with me a glorious reality." (*Ibid.*) *Cowardice cannot understand courage* :—Mordecai's fellow-servants were not capable of understanding his principles. Cowards never apprehend the true character of a brave man. Little minds cannot see up into the magnanimity of a great and noble soul. (*Ibid.*) *For he told them that he was a Jew*.—*Fidelity to principle* :—We have in the case of Mordecai an example of fidelity to principle which is worthy of all study and imitation. He felt that it was wrong to do homage to Haman. In resisting the entreaties of his fellow-servants, he shut up the whole controversy with the simple confession, "I am a Jew." Herein he gave an example which Christians might follow with advantage. Have the courage, young men, when you are asked to do what you know to be wrong, to reply simply, "I am a Christian." Add to your faith courage—the heroism not of the warrior but of the man who has learned to run the gauntlet of ridicule and scorn, and to follow the dictates of duty "uncaring consequences." To quote the words of the greatest wit of his age—"Learn to inure your principles against ridicule. You can no more exercise your reason if you live in the constant dread of laughter than you can enjoy your life if you are in the constant terror of death. If you think it right to differ from the times, and to make a point of morals, do it, however rustic, however antiquated, however pedantic it may appear; do it as a man who wore a soul of his own and did not wait till it was breathed into him by the breath of fashion." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Vers. 5, 6. *And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not . . . then was Haman full of wrath*.—*Vanity and cruelty* :—Haman manifests by his behaviour the intimate connection there is between vanity and cruelty. 1. Vanity is a form of magnified egotism. When a vain man looks out on the world it is always through the medium of his own vastly magnified shadow. Like the Bröcken

Ghost, this shadow becomes a haunting presence standing out before him in huge proportions. He has no other standard of measurement. The good is what gives him pleasure; evil is what is noxious to him. (1) Egoism utilises the sufferings of others for its own ends. No doubt cruelty is often the result of sheer callousness. It is not so in Haman's case; he is irritated, and vents his annoyance in a vast explosion of malignity that must take account of the agony it produces, for in that agony its own thirst for vengeance is to be slaked. (2) Egoism promotes cruelty by destroying the sense of proportion. Self is not only regarded as the centre of the universe; like the sun surrounded by the planets, it is taken to be the greatest object, and everything else is insignificant when compared to it. What is the slaughter of a few thousand Jews to so great a man as Haman? It is no more than the destruction of as many flies in a forest fire that the settler has kindled to clear his ground. The same self-magnification is visibly presented by the Egyptian bas-reliefs, on which the victorious Pharaohs appear as tremendous giants driving back hordes of enemies or dragging pigmy kings by their heads. It is but a step from this condition to insanity, which is the apotheosis of vanity. The chief characteristic of insanity is a diseased enlargement of self. 2. Vanity leads to cruelty through the entire dependence of the vain person on the good opinion of others. In this vanity differs from pride. A proud man is satisfied with himself, but the vain man is always looking outside himself with feverish eagerness to secure all the honours that the world can bestow upon him. While a proud man in an exalted position scarcely deigns to notice the "dim, common people," the vain man betrays his vulgarity by caring supremely for popular adulation. Therefore, while the haughty person can afford to pass over a slight with contempt, the vain creature who lives on the breath of applause is mortally offended by it and roused to avenge the insult with corresponding rage. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The misery of pride*:—A man of principle would have respected the conscientiousness of the act, even though he might have laughed at what he regarded the smallness of the scruple. A man of ordinary common sense would have treated the whole affair with indifference; but Haman valued his office just because it carried with it the right to such homage, and therefore what would have been a mole-hill, or hardly so much, to others, was a mountain to him. The proud man thus increases his own misery; and little slights, which other people would not so much as notice, are felt by him with great keenness. He whose arm has been recently vaccinated is very sensitive where the pustule is, so that a push which you would think nothing of is agony to him. Now, in precisely the same way the proud man is "touchy," as we say; the slightest infringement on his dignity wounds him to the quick, and when other people are laughing he is vowing revenge; for, as this story illustrates, the passions are all near of kin, and one prepares the way for another. Brooding over the refusal of Mordecai to do him reverence, it became so magnified in his estimation that he determined to punish it; there was revenge. That he might gratify that revenge, it became necessary to bring the peculiarities of the Jewish nation before the king, and he requested their destruction on the ground that they were not profitable to the monarch, whereas the sole reason why he suggested their extirpation was that Mordecai had slighted him; there was falsehood. Then, in planning their massacre, there was murder. Here, therefore, were four sins all in a line, each rising above the other in enormity—pride, revenge, falsehood, murder. People think, sometimes, that pride is no great sin; some almost speak of it as if it were half a virtue; but, as this and other histories make plain, it is the germ of other evils that are worse than itself, and therefore we ought to be on our guard against allowing ourselves to become its victims. And how shall we best counteract it? I reply, by cultivating a sense of responsibility. That which we have, whether it be ability, or wealth, or exalted position, we have received as a trust, and we are to use it, as stewards for God, in the service of our fellow-men. Let us keep pressing the questions, Who hath made me to differ from others? What have I that I have not received? For what purpose have I been entrusted with these things? And the more we ponder these, the less we shall be inclined to plume ourselves on our possessions, and the more we shall be stirred up to the service of our generation by the will of God. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Injured vanity*:—"A man will forgive you anything," Professor Huxley said, "if you do not injure his vanity. Once do that, and he will never forgive you." *Evil passion its own penalty*:—Now, it may be thought by some that the case of Haman allowing himself to be so chafed and perturbed by a trifle as to be made miserable in the midst of so many advantages, is to be regarded as altogether extreme and

without parallel; but we believe that on examination it will be found that the wicked always receive part of their punishment in the violence of some unhallowed passion which blinds them to all the real benefits of their lot. Is there not a gnawing disease in the heart of the covetous man, for example, which prevents him from enjoying the good things which are placed within his reach, just because he has not yet acquired all that he wishes to possess? And still, as he gets more and more, is he not as far as ever from being satisfied, since he has not yet reached the point at which he aims? Or again, look to the man who is the slave of envy, and mark how miserable this base passion makes him. He has ample means of enjoyment, which he can call his own; but his neighbour has something which pleases him better, and just because that one thing is wanting to himself, he can find no satisfaction in the varied blessings which a kind providence has showered upon him. His neighbour's good is to him what Mordecai at the king's gate was to Haman. In like manner, I might advert to the working of the more violent passions of anger and revenge as a cause of intense torment to those who cherish them, and as altogether preventing them from taking advantage of many sources of happiness which lie open to them on every side. I might also allude to the misery which wounded vanity and affronted pride often bring to those who have high notions of their own importance, as when a trifling word or action will discompose them for many days together, and deprive them of their relish for the things that formerly pleased them, and made them happy. But enough has been said to show how by a just retribution the ungodly, following their natural tendencies and passions, work out their own passion. How different is the picture presented to us, where grace reigns in the heart. Although corruption is not altogether eradicated from the spiritual man, yet its power is subdued; the fierce passions are tamed, love takes the place of envy, malignity, and wrath; and the believer, seeking and finding his chief enjoyment in God, remains comparatively untroubled by those incidents which breed so much vexation and disquietude in the breast of the ungodly. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Wounded pride*:—Wounded pride excites revenge, and this always burns hottest in the weakest minds. How insatiable is revenge, especially when it is associated with national and religious rancour! Haman learned that Mordecai was a Jew, a name that called up the bitterest recollections in the breast of an Amalekite, and he resolves at once on the total extermination of that people. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *A favourite lust*:—And it has always been one of the devices of the enemy to drive men into criminal excesses to their own ruin, through the instrumentality of some favourite lust or appetite. It was the covetous spirit of Judas that opened a way to the tempter to hurry him on to betray the Saviour. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Then was Haman full of wrath*.—*The penalty of an evil passion*:—How dreadfully this wrath flamed in his bosom we learn from the method which he took to express it. We may observe, at present, what misery pride, by its own nature and inseparable consequences, brings upon men. No proud man ever received all that respect, or was treated with all that delicacy of regard, which he thought his due. Now pride mortified by neglect or contempt, kindles a fire in the soul which burns, and torments, and destroys. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 6. Wherefore Haman thought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom.—*Plotting in vain*:—We proceed to consider the scheme of destruction which Haman arranged with the utmost craft. It seemed in its arrangement perfectly secure. Its accomplishment appeared certain and beyond resistance. 1. Haman's malice was extreme, equal to any result to which it might lead. There was no reluctance, no holding back in the carrying out his purposes of wickedness to the utmost. 2. Haman's plan was extremely crafty and determined. It involved many successive steps, and he faithfully persevered through them all. But what avails all this plotting against God? How mad and silly seem all the well-arranged plans of this scheme of wickedness when the providence and power of God are brought into the account! The secrecy of the plan is nothing. He that is higher than the highest regardeth it. An infinite power unseen is contending against him. Remember the story of Elisha, and his servant on the hill of Samaria (2 Kings vi. 15). 3. We see the people whom Haman desired to destroy given entirely into his hands. The king makes him an unlimited grant. "The king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee." "Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry," &c. Alas, what extended

sorrow among men the arbitrary wickedness of man is able to produce! Ambition deluges the earth with blood. The wicked covetousness of a few may doom myriads to misery, with no relief. The pride of this world will not stop to hear; the business of this world will not stop to consider; the prosperity and self-indulgence of this world will not be troubled with the griefs of the absent suffering; the indifference of this world cannot take the trouble to read, or think, or act, concerning them. 4. We see on the side of the Jews no power to resist. The highest human power was irrevocably pledged to their oppressor. Every advantage is on the side of the oppressor. But God has His own plans already laid and fixed. 5. We are ready to ask, in reference to the case before us, How could any one ever present greater difficulties? But God delights in overcoming difficulties, and in causing the faith of His people to endure in the midst of all discouragements. He allows the obstacles in their path to accumulate to the utmost. And God graciously honoured the faith which He imparted by fulfilling all its expectations in a manner the most complete. If you come to serve the Lord, you must endure your part of the trials which His people meet. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Revenge*:—Justice is said to blindfold herself that she may hold the scales evenly, not knowing what has been put into each; but revenge shuts both eyes that it may see no scales at all. What monstrous disproportion between the offence and the penalty, to avenge a small personal affront received from one Jew by "causing to perish in one day all Jews, old and young"! To say nothing of Nero or Domitian, nor of Radama in Madagascar—for these, being heathen, had to that extent the same excuse as Haman—let me recall in a few words a well-known story. There were many Protestants in France after the Reformation, some of them nobles, all of them peaceful citizens. Their numbers and their growth vexed the Pope, and especially vexed the Pope's "niece," Catherine de Medici, queen of France, and mother of three of its kings. Suddenly, while one of her sons, Charles IX., was young, Catherine made peace with the Huguenots, and displayed great zeal in enforcing new laws in favour of her Protestant subjects. After two years, without any warning, on the eve of St. Bartholomew's Day, there began a massacre in which six thousand persons perished in Paris alone, and fifty thousand in the provinces of France, within three days. When the joyful tidings reached Rome, public thanks were given in the churches. Haman would have rejoiced in the bloodshed; but he must have owned himself outdone in cunning and blasphemy. Catherine succeeded where Haman failed; her victims were effectually blindfolded, and she took the name of a holy God and a merciful Saviour to justify an act which even those of her own creed now blush to acknowledge. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Enmity to God's people*:—We see how enmity to God's truth and His people displays itself with restless activity for the accomplishment of its ends. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

**Ver. 7. In the first month . . . they cast Pur, that is, the lot.**—*The time of the lot*:—The drawing of the lot took place in the month Nisan, or about March of our year, and the day fixed by it was the thirteenth day of Adar, or February—a period of nearly twelve months intervening. The patience of Haman would be sadly tried by this result, but his superstitious fears would prevent him from acting contrary to the decision of "Pur." In tracing the deep lines of providence in the whole narrative, however, we cannot help seeing a higher and more beneficent wisdom than that of chance. Had an earlier day been decided upon, sufficient time might not have been given to Mordecai to use the means which he did to frustrate the conspiracy. If the suspense of the Jews was a trial of their faith, and an incentive to prayer, the interval was also a boon in so far as it gave Mordecai leisure for deliberate action in view of the king's subsequent decree. No doubt, in this instance, the disposing of the lot was of the Lord—a disposing of it very different from the intention of those who used it. So may the lot become in the hands of those who believe in its decisions the means for the accomplishment of the retributive purposes of God. (*T. McEwan.*) *The blind method of revenge*:—Revenge, when it becomes a master passion, is the worst madness. I. **REVENGE IS BLIND IN ITS METHOD.** This is illustrated in the conduct of Haman. He caused the lot to be cast to find out the favourable day for the accomplishment of his purpose. 1. He was blind to the fact that there is no chance. 2. He was blind to the fact that so-called chance might as easily be against him as for him. 3. He was blind to the fact that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." II. **HAMAN PERSISTED IN HIS REVENGEFUL PURPOSE.** What a



glorious revolution would soon take place, if the good were as persistent in the pursuit of merciful purposes as the bad are in revengeful projects. Every bad passion is injurious in its permanence. III. REVENGE IS DESTRUCTIVE IN ITS PATIENCE. Haman was willing to wait twelve months in order that his revenge might be the more signally marked. But his very patience worked his ruin. Time is not on the side of revengeful waiters. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 8. **And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus.**—*Listening to scandal:*—If we blame Ahasuerus for too readily listening to the invective of Haman, and condemning the Jews untried and unheard, we should be on our guard against committing the same sin, by giving heed to scandal in regard to others, without careful personal inquiry and observation, lest we should be only crediting the creations of the worst passions and distempers of our fallen nature. (*T. McEwan.*) *Half the truth dangerous:*—There is no notice taken of Mordecai. Not a syllable about his own injured pride. No reference made to the enmity of the Amalekites to the Jews. The real merits of the proposal are all kept back, and only those things are mentioned which were fitted to arouse the indignation of the king against the Jewish people. They were “a certain people”—a nondescript race, scattered abroad, like so many rebels against the government, and yet preserving their own unity; having their own laws, and despising constituted authority; contemning the king’s laws, and setting the example of insubordination; and sowing dissension and strife throughout all the provinces of the empire. For these reasons it was clearly not expedient that they should be tolerated any longer. How skilfully does the crafty conspirator conceal his malice and revenge under cover of the king’s profit. He did not ask for the destruction of this disaffected people as a favour to himself, but in making the proposal he artfully insinuated that he was doing the king a service. (*Ibid.*) **There is a certain people scattered abroad.**—*The destruction of the Jews:*—He stood high in the favour of his prince, but did he not risk the total loss of that favour by a proposal so evidently unjust and inhumane? Why did he not dread the wrath of the king, which is as messengers of death? Might he not have heard such words as these in answer to his proposal: “Audacious wretch! what hast thou seen in me that thou shouldst hope to make me the murderer of my people? Man of blood! thou scruplest not to seek the destruction, at one blow, of thousands of my subjects, upon a vague, unsupported charge which thou bringest against them! Wilt thou not another day follow the example of Bigthan and Teresh? Wilt thou be more afraid to lay thy hand upon one man, though a king, than upon many thousands of my subjects who have done thee no wrong?” (*G. Lawson.*) *Haman’s proposition* contained truth enough to make it plausible, and error enough to make it cruel, and enough personally agreeable to the king to make it popular with him. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Cunning malice:*—But observe the cunning malice of his address to the king. He does not say, “There is an old Jew that has offended me, and, through me, offered an affront to your sacred majesty; therefore let me execute vengeance upon him.” No, not a word of this sort. He feared to show his real character for rancour to the king, or courtiers. He professes to have no personal motives, but to be moved altogether by a desire for the public good. (*Ibid.*) *True and false accusations:*—Having formed so thorough-going a purpose, Haman took steps to execute it. We need not wonder at his lying about the character of the Jews; for it is often possible to use nothing but the language of truth, and yet to utter only the greater falsehood. It was quite true of God’s people, that their laws were “diverse from all people”: it is true of them to-day, and was equally true then, that, being bought with a price, they cannot be slaves of men; that, if any human law interferes with the will of their Saviour, they can give only the one answer, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But it was false to say, “Neither keep they the king’s laws”; for, in respect of everything that man has a right to command, God’s people are the best subjects. To the fathers of these exiles the God of Israel had given this commandment: “Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace”; and Haman could scarcely be ignorant that both the former empire and this one had profited by the private virtue and public faithfulness of pious Jews. God will answer Haman in His own way. But we ought to be fully prepared for the calumny, seeing it arises from two causes which remain always in force. The world cannot understand what it is that we owe to the love of God and to the blood of Christ, and how He must, therefore, reign supreme in the believing heart; and the world extremely

dislikes to hear a claim advanced for liberty of conscience which reminds it of a power higher than its own. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) Therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.—*Profit*:—Worldly hearts are not led by good or evil, but by profit and loss; neither have they grace to know that nothing is profitable but what is honest; they must needs offend by rule, that measure all things by profit and measure profit by their imagination. How easy it is to suggest strange untruths when there is nobody to make answer! False Haman, how is it not for the king's profit to suffer the Jews? If thou construe this profit for honour, the king's honour is in the multitude of his subjects; and what people more numerous than they? If for gain, the king's profit is in the largeness of his tributes; and what people are more deep in their payments? If for service, what people are more officious? No name under heaven hath made so many fools, so many villains, as this of profit. (*Bp. Hall.*) *No true profit in sin*:—It is, then, a question of profit or loss, not of right and justice. Never was there a scheme of villainy that was not gilded over with the plausible pretence of public utility. Nothing under heaven has made so many fools and so many heartless villains as supposed profit. The greatest good to the greatest number is indeed desirable, but such an object was never yet reached by a disregard of justice and right. Expediency is a fallacy. It is never allowed us to try the experiment of doing evil that good may come. How did it turn out in the case before us? The king is to get ten thousand talents for this execution. But instead of that his only profit was the blood and mangled bodies of thousands of his faithful subjects. Ah, cruel Haman! Are these the tender mercies of the wicked? Are these the profits of sin? What "if thou couldst have swum in a whole sea of Jewish blood, if thou couldst have raised mountains of their carcases? What if thou couldst have made all Persia thy shambles, who would have given thee one farthing for all those piles of flesh, for all those streams of blood?"—*Hall. (W. A. Scott, D.D.) Haman's murderous proposal*:—I. THE COMMONNESS OF IT. In every age God's people have been hated for the very reasons that are here assigned. They worship the one true and living God. David tells of confederacies formed to "cut off the Jews from being a nation." The ten persecutions in the early ages of Christianity. At the present day private animosity is indulged as far as the laws of the land will allow. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." II. THE IMPIETY OF IT. III. THE FOLLY OF IT. Haman with all his power could not prevail against the Jews, who yet in appearance were altogether in his hands. (*C. Simeon.*)

Ver. 9. I will pay ten thousand talents of silver.—*Haman's wealth: ancient millionaires*:—Crassus owned a landed estate valued at more than one million and a half pounds sterling, and Ridorus, after having lost a good deal in the civil war, left an estate worth one million forty-seven hundred pounds. And Lentulus, the augur, died worth three millions, three hundred and thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three pounds sterling. Apicius was possessed of above nine hundred and sixteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-one pounds. His wealth, however, was by no means satisfactory or sufficient for him. For after having spent vast sums in his kitchen, he was so miserable that he put an end to his own life by poison. These rich old Romans were not bankers or mere merchants and traders. These amounts did not merely pass through their hands in the way of trade. They were worth so much in hard money. Nor were all the millionaires of ancient times Romans. Herodotus says that Xerxes, in going to Greece, the father of Ahasuerus—or as some say, Ahasuerus himself—found Pythius, the Lydian, possessed of two thousand talents of silver and four millions of gold darics; that is, about twenty-seven and a half millions of dollars (*Lib. vii.*). And Plutarch informs us, that after Crassus, the Roman general, had given the tenth of all he had to Hercules, he entertained ten thousand people at his tables, and gave to every citizen as much corn as would support him three months; and then had seven thousand one hundred Roman talents remaining; that is, about twenty-eight millions of dollars. Surely, then, there is nothing incredible in our history because it speaks of ten thousand talents of silver. The wealth and luxury of the old world, in many particulars, surpassed our own times. The enormous debts contracted in the days of Alexander and of the Cæsars prove that the wealth of those times was great, although this is a way to prove one's wealth by that is not at all to my mind, especially for a Church. Anthony owed, we are told, at the ides of March, £333,333 13s. 4d., which, however, it is said he paid before the calends of April, every

penny of it. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Costly revenge* :—His revenge was so dear to him, that he would not only hazard the king's favour by the horrid proposal of murdering a whole nation, but expose himself to a severe loss in his fortune, rather than suffer the hated race to live. What liberal sacrifices will men make to their passions! They will give a great part of the substance of their house to the gratification of their hatred or their lust. Why then should we think it a hard matter to give a part of our substance to God? If our desires are as eager for the advancement of virtue and purity, if we are as earnest in our wishes to have the wants of the poor supplied, and the afflictions of the unfortunate relieved, as revengeful men, like Haman, are to gratify their ill-nature, it will give us pleasure to honour the Lord with our substance, and to minister to the needs of our fellow-men. (*G. Lawson.*)

**Ver. 11. To do with them as it seemeth good to thee.**—*The danger of an easy temper* :—Ahasuerus appears to have been a man of an easy temper, and ready to confer the greatest obligations, without deliberation, on those whom he loved. But there is no true wisdom without judgment and steadiness. A thoughtless man, of an easy temper, is more likely to turn out a vicious than a virtuous character, because in a world where so many more bad than good men are to be met with, he is likely to give up himself to the guidance of those who will lead him out of the way of understanding; or if he should be led in the right path by some of his friends, there are others that will lead him out of it. Ahasuerus would have heaped favours upon the Jews, if Mordecai had been to him at this time what Haman was. **I. MANY HAVE NOT DULY DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN AN EASY AND A GOOD TEMPER.** An easy temper is a very dangerous one, when it is not under the powerful restraints of wisdom. It is vain to boast of a ready compliance with every good motion suggested to us if we are equally ready to comply with bad motions. If we surrender ourselves to the direction of our friends, we may soon find that we have given up ourselves to our enemies. He is not our friend who desires to be our lord. **II. PLEASE MEN FOR THEIR GOOD TO EDIFICATION.** Be always ready to grant reasonable requests, and to follow good counsels. But you must judge for yourselves, by the light which God has given you, what requests are lawful to be granted, and what counsels are worthy to be followed. (*Ibid.*) *The terrors of despotism* :—**I.** This history is an illustration of the danger of a one-man power—OF AN ABSOLUTE DESPOTISM. The liberty that rests on the selfishness, or the inclination of one man, or of a hundred men, is suspended despotism, and if we must choose between the rule of one man, or of thirty, without a written constitution and laws, we should greatly prefer the one. In either case, our property and personal liberty are at the will of human caprice or passion. **II.** We see HOW GREATLY WE ARE BLESSED, IN HAVING A GOVERNMENT, NOT OF MEN, BUT OF JUST, MILD, ENLIGHTENED AND EQUITABLE WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED LAWS, guaranteeing to us liberty in the worship of God, and in the pursuits of life and the enjoyment of our institutions. The King of Persia, in some instances, seems to have been surrounded by the restraints of precedents, yet, in other cases, he could do what he pleased with the lives and property of his subjects. There was no written constitution. **III.** WE ARE NEVER TO DESPAIR OF THE ARK, EVEN WHEN IT FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES. God will never forsake His people. It is no new thing for the godly to have to suffer persecution. The Jews were misrepresented. Even what Haman said of them that was true was so said as to give a fresh colouring to the whole picture. There is no proof that the Jews were factious under the Persian rule. On the contrary, from the lives of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah we should infer just the opposite. It is an old aspersion of God's people, to charge them with singularity. Would to God there was more cause for the imputation than there is! The very thing, therefore, that constituted their glory was made their offence. But it is better always to fall into the hands of God than of men. This was David's choice, and observation approves of it. The very reasons Haman gave for destroying the Hebrews are among the very reasons why God will not let them perish out of the earth. That which whets the sword of men moves the pity of the Almighty. God sometimes leaves His people to come into the greatest peril, that His power may be the more easily seen in their deliverance. Pharaoh was raised up to show His power, and so was Haman. "God taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and ensnares the wicked in the works of their own hands." In the darkest hour it is our duty and our highest happiness still to trust in God. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

**Vers. 12–15.** Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day.—*Fruit-*

*less preparations*:—I. HERE IS UNSEEMLY HASTE. II. HERE ARE INCONSISTENT PRECURSORY MEASURES. Wickedness renders a man inconsistent. Revenge impelled to action, but conscience still spoke in reproving tones. All must be done according to law. Obedience to the eternal law of right is the only method by which human lives can be rendered consistent and harmonious. III. HERE IS A LOW ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE, SHOWN—1. In the unmethodical nature of the slaughter designed. 2. In the indiscriminate nature of the slaughter designed. 3. In the rapacity after property. Life *versus* property. This decree is one of the unwritten decrees of modern civilisation. IV. HERE IS WICKEDNESS BOLSTERED UP BY HUMAN AUTHORITY. Learn—1. Great men should try to get a true idea of the importance of human life. 2. Statesmen should remember that the true wealth of a community is its men. 3. All ought to remember that life is ignoble when passion is allowed to rule. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Persian postal facilities*:—The postal service for that age was exceedingly good, but only the king could take advantage of it. Indeed, it was one of the means used by him for the government of the empire, and was very largely, according to Herodotus, the device of this same Xerxes. Along the chief lines of travel he established, at intervals of fourteen miles, post-houses, at each of which relays of horses and couriers were always in readiness. One of these messengers, receiving an official document, rode with it at his utmost speed to the next post-house, where it was taken onward by another courier with another horse, and in this way a proclamation like that here described would reach the farthest limits of the empire in five or six weeks. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. **To kill, and to cause to perish.**—*A wicked massacre*:—The wickedness of the intended massacre does not rest with Ahasuerus and Haman. Great multitudes of the king's subjects must participate in the guilt. The governors and rulers of every province, and the people under their command, have letters written to them, sealed with the king's seal, to contribute their part to the massacre. Let the great consider what they do. If they are wicked, they are not wicked alone. We ought to bless God that no man hath power to require us to do anything but according to the known laws of the land. And yet men of true virtue will not comply with the will of the most absolute monarchs when it is not consistent with the laws of justice and of mercy. At the famous Bartholomew massacre, when the King of France sent his orders to the commanders in the different provinces to massacre the Huguenots, one of them returned him this answer: "In my district your Majesty has many brave soldiers, but no butchers." That virtuous governor never felt any effects of the royal resentment. It is to be feared that few of the Persian governors would have given such proofs of virtuous courage if the king's edict had not been reversed. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 15. **And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.**—*Society broken into sections*:—Alas! how society is broken up into sections—one part caring little for another that is closest to it, and at the very moment pressing upon it for sympathy and succour. Stone walls were all that separated these two men from an agonising population, and yet they were as insensible to the sufferings which were without as though they had been hundreds of miles removed from that scene of perplexity and dismay. How many are in suffering in every great city! How many tears are being shed, groans of distress uttered, pangs of anguish and remorse endured! But the world takes no notice of them—enjoys its ease, and dulls all sensibility to the pain of others by sensual delights. "What is that to us? see thou to that," is still the reply of the world to those who have been its slaves. Happy shall be the time when the gospel shall have rectified this state of things; when each shall regard himself, like the Saviour, as a minister to others; when the wide breaches of fashion and caste shall be bridged over and healed; when priest and Levite shall disappear in the compassionate Samaritan; when every man shall look not upon his own things, but also on the things of others, and when society, from the highest to the lowest, shall be a holy, sympathising, loving brotherhood, possessed of the spirit and imitating the example of our Lord Jesus Christ! It was not the Jews only who were distressed and alarmed, but the whole community—some, because in the destruction of the Jews they would themselves suffer in friendship or outward estate—others from feelings of humanity at the prospective slaughter of good citizens and unoffending women and children—some through fear that a deed so cruel and horrible might lead to an insurrection in the provinces, and an indiscriminate plundering and murdering among the inhabitants

—and others lest such an unrighteous decree might provoke the judgment of the Almighty. The city was panic-stricken. If the king was to act thus arbitrarily and unreasonably in one instance, might he not do so in many ways? (*T. McEwan.*) *Self-indulgence*:—How self-indulgence renders men callous to the distresses and sufferings of their fellow-men. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The irregularities of human conditions*:—I. THE INEQUALITIES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS. 1. The most striking instance of inequality is that which is illustrated between the condition of the oppressor and the oppressed. 2. This is further illustrated by the contrast between the jollity of the palace and the perplexity of the city. 3. The indifference of one class of the community towards another and seemingly less favoured class is brought to view in this passage. 4. This indifference has its root in and is the outcome of selfishness. II. THE MYSTERIES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS. Haman feasting with the king, Mordecai mourning at the king's gate. III. THE COMPENSATING FORCES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS. The pleasure of Ahasuerus was not a permanent stream. The glory of Haman was soon tarnished. The sorrow of Mordecai was turned into laughter. IV. THE SYMPATHETIC ELEMENT IN HUMAN CONDITIONS. Sorrow draws men and women more closely together than joy. When one part of a city suffers, the whole of the city should be perplexed. V. THE HARMONISING PRINCIPLE FOR HUMAN CONDITIONS. What principle is there that is to adjust in fit proportions the various parts and members of human society? The gospel rightly understood, broadly interpreted, and fully received. The gospel dethrones selfishness, and teaches the true brotherhood of humanity. VI. THE TRUE SUSTAINING POWER FOR ALL HUMAN CONDITIONS: "Even our faith." The true help in life's difficulties is to go into the sanctuary of God. By faith and prayer the world's true heroes have ever conquered. Here learn—1. To keep away from sensuality, which hardens the nature. 2. To cultivate sympathy, which ennobles the nature. 3. To foster firm faith in an overruling power, which brightens life. 4. To have respect unto the harmonies of heaven amid the discords of earth. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

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#### CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes.—*Mordecai's grief*:—In the case of Mordecai, the first effect of the proclamation was bitter anguish, for his conduct had been the flint out of which the spark leaped to kindle this portentous conflagration. But Mordecai's grief did not upset his judgment. The genuine sorrow of an honest soul very seldom has that effect; and this man's greatness comes out in his deliberateness. Faith, too, as well as sound judgment, may be discerned under this good man's grief. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Mordecai in sackcloth*:—I. MORDECAI WAS EXCEEDINGLY AFFECTED AT WHAT THE KING HAD COMMANDED (ver. 1). See the stirring benevolence of this man, the sweet philanthropy which dwelt in his soul, and how deeply he felt the common calamity, which resulted from his own conscientious doings. There is nothing new in the Lord's people meeting with adversities and troubles in this life. "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." II. IN THE DEPTH OF HIS GRIEF, MORDECAI "CAME EVEN BEFORE THE KING'S GATE, CLOTHED WITH SACKCLOTH: FOR NONE MIGHT ENTER INTO THE KING'S GATE CLOTHED WITH SACKCLOTH (ver. 2). Amusements or diversions are one class of spiritual idols to which many of the sons of men render homage. The wise man informs us that a scene of unbroken enjoyment is not the best for the interest of the soul. "It is better to go to the house of mourning," &c., "for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart." Do as the saints of old did; we never hear them saying, "I will rejoice in the world"; but "I will rejoice in the Lord," "I will rejoice in Thy salvation." "In the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." "My soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." III. Mordecai, though he could not enter within the king's gate with his signals of distress, WENT AS NEAR IT AS HE DARED TO GO, WITH THE VIEW OF ACQUAINTING ESTHER, BY MEANS OF HER ATTENDANTS, WITH THE IMPENDING DANGER. As soon as she heard of his mournful habit, she sympathised with him, and sent

him raiment instead of his sackcloth, that he might resume his place. We cannot but admire two things which the grace of God had wrought in this woman—her condescension and gratitude. She was now a queen. Providence had placed her on the summit of worldly greatness, yet did she not disregard one of her subjects in distress. She kindly inquired into the cause of his sorrow. Her gratitude also was lovely. Mordecai had acted the part of a tender father towards her, when she was cast a parentless child on the wide world. She does not now forget that tenderness.

IV. MORDECAI SENT BACK TO ESTHER TIDINGS OF THE SITUATION IN WHICH HE, AND SHE, AND THEIR PEOPLE WERE PLACED (vers. 7, 8). Esther was now in a station, high and influential, and she is here charged to use her influence on the side of right and justice, and against oppression and tyranny. It is delightful to behold power thus employed! Power is a mighty weapon, and effects great things either to the injury or benefit of the community. V. ESTHER SENT AGAIN TO MORDECAI, TO TELL HIM THAT SHE HAD NOT FOR A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD BEEN INVITED TO THE ROYAL PRESENCE, AND THAT TO GO UNINVITED WAS CERTAIN DEATH. VI. NOTWITHSTANDING WHAT ESTHER SAID, MORDECAI WOULD BY NO MEANS HAVE HER NEGLECT THE WORK WHICH HE HAD ASSIGNED HER (vers. 13, 14). We learn a few particulars from these words. 1. That Mordecai had a strong belief that God would interfere for His people in this case. 2. That we are not to flinch from our duty by reason of the danger which we incur by its performance. It is easy to walk in the way while it is smooth and easy, but it must be walked in also when it is rough and thorny. 3. That the work of the Lord shall prosper, whether we endeavour to promote it or otherwise. "Deliverance shall arise to the Jews from another place: but thou," &c. God is never at a loss for instruments to accomplish His will. If we neglect the honour, He will make others willing to spend and to be spent in His service. VII. WE COME NOW TO ESTHER'S ANSWER (vers. 15, 16). Fasting and prayer were resorted to on this occasion. Spiritually performed, they never fail of success. United prayer, as in these cases, and in that of Peter, who was about to be killed by Herod, is omnipotent. Like Esther, let us work and pray. These duties must ever be associated. To work without praying is Pharisaism and presumption. To pray without working is insincerity and hypocrisy. Like Mordecai, let us counsel others to do their duty, heedless of all temporal consequences, and pray that they may have power from on high for its due accomplishment. (*J. Hughes.*) *Anguish keenly felt:*—At first it would appear that he was so stunned, and almost stupefied, by the news, that he knew not what to do. He was cast into the uttermost distress. He was like a vessel struck by a cyclone. He would get to the use of efforts to meet the crisis by and by; but, for the moment, when the hurricane first burst upon him, he could do nothing but give way to the violence of the storm. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Great sorrow:*—I. SORROW CANNOT BE PREVENTED. Sibbes says, "None ever hath been so good or so great as could raise themselves so high as to be above the reach of troubles." Thomas Watson observes, "The present state of life is subject to afflictions, as a seaman's life is subject to storms. Man is born to trouble; he is heir-apparent to it; he comes into the world with a cry and goes out with a groan." II. SORROW CANNOT BE EXPLAINED. In its general aspect sin is the cause of sorrow. When we come to particularise we find ourselves at fault. Eternity is the only true and complete interpreter of time. Heavenly joys only can make plain the meaning of earthly sorrows. III. SORROW CANNOT BE HIDDEN. Emotion is as much part of our God-given nature as intellect. The man who does not feel is a man with the better part of manhood destroyed. Feeling must sooner or later find an expression. It is better not to hide our sorrows. Trouble concealed is trouble increased. IV. SORROW CANNOT BE CONFINED. It passes from nature to nature; from home to home. This community of feeling, this susceptibility to sorrow, speaks to us of our brotherhood. We are members one of another. V. BUT SORROW CAN BE MITIGATED. 1. By believing that the threatened trouble may never come. 2. By believing that God knows how to effect a deliverance. 3. By believing that sorrow may be made productive. As the waters of the Nile overflow the surrounding country, and open up the soil, and prepare it for the reception of the rice seed, so the waters of sorrow should overflow and open up the otherwise barren soil of our nature, and prepare it for the reception of the seed of all truth in its manifold bearings. "Tribulation worketh patience," &c. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Mordecai's grief:*—There is perhaps but little doubt that Mordecai passed hours—they come to nearly all—when gloom lay heavy upon the soul, when the shock he had felt seemed to render existence a blank, leaving little of hope before him save that which glittered around the gateway of death and seemed to whisper, "Abandon effort; accept the inevitable"—

seasons when the fruitlessness of labour, the unreasonableness of man, the malignancy of human enmity, the worthlessness of human sacrifice, the emptiness of the most ardent aspirations, and the inefficiency of goodness, leave the soul drifting upon the open sea of despondency with a torturing sense of loneliness—moments when faith in man, even faith in the Church, is shaken, inducing the spirit to cast itself upon the Fatherhood of God, as the storm drives the wearied bird to its home in the rocks. But since faith still lives, and can only live, in the performance of present duty—which alone has the power of maintaining piety in the soul—he soon discovers that continued reliance upon God is urging him to labour for the realisation of the results he covets. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. **Clothed with sackcloth.**—*The transfigured sackcloth*:—The sign of affliction was thus excluded from the Persian court that royalty might not be discomposed. This disposition to place an interdict on disagreeable and painful things still survives. Men of all ranks and conditions hide from themselves the dark facts of life. Revelation, however, lends no sanction to this habit. We wish to show the entire reasonableness of revelation in its frank recognition of the dark facts of existence. I. WE CONSIDER FIRST THE RECOGNITION BY REVELATION OF SIN. Sackcloth is the outward and visible sign of sin, guilt, and misery. What is popularly called sin, certain philosophers call error, accident, inexperience, imperfection, disharmony, but they will not allow the presence in the human heart of a malign force which asserts itself against God and against the order of His universe. Intellectual masters like Emerson and Renan ignore conscience; they refuse to acknowledge the selfishness, baseness, and cruelty of society. Men generally are willing to dupe themselves touching the fact and power of sin. We do not unshrinkingly acquaint ourselves with the malady of the spirit as we should with any malady hinting itself in the flesh. The sackcloth must not mar our shallow happiness. In the vision of beautiful things we forget the troubles of conscience as the first sinners hid themselves amid the leaves and flowers of paradise; in fashion and splendour we forget our guilty sorrow, as mediæval mourners sometimes concealed the cerements with raiment of purple and gold; in the noises of the world we become oblivious of the interior discords, as soldiers forget their wounds amid the stir and trumpets of the battle. Nevertheless sin thrusts itself upon our attention. The creeds of all nations declare the fact that men everywhere feel the bitter working and intolerable burden of conscience. The sense of sin has persisted through changing generations. The sackcloth is ours, and it eats our spirits like fire. More than any other teacher, Christ emphasised the actuality and awfulness of sin; more than any other He has intensified the world's consciousness of sin. He never sought to relieve us of the sackcloth by asserting our comparative innocence; He never attempted to work into that melancholy robe one thread of colour, to relieve it with one solitary spangle of rhetoric. He laid bare its principle and essence. The South Sea Islanders have a singular tradition to account for the existence of the dew. The legend states that in the beginning the earth touched the sky, that being the golden age when all was beautiful and glad; then some dreadful tragedy occurred, the primal unity was broken up, the earth and sky were torn asunder as we see them now, and the dew-drops of the morning are the tears that nature sheds over the sad divorce. This wild fable is a metaphor of the truth, the beginning of all evil lies in the alienation of the spirit of man from God, in the divorce of earth from heaven; here is the final reason why the face of humanity is wet with tears. Instead of shutting out the signs of woe, Christ arrayed Himself in the sackcloth, becoming sin for us who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins; He establishes us in a true relation to the holy God; He restores in us the image of God; He fills us with the peace of God. Not in the spirit of barren cynicism does Christ lay bare the ghastly wound of our nature, but as a noble physician who can purge the mortal virus that destroys us. We go to Him in sackcloth, but we leave His presence in purity's robe of snow, in the heavenly blue of the holiness of truth. II. WE CONSIDER THE RECOGNITION BY REVELATION OF SORROW. Sackcloth is the raiment of sorrow, and as such it was interdicted by the Persian monarch. We still follow the same insane course, minimising, denying suffering. Society sometimes attempts this. Literature sometimes follows the same cue. Goethe made it one of the rules of his life to avoid everything that could suggest painful ideas. Art has yielded to the same temptation. Most of us are inclined to the sorry trick of gliding over painful things. When the physician prescribed blisters to Marie Bashkirtseff to check her consump-

tive tendency, the vain, cynical girl wrote: "I will put on as many blisters as they like. I shall be able to hide the mark by bodices trimmed with flowers and lace and tulle, and a thousand other things that are worn, without being required; it may even look pretty. Ah! I am comforted." The real secret of the power of many of the fashions and diversions of the world is found in the fact that they hide disagreeable things, and render men oblivious for awhile of the mystery and weight of an unintelligible world. There is no screen to shut off permanently the spectacle of suffering. When Marie Antoinette passed to her bridal in Paris, the halt, the lame, and the blind were sedulously kept out of her way, lest their appearance should mar the joyousness of her reception; but ere long the poor queen had a very close view of misery's children, and she drank to the dregs the cup of life's bitterness. Reason as we may, suffering will find us out, and pierce us to the heart. We will not have the philosophy that ignores suffering; witness the popularity of Schopenhaur. We resent the art that ignores sorrow. The most popular picture in the world to-day is the "Angelus" of Millet. We will not have the literature that ignores suffering. Classic religions had little or nothing to do with the sorrows of the million; the gods reigned on Mount Olympus, taking little note of the grief of mortals. Christianity boldly recognises the sad element in human nature. Christ makes clear to us the origin of suffering. He shows that its genesis is in the error of the human will; but if suffering originate in the error of the human will, it ceases at once if the erring will be brought into correspondence with the primitive order of the universe. Christ has power to establish this harmony. Dealing with sin, He dries up the stream of sorrow at its fountain. By the authority of that word that speaks the forgiveness of our sin, He wipes away all tears from the face of such as obey Him. Christ gives us the noblest example of suffering. So far from shutting His gate on the sackcloth, once more He adopted it, and showed how it might become a robe of glory. Poison is said to be extracted from the rattlesnake for medicinal purposes; but infinitely more wonderful is the fact that the suffering which comes out of sin counterworks sin, and brings to pass the transfiguration of the sufferer. It is a clumsy mistake to call Christianity a religion of sorrow—it is a religion for sorrow.

III. WE CONSIDER THE RECOGNITION BY REVELATION OF DEATH. We have, again, adroit ways of shutting the gate upon that sackcloth which is the sign of death. Some would have us believe that through the scientific and philosophic developments of later centuries the sombre way of viewing death has become obsolete. The fact, however, still remains, that death is the crowning evil, the absolute bankruptcy, the final defeat, the endless exile. If we are foolish enough to shut the gate on the thought of death, by no stratagem can we shut the gate upon death itself. Christ displays the fact, the power, the terror of death without reserve or softening. He shows that death is unnatural, that it is the fruit of disobedience, and by giving us purity and peace He gives us eternal life. He demonstrates immortality by raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Here is the supreme proof of immortality: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father." The moral works are the greater works. If Christ has raised us from the death of sin, why should we think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead? If He has wrought the greater, He will not fail with the less. Christ bringing life and immortality to light has brought about the great change in the point of view from which we regard death, the point of view which is full of consolation and hope. Once more, by boldly adopting the sackcloth Christ has changed it into a robe of light. We cannot escape the evils of life. Wearing wreaths of roses, our heads will still ache. "The king sighs as often as the peasant"; this proverb anticipates the fact that those who participate in the richest civilisation that will ever flower will sigh as men sigh now. Esther "sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take his sackcloth from him, but he received it not." In vain men offer us robes of beauty, chiding us for wearing the robes of night; we must give place to all the sad thoughts of our mortality until we find a salvation that goes to the root of our suffering, that dries up the fount of our tears. Christianity gives such large recognition to the pathetic element of life, because it divines the secret of our mighty misfortune, and brings with it the sovereign antidote. The critics declare Rubens had an absolute delight in representing pain, and they refer us to his picture of the "Brazen Serpent." The writhing, gasping crowd is everything, and the supreme instrument of cure, the brazen serpent itself, is small and obscure, no conspicuous feature whatever of the picture. Revelation brings out broadly and impressively the darkness of the world, the malady of life, the terror of death, only



that it may evermore make conspicuous the uplifted Cross, which, once seen, is death to every vice, a consolation in every sorrow, a victory over every fear. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Sorrow may be transfigured*:—Science tells how the bird-music has arisen out of the bird's cry of distress in the morning of time; how originally the music of field and forest was nothing more than an exclamation caused by the bird's bodily pain and fear, and how through the ages the primal note of anguish has been evolved and differentiated until it has risen into the ecstasy of the lark, melted into the silver note of the dove, swelled into the rapture of the nightingale, unfolded into the vast and varied music of the sky and the summer. So Christ shows that out of the personal sorrow which now rends the believer's heart, he shall arise in moral and infinite perfection; that out of the cry of anguish wrung from us by the present distress shall spring the supreme music of the future. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 2. For none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.—Death must be encountered**:—Since the last enemy must be encountered by the greatest as well as the least of our race, is it not far better to be prepared for meeting him, than to banish him from our thoughts? (*G. Lawson.*) *Death a visitor that cannot be stopped at the gate*:—And is Death included in this prohibition? Have you given orders to your porters and guards to stop this visitor at the gate, and to say to him, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further"? Or will they be able to persuade him, and his train of ghastly attendants, gout, fever, consumption, and other diseases, to lay aside their sable dress, together with their darts and spears and scorpions? (*T. McCrie.*) *We cannot keep trouble from our hearts by banishing the signs of mourning from our dwellings*:—It is the height of folly, therefore, for us to try to surround ourselves with the appearance of security, and make believe that no change can come upon us. That is to do like the ostrich, which buries its head in the sand, and thinks itself safe from its pursuers because it can no longer see them. Trouble, sorrow, trial, death are inevitable, and the wise course is to prepare to meet them. We cannot shut our homes against these things; but we can open them to Christ, and when He enters He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

**Ver. 3. And in every province . . . there was great mourning among the Jews.—A sentence of death**:—If a sentence of death pronounced by an earthly sovereign produced such grief, such anxiety, such cries of deliverance, what impression ought to be made on the minds of sinners by that sentence which is passed against them in the court of heaven?—"Judgment is come upon all men to condemnation." We are still under that sentence of condemnation if we are not in Christ Jesus. Surely we believe neither law nor gospel, if we can enjoy peace in our own minds, without the humble hope of mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (*G. Lawson.*)

**Ver. 4. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment.—Sorrow not superficially removed**:—Esther, in her elevation, and in her separation from her friends, was far from forgetting them. She was deeply afflicted when she heard of the mourning habit and sore affliction of Mordecai. She was vexed that he should appear at the king's gate in a dress in which he could not enter it, and therefore sent to him change of raiment. But she knew not the sources of his distress. Grief so firmly rooted, and so well founded, could not be removed without a removal of its cause. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 5. Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains.—Hatach**, the chamberlain, gives us a good subject for reflection; and not a hackneyed one. Pause we a moment then on this undistinguished name. Let the greater actors stand aside—king and queen—Haman and Mordecai—mourning Jews and raging Amalekites—and let a servant (in high office no doubt, but still a servant), rendering true fealty in the spirit of reverence and faithfulness, stand before us in his undistinguished honesty and simplicity. The queen begins to be in sore trouble. The darkness is deepening. Some unknown but dire calamity is near—"Send me Hatach—I need my truest and my best—that I may know what it is, and why it is," and what may be done to prepare for, or avert the evil day." Imagine, if you can, what this world would be if all the Hatachs were taken out of it, or taken out of its offices. Let Abraham have no Eliezer; Sarah no Deborah; Naaman's wife

no little maid of Israel; Saul no armour-bearer; Esther no Hatach. Let that process go on through a particular section of society, and what helpless creatures kings and queens would be, and all the men of great name, and all who live in state, and luxury, and grandeur! It would be like a landslip in society. The upper stratum would come sliding down, in some cases perhaps toppling down in many things to a level with the lowest. There are men in government offices never heard of in public life, who have more merit in particular measures which pass than some of those whose names are connected with them. There are managers and confidential clerks who mainly conduct great businesses in the city, and in whom their masters proudly and safely trust. Or, to enter the private scene, many a house is kept quiet, and orderly, and sweet, and homelike, mainly by the assiduities of one confidential servant. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

**Ver. 8. And to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him.**—*A resolute will*:—In the meantime, this lesson may be drawn from his conduct—that a resolute will, when it is exerted for the accomplishment of any purpose, is usually successful in the end. The triumphs of the Reformation, for example, in our own country and in other lands, where it did triumph, while they are really to be ascribed to the overruling providence of God, are instrumentally to be attributed to this, that God raised up and qualified for the work certain men of determined will and unflagging energy, who kept before them the great purpose which they sought to effect, and would be turned aside by no danger or difficulty from working it out. And I would remark, that in things spiritual—in things affecting the eternal salvation of man—resoluteness of will and indomitable energy are as indispensable as in the pursuit of temporal good. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Human sympathy*:—How ardently Mordecai is coveting the sympathy of one whom his self-sacrifice elevated to a position above his own! Human sympathy, exhibited in practical ways, proves wondrous in power, multiplying joys and dividing sorrows. It is like sunshine upon rosebuds, unfolding hidden beauty and evoking new fragrance. Like May breezes upon consumptive cheeks, it brings back the glow of health where pallor of death has been, and paints cheerfulness where despondency has been brooding too long already. It is a contribution of the heart more priceless than the wealth of the Indies. It may be incapable of explaining the mysteries of providence; it may be disqualified for recommending resignation to the Divine will; possibly it may be powerless in effecting deliverance; but when genuine it possesses inestimable value, though it may not open avenues from Marah to the land of Beulah. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*)

**Ver. 11. But I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.**—*Providence tries faith*:—Thus it is that Providence sometimes frowns on the cause of His Church and people, by not only exposing them to imminent danger, but by shutting up all the ordinary avenues of escape, so that there appears no evasion for them. This proves a severe trial to their faith, but affords an opportunity for displaying His own wisdom and mercy in their ultimate deliverance. (*T. McCrie.*) *The darker aspect of providence*:—We have here an illustration of what is not infrequently observable in the arrangements of the Divine providence—that the affairs of God's people assume a darker and darker aspect, just before a favourable interposition comes—in order, no doubt, to make the truth more palpable, that it is by His hand that their deliverance is wrought out, and that therefore they should never distrust Him, nor think that He has forgotten to be gracious. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Access to God without fear*:—It is indeed with the Great King you have to deal, and life and death are at His disposal; but you may go to Him without fear, if you go with a true heart. There was all the formality of priestly services under the law, between the worshippers and Jehovah, to make them feel that they could not come nigh personally; just as there were functionaries to prevent Esther from coming into the presence of the king, when she merely felt the wish to do so. Now, however, God invites us to come to Him at all times, and what prevents us from having full communion with Him is not our personal unworthiness, but our unbelief. (*Ibid.*)

**Ver. 13. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther.**—*Repeated admonition necessary*:—It is necessary for those who desire to be useful to the souls of their neighbours not only to tell them, as occasion requires, what it is their duty to do, but to repeat their admonitions, to enforce them by reasons, and to obviate those

objections which rise up in their minds against the performance of it. (*G. Lawson.*) *High motives necessary*:—Mordecai's answer is tragical and grand. Esther's womanly caution brought out his courage and his faith. In his consuming zeal for God and God's people, he left the domestic affections far below him. Though loving Esther more than he loved any one else on earth, he never scrupled about risking her life. For the same reason he made no allusion to the obligations under which she lay to his kindness. He had nursed her on his knees, he had taught her to walk and speak, he had fed and clothed her, he had surrounded the perilous steps of her maidenhood with the shield of his watchful and wise affection; but he neither remembered these things now nor wished her to remember them. As none of them moved him to spare her the risk, so neither will he urge them as reasons why she should undertake it. This great thing must be gone through under the influence of higher motives than these, and in obedience to a higher will than his. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.*—*False hopes of safety are one fruitful source of delusion*, by making persons careless or averse to use means for their own escape, or the deliverance of others, from danger, temporal or eternal. They must, therefore, be disabused and undeceived; the veil of covering which is spread over their minds must be torn off, and they must be shown their real state, and their impending danger in all its nakedness and nearness. We never will persuade sinners to flee to the refuge opened for them if we do not convince them that wrath is coming upon them. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Think not with yourselves that you shall escape their doom, however sober, and decent, and moral you may be, compared with some of them. While profligacy destroys its thousands, false peace and lying confidences destroy their ten thousands. (*T. McCrie.*) *Reluctant self-denial*:—Alas! how often it happens that the Christian needs to be plied with arguments rooted in selfishness ere he can be induced to perform an unpleasant duty, especially if it involves the possibility of self-sacrifice! John Sterling well said, "The worst education which teaches self-denial is better than the best which teaches everything else but that." Strange that, although we announce ourselves followers of the Saviour, we should be so reluctant to endure hardship as good soldiers, while yet fulsome in the declaration, "No sweat, no sweet; no cross, no crown; no pains, no gains." (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *No refuge in the king's house*:—In many ways do men cherish false hopes, from the simple circumstance of dwelling in what may be called "the king's house." For example: The Word of God includes all under condemnation who have not a personal faith in the Divine Redeemer; but in the neglect of that urgent duty there are some who hope for salvation simply because descended of pious parentage, or possessed of an outwardly good moral character, or connected with the Christian Church. When they are charged with their duty in relation to the gospel these are the king's houses in which they vainly flee for refuge. (*T. McEwan.*)

**Vers. 14. Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.**—*Female deliverers in Israel*:—In former ages women, as Deborah and Jael, had been made the instruments of saving Israel. Esther might have a place among those whose memories, after so many generations, were still fragrant among their countrymen. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Enlargement and deliverance*:—Enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews, to the Israel of God, under the gospel as well as under the law. Amidst all the distresses of the Church, we may rest assured that she cannot perish. All, therefore, who perform eminent services to the Church ought humbly to thank the Lord for choosing to employ them rather than others; for He is never at a loss for servants to do His work. (*G. Lawson.*) **And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**—*The use of talents to be accounted for*:—A man who knows a particular remedy for a certain disease, of which others are ignorant, would be chargeable with the fatal consequences that may arise from the general ignorance if he locks up his knowledge within his own breast. If Providence furnish us with talents which are not granted to others, we must account for our use of them. If we have opportunities of doing much good which others have not, and make no use of them, we make ourselves guilty of a crime which can be charged upon none but ourselves. (*Ibid.*) *Services suitable to our situation required by God*:—If God has done remarkable things for us, we have reason to believe that He expects some services from us suited to the situation in which He has placed us, and to the means of service with which He has

furnished us. We ought, therefore, when we consider what God hath done for us, to consider at the same time what He requires from us. If our circumstances are peculiar it is likely that some peculiar services are required. (*Ibid.*) *The time for usefulness*:—Our times are in the Lord's hands. He fixes the bounds of our habitations and arranges our conditions according to His own will. His servants have a special earthly calling wherein they are called, the duties of which they are individually to fulfil. He has particular relative objects to secure in the exaltation of those whom He loves. And when any of His servants are raised to influence, or wealth, or power, it is that He may make them effective instruments of His power for blessing to others. There is, therefore, a special propriety of time at which His gifts of power and influence are bestowed upon particular men. If one is made rich, it is because there are many poor waiting to be enriched by him, and he is to have the greater blessing of imparting, giving to his fellow-men. There is a particular reason, could we know it, for which we are "come to the kingdom for such a time." We should study our duty in the circumstances of its time. Every virtue and trait of holiness in her character shines with increasing brightness and beauty as Esther goes forward in her appointed dispensation. Let us consider the circumstances of the time. 1. It was a time of great trial for the people of Israel. 2. The time tested the sincerity of Esther's affection for Mordecai, and brought that into immediate demonstration. 3. The time also tried the sincerity of Esther's affection for her nation. The truly pious heart will cherish an universal love. The wants and sorrows of all mankind are the subjects of its sympathy and its concern. But true religion especially exalts and enlarges domestic love, and love for our country and nation. The more truly the heart is engaged for God the more earnestly will it feel the sorrows and needs of those who are near to us. Have we wealth? We have those connected with us who are poor and suffering. Have we station or knowledge? It is no Christian heart which has no fellowship in suffering and no tenderness for woe. Yet we sadly see a hardness of heart often attendant on exalted conditions. Men seem to feel that they have been elevated by their own efforts, and that inability to do the same in others is in some degree a crime which ought to be punished by suffering. They invent every possible excuse for withholding their demanded aid. 4. The time displayed her entire disinterestedness of spirit, and her trust in God. She resolved to put the request of Mordecai into immediate operation. Mere self-indulgence would have delighted in her own state of luxury and enjoyment, and have shut her ears and her heart against the cries and woes of her people. To preserve this people she must hazard her own life. Beautiful is this illustration of a disinterested and devoted spirit. I am content to perish to gain the great end of blessing to others which I have before me. Such was the love of our Divine Redeemer for us. "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross and despised the shame." (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *A human voice speaks Divine lessons for human lives*:—What are the Divine lessons which this human voice speaks, not only to Esther, but to every true soul. I. THAT GREAT ADVANTAGES ARE CONFERRED FOR A DIVINE PURPOSE. Talents, position, influence, wealth. II. THAT GOD REQUIRES THAT SUCH ADVANTAGES SHOULD BE FAITHFULLY USED FOR THE PROMOTION OF HIS PURPOSES. III. THAT SUCH DIVINE PURPOSES CANNOT BE FRUSTRATED. IV. THOSE WHO FRUSTRATE DIVINE PURPOSES SHALL BE INJURED. V. LEARN THAT A FAITHFUL DISCHARGE OF DUTY MUST BRING RICH RESULTS. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Esther's exaltation; or who knoweth*:—I shall lay out my sermon under four words. I. HEARKEN! 1. To a question. Brother, will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God? Do you mean to say, "I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that I do not say you will be lost, but I say you are lost already. It is as needful that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice. 2. To a second question: If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them? 3. Remember, for your humiliation, that God can do without you. 4. As God can do without us, it may be He will do without us. 5. How will you bear the disgrace, if ever it come upon you, of having suffered your golden opportunities to be despised? II. CONSIDER—1. To what some of you have been advanced. 2. Why the Lord has brought you where you are. 3. At what a time it is that you have been thus advanced. 4. Under what special circumstances you have come where you are. 5. With what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you. III. ASPIRE. "Who knoweth," &c. When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham, and

everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne," and he did so before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, &c., of earth, but I would fain make you all ardently ambitious to honour God and bless men. IV. CONFIDE. 1. If thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this, be confident that thou art safe. 2. If God has a purpose to serve by a man, that man will live out his day and accomplish the Divine design. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The duty of the hour* (to an agricultural college):—This exemplifies a truth of universal application and of particular pertinency. The idea is that the general welfare is best promoted by the advancement of the individual, while the advancement of the individual can be maintained only by his loyal devotion to the public weal. We have discovered in these latter days that relations are of more moment than things. Charcoal, sulphur, nitre are things of some potency, in themselves considered; but they must be brought into the proper relations, the one to the other, before the might of gunpowder shakes the earth. I observe—1. That the college graduate of to-day, who has completed a four years' course of liberal training in a well-equipped and thoroughly-manned institution of learning comes into a kingdom. 2. The college graduate of to-day comes into his kingdom at a time of marvellous and portentous significance. 3. Our time, with its sudden transitions, is fraught with danger to all classes of society, but to none more than to those who till the soil. (*C. S. Walker, Ph.D.*) *The principles of Divine providence*:—I. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE HIGHEST GOOD OF MAN. This is shown—1. In the advent of Christ for the world's salvation. 2. The spread of the gospel and the conversion of the Gentiles. 3. The restoration of peace between nations and the final destruction of slavery. II. THE HIGHEST GOOD OF MAN IS SECURED INDEPENDENTLY OF MAN'S INDIVIDUAL CONDUCT. The stream of human agency is like a river, ever flowing and ever changing. One drop in the stream cannot say, "When I am gone the channel will be dry." No sooner is room made than another follows, and the channel is ever full. So it is in the history of man. God's providence will secure workers. III. THAT MEN ARE PLACED BY GOD IN SUCH POSITIONS THAT THEY MAY SECURE FOR THEMSELVES THE HONOUR OF HELPING GOD IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL WORK. IV. IN NOT MAKING USE OF OUR PROVIDENTIAL POSITION WE EXPOSE OURSELVES TO FEARFUL EVILS. V. THAT IN MAKING USE OF OUR PROVIDENTIAL POSITIONS, WE SHALL REQUIRE SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS, AND SHALL HAVE THE SYMPATHY AND CO-OPERATION OF A HOLY UNIVERSE, AS WELL AS THE COMMENDATION AND BLESSING OF GOD. Notice—1. That in doing our duty we show the possession of the highest and noblest moral qualities. (1) Duty done under the pressure of difficulty is done by faith in God, and is therefore a proof of piety. (2) Duty done in difficulty requires a self-sacrificing disposition. (3) Duty done amid difficulties requires consummate skill. (4) In doing duty no time should be lost. 2. That in doing our duty we have the help of a holy universe (chap. vi. 1). (*Evan Lewis.*) *The preservation of the Jews an illustration of the Divine government*:—The text presents for our consideration—I. A FIRM CONVICTION OF AN OVERRULING PROVIDENCE. II. THE RECOGNITION OF HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITIES IN THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. III. THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-SACRIFICE WHICH ENABLES MEN TO BE ACCEPTABLE INSTRUMENTS IN THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. (*Prof. E. J. Wolf, D.D.*) *Position and responsibility*:—Our Lord's great principle, "Unto whom much is given of him shall much be required," is clear as a mathematical axiom when we look at it in the abstract; but nothing is harder than for people to apply it to their own cases. If it were freely admitted, the ambition that grasps at the first places would be shamed into silence. If it were generally acted on, the wide social cleft between the fortunate and the miserable would be speedily bridged over. The total ignoring of this tremendous principle by the great majority of those who enjoy the privileged positions in society is doubtless one of the chief causes of the ominous unrest that is growing more and more disturbing in the less favoured ranks of life. If this supercilious contempt for an imperative duty continues, what can be the end but an awful retribution? Was it not the wilful blindness of the dancers in the Tuileries to the misery of the serfs in the fields that caused revolutionary France to run red with blood? (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *God's purpose and man's opportunity*:—I draw from the text the following general truths: I. THAT RUNNING THROUGH THE PROVIDENCE OF THIS WORLD THERE IS A GRACIOUS DIVINE PURPOSE FOR ITS ULTIMATE SALVATION. 1. Mordecai believed in the indestructibility of the Jews. This was with him evidently a religious faith. This faith must have been founded

on one or more of the promises of God. 2. This purpose of the preservation of the Jews is but a branch and a sign of another and grander purpose—a purpose to gather and save the whole world. This types itself in the kingly history; gleams in the prophet's vision; breathes in the holy psalm; speaks out in the Acts of the Apostles; runs through all the epistles, and sighs up to heaven in that last apocalyptic cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." II. THAT RICH AND RARE OPPORTUNITIES OCCUR IN THE PROGRESS OF THINGS, BY WHICH BELIEVING MEN ARE ALLOWED TO COME EFFECTUALLY "TO THE HELP OF THE LORD AGAINST THE MIGHTY." We must spread the gospel or lose it. Our moral opportunities, our reasonable times for action, are very precious, are very brief, and when they are gone they cannot be renewed. So it is at times with Churches, with societies, and with nations. III. THAT THE NEGLECT OF SUCH PROVIDENTIAL CALLS HAS A TENDENCY TO BRING DESTRUCTION. Mordecai probably had in view a general principle of retribution, acting at all times, but sure to act swiftly and terribly in a case like this. This principle has its fullest application to the ungodly. The way, the hope, the expectation, the works, the memory, and saddest of all, the soul of the wicked shall perish. Let a Christian man neglect opportunities and hold truth in unrighteousness, and what will happen to him? He perishes as to the real power of his life. It is the same with Churches, &c. No Church, &c., can live except as they continue to be in harmony with the purpose and the providence of God. Where are the seven Churches in Asia? IV. THAT OBEDIENCE WILL BRING ELEVATION AND BLESSING. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Inactivity in the cause of Christ condemned*:—Reflect—I. THAT THE MAN WHO USED THESE WORDS WAS EVIDENTLY WELL AWARE THAT THE CAUSE OF GOD WAS NOT DEPENDENT ON THE AIDS OF MEN. This is evident if we consider—1. The meanness of the instruments and the greatness of the work to be done. 2. How absolute are the promises of God, which show His determination to bless His people. 3. The power of God. These considerations ought to teach the instruments to be humble, and they ought also to confirm the faith of the people of God. II. THAT HIS PROVIDENCE DOES RAISE UP SUITABLE INSTRUMENTS TO CARRY FORWARD HIS WORK. III. THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF THOSE INSTRUMENTS TO GIVE THEMSELVES UP TO THE WORK. We are not only to study the book of God to know what is our duty in general, but also the book of providence to know what is the particular duty He designs us to do. We ought to study—1. Our particular talent. 2. Our sphere. 3. Our circumstances. 4. The times. IV. THAT AN AWFUL DOOM RESTS ON THOSE WHO LISTEN NOT TO THE CALL OF PROVIDENCE. 1. We shall lose the satisfaction of doing good. 2. We shall not prosper. (1) Temporally. (2) Spiritually. Those who are not actively employed in the service of Christ feel most of the bitterness arising from doubts as to their actual condition and fears as to their spiritual state. Listlessness in the cause of Christ will be a cause of gloom on a dying bed. 3. There is an intimate connection between the degrees of glory in heaven and the exercises of activity here. (*W. H. Cooper.*) *Providence and opportunity*:—God's providential purpose; man's present opportunity; that is how I read the lesson of this marvellous history. A purpose clearly written on the face of events and to be readily deciphered from their grouping. Moses at the Red Sea heard a voice telling him to stretch his rod over the sea, that a way might be made for the ransomed to pass over. Now we have no voice; but circumstances gather about us, the rod is thrust into our hand, and we miss our deliverance if we do not see that we must wave the rod. We are not in intellectual and religious infancy. We ought to be able to discover without any warning voice what God's purpose is, and what our opportunity is worth. I. AS TO LIFE ITSELF, HUMAN EXISTENCE; ENTRY UPON IT IS A COMING TO A KINGDOM. Living now, we are conditioned by the time and circumstances of to-day. Our days have fallen on a time different from all that have gone before, unique in this particular, if in nothing else—the power of public opinion. In former days but one man here and there seemed to have a kingdom to enter upon, a few men swayed the nations, a few men seemed to be inspired to deeds which raised them into leaders of the people. But now the rulers in name are the ruled in fact. The government is governed and the people control everything. It is a great thing to live now. Literature and science pour their wealth out before us. By these things we have the chance of being better men in some directions of thought and of exerting a mightier influence in the world than our fathers could exert. Some men might just as well have lived hundreds of years ago, for any appreciation they seem to have of the privileges and demands of the time. No time is like another in all its details. We have to make it what it shall be. By the impulse of an earnest life,

by the influence of holy character, by brief words spoken and little deeds done according to our opportunity, must we do something to mould that public opinion which is omnipotent. II. As CHRISTIANS WE HAVE COME TO A KINGDOM. Christianity has always presented two aspects, the offensive and the defensive. In the old days of national warfare, when ships were made of wood, rough-wrought cannon and shot were sufficient means of attack. But with the iron-plating has necessarily come improvement in the means of destruction. As the ship becomes more exposed to the danger of improved appliances she must be more scientifically defended. We sometimes smile as we see the way in which truth used to be asserted and defended. We now see that truth is its own best defence. (*J. Jones.*) *The day we live in:*—Esther had her God-appointed work. You and I have ours. I. IN ORDER TO MEET THE SPECIAL DEMAND OF THIS AGE YOU NEED TO BE AN UNMISTAKABLE, AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN. Of half-and-half Christians we do not want any more. A great deal of the piety of the day is too exclusive. It hides itself. It needs more fresh air, more outdoor exercise. There are many Christians who are giving their entire life to self-examination. They are feeling their pulses to see what is the condition of their spiritual health. How long would a man have robust physical health if he kept all the day feeling his pulse instead of going out into active, earnest, every-day work? I was once amid the wonderful, bewitching cactus growths of North Carolina. I never was more bewildered with the beauty of flowers, and yet when I would take up one of these cactuses and pull the leaves apart the beauty was all gone. You could hardly tell that it had ever been a flower. And there are a great many Christian people in this day just pulling apart their Christian experiences to see what there is in them, and there is nothing left in them. This style of self-examination is a damage instead of an advantage to their Christian character. I remember when I was a boy I used to have a small piece in the garden that I called my own, and I planted corn there, and every few days I would pull it up to see how fast it was growing. Now, there are a great many Christian people in this day whose self-examination merely amounts to the pulling up of that which they only yesterday or the day before planted. If you want to have a stalwart Christian character, plant it right out of doors in the great field of Christian usefulness. The century plant is wonderfully suggestive and wonderfully beautiful, but I never look at it without thinking of its parsimony. It lets whole generations go by before it puts forth one blossom; so I have really more admiration when I see the dewy tears in the blue eyes of the violets, for they come every spring. Time is going by so rapidly that we cannot afford to be idle. A recent statistician says that human life now has an average of only thirty-two years. From these thirty-two years you must subtract all the time you take for sleep, and the taking of food, and recreation; that will leave you about sixteen years. From those sixteen years you must subtract all the time that you are necessarily engaged in the earning of a livelihood; that will leave you about eight years. From those eight years you must take all the days, and weeks, and months—all the length of time that is passed in sickness; leaving you about one year in which to work for God. II. To meet the duties this age demands of you, you must, ON THE ONE HAND, AVOID RECKLESS ICONOCLASM, AND ON THE OTHER HAND, NOT STICK TOO MUCH TO THINGS BECAUSE THEY ARE OLD. Do not take hold of a thing merely because it is new. Do not adhere to anything merely because it is old. There is not a single enterprise of the Church or the world but has sometime been scoffed at. There was a time when men derided even Bible societies, and when a few young men met in Massachusetts and organised the first missionary society ever organised in this country there went laughter and ridicule all around the Christian Church. They said the undertaking was preposterous. And so also the work of Jesus Christ was assailed. People cried out, "Who ever heard of such theories of ethics and government? Who ever noticed such a style of preaching as Jesus had?" Many have thought that the chariot of God's truth would fall to pieces if it once got out of the old rut. And so there are those who have no patience with anything like improvement in church architecture, or with anything like good, hearty, earnest church singing, and they deride any form of religious discussion which goes down walking among every-day men rather than that which makes an excursion on rhetorical stilts. Oh, that the Church of God would wake up to an adaptability of work! There is work for you to do, and for me to do, in order to this grand accomplishment. Here is my pulpit, and I preach in it. Your pulpit is the bank. Your pulpit is the store. Your pulpit is the editorial chair. Your pulpit is the anvil. Your pulpit is the house scaffolding. Your pulpit

is the mechanic's shop. III. In order to be qualified to meet your duty in this particular age, YOU WANT UNBOUNDED FAITH IN THE TRIUMPH OF THE TRUTH AND THE OVERTHROW OF WICKEDNESS. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Women's duty to the age* (a woman's sermon to women):—What is women's duty? It is to be gentle, true, devoted. It is to be as strong as it is in her to be and as beautiful as possible. It is to be a discreet keeper at home, a willing performer of out-of-sight duties, a helpmeet to man, a mother in Israel, a handmaid of the Lord. It is a fact past denial that women do exert an immense influence in the world. An English bishop has said, "A nation is what its women make it." No man is so strong, or so wise, or so good, that he can afford to do without the gentle remonstrance, the inspiriting plaudits, the pure and bright life-example of the women of his family. There is great need now for "women who understand the times and know what the people ought to do." Reforms are necessary, and in making them we shall certainly have to begin with ourselves. Better women will make better homes, better homes will make better society, better society will raise the tone of public opinion, and influence those who frame and execute our laws. Let us learn from the example of Queen Esther how to become better. I. LET US RECOGNISE THE FACT THAT AS SHE HAD HER OPPORTUNITY, SO HAVE WE OURS. If we look around us we must see how God brings certain persons into certain circumstances because they are most fit to be there. One in a family converted. One in a family to whom has been given the seeing eyes and the understanding heart. One in a family more clever, more strong, more amiable than the rest. Why? That that one may fulfil the duties, and meet, not shirk, the responsibilities of that position. II. LET US LEARN THAT THE FACT OF A DUTY BEING DIFFICULT AND DANGEROUS IS NO EXCUSE FOR OUR FAILING TO PERFORM IT HONESTLY. III. WE MAY LEARN THE SOURCE OF TRUE STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE. IV. WE MAY LEARN THAT HAVING SEEN OUR DUTY, AND ASKED GOD'S GUIDANCE AND BLESSING, WE SHOULD FEARLESSLY GO THROUGH WITH OUR TASK. Fearlessly, but wisely, according to the light that is given to us. Esther fortified her soul with trust in God, and then used her own common sense. Esther's judgment was equal to her courage. She knew how to "bide her time." (*Marianne Farningham.*) *Public duty*:—This message sets before us three weighty principles. I. THAT GOD'S CAUSE IS INDEPENDENT OF OUR EFFORTS. Mordecai believed that the record of God's faithfulness in the past gave the assurance that in some way of His own He would prevent the extinction of His people. This is an attitude of mind we should seek to cultivate in reference to the cause of Christ. This cause has the omnipotence of God behind it. He has promised Christ the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, and, whoever helps and whoever hinders, His word shall not be broken. One man with truth and the promise of God at his back is stronger than an opposing world. The cause of Christ has come through crises when persecution has tried to exterminate it. It has passed through periods of scepticism when learning and cleverness have fancied that they have blown it away as an exploded superstition. Men have had to stand up for it single-handed against principalities and powers, but with it at their backs they have been stronger than all that were against them. II. THAT WE ARE NOT INDEPENDENT OF IT. We cannot hold back from Christ's cause with impunity. It can do without us, but we cannot do without it. If religion is a reality, to live without it is to suppress and ultimately destroy the most noble part of our being. To live without God is to renounce the profoundest and most influential experience which life contains. If Christ is the central figure in history, and if the movement He has set going is the central current of history, then to be dissociated with His aims is to be a cipher or perhaps even a minus quantity in the sum of good. III. CHRIST'S CAUSE OFFERS THE NOBLEST EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR GIFTS. It is a transfiguring moment when the thought first penetrates a man that the purpose for which he has received his gifts is to help humanity and the cause of Christ in the world. A man enters upon his spiritual majority when he ceases to be the most important object in the world to himself, and sees outside an object which makes him forget himself and irresistibly draws him on. The problem of the degraded and disinherited is pressing on the attention of intelligent minds with an urgency which cannot be disregarded. The heathen world is opening everywhere to the influences of the gospel. If you would run in response to this call, do not neglect the preparation. Knowledge is the armour of light in which the battles of progress have to be fought. Life for God in public must be balanced by life with God in secret. (*James Stalker, D.D.*) *Woman's opportunities*:—It has been observed that with every great emergency



God has raised up a man equal to the emergency. As God called Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, David, and Daniel for a special work, so He called Alfred the Great, William the Conqueror, Washington and Lincoln. As God inspired Bezaleel to invent cunning works, so to-day He raises up such men as an Edison to solve and use mysterious forces of nature. Every age and every emergency has had the men needed for the age and the emergency. The apostles met the demand of their age. The Church Fathers did a peculiar work for which they were fitted. Luther came upon the scene just when needed. This is also true of all great men who have become the world's leaders and saviours. I have spoken of man, but what has been said of him is equally as true of woman. She may not have been so conspicuous a figure, but she was none the less important. When Samuel's mother consecrated her boy to the service of Jehovah, had she no part in determining the destiny of Israel? When the mother and grandmother instructed young Timothy in the Scriptures, did they have no part in the establishment of the Apostolic Church? When Martha and Mary made a home for the Saviour, a place where He could lay His head, did they not perform an important part? When the mother of Augustine taught and conversed with him about Scriptures, did she not do much toward making Augustinian confessions possible? The mother of Alfred the Great was his first teacher and always his most trusted counsellor. The mother of Henry VII. of England did more than her royal son for the dissemination of learning and the establishment of colleges. The rise of Methodism goes back beyond John or Charles Wesley to their noble mother. Who familiar with the life of Herschel and his sister can doubt that much of his greatness rests upon her co-operation and untiring labour? The name of Joan of Arc suggests what woman can do on the field of war. Of every woman mentioned it might be said, "Thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." The breadth of woman's influence is widening. She is the strongest social force of to-day. Life is her key-board which she may sweep with a master's touch if she will. To woman all doors are open. She may enter and win her bread without being touched by snobbishness and caste. The entrance of woman into the various occupations has had the tendency to stop the growing boorishness which was manifesting itself in business circles. It is slowly but surely leading men to recognise the one great work of life not to be money getting, but character building. She is giving a shading to the values of life; hence we are beginning to place things more nearly where they belong. In temperance reform woman has been, and is still, the leader. Time and again she has undergone the scoffs of rowdies and the ridicule of pot-house politicians, but feeling that God called her to the kingdom for such an hour as this, she has risked popularity and society influence in defence of home and children. The most important work in all this widening field of woman's activity is the evangelisation of the world. It is of God. It touches man's deepest need. It brings him the blessings of a Christian civilisation and the assurance of life eternal. It is therefore the highest service woman can enter into. There is nothing that will yield greater joy or larger returns. (*W. C. Burns, D.D.*) *The Church and the present crisis*:—I ask you to observe—

I. THAT A CRISIS HAS COME OF OVERWHELMING IMPORTANCE IN THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE WORLD. It is a crisis of magnificent opportunity and also of infinite responsibility. It is a crisis in which unparalleled success may be achieved for the glory of God, or where Churches may be utterly broken and destroyed by their unfaithfulness and disobedience. It is, indeed, the crisis of history; for never have such opportunities for the evangelisation of our own country, or of the heathen abroad, been presented; never have difficulties been so remarkably removed, and never were calls for help so loud and piercing as just now. That I may help you to realise this truth, let me recall a few facts to your remembrance. Within the lifetime of some now here the world was practically closed against the extension of Protestant Christianity. Mohammedanism sealed itself against the truth of Jesus; and the heathen nations of the earth were walled around by prejudice or by prohibitory laws. China and Japan were hermetically sealed against the entrance of Christianity. And now, with our scientific discoveries, our mechanical inventions, our great social movements and combinations, we are sweeping along with a rapidity which it is almost bewildering to contemplate. All this is wonderful beyond realisation. Never did the human race move so quickly. Time after time have the maps of the world been altered and reformed in our day. Now with a startling swiftness the moral map of the world is changing, and no one can presage what will be the next great movement that will

command the wonder of mankind. In all these revolutions and developments of the hour, what institution ought to be more concerned than the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ? The Church of to-day is the arbiter of the world's future. It is called on to save idolatrous nations awakening from the sleep of ages from relapsing into the abyss of scepticism. It is summoned to sanctify and beautify the growing intelligence and wealth of barbarous peoples, by suffusing them with the glory of Christian holiness and truth. It is destined to become the harbinger and bestower of liberty, of enfranchisement, of spiritual expansion to classes and masses of the race who have hitherto groaned in bondage and shame. II. WHAT IS REQUIRED FROM THE CHURCH TO MEET THE PRESSING CRISIS. We have a Church of the times; we need a Church for the times. The Church of the times is far too much formal, aiming at gentility and fashion; the Church for the times must be spiritual and powerful, aiming at evangelistic aggression and the conversion of the world. If the Church will seek a new baptism and enter on a new career of aggressiveness, how soon the most glorious prophecies of time shall be fulfilled it is impossible to realise. "A short work will God make upon the earth." A very brief period sufficed for the destruction of Sennacherib's host and for the downfall of Babylon. It was a short time only that was required for the humbling of Napoleon's pride. And if the Church of God, with her splendour of learning, her ripeness of intellect, her boundless wealth, and her unparalleled vantage-ground, be only faithful and obedient, and ready for the avalanche of opportunities which now present themselves, the progress of the gospel must be far more rapid and glorious than ever before. (*W. J. Townsend.*) *Man born for an end.*—While we continue on earth we are obliged to a sort of spiritual speculation; to judge as well as we can, but to remain uncertain; to take the most important steps in the dark; to pursue our course like vessels in a mist, cautiously and fearfully, having no clear view of the coast by which we sail, but only catching here and there a dubious sign of where we are, and whither we are tending. This acting on venture is emphatically taught in the text. Observe—I. THAT ALL GENERATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ARE CREATED FOR THEIR OWN END. We cannot doubt that it was with a definite design that God set up the pillars of the universe. And so with its continued existence. The mighty river of human life which gushed forth in Adam, flows, we are sure, to some goal and makes to some issue. God beholds the vast tide of being sweeping on to a glorious consummation, which He perceives now, and we shall see hereafter, to have been the point to which the current tended from the beginning. This will appear from the continual changes which take place. Why do not men's habits remain always the same? Why does one generation abandon the principles and tastes of its predecessor? How is it that the nineteenth century is not like the sixteenth? Continual change intimates that we are travelling on to an appointed destination. To suppose otherwise would be to suppose God to be a God, not of order, but of confusion. We see traces of this in the several dispensations of religion which God has revealed. The law prepared the way for the gospel; all the wars and conquests of Rome brought the human family into a condition the most favourable for the preaching of the apostles. The Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian dispensations, appear to follow in manifest order, each working up and fading into that which came next. What the world is now is a necessary step to what the world is to be. And what is true of periods of a thousand years is true also of each period of fourscore years. Every generation of human kind is born for an end. We are apt to consider overmuch individual life, not the life of the universe. We see unnumbered ripples on the stream of time, coming and going apparently without cause or effect; God beholds in each ripple an onward flow; that not one could be withdrawn without injury to the symmetry of the great whole. There arises out of all this a very solemn character attaching to our tenure of life. We have our part in a stupendous work, whose limits we cannot discern. We have been launched into being just at the moment when we were wanted. Not to do our own pleasure, but to fulfil a part in working out God's counsels. This is the solemn vocation of each generation. II. VERY COMMONLY A MAN'S LIFE WORKS UP TO, OR HANGS UPON A CERTAIN CRITICAL MOMENT. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Oh! they are words which may well sound in the ears of the soul, at many a sick-bed, at many an event of inferior importance in our earthly career. How did Abraham live seventy years in his father's house an ordinary man, till the mysterious moment when the voice said to him, "Come out from thy kindred?" and on what he did at that strange bidding hung not only his, but the

world's history! How did all David's life turn upon the incident, that at the moment when he chanced to visit his brethren in the camp, at that moment Goliath came out with his defiance of the living God! And so with ourselves: there are in almost every man's life turning-points upon which all hangs. Who cannot look back and discern times and seasons when, if he had acted otherwise, his whole after-life would have been altered? And thus in religion—whether a man be lost or saved will frequently depend upon a step taken at a particular crisis; all subsequent steps grow out of that step. True that every hour of our lives is an hour when good and evil are set before us. There are strong temptations occurring at intervals, which, well got over, leave a man's heart for a long time at liberty; which, if not resisted, lead from deceit to deceit—from sin to sin—until there is no getting the feet out of the net. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Sometimes a man's whole life may be traced afterwards to have led up to one such moment. His education, his tastes, his companionships may all be discerned to have been the instrumentality of drawing him into the wilderness for his one great conflict with the adversary. (*J. B. Woodford, M.A.*) *Every one has his peculiar work*:—The thought to a devout man is always supreme—thou art come here for such a time—for such a purpose. Thy steps are ordered of the Lord. Thy talents, thy character, thy place in society have all been shaped and settled, with a special adaptation to the Divine purpose. "Nothing walks with aimless feet." As in the human body every function, so in the Divine government every Christian is placed to do a work which none else can do, and his Lord's eye is ever on him. While this is his victory over every base fear, and discouraging thought, his faith, his confidence that God has called him to his proper work, will sustain him in it. (*Homilist.*) *Emergency*:—Let us learn from the appeal of Mordecai to Esther that opportunity is the test of character. "Who knoweth," he said, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" It was the tidal time of her life, the great opportunity of her existence, and the question was whether she would rise to the occasion and make it subservient to her greatness or whether it would sweep her away with it as weak, irresolute, and unequal to the emergency. Happily she stood the test, and by her courageous self-devotion proved that she was worthy of the affection with which her foster-father regarded her. Character is revealed only by being tested, and that test often comes in the shape of sudden elevation. The common idea, I know, is that character is tested only by affliction; but I am not sure if prosperity be not a more searching acid than adversity. Now, this is a truth which ought never to be lost sight of by any one among us. What we shall do in a crisis depends upon what we have been doing all along in the ordinary routine of our lives, when no such emergency was on us. We cannot cut ourselves off from the past. There is a continuity in our lives, such that the habits which we have formed in the days that are gone do largely condition for us our resources in the present. Every day we live we are either adding to that constant element in us which constitutes our truest selves, and so increasing that reserve force on which in times of emergency we can draw with advantage, or we are expending with imprudent prodigality our spiritual capital, and living morally beyond our means, so that when a crisis comes we cannot stand it, and must inevitably go down. The careful man who husbands his earnings and stores them in some safe bank is able, when a time of adversity comes upon him, to tide over the difficulty by breaking in upon the surplus which he has accumulated. We all see and admit that in the case of deposits that are made outside of ourselves, and which are not us so much as they are ours. But we too frequently fail to take note of it in respect to the character deposits or drafts which we are constantly making on or from ourselves—meaning, thereby, our souls. If, as each morning dawns, we meet every duty as it calls us, or face every temptation as it attacks us, as a duty to be performed, or a temptation to be resisted out of regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall thereby add to our store of strength for the confronting of what may yet be before us; but if we go through our lives seeking only our own ease or the gratification of our appetites, or the indulgence of some evil ambition, we are, in all that, only weakening ourselves, and making ourselves so much the less to be relied upon when we come into our kingdom, and have to face a time like that which Esther was here required to meet. Travellers tell us of a tree in tropical countries, the inner parts of which are sometimes eaten out by ants, while the bark and leaves remain apparently as fresh as ever, and it is not till the tornado comes and sweeps it down that its weakness is discovered. But the storm did not make

the tree weak : it only revealed how weak it really was ; and its feebleness was the result of the gnawings of innumerable insects through a long course of years. In like manner, if we let our characters be honeycombed by neglect of common duty, or by daily indulgence in secret sin, or by habitual yielding to some temptation, we cannot expect anything else than failure when the testing hour shall come. What an importance thus attaches to what I may call the commonplace of life ! We are apt, when we read such a history as that before us, to exclaim, "How tremendously important these grand outstanding opportunities of doing some great service are !" And no doubt they are all that we can say they are. But then we forget that the hearing in these of the individuals to whom they have been given will depend on the characters which they have been forming and strengthening in the ordinary routine life of every day before they came into their kingdom. It is out of the commonplace, well and faithfully done, that the heroic is born ; and the splendid devotion of Esther to the welfare of her people would never have been heard of had she not meekly learned and diligently practised the lessons of her girlhood which Mordecai taught her in his pious home. The prize-taker at the end of the year is the daily plodder all through it. The gaining of his diploma by a student depends, no doubt, on the manner in which he passes his final examination. That is for him the equivalent of this occasion in the life of Esther ; but then the proficiency which at that time he manifests does itself depend on the steady, constant perseverance which he has maintained in his class work from hour to hour throughout his course. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Junctures* :—Nor does this prophetic utterance of Mordecai apply simply to our position and responsibility as a nation, but also to our circumstances and obligations as individuals. When a ship is moving in a certain course, and there is despatched a wrecked crew and passengers tossed in their little boat, or imprisoned on some lonely island, the captain might well consider whether he has not been brought into the course which he has taken for "such a time"—such an occasion of humanity and benevolent action as that—and would be censured if he did not avail himself of it for the rescue of the perishing. In every life there are junctures when the same reflection should have a place in our minds. It may be an orphan family cast in the way of a wealthy relative whom he has the opportunity of taking under his protection and guardianship, or an infidel assault on the vital doctrines of Christianity, when just such talents and faith as we may possess may be what is needful to repel it, or an injury being done to a neighbour when, from our position and influence, interference on our part may be all that is called for to prevent it. In a thousand different ways may we have to consider whether God has not so placed us in providence as to be specially qualified and circumstanced for the accomplishment of particular works of faith and labours of love. (*T. McEwan.*) *Our opportunity* :—As I read Captain Mahan's masterly and noble "Life of Nelson" the other day with Esther in my mind, I could not but mark with my pencil such things as these in that great sea-captain who had such a hand in setting England up on her high opportunity. "Opportunity," says the excellent biographer, "flitted by, but Nelson was always ready and grasped it." Again, and again, and again the same thing is said of Nelson, till it shines out above all his other great gifts, and becomes the best description of his great genius. But we are not great queens like Esther, with the deliverance of Israel in our hands ; nor are we great sea-captains like Lord Nelson, with the making of modern England in our hands. No. But we are what we are, and what God has made us to be and to do. We all have our own circle set round us of God, and out of our own circle our own opportunities continually arise. Our opportunities may not be so far-reaching or so high-sounding as some other men's are ; but they are our opportunities, and they are far-reaching enough for us. Our opportunities are life or death to us and to others ; they are salvation or condemnation to our immortal souls ; and is that not circle and opportunity enough ? We are all tempted every day to say, "If I only were Esther ! If I only had a great opportunity, would I not rise to it ! Would I not speak out at any risk ! Would I not do a work, and win a name, and deliver Israel, and glorify God !" Did you ever read of Clemens, and Fervidus, and Eugenia, and their imaginary piety ? Clemens had his head full of all manner of hypothetical liberalities. He kept proposing to himself continually what he would do if he only had a great estate. Come to thy senses, Clemens. Do not talk what thou wouldst be sure to do if thou wast an angel, but think what thou canst do as a man. Remember what the poor widow did with her one mite, and go and do likewise. Fervidus, again, is only sorry he is not a minister. What a reformation

he would have worked in his own life by this time, and in his whole parish, if only God had made him a minister! He would have saved his own soul, and the souls of his people, in season and out of season. Do you believe yourself, Fervidus? You are deceiving yourself. You hire a cabman to drive you to church, and he sits in the wet street waiting for you, and you never ask him how he manages to live with no Sabbath. It is not asked of you, Fervidus, to live and die a martyr; but just to visit your cabman's wife and children, and have family worship with them on a Sabbath night like you would have done if you had been a minister. Eugenia, again, is a young lady full of the most devout dispositions. If she ever has a family she will let you see family religion. She is more scandalised than she can tell you at the way that some of her schoolfellows have married heathens, and at the life they lead without God's worship in their newly-married houses. But, Eugenia, you may never be married so as to show married people how to live. At the same time, you have a maid already, all to yourself. She dresses you for church, and then you leave her to have as little religion as a Hottentot. You turn her away when she displeases you, and you hire another, and so on, till you will die unmarried, and without a godly household, and your circle will be dissolved and your opportunity for ever lost. Your maid, and her sister, and her widowed mother, and her ill-doing brother, and her sweetheart, they all are your circle at present, and your opportunity is fast fitting by; and, because it is so near you every day, you do not discover it. Oh, Eugenia, full to the eyes of so many vain imaginations! You never heard of Eugenia, and Fervidus, and Clemens before, and do not know where to find them. But no matter. You and I are Fervidus and Eugenia ourselves. You and I are Mordecai and Esther ourselves. We are in that circle, and amid those opportunities, the very best that all the power, and all the wisdom, and all the love of God can provide for us. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 15-17. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan.—*The crisis in the life of Esther*:—The spectacle presented reminds us—I. THAT IN NEITHER PLACE NOR FORTUNE HAS ANY ONE SECURITY AGAINST TRIAL AND DANGER. The palace may be a prison to its inmate, the hut cannot exclude the approaches of a grief. II. THAT ONE REASON NOT ONLY FOR GIFTS OF PLACE AND FORTUNE, BUT FOR EXPERIENCES OF TROUBLE ALSO, MUST BE THAT WE MAY HELP OTHERS IN THEIR PERILS. Power and opportunity measure obligation. Even sorrow and peril as they enrich and mellow the nature, enhance the power to help and bless. III. THAT RISK AND DIFFICULTY DO NOT EXEMPT FROM DUTY OR RELEASE FROM OBLIGATION. It is told of the Duke of Wellington that, in one of his campaigns, an officer awoke him to say to him that a certain enterprise to be carried into effect that night was impossible. As the officer was going on to give reasons for this opinion, the Duke replied, "Bring me my order-book." Turning over its leaves, he said, "It is not at all impossible; see, it is down in the order-book." Whereupon he lay down to sleep again. Risks are not to be unprovided for. Difficulties are not to be despised; but had there been none to run great risks, to undertake in the face of great hardships, prophets and apostles had been few. There had been no Elijah or Daniel, no John the Baptist or Paul the apostle, no Luther or Knox. IV. THAT HELPING TO SAVE OTHERS IS OFTEN THE BEST WAY TO INSURE OUR OWN SALVATION. The teaching of experience and history is that mere self-seeking is self-ruin. There is such a thing as the solidarity of human interests. The capitalist thrives best when he promotes the weal of the labourer, the labourer when he regards the interests of his employer. To save my children I must help to save my neighbour's. To one who inquired if the heathen can be saved if we do not give them the gospel, the apt reply was, "A much more practical question for us is whether we can be saved if we do not help to give it them." An eminent statesman early professed his Christian faith, and for some years maintained a godly walk. After a time he ceased to be religiously active, and allowed his light to be hid. While not renouncing his faith, yet his Christian character did neither himself nor Christ any honour. One evening he dropped into a little school-house gathering, and at the close he introduced himself to the preacher, and after an earnest conversation with him, he said, "Sir, I would give all the fame I now have, or expect to have, for the assurance of that hope of which you have spoken to-night." To be ourselves saved we must help to save others. V. OF THE TRUE SOURCE OF COURAGE AND HELP IN PERPLEXITY AND ILL. Although no distinct mention of prayer is made, yet it is evidently implied. It is an instinct of the human heart to resort to the Hearer of Prayer. In its distress the soul cries unto God. When a great steamship was

hourly expected to sink in mid-ocean we are told that all on board gave themselves to prayer. VI. THAT GOD'S PROVIDENCE IS ALWAYS OVER HIS PEOPLE FOR GOOD. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*) *Difficulties cleared up*:—1. Esther's heart was moved not to shrink from manifest duty. "Add to your faith, virtue," courage, a manly and determined purpose to carry out its calls to their utmost extent. Stop not to ask leave of circumstances, of personal convenience or indolent self-indulgence, but go forward in your appointed work. How prone we are to shrink from disagreeable or dangerous duty. How many excuses we are able to frame for our neglect. How easy it becomes to satisfy our sinful hearts that God will not require that which it is so difficult or so dangerous to perform. Fly from no duty when the word and providence of God call you forward. Go on, and trust yourself to God. 2. Esther's heart was moved to sincere dependence on God. Prayer seems the natural voice of danger and sorrow. The ancient philosopher said, "If a man would learn to pray, let him go to sea." The hour of the tempest will be to multitudes a new lesson in their relations to God. When men are in affliction and trouble they are easily led to cry unto God. Esther and her maidens prayed. What if the husband does not or will not bless his household? Cannot the mother and the wife collect her children and her maidens for prayer? 3. The king's heart was moved to listen and to accept her. The clouds have passed, and the Lord whom she loved has given her a token for good. This is the power of prayer, the work of providence, the influence of grace. The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord, and as the rivers of water, He has turned it according to His will. What a lesson in providence is this! The same power which leads to prayer, and supports us in prayer, at the same time works over other minds and other things to make an answer completely ready for our enjoyment. How easily can God remove all the stumbling-blocks out of the way of His children! "What art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Anticipated difficulties suddenly vanish; enemies whom we had expected are not found; the things which apparently threatened our hurt turn out to our advantage; and blessings which we had not dared to hope for crowd around our path. Thus Paul found it at Rome. 4. God moved Esther's heart to great wisdom and prudence in her management of the undertaking she had assumed. Peculiar wisdom and skill often are imparted to us in answer to prayers for the accomplishment of the work of the Lord. Our dependence and prayer have no tendency to make us headlong or rash. We are still to employ all the proper means and agencies which our utmost wisdom will suggest to attain the end we have in view. True piety in the exercise of its faith and love and hope towards God, is the highest wisdom. It unites all the wisest calculation and effort of man with all the goodness and power of God. It is a fellowship, a partnership with God in which He furnishes all the capital, and employs our sanctified labours alone; in which we strive to be faithful, and He promises to bless. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Esther's petition*:—I. WE NOTE THE FACT THAT EVERY ONE HAS SOME SPECIAL MISSION. Esther's special mission was to avert the destruction which threatened her people. Is it true that all have some such peculiar charge? We read of the decisive battles of the world and their commanders; of the dominating philosophies and their masters; of the ruling arts and their teachers; of the controlling religions and their high-priests; of the great reforms and their leaders. Yet these elect ones are but as a handful of sands to the grains which make the shore. For the rest, mere existence seems to be its own end and object. But it is not so. A persistent pressure is in and on every heart to enter into secret communication with God, and linking its weakness with His strength, exerts a blessed influence which, like the sound-waves, goes on endlessly. That hour of audience with its Maker is its greatest possibility. For that, at least, it has a special mission. From Him it receives what almost might be called "sealed orders." Saul of Tarsus was given his at Damascus, and so he went to Jerusalem, not knowing how they would read as he opened them there. So every Christian goes his way, till we find Henry Martyn preaching Christ to the Hindus, Isaac Newton solving the problem of the apple's fall, Leigh Richmond writing "The Dairyman's Daughter," George Müller erecting his orphanage, Mary Lyon opening collegiate doors to her sisters, and Abraham Lincoln issuing the emancipation proclamation. And though not yet widely observed, the prayers, counsels, and inspirations by which gifted souls have roused, led, and saved society originated in the closet, and kitchen, and field, where the godly parent or teacher has fulfilled a holy and particular mission. The successful general is feted and praised. Every soldier in the ranks is just as essential to the victory. Every individual, however

insignificant, has his momentous obligation. The child's hand in the lighthouse tower may turn the helm of a whole navy, that it is not strewn along the reefs.

II. NOTE THE FACT THAT LOVE FOR OTHERS IS WORTHY LOVE OF SELF. To lose one's love of life, comfort, and honour in the greater love of the life, comfort, and honour of his kin is counted the highest of human virtues. Mettus Curtius, in spurring his horse into the yawning chasm to save Rome, was not the first nor the last to hold the welfare of the many above that of the individual. "We have no religion to export," meanly argued a legislator against the Act of incorporation of the American Board. "Religion," was the profound reply, "is a commodity which the more we export the more we have." III. NOTE THE NEED OF TIMELY PREPARATION FOR OUR WORK. Then—always—the idea has prevailed that united petitions, like the volume of the sea, would be mighty, while the solitary plea, like the single drop, would be null. Jesus promised answer when two or three were agreed in their request. Spiritual momentum, like physical, seems to be proportioned to the quantity of soul multiplied by its eagerness. The Church has upborne its ministers, and made them speak with authority when it has been praying with them. Individual preparation must also be made. Esther must fast no less than her people. She does all she can to pave the way for a favourable reception of her cause. Jacob's present of flocks and herds, sent forward to placate Esau, with the greeting "and behold he is behind us," fitly represents the forethought and tact which oftenest gains its end. We may call it "policy"; but what harm, if it be not bribery? IV. NOTE THE REWARD OF VENTURING IN A GOOD CAUSE. The supreme hazard gains the supreme desire. The fearless champion of a full and free religious life oftenest triumphs. St. Patrick before the Druid chieftain; Wickliffe before the angry bishops, and Luther before the Diet, succeed, when others of as noble wish, but of less courage, must have failed. Into the densest heathenism the soldier of the Cross penetrates, and a redeemed people build their monument of thanksgiving, not for his piety simply, but for his bravery. Holy causes seem often to clothe their advocates in such shining dress, that assaulting powers are abashed at the sight. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

*A suggestion and its operation.*—We have here illustrated—

I. HUMAN OBLIGATION TO SUGGESTION. By far the majority of the imports into the soul and life of the world are marked "*viâ suggestion.*" As the present holds in it the past, so suggestion is the essential of progress, the root of accomplishment, the spur of duty. Compute, if you can, the poet's debt to suggestion; Burns and the mouse, &c. The prime factor of invention is suggestion. Men see something, hear something, touch something, and in a flash an idea springs full-armed and captures the mind. The eye suggests the telescope, the heart the engine. Is naval architecture to be completely revolutionised? Is the new leviathan to be the future type of ocean steamers? Subtract the suggestion of a whale's back, and what then? Human experience is largely the outcome of suggestion. Mordecai could not command Queen Esther, but he could pace in sackcloth before the palace gate. He could send a message to the queen making an entreating, pitiful suggestion.

II. THE STRUGGLE WHICH ENSUES IN CARRYING A SUGGESTION OVER INTO PRACTICE. Carlyle has said, "Transitions are ever full of pain." Thus the eagle when it moults is sickly, and to attain his new beak must harshly dash off the old one upon the rocks. There is no more critical experience for a human soul than when a suggestion lodges in it; especially when it means the readjustment of all our spiritual furniture, burying of cherished plans, crucifying selfish ambition, stripping off desire, defying danger, releasing power, and making us risk the sarcasm, the scorn which are ever the pall-bearers of failure. This gives scope for the true heroism of life, a heroism which finds its choicest exhibit, not in those who have the leverage of a great enthusiasm and who are consciously beneath the eyes of a great multitude, but in those duels between souls and suggestions fought out in the solitude of the human breast. Thus John Knox, when summoned in public assembly to the ministry, rushes from the congregation in tears to enter, in his solitary chamber, upon a struggle which should last for days, but the outcome of which should be a face set like a flint. Thus Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel shrink and wrestle but obey. Thus Esther hesitates and excuses herself on the ground of personal danger, till at last the suggestion rides over her soul roughshod, and in the heroism of a great surrender she declares, "So will I go in unto the king . . . and if I perish, I perish."

III. THE AVAILING OF ONE'S SELF OF ALLIES IN THE EXECUTION OF A DETERMINED PURPOSE. Esther made three allies. 1. With herself. She knew her royal spouse was impulsive; she knew he was susceptible. And so, bent on subduing him, she

bedecks herself with jewels, and right royally attired stands in the court. Impulse leaps, susceptibility flames: "She obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre." 2. With her husband. In the execution of a worthy purpose one may find and may avail himself of the ally which resides in that which is to be overcome. It makes a deal of difference how you take hold of a thing. The handle of a pail is the water-carrier's ally; he may despise it and fare worse! Said one of the keenest logicians in this country, "In entering upon a debate, find, to begin with, common ground with your antagonist, something you can both accept—a definition, a proposition, or if nothing else, the state of the weather." Here is a deep truth. There are natural allies in the enemy's country; it is strategy, it is generalship, to get into communication with them. Esther recognised her ally, and so she approached her husband, not with entreaty or rebuke, but with invitation. The suggestion of a feast prepared under her direction in honour of his majesty was the warder within the castle of the fickle king's soul, who would not fail to raise the portcullis of his will to admit the entrance of a queen's desire. 3. With time. There is a ministry in wise delay; haste is not of necessity success. Is procrastination the thief of time? Then precipitation is the assassin of it. To work and wait—to wait for the order, the chance, the moment to strike, was a lesson Esther had learned by heart, and so she refused to unbosom her petition till the hour struck. When Leyden was besieged by the Spaniards the inhabitants sent word to the enemy that they would eat their left arms and fight with their right before they would surrender. At last, in their extremity, they told the governor they must surrender. "Eat me, but don't surrender," was the heroic reply. Then some one thought of cutting the dykes and flooding the enemy's camp; they did it, rushed upon the enemy in the confusion, and out of apparent disaster snatched a glorious victory. (*Nehemiah Boynton.*) *Esther's petition.*—Learn—I. THAT IN THE EXIGENCIES OF RELIGION AND OF GOD'S KINGDOM, THE CHURCH MAY DEMAND OF US THE DISREGARD OF PERSONAL SAFETY. II. THAT WHEN GOD GIVES US A MISSION WHICH WE ARE WISE ENOUGH TO SEE AND TO FULFIL, THEN WE MAY HUMBLY EXPECT THAT HE WILL ACCOMPLISH BLESSED RESULTS BY THE FEEBLEST INSTRUMENTS. (*W. E. Boggs, D.D.*) **I also and my maidens will fast likewise.**—*Mistress and maid.*—Some, it is probable, of Esther's maids were heathens when they came into her service. Yet we find her promising that they would fast. She can answer for them, as Joshua for his household, that they would serve the Lord. If mistresses were as zealous as Queen Esther for the honour of God and the conversion of sinners, they would bestow pains upon the instruction and religious improvement of their female servants. If women may gain to Christ their own husbands by their good conversation, may they not also gain the souls of their servants? and if they are gained to Christ, they are also to themselves also. (*G. Lawson.*) *Fasting is in itself a prayer.*—It is remarkable that nothing is here said about prayer, but fasting was in itself a prayer; for it was not a form put on from without, but the natural expression of the inner emotion, and as an application to God, it is to be explained much as we do the touching of the Saviour by the woman, who in that way sought her cure. Words are signs, just as fasting is a sign. That which is essential in either is genuineness. God does not look to the words themselves, any more than He does to the fasting in itself. He has regard only to that which the soul expresses, either by the one or through the other. The touch of the soul of the woman went to the Master's heart through her touching of His garment with her fingers; and the yearning of the soul of Esther, through her fasting, made its appeal to Jehovah, even though she did not breathe His name. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) **And so will I go in unto the king.**—*Prayer accompanied by appropriate use of means.*—She will not think that her duty is done when she has prayed and fasted. She will seek, by the use of proper means, to obtain that blessing which she has been asking. The insincerity of our prayers is too often discovered by our sloth and cowardice. We ask blessings from God, and, as if He were bound to confer them, not according to His own will, but according to ours, we take no care to use those means which He hath appointed for obtaining them, or we do not use them with requisite diligence. (*G. Lawson.*) *Courage to face difficulties.*—There are two kinds of courage—the mere animal courage, which results from well-strung nerves, and is exerted by impulse rather than by reflection; and the moral courage, which, on a calm calculation of difficulties, and of the path of duty, will face the difficulties and prosecute the path of duty at any hazard, even at the risk of life itself. It will often be found that men are deficient in the latter of these



qualities, while they are remarkable for the former. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Esther's resolve*.—I. THE PREPARATION: fasting and prayer. 1. Fasting is abused by the Church of Rome, therefore disused by many who belong to the Church of Christ. Deep feeling will make fasting natural. Moses (Exod. xxxiv. 28), Elijah (1 Kings xix. 7, 8), Christ (Matt. iv. 2), fasted forty days each. See Ezra's fast (Ezra viii. 21, 23). Directions how to fast (Matt. vi. 16-18). Paul was given to fasting (2 Cor. vi. 4, 5; xi. 27). Fasting is useless without faith. The Pharisee (Luke xviii. 12). 2. Prayer. Three days' special prayer. The Jews in their synagogues. Esther in the palace. With what humility, sorrowful confession, and earnestness did they pray! II. THE RESOLUTION: "So will I go in unto the king," &c. There are some points of resemblance and of contrast between the case of Esther and that of the poor sinner. 1. Points of resemblance. (1) She was in extreme danger (ver. 13). So with the sinner (Psa. vii. 11-13). (2) There was no other way for her escape. "By no means" (Psa. xlix. 7). (3) This way seemed full of difficulty and danger. Haman's influence. The king's temper. The royal guards. 2. Points of contrast. (1) She went into the presence of an earthly monarch who was partial, changeable, irritable, weak. God is always the same. (2) She was uninvited. The sinner pressed to come. (3) The law forbade her to come. (4) The king has apparently forgotten her for thirty days. (5) She might have been stopped by the guards. (6) She might have been misunderstood. (7) She might have failed by going the wrong time. Lessons.—1. Warning. Danger threatens. 2. Instruction. Prepare. 3. Encouragement. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) **And if I perish, I perish.**—*Love to God stronger than death*:—"If I perish, I perish." Our lives are not our own; they cannot be long preserved by us. They will be of little value to us without a good conscience. The life which is purchased by neglect of duty is shameful, bitter, worse than death. Whoever shall save his life in this manner shall lose it in this world as well as in the next. But to lose life for the sake of Christ and a good conscience is truly to live. A day of life employed in the most hazardous duties, by which we show that our love to God is stronger than death, excels a thousand days of a life spent in the service and enjoyment of the world. (*G. Lawson.*) *Esther's resolve*.—I. THE IMPENDING DANGER. 1. A wicked, crafty, designing foe. 2. An irrevocable decree of destruction. 3. No visible way of escape. II. THE BOLD RESOLUTION. III. THE SOLEMN PRELIMINARY: fasting and prayer. IV. THE SUCCESSFUL ISSUE. 1. Life spared. 2. Enemy is destroyed. 3. Honour is given. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *The crisis met*.—I. OBSERVE THE QUEEN'S MODESTY—her extraordinary prudence at the very moment that she is most successful. Her request was a simple invitation to have the king come to a banquet of wine the next day, and as a mark of regard for his preferences, she wishes him to bring Haman. II. In Esther's fasting and prayer and pious courage we see THAT FAITH AND PIETY ARE NOT ALWAYS SHORN OF THEIR FRUITS UNDER UNFAVOURABLE INFLUENCES; they may flourish in a palace. In a chaotic state of society a pious man may have greater difficulties to overcome in maintaining a godly walk, but then, in overcoming these difficulties, he will gain a greater degree of spiritual strength. III. QUEEN ESTHER WAS A TRUE REPRESENTATIVE WOMAN. Every one is raised up as she was, not to be a Sultana, and do just the work she did, but to do his or her own work. Every one has a duty to perform—a post to maintain—a lot to fulfil. IV. It may sometimes be our duty to ourselves, our country, our fellow-men and our God to put our LIVES IN JEOPARDY FOR THE TRUTH, OR FOR THE CHURCH, AND FOR THE SAKE OF JESUS. True piety ought to make men brave. V. WE SHOULD NEVER FEAR TO DO OUR DUTY. The God whom we serve is able either to sustain us under our trials or to deliver us out of them. Why should we yield to the fear of man that bringeth a snare, seeing that we are in the hands of Him who holdeth the hearts of all men and of devils in His hand? VI. THE PRIVILEGE AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER. 1. As Henry remarks, here is an example of a mistress praying with her maids that is worthy of being followed by all housekeepers and heads of families. 2. And we are here encouraged to ask the sympathy and prayers of others when we undertake any great or perilous enterprise. The king's favourite was her greatest enemy. But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, even His own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. VII. ONE OF THE GRACIOUS DESIGNS OF AFFLICTION IS TO MAKE US FEEL OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. A gracious result of trials to the people of God is that it drives them to prayer. But the court of heaven is not like that of Persia, into which there was no entrance for those that were in mourning or clothed with sackcloth. Such could not come

near the palace of Ahasuerus. But it is the weary, the heavy-laden, and the sorrowing that are especially invited to the throne of grace, and invited to come boldly. "Is any among you afflicted," saith the apostle James, "let him pray." (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Courage ought to be cultivated*:—The exigencies of human existence call loudly for the cultivation of courage. Victory is frequently suspended upon boldness. Cromwell's Ironsides were accustomed to enter the battle shouting, "The Lord is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." They were always victorious. The Christian's heroism should be like that of the Prince of Condé, who, when offered by his monarch the choice between three things—"To go to Mass, to die, or to be imprisoned"—heroically replied, "I am perfectly resolved never to go to Mass, so between the other two I leave the choice to your majesty." If Luther dared to enter the Diet of Worms relying on the justice of his cause and the protection of God, assuredly the Christian in this age may confidently face the dangers which confront him. Genuine piety has a powerful tendency to develop heroism. Moses, Elijah, Nathan, Daniel, John the Baptist, &c. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *Moral heroism*:—1. The Christian should make no concealment of his piety. If Esther dared to reveal her religion, asking her maidens to unite in imploring the interposition of Jehovah, surely the Christian ought not to cloak his. 2. Sympathy shown to the suffering is advantageous to the giver as well as to the receiver. 3. Those who resist the evidence that the Church is not infrequently in a condition calling for immediate deliverance are enemies of true religion, not friends. 4. Christians should possess moral heroism. 5. If desirous of securing deliverance for the Church, we should endeavour to impress upon each a keen sense of personal responsibility. 6. We should endeavour to sustain those who are passing through trials for us. Mordecai and the Jewish people engaged in prayer while Esther exposed herself to death on their behalf. 7. Assurance of deliverance should impel to the performance of present duty. (*J. S. Van Dyke.*) *Esther's peril and its attendant success*:—Notice—**I. THE SITUATION IN WHICH ESTHER WAS PLACED.** **II. HER CONDUCT IN THE EMERGENCY.** **III. THE SUCCESS WHICH ATTENDED HER APPLICATION.** (*R. P. Buddicom.*) *Esther's resolve*:—This was not—**I. THE RESOLUTION OF A FATALIST WHO ACTS UPON THE PRINCIPLE THAT WHAT IS DESTINED TO BE MUST BE.** **II. THE RESOLUTION OF DESPERATION, WHICH FEELS "MATTERS CANNOT BE WORSE, and to have done the utmost may bring relief, while it cannot possibly aggravate the evil."** **III. THE RESOLUTION OF A PERSON PROSTRATED UNDER DIFFICULTIES, AND YET, WITH A VAGUE HOPE OF DELIVERANCE, saying, "I will make one effort more, and if that fail, and all is lost, I can but die."** Esther's purpose was framed in a spirit altogether different. It was the heroism of true piety, which in providence shut up to one course, and that, full of danger, counts the cost, seeks help of God, and calmly braves the danger, saying, "He will deliver me if He have pleasure in me; if not, I perish in the path of duty." (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Access to the throne*:—I remember at the time of that marvellous "blizzard," as it was called, in America, there was an astounding instance of roundabout communication. There were parties in Philadelphia who wanted to communicate with Boston, but all the telegraph lines were down, and they actually cabled the message across the sea to London, and from London by cable to Boston, in order to get the message through which it was desired to communicate to parties in that city. This may illustrate what I mean, that sometimes, when interruption of communication exists on earth, or there are closed doors or insurmountable obstacles which hinder our effective labour, and when in vain we knock and ring at the closed doors, or attempt to overcome the hindrances that exist between us and the ends that we desire to attain—if we can get access to the King of kings, and if we can send our message up to the throne, from the throne the answer will come. We shall find that the surest way to get to the upper storey of the house, or to reach across the intervening obstacles that have accumulated in our path, is to approach the desired end by way of God's throne. (*A. T. Pierson.*) *Gospel-consecration* does not go farther than this. Everything dear and valued was left behind in order that she might serve God. "All things were counted but loss" that she might maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." Ah! how this believer, in old times, when as yet the Saviour was only had in promise, puts to shame many in these latter days who are in possession of the finished salvation! Even the pleasures of sense, and the wealth and rewards of the world, keep them in a state of indecision and vacillation, if not of absolute indifference, to the call and claims of the gospel. (*T. McEwan.*)

## CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-14. Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel.—*There is nothing stationary* :—“ Now it came to pass.” These words call for special notice in a book which strikingly illustrates the providence of God both in regard to nations and individuals. They remind us that there is nothing stationary—that what comes is moving on. Seasons of trial and perplexity would be overwhelming if they had the character of fixedness. It is happily not so. As you have stood gazing on a mountain, bathed in sunlight, you may sometimes have observed a dark shadow creeping along the side of it, as though hastening to accomplish its mission, and quickly gliding away out of sight, leaving the landscape all the more beautiful because of your remembrance of it. So is it with what is painful and sad in providence. Events of this kind have come at intervals, but it was only to pass—not to abide—like the floating of little clouds between us and the sun, and when past, giving to human life, as to nature, a greater richness and variety. Biographies are but commentaries on these familiar words. Indeed, men themselves but come to pass. (*Ibid.*) *Performance must follow resolve* :—Esther was not one of those who resolve and promise well, but do not perform. (*G. Lawson.*) *Crisis help* :—I. We have here an illustration of the fact THAT WHEN THE CRISIS COMES GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE GRACE TO MEET IT. Doubtless Esther looked forward with much trepidation to the moment of her entering in before the king. When the time came she found that the way was clear. This is far from being an uncommon experience with the children of God. That which in the prospect is most formidable turns out to be in the reality most simple. The women at the sepulchre. When God asks us to perform some dangerous duty, we may rely that the way up to the duty will be made open to us, and that strength will be given to us for its discharge. “ I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.” “ As thy days so shall thy strength be.” “ My grace is sufficient for thee.” How often have these promises been made good to Christians in these days. It is a time of extremity ; the enemies of truth are bitterly assailing the very citadel of the faith, and now a stand has to be made which shall determine the issue for years. The eyes of all humble Christians are turned to one singularly gifted man ; all are saying that, like Esther, he has come to the kingdom for such a time as this. But he is full of anxiety and trepidation. At length he consents to lift the standard and enter on the conflict, and when the time comes he is carried away out of himself, and so sensibly helped by the Spirit of God that he sweeps everything before him on the resistless torrent of his eloquence. Or there is a terrible disease invading the frame ; it cannot be cured, and if let alone it will issue in a lingering illness and painful death. There is nothing for it but a critical surgical operation, and yet from that the patient shrinks. At length, however, the consent is given. It is to be performed on a certain day and at a certain hour. The meanwhile is given to prayer, and all the friends and relatives are requested, each in his own closet, to join in the supplication. Then when the hour strikes the diseased one walks with a strength that is not her own into the room, and gives herself into the hands of the surgeons, saying, “ Living or dying, I am the Lord’s.” The shrinking is gone, the fear is subdued, and there is nothing but a calm heroism, which is the gift of God for the occasion. Or, yet again, a difficult duty is to be performed—a brother to be expostulated with for some serious sin, or to be warned of some insidious danger. But we do not know how he will take it, and the question comes to be whether our effort to save him may not aggravate the danger to which he is exposed. Who will undertake the task ? There is one who, of all others, seems to be the fittest ; but the very idea of it fills him with anxiety. How shall he proceed ? There is nothing for it but prayer ; and in the faith that God will answer he goes forward. He finds the way marvellously opened. He has a most satisfactory interview. All his fears are dispelled—he has saved his brother. II. WHEN THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT WITH GOD A LITTLE MATTER WILL MAKE A GREAT MISERY. Happiness does not consist in the bearing of others towards us, but in the relation of our own souls to God. A self-centred heart cannot avoid misery. The one thing needful to happiness is a new heart. III. WHEN A LITTLE MATTER MAKES A GREAT MISERY, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE THAT THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT WITH GOD. IV. IT IS A GREAT MISFORTUNE WHEN A MAN’S WORST COUNSELLORS ARE IN HIS OWN HOUSE. A good wife would have turned his thoughts in another direction. Here, then, is a beacon of warning for all wedded wives. Let them beware of adding fuel to a fire

already burning far too strongly in their husbands' hearts, as Zeresh did here. When they see those whom they love best going in the way of envy or passion or revenge, let them exert themselves wisely, yet firmly, to alter their determination. And let those husbands who have wives that are wise enough to see when they are going astray, and brave enough to endeavour to keep them from doing that which is wrong, thank God for them as for the richest blessings of their lives. A wife who is merely the echo of her husband, or who, as in the instance before us, only seconds and supports that which she sees he is determined upon, is no helpmeet for any man. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The glory of intercession*.—I. THE BOWED FORM OF THE SUPPLIANT QUEEN. To bend the knees for others is the noblest attitude possible for the children of men. What shall be said of the selfish pietist who prays, "Forgive us our trespasses," and gives no heed to the multitudes who lie in darkness and the shadow of death? What shall be said of those Christians who "don't believe in missions"? When the ship *Algona* went down and the captain made off with one of the boats, leaving forty-eight passengers to drown, the whole world stood in horror of him. It is far better to sing "Rescue the perishing" than to make too much of "When I can read my title clear." A glorious award awaits those who in self-forgetfulness have adventured all in behalf of their fellow-men. II. THE OUTSTRETCHED SCEPTRE. It means to us that the great King is ever ready to hear intercessory prayer. In the rabbinical legend of Sandalphon an angel is represented as standing at the uttermost gates of heaven, one foot on a ladder of light. He is listening for a mother's appeal, the sob of a burdened heart, the cry "God be merciful to him!" On hearing these voices of intercession he bears them aloft, and they turn to garlands as he lays them before the feet of God. It stands in the nature of the case that God should be most willing to hear unselfish prayers. III. THE SEQUEL. The Jews were saved and the Feast of Purim instituted in recognition of this deliverance. The world waits to be won by Christian intercession. When General Grant was languishing on his bed of pain, no message of sympathy touched him more than that from an aged quaker: "Friend Grant, I am a stranger to thee. I would not intrude upon thy suffering, but I am anxious for thy soul. Trust in Jesus; He will not fail thee." The abundant entrance into heaven is for those who by prayer and its supplementary effort have wrought deliverance for others. At the close of the American Civil War, when Lincoln went down to Richmond, the freedmen loosed the horses from his carriage and dragged it through the streets, shouting, "God bless Massa Lincoln!" He had broken their chains, and this was a slight expression of their gratitude. In the apportionment of the honours of heaven there is nothing comparable with this, "He hath saved a soul from death!" (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The royalty of faith*.—I. ROYAL APPAREL MAY COVER A SAD HEART. II. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH SUSTAINS IN SADNESS. Faith possesses the true alchemy which can transmute the base metal of sadness into the celestial gold of abiding gladness. The sick saint; the imprisoned martyr; the lonely missionary bereft of wife and child on a foreign shore; the pastor labouring amongst an unresponsive people—all acknowledge the sustaining power of faith. III. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH LEADS TO DARING VENTURES. Abraham was ready to offer up his only-begotten son; Esther was ready to offer up herself. Hers was a Divinely inspired faith, worthy of a place among those celebrated in Hebrews. IV. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH IS GREATER THAN THE ROYALTY OF MERE CIRCUMSTANTIALS. The Cæsars and the Neros do not now rule—the Pauls and the Peters do. Faith is better and mightier than weapons of war, words of wisdom, or the gilded trappings of earthly royalty. V. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH COMMANDS SUCCESS. VI. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH SWAYS THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *A conquest by feminine beauty*.—One of the most stirring passages in history with which I am acquainted tells us how Cleopatra, the exiled Queen of Egypt, won the sympathy of Julius Cæsar, the conqueror, until he became the bridegroom and she the bride. Driven from her throne, she sailed away on the Mediterranean Sea in a storm, and when the large ship anchored she put out with one womanly friend in a small boat until she arrived at Alexandria, where was Cæsar, the great general. Knowing that she would not be permitted to land or pass the guards on the way to Cæsar's palace, she laid upon the bottom of the boat some shawls and scarfs and richly dyed upholstery, and then lay down upon them, and her friend wrapped her in them and she was admitted ashore in this wrapping of goods, which was announced as a present for Cæsar. This bundle was permitted to pass the guards of the gates of the palace, and was put down at the feet of the Roman general. When the bundle was unrolled there rose before Cæsar one whose

courage and beauty and brilliancy are the astonishment of the ages. This exiled Queen of Egypt told the story of her sorrows, and he promised her that she should get back her throne in Egypt and take the throne of wifely dominion in his own heart. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *A queen on the vanity of jewellery* :—Among the treasures most coveted are jewels, but in the "Diary" of Madame D'Arblay, whose maiden name was Burney, and who was lady-in-waiting on Queen Charlotte, consort of George III., we read: "The queen told me how well at first she had liked her jewels and ornaments. 'But how soon,' cried she, 'was that over! Believe me, Miss Burney, it is a pleasure of a week—a fortnight at most. The trouble of putting them on, the care they require, and the fear of losing them, made me in a fortnight's time long for my own earlier dress, and wish never to see them more.'" *Esther's nobleness* :—The splendour of Esther's career is seen in the fact that she does not succumb to the luxury of her surroundings. The royal harem among the lily-beds of Shushan is like a palace in the land of the lotus-eaters "where it is always afternoon," and its inmates in the dreamy indolence are tempted to forget all the obligations and interests beyond the obligations to please the king and their own interests in securing every comfort wealth can lavish upon them. We do not look for a Boadicea in such a hot-house of narcotics. And when we find there a strong, unselfish woman such as Esther conquering almost insuperable temptations to a life of ease, and choosing a course of terrible danger to herself for the sake of her oppressed people, we can echo the admiration of the Jews for their national heroine. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The sight of a face* :—It is a constant fact in nature that the sight of a face will do what nothing else can do in the way of awakening love, touching sympathy, securing trust, evoking help, or, it may be, in the way of provoking and stimulating feelings of a very opposite description. If a purpose be very important and very good, generally it will be better promoted by a personal appearance than by any kind of representation. If I am seeking a good thing, my face ought to be better than the face of another for the getting of it; better, too, than my own letter asking it. If the poor widow had sent letters to the unjust judge, he probably would not have been much discomposed, but by her continual coming she wearied him, and won her quest. When the king saw Esther she obtained favour. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *And the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand.—God grants requests* :—Did this haughty monarch hold out the sceptre, and say, "What wilt thou, and what is thy request?" and shall not God hear His own elect—His chosen spouse—crying to Him day and night? Esther had to go into the presence of a proud imperious man, we to go into the presence of a God of love and condescension. She was not called; we are invited. She went in against the law; we have both precept and promise in our favour—yea, precept upon precept, and promise upon promise. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." She had no friend at court on whom she could rely, and the great favourite was the accuser of her brethren, the mortal foe of her name and race; we, even when we have sinned, and sinned after light and pardon, have an Advocate with the Father, His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, who also is the propitiation for our sins. Esther was encouraged to ask to the extent of the half of the kingdom of Persia; we are encouraged to ask to the whole of the kingdom of heaven, with a life-rent on earth of all that is needful for us. Ought we not then to "come boldly to the throne of grace"? (*T. McCrie.*) *The gifts of the heavenly King* :—1. Ahasuerus held out the sceptre to his queen, who had never offended him, nor been unfaithful to him; but Jehovah holds out His sceptre to the unfaithful. 2. But the king not only bade the queen to his presence, but made her a bountiful offer. "What is thy request? It shall be given thee to the half of my kingdom." This offer he makes three times over. Surely the Lord wrought marvellously herein, and in His goodness to His people, exceeded their largest expectations. God grants a kingdom to His people, and that an everlasting kingdom—their crowns fade not away, their purses wax not old. Their riches cannot be corrupted by moth and rust, and thieves cannot deprive them of their treasures. Their joy no one taketh from them, and their pleasures are those which are at God's right hand for evermore. Oh! let us approach the heavenly King in the all-powerful name of the one Mediator, and fervently pray for these imperishable blessings. (*J. Hughes.*) *Confidence in prayer* :—The Church is "the Lamb's wife." She has free access to the throne of the King of kings. Oh! how timidly and doubtfully do believers sometimes draw near to Him! It is as though they feared His royal sceptre, forgetting that it is the sceptre of

mercy; as though they were apprehensive that He had taken away His love from them, forgetting that "having loved His own who were in the world, He loves them unto the end." He has no half-measures—no half-kingdoms to offer. He promises you the kingdom—wholly, willing, unreservedly—and even chides you for having hitherto asked nothing in His name, and encourages you to "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." King Ahasuerus could not anticipate the request of Esther; after his own carnal heart he thought that it must be some additional temporal good. But our King knows all beforehand, and has provided for, and is ready to bestow upon us all that we can need upon the earth, and all that we can desire to prepare us for heaven. And surely, if we require to be stirred to earnestness and importunity by the presence of a great cause, we all have it in the condition of our own hearts, the souls of others, and the salvation of the world. (T. McEwan.) *The golden sceptre*:—In reverence, in submission, and for safety, she touched the top of the sceptre, and then all the power of the empire was between her and harm. We cannot assert that this was meant to be a symbolical act; but certainly it does express in a striking way the method and the result of our coming as sinners to God. The golden sceptre of grace is ever in the King's hand. Never does He cast one wrathful glance upon any who approach unto Him; He is on the throne of grace, that He may be gracious. When we touch the sceptre we yield submission; we are reconciled, accepted, and protected by all the forces of the universe, and by all the perfections of God. (A. Raleigh, D.D.) *Touching the sceptre*:—I. THE SCEPTRE IN THE HANDS OF CHRIST. We read that He is "head over all things," and more than this, "head over all things to the Church." He holds that sceptre for them—for their protection—for their highest and best interests. Christ is on the throne! The steps which lead to that throne ought to assure us what He is, now that He is there. The Cross best explains Christ. His character in all its transparency and purity, its glory and beauty, fitted Him to reign over all. But we want more than a righteous King; more than a true King! Love must be on the throne which is to sway the hearts of men, and "herein is love." II. IN ALL APPEALS TO HIM WE TOUCH THAT SCEPTRE. 1. When we touch that sceptre, we prove that we believe His Word. It is certain that actions bespeak faith more than words. Do we believe in Christ's purposes of mercy? Do we believe that all the vice, misery, wrong, around us, Christ desires to do away with? that it grieves His heart more than it ever can ours? We must believe this in the light of His Incarnation, coming into this world as He did to seek and to save that which was lost. When we touch His sceptre, we proclaim our belief in His mercy, we come to the King as those who know that He is the same Saviour that walked this world, and went about doing good, and preached deliverance to the captives everywhere. 2. When we touch that sceptre, we bespeak its aid; we imply confidence in its power. We manifest our consciousness that there is a greater power than that of evil: that Jesus must and will reign. It were sad to live were it otherwise. We who know Christ for ourselves, have confidence in His ability to realise the ideal of the Inspired Word, "Godliness is profitable for all things: having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 3. When we touch that sceptre, we imply our oneness of spirit with Him. Many would like to touch other sceptres, and turn their purposes of success into golden achievements. See how men wait on others. But Christ's purposes are moral and spiritual purposes. His kingdom is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and we say by our touch of His sceptre, "Master, we do desire this end; deliver our people from slavery, from the plots of our Hamans, from the desires which would destroy their peace of mind, hinder their happiness, and harm their souls hereafter. Oh! King Jesus, we are one with Thee!" 4. When we touch that sceptre, we imply that Christ loves us. We love Him, and He loves us. We know that the fact of His love to us will make our petitions powerful before Him. III. THE SCEPTRE MAY BE TOUCHED BY THE HUMBLEST HAND. Yes; and it often is. Poor and humble saints, weak and afflicted saints, that can do little else, can pray. Not through door-keepers, and past stately sentinels, do we reach the Royal Pavilion! No! Esther goes straight in to the king. So may we! The privilege of prayer itself is not more wonderful than the freeness of it. The Heavenly Royalty needs no poor pageantry of outward state. You can touch that sceptre. You can come in, and be face to face with the King. IV. THIS SCEPTRE IS NOT SWAYED BY US, BUT TOUCHED BY US. Esther touched it! And then the king said unto her, "What wilt thou, Esther?" And thus it is with us. It pleased the king to grant her widest request. But still it

was the king's will. And so it is with us. I would ask this question: Who would dare to touch the sceptre, if the touch was to turn to swaying it? Not I! Not you! No; you know enough of life to wish at all events its government taken out of your hands. We touch the sceptre, but we do not take it. No. That moment an awful consciousness would come over us, and we should flee from mountain to city, to be absolved from the responsibility. We might seem to benefit ourselves, but whom might we not harm? We might seem to gain a transitory good, but what beneficent laws of the universe, working for the common good, might we not endanger? It is a comfortable thing to be able to cast all our care upon Christ.

V. IN SWAYING THAT SCEPTRE CHRIST CAN OVERCOME ALL THE DESIGNS OF OUR ENEMIES. The danger seemed great to the company of Jews in the Persian empire, but in one brief hour the darkening cloud had disappeared, and Esther had "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." (*W. M. Statham.*) *What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request?*—*Prayer should be definite*:—To make prayer of any value, there must be definite objects for which to plead. We often ramble in our prayers after this, that, and the other, and we get nothing, because in each we do not really desire anything. We chatter about many subjects, but the soul does not concentrate itself upon any object. Do you not sometimes fall on your knees without thinking beforehand what you mean to ask God for? You do, as a matter of habit, without any motion of your heart. You are like a man who would go to a shop and not know what articles he would procure. He may, perhaps, make a happy purchase when he is there, but certainly it is not a wise plan to adopt. And so the Christian in prayer may afterwards attain to a real desire, and get his end; but how much better would he speed if, having prepared his soul by consideration and self-examination, he came to God for an object at which he was about to arrive, with a real request. Did we ask an audience at her Majesty's court, we should not be expected to go into the presence of royalty and then to think of some petition after we came there. Even so with the child of God. He should be able to answer the great question, "What is thy petition? and what is thy request? and it shall be done unto thee." Imagine an archer shooting with his bow, and not knowing where the mark is! Would he be likely to have success? Conceive a ship, on a voyage of discovery, putting to sea without the captain having any idea of what he was looking for! Would you expect that he would come back heavily laden either with the discoveries of science or with treasures of gold? In everything else you have a plan. You do not go to work without knowing that there is something that you designed to make; how is it that you go to God without knowing what blessing you design to have? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Large offers*:—1. With respect to the largeness of the offer. "Even to the half of my kingdom," the king said, "will thy request be granted." "All things are yours," it is said to believers; and it may well be said, since Jehovah gives Himself to them as their God, and Christ is theirs, and the Spirit dwells in them. 2. But then as Esther was afraid all at once to ask what she most desired, so God's people are often slow or afraid to avail themselves to the full of their privilege of asking. Many are contented to live from year to year with little more to uphold them than an indistinct hope that they shall reach heaven at last, when, if they would but take home God's promises in all their freeness and richness, they might be able to rejoice in Him as their portion. But perhaps it may be that as Esther did not feel herself in a condition all at once to close with the king's most liberal offer, so some among us, for other reasons than the feeling that it would be presumptuous, may be exercised in the same way with respect to spiritual privileges. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Directions for prayer*:—I. There must be METHOD in prayer. "What is thy petition?" Self-examination is especially beneficial as we are about to approach God. Prayer with too many is too much like the hurried salute given to a passing friend; or it is like the quick march of an army past the royal standard. It is often little better than counting beads strung on a cord; or as one turning a praying wheel. More strength in prayer would be obtained by more method in prayer. II. There must be ASSURANCE in prayer. Not merely the assurance that God is ready to hear prayer, but the assurance that we "have found favour in the sight of the King." Esther desired to feel her ground sure here. How shall we know if our heavenly King is favourable to us? By looking to the unspeakable gift. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." The gift of Christ implies the gift of all things needful. III. There may be HESITANCY in prayer. Not the hesitancy of doubt, but of deliberation. That is sometimes the truest prayer, when the heart is too

full for utterance. IV. There must be SUBMISSION to the Divine will in prayer. "I will do to-morrow as the king hath said." (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 8. Let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said.—*Do not hasten providence*:—The very persons are here before whom it will be told to-morrow—the king, the queen, Haman! Then why delay? Nine people out of ten would have said, if consulted beforehand, "Ah, she is losing her case, through fear or through finesse, or by some evil counsel. She is losing the ripe and favourable hour, which will never return. To-morrow! O Queen, why not to-night?" And so, oftentimes, we would hasten providence in our own affairs, fretting against His wise delays, and laying our poor shoulders to the great wheels of God, as though He were not moving them fast enough, when, in fact, they are going as evenly as the sun, as sublimely as time itself. "The king is here; why not speak?" Yes, he is here, and he is not here. He is not here as he will be to-morrow night. To-night he will be sleepless. To-night he will be reminded, through his sleeplessness, of an act of loyal faithfulness on the part of Mordecai, which has been hitherto unrewarded. To-night the order will be given for the preparation of a gallows. In a word, when the same three meet at to-morrow's banquet, they will be the same, and yet not the same. They will be really in different relations to each other, and to many beyond. So the banquet is ended, as if by the utterance of the word "wait." "He that believeth shall not make haste." (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Wisdom to act in critical situations*:—When persons are placed in critical situations, and endeavour to act singly and honestly, wisdom is granted to them to direct their course. Though she had met with a reception equal to her most sanguine expectations, Esther did not immediately present the request which was nearest her heart, but contented herself with begging that the king, accompanied with Haman, would "come to the banquet of wine which she had prepared." By this she testified her disinterestedness. She was afraid of precipitating the decision, and sought to avail herself of every prudent method for ensuring success. (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 9. Then went Haman forth that day joyful.—*The superficial man*:—I. HAMAN'S GLADNESS. It arose—1. From a false estimation of himself. 2. From a false estimate of his position. II. HAMAN'S USE OF HIS EYES. He saw, but not correctly. Pride casts a film over the mental vision. Prejudice lessens the power of vision. Green-eyed jealousy cannot see correctly. He could not see that stubbornness rightly read meant integrity of purpose. III. HAMAN'S CONSEQUENT CHANGE OF STATE. A false use of the eyes has its penalties. No faculty can be perverted without bringing retribution. IV. HAMAN'S POWER OF SELF-CONTROL. The power of self-control is not to be despised, but the power of self-conquest is a nobler achievement. V. HAMAN'S RESOURCE IN TROUBLE. It is observable how many bad men have attached themselves to wives who have stuck to them in all circumstances. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Joy from meagre sources*:—There is much joy among the children of men which arises from very meagre sources, much joy the loss of which would be better than its possession. (*J. Hughes.*) *Short-lived gladness*:—That day was the last of his gladness; next morning's sun should not set before all his glory was laid in the dust. Nay, that very day, and that very moment when it was most buoyant, his joy was destined to suffer a dash from which it would never completely recover. (*T. McCrie.*) *The last to-morrow*:—Be not so cruel as speak to him of to-morrow! Let the wicked enjoy their bright to-day—it is the only bright to-day which they will ever have. Yes, to-morrow! Let worldly men fear and prepare for their last to-morrow! "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." (*T. McEwan.*)

Ver. 10. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself.—*Self-restraint possible*:—Haman refrained himself. It is a circumstance not unworthy of notice, that even those persons who are habitually self-willed, and destitute of the power of self-government, can nevertheless, when occasion requires it, exercise a wonderful control over both their speech and their passions. Thus, for example, a man who is addicted to the sin of profane swearing will be found to put such guard upon his words in the presence of a superior who detests that sin, that not one oath will escape from his lips. A man who has no command of his temper at ordinary times will appear smooth and unruffled in his intercourse with those on whom he is



dependent, or whose good opinion he desires to gain. A man given to excess in the indulgence of his appetites will be careful not to transgress in company where it would be accounted shameful. Now there is an important principle involved in all this, deeply affecting the moral responsibility of such men for all their conduct. For if they can lay themselves under such restraint—when it serves their purpose—that long-formed habits can be checked and mastered, then we think that even they themselves must admit that they are deprived of all excuse when they suffer themselves to be usually governed by these habits. And if regard for the opinions and feelings of their fellow-men exerts a power over them which the law of God does not possess, then manifestly they are chargeable with the guilt of standing more in awe of men than of God. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) **And when he came home.**—*Home with a bad man* :—It is not pleasant to go home with Haman; but God thinks it good for us to see the inside of a bad man's heart. We shall understand the irony of His providence the better. (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 11–13. **And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children.**—*The discontented man as a reckoner* :—The discontented man is—**I. A GOOD RECKONER, UP TO A CERTAIN POINT.** Look at Haman's statement: Riches—children—position—honour. These represent the ideal of happiness to a large majority of men. The whole is stated correctly, but the result is false. **II. A BAD RECKONER, because**—1. He places too high an estimate on the mere material. 2. He does not take into account the unknown quantity. 3. He over-estimates his own deserts. 4. He is bad at subtraction. He enumerates his blessings as four, and his drawback as one. He subtracts one from four, and makes nothing the strange result. 5. He is defective in multiplication. Haman made more of Mordecai's refusal to render him homage than it deserved. Discontent is always an unreliable multiplication. It makes evils where there are none, and more of existing evils than it ought to do. **III. THE DISCONTENTED MAN UNKNOWINGLY MAKES A GOOD COMPUTATION.** "All is vanity and vexation of spirit" is the statement of those who have taken their fill of this world's good things, and have forgotten God their maker. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 13. **Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.**—*Outward prosperity and an evil heart* :—Haman's misery sprung from his most prominent vice. The avenger did not so much track his path, like an independent retributive messenger, as that it was secreted in his very sin. It is often so in providence. God does not need to stretch forth His hand against the sinner. It is enough that He allows the working of his sin to overtake him. Had there been no pride in Haman's heart he could never have been subjected to this soul-torture because of a harmless affront by an inferior in rank; but forasmuch as he had nursed and cherished his pride to an ungovernable extent, the pain and anguish which he had to endure when it was thwarted and injured was crucifying to all his prosperity and joy. He became his own tormentor. The law is universal, giving to all sin its entail of evil. The sinner may suppose that his sin is not known, and, because not known, that it will escape punishment; but the sin will itself find out the man, and the punishment will grow out of it as a poisonous plant from a hidden seed. Sceptics may theoretically deny the Divine government, but practically it is beyond dispute. By an inexorable law "evil pursueth sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid." Intimately connected with this thought there is another of equal importance—that we are not in a position to judge of the relative amount of happiness or unhappiness in the lot of man upon the earth. Surveyed from without there might not appear to be a more enviable man than Haman. If earthly good could make happiness there was no element wanting in his case. There was ostensibly no comparison between his lot and that of some contented poor man, who, besides meanness and obscurity, has to bear the burden of bodily suffering. Nevertheless you might never get from the poor sufferer under the influence of religion the same confession of wasted happiness and blighted peace that we have from this lordly great man in the high day of his abounding prosperity. Let the outward condition be what it may, his spirit—the real man—rises superior so it, and is not touched by it. But in the other case it was the spirit which was diseased, and which, like the scorpion when surrounded by fire, turned its sting in upon itself. So that, before we could estimate relative individual happiness or unhappiness, we would require to go below the surface of things and look upon the heart. Moreover, we cannot fail to notice that outward prosperity in an unsanctified

heart renders the man more susceptible to trifling annoyances. He becomes so accustomed to what is highly pleasing that a very small thing occasions great uneasiness. While he looks at his good things through the large end of the telescope, he beholds what is troublesome and vexatious through the small. The world's broad way is crowded with eager seekers after happiness. "It is here," cries one, and there is a rush in that direction, only to be followed by disappointed looks and longing hearts. "It is there," cries another, and there is anxious toiling and plodding for its attainment; but the cisterns are found at last to be broken and empty. In the midst of this thirsting, moiling, weary world, Jesus has caused His voice to be heard, pleading and saying: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." (T. McEwan.)

*Vain prosperity* :—The servants of God may be sometimes so foolish as to envy the prosperity of the wicked. But a sure result is before the wicked, and in due time their sin finds them out. They are set in slippery places. We see here the most crafty and accomplished wickedness caught in its own snare, and made the instrument of its own punishment. All its schemes of evil are overruled; all its revengeful and hostile purposes are made to bless those against whom they have been prepared. 1. We see every possible advantage of condition and power conceded to him. God allows the cause opposed to Him to have all the means of apparent triumph and success, so that if such opposition may ever prevail, it shall have the fullest opportunity. When He would show us the vanity of the world He allows it to heap up every possible means of gratification and pleasure. When He would show us the security of piety He permits every possible difficulty and objection to be in its way. Haman shall complain of no want on his side of any instrument which might render his triumph certain. And then, in defiance of all his power and his craft, God will overturn all his schemes. Could the wickedness of man ever succeed, it must in circumstances like his. He was rich; unlimited wealth seemed to be in his control. For a single grant of power he offered the king ten thousand talents of silver, nearly twenty millions of dollars. Not only rich, he was highly exalted in station. No subject of the monarch equalled him in rank or in the influence which his station gave. Rich and exalted, he was powerful also. The king had given him his own ring. All the powers of government in the kingdom were thus placed in the hands of Haman. In this high condition he was flattered and honoured by universal homage. "All the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed," &c. And as we survey his condition we exclaim, "What gratitude such a man must owe to God! What blessings he might bestow upon his fellow-men." But Haman had no heart for gratitude, no love for mankind. He was an enemy to God, to His people, and to His truth. The controlling spirit of his wicked heart was selfishness. "Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished." 2. We see the small amount of Haman's alleged deficiencies. "Mordecai bowed not nor did him reverence." What an illustration of the prosperity of this world. It is impossible that any earthly portion should be free from every cause of complaint. The decay and sorrow which human sin produces must everywhere in some shape be found. It is left as a token of God's authority, as a test of man's submission, as a teacher of contentment and humility in the midst of occasions for pride and self-indulgence. There is to every man a Mordecai in the gate, an unbending and unsubmitive difficulty of some kind in human life, to guard the children of God from the ruin which prosperity would bring, and to awaken the sinful to a consciousness of the insufficiency of an earthly portion, and the importance of something higher and something better than earth can give. Less than Haman's sorrow no living man can have. But this fact of trial in human condition is always a constantly recurring one. It was so here. Day by day Haman must pass the gate, and Mordecai could not be avoided. The sorrow is small, but it is ever present, like a broken tooth, or a missing step in the stairs on which we must habitually pass. It can never be forgotten. A submissive mind receives it as a call for acknowledgment and humility. A rebellious mind makes it an occasion of complaint, and the same annoyance hardens the heart in rebellion and impiety. Let us make a friend and teacher of every Mordecai in our way. We shall never be without him. 3. This leads us to mark the effect of this one exception upon Haman's feelings and mind. This single deficiency completely destroyed all his enjoyment and peace. To make a man happy whose heart is astray from God is impossible. Whatever of earthly bounties may be given, there is the secret feeling of remorse and consciousness of guilt which nothing can silence or dismiss.

The mind is in rebellion against the only power which can give it peace. 4. All these circumstances in Haman's condition showed how small was his temptation to crime. Haman had no reasonable excuse, no motive but in his own wicked heart, for the course of crime on which he was to enter. It was simply the working of malicious wickedness, his own fretful, hateful temper. Mordecai did him no injury, diminished none of his real advantages or possessions. Such is the process of yielding to the suggestions and claims of a sinful temper. It leads us from one step to another in the course of sin, until the sinner is ensnared in unexpected guilt, and entangled in crimes hideous in their aspect and beyond his power to escape. It may be the appetite for gain, the haste to be rich, which pushes him on to every sacrifice of duty, and through every species of fraud and every scheme of attempted concealment, till God suddenly reveals the whole plot and the man is ruined beyond recovery. Let no young man feel that he is safe from temptation to the worst of crimes in allowing the power for a moment of such a spirit. Watch against its first encroachment. Cultivate, as the rule of life, high and pure motives, habits of self-control, refusal to receive affronts or to take offence at the errors or neglect of others. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Poisoned pleasures*.—Give a whole world of pleasure to a man who loves the world and the things of it, he will soon find that something is wanted, though perhaps he does not know, so well as Haman thought he did, what it is. He finds some gall and wormwood that spread poison over his pleasures. All his abundance cannot compensate for the loss of some one thing or other that he deems essential to his happiness. The fact is that the world cannot give a right constitution to his disordered soul, or be a substitute for that Divine favour in which lies the life of our souls. (*G. Lawson.*) *On the disorders of the passions*:—These are the words of one who, though high in station and power, confessed himself to be miserable. His whole soul was shaken with a storm of passion. Wrath, pride, and desire of revenge rose into fury. With difficulty he restrained himself in public; but as soon as he came to his own house he was forced to disclose the agony of his mind. I. HOW MISERABLE IS VICE WHEN ONE GUILTY PASSION IS CAPABLE OF CREATING SO MUCH TORMENT! We might reason from the constitution of the rational frame, where the understanding is appointed to be supreme and the passions to be subordinate, and where, if this due arrangement of its parts be overthrown, misery as necessarily ensues as pain is consequent in the animal frame upon the distortion of its members. Had this been a soliloquy of Haman's within himself, it would have been a sufficient discovery of his misery. But when we consider it as a confession which he makes to others, it is a proof that his misery was become insupportable. For such agitations of the mind every man strives to conceal, because he knows they dishonour him. Other griefs and sorrows he can with freedom pour out to a confidant. When he suffers from the injustice or malice of the world he is not ashamed to acknowledge. But when his sufferings arise from the bad dispositions of his own heart; when, in the height of prosperity, he is rendered miserable solely by disappointed pride, every ordinary motive for communication ceases. Nothing but the violence of anguish can drive him to confess a passion which renders him odious, and a weakness which renders him despicable. To what extremity in particular must he be reduced before he can disclose to his own family the infamous secret of his misery! In the eye of his family every man wishes to appear respectable, and to cover from their knowledge whatever may vilify or degrade him. Attacked or reproached abroad, he consoles himself with his importance at home; and in domestic attachment and respect seeks for some compensation for the injustice of the world. Judge, then, of the degree of torment which Haman endured by its breaking through all these restraints and forcing him to publish his shame before those from whom all men seek most to hide it. How severe must have been the conflict. Assemble all the evils which poverty, disease, or violence can inflict, and their stings will be found by far less pungent than those which such guilty passions dart into the heart. Amidst the ordinary calamities of the world the mind can exert its powers and suggest relief. And the mind is properly the man; the sufferer and his sufferings can be distinguished. But those disorders of passion, by seizing directly on the mind, attack human nature in its stronghold, and cut off its last resource. They penetrate to the very seat of sensation, and convert all the powers of thought into instruments of torture. 1. Let us remark, in the event that is now before us, the awful hand of God, and admire His justice in thus making the sinner's own wickedness to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him. Sceptics reason in

vain against the reality of Divine government. It is not a subject of dispute. It is a fact which carries the evidence of sense and displays itself before our eyes. We see the Almighty manifestly pursuing the sinner with evil. 2. Let us remark also, from this example, how imperfectly we can judge, from external appearances, concerning real happiness or misery. All Persia, it is probable, envied Haman as the happiest person in the empire; while yet, at the moment of which we now treat, there was not, within its bounds, one more thoroughly wretched. Think not, when you behold a pageant of grandeur displayed to public view, that you discern the ensign of certain happiness. In order to form any just conclusion you must follow the great man in the retired apartment, where he lays aside his disguise; you must not only be able to penetrate into the interior of families, but you must have a faculty by which you can look into the inside of hearts. 3. Unjust are our complaints of the promiscuous distribution made by providence of its favours among men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous; that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men: but the allotment of real happiness is never so. For to the wicked there is no peace. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They travail with pain all their days. Trouble and anguish prevail against them. Terrors make them afraid on every side. II. HOW UNAVAILING WORLDLY PROSPERITY IS, SINCE, IN THE MIDST OF IT, A SINGLE DISAPPOINTMENT IS SUFFICIENT TO EMBITTER ALL ITS PLEASURES. We might at first imagine that the natural effect of prosperity would be to diffuse over the mind a prevailing satisfaction which the lesser evils of life could not ruffle or disturb. We might expect that as one in the full glow of health despises the inclemency of the weather, so one in possession of all the advantages of high power and station should disregard slight injuries, and, at perfect ease with himself, should view in the most favourable light the behaviour of others around him. Such effects would indeed follow if worldly prosperity contained in itself the true principles of human felicity. But as it possesses them not, the very reverse of those consequences generally obtains. Prosperity debilitates instead of strengthening the mind. Its most common effect is to create an extreme sensibility to the slightest wound. It foment's impatient desires, and raises expectations which no success can satisfy. It fosters a false delicacy, which sickens in the midst of indulgence. By repeated gratification it blunts the feelings of men to what is pleasing, and leaves them unhappily acute to whatever is uneasy. Hence the gale, which another would scarcely feel, is to the prosperous a rude tempest. Hence the rose-leaf doubled below them on the couch, as it is told of the effeminate Sybarite, breaks their rest. Hence the disrespect shown by Mordecai preyed with such violence on the heart of Haman. Upon no principle of reason can we assign a sufficient cause for all the distress which this incident occasioned to him. The cause lay not in the external incident—it lays within himself; it arose from a mind dis-tempered by prosperity. Let this example correct that blind eagerness with which we rush to the chase of worldly greatness and honours. Let the memorable fate of Haman suggest to us also how often, besides corrupting the mind and engendering internal misery, they lead us among precipices and betray us into ruin. At the moment when fortune seemed to smile upon him with the most serene and settled aspect she was digging in secret the pit for his fall. Prosperity was weaving around his head the web of destruction. Success inflamed his pride; pride increased his thirst of revenge; the revenge which, for the sake of one man, he sought to execute on a whole nation, incensed the queen; and he is doomed to suffer the same death which he had prepared for Mordecai. An extensive contemplation of human affairs will lead us to this conclusion, that among the different conditions and ranks of men the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure equal; and that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, approach, in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other than is commonly imagined. In the lot of man mutual compensations, both of pleasure and of pain, universally take place. Providence never intended that any state here should be either completely happy or entirely miserable. If the feelings of pleasure are more numerous and more lively in the higher departments of life, such also are those of pain. If greatness flatters our vanity, it multiplies our dangers. If opulence increases our gratifications, it increases, in the same proportion, our desires and demands. If the poor are confined to a more narrow circle, yet within that circle lie most of those natural satisfactions which, after all the refinements of art, are found to be the most genuine and true. III. HOW WEAK HUMAN NATURE

IS WHICH, IN THE ABSENCE OF REAL, IS THUS PRONE TO CREATE TO ITSELF IMAGINARY WOES. Let it not be thought that troubles of this kind are incident only to the great and the mighty. Though they, perhaps, from the intemperance of their passions, are peculiarly exposed to them, yet the disease itself belongs to human nature, and spreads through all ranks. In the humble and seemingly quiet shade of private life, discontent broods over its imaginary sorrows, preys upon the citizen no less than upon the courtier, and often nourishes passions equally malignant in the cottage and in the palace. Having once seized the mind, it spreads its own gloom over every surrounding object; it everywhere searches out materials for itself, and in no direction more frequently employs its unhappy activity than in creating divisions amongst mankind and in magnifying slight provocations into mortal injuries. Those self-created miseries, imaginary in the cause but real in the suffering, will be found to form a proportion of human evils not inferior, either in severity or in number, to all that we endure from the unavoidable calamities of life. In situations where much comfort might be enjoyed, this man's superiority, and that man's neglect, our jealousy of a friend, our hatred of a rival, an imagined affront, or a mistaken point of honour, allow us no repose. Hence discords in families, animosities among friends, and wars among nations. Hence Haman miserable in the midst of all that greatness could bestow. Hence multitudes in the most obscure stations for whom providence seemed to have prepared a quiet life, no less eager in their petty broils, nor less tormented by their passions, than if princely honours were the prize for which they contended. From this train of observation which the text has suggested, can we avoid reflecting upon the disorder in which human nature plainly appears at present to lie? Amidst this wreck of human nature, traces still remain which indicate its Author. Those high powers of conscience and reason, that capacity for happiness, that ardour of enterprise, that glow of affection, which often break through the gloom of human vanity and guilt, are like the scattered columns, the broken arches, and defaced sculptures of some fallen temple, whose ancient splendour appears amidst its ruins. In this view let us with reverence look up to that Divine Personage, who descended into this world on purpose to be the light and the life of men; who came in the fulness of grace and truth to repair the desolation of many generations, to restore order among the works of God, and to raise up a new earth and new heavens, wherein righteousness shall dwell for ever. Under His tuition let us put ourselves; and amidst the storms of passion to which we are here exposed, and the slippery paths which we are left to tread, never trust presumptuously to our own understanding. Thankful that a heavenly Conductor vouchsafes His aid, let us earnestly pray that from Him may descend Divine light to guide our steps, and Divine strength to fortify our minds. Fix, then, this conclusion in your minds, that the destruction of your virtue is the destruction of your peace. At your first setting out in life, especially when yet unacquainted with the world and its snares, when every pleasure enchants with its smile, and every object shines with the gloss of novelty, beware of the seducing appearances which surround you, and recollect what others have suffered from the power of headstrong desire. If you allow any passion, even though it be esteemed innocent, to acquire an absolute ascendant, your inward peace will be impaired. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline must never be relaxed of guarding the heart from the dominion of passion. Eager passions and violent desires were not made for man. They exceed his sphere. They find no adequate objects on earth, and of course can be productive of nothing but misery. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *The mission and the curse of jealousy*:—In the formation of character, as in the make-up of the world, nothing is ever lost or misplaced. The heat of the tropics in the belt of the equator makes trade-wind currents, and trade-wind currents make northerly gales, and northerly gales bring hail and snow, and the rivers swollen from the mountain streams flow again into the ocean. There are scavengers on land and sea which consume the world's refuse; there are processes at work in the economy of nature by which the refuse of the barn-yard and the dry bones of the slaughter-house become restorers of the soil and fertilisers of Mother Earth robbed yearly of her life-giving qualities. And in the economy of character we see this same endless chain of results. God does not work at right angles to His guiding principles. When a great law or tendency is boldly thrown out in the material world, we shall be sure, if we look closely enough, to find a corresponding principle in the mental and moral world. Just as there are sharks in the ocean and crocodiles in the jungle, and lizards and snakes and a world of crawling

things about us; just as there are fevers and poisons and dreadful illnesses stored up in certain lovely-looking regions, so there are dreadful passions and instincts, revenges and jealousies, stored away in nature, which look as charming but are as deceitful as Brazilian wild meadow land. All these things have their use. Consider the mission and curse of jealousy. I. ITS MISSION. Have you ever felt in a yacht that the masts and the sails could not stand the strain of wind much longer? But the skipper at the helm laughs down your fears, for he knows how much lead is on the keel, or how much centre-board is down. Bulk is planted in that boat somewhere on purpose to steady it when the wind draws on for a blow. In some such way has jealousy been planted in human nature to steady the character when flaws of temptation or gusty currents of animalism strike us. In its existence we find the reason for monogamy and marriage faithfulness and domestic happiness and concord. Why should we be jealous if the Christian view of marriage is false? God has placed this Cerberus-like attribute, this watch-dog instinct, chained but barking, at the door of domestic happiness on purpose to guard the honour and sanctity of those within. II. ITS CURSE. Any force perverted becomes an evil, and when jealousy steps an inch beyond its lawful limits, then it becomes the direst curse. It is just like the mission or the curse of any strong drug or medicine. Any instinct or attribute which becomes inflamed or enlarged and assumes an undue prominence, causes trouble in the character, in the same way in which any enlarged or congested organ asserts itself with pain and irritation in the physical system. And when jealousy passes beyond its proper sphere and rangles in the nature like some smouldering back-log, it lights up every new object which is thrown upon it. It is like a secret fever, which burns and keeps one hot amid all sorts of cool surroundings, as when Haman said, "Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." It assumes many varying forms. It appears as tribe jealousy with its clannish smallness; it appears in the countless bickerings of society, in the pride of caste, and in that vulgar pride which rejoices in trampling upon caste; it is the great motive power of ambitious and scheming women; it gives the cud of reflection to innumerable artists, painters, musicians, and business men. It is with the physician in consultation with his fellow physician as they finger the pulse of their dying patient. It is with the warring lawyers, in strife over the sentence upon the accused murderer; it defiles the sacred chancel, it defiles the pulpit steps; it makes us think hard things of our brethren. In all these instances it is a moral malaria within the soul. It is the sight of the hated Mordecai sitting at the gate. The old Goth Alaric was called the scourge of God, as he came thundering down the plains of Lombardy. But jealousy is a greater scourge than the old Goth. It is the root of all our domestic troubles. Jealousy means pride; it means selfishness; it means inordinate self-conceit; it means being first all the time; it means a blighted life and a miserable old age. If you want to please yourself you can count up what you save and all you have got, as Haman did, and yet all this will avail you nothing every time you see the one you are jealous of sitting where you want to be. But if you cast these demons out—jealousy, selfishness, self-conceit—if you sink yourself and throw overboard for ever this thought of always being first, a whole new world of life and honour will be before you. (*W. Wilberforce Newton.*)

*The festering thorn that poisons the body:*—It does not take much to spoil a man's life. One little thing may mar his usefulness and the veriest trifle may destroy his peace. The record of lost men will be a record of apparent trifles. "One thing lacking" will be the keynote of the wail of hell, as it is the cry of those who have slipped down when they have reached the topmost rung but one of the ladder of life's ambition. This man would have been the greatest of senators but for one infirmity. He has brilliance, power, eloquence, wisdom, but he has no stability. That man would have been the greatest soldier. He has courage, knowledge, skill, self-denial, but he has an unbridled temper. And so it is in every grade of life. In Haman we have a notable example of a worldly life, and a potent instance of the working of sin, sending its poisonous influence through a man's character until it works out its own deadly end. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." We have the history of sin in the world exemplified in this individual man. I. THE POISON LATENT. There is not a thing on earth but is poisoned. We attain learning, and while attaining it we swallow the poison with which it is infected. We derive honour, but at the same time we lay hold of the seeds of misery which accompany it. Heavy is the head that wears a crown. The baton

of power is a symbol of weariness. The seat of honour is a seat of persecution. There is a great system of compensation in life which makes men much more nearly equal than they appear to be. II. NOTICE THE SORE FESTERING. This festering grievance was nothing but a sentimental fancy. And such are most of our festering sores. Mental, moral, or bodily maladies are soon got rid of, but visionary troubles—never. A man will recover after small-pox or fever; he will revive after bereavement or sorrow; he will be cheerful after the loss of a leg or the ruin of his pecuniary affairs. But once let him get a sentimental grievance, and he is never the same again. III. NOTICE THE SORE WORKING. Death. (*J. J. S. Bird.*) *The ruinous nature of discontent*:—In treating upon these words I shall endeavour to show—I. THAT THE DISCONTENT THEY EXPRESS IS COMMON WITH PERSONS IN EVERY POSSIBLE CONDITION OF LIFE. II. ITS EVIL AND RUINOUS NATURE. III. ITS CONTRARIETY TO THE CHRISTIAN TEMPER. (*W. Richardson.*) *Human limitations*:—Is there not a gnawing worm in the heart of every joy? Is there not a Mordecai in the way of every ambitious man? We cannot have all things exactly our own way; there is one nail we cannot extract, one lock we cannot undo, one gate we cannot open, one claim we cannot pacify. In every path there would seem to be a deep, gaping grave which even mountains cannot fill up. How near are some men to perfect bliss! If but one thorn could be extracted, then the men themselves would be safe in heaven; but that one thorn abides to remind them of their limitations, and to sting them with a useful sense of disappointment. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Haman's confession*:—This confession is calculated to impress two things upon us. I. THAT MATERIAL THINGS CANNOT MAKE US HAPPY. II. THAT HUMAN HAPPINESS IS ALL TOO EASILY DESTROYED. The work of destruction is, in general, easy. What is a flower worth after you roughly plant your foot upon it? What damage is done to a fair picture by throwing a bottle of ink against it! A servant can by mistake burn in a few minutes a MS. on which years of study were expended by her master. A succession of strokes with a hammer soon disfigure the most skilful and costly piece of furniture that ever was made; and it cannot have escaped the notice of any thoughtful man that human happiness is a flower of amazing delicacy. It takes but little to lay it low. A headache or the scratch of a pin unfits us for enjoying ourselves. An unkind remark renders us miserable for days. A disappointment does the same; and so with scores of other things. Mordecai's want of respect was in itself a small matter; but it sadly interfered with Haman's enjoyment. It had the effect of neutralising, and more than neutralising, all the felicities of his office and condition. He may be compared to the owner of a mansion sitting at a blind window seeing nothing, and all the while there are windows in every room from which excellent views of the surrounding scenery can be obtained if he would only place himself at them and look through them. Haman made the mistake—1. Of thinking too much about Mordecai's refusal to pay him the honour to which he considered he was entitled. 2. Of setting too high a value on the respect of Mordecai. (*Homilist.*) *Things that ought to be unnecessary for happiness*:—A forcible writer of our day has some remarks to the point which will well bear quotation—a few words only being altered. He is speaking of the great Lord Bacon. After describing the chancellor's strenuous efforts within his library, where his rare powers were guided by an enlarged philanthropy and a sincere love of truth, this writer observes: "Far different was the situation of the great philosopher when he came forth from his study and laboratory to mingle with the crowd which filled the galleries of Whitehall. In all that crowd there was no man equally qualified to render great and lasting services to mankind. But in all that crowd there was not a heart more set on things which no man ought to suffer to be necessary to his happiness—on things which can often be obtained only by the sacrifice of integrity and honour. To be the leader of the human race in the career of improvement . . . to be revered by the latest generations as the most illustrious among the benefactors of mankind—all this was within his reach. But all this availed him nothing, while some quibbling special pleader was promoted before him to the bench, while some obscure commoner took precedence of him by virtue of a purchased coronet . . . while some buffoon, versed in all the latest scandal of the court, could draw a louder laugh from the king." This illustration shows how the profoundest intellect may be enslaved by a puerile self-conceit. It shows that refined mental power, together with exalted rank, immense reputation, European greatness (in fact or in tendency), may yet be coupled with a wretched, drivelling idolatry of toys and follies. And the difference is soon reached; we see that the

soul of man is too capacious to be filled by the largest gifts of earth, and that time will not satisfy the cravings of a spirit made for eternity. *Wealth not happiness*:—Haman's wealth, honour, power, palace, friends, &c., failed to satisfy and make him happy. "There be as many miseries beyond riches, as on this side of them." "Pleasure is like lightning, a flash and away. The world is like an artichoke—nine parts of it are unprofitable leaves; about it there is a little picking meat, and, in the midst, there is a core enough to choke them that devour it." It may be said of the world, as of Athens, "It is a fine place to pass through, for there is much to be learned there; but it is a bad place to live at, there are so many dangers in it." The pleasures of sin are momentary and unsatisfying; its punishment is eternal and terrible. Adrian, a pope of Rome, said, "I had great hardships and troubles in early life, but none gave me such misery as the papal crown." Diocletian, a Roman emperor, gave up his sovereignty, and retired to private life for comfort and happiness. It would be very foolish to pay genuine golden sovereigns for base counterfeit farthings. It is incredible that an angel should come from heaven to seek enjoyment with a baby's toys. And the soul should seek satisfaction and blessing from God. (*H. Burton.*) *Unsatisfied*:—In the deserts of Central Australia there grows a plant called the Nardoo plant, which although it satisfies hunger, is said to be destitute of nutritious elements, and a party of English explorers once perished of starvation while feeding daily upon it. It is so in the experience of those who find their portion in earthly things. Their desires are crowned, but they are actually perishing of want. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*) *The black ewe*:—Some time ago, as a gentleman was passing over one of the extensive downs in the West of England, about mid-day, where a large flock of sheep was feeding, and observing the shepherd sitting by the roadside preparing to eat his dinner, he stopped his horse, and entered into conversation with him to this effect: "Well, shepherd, you look cheerful and contented, and I daresay you have few cares to vex you. I, who am a man of pretty large property, cannot but look at such men as you with a kind of envy." "Why, sir," replied the shepherd, "'tis true I have no troubles like yours; and I could do well enough was it not for that black ewe that you see yonder amongst my flock. I have often begged my master to kill or sell her; but he won't, though she is the plague of my life, for no sooner do I sit down to look at my book, or take up my wallet to get my dinner, but away she sets off over the down, and the rest follow her, so that I have many a weary step after them. There, you see, she's off, and they are all after her." "Ah, friend," said the gentleman, "I see every man has a black ewe in his flock to plague him as well as I." *Small things annoy the greatest*:—How small things may annoy the greatest! Even a mouse troubles an elephant, a gnat a lion, a very flea may disquiet a giant. What weapon can be nearer to nothing than the sting of this wasp? Yet what a painful wound hath it given me! That scarce visible point, how it envenoms, and rankles, and swells up the flesh. The tenderness of the part adds much to the grief. If I be thus vexed with the touch of an angry fly, how shall I be able to endure the sting of a tormenting conscience. (*Dp. Hall.*) *Worldly possessions cannot give full satisfaction*:—Who that looked upon Haman as he rode forth in all the glory of purple and gold, or as he lounged on his divan in the midst of his friends, would have supposed that he had anything to cause him so much annoyance? And yet is it not always so? There is a skeleton in every house, the worm in every rose, sorrow in every heart. Look into that stately mansion. See how richly it is furnished with finely carved chairs, luxurious lounges, marble-topped tables, and bookcases with rows of costly books. Pictures of the choicest character deck the walls. Busts and antiques are here and there. The velvety carpets feel like a mossy bank beneath the feet. Ask the occupants of the mansion if they are content, and perhaps the owner will tell you, "All this availeth me nothing" so long as my neighbour on the hill has a house larger and better furnished. The wife will perhaps tell you that "all availeth nothing" so long as a certain family is accounted as higher in the social scale than hers; or because at a dinner-party she noticed with annoyance that some one had taken precedence of herself; or because she had not been invited to some great gathering where certain of the *élite* were expected. The absurdities and vexations of the weak-minded and exclusive are more than equal to those of the excluded. The petty social fanciful annoyances oft make all comforts and possessions to "avail nothing" in the production of real happiness. Enter the shop of that tradesman. What a large business he carries on! Yet he in his soul is not happy. He is envious. He will confess to himself, if not to you, "All this availeth me nothing"



so long as a certain competitor in the same business can buy cheaper or make money more rapidly than myself. Go along a country road, and note some pretty homestead nestling among the trees; surely that must be the abode of content and peace! You approach it, and meeting the occupant thereof, you congratulate him on the beauty of his dwelling-place and charm of the surrounding hills; he, haggard and worn, only replies, "All this availeth me nothing." Look at my neighbour's barn, how much larger, and his crops how much finer than mine! So the warrior or statesman, the preacher and the potentate, are alike discontented. Dissatisfied, successful men! The blessings and privileges they possess are nothing; the trifling lack or annoyance is everything. Their state is as sinful as it is miserable. They are lineal descendants of Haman the Agagite. It is not in the nature of worldly possessions or position to give full satisfaction. If they could, the results would have been injurious to man's moral nature. No thoughts of higher things entering man's mind, he would soon have been degraded to the level of the brute creation. (*F. Hastings.*)

Vers. 14. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends.—*Bad advice*:—If a proud man make his complaint to you of his unhappiness, you but make him more unhappy if you advise him to gratify his pride by unreasonable and sinful means. You might as well advise a man dying of a dropsy to pour into his throat large quantities of water. Advise him to mortify his pride, and to learn of Him who was meek, and lowly of heart; to deny himself, to prepare himself for bearing the cross, to take upon himself the yoke of Christ, which is easy. The humble man is always happy. The proud man can never be happy till he is effectually humbled. It is not consistent with the nature of things, nor with the will of the High and Lofty One, who abhors the proud, that the gratifications which pride requires should ever give pure or lasting pleasure to the soul. (*G. Lawson.*) *Women best and worst*:—The truth is women are the best and the worst. Because they can be the best, they can be the worst. Because they can rise to the highest in moral grandeur, in self-sacrificing love, in the things which bring human nature nearest to the angelic mood, therefore they can sink to the lowest, and when "past feeling" can be most like the angels fallen. Thank God that your best friends would renounce your society rather than stand by you in anything revengeful or mean. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1. On that night could not the king sleep.—*The power of a sleepless night*:—A trifling circumstance to record. Ah! how important are little things: the unnoticed things are the life-blood of the world. In a great palace we think of the marble and the stone, the cedar and the iron, but who thinks of the mortar and the nails? And yet, in the architecture, mortar and nails are as important as pillars and columns and beams. Thus in the architecture of the world, and in the conduct of its moral affairs, trifles are the mortar and the nails. I. The first thing I see here is **A WONDERFUL LESSON IN THE ILLIMITABLE PLAN OF PROVIDENCE.** How events ripen to the close! How crime matures itself to its doom! Amazing is the work of providence. You see two distinct sets of actions progressing at the same moment. The election of Esther, the choice of a merely capricious king; the elevation to dignity: the integrity of Mordecai; the ambition of Haman: the desire to crush the Jews; and the yearning desire to save them. All these things are working together. You remember "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And "all things work together for good to them that love God." Calmly and surely proceeds the Divine plan, and, unaware of the Divine idea, proceeds the infernal plan. See how triumphantly Haman looks at the letters of persecution signed with the signet of the king: and see how he gloats as the morning sun shines over the black gallows-tree, and never for a moment suspects it to be his own. The poor blind fool checkmated by himself! ingeniously rearing his own scaffold, and twisting the rope for his own neck. You will perhaps say to me, "Why did God allow all this to go on so far? Why did He not check Haman in the first moment of his invidious attempting? Why is the crime matured?"

And the answer perhaps only pushes the inquiry farther back. "Why did He allow Haman to be near the court at all?" The answer must be, that God and providence are not the capricious and intermeddling agencies you have sometimes supposed: they prosecute their own path, and Satan and sin prosecute their path too. On they hasten, every step hastens to judgment; every movement winds the entangling coil of circumstances more irretrievably around them. II. HOW, FROM THE WIDE SWEEP OF IMMENSE PROVIDENCES WE DESCEND TO TRIFLES! How the scheme of providence includes and encloses the small details of human affairs! I will extract three other lessons—1. How remote, and yet how distinct and minute, are the operations of God's providence! Here was a circumstance connected with the history of the Church, with the preservation of God's people, and with the conservation of Divine truth, and the advent of the Messiah. How small a place is Shushan and the whole of Media and Ahasuerus! 2. See the perfect compatibility, nay, unity, of prayer with the plans of providence. The prayers of Mordecai, the mournings of the Jews, they are the operating causes round the sleepless couch. The prayer so troubled the couch, that the king could not sleep. 3. May I not apply it yet once more, and ask you the meaning of some sleepless nights, some troubled days? (*E. P. Hood.*) *Ahasuerus' sleepless night—the Divine government*:—1. Who is the sleepless monarch on this night? 2. What was the book he read that night? 3. What was the discovery he made that night? 4. What was the result of the discovery that night? Two things, at least, came out from the king's sleeplessness this night. (1) The preservation and exaltation of Mordecai. (2) The frustration of enormous wickedness, and the salvation of the whole Jewish people. Truly, this was a memorable night. From this subject we may learn a few lessons in connection with God's government of the world. I. HE OFTEN WORKS OUT HIS PURPOSE THROUGH THE FREE WORKINGS OF DEPRAVED MINDS, UNCONSCIOUS OF HIS INFLUENCE. The brethren of Joseph, prompted by evil passions, sell him to the Ishmaelites, and he is borne a slave into Egypt. They are free in their wicked counsels and deed; but, unconsciously to themselves, all the while they are carrying out the purposes of Heaven. The same with Vespasian and Titus in their destruction of Jerusalem. Though a spirit most fiendish moved and directed these bloodthirsty and ambitious pagans, yet they wrought out almost with letter minuteness the long-threatened judgment of Heaven. As nature moves on to the magnificence of summer, as well through cloudy skies and thunderstorms as sunshine and serenity, so providence advances its purposes, as well through such a mind as that of Ahasuerus as that of Peter, or of Paul. II. HE ALWAYS OVERRULES THE CONDUCT OF SINNERS FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THEIR OWN PLANS. The very destruction which Haman and his accomplices plotted for Mordecai and the whole Jewish people came upon themselves. On the lofty gallows that Haman had raised for another, he was hanged himself. Thus it ever is. The men of Babel build a tower in order to be kept in close social combination; but that structure leads to their confusion and separation. The Egyptians rush into the Red Sea in order to wreak vengeance on the fleeing Israelites; but the channel in which they sought to bury their enemies became their own grave. It is the very nature of sin to confound itself. Its struggles for pleasure will lead to misery; for honour, will lead to degradation. Sin always conducts the sinner to a result never sought, never intended. What sinner aims, as an intelligent purpose, at the blasting of all his hopes, the loss of all his friendships, the everlasting ruin of his soul? Yet to these every sin he commits is conducting him. Like Haman, every sinner is building his own gallows. Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. III. HE SOMETIMES WORKS OUT HIS PURPOSES BY MEANS APPARENTLY MOST INSIGNIFICANT. (*Homilist.*) *The sleepless night*:—I. HOW GOD OPERATES TO MIGHTY ENDS THROUGH INCONSIDERABLE AGENCIES. We are apt to measure God by standards established between man and man. The Divine greatness is regarded as that of some very eminent king: what would be inconsistent with the dignity of the potentate is regarded as inconsistent with the dignity of God; and what seems to us to contribute to that dignity is carried up to the heavenly courts, or supposed to exist there in the highest perfection. But we should gain a grander and juster idea of our Maker by considering in what He differs from men, than by ascribing to Him, only in an infinite degree, what is found amongst ourselves. It is not by putting unbounded resources at the disposal of God and representing Him as working through stupendous instrumentality that we frame the highest notions of Him as a sovereign and ruler. There is something sublimer and more over-

whelming in those sayings of Scripture, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength," "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things that are mighty," than in the most magnificent and gorgeous descriptions of dominion and strength. Christianity, for example, diffused through the instrumentality of twelve legions of angels would have been immeasurably inferior, as a trophy of Omnipotence, to Christianity diffused through the instrumentality of twelve fishermen. When I survey the heavens, with their glorious troop of stars, and am told that the Almighty employs them to His own majestic ends, I seem to feel as though they were worthy of being employed by the Creator. But show me a tiny insect, just floating in the breeze, and tell me that, by and through that insect, God will carry forward the largest and most stupendous of His purposes, and I am indeed filled with amazement. And is there anything strained or incorrect in associating with an insect the redemption of the world? Nay, not so. In saving the race whence Messiah was to spring, God worked through the disturbed sleep of the Persian monarch, and the buzz of an inconsiderable insect might have sufficed to break that monarch's repose. When God interfered on behalf of His people groaning under the bondage of Pharaoh, it was with miracle and prodigy, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm; but I fall before Him as yet more amazing in wisdom and power, when I find the bloody purpose of Haman defeated through such instrumentality as this: "The king could not sleep," &c. II. THE SETTING UNDER A RIGHT POINT OF VIEW OF THE UTILITY OF PRAYER. It is often objected against prayer that it seeks for miracles and expects God to interrupt at our call the established course of things. It may be that when the Jews betook themselves to prayer, that they looked for visible and miraculous interference, as in other emergencies when God bared His arm in defence of His people. Although I thoroughly believe that were a case to arise in which nothing short of a miracle would meet the circumstances of a servant of God, the miracle would not be withheld; yet I am satisfied that it is not required that there should be miracles in order to our prayers being granted, neither does the granting them suppose that God is variable or changes in His purposes. There was no miracle in His causing Ahasuerus to pass a sleepless night: a little heat in the atmosphere, or the buzzing of an insect, might have produced the result; and philosophy, with all its sagacity, could not have detected any interruption of the known laws of nature. Neither were God's purposes variable, though it may have actually depended on the importunity of prayer, whether or not the people should be delivered. God's purpose may have been that He would break the king's sleep if prayer reached a certain intenseness; that He would not break it if it came below that intenseness; and surely this would accord equally with two propositions—1. That the Divine purposes are fixed and immutable. 2. That notwithstanding this fixedness and immutability, they may be affected by human petitions, and therefore leave room for importunate prayer. Comparatively I should not be encouraged, were I told that what disquieted the monarch was the standing of a spectre by his bedside in an unearthly form, which in unearthly accents upbraided him for leaving Mordecai unrequited. But when I observe that the king's rest was disturbed without anything supernatural; that all which God had to do in order to arrange a great deliverance for His people was to cause a sleepless night, but so to cause it, that no one could discern His interference, then indeed I learn that I may not be asking what the world counts miracle, though I ask what transcends all power but Divine. There is something encouraging in this to all who feel their insignificance. If the registered deliverances, vouchsafed to the Church, were all deliverances which had been effected through miracles, we might question whether they formed any precedent on which creatures like ourselves could justly rest hope. We dare not think that for us armed squadrons will be seen in the heavens, or the earth be convulsed, or the waters turned into blood. But look from Israel delivered from Pharaoh to Israel delivered from Haman, and we are encouraged to believe that God will not fail even us in our extremity, seeing that He could save the people through such a simple and unsuspected process as this: "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The sleepless night*:—There may have been three or four reasons for this restlessness. 1. The care of his kingdom. 2. The revolving of ambitious schemes. 3. His raging passions. His passions often showed themselves in a ridiculous way. When he came back from his Grecian expedition he was so mad at the river Hellespont for breaking up his bridge of

boats, that he ordered his servants to whip that river with three hundred lashes.

4. A troubled conscience. There is nothing like an aroused conscience to keep a man awake when he wants to sleep. There was a ruler who one morning was found with his sword cutting a nest of swallows to pieces. Somebody came up and said, "Why do you cut that nest of swallows to pieces?" "Why," he replied, "those swallows keep saying that I murdered my father." The fact was, that the man had committed the crime, and his conscience, by Divine ventriloquism, was speaking out of that birds' nest. No, Ahasuerus could not sleep. The more he tried to sleep, the wider he got awake. All around about his pillow the past came. There, in the darkness, stood Vashti, wan and wasted in banishment. There stood the princes whom he had despoiled by his evil example. There were the representatives of the homes he had blasted by his infamous demand that the brightest be sent to his palace; broken-hearted parents crying, "Give me back my child, thou vulturous soul!" The outrages of the past flitting along the wall, swinging from the tassels, crouching in the corner, groaning under the pillow, setting their heels on his consuming brain, and crying, "Get up! This is the verge of hell! No sleep! No sleep!" (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

*The sleepless night*:—How many different causes or occasions there may be of the sleepless night! Some cannot sleep in the remembrance of recent sin. Some are kept waking by great sorrow. Some by brain excitement. Some in very weariness of overwork. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

*Sleep a necessity*:—Without it human life would soon come to an end. It would burn rapidly away. (*Ibid.*)

*Men sleep or wake as God wills*:—Kings have no specific to secure healthful rest; rather they are apt to miss the best specific, hard work and a good conscience. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

*Resource in sleeplessness*:—A good book is a better resource in sleeplessness than drugs. (*Ibid.*)

*Divine providence*:—I. Note THE MINUTE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD'S SUPERVISION AND CONTROL. The notion of many is that providence is concerned only with great matters. But those who so believe forget that perfection in anything cannot be secured without attention to details, and that great issues often hinge on apparently very trifling affairs. A sleepless night is in itself no very important thing. Again, it is a matter of little moment what a man shall do to fill in the hours of sleeplessness and keep himself from *ennui*; but if Xerxes had adopted any other plan than that which he followed, or if the attendant had chosen to read from any other section of the chronicles of the kingdom than that which he selected, there would have been nothing to recall Mordecai's services to the king's remembrance. Once more: if Haman had not come to the court at the time he did, and been introduced into the presence at the precise moment when the mind of the king was pondering the question what honour should be conferred on Mordecai, then the first word might have been his, and so the fiat might have gone out for the consigning of Mordecai to the gallows, even at the moment when the monarch was thinking about doing him honour. Now, this history is not exceptional in any respect. It certainly is not exceptional in this particular. You see the same supervision of the most apparently trifling things by God in the biography of Joseph, and there are many striking illustrations of it in secular history. A change of wind from west to east is not a great matter, and yet on such a change as that, at a particular hour of a particular day, the history of Great Britain turned; for thereby the fleet of William of Orange was wafted to Torbay, while that of James II. was by the same means prevented from putting out to sea to intercept its progress. II. But note THAT WE HAVE HERE NO INTERFERENCE WITH THE OPERATION OF THE LAWS OF NATURE, AND NO INFRINGEMENT OF THE LIBERTY OF MORAL AGENTS. We have no record of any miracle in this case. There is nothing supernatural in a man's having a sleepless night, or in his fixing on a certain part of his chronicles to read, or in the coming in of another person upon him at a particular juncture; and no single one of the actors in the case was working under compulsion—each one knew at the moment that he was following his own bent. But it was not less the work of God, or less glorifying to God. Now this non-miraculous providence, if I may so call it, is a greater and grander and more glorious achievement of God's than it would have been if the same results had been accomplished through the direct forth-putting of His own omnipotence. Now, if what I have advanced on this important matter be true, it may cast some light on the way in which God answers His people's prayers. There are those who affirm that to ask God to confer on us a physical blessing is to ask Him to work a miracle in our behalf. Even if I believed that, I would still ask Him for what I need, because

He has commanded me to do so, and I would trustfully leave the method of His answer in His own hands. But I do not believe that to ask a physical blessing from God is to ask Him to work a miracle in our behalf, and such a history as this of Esther confirms me in that non-belief. Then, finally, here, if what I have advanced in this connection be correct, it may tend to reconcile us to the minor inconveniences that come upon us in life. What an amount of fretting we do over little things! We go off our sleep, or we miss a train, or we have to wait for some tedious hours at a railroad station, or we approach the harbour in a fog and have to lie outside for a long while, so near our homes and yet so far from them, or a friend disappoints us and our plans are deranged. Yet why should we be impatient if it be true that even these little things are taken cognisance of by God, and woven by Him for His glory and our good into the fabric of our lives? If we could but pause a moment and say within ourselves, "This is all in the plan of God concerning us," we should at once have self-control. Lessons—1. Think how valuable God's commonest gifts are. Keep your conscience clean, that nothing of guilt may put thorns into your pillow. Take no ambitious schemes with you to your couch, lest you should be constrained to lie awake in the attempt to work them out. Finish each day's business in its own day, that there may be no nervous anxiety in your mind about the morrow. Watch over your table, and take nothing there that will make you restless. Think more of this common blessing of sleep, and see in that one of the richest tokens of the Divine goodness which is not to be trifled with, but to be valued and enjoyed. 2. And this leads me, by a very natural transition, to ask whether you have ever reviewed your obligations to God for all that He has done for you? Xerxes utilised his sleepless hours in discovering wherein he had failed to meet his obligations to his benefactors. But what a benefactor you have had in God! He gave His only Son for your salvation. Xerxes' indebtedness to Mordecai was nothing in comparison to your obligation to Jehovah. Now let me ask, What have you done to Him for that? (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Sleeplessness providentially used* :—There is no reason assigned for this. The king was not afflicted with illness, he was not suddenly seized with any disease to cause this wakefulness, nor was it occasioned by any intelligence of a distressing character, such as that formidable enemies had made their appearance before Shushan, or that grievous misfortunes had happened to any one dear to him. No; but the matter was entirely of the Lord. God has employed sleep for weighty purposes, in various ages of the world. It was while Adam was in "deep sleep" that "one of his ribs was taken," and made a living being and an help meet for him. It was while Jacob was asleep that he was favoured with that wonderful vision, in which he beheld a ladder set upon the earth, whose top reached to heaven—a striking representation of God's providential care for His people, and likewise of that Redeemer who is the way to the Father—a way in which whosoever walketh the angels of glory continually afford him their friendly ministrations. It was when Joseph was asleep that he was directed from heaven to take Mary for his wife, because that which had been conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost. But here God carries His purposes into execution by means of the absence of sleep. He is never at a loss to bring His designs to pass. (*J. Hughes.*) *Watches of the night* :—Had Ahasuerus been a pious man, and acquainted with the Word of God, he would have filled up the watches of the night with religious meditations, or called for the book of the law of the Lord, in which he would have found both instruction and entertainment. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Historical records* :—Nor was the custom wholly confined to the East. The "Chronicles of the Cid," William of Malmesbury's "Chronicles of the Kings of England," the six old English Chronicles, viz., Asser's Life of Alfred, and Chronicles of Eldred, Ethelred, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and of Richard, and "The Chronicles of the Crusaders," of Robert of Gloucester, and Ossian, and the famous Spanish and English ballads, are a part and parcel of the history and literature of our own day. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *A sleepless king* :—In one of the dungeons of the fortress of Glatz lay a Prussian nobleman. King Frederick William III. had confined him there for treason. He had been long a prisoner, and there was no hope that he would ever be released. His only company was a Bible—the book he hated, and never read. But suffering and solitude wore upon his spirit, and he did read at last—till there rose in his soul some sense of a just God, who punishes those that forsake Him. He had forsaken Him—and now he repented of it. One night, by the dim light of his dungeon lamp, he was turning the leaves of the Bible for consolation, when his eyes fell on Psa. l. 15, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt

glorify Me." Then, for the first time since childhood, the proud man knelt and prayed, and the peace of God came into his heart and dwelt there. That same night King Frederick in his palace, like King Ahasuerus, could not sleep. Worn out, he begged the Lord to give him one hour of rest from pain; and his prayer was granted. He awoke refreshed and grateful, and said to his wife, "Who in all my kingdom has wronged me most? I will forgive him." Said Queen Louise, "It is the Count M—— in the prison of Glatz." "Send orders to release him at once," commanded the king. And in a few days the prisoner was a free man, glorifying God for both spiritual and temporal deliverance. *All records before God's eye continually*:—When Ahasuerus read in the book of the records of the chronicles, and there found how Mordecai had discovered a plot of treason against his person, he did not lay the book aside, and slightly pass by such a piece of service, but inquires what honour and what dignity had been done to Mordecai. It seems if the king had thought on, or read of him sooner, he had rewarded him sooner: but God hath ever in His eye all the records and chronicles of His people's actions; He reads their journals every day. (*J. Spencer.*)

**Ver. 3. There is nothing done for him.—Merit overlooked**:—Modest merit is overlooked, while the aspiring, the ambitious, and the time-serving rise to honour and riches. Nor is ingratitude confined to courts. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Ingratitude to God*:—But if gratitude to man for his comparatively little kindness (for man cannot do much for his fellow) animate the believer's bosom, it glows with still more fervent gratitude to God, for the invaluable and merited blessing of salvation. (*T. Hughes.*) *A resurrection of good works*:—Things are done and forgotten, and men never suppose that they will come up again; yet after many days they are revived, and history begins to take up the thread where it was dropped. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's time best*:—But God is never surprised, and the end of all is to make us think of Him. Nothing entered in His "book of remembrance" is ever forgotten. His time for bringing the good deeds of His people to light may seldom be the time we would judge best, but it is always the most fit. Look to this case. Had it been a day, an hour, half an hour sooner, would the effect have been as good for Mordecai or for his people? Would humility, prayer, patience, have been called into strengthening exercise? (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Unearthed*:—The loyalty and faithfulness of Mordecai had not been rewarded at the time. On the human side that might have been regarded as a piece of ingratitude, if not a reprehensible oversight; but on the Divine side it was a prepared cause, secreted and hidden for a long period, and yet waiting, and ready for the accomplishment, at the right time of a beneficent result. It was destined to come to the light. It was a seed-corn buried in the earth, which should bear fruit in due season. In an opposite direction there is the same particular providence often manifested in the unveiling of crime, and the bringing home of guilt to the hearts of those who have contracted it, as in the envy and malice of Joseph's brethren and the avaricious covetousness of Achan. As shells, deep in the sea, grope their way to the shore, or as hidden springs burst their way through to the surface, and form little rivulets, so is there in providence a great law, constantly in operation, for the disclosure of all that is either good or bad in human character or conduct. If bad, it is as though the avenger was tracking the steps of the transgressor, and at some turning in his path, and by some trivial accident, the evil is unearthed, and the doer of it brought to judgment. Or if good, it is as though the rewarder was following in the way of the righteous, and at the best time, and apparently by the most fortuitous combination of circumstances, the well-doing is made known, and meets with its recompense. Even now it is so. But the lines are drawn out far beyond the present, and converge in the transactions of a distant day. (*T. McEwan.*) *Reward and retribution*:—I. IT TEACHES US HOW WELL A GOOD MAN CAN AFFORD TO WAIT FOR THE DUE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS UPRIGHTNESS, AND FOR ANY REWARD HE MAY NEED FOR THE GOOD HE HAS DONE. The conjecture is that six long years had gone by since Mordecai revealed the plot of the chamberlains and saved the king's life, and not even a word of acknowledgment had come to him during all that time. But what we most admire is his behaviour meantime. If he had been a self-seeking man, he could easily have found means to refresh the king's memory as to his services; but he kept silence. If he had been a malignant man, he might have sought what he would, in that case, have called a just revenge for the ungrateful neglect with which he had been treated, by hatching or falling in with some other plot. And then, how well all turns out in the end! How much

better than if the reward had been given at the time! "He that believeth shall not make haste"; God's time is always the best. Righteousness is its own reward, and we are never righteous as God would have us be until we feel this deeply and act accordingly. He who, in God's strength, looks every day on the face of duty, and walks with her along whatever paths her sacred feet may tread, has in his own spirit, in his own character, what soon or late will blossom out into all beauty and grandeur; what will in the end become "glory, honour, and immortality." II. The next lesson is just the opposite of this, viz., "HOW CERTAINLY A BAD MAN MUST BE OVERTAKEN AND PUNISHED!" We say "how certainly" because there is in his badness the root and element of the retribution, and often, without knowing it, he carefully develops and ripens by his own action the retribution that falls on his head. III. FOR THERE IS AN INCRESCENT POWER IN EVIL (as indeed there is also in good), IN VIEW OF WHICH WE CANNOT BE TOO WATCHFUL AND ANXIOUS, LEST BY ANY MEANS WE SHOULD FALL UNDER THE POWER OF IT. The power of it, remember, is very silent and gentle, generally, in its operations. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Pacification of conscience*:—The king was determined to rectify this matter, for he thought that by the pacification of conscience sleep might return. Many men are willing to purchase sleep on high terms. Could the murder but be undone; could the evil deed be but blotted out; could the stolen money be but safely returned; could the cruel word but be recalled; in short, could anything be done that sleep might once more come to the house, and fold all memories and anxieties within its healing robes! (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 6-11. **What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?**—*Pride associated with folly*:—1. In Haman honouring Mordecai we have a remarkable verification of the fable of the dog and the shadow. He gaped after the shadow and lost the substance. Folly generally rides after pride. Haman grew more and more insolent and arrogant as he advanced in wealth and power, until he reached the highest point allowed to him by providence. He did not consider that he who does not climb gets no fall, and that he that climbs too high is sure, at last, to come down with a terrible crash. His temerity is remarkable. Thinking, however, that he was ordered to cut out his own honour, it is natural he should have made the measure large. 2. How completely wretched are the envious and the proud. Pride is the canker-worm of the soul. It always renders us unhappy. It is ever so with those who have not a new heart. The most wealthy and highly honoured are not content. There is something still wanting. There is something they still complain about. They make themselves miserable when they ought to be happy. Oh, how little a thing is earthly grandeur! How little a thing may embitter all human honour and affluence! There can be no happiness on earth till there is self-denial and trust. There is no happiness till we begin to crucify selfishness, and to trust in God as the portion of our souls. 3. We see here how great a misfortune it is to have friends and counsellors who are ignorant, wicked, or evil-disposed. There is a great deal of truth in the proverb, "Save me from my friends, and I will take care of my enemies." It is sad when a man's bosom counsellor is not true and faithful. And there is always danger to be apprehended when the advice of a professed friend is pleasing to our own angry or revengeful feelings. If Haman's wife had been a meek, quiet, prudent, intelligent, God-fearing woman, her advice, at first, had been altogether of a different sort, and her bearing toward her husband, when he hastened home from court, almost heartbroken with disappointment and rage, would have been altogether different from what it was. Instead of adding fuel to his malignant passions, she should have endeavoured to moderate and restrain them. And instead of bruising a heart already broken, by adding taunt and reproach to grief, she should have sought to calm him and make him feel that, with her, in his own home, he was still with friends, respected and beloved, however much he had suffered at court. The husband's fortune is more fully in the hands of his wife than anywhere else. It is hers to make his home happy, and to gird him with strength by sympathy and counsel. When his spirits are almost overwhelmed, she alone, of all human beings, is the one to minister to him. Her nursing is as sovereign to his sick soul as it is for his ailing body. It is her gentle tones only that can steal over his morbid senses with more power than David's harp. And when his courage is almost gone, her patience and fortitude will rekindle his heart again to dare and do, and meet anew the toils and troubles of life. What a misfortune it was that Haman had not a sweet Christian home to retire to after the terrible disappointments and bitter

experiences of that day! Yes, a sweet, quiet home. But you tell me I forget that he was a man of large estates, great honours, and the owner of a princely palace. True, but a palace is not always a home. What is a home? It is something for which many of earth's babbling tongues have no term. A home is not a mere residence for the body, but a place where the heart rests and the affections nestle and dwell and multiply. Just in the proportion that a good woman is a blessing, in the same proportion is a bad woman a curse. Woman's mission is a high and grand one. She is connected with everything that belongs to our race that is noble, refining, and hopeful. Great is the calamity, then, for a community to be under the influence of such opinions or sentiments as are degrading to its women. One bad woman can do more harm in society than a dozen bad men. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *The Nemesis of providence*:—Had he been planning for Mordecai all the time he had been thinking of himself? Yea, verily, that was the Nemesis of providence; and yet, bad as it was, that was only one-half of the matter, for before long he would find that he had also been planning for himself when he had been thinking of Mordecai. The honour which he had designed for himself went to Mordecai, and the destruction which he had devised for Mordecai fell upon himself. The royal apparel was worn by the Jew, and the Agagite was hanged upon the gallows. His head had not been turned by the brief honour, nor his heart uplifted by the short-lived glory, for he was well ballasted, and his people were not yet delivered. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Great changes*:—What a marvellous change! what an unlocked-for revolution! The side of the wheel that was lately the lowest is now the highest. That which was a short time ago shrouded in darkness is now radiant with light! "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." (*J. Hughes.*) *The vain man*:—We see here the working and the punishment of vanity and pride. "Whom can the king think worthy of special honour but myself?" thought Haman. The vain man is always occupied about himself. He thinks about himself; he speaks about himself; he is all in all to himself. The idea never crossed Haman's mind that there could possibly be anyone besides himself whom the king could desire to distinguish by any particular mark of favour. But then how crushing was the order: "Go and do as thou hast said to Mordecai the Jew." (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The Church honoured by her enemies*:—In this manner does God sometimes make the enemies of His Church and servants to honour them. He not only makes the sinners' hands to forge the snares in which they themselves are caught, but He compels them to weave the crown and impose it on the head of the righteous. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Insatiable vanity*:—Haman's answer reveals the insatiableness of vanity. No sooner was honour mentioned than his heart cried, "Let me have it! Make me a king, though it be only for an hour; if without the power, yet with all the pomp and trappings." Will this man never have enough? Never; the food is so light and the appetite so strong that there must be a constant supply. Give him this, and to-morrow he will seek something more. The craving is a disease, an atrophy, a cancer. To enjoy honour and to be satisfied with it, a man must be healthy—that is, humble. Mark the strong delusion: "Now Haman thought in his heart." A man cannot have a worse guide than the thought of his heart, unless God has broken and new-made it. Twice within this single minute Haman was cheated by the thought of his heart. He thought others must esteem him as highly as he esteemed himself; but it is never the case that when a man has a lofty opinion of himself other men have an opinion equally flattering. And he thought that all was going well with him, that this sudden honour would only postpone his revenge for an hour, that by the time he returned from the queen's banquet he would be the happiest man in Persia; but he was just on the brink of perdition. The water is always smooth above a cataract. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Self-flattery leading to self-humiliation*:—I. AN ARTLESS QUESTION ADDRESSED TO CONCEIT. II. THE REASONING OF CONCEIT. III. THE ANSWER OF CONCEIT. IV. THE FEARFUL BLOW TO CONCEIT. V. THE HUMILIATING CONDITION OF CONCEIT. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 12. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate.—*Humility*:—A proud, ambitious man would have said to himself, "No more of the king's gate for me! I shall direct my steps now to the king's palace, and hold myself ready for honour, office, emolument, which surely must now be at hand." Mordecai seems to have said within himself, "If these things are designed for me in God's good providence, they will find me. But they must seek me, for I shall not seek them. Those who confer them know my address. 'Mordecai, at the king's gate,' will still find me."



(*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Honours modestly borne*:—Few can bear honours and dignities with equanimity, even when they come upon them gradually; but such sudden and high advancement was enough to make any ordinary person giddy, to cause him to forget himself, and behave unseemly. What fatal effects upon the head and heart do we often witness in persons who have all at once been raised from poverty to riches and rank. Even good men are not always proof against the intoxicating influence of such transitions. But Mordecai kept his place; like a gallant ship, firmly moored in a bay, which during a flood-tide heaves and seems for a time borne along with the lighter craft, but, obeying its anchor, comes round and resumes its former position. The pageantry of an hour could not unsettle his mind; he regarded it in its true light—a vain show. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. *Before whom thou hast begun to fall*.—*Descent easy*:—The ascent to honour and greatness is steep, and those who aspire after them must climb it slowly, and with difficulty; but the descent is easy, and so precipitous, that when they lose their footing they fall in minutes what they rose in years. (*Ibid.*)

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## CHAPTER VII.

**VERS. 1-6. What is thy petition, Queen Esther?**—*Esther's petition*:—1. When called to speak for God and His people, we must summon up our courage, and act with becoming confidence and decision. Had Esther held her peace, under the influence of timidity or false prudence, or spoken with reserve as to the designs against the Jews and their author, she would have been rejected as an instrument of Jacob's deliverance, and her name would not have stood at the head of one of the inspired books. 2. When persons resolve singly and conscientiously to discharge their duty in critical circumstances, they are often wonderfully helped. The manner in which Esther managed her cause was admirable, and showed that her heart and tongue were under a superior influence and management. How becoming her manner and the spirit with which she spoke! 3. It is possible to plead the most interesting of all causes, that of innocence and truth, with moderation and all due respect. The address of Esther was respectful to Ahasuerus as a king and a husband: "If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king." Esther was calm as well as courageous, respectful as well as resolute. 4. It argues no want of respect to those in authority to describe evil counsellors in their true colours in bringing an accusation against them, or in petitioning against their unjust and destructive measures. "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." 5. It is horrible to think and hard to believe that there is such wickedness as is perpetrated in the world. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" We might well ask, Who was he that betrayed his master, and where did they live who crucified the Lord of glory? Who or where is he that dares presume to say, even in his heart, "There is no God"—that denies a providence, profanes the name and day of God, turns the Bible into a jest-book, mocks at prayer and fasting, and scoffs at judgment to come? And yet such persons are to be found in our own time. 6. We sometimes startle at the mention of vices to which we ourselves have been accessory. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" He is not unknown to thee, neither is he far from thee, O king. "Thou art the man!" And how seldom do we reflect on the degree in which we have been accessory to and participant in the sins of others by our bad example, our criminal silence, and the neglect of those means which were in our power, and which we had a right to employ for checking them. 7. Persecution is not more unjust than it is impolitic. (*Ibid.*) *The prudent management of things*:—I. We see the GREAT IMPORTANCE OF CAPABLE AND PRUDENT MANAGEMENT OF THINGS. Esther's management of these great affairs is evidently consummate. There is an overruling providence, but there is also a teaching wisdom of God, and if we wish to be fully under the protection of the one, we must open all our faculties to receive the other. II. We have in Esther's behaviour a VERY NOTABLE AND NOBLE INSTANCE OF CALM AND COURAGEOUS ACTION IN STRICT CONFORMITY WITH THE PREDETERMINED PLAN. How few women are born into the world who could go through these scenes as

Esther does! How many would faint through fear! How many would be carried by excitement into a premature disclosure of the secret! How many would be under continual temptation to change the plan! Only a select few can be calm and strong in critical circumstances, patient and yet intense, prudent and yet resolved.

III. HER BOLDNESS TAKES HERE A FORM WHICH IT HAS NOT BEFORE ASSUMED: IT IS SHOWN IN THE DENUNCIATION OF A PARTICULAR PERSON: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Strong language; but, at any rate, it is open and honest and above-board—no whispering into the king's private ear; no secret plotting to supplant the Prime Minister. Every word is uttered in the man's hearing, and to his face. Let him deny, if he can; let him explain, if he can. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) Let my life be given me at my petition.—*A plea for life*:—We have the very same cause for urgency of suit as she had. It behoveth us to say in the presence of another King, "Oh, let my life be given me at my petition." There is a royal law, and under that law our lives are forfeited. Life, in the narrative before us, was about to be taken away unjustly—by force of a most cruel mandate; but it is a holy law that dooms us to death. (*J. Hughes.*) For we are sold.—*A plea for liberty*:—We also ought to sue both for our lives and our liberties. By nature we are the bondmen and bondwomen of sin and Satan. (*Ibid.*) Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?—*The doings of a wicked heart*:—I. A wicked heart INDUCES FOOLHARDINESS. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Haman's daring presumption. A wicked heart is both deceitful and deceiving. II. A wicked heart sooner or later MEETS WITH OPEN CONDEMNATION. III. A wicked heart LEADS TO FEARFULNESS. (*W. Burrous, B.A.*) Moral indignation, being commonly sudden and intense in uttering itself, furnishes strong testimony in favour of the universal principles of God's moral law; but we have need to be careful how we indulge in expression of virtuous wrath. It is safe and wholesome for us to pause and ask whether there is no risk that in judging others we may be condemning ourselves. Ahasuerus will feel ere long that he has uttered his own condemnation. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.—*The index finger*:—"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." This is the best way of dealing with every enemy. Definite statements are manageable, but vague charges are never to be entertained. No man makes progress who deals in generalities. The sermon is in the application. The prayer is in the amen. Let us apply this teaching. I. IN THE MATTER OF OUR OWN PERSONAL CHARACTER. 1. Put your finger upon the weak point of your character, and say, "Thy name is Self-indulgence." Tell yourself that you are allowing your life to ooze away through self-gratification. You never say no to an appetite, you never smite a desire in the face. 2. Take it another direction. "The adversary and enemy is this infernal jealousy." Your disease, say to yourself, is jealousy. Speak in this fashion when you have entered your closet and shut your door; say, "I am a jealous man, and therefore I am an unjust man; I cannot bear that that man should be advancing; I hate him; the recollection of his name interferes with my prayers; would God I could lay hold of something I could publish against him, I would run him to death." Yes, this is the reality of the case, God never casts out this devil, this all-devil; only thou canst exorcise this legion. 3. Or take it in some other aspect and say, "The adversary and enemy is this eternal worldliness, that will not let me get near my God." II. WITH REGARD TO PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS. 1. Take it in the matter of public decay. (1) Who in looking abroad upon the country will say, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked liquor traffic"? (2) Or, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked official self-seeking"? 2. Apply the same law to the decline of spiritual power. It is an easy thing to read a paper on this subject, but who names the Haman? What keeps us back? (1) Fear of offending the world. The world ought to be offended. No worldling should ever have one moment's comfort in the house of God. He should feel that unless he is prepared to change his disposition, he is altogether in the wrong place. (2) Sometimes the enemy is doubt in the heart of the preacher himself. The man is divided. His axe is split across the very edge. There is no power in his right arm. When he speaks he keeps back the emphasis. III. WE MIGHT APPLY THE SAME DOCTRINE TO HINDRANCES IN THE CHURCH. The adversary and enemy is this wicked, cold-hearted man. Whenever he comes into the church the preacher cannot preach; he cannot do many mighty works because that man is there, cold, icy, critical. We are afraid to name the adversary in church; we confine ourselves to "proper" words, to "decent" expressions, to euphemisms that have neither beginning nor ending as

to practical vitality and force. We are the victims of circumlocution, we go round and round the object of our attack, and never strike it in the face. What we want is a definite, tremendous, final stroke. Esther succeeded. Her spirit can never fail. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.**—*Guilt cowardly*.—Haman was now left alone with his righteous accuser. Innocence is courageous, but guilt is cowardly. Men, with the consciousness of having truth and justice on their side, have risen superior to the fear of death, and stood undaunted before wrathful kings. But this man, haughty and hardened in view of the sufferings of others, no sooner sees that evil is determined against himself than he becomes a poor, unnerved trembling suppliant at the feet of her whom he had most grievously wronged. (*T. McEwan.*) *Cruel people often cowardly*.—Very cruel people are sometimes very cowardly. Judge Jeffreys could go through his black assize in the West of England, the terror of the land, manifesting the fury of a wild beast; but when the tide turned, and he saw nothing before him but ignominy and disgrace, he sank into a state of abject fear which was pitiable to see. "Haman was afraid before the king and the queen." As he well may be. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Vers. 7-10. **And the king, arising from the banquet.**—*Unexpected results*.—Man's calculation is always upon the result of his own forethought and skill. There is to be a sure success from the wisdom of his plans. The race is for the swift and the battle is for the strong. Napoleon said, "Heaven is always on the side of the heaviest artillery." The history of human contests would give innumerable illustrations of the contrary. God vindicates His own right to rule by employing the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and taking the wise in their own craftiness. Haman has illustrated this in a very clear and remarkable manner. But Haman's course is not yet complete. "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Now Haman sees and feels the folly of his malice, however well contrived. He illustrates the ever-remarkable fact, that the boldest oppressor of others is the most cowardly suppliant in a returning danger upon himself. Then said the king, "Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified." This closed his career of wickedness. Thus its folly and madness, as well as its guilt and certain ruin, were displayed. "Who hath hardened himself against the Lord, and hath prospered?" "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." The prosperity of the wicked is short; the triumph of the ungodly is but for a moment. We see it thus displayed. Why shall we ever be tempted to test it for ourselves? Survey the whole course of this providence as it has passed. 1. It was a train of very trifling circumstances in each particular. There has been no event in the whole succession in itself of a remarkable or unusual character. 2. It was a very circuitous and remote process. The first step we have seen was very far off from the final result, and could not have been imagined to have any connection with it. Every succeeding step seemed equally independent and unlikely to produce the end designed. A wonderful plan was lately proposed for connecting New York and Brooklyn by a bridge, the foundation of which should be in the park. Who that saw men digging and laying stone in the middle of the park, with no knowledge of the plan proposed, could have imagined that it was the starting of a bridge over water so far distant, and to a shore so entirely out of sight? Yet such has been the course of this providence which we have considered. Stop at any point, and the connection is just as hidden, and the calculation of the future remains just as difficult. "Known only unto God are all His works from the beginning." We may stand and ask, Why should the king have selected Esther at the very time of Haman's elevation? Yet every step is sure and leading forward to the result designed. Nothing is lost, and no error is committed upon the road. This is the wonderful skill of Divine providence. The wheels are full of eyes on every side. 3. It was a perfectly unexpected result. Haman had gone through his whole preliminary course with entire success. But how suddenly and wonderfully was he disappointed. 4. God overturns this whole scheme of wickedness without appearing directly to interfere with it in any step of the proceeding. The whole plan wrought out its own result as naturally as the seed of spring brings forth the summer's plant and the autumn's fruit. The sinner was entrapped in his own devices. The sinner was deluded, by his prosperity, to suppose the race was for the swift and the battle to the strong. And yet the whole scheme was overturned in a moment, without one

violent interruption occurring in its process. This is a most important lesson to us. It must teach us never to doubt the constant presence of God in all our concerns, and His directing power over all events involved in them. A change of wind may turn the dreaded flame from our habitation, a sudden lull may break the force of the tempest, the very means of apparent death may be made the real instrument of security and protection. And all this may be with no remarkable interference of special Divine power. Thus remarkable in the simplicity of its arrangement, as well as in the perfection of its result, was this whole process of the Divine overthrow of the crafty wickedness of Haman. He was caught in the very pride of his power. Haman was made the instrument of exalting the very adversary he so much hated. The very sorrow which he had prepared for his victim he was himself required to endure. Dr. Mason of New York, describes a remarkable scene of which he was an unexpected witness. A butcher in this city, in his rage with his aged father who had offended him, knocked him down upon the floor, and was dragging him by his hair to throw him into the street. He had pulled him to the outer door, when the old man cried out, "There, stop now, I did not drag him any further," and then confessed that he had abused his own father in the same manner, and dragged him to that very spot, with the same design. Such instances, in some shape, are constantly occurring, so that it is a familiar expectation that the wicked shall fall into the pit they have digged for others, and they who take the sword perish by the sword. The result of this whole providence was complete deliverance and exaltation to the oppressed, and complete destruction to the oppressor. This was the final result, and an illustration of that which will always be, and at last surely be, the final result. God will exalt those whom man oppresses. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

*Retributive justice*.—An indestructible connection exists between the violation of Divine law and consequent suffering. A disregard to the conditions of health entails sickness. Poison destroys human life. He who thrusts his hand into the flame invites suffering. A like measure of changelessness marks the operations of moral law. Transgression is followed by suffering. Remorse is entailed by doing what one knows to be wrong. A sense of humiliation succeeds an unreasonable outbreak of anger. Loss of happiness and of self-restraint, and of the esteem of friends, is a portion of the legacy of self-indulgence. A knowledge of this law of retribution is not dependent on revelation. The conviction of its existence is inwoven with human nature. Graven on the conscience, it cannot be effaced. Of the examples of retribution few are more worthy of consideration than that of Haman. This illustrates—

I. THE CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH RETRIBUTION COMES. The harvest is garnered: how shall the grain reach the seaboard? Along iron rails laid down by man. The rice-fields are gleaned: how shall the product be conveyed to its destination? Through canals cut by man's agency. The fruits of malice, of cruelty, of ambition, and of tyranny are perfected: how shall they be delivered to him for whom they are designed? Through agencies he himself has prepared—by some human hand to which a higher power has consigned them. Retribution though prepared in heaven, in coming to earth traverses the road which man has made ready for it. The lightning-bolt, though forged in the clouds, may make as it comes to earth a pathway of the tree planted by human hands. Haman's wickedness is so conspicuous that the shafts of retributive justice are certain to strike him, miss whom else they may. Oppression and heartlessness, cherished hatred and the spirit of revenge, are towering upward to such heights that their summits are hidden in clouds already black with fury. The particular person commissioned of Heaven to mete out retributive justice to Haman was Ahasuerus. This is in accordance with God's usual method of dealing. Though bearing the seal of the invisible kingdom, retribution comes through some agency with which we are familiar. The king showed good judgment in the earlier stages of his anger. "In his wrath he went into the palace garden." Anger which speedily vents itself in harsh words is less harmful to its object than that which is repressed till a settled purpose is formed. Fear the man who can so far control his resentment as to be able to exercise good judgment in deciding upon measures which noiselessly bring the results of deeds home to their author. The steam which is generated so speedily as to cause a violent explosion might have proved sufficient, if properly controlled, to convey a long train, freighted with the enginery of death, to some advantageous position whence every missile would have told with deadly effect upon the enemy.

II. A FRUITLESS PLEA FOR DELIVERANCE. Haman stood up to make request for his life. Verily no man can tell what awaits him! A few days, a few hours, may suffice to cloud the most brilliant prospects. The question, What new requisition is possible?

may be suddenly converted into the anxious inquiry, Can I save anything from the common wreck, even life itself? Haman's prayer, though importunate, was fruitless. The arrival of retribution chronicles the departure of mercy. In the presence of the king even the queen is powerless to rescue the culprit. He is now before the judge whose will is Esther's law. At the day of final adjudication it will no doubt be evident that mercy is powerless to rescue those who have incurred "the wrath of the Lamb." When mercy is driven to assume an attitude of vengeance, hope is for ever extinguished. III. THE SIGNS OF COMING DOOM. Haman's sinful career must be checked, or the queen must perish. Wickedness unchecked would ultimately extinguish goodness. Thistles and grass cannot continuously occupy the same soil, nor is it doubtful which would gain the mastery. "As the word went out of the king's mouth they covered Haman's face." Guilt is left to bear the penalty alone. Alas, the heartlessness of those who are comrades in iniquity! No ingratitude surpasses that of those who have been associated in wickedness. To be deserted in the critical hour is the fate of those who have violated Divine commands. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai." He is snared in his own devices. The arrow he directed at another has rebounded, causing his own death. The cannon which, loaded to the muzzle, was to annihilate his enemy, has recoiled, crushing him beneath its ponderous wheels. "As Haman brewed, so he drank." "He made his bed, and he lay in it." Cruelty displayed can have but one issue—cruelty endured. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *The fear, the folly, and the doom of the evil-doer:—*

I. THE EVIL-DOER RECEIVES WARNING. "Haman saw that there was evil determined against him by the king." He clearly heard the sound of the avenging deity though his feet might be shod with wool. Evil-doers receive warning. Nature gives warning. Revelation gives warning. History gives warning. II. THE FOOLISH EVIL-DOER WORKS HIS OWN DESTRUCTION. The very means Haman took to save his life was the means of bringing about his speedy execution. III. THE EVIL-DOER RAISES STRIKING EVIDENCE OF HIS OWN GUILT. "Behold the gallows fifty feet high," &c. IV. THE EVIL-DOER IS PRACTICALLY HIS OWN EXECUTIONER. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai." (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The wicked overthrown:—*This great fact of Divine government we constantly forget. The person of the Deity is invisible. His ways and plans are not governed by the principles or the expectations of men. But the government is still on His shoulders, and He upholdeth all things by the word of His power. The history of Haman shows us how completely God controls the wicked and makes their crafty and malicious plans result in their own overthrow and ruin. But we come now to consider the peculiar method which God adopted for his overthrow. It is a wonderful illustration of the Divine providence in its minuteness of application. The successive steps in this scheme of counteraction are very minute. It is a regular arrangement of mining and countermining, as in military assaults and sieges. Each successive step is taken in direct reference to the previous motion of the antagonist, and as secretly as possible from him. 1. God lays up in store for His future use Esther's unexpected relation to the king. It was a fearful trial of Mordecai's faith and Esther's piety. It seemed an unaccountable and dark proceeding. Their broken hearts both grieved in bitterness over the dispensation. But God was mercifully preparing for the evil to come. The hold which was allowed upon the affections, and the influence which was thus exercised upon the character of Ahasuerus, were very important in the train of results which was to be brought out. 2. God prepared a special obligation from the king to Mordecai. "Two of the king's chamberlains, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus," &c. 3. God interposed in the settling of Haman's lot. "They cast the lot from day to day, and from month to month to the twelfth month." This was a very peculiar interposition. It gave nearly a year's delay to the executing of the plan. 4. God gave great ease and apparent prosperity to Haman's plan. The king granted his request at once, and gave him unlimited power to fulfil his purpose. Thus Haman was enticed forward to perfect security. His success was so flattering to his own power that it led him to an immediate publication of his whole scheme. "There was written according to all that Haman commanded, to the governors that were over every province," &c. 5. God endowed Esther with singular wisdom in arranging her scheme of argument and defence. 6. God awakens the slumbers of the king. "On that night the king could not sleep." What trifling incidents does God employ to accomplish His great results! You will sometimes hear of His providence as if it were only concerned in

what men call great events; but there are no distinctions of great and little in human events before God. Never be deluded by any false schemes of men. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the notice of your heavenly Father, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 7. God remarkably employs the waking king. "The king could not sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." This was a singular step. He might as readily have called for any other book. 8. God furnished the very agent desired for the accomplishment of His plan. "And the king's servants said unto him, Behold Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in." Every step appears to be propitious to Haman. He enters instantly, perfectly secure of the triumphant attainment of his purpose. But God had now perfectly prepared the way for Mordecai's exaltation, and Haman, who had planned his death, must be the instrument of his honour. "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." There is providence, and this was its course thus far. Every step is natural, voluntary, trifling in itself. No single step had any apparent earthly connection with the others, in the mind of the one who took it. The threads all seemed perfectly separate and unconnected. But it was a single hand which wove them all. How perfect is the scheme! How indispensable is every part! How clear the wisdom which has ordered the whole! With what confidence we may rely on such a Protector. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. His eyes are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

*The precarious position of princes' favourites*:—Thus empty vessels swim aloft; rotten posts are gilt with adulterate gold; the worst weeds spring up bravest; and when the twins strive in Rebekah's womb Esau comes forth first, and hath the primogeniture. But while they seek the greatest dignities they most meet with the greatest shame; like apes, while they be climbing they the more show their deformities. They are lifted up also that they may come down again with the greater poise. It was, therefore, well and wisely spoken by Alvarer de Luna, when he told them that admired his fortune and favour with the King of Castile, "You do wrong to commend the building before it is finished, and until you see how it will stand." Princes' favourites should consider with themselves that honour is but a blast, a glorious fancy, a rattle to still men's ambition; and that as the passenger looketh no longer upon the dial than the sun shineth upon it, so it is here. (*J. Trapp*)

**For he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.**—*Esteem changed to hatred*:—How easily does he appear to have taken off his regards from his favourite! There was nothing lasting in the bond which united them. The esteem of yesterday was changed into hatred to-day. All their convivial meetings and merry-making, when the city of Shushan was perplexed, were forgotten, and the man's destruction was determined upon with as much zest and zeal as his elevation had been promoted. Such is largely the characteristic of the friendship of worldly men. Close and ardent for a time, but liable at any moment to be turned into enmity. How different from the tie which ought to bind together Christian hearts in the common love of the same Saviour. (*T. McEwan*.)

*Unexpected peril*:—The wicked know not the moment that the mine is to be sprung under their feet. (*Ibid.*)

**Will he force the queen also before me in the house.**—*Suspicious*:—It is the misery of those who have been detected in the commission of great crimes, and it is a just part of their punishment, to be suspected or accused of that of which they were guiltless. But yesterday, all that Haman said or did was viewed with a favourable eye; now, the most innocent actions are construed to his disadvantage. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*)

**And Harbonah, one of the king's chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high.**—*The falling man*:—When a great man is going down, the meanest will give him a push. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

*Fickle courtiers*:—Courtiers are very clever persons, and turn with wonderful agility. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

*Reverses*:—But how terrible are the reverses of princes, and how sudden the fall of statesmen. Wolsey, Raleigh, Essex and Louis Phillippe, are only a few out of many that illustrate how slippery are the steps of thrones and the standings around them. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

**So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.**—*Moral retribution*:—We all remember the ballad of Southey which tells how Sir Ralph the Rover, who cut away Inch Cape Bell, perished with all his crew upon the Inch Cape Rock; and even secular historians have been constrained to remark on illustrations of the fulfilment of this law of providence. Thus Macaulay reminds us that no man ever made a more unscrupulous use of the

legislative power for the destruction of his enemies than Thomas Cromwell, and that it was by the unscrupulous use of the legislative power that he was himself destroyed. And Alison recognises in the death of Murat a memorable instance of the "moral retribution which often attends upon great deeds of iniquity, and by the instrumentality of the very acts that appeared to place them beyond its reach." He underwent, in 1815, the very fate to which, seven years before, he had consigned a hundred Spaniards of Madrid, guilty of no other crime than of defending their country, and this, as the historian adds, "by the application of a law to his own case which he himself had introduced to check the attempts of the Bourbons to regain a throne which he had usurped." Thus, often, in the words of the great dramatist, the engineer is "hoist with his own petard"; and we see that even in this life there is retribution. But it may be said that, though this is observable in great matters and with great people, it is not found in small. And to that I reply that there is nothing small in the providence of God. But others may say that this law is not absolutely universal, and that there have been cases in which it has not been fulfilled. To that I reply that there are such anomalies in God's providence on earth, but the existence of these is only a reason for our believing that the retribution which has not overtaken the sinner here will surely come upon him hereafter; for then God "shall render to every man according to his works." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

*Haman confounded* :—1. Oh, how great are the vicissitudes of life! When Haman thought himself secure, then he was nearest to his ruin. 2. How sudden and astonishing the change that takes place in the feelings of those about the court. Yesterday, everybody envied Haman for his prosperity, but hated him for his insolence. Yesterday, they bowed the knee, and did him homage, but now that they see he has fallen, they are just as hearty in their rejoicings at his downfall. If Haman be going down, they all cry, "Down with him!" And as Mordecai is now the favourite, all are ready to exalt him. The old Louis, dead in Versailles, may rot or bury himself, while the courtier and countesses are making fair weather with the rising sun. 3. Haman pleading at Esther's feet is a proof that "the heathen are sent down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken." The Jews' enemy, and the adversary of the Hebrew orphan, a suppliant at the queen's feet, illustrates how God regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, and scattered the proud in their imagination. 4. Another lesson learned from Haman's gallows, perhaps, better than from any other standpoint of this history, is to beware of the first risings of evil passions. 5. We see again that human prosperity is wholly unavailing in the hour of calamity. The glory of Haman yesterday only enhances his disgrace to-day. 6. It is then an unfair, limited, and partial view of providence to say that God's favours are not wisely and equitably distributed among men. The purposes of God are not to be judged of by the events of a moment, nor by the occurrences that are near together. The chain of providence has many links; some are so high, and some are so far away, that at present we cannot see them, nor can we judge correctly of it till we see the whole chain together. 7. You must learn to discriminate between real and apparent happiness. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

*A warning to ambitious men* :—Let all ambitious men read the story of Haman and take warning. His story may not be repeated in all its Oriental details; yet there remains enough in the tale to remind us that we too are ambitious, that we too may have ignoble thoughts towards our fellow-men, and that even we are not above resorting to the foulest practices to get rid of the Mordecai who stands in our way as a stumbling-block. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

*The law of retribution* :—A proverb says, "Harm watch, harm catch," and it is a true saying. *Haman* :—In the character of Haman there is a singular exhibition of ambition and envy. He was a man without benevolence, justice, or mercy. From the one external act in respect to Mordecai, we infer the fearful depth of depravity within. It does not appear but that his character might have been without reproach previous to his promotion. Exemplary conduct, however, previous to an open act of sin, must not be taken as a proof of purity of character at any time, for the external acts of sin may be compared to the eruptions of a volcano, which sometimes occur only after intervals embracing centuries, while the internal depravity is like those pent fires which lie couched beneath the base of the mountain, where in secret the lava wave is in perpetual motion. From the life and death of Haman learn—

1. That the wicked man cannot go unpunished.
2. That the wicked man will be punished when he least expects it.
3. That the wicked man will be punished by means of his own devising. (*O. T. Lanphear, D.D.*)

*Gallows for Haman* :—

Here is an Oriental courtier, about the most offensive man in Hebrew history.

I. THAT WHEN THE HEART IS WRONG THINGS VERY INSIGNIFICANT WILL DESTROY OUR COMFORT. Who would have thought that a great prime minister, admired and applauded by millions of Persians, would have been so nettled and harassed by anything trivial? The silence of Mordecai at the gate was louder than the braying of trumpets in the palace. Thus shall it always be if the heart is not right. Circumstances the most trivial will disturb the spirit. It is not the great calamities of life that create the most worriment. I have seen men, felled by repeated blows of misfortune, arising from the dust, never desponding. But the most of the disquiet which men suffer is from insignificant causes; as a lion attacked by some beast of prey turns easily around and slays him, yet runs roaring through the forests at the alighting on his brawny neck of a few insects. You meet some great loss in business with comparative composure; but you can think of petty trickeries inflicted upon you, which arouse all your capacity for wrath, and remain in your heart an unbearable annoyance. If you look back upon your life you will find that the most of the vexations and disturbances of spirit which you felt were produced by circumstances that were not worthy of notice. If you want to be happy you must not care for trifles. Do not be too minute in your inspection of the treatment you receive from others. Who cares whether Mordecai bows when you pass or stands erect and stiff as a cedar? That woodman would not make much clearing in the forest who should stop to bind up every little bruise and scratch he received in the thicket; nor will that man accomplish much for the world or the Church who is too watchful and appreciative of petty annoyances.

II. Again, I learn from the life of this man THAT WORLDLY VANITY AND SIN ARE VERY ANXIOUS TO HAVE PIETY BOW BEFORE THEM. Haman was a fair emblem of entire worldliness, and Mordecai the representative of unflinching godliness. When, therefore, proud Haman attempted to compel a homage which was not felt, he only did what the world ever since has tried to do, when it would force our holy religion in any way to yield to its dictates. Paul might have retained the favour of his rulers and escaped martyrdom if he had only been willing to mix up his Christian faith with a few errors. His unbending Christian character was taken as an insult. Faggot and rack and halter in all ages have been only the different ways in which the world has demanded obeisance. Why was it that the Platonic philosophers of early times, as well as Toland, Spinoza, and Bolingbroke of later days, were so madly opposed to Christianity? Certainly not because it favoured immoralities, or arrested civilisation, or dwarfed the intellect. The genuine reason, whether admitted or not, was because the religion of Christ paid no respect to their intellectual vanities. Blount, and Boyle, and the host of infidels hatched out during the reign of Charles II., could not keep their patience, because, as they passed along, there were sitting in the gate of the church Christian men who would not bend an inch in respect to their philosophies. Reason, scornful of God's Word, may foam and strut with the proud wrath of a Haman, and attempt to compel the homage of the good, but in the presence of men and angels it shall be confounded. When science began to make its brilliant discoveries there were great facts brought to light that seemed to overthrow the truth of the Bible. The archaeologist with his crowbar, and the geologist with his hammer, and the chemist with his batteries, charged upon the Bible. Thus it was that the discoveries of science seemed to give temporary victory against God and the Bible, and for awhile the Church acted as if she were on a retreat; but when all the opposers of God and truth had joined in the pursuit, and were sure of the field, Christ gave the signal to His Church, and, turning, they drove back their foes in shame. There was found to be no antagonism between nature and revelation. The universe and the Bible were found to be the work of the same hand, strokes of the same pen, their authorship the same God.

III. Again, learn THAT PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL. Was any man ever so far up as Haman, who tumbled so far down? Yes, on a smaller scale every day the world sees the same thing. Against their very advantages men trip into destruction. When God humbles proud men, it is usually at the moment of their greatest arrogance. If there be a man in your community greatly puffed up with worldly success, you have but to stand a little while and you will see him come down. You say, "I wonder that God allows that man to go on riding over others' heads and making great assumptions of power." There is no wonder about it. Haman has not yet got to the top. The arrows from the Almighty's quiver are apt to strike a man when on the wing.

IV. Again, this Oriental tale reminds us THAT WRONGS WE PREPARE FOR OTHERS RETURN UPON OURSELVES. The gallows that Haman built for Mordecai



became the prime minister's strangulation. Robespierre, who sent so many to the guillotine, had his own head chopped off by the horrid instrument. The evil you practise on others will recoil upon your own pate. Slanders come home. Oppressions and cruelties come home. When Charles I., who had destroyed Strafford, was about to be beheaded, he said, "I basely ratified an unjust sentence, and the similar injustice I am now to undergo is a sensible retribution for the punishment I inflicted on an innocent man." Haman's gallows came a little late, but it came. Opportunities fly in a straight line, and just touch us as they pass from eternity to eternity; but the wrongs we do others fly in a circle, and however the circle may widen out, they are sure to come back to the point from which they started. They are guns that kick! Furthermore, let the story of Haman teach us how quickly turns the wheel of fortune. So we go up, and so we come down. You seldom find any man twenty years in the same circumstances. Of those who, in political life, twenty years ago were the most prominent, how few remain in conspicuity! Of those who were long ago successful in the accumulation of property, how few have not met with reverses! while many of those who then were straitened in circumstances now hold the bonds and the bank-keys of the nation. Of all fickle things in the world, Fortune is the most fickle. Every day she changes her mind, and woe to the man who puts any confidence in what she promises or proposes! She cheers when you go up, and she laughs when you come down. V. Again, this Haman's history shows us THAT OUTWARD POSSESSIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES CANNOT MAKE A MAN HAPPY. There are to-day more aching sorrows under crowns of royalty than under the ragged caps of the houseless. Much of the world's affluence and gaiety is only misery in colours. Many a woman seated in the street at her apple-stand is happier than the great bankers. The mountains of worldly honour are covered with perpetual snow. Tamerlane conquered half the world, but could not subdue his own fears. Ahab goes to bed sick because Naboth will not sell him his vineyard. The soul's happiness is too large a craft to sail up the stream of worldly pleasure. As ship-carpenters say, it draws too much water. This earth is a bubble, and it will burst. This life is a vision, and it will soon pass away. Time! It is only a ripple, and it breaketh against the throne of judgment. Mordecai will only have to wait for his day of triumph. It took all the preceding trials to make a proper background for his after-successes. The scaffold built for him makes all the more imposing and picturesque the horse into whose long white mane he twisted his fingers at the mounting. You want at least two misfortunes, hard as flint, to strike fire. Heavy and long-continued snows in winter are signs of good crops next summer. So many have yielded wonderful harvests of benevolence and energy because they were for a long while snowed under. We must have a good many hard falls before we learn to walk straight. It is on the black anvil of trouble that men hammer out their fortunes. Sorrows take up men on their shoulders and enthrone them. Tonics are nearly always bitter. Men, like fruit-trees, are barren unless trimmed with sharp knives. They are like wheat—all the better for the flailing. It required the prison darkness and chill to make John Bunyan dream. Mordecai despised at the gate is only predecessor of Mordecai exalted. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Retribution*.—A bishop said to Louis XI. of France, "Make an iron cage for all those who do not think as we do—an iron cage in which the captive can neither lie down nor stand straight up." It was fashioned—the awful instrument of punishment. After a while the bishop offended Louis XI., and for fourteen years he was in that same cage, and could neither lie down nor stand up. It is a poor rule that will not work both ways. "With that measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (*Ibid.*) *The purpose of God*.—The wheels in a watch or a clock move contrary one to another, some one way, some another, yet all serve the intent of the workman, to show the time, or to make the clock to strike. So in the world the providence of God may seem to run cross to His promises. One man takes this way, another runs that way. Good men go one way, wicked men another. Yet all in conclusion accomplish the will, and centre in the purpose of God, the great creator of all things. (*R. Sibbes.*)

## CHAPTER VIII.

**VERS. 1, 2. On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen.—Right use of wealth :—**I. We see how, in **THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THE WEALTH WHICH WORLDLY MEN WOULD USE IN OPPOSITION TO THE INTERESTS OF GOD'S CAUSE AND PEOPLE MAY BE WRESTED FROM THEM, AND MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THESE INTERESTS.** The conclusion which we draw from all this is, that the best and happiest arrangement which a man can make with respect to the good things which have been bestowed upon him is that in his lifetime he seek to be personally the dispenser of good to others. If he lives and acts in this spirit, then he will have the less anxiety as to the disposal of what he may be able to leave behind him. **II. The peculiar providence which we see exercised in the case of Mordecai teaches us THAT MEN MAY BE WELL CONTENT TO WAIT, WHILE THEY ARE IN THE WAY OF WELL-DOING, UNTIL THEY RECEIVE THEIR RECOMPENSE.** Worth and faithfulness and humility, after they have been long neglected, are brought into the light, and are honoured in proportion to the neglect which they formerly experienced. **III. FROM ESTHER'S LOVE FOR HER PEOPLE WE TAKE A LESSON.** Then should not this be an example to those among us, who themselves have had their souls gladdened by the grace of God, to be mindful of others who have not been visited so graciously? **IV. THE LESSON WHICH IS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE CONDUCT OF THE KING AS IT IS HERE EXHIBITED.** If one man, for example, has injured another, and knows it, but is too proud to acknowledge it, then he is destitute of the true spirit of Christianity. If a man is engaged in a wrong course of action, and is sensible of it, but will put his soul in peril rather than yield to the remonstrances of his friends, then his pride will certainly prove the ruin of his soul. There is, perhaps, more real heroism in confessing and correcting errors and weaknesses than there is in boldly contending for truth, when we are conscious that we have it on our side. Many voices will cheer us onward in the defence of principles which we defend at some risk. The courage that suffers in a good cause will always get applause. But when I have done wrong, and make confession of the wrong, the men of the world do not sympathise. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) **And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai.—The end in peace :—**But success to faithfulness, even in the narrowest sphere and with the feeblest powers, is uniform and certain, and, as an example, blessed and wholesome. This is the great principle which Mordecai illustrates. **1.** In his case we first see this fidelity for a period exceedingly tried and hopeless. **2.** We see this faithfulness in duty brought to extreme danger. Not only was Mordecai unrewarded, but he was condemned to an appointed destruction. **3.** We see this fidelity in duty completely rescued and delivered. **4.** We see this fidelity in duty proportionably exalted. **5.** We see this fidelity in duty abundantly rewarded in outward, earthly things. **6.** We see this fidelity in duty not only rewarded in itself, and in the person and condition of the man who is distinguished by it, but crowned with eminent usefulness to others. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

**VERS. 3, 4. Besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman.—Counteracting evil :—**It requires earnest and vigorous efforts on the part of the pious to undo the evil wrought by the wicked, and left by them as a legacy to the world. How much thought and research have been expended in this way in answering the works of such men as Voltaire and Paine! The evil cannot be sufficiently deplored, but may it not, in the providence of God, be overruled and sanctified for good? In nature we have opposing forces at work, which issue in greater stability and permanence; and somewhat the same result is secured by the opposition and conflict of minds. By the strain to which the truth is subjected it is put to the test, and whilst what cannot be maintained falls away, all that is founded on reliable evidence is retained, and made on every side more perspicuous, as the pressure of a great need has stimulated the inventive genius of a people to provide appliances to meet it. So has one infidel book or wicked action occasioned the writing of treatises in defence of Divine revelation, or the performance of holy and generous deeds, and the evil of the former has been more than counteracted, and the result proved an absolute boon. In this direction also we may see the hand of God, and praise Him for His goodness. (*T. McEwan.*) **Sin survives the sinner :—**I. **EVIL OUTLIVES ITS FIRST CONTRIVERS.** **1.** Haman is dead, but the mischief he devised still hangs over the Jews. A passing stranger may loosen a stone in an embankment, and go

on his way; but a whole province will bewail his folly. An infidel father trains most carelessly an infidel son; the son becomes an eminent writer and spreads through a whole generation the poison he imbibed on his father's knee. An English colonist, filled with pity for the Caribbæans, introduces negro slavery into the West Indies—doing evil that good may come—and for centuries those fair islands are cursed by his device. 2. Evil tends to permanency. (1) Because of the natural corruption of the heart. (2) This principle is assisted by the solidarity of our race. What affects one affects all. II. EVIL YIELDS BEFORE HOLY SELF-SACRIFICE. Esther was—1. Intensely solicitous. 2. Persistent. 3. Boldly self-sacrificing. 4. Successful. III. EVIL CRUSHED BUT NOT KILLED. IV. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. The folly of infallibility. 2. The power of intercession. 3. The awful nature of sin. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Vers. 5, 6. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people.—*Great changes*:—The world is full of changes. There are no elements of stability belonging to it. When all appears fair and promising, some unlooked-for event takes place, to darken the prospect, and to render it cheerless and gloomy. And, on the other hand, when the atmosphere forbodes great storms, a gale arises unexpectedly, to chase away the clouds, and to pour liveliness on all around us. We find these statements strikingly verified in this chapter. 1. Haman's prosperity vanished away suddenly, and the objects of his deadly enmity rose to power and happiness. "On that day" (in which Haman was executed) "did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, unto Esther the queen." Here she, who had been doomed to an untimely death by a wicked man, is enriched with his estates. How true the declaration of the psalmist, "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them"! 2. Esther was not the only one that profited by Haman's doom. Mordecai also was advanced by it. How could he advance a more deserving character, one who had been more faithful in every duty? Were things properly conducted, such would always be the case. Worthlessness of character would ever act as an hindrance to power, and a life conducted on the principles of integrity and faithfulness would lead to preferment and honour. Such will be the case on a future day. The good and faithful servant shall enter into the joy of his Lord. Esther likewise behaved well on this occasion. She did not forget Mordecai's kindness to her when she was destitute and in trying circumstances. There is a perpetuity in holy affection and friendship which you look for in vain in the children of this world. These may for a season be loud in their professions of attachment; but when it suits their purpose they find it convenient to forget those professions, and allow their attachments to degenerate into neglect and oblivion. But Christian friendship, based on permanent principles, is permanent in duration. The sweet friendship between Jonathan and David nothing could extinguish, no reverse of fortune could even cool. But there is no friend equal to Jesus! the acts of His friendship are unceasing. He is, what every friend ought to be, "a friend that loveth at all times." 3. The Jews also derived great advantage from the death of Haman, for his edict contemplated their destruction. Esther interceded for them, and as far as circumstances permitted, prevailed. She approaches the king again, uncalled, in the humblest manner, and with abundant tears in his eyes. It is a good sign when we feel an interest in the welfare of those related to us, and when we can with importunity invoke the blessings of God upon them. Thus did Esther. She was not more earnest for herself than for her people. Thus felt Jesus. "When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it." Thus felt St. Paul. He poured out his very soul for his people, the Jews, though they persecuted him, and tried to effect his destruction. He tells us that he "had great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart" at their folly and wickedness in rejecting Christ, and that his "heart's desire and prayer unto God for them was, that they might be saved." Are we thus minded? Esther fell down at the king's feet for her people. Have you done so for your relatives and friends? "Oh that" my children "might live before Thee!" 4. Esther interceded not in vain: for the king took immediate steps to avert, at least in some degree, the storm which had long been gathering over their heads. The unchangeableness of the Persian laws was deeply to be regretted, and caused much injustice and cruelty. The law of God is indeed unchangeable, and properly—necessarily so. His commands are based on immutable foundations, and therefore they must be eternally the same. How strangely was this kingdom managed! Here are two different and

contrary laws—authorising civil war from the one end of the realm to the other—one decree authorising the Persians to attack the Jews, the other authorising the Jews to defend themselves, and to slay the Persians. Let us bless God for more rational and equitable enactments in our kingdom. We owe this altogether to His goodness in giving us the Scriptures; for our civil as well as religious light are derived from their sacred page. 5. If such anxiety was manifested for this newly-enacted law to be known throughout the empire, how much more anxious should we be to circulate the Word of God throughout the world! And if it was deemed of such moment that the decree should be “written unto every people, after their language,” how should we rejoice that the great charter of salvation has been translated into so many of the languages of the earth, and that a copy of the Scriptures goeth forth into distant parts of the world for every moment that passeth away! The speed with which the decree in favour of the Jews was to be made known to them deserves our attention. “The posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment—that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.” Was preservation from temporal death of such consequence to the Jews that all this expedition was enjoined that they might obtain it? Of how much greater consequence is preservation from everlasting death. 6. Mordecai, being now chief minister of state, went forth arrayed, according to the dignity of his office, and the people rejoiced at beholding power conferred on one who would use it beneficially. “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” Their weeping endured for a night, and there was joy in the morning. “A good day!” yes! a day of everlasting sunshine, awaits holy mourners, in a future world. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (*J. Hughes.*) *Esther’s patriotism and piety*:—Patriotism among the Jews was not a mere beautiful sunflower that flourished and expanded in days of prosperity, but a strong and powerful principle that displayed itself as much, if not more, in days of adversity. Our text breathes the spirit of the truest patriotism.

I. THE SCENE THAT PRESENTED ITSELF TO ESTHER’S FEELING HEART. What patriotic Christian can contemplate the condition of large masses of our people without being moved to sympathy and confession? 1. Their poverty and privations. 2. Their want of moral and religious influence. 3. Their spiritual wants. II. THE EFFORT SHE USED UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH SHE WAS PLACED. 1. She addressed herself in earnest prayer to the king in behalf of her countrymen. Let us arise and plead their cause with the King of kings who are the willing captives of sin and Satan. 2. She was active in the use of proper and legitimate means to accomplish her heart’s desire. “Prayer without works is enthusiasm, and works without prayer presumption.” 3. She did all in deep humility (ver. 5). III. ENCOURAGEMENTS TO CHRISTIAN EXERTION. 1. The times are favourable. 2. The gospel is admirably adapted to meet the wants of people everywhere. 3. The example of pious characters in all ages from the time of Christ down to our own time, who have felt it their duty and privilege to propagate the gospel. 4. “The value of the soul.” (*C. Hyatt.*) *Esther, an example of intercession*:—

I. ESTHER’S DEEP AFFECTION FOR HER KINDRED. II. THE CHARACTER OF HER INTERCESSION ON THEIR BEHALF. She had singular advantages and great opportunities, and she turned them to the best purpose. III. SHE USED HER ADVANTAGES WITH EARNEST AND PERSEVERING IMPORTUNITY. Conclusion: There are two points of difference between Esther’s intercession with Ahasuerus and ours with the Lord Jesus. 1. She went into the king’s presence uncalled and unbidden; we are urgently invited and commanded to make our requests known unto God. 2. Esther had reason to fear a repulse; we are positively assured of a welcome. (*R. Glover, D.D.*) *Concern for unsaved relatives*:—It is one of the results of sin that it deadens the spiritual side of our nature so that, while in theory we admit the danger of the unsaved, in fact we fail to realise it. How anxious parents are about the health of their children! If they have any fatal disease, what care and pains they will take until they feel that they are out of danger. Or if on a steamer that was reported in the city to be in danger, how distressed they would feel until they learned of their safety. When the ocean steamer *Atlantic* was wrecked some years ago on the Banks of Nova Scotia, a gentleman from Chicago was reported among the lost. Then came the telegram “Saved,” and his name under it. His business partner had it framed and hung up in the store. If the members of a family really felt the true condition of every one in it who is not a Christian, they would never rest until all were safe. But the true condition is not realised. A mother will say, “My boy

is steady, industrious, no bad habits, stays at home, is kind and good." All well. Many a son is the opposite, disgraces his family and breaks his parents' hearts. But is your son a Christian? Is he saved? It would be a pity that a good boy should be lost. When one of the family is lying on the brink, what a concentration of effort is put forth to rescue him from the grave. The ventilation, temperature, quiet of the house; the exclusion of all excitement, consultation of physicians, all the ordering of household affairs to one end. Then in convalescence moving from one place to another. Oh, if the same care and skill and devotion were employed to save the soul as is put forth to save the body, how many holy, happy Christian homes there would be—father and mother, son and daughter, all one in Christ! (*G. H. Smyth, D.D.*) *Neglecting the spiritual safety of others*:—Some of you perhaps remember when you were awakened to your danger and saw your condition before God. Does not the recollection move you for the safety of others? "How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" If the awful fate must be theirs, we would shrink from it. Hagar in the wilderness—"Let me not see my child die." David—"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept; and as he wept, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son! my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Sam. xviii. 33). A boy was once lost in a storm at sea. His mother went to learn the sad story from the captain of the vessel, who barely escaped with his life. Among other inquiries she asked, "Did you see my boy at the time he met his sad fate?" The captain replied, "Yes, he was clinging to a piece of broken spar that hung over the side of the ship a short time before she sank." "Did he speak to you or say anything about his father or me?" The captain said yes, and then a long pause was broken by the weeping mother impatiently saying, "Oh, tell me what he said, one word of my dear boy will bring me comfort." The captain still tried to avoid telling her, but she insisted. "Well, then," replied the weather-beaten seaman, "your boy looked despairingly at me and said, 'My parents never prepared me for a moment like this!' Then a huge wave washed him from my sight." (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 7-14. Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen.—*A monarch's imbecility*:—Always distrust the man who is the victim of circumstances. Great men make their circumstances and little men are made by them. Ahasuerus here pleads his circumstances, and rather than acknowledge an error, plunges the whole empire in danger of civil war. He throws upon Mordecai the duty of contriving a remedy against his own mistakes. I. A WEAK MAN'S SELF-DEFENCE. "I have given Esther the house of Haman," &c. He had given what cost him nothing. With a maudlin tenderness, like that of a drunken man, while Esther is inspired with an almost Divine passion of patriotism, he pleads his affection for her person. A small propitiation for a great wickedness. As if the hero of one hundred swindles flung a copper to a beggar; as if a cowardly murderer gave a crust to his victim's orphan; as if a life-long sinner offered to God the compensation of a Sunday prayer; so Ahasuerus hopes that Haman's death will make Esther unmindful of the wickedness devised against her kindred. II. A WEAK MAN'S "NON-POSSUMUS." III. A WEAK MAN'S REFUSAL OF RESPONSIBILITY. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *May no man reverse.—The repeatable and unrepeatable in human conduct*:—1. There is something in all human action unrepeatable. But the only way of making quite sure that we shall obviate or nullify the consequences of an evil action or an evil course of conduct (if one may express the thing in a strong solecism) is—not to do the action; not to follow the course of conduct. Few things are more melancholy and affecting than the deep concern and trouble of aroused consciences in view of things deeply regretted, but seen to be beyond recall, and, in a large degree, intractable to modification and management. It is easy to touch a spring in a piece of complex machinery where there is force of water or steam pent up and ready to play; but if you don't know all the consequences, you had better not touch the spring. We must not take a morbid view, and afflict ourselves with imaginary fears, and think of this great machine we call providence as if it were full of lurking mischiefs ready to break out at the slightest touch. We are responsible chiefly, almost exclusively, for this—the action in itself, the course of conduct in itself. We cannot control the consequences, and we shall not be accountable for them except in so far as they are the direct and proper fruit of the action. If we do what is right, and wise, and for good reasons, we have nothing to fear. If we do wilfully or carelessly what we know to be wrong, we have every reason to look for

the evil consequences, and every reason to judge that we are responsible for them as far as personal responsibility goes in such a case. 2. This narrative may teach us farther that in the darkest and most unpromising circumstances there is nearly always some way of relief and improvement. How seldom are things so in human life that literally nothing can be done! There is something unrepeatable in all important human action. But there is also much that may be practically repealed. I think we may say that never, at any one time, in the history of a nation, never in the life of an individual, are things so dark and bad that nothing can be done to amend and lighten them. If this were not so, the world would soon be full of the most pitiable spectacles that could be conceived; communities and individuals sitting hopelessly amid the gloom of their own failures. But who knows not, also, that calamities and misfortunes are retrieved, that injuries are redressed, that mistakes are rectified? As Esther set her single will against the deadly edict, and drew from it, as far as her people were concerned, its deadliness, so a single will is often set against a whole system of evil, and by vigorous and persevering assaults it is brought to an end. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *The irreversible in human life* :—The word once spoken cannot be recalled. The deed once done cannot be undone. The book once issued begins to exercise an influence which cannot be bottled up again, but which must go on operative for evermore. The man who in youth sowed "wild oats" cannot stop the production of the harvest which has sprung from his folly. The hasty-tempered one, whose words sank into the heart of a friend and stabbed him with something keener than a poniard, cannot undo the mischief he has wrought. The author of a vile book may see his folly and lament it, but he cannot catch and confine the influence it exerted, even supposing every copy were to be recalled. You cannot stop the ball after it has left the gun. If you shake the dewdrop from a flower you cannot put it back again. "Don't write there, sir," said a newsboy to a young dandy in the waiting-room of an English railway station, when he saw him take off his ring and begin with the diamond in it to scratch some words upon the surface of the mirror. "Don't write there, sir." "Why not?" "Because you can't rub it out." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) **And to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay.**—*War against evil* :—There is not an evil passion or lust against which we are not called upon to do battle, not a temptation which we are not commanded to resist, not a spiritual adversary which we are not required to put forth all our energies to overcome. In our "evil day" we are summoned by our King to "stand for our lives," and be prepared to war against our enemies as though the victory lay with ourselves. God helping us, we will do it. (*T. McEwan.*)

**Vers. 15-17. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.**—*Proper use of power* :—Now let us pause for a little, and take from this passage one or two of the important lessons which it suggests. 1. In the first place, the conduct of Mordecai under the strange revolution which had been wrought in his condition and prospects is full of practical instruction to us. The lesson is this, that advancement in worldly honour and prosperity should be turned to account, by being made conducive to the promotion of the interests of the Church of Christ and to the good of His people. It reflects high honour upon Mordecai, that the first act of authority which he performed in the exalted position to which he had been raised was one which secured the enlargement of the Church and the safety of his brethren. In other hands the king's signet had been more frequently employed to give effect to decrees of violence and cruelty; but no sooner does it pass into his hands than it is used in behalf of the oppressed. Worldly honour and dignity in his case were invested with a value which does not intrinsically belong to them, and which never can belong to them, except when they are made subservient to such ends as he sought to promote by means of them. Now we say that all who have been blessed with wealth and influence may well look to this example and learn from it. The natural selfishness of the human heart prompts men to overlook the miseries of others, when they have gathered about them all that is needful for their own comfort. If they can but obtain the luxuries which gratify the senses, they care not what amount of woe and wretchedness may be experienced by those who live almost at their door. They waste not a thought upon the sad condition of the victims of spiritual darkness. We would remind them, therefore, that there is a luxury, the sweetest and best which wealth can purchase, and which lies fully within their reach—the luxury of doing good. 2. In the second place, the account given in the text of the feelings of the Jews when the edict was issued for their

deliverance, suggests some profitable reflections to us. It caused them light, and gladness, and joy; and the day of its publication was a day of feasting to them, and a good day. But our thoughts are directed by the description to a still higher theme. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth." All mere temporal deliverances sink into insignificance when contrasted with this which the prophet celebrates. The sentence of doom under which we all naturally lie, as transgressors of God's covenant, has been followed by a message of pardon and life through Jesus Christ to all who will accept God's gracious offer. Surely, then, we are warranted to ask, What has been the effect of this message upon you who have so often heard it? Now, according to the views of some, where spiritual joy and gladness are wanting, spiritual life must be wanting also. But to this opinion we cannot give our assent. Various causes there may be for the obscuration of the light of Divine joy in the soul, while there is no good reason for supposing that the soul is still dead in sin. No one who has had experience of the conflicts of the life of faith, and of the power of temptation, will require any formal reasoning in proof of the fact that there may be spiritual life without joy, or at least with not a little darkness and disquietude. Yet, it is unquestionably the duty of all Christ's followers to rejoice in His salvation. 3. In the third place, we may take a lesson from what is said in the text respecting the readiness which was shown by multitudes to join themselves to the Jews, when the king's edict in their favour was published. It may be believed that in some instances those of the people of the land who professed the Jewish religion were influenced by right motives, and forsook their heathenism because they felt that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, was the true God. Zechariah had foretold such event (Zech. viii. 23). It is very manifest, from the language used in the text, that such was not the generally prevalent feeling. "Many became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." The sunshine of the royal favour was now resting upon the seed of Abraham. They were a numerous body of themselves; and now, when they had liberty of action, by their wealth they could bring over to their side those who would protect them. It was good policy, therefore, to profess to be friendly toward them. And so not the fear of God, but the fear of the Jews, moved many to renounce heathenism, and acknowledge submission to the law of Moses. The Church was in one of her prosperous periods, and hence there were strong inducements to the worldly-minded to enrol themselves among her members. Now this is no isolated case. Such things have often occurred, although by no means tending to the advancement of vital religion. For example, it must have often struck the reflective readers of history, as a subject rather of painful than of pleasant contemplation, that the progress of the Reformation in many countries should have been so intimately connected with and dependent upon the belief and practice of the ruling powers. The flowing and ebbing of the tide of religious profession might be calculated too surely from the prevailing sentiments of the court. Thus, for instance, how sudden were the changes which the aspect of the Church in England presented during the reigns of three successive sovereigns. In the brief time of the Sixth Edward, when his counsellors were Protestant, and Popery was disallowed, how fast did the principles of Protestantism spread through the kingdom! Then Popery became rampant again, and the majority were glad to seem to be upon its side. And no less remarkable was the revival of Protestantism during the reign of Mary's successor, Elizabeth. The nation appeared to be born in a day; and again multitudes who had joined in the celebration of the Mass cried, "Away with it!" and became the friends and promoters of the purer faith. And thus, from regard to character, and with a view to maintain respectability and to forward worldly interests, very many join themselves to the Church of Christ without being influenced at all by the love of Christ. Now, if we examine all the circumstances carefully, we shall perceive that we have as little reason to take comfort to ourselves from the external state of religion among us as the Jews had from the apparent respect which was shown for their religion in the days of Mordecai, or as the conflicting parties had which alternately sunk or prevailed in many countries at the period of the Reformation. The worldly and selfish element—the fear of man, and not the fear of God—has ever been too prevalent in moulding religious profession; the fires of persecution being sometimes employed to compel, and the attractions of self-interest at other times to draw men to confess with the mouth what they did not believe in their heart. And thus it is that the numerical force

of Christianity, if I may so speak, is so different a thing from the vital power of it. A profession of Christianity, with some show of reverence for its ordinances, will not carry you to heaven. It will not even abide the trouble of a sifting-time on earth, if such time should overtake you. It will not give you solid comfort when you come, as soon you must come, to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Nothing will avail but the faith which rests on Christ, and which, being the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, makes the possession of heaven sure, by the present foretaste of it with which it feasts the soul. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Light and gladness*.—I. THE FOLLY OF CLAIMING HUMAN INFALLIBILITY. Think of what the king had here to do. His law "might no man reverse." To save the doomed Jews the king was reduced to the absurd necessity, as Matthew Henry pithily puts it, "of enacting a civil war in his own dominions between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms by his authority and yet against his authority." What is not claimed by our sovereigns or legislators is claimed, in matters of religion, by the Roman Pontiff. As a general belief it may be held by Roman Catholics. But in what one law has this personal infallibility been exercised? In the end it must be a manifest failure in religion, as it has been in politics. II. INTO ALL THE LANGUAGES OF PERSIA WAS THE NEW DECREE TRANSLATED. Thus with man's law. Thus too it should be with God's law. Happy day for any nation when in its own language it comes into possession of the Bible, the good news from God. III. THE PROMPTITUDE IN THE COMMUNICATION OF GOOD NEWS. Wonderful the promptitude that marks the postal service of to-day! It may bring its burden to some, but it is a ministry of consolation to the many. It brings the distant nigh. It revives with oil of love the lamp of life. IV. THE TEMPORAL SALVATION OF THE JEWS WAS BUT A FAINT SHADOW OF THE GOOD THINGS TO COME IN THE GREAT SPIRITUAL SALVATION WROUGHT BY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (*G. F. Coster.*) *The story of a great deliverance*.—Some of the most striking illustrations of Divine truth are afforded to us in the incidents of history. It might be too much to say that the Book of Esther is an allegory, but I believe that its spiritual purpose is, that it should furnish us with a most striking illustration of that greater deliverance which God hath wrought for the sons of men through Jesus Christ. I. Now the first thing to be noticed in this story is, THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S DANGER. It arose from the fact that Israel had an enemy at court—"that wicked Haman," who was, in the first place, moved by bitter hatred against the person of Mordecai, but who extended his antipathy to the whole nation to which the object of his hatred belonged. Observe, however, that the strength of the enemy's position rested upon a more valid basis than his own personal hatred. In urging this case against them, he was able to appeal to the laws of the king's realm, and that "it was not for the king's profit to suffer them." We need to point out where the analogy fails, as well as where it becomes instructive. There is no kind of moral resemblance between the Christian's God, and this half-barbarous monarch, Ahasuerus. This man was a capricious and licentious Oriental tyrant, utterly selfish; while righteousness and mercy are blended in wondrous harmony with the attributes of Him whom we acknowledge as King of kings, and who holds our lives and our destinies in His hands. Once again, these Jews were harmless folk, and the charge brought against them, though plausible, was destitute of any such foundation in fact as could have justified severe measures against them. We may despise the moral character of this Oriental despot, and yet the attitude which he, as a king, assumed towards the Jews may well serve to illustrate the attitude which the King of kings is constrained to assume towards those who disobey His laws. Further, though the Jewish people were innocent of any moral or serious political offence, yet at the same time, the fact that they had laws and institutions of their own and that these laws and institutions were diverse from those of other nations, and in particular did not wholly accord with the laws of the Medes and the Persians, placed them in a position of apparent sedition against the ruling power. Here, then, first we have a striking illustration of the relations between the King of kings and Lord of lords, and His rebel creature man. In virtue of the sovereign position which He occupies in His universe, He cannot tolerate anything like deviation from those eternal statutes of righteousness which He Himself has laid down for His creatures; and, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the sinner does break the King's laws, and set His authority at defiance. We also have a determined and malignant foe, "the accuser of the brethren," who first lays himself out to induce us to sin against these eternal edicts, and to form habits of life which are altogether at variance with



the Divine mind, and who then turns round upon his victims and next accuses us to the Divine Being as persons whose very existence in the universe is a source of danger, moral disorder, and general peril to the stability of the kingdom over which the King of kings holds sway. He presses upon the notice of the Supreme Ruler the fact that it is not for His profit to allow us to go on as we are doing. Between the case of Haman against the Jews, however, and Satan's case against us, there is this wide difference—that the charge brought by the enemy of the Jews was morally a plausible pretext, a trumped-up accusation; whereas in the case of the sinner the charge is only too true. If there is one single person whose heart has not been surrendered to God, and whose will is not yet wholly yielded to Him, then of such an one the accusation is true, terribly true, "It is not for the King's profit to suffer him." Let me ask you, then, Have you yielded yourself to God? For observe that if God were to allow men to go on from age to age, defying and disregarding His Divine will and law, He would be permitting His own rule to be overthrown, and would be virtually abdicating the throne of the universe, and giving all over to general anarchy and disorder. Nay, God can never lay aside His claims, and therefore it is not for the King's profit to suffer those who reject or ignore Him. "Has it been for the King's profit that thou hast lived?" If you were eliminated from human society to-day, would it be a gain instead of a loss to the world in which you have lived? You may reply, "I have affections as well as other people. There are many whom I love, and who love me, and whose hearts would bleed if I were taken away; how, then, could the world be anything but a loser by my removal?" Stay, let me ask you, What is the character of your influence and the effect of your example upon those very persons whose affections you have won? Are you doing them harm or good? What fruit does your life bear from day to day? Father, might it not be better for your sons' spiritual and eternal well-being if you were taken away from them? Mother, might it not be better for your daughters, better for your household, if your baneful influence were removed? And you, young man! who are the ringleader of a little band of friends, let me ask, Whither are you leading those young companions of yours? Is your fatal influence dragging them down to ever-deepening depths of moral degradation and sin? Ah! if that be thy case, if thy very friendship is a source of danger to those who are its objects, surely it is not for the King's profit to suffer you. Well, you say, or some one says, "Why does He suffer me, then?" Ah, here is a point to which we can find nothing to answer in the analogy. Let St. Paul explain why God suffers you, "Despise thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Such is the secret of our danger; and now, turning again to our illustration, let us observe the sequel. There goes forth as the result of all this, a terrible edict against these unfortunate Jews, no less than an edict of utter destruction. Just let us picture to ourselves what effects must have been produced wherever the proclamation came. Yonder comes the royal herald into a large provincial town; he blows his trumpet and proceeds at once to nail up his proclamation at the gate of the city, or in the crowded market-place. The news spreads like wildfire, and soon it reaches the Jewish quarter of the city. See the terrified inhabitants rushing about from house to house, and at last collecting in a crowd around the fatal parchment, eager to know the worst. One in a clear voice begins to read the dreadful paragraphs amidst a silence still as death. As he proceeds, strong men begin to weep like children, mothers clasp their children to their hearts in an agony of despair, till by and by, as with one voice, all break forth into a cry of lamentation; they rend their garments and grovel in the dust, utterly overwhelmed by a misfortune so unlooked-for and so inevitable. It is easy to account for their consternation, but it is much more difficult to explain the stolid equanimity with which sinners listen to the terrible threats against them of a proclamation more appalling than that which caused such terror to Israel of old. The dread and righteous decree which must expel the sinner from the Divine presence, and consign him to the darkness of death, may not be carried into effect at once; no more was the decree of Ahasuerus; but, remember, the command has gone forth, the sword of judgment is drawn, and under that most dread edict the sinner is condemned already. "The wages of sin is death." Oh, if there was weeping and wailing throughout the provinces of Persia when that ancient proclamation was read, no less is there horror and fear in the heart of the sinner when, his conscience being roused, he at last becomes aware of his actual state, and of his terrible danger. Too many, indeed, are so absorbed with the passing nothings of this world, that they endeavour to evade all serious thought, and to

forget the real perils of their present condition. But, thank God, it is not so with all. See that terrified jailer of Philippi. Why does he exclaim with such undisguised trepidation, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Surely it was because in his own conscience he had discovered the proclamation. Remember that nothing is gained by shutting our eyes to facts. II. **THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S SAFETY**; for saved, eventually, they were in spite of the foe and the terrible edict of the king. How were they saved? As their danger was due to the presence of an enemy at court, so their safety was due to the fact that they also had a faithful friend at court. 1. Let us consider their deliverer; and the first thing that strikes us about her is the fact that she was connected by a double relationship with each of the parties concerned. On the one hand she was related to the doomed race; she was one of them—a Jewess, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; while, on the other hand, she was also closely related to the monarch. She was his wife. Thus she stands, then, between the two—the monarch and the condemned race—and so in her own person effects a reconciliation. 2. Notice, again, that the motive which inspired her to risk her life was love for her people. One angry word, one look, and she and her people were alike lost; but for love of them she was content to risk her all! 3. She stood before King Ahasuerus, not for herself, but as the representative of her people. She approaches him, not in her royal dignity as queen, but as identified with her kindred. For us, too, there is a secret of safety, and blessed are they who are acquainted with it. Let us proceed to consider how this safety has been secured. We, too, have a Friend at Court, and, like Esther, He is possessed of a certain double relationship. On the one hand, He is bound to humanity, for He Himself is man. Voluntarily He took our nature upon Him, "He was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us." He has identified Himself for ever with mankind; but, on the other hand, He is no less closely bound to the everlasting Father than to us. He is one with the Father from all eternity, the Son of His love, the express image of His Person. Further, observe that it was as the representative of His people that the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to perform the work that had to be done before man could be saved. Queen Esther took her life in her hand and presented herself before the king, in order to save; but our Deliverer has done much more than that—He has not risked, but given His life for the doomed race. Now observe, further, when Queen Esther entered into the presence of King Ahasuerus, we read that she found favour, or grace in his sight; but this favour was shown her on her own account, and not because she was a Jewess. Ahasuerus would scarcely, under the circumstances, have been disposed to listen to such a plea, even when advanced by his wife. What does she do? First she wins the king's favour for herself, and then she is in a position, so to speak, to transfer that favour to those whom she represents. Even so was it with our Great Deliverer when He entered within the veil, with His own blood having perfected the work of filial obedience which He had undertaken on our behalf. He was then most of all the Beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased, but the special favour with which He was then rewarded by the Divine Father was won on our behalf that it might be transferred to us. When the grace of Ahasuerus reached Esther, it reached through her the Jew; and even so when the grace of the Father reaches the Beloved Son as Representative of the human family, it reaches us also through Him. Thus indeed "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." You will notice that this grace thus assumes a definite form in a second proclamation made this time in favour of the Jews, whom the former proclamation had given over to death. This second proclamation, observe, does not override or conflict with the first. The law could not be abrogated, and yet its fatal operation had to be prevented, its condemning force was to be rendered nugatory. Here again we need to call attention to points of difference as well as points of agreement. The Gospel dispensation was not designed to abrogate but to fulfil the law. The law of God must remain unalterable, not in virtue of an arbitrary decree of Omnipotence, but because it is founded on moral principles of eternal obligation; it is only because Christ is "the end of the law to every one that believeth," that is to say, produces consequences greater and better even than the law was designed to effect, that the dread penalties of the law can be escaped under the new dispensation. Now let us observe more closely the nature of this second proclamation, for we shall find the illustration very suggestive. The first proclamation puts the whole of the Jews into the hands of their enemies, and arrays against them all representatives of the king's authority and of legal justice throughout the land. The second proclamation, on the other hand, has the opposite effect, for it puts the law on the

side of the Israelites; it gives them the right to defend themselves. Thus it is that the story of this marvellous deliverance shadows forth ours with strange fidelity. For us, too, there has been issued from the throne of the Eternal Being a second proclamation. It has been nailed to the Cross of Calvary, it has been revealed in the broken body of the Son of God. First, it puts the sinner who avails himself of it right with his God; it arrays all the forces of justice on his side, and enables him to find his surest protection in that which but for the work of Christ must have condemned him; and further, it puts him in a position to rise up against the tyrant sins by which he was previously enslaved, and to lead his captivity captive. From the condemnation of the law and from the cruel dominion of sin the believing sinner is equally delivered by the proclamation made from Calvary. The eternal justice of God, which apart from the Cross of Christ must have righteously demanded our punishment, now secures our safety; and we find now that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Many see that God is merciful to forgive us our sin; but how much stronger is our confidence when we see even His eternal justice, that attribute of His from which we needs must have most to fear, arrayed on our side! And here again I think we may notice, without pressing the illustration unduly, that this second proclamation demanded a certain believing response from the Jews before it could be of any practical utility to them. The favour of the king towards the race was conveyed by the proclamation; but unless the Jews had sufficient faith in the king's word to act upon it, and to arm themselves and issue forth against their enemies, they might still have fallen an easy prey. The proclamation from Calvary is described by St. Paul as "the grace of God which bringeth salvation to every man," but it is not every one that ventures forth upon it, claims justification, and, as it were, takes his spiritual enemies by the throat because that proclamation has delivered them into his hands. Alas! how many are there still who receive the grace of God in vain! But to return to our story, let us follow the second proclamation in its journey forth from the court of King Ahasuerus. In hot haste the heralds speed on their way, for the business is urgent, and the tidings spread from city to city, until they reach the uttermost parts of the great king's dominions. Let us watch this royal messenger as he enters that same provincial town that we were visiting in our thoughts when I was describing the promulgation of that first terrible edict. See, he rides up the street in great haste, he blows his trumpet, and the people begin to gather in a crowd. What is going to happen now? Another proclamation! What is it all about? Some poor trembling Jews venture into the throng in deadly terror, lest it should prove but some fresh aggravation of their woes. "Oh, it's about these Jews again! What more about them? Are they to be given up to us at once instead of our having to wait three or four days longer?" It is in three or four different languages, amongst others in Hebrew, and signed with the king's seal. See, there is one of the doomed race. His eyes fall upon the Hebrew; eagerly he begins to read, the colour comes and goes. "God of my fathers!" I fancy I hear him exclaim, "what is this?" Another glance to make sure that his eyes don't deceive him, and then away he hies to the Jewish quarter of the town. "Deliverance!" he cries, "we are delivered, we are saved, God has saved us!" The Jews rush out of their houses, the whole multitude throng to the market-place. Eagerly they listen as one reads aloud; and as sentence after sentence falls from the lips of the reader, sobs of joy and gladness are heard. Ah, that was a day long to be remembered by all. What tears of joy were shed, what songs of rejoicing were raised, what feasts they held! But what shall we say of the joy of the ransomed sinner when the proclamation of life reaches his liberated heart? He has heard the sentence of doom from Sinai, he has felt his impotence to resist his terrible foes, and has wrung his hands in despair as the iron has entered into his soul. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It may be that his misery is so great that he can scarcely attend to his ordinary business, or even find an appetite for his necessary food; and if so, why should we wonder at it? Are you surprised, then, at his joy when first he reads the second proclamation, and discovers that it is really intended for him? Do you blame him for being excited? I'll answer for it, these Jews were excited enough. How could they help it? And how can he? The Jews, we read, had light and gladness, and joy and honour; and such are the blessed privileges still of him who hears the gospel "report," and believes it. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon him with healing in His wings—joy within, and gladness without; and honour, for are we not children of the Most High, "heirs of

God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"? Honour! Yes, for all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Well, now, that second proclamation has been made to us; the voice from Calvary has been spoken. On the Cross, favour has been secured for a guilty world. Have you received the report? But do you say, "I don't realise it; I am afraid it can't be for me, because I don't feel happy; I don't feel as if I were free from condemnation; I don't feel that I am saved"? Did these Jews of old know that they were delivered because they felt happy? Or did they feel happy because they knew that they were delivered? Which? Thy happiness is the effect, not the cause of thy safety. If thou wouldst be happy read the proclamation. Answer all thy inward misgivings by telling thy troubled heart that the good news is for thee. When we really believe a thing, we cease to look for evidence of our believing it in the effect produced in our own experience. Let me put it thus: Suppose we were to visit that Persian city shortly after the proclamation, and find there an aged Israelite of a sorrowful countenance. "Well, sir," we remark, "this is a day of good tidings: it occurs to us that a more cheerful look might be more in keeping with the occasion." "Ah, sirs," he replies, "this is a sad, sad time with me. I can get no comfort." "Why not, my good friend? Haven't you heard all about the king's decree, and how you Jews are to stand up against your enemies; and don't you know that the king's officers are all going to defend you, and that you are safe?" "Ah!" he replies, with a mournful shake of his head, "that may be all very true, but—but—I don't realise it!" "But what has your realising got to do with it: do tell us, is it true or false? If it is true, your realisings won't make it any truer; and if it be false, your realisings won't make it true; which is it?" "Oh, no doubt it's perfectly true; but still, how can you expect me to be happy when I don't realise it?" Really, if we could have found such a man, don't you think we should have felt something like irrepressible impatience with him? (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*) Many became Jews, for the fear of the Jews were upon them.—*Reasons for uniting with a Church*:—The true reasons why one should unite himself with a particular Church are because, first of all, he is already united to Christ; because, next, the organisation and activities of that special Church commend themselves to him as most in harmony with the principles of the New Testament; and because, finally, he is most edified and sustained by its ordinances and ministry. But to allow fashionable or worldly motives to intervene and become the determining elements is to secularise the Church by making it an anteroom of the world and so subordinating it to the world. One should be in that Church where he sees most of Christ; where he gets most from Christ; and where he can do most for Christ. The Church that is composed of such members will be blessed, and will be made a blessing, not to its own adherents only, but to all around. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

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## CHAPTER IX.

**VER. 1. Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar.**—*Hope and foreboding*.—I. HOPE BLIGHTED. In the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them. The human reasonableness of this hope may be shown—1. From their own numbers. 2. From the insignificance of the Jews. 3. From the known unchangeableness of Persian law. II. FOREBODING REPROVED. How often we look forward to a month Adar, and see it shrouded with ominous darkness. But the month Adar may, after all, be the month of rejoicing. III. TRUE HOPE REWARDED. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The method of providence*:—1. Although, then, as has been already said, the grand design of this whole Book of Esther is an illustration of a retributive providence in working out the deliverance of the chosen people, still it is better for us to note the proofs of such a providence, as they occur, in detail. 2. We see here, as well, indeed, as also in other portions of sacred history, and as the lessons of all history and of every-day life also demonstrate, that God, in the exercise of His sovereignty, uses men of very different characters as instruments for fulfilling His supreme purpose. Both Esther and Abasuerus, both Mordecai and Haman, were Divine agents for bringing about the Hebrew deliverance. 3. These pictures show us that we are to construct men's

reputation for character out of their whole life and principles, and not from any one moment, nor from any word or act. 4. We are here taught to feel the deepest interest in the welfare of our fellow-men, especially of those who may be associated with us, or be bound to us by social ties, or by blood and nationality. 5. I am perfectly sure that in the lives of the men and women as illustrated in the sacred writings we are taught the mind of God Himself, as to the precepts and principles which are agreeable to Him; and that it is in the teachings of the Word of God, and in it alone, that we can find the true principles of all proper reforms. It is in the Bible, and in the Bible alone, we have the principles of happiness—the only true principles of reformation. 6. We see here how great a blessing we enjoy in having mild, equitable, salutary laws, and in having a written constitution, that provides for its amendment, and points out the way for the repeal or alteration of any laws that may be made in haste, or in ignorance, or through party zeal, that are found to be unconstitutional and not for the good of the people. 7. The difficulties of the Persian monarch, growing out of his rash decree, even after the author of it has been punished, are a warning to us to beware of the consequences of our words and actions. 8. This history teaches us to trust in God for the vindication of His own ways and the justification of His judgments against the wicked, as well as in His faithfulness to His people, in remembering to keep and fulfil, at the right time, all His promises to them. 9. The delay of judgment against evil-doers, instead, therefore, of encouraging them to boldness in sin, should melt them to penitential sorrow. (1) For the delay of providence to punish the wicked does not change the nature of sin. It remains intrinsically the abominable thing that God hates. It is impossible, in the nature of things, that sin should ever meet with His approbation. The patience of God, therefore, produces no mitigation of the enormity of wrong-doing. It is no proof of Divine indifference to sin, or of its being a trifling offence in the sight of God, that He does not instantly express His abhorrence of it, and pour out His wrath upon the guilty. Men kindle immediately into a transport of passion when provoked. But God is not a man. He punishes sin not from passion, but from principle—not to revenge Himself for any injury He sustains from sin, but in order to maintain a righteous government for the happiness of His creatures. And the punishment of sin will only be the more severe because of the aggravations of abused mercy. (2) But an evil work is itself a judgment. It was so with Haman. His whole history shows that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall—that God can easily so direct human affairs as to thwart the best laid schemes of wicked men. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Providence—as seen in the Book of Esther*.—From the narrative of the preceding chapters we learn—I. THAT GOD PLEASURES HIS AGENTS IN FITTING PLACES FOR DOING HIS WORK. II. THAT THE LORD NOT ONLY ARRANGES HIS SERVANTS, BUT HE RESTRAINS HIS ENEMIES. III. THAT GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE TRIES HIS PEOPLE. IV. THAT THE LORD'S WISDOM IS SEEN IN ARRANGING THE SMALLEST EVENTS SO AS TO PRODUCE GREAT RESULTS. V. THAT THE LORD IN HIS PROVIDENCE CALLS HIS OWN SERVANTS TO BE ACTIVE. VI. THAT IN THE END THE LORD ACHIEVES THE TOTAL DEFEAT OF HIS FOES AND THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE. Lessons—1. It is clear that the Divine will is accomplished, and yet men are perfectly free agents. 2. What wonders can be wrought without miracles! In the miracles of Pharaoh we see the finger of God, but in the wonders of providence, without miracle, we see the hand of God. 3. How safe the Church of God is! 4. The wicked will surely come to an ill end. 5. Let each child of God rejoice that we have a Guardian so near the throne. Every Jew in Shushan must have felt hope when he remembered that the queen was a Jewess. To-day, let us be glad that Jesus is exalted. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 2, 3. *The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities.*—*The wise conduct of the Jews*.—The Jews acted—1. Wisely. They acted in unison. "They gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives." Union is power: concentration of strength is mighty for good and for evil. How awful the extent of the mischief perpetrated by the evil spirits, because they act in concert—unitedly: whereas disunion would cause even their kingdom to fall. Union and co-operation are likewise powerful for the production of good. Hence copies of the Divine writings are flying to all parts of the world, and missionaries to unfold their precious contents to those who are perishing for lack of knowledge. What would individual efforts do in cases like these? 2. Manfully. "They laid hands on all such as sought their hurt, and no man could withstand them." They were

acting legally: for the royal law permitted them to defend themselves. Trust in God, in His power and faithfulness, is the only source of true magnanimity. It is this alone that makes man undaunted on rational grounds. St. Paul tells us of the ancient believers, that "out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." And this, he tells us, was the effect of relying on God. 3. Moreover, they acted forbearingly, or self-denyingly. They merely defended themselves, and seized not upon the spoils of their enemies: "On the spoil they lay not their hand." They wanted only their lives and their own possessions, and not the riches of their neighbours. We find that great believer, Abraham, acting thus self-denyingly in Gen. xiv. The victory which the Jews obtained on this occasion was a very signal one. "The Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them." "In Shushan, the palace, the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men." At the request of the queen, three hundred more were slain in the royal city. And in the different provinces of the empire they slew of their foes seventy and five thousand. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! Behold the fruits of the wickedness of one individual! (*J. Hughes.*) *Self-help brings help*:—I. DIVINE HELP. In this narrative we see all along that the Jews were helped of God. II. DIVINE HELP FOSTERS AND SUCCEEDS SELF-HELP. Divine help must first work, and then there can be successful self-help. These Jews helped themselves—1. By co-operation. 2. By active agency. 3. By a name of power. 4. By aggressive measures. III. SELF-HELP SECURES THE HELP OF OTHERS. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 10. But on the spoil laid they not their hand.—*Leaving the spoils*:—It is not always good to seize all the money to which one has a legal right. There are many cases in which a regard to one's own credit, and there are others in which a sense of duty, should bind up our hands from receiving what we might otherwise take without injustice. The king's edict gave the Jews the right to take the spoil of their enemies. If they had done so, the tongue of slanderers might have alleged that they had slain innocent persons to enrich themselves. (*G. Lawson.*)

Vers. 17-28. On the thirteenth day of the month Adar.—*A national memorial*:—This national memorial—I. WAS ESTABLISHED BY SUPREME AUTHORITY. II. WAS APPROVED BY A GRATEFUL PEOPLE. III. WAS SANCTIONED BY THE MARVELLOUS NATURE OF THE EVENTS CELEBRATED. IV. WAS HALLOWED BY THE MANNER OF ITS CELEBRATION. V. WAS PRESERVED BY A WISE METHOD. VI. IS PERPETUATED WITH A GOOD RESULT. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The memorial*:—It would—1. Keep in remembrance an interposition of the Almighty, without which the Jewish nation and religion had been in a great measure, if not wholly, extinct in the world. 2. Mark a striking fulfilment of prophecy in the destruction of the Amalekites, who were the hereditary enemies of the Jews. 3. Stimulate confidence in God in the most critical circumstances, and refusal to pay such homage to the creature as is due to God only. 4. Foster that recognition of God in history and providence which men are ever liable to overlook and forget. In these respects it was an institution which should prove as advantageous to after-generations, and even more so, than to the people of God who were then living. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (*T. McEwan.*) *Memorial days, their obligation and manner of observance*:—I. TAKE A VIEW OF THE REASONS HERE ASSIGNED FOR THE ESTABLISHING THE OBSERVATION OF THE DAYS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT. 1. They were delivered from the entire extirpation of themselves and their religion out of the dominions of the Persian king. 2. The destruction with which they were threatened was in all human appearance inevitable. 3. The Jews might plainly discern a special hand of God in the deliverance which was granted them. 4. As this was a signal instance of God's special favour towards them, so it was but one instance among many others which they continually had from one generation to another. II. CONSIDER THE MANNER IN WHICH THE JEWS ARE HERE COMMANDED TO OBSERVE THEIR FESTIVAL. It includes three parts. 1. The natural. Feasting, rejoicing, &c. 2. The religious. Thanksgiving and praise. 3. The charitable. Sending portions one to another. If our gratitude to God on memorial days be sincere, we shall go on to express our sense of great deliverances. 1. By living as becomes those who have received such great favours from the hands of God. 2. We shall be zealous to maintain and secure the inestimable blessings hitherto continued to us. (*Samuel Bradford.*) *A national memorial*:—The feast instituted by Mordecai was designed to be—1. A

memorial of REST. II. A memorial of JOY. III. A memorial of TRIUMPH. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *The Feast of Purim*:—Looking at the establishment of Purim, we are struck—I. WITH THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF A FEAST OF THIS SORT. II. THERE IS ALSO AN EDUCATIONAL VALUE IN SUCH A FEAST. All the education of a child is not comprised in what he receives at school. He learns much in the home. He is greatly affected by what he sees on the streets. Dr. Andrew Reid tells us how profoundly he was moved by the sight of the statue of John Howard in St. Paul's Cathedral, and traces to that the benevolent purpose of his life, which ended in the establishment of so many asylums for orphans and imbeciles. So we ought to be careful what sort of men those are whom we allow to be honoured in that way. For every one who looks upon a statue is moved to ask, "Whose is it? what was his character? what was his history? and why has he been honoured thus?" And the answers will be a part of the education of those who put the questions, stirring their ambition or firing their enthusiasm. It is the same with national holidays. The Passover, &c. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Different means of commemorating great events*:—Different means have been employed by different nations and in different ages to perpetuate the memory of great events. We are told (Gen. xxxi. 45): "Jacob took a stone and set it up for a pillar." Again (Gen. v. 51). Achan and his family. The king of Ai. Absalom. Alexander the Great caused a tumulus to be erected over the grave of his friend Hephæstion, costing a million and a half of dollars. Virgil makes mention of memorial stones, as does also Homer. Standing-stones, or "menhirs," were also erected in memorial of particular events; and stone circles, constructed with the same design most probably, were so numerous that they may be found even yet in almost every country—in the Orkneys, in Russia, in Hindustan, in Africa, in Greenland, in America, in all parts of Europe. The most remarkable are Stonehenge and Abury, in England. As a means of transmitting events to succeeding generations, a simple ceremony committed to those who sympathise with the cause in which the observance originated is far more effective than even the most imposing monumental structure which art has devised, strength erected, or wealth adorned. The latter is dumb; the former has loving hearts and living tongues to perpetuate the memory of deeds that once stirred human souls and distilled blessings upon the world. The celebration of the 4th of July is likely to prove more satisfactory, as a memorial of a national birthday, than any other monument which the energy and liberality of the American people could have reared. In the rites connected with the Feast of Purim, Mordecai and Esther have a more enduring monument than the Egyptian monarch who erected the pyramid of Gizeh, or the Pharaoh who constructed the marvellous labyrinth. In confirmation of the theory that a ceremony is more effective as a memorial than dolmens, cromlechs, &c., I have only to remind you that the touching incidents connected with the life and death of Christ have been conveyed to the human family in a most remarkable way by the Eucharist. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) **And that these days should be remembered.**—*Days to be remembered*:—I. OUR BIRTHDAYS. II. DAYS OF AWAKENING AND CONVERSION. III. DAYS OF DARKNESS. 1. Days of bereavement. 2. Days of mental depression. 3. Days of perplexity. IV. DAYS OF DELIVERANCE. V. TIMES OF REFRESHING AND SEASONS OF COMMUNION WITH GOD. VI. THE DAY OF DEATH AND THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. (*J. Bolton, B.A.*) *A memorial day*:—In these words we have an account of the founding of the Jewish national memorial day. It was not so much a religious as a national memorial day. It celebrated a day of victory and triumph; and they made it memorable by annual observance. I. LET US THINK OF IT AS A MEMORY DAY. There are those who think it unkind to recall the memory of the dead, or even to speak to the bereaved of their losses. There are some who think that the only way to console is by diverting the thoughts from all memory of that which occasioned pain. There is no more mistaken treatment for the human heart than to prescribe oblivion for its cure. The very memory of the loved one blesses us and makes us more gentle and tender toward the living. It is neither manly nor womanly nor human to be either hard-hearted or forgetful. Then, do you think that the heart of our nation is softened, and that sympathy, sensibility, and true greatness are promoted by our observance of a national memorial day? II. THAT OUR MEMORIAL DAY IS A DAY WITH VERY IMPORTANT LESSONS. 1. It teaches Christian patriotism. Love of country is not only a natural sentiment in every true heart, but it is right in the sight of God. No man can ignore his relation to his country and not sin against God. 2. Again, our memorial day teaches the value of peace. Memorial day is a constant reminder of the terrible price paid.

3. The day also brings lessons of gratitude and hope. Memory is the mother of gratitude. So when we recall our national blessings how much cause we have for gratitude to God! "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." (*Southern Pulpit.*)

## CHAPTER X.

**VERB. 1-5. And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land.—A good government :—**A good government—I. HAS A WISE SYSTEM OF TAXATION. II. MAKES ITS POWER FELT. III. PLACES GOOD MEN IN OFFICE. IV. PROMOTES THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE. V. STRIVES TO PRESERVE PEACE. VI. IS ACCEPTABLE TO A VIRTUOUS AND ENLIGHTENED PEOPLE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The greatness of Ahasuerus and of Mordecai :—*I. THE GREATNESS OF THE MONARCH IS SEEN—1. In the character of his government. "He laid a tribute on the land," &c. Possibly this was a judicious system of taxation, designed to displace some obnoxious method of raising money for the public treasury. 2. In the acquiescence of his subjects. II. THE GREATNESS OF MORDECAI IS SEEN—1. In the contrast existing between his present and his former position. 2. In the fact that his severest trials became the avenue through which he ascended to fame. 3. In his reaching the pinnacle of greatness by simple fidelity to principle and unwearied diligence. 4. In his employing the influence he acquired, not for selfish ends, but to promote the welfare of his people. **Lessons—**1. He who fills well the position he occupies thereby effectually recommends himself to a higher. 2. Nothing is lost by maintaining integrity. 3. Worldly prosperity is often the result of religious faith. 4. It is unwise to be disheartened in the hour of adversity (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *Mordecai's exaltation : a summary of providential interpositions :—*To extirpate the Jewish nation would have been to destroy the Church of God, to make void His everlasting covenant, and to bring to nought His merciful and gracious counsels in behalf of a sinful and unhappy world. 1. It was not, therefore, for his own sake only that Mordecai was exalted. 2. Before Mordecai was exalted it was the will of God to try the faith of the Jews. 3. One great purpose of the trial was to recall them to a recollection of their true office and position in the world as witnesses of God and pilgrims to the heavenly city. 4. God prepared an advocate and protector for His people years before Haman had power to do them harm. 5. To prepare the way for this advocate and protector, the divorce and dethronement of Vashti was overruled by God for the advancement of Esther to the crown of Persia. 6. The foundation of Mordecai's greatness was actually laid by his bitterest and most implacable enemy. 7. To pave the way for Mordecai's future advancement, a claim had to be established on the gratitude and confidence of the king, long before the rise of Haman. 8. The time pointed out by the lot for the slaughter of the Jews providentially fell so close to the end of the year as to give almost as much time as possible to Esther and Mordecai to consider what steps could be taken to avert the destruction of their nation. 9. Esther's concealing her Jewish origin, both before and after coming to the throne, was overruled to the confusion and destruction of Haman. He would never have issued the decree against the Jews had he known that the queen was a Jewess. 10. Haman's concealing from the king that it was the Jewish nation he wished to destroy was overruled so as to become the means of his own downfall. 11. The insolence and impatience of Haman getting the better of his prudence was the means of defeating and disappointing his malicious schemes. 12. That Esther should have been received with favour by the king, after she had apparently been slighted by him for thirty days, was clearly an instance of the hand of God. 13. That Esther, through some impression on her mind, should have deferred her petition till the following day, was one of the most remarkable providential interferences in the whole history. The delay led to the erection of the gibbet on which Haman afterwards suffered and also to his humiliation in being compelled to do public honours to Mordecai. 14. The king's sleepless night had momentous results. 15. How providential that Haman should have been at hand at the very moment the king was desirous for some one to propose a suitable reward for Mordecai! 16. Haman's humiliation at being compelled to do honour to Mordecai so dispirited him that when Esther's terrible charge was made against him he was not able to make even a plausible defence, such as his ignorance that the queen was



a Jewess and his ignorance of any conscious intention to injure her. 17. Even the trivial circumstances that the chamberlains sent to summon Haman to the banquet arrived before he had time to have the gibbet taken down and removed, and that thus they came to be informed that it was prepared for Mordecai, were as plainly the work of providence as any other event in the whole narrative. 18. To all these extraordinary accidents and coincidences we must add that the issue of the whole matter placed the Jews in a much more prosperous condition than they were in before, and confirmed their faith in the Divine promises and protection. (*W. Crosthwaite.*) *The Book of Esther*:—I. WE HAVE HERE A GOLDEN LEAF IN THE CHAIN OF PROVIDENCE teaching us that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." II. WE LEARN HERE THE PECULIAR CARE WITH WHICH GOD WATCHES OVER HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE. III. WE SEE THE WONDERFUL MANNER IN WHICH GOD RAISES UP INSTRUMENTS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE. IV. WE NOTICE THE SURPRISING MANNER IN WHICH PROVIDENCE OPENS UP THE WAY IN WHICH THESE INSTRUMENTS ARE DESTINED TO ACT. V. WE ARE TAUGHT THE DUTY OF PLACING OUR SOLE TRUST AND DEPENDENCE ON GOD. VI. WE LEARN FROM THIS BOOK THE HIGH UTILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES, AND THEIR STANDING AUTHORITY AS A RULE BOTH TO INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES. (*Thomas McCrie, D.D.*) *A well-governed empire*:—The Chinese have a political saying which is worthy the reading even of English statesmen. It is as follows: When is the empire well governed, and affairs go as they should go? When swords are rusty, and spades are bright; when prisons are empty, and grain-bins filled; when the law courts are lonely and o'ergrown with grass; when doctors walk and bakers ride: it is then that things go as they ought, and the State is well ruled. *The highest government*:—Above all, it is ever to be kept in mind that not by material but by moral power are men and their actions governed. How noiseless is thought! No rolling of drums, no tramp of squadrons, or immeasurable tumult of baggage-waggons, attend its movements. In what obscure and sequestered places may the head be meditating which is one day to be crowned with more than imperial authority! for kings and emperors will be among its ministering servants; it will rule, not over, but in, all heads, and with these its solitary combinations of ideas, as with magic formulas, bend the world to its will. The time may come when Napoleon himself will be better known for his laws than for his battles; and the victory of Waterloo prove less momentous than the opening of the first Mechanics' Institute. (*Thomas Carlyle.*) *Seeking the wealth of his people*.—Mordecai was a true patriot, and therefore being exalted to the highest position under Ahasuerus, he used his eminence to promote the prosperity of Israel. In this he was a type of Jesus, who, upon His throne of glory, seeks not His own, but spends His power for His people. Every Christian should be a Mordecai to the Church, striving according to his ability for its prosperity. Some are placed in stations of affluence and influence; let them testify for Jesus before great men. Others have what is far better, namely, close fellowship with the King of kings; let them be sure to plead daily for the weak of the Lord's people, the doubting, the tempted, and the comfortless. Instructed believers may serve their Master greatly if they lay out their talents for the general good, and impart their wealth of heavenly learning to others, by teaching them the things of God. The very least in our Israel may at least seek the welfare of his people; and his desire, if he can give no more, shall be acceptable. It is at once the most Christlike and the most happy course for a believer to cease from living to himself. He who blesses others cannot fail to be blessed himself. On the other hand, to seek our own personal greatness is a wicked and unhappy plan of life, its way will be grievous and its end will be fatal. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)









