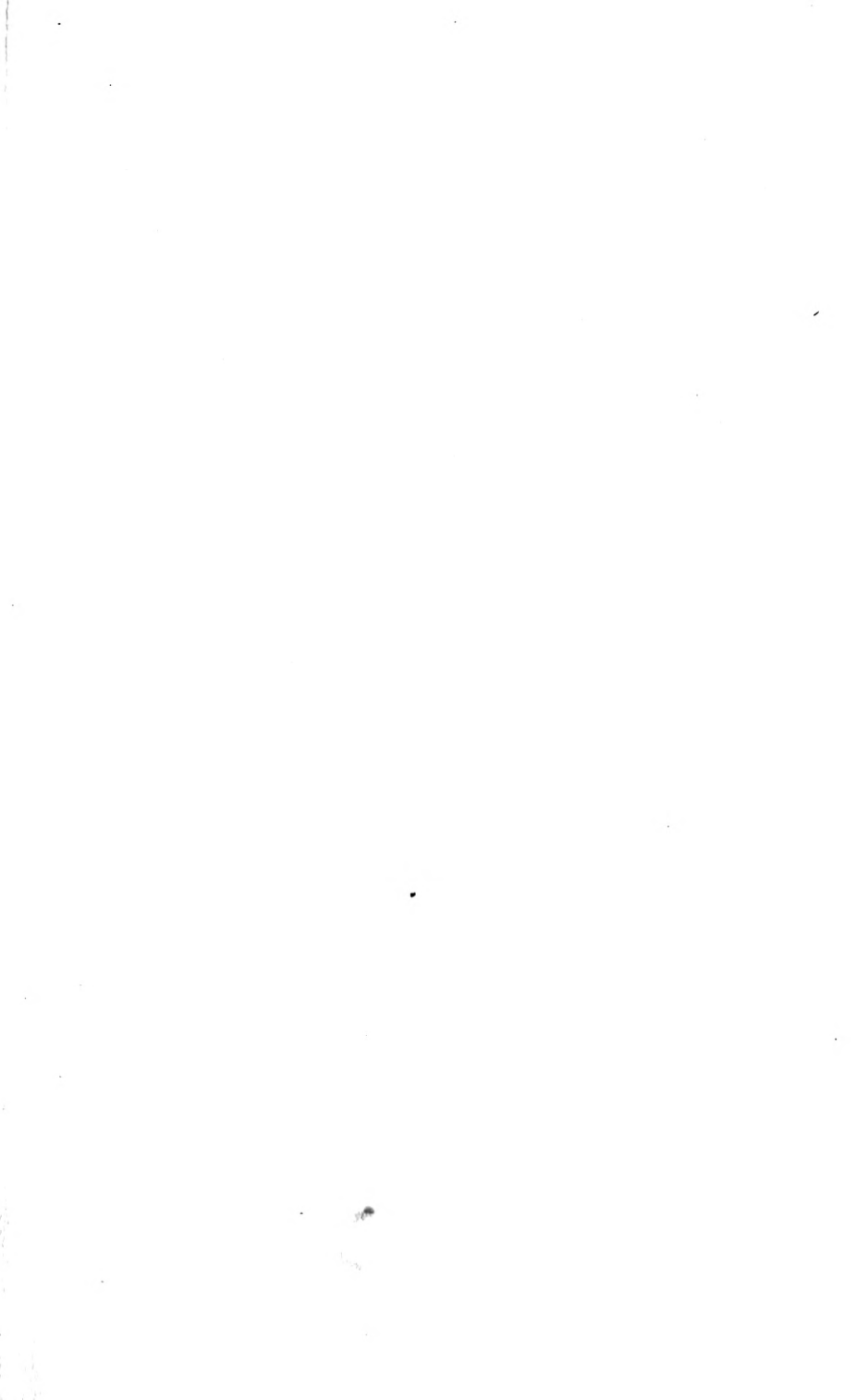






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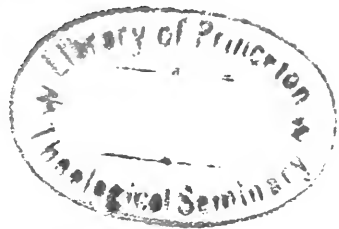
Anecdotes, Similes, Emblems, Illustrations;
Expository, Scientific, Geographical, His-
torical, and Homiletic, Gathered from
a Wide Range of Home and Foreign
Literature, on the Verses of the Bible

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

THE MINOR PROPHETS. Vol. II.

NAHUM, HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH, HAGGAI
ZECHARIAH, AND MALACHI



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INTRODUCTION TO NAHUM.

THESE are two sides to the character of God—two sides which yet are perfectly consistent and harmonious. At times He shows Himself most gentle and compassionate, ready to pardon wrong-doing, willing to admit the wrong-doer to His own fellowship and favour. At other times He is stern in His justice, inflicting punishment upon evil, visiting the crimes of men with the tribulation and anguish which are their due. There is no contradiction, as I have said, between these perfections of God. He is stable, consistent, immutable, although now He speaks in the thunder and the mighty rushing wind, and now in the still, small voice. For, first of all, He cannot but act differently toward different classes of men—different moods and conditions of soul. To the penitent heart that weeps bitterly over its sin, to the faithful servant who keeps well his Master's trust, He must of necessity reveal His mercy and love; it is not in His nature to shut such as these out from His favour. But to souls that are proud and wilful and wedded to their iniquity, what can God be but just and severe and terrible, a consuming fire, a hammer to break the flinty rock in pieces? He would forfeit His uprightness were He to deal leniently with these. And then, also, so far from mercy and judgment being irreconcilable the one with the other, there are seasons when the infliction of judgment is indeed the truest mercy. His own children will breathe more freely once their oppressor and antagonist is away; weak and yielding souls will be prevented from surrendering themselves to His will; and the world will be lifted up to a higher level. Very frequently mercy and justice are in reality synonymous terms. Such thoughts as these are awakened within us when we open this Book of Nahum. It is not a book which deals either with Israel or with Judah. It has no direct reference to the chosen people. It is concerned from first to last with the fate of Nineveh, the proud capital of Assyria. Jonah, the son of Amittai, had been sent thither by God about two hundred years before Nahum's time. And the Assyrian monarch and people of Jonah's day had opened their hearts to hear God's Word and to acknowledge His presence and authority. Seeing their sorrow and rejoicing at its manifestation, He had passed from the fierceness of His anger. But their penitence was of short duration. Soon they had grown haughty and sin-loving and cruel again. And God could bear with their tyranny and evil no longer. He bade His servant Nahum prophesy their speedy destruction. Jonah had been His messenger of grace to Assyria; Nahum is His messenger of judgment. I. It is exceedingly little that we know of THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF THIS PROPHET. To most of us he is simply a voice crying in the desert; we remember him by his words alone. But I think it is possible for us to fashion for ourselves some authentic picture of the man and his surroundings. There has long been debate as to the locality of his birth. "Nahum the Elkoshite," he is described in the opening of the book; but it is hard to decide what meaning should be attached to the epithet. The Christian father Jerome speaks of a village called Elkesai which lay in Galilee, and tells us that a few relics of it were pointed out to him by a dweller in the district. Such a testimony is undoubtedly

possessed of considerable value, for Jerome had his home for a great part of his life in Palestine, and was well acquainted with its villages and towns. And some expositors have found a confirmation of the theory that Nahum was a Galilean, born and brought up in the northern parts of the Holy Land, in another name which is familiar to us in connection with the history of One greater than the prophet—the name Capernaum. For Capernaum means “the village or hamlet of Nahum”; and who more likely to give it its distinctive title, it has been asked, than the ancient servant of God who proclaimed the downfall of his people’s enemies? It would be pleasant, indeed, to imagine the prophet moving about the very scenes which were afterwards to be hallowed by the presence of Christ; walking in prayer and meditation by the shore of the lake which the Saviour knew so well; spending the most of his days in those holy fields which six hundred years later were trodden by the Son of God. But however attractive such a theory may be, I cannot but incline to the other solution which has been suggested for the phrase, “The Elkoshite.” Travellers in the East tell us of a village called Alkush (Sir A. H. Layard describes this village and the supposed tomb of Nahum, in his *Nineveh and Babylon*) not far from Mosul, away in what was ancient Assyria, where the tomb of Nahum is pointed out at this day. The tomb is no doubt an erection comparatively modern; but at least it bears witness to the existence of an older belief that here, in the land of the alien and the oppressor, God’s prophet had lived and died. And there is that in the character of the prophecy which strengthens our conviction that Nahum was himself an exile in Assyria. Its descriptions are so graphic and vivid, so apparently painted from the life, that we can scarcely escape the conclusion that the writer is recounting what his own eyes have seen and his own ears have heard. He seems to have dwelt in the very heart of the country against which he proclaimed God’s judgment. It is true that this clear and definite knowledge of Nineveh and its inhabitants may have been supernaturally imparted to the prophet. But that is far from likely. For the most part, the prophets of the Lord deal with those sights and sounds, those persons and events, by which they are themselves surrounded. They read to men the lessons of warning or of comfort which the Holy Ghost enables them to gather in that world in which they live and move and have their being. Let us think of Nahum, therefore, as the son of a Hebrew family that had been carried captive to Assyria when the kingdom of the ten tribes was broken and destroyed. He was born among strangers who were harsh and cruel; but at home he breathed an atmosphere of love. For his name means “consolation”; and probably it describes the comfort which the child brought with him to the hearts of his parents. Outside, in the alien territory where they were forced to stay, they saw only high-handed wrong-doing and daily sin; but within the walls of their dwelling they had what compensated them for the oppressor’s wrong and the proud man’s contumely; they were cheered and strengthened as they looked on the boy whom God had sent them, and offered up their prayers for him, and hoped that he might yet do great things for his injured and afflicted people. When Nahum grew up to manhood he showed that he had the heart of a patriot throbbing within him. He loved and remembered the land of his ancestors. Bashan and Carmel and Lebanon were familiar names to him (Nah. i. 4), even although he had never looked on them with the bodily eye. And, in proportion as he took delight in that sweet and pleasant soil from which he and his had been banished, he loathed the tyranny and the manifold evil of the heathen who had triumphed over God’s heritage. He saw before him the splendour of Nineveh, and its ferocity and its luxury and its sensuality, and he hated it with a righteous hatred. The Latin satirist says that it is indignation which makes a man a poet; and Nahum’s exultant and pitiless words were prompted by his indignation against the empire which had robbed his fatherland of peace and prosperity and life itself. But if these were dark and awful words for the Assyrian, they were bright and soothing for the Israelite. They assured him of the opening of the prison-house and the dawning of a better day. He was indeed a poet—this old Hebrew. Many have remarked how terse and vigorous, how forcible and vivid and fervent, his phrases are. Very bitter and relentless he is towards his enemies; but we must remember that they were the enemies of God as well as his own, and that his was a religious enthusiasm. There is music of an inspiring and triumphant sort in all that he utters—music like that of the trumpet which calls to battle and victory. He depicts the fall of Nineveh as though he actually beheld it. He rejoices in its desolation as though it were present to his

eyes. There is energy in every verse. II. Let us look a little more particularly at **THE WORK WHICH WAS GIVEN HIM TO DO.** The Assyria which he knew was powerful in the extreme. The empire had attained the very summit of its splendour and prosperity. It had "multiplied its merchants as the stars of heaven." Its crowned ones, its princes and nobles, were "as the locusts" for number—as the locusts, also, in their destructiveness and their love of spoil. It seemed as if Nineveh had never been seated on a throne more secure and stable. We can fix pretty accurately the date of Nahum's prophecy from a historical reference which he makes in the course of it. Addressing the haughty city, which had no disquieting dreams of coming evil, he asks, "Art thou better than No-Amon that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about her, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was of the sea?" Yet what a destruction, entire and irrevocable, had befallen her, as the prophet goes on to point out! "She was carried away, she went into captivity; her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets; and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains" (iii. 8, 10, R.V.). Now, this triumph over No-Amon, which we are better acquainted with under the name of Thebes, was gained by Assyria itself. It was one of the achievements of King Assur-bani-pal that he crushed a dangerous revolt which had broken out in Egypt, and drove the leader of it from the country, and plundered Thebes and laid it waste. Its temples were hewed in pieces, and two of its obelisks were carried as trophies to Nineveh. Its people, as Nahum declares, were treated with the terrible barbarities of heathen war. And this victory over the city of Amon was won about the year 665 B.C.; so that the prophet, who is familiar with it, must have preached and laboured at a somewhat later period, perhaps about the middle of the seventh century before the coming of our Lord.¹ It was only the inspiration of God's Spirit which could lead any one to foretell, at an era when the Assyrian empire had reached its widest limits, that its overthrow was close at hand. To ordinary onlookers everything seemed to presage for it a long and a successful future; no ominous cloud had as yet appeared in the sky; no enemy too formidable to be met and overcome had shown himself. Assur-bani-pal² was not personally, indeed, a brave and fearless ruler, such as his predecessors Esar-haddon and Sargon had been. He was liker the haughty and luxurious and boastful Sennacherib, who had led his armies against Hezekiah half a century before, only to see them "melted like snow in the glance of the Lord." But yet he had gained for Nineveh a glory which the city had never possessed formerly. It needed a Divine enlightenment to predict an issue so utterly improbable and so far beyond the ken of human foresight. And very speedily and very terribly the ruin came. Before Assur-bani-pal had been forty years dead his empire had ceased to be, and his rich and glorious capital had been blotted out from the face of the earth. Perhaps no part of Old Testament Scripture has had greater light thrown upon it by those excavations which have been carried on during recent years in Assyria than this short prophecy. As we read the records of the investigators, and thread our way in thought among the remains of Nineveh, and trace the after history of the deserted and forgotten site, we see everywhere the fulfilment of Nahum's righteous denunciations. Of the words which he uttered against the doomed city, there is none which has not come to pass. The Medes and the Babylonians were the chief assailants of the great empire, although its antagonists seemed to rise up from every quarter. So mighty a nation died hard. When its armies were routed in the open field the king³ made a final stand in the capital, and closed the city gates. The siege, as we learn from some tablets which survive from these days of mortal struggle, lasted over two years; for the walls were one hundred feet high and fifty feet thick, and had been impregnable hitherto. But at length the end came—came not in the way of ordinary warfare. A great rise of the Tigris brought about the fall of Nineveh, the flood undermining the fortifications. It was exactly as Nahum

¹ Nahum's date has been placed earlier by some, who regard him as a contemporary of Isaiah and belonging to the second half of the reign of Hezekiah. But on this supposition it is hard to explain the allusion to the capture and destruction of No-Amon.

² Assur-bani-pal is probably the "great and noble" Asnapper of Ezra iv. 10. We are better acquainted with him under his Greek name, Sardanapalus.

³ The last king of Nineveh was Esar-haddon II., called Sarakos by the Greeks. The fall of the city may be placed in the year 606 B.C.

had foretold, "the gates of the rivers had been opened, and the palaces had been dissolved." Entering the city through the breach which the torrent had caused, the besiegers soon made it "void and waste." Built only of sun-dried clay, its houses and temples quickly crumbled into dust.¹ We can well believe that, to many of the poor afflicted Israelites who heard them, Nahum's words seemed too good to be true; yet God has carried them out literally and in every detail. What a blessed deliverance this was which the seer beheld! Nineveh was as cruel as it was great. It was in reality what the prophet of Elkosh pictured it, a lion which "did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin." "The Assyrian annals," says Professor Sayce, who has made them his daily study, "glory in the record of a ferocity at which we stand aghast." And, no doubt, the captive Hebrews had felt in many ways the brutality of their conqueror; the godly among them, too, shuddered when they saw his molten images, his drunkenness, his lust, his exalting of himself against Jehovah. It was no mere vindictiveness which led them to wish and pray that the earth might be freed from a monster such as this—a monster which, like the Grendel that Beowulf slew, made the hearts of men everywhere sad and weary and hopeless. Rather it was the truest piety and the most genuine religion. How these sorrowful and yearning souls would welcome Nahum's prophecy! III. Can we gather ANY LESSONS FOR OURSELVES from Nahum and his prophecy? 1. One of them will be a lesson of the vanity and hopelessness of resisting God. Very impressively that truth is taught us by the words of the prophet, if they be read in the light of their fulfilment. The Nineveh of Nahum's day looked fair and strong, as though no evil were ever likely to befall it and no plague to come nigh it. But it had taken up arms against God. Its idol worship, its licentiousness, its pride, its cruelty towards His people, whom He had given into its hands to be chastened and not to be destroyed,—all these things made Him its enemy. And in conflict with such an Adversary even Nineveh could avail nothing; it dashed itself in vain against the bosses of Jehovah's buckler. Nay, He has utterly vanquished it; He has ground it to powder. What a tragedy there is in the history of every nation, and of every individual heart, that is opposed to God! Sooner or later the history closes in darkness and misery and ruin. 2. Again, we gather from Nahum's prophecy a lesson with regard to the motives which guide and animate God's government of the world. He rules it in the interests of His own people. There is something grand and sublime in the spectacle of the lonely Hebrew captive who stands up to face the great Assyrian tyranny, and to tell it that the destined hour for its fall is almost come. What was it that wrought within him such faith as this—a faith which "laughs at impossibilities, and says, 'It shall be done'?" It was the conviction that his Lord remembered still His own chosen generation, the seed of Abraham His friend. But such a confidence all God's sons and daughters should seek after and should cherish. Let them believe that He governs the world and controls its affairs on their behalf; that He has thought of their necessities in planning all the events which take place among men; that He cares more for the souls of His little ones than for the principalities, and powers, the thrones and dominions, of the earth. They dwell secure who find their home in Him. 3. Once more, we may learn from some of Nahum's words the supreme blessedness of leaning upon God. Now and then there is a lull in the thunder of His sentences, and his speech drops as the rain and distils as the dew—as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass. He forgets Nineveh for a little, and turns in pity and love to Israel. This is his language at one moment, "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him." But, the next moment, how soft and sweet are the tones of his voice! "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him." There is no more beautiful verse in all the Bible. And it is as true as it is beautiful. We should

¹ "Rich, in 1818, conjectured that the mounds of Kouyunjik, opposite the modern town of Mosul, concealed the ruins of Nineveh beneath them; but it was not until the excavations of the Frenchman Botta, in 1842, and the Englishman Layard, in 1845, that the remains first of Dur-Sargon, and then of Nineveh itself, were revealed to the eyes of a wondering world."—Professor Sayce, *Assyria: its Princes, Priests, and People*.

have no doubt of its truth—we who live after Bethlehem and Calvary and the grave in Joseph's garden, and who are familiar with the exceeding grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

NAHUM'S RANGE AS AN INSPIRED TEACHER.—As to this prophet's rank in the series of inspired teachers, it is suggested that his message is meagre and his conceptions are narrow. He has nothing to say about Israel's Messianic character and future. He has no rebuke for her sinfulness and unworthiness. His soul is consumed with unreasoning indignation against Assyria, and he is devoid of that lofty conception of the world's government which enabled earlier prophets to recognise in Assyria Jehovah's scourge for His people's stubbornness and the chastening rod of His gracious discipline. In contrast to that large and religious interpretation of Providence, Nahum appears as the representative of a retrogression into narrow, national particularism. Now it is to be admitted that the form of Nahum's oracle lends itself to this misreading, but the spirit and aim of the prophet ought to have prevented it. Besides the wrong of Israel, more than once in his short utterance he presents Assyria as the oppressor of mankind, whose avenger Jehovah is (iii. 4, 7, 19). Nor even in the contemplation of his own people's injuries is the prophet's zeal vindictive and national. It is not revenge, but righteousness that demands the transgressor's downfall. It is not Israel's pride that is at stake, but God's honour; not the redemption of his people, but the vindication of his God, that is in question. With Nahum Nineveh's punishment is the guarantee of the world's Divine government, and his impassioned declaration of its downfall is the measure, not of his hostility to it, but of the struggle and triumph of his faith in God, and in God's kingdom. That being the single and simple issue present to his mind, he naturally does not even touch that aspect of the Assyrian enigma which explains its evil power over God's people and the world by their sinful failure to be what God would have had them be for their own happiness and humanity's good. (*W. G. Elmslie, D.D.*)

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NAHUM.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. *The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.—Nahum's book:—*Nahum writes a book. It was a curious thing to do in those days. It was a book of a vision, and therefore likely to be quite misunderstood; for who has eyes that can see visions of the shadowy, aerial kind? Only a visionist can read visions. There are some men who ought never to attempt to read poetry, because they kill it. They do not know that they are killing it, but their slaughter is none the less complete. There are persons who ought not to read the lighter kinds of literature, say even comedy itself, because they were born to live at the graveside, and never have caught a laugh on the wing. Only those who have the inspired heart can read the prophets, either major or minor, and understand what they are about,—not understand what they are merely saying, but understand what they are meaning. There is a common drift in all the prophecies, a set, a tendency in this great biblical movement. Unless you comprehend that tendency or movement you will be lost in the details of the dislocated parts. The Bible reveals God; now let all the rest fall into proper adjustment under the influence of that dominant and ennobling thought. How will Nahum talk about God? He will talk about God in his own way. If every man would do that we should have a new and grand theology, because we should have as many theologies as there are human beings reverently engaged in the profound study of God. Every man sees his own aspect of the Divine Being; every man catches his own particular view of the Cross; hence a good deal of the obstinacy that is found in theological controversy and religious disputation. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. *God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth.—The jealous God:—*There is in man a selfishness that is Divine. It is a singular fact, in our moral constitution, that often the tenderest feelings of our nature should also be the most selfish. Love, even apparently in its highest moods, is sometimes also most exacting and difficult of satisfaction. I have known a mother most jealous of the departure of a daughter's heart to its natural home and rest. When I have seen this, I have thought of the selfishness of God. God is infinitely selfish, for we may appropriately use that term. For selfishness may be celestial, and an attribute of benevolence. We do not, indeed, think much of love that cannot, in circumstances, be jealous; such is but a cold, indifferent, impoverished affection. How can it be other than that the best natures of the universe must be most selfish? Jealousy is not necessarily an infirmity. It may be a Divine emotion. The apostle speaks of a "godly jealousy." No doubt all our love is infirmity. The best, what we call the most purely unselfish, has its infirmity. I call that love of the highest which most intensely desires the well-being of its objects; this is the selfishness of love. Jealousy is a passion that depends for its character upon the fuel that gives its flame. It is the sorrowing and pitying passion which would save, if it could, from the perdition and the doom, and unable to do so, or even seeking to do so, moves all its powers, takes all the minor emotions, faculties, and casts them into the flames of its love, bidding all blaze. This is

the apostle's "godly jealousy." And God is jealous. Do not think of Him as beneath the influence of that passion which sometimes, as envy, spite, and malice, disturbs our rest; still think of Him as, in a lofty sense, the jealous God. There are many terms applied to Him in Scripture which seem to anthropomorphise His character. "Angry," "repenting," "foreseeing." Whenever such terms are used, think of them as steps of Divine descent. We may be sure they do represent some qualities of the Divine nature on which it is important that we should reflect, and of which we should stand in awe. The meaning of words assists to the conception of things. Jealous is the same word as zealous, and both are derived from the Greek word *zeal, fire*; zeal is enthusiasm—moral fire; and jealousy,—what is jealousy but love on fire? Is not this the representation we constantly have of God? I do believe in the mercy, and gentleness, and goodness of God. I do believe that He who "knows our frame," does save His children from the alienation of eternity, even when the heart has so vehemently loved in time the children of time. But then you must take the consequences here of that too vehement love. God is jealous of sin, of all aberrations from Himself. He is jealous of love, of power, of knowledge. See how He is constantly reminding man of his weakness as He incarnates his strength; and God is constantly absorbing man's knowledge, power, and love to Himself. Divine love on fire, God is jealous! There is no love where there is no fire, but let it burn with the white, not with the red heat. Imagine no evil against God from this declaration of His Book. God is jealous, His love is on fire, the Holy Spirit is love on fire,—hell is love on fire. The one by gentle persuasion entreats; the other, by forcible compulsion, guards His holy ones. Thus His fire folds inward and outward; inward to bless, outward to punish—so a calm breath of holy life, a stormy fire of doom. (*Paxton Hood.*) **The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries.—Great sins bringing great ruin:—**I. THAT THE GREAT SINS OF A PEOPLE MUST EVER BRING UPON THEM GREAT RUIN. The population of Nineveh was pre-eminently wicked. It is represented in the Scriptures as a "bloody city," a "city full of lies and robberies"; the Hebrew prophets dwell upon its impious haughtiness and ruthless fierceness (*Isa. x. 7, 8*). Great sins bring great ruin. It was so with the antediluvians, with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. The principle of moral causation and the Eternal Justice of the universe demand that wherever there is sin there shall be suffering, and in proportion to the amount of sin shall be the amount of suffering. II. THE GREAT RUIN THAT COMES PRESENTS GOD TO THE "VISION" OF MAN AS TERRIBLY INDIGNANT. The passions of man are here ascribed to God. It is only when terrible anguish comes upon the sinner that God appears to the observer as indignant. (*Homilist.*) *National punishments part of God's moral government:—*I. THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL NOT REMAIN UNPUNISHED. 1. The inevitable working of natural laws secures this. Physical, social, and spiritual evils follow sin. 2. The declared character of God secures it. He is a jealous God. II. THERE IS NO RESISTING THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD. His power is seen in nature. The rolling whirlwind, the dark tempest, the desolating storm are symbols of His wrath and of His might. III. YET IN WRATH GOD REMEMBERS MERCY. 1. There is a refuge for those who turn and repent. 2. No sins preclude hope. 3. Salvation is full and certain to the truly penitent. 4. Though the godly suffer trouble, they will be delivered from it. Their trials are only a discipline, if used aright. (*C. Cunningham Geikie, D.D.*) *God's judgments will be fulfilled:—*As you stood some stormy day upon a sea cliff and marked the giant billow rise from the deep to rush on with foaming crest, and throw itself thundering on the trembling shore, did you ever fancy that you could stay its course and hurl it back to the depths of the ocean? Did you ever stand beneath the leaden, lowering cloud, and mark the lightning's leap as it shot and flashed, and think that you could grasp the bolt and change its path? Still more foolish and vain his thought who fancies that he can arrest and turn aside the purpose of God. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.—Mercy, omnipotence, and justice:—**Works of art require some education in the beholder before they can be thoroughly appreciated. There must be something in the man himself before he can understand the wonders either of nature or of art. Certainly this is true of character. By reason of failures in our character, and faults in our life, we are not capable of understanding all the separate beauties and the united perfection of the character of Christ, or

of God His Father. Men, through the alienation of their natures, are constantly misrepresenting God, because they cannot appreciate His perfection. This is especially true with regard to certain lights and shadows in the character of God, which He has so marvellously blended in the perfection of His nature, that, although we cannot see the exact point of meeting, yet we are struck with wonder at the sacred harmony. How can God be "slow to anger," and yet unwilling to "acquit the wicked"? Our character is so imperfect that we cannot see the congruity of these two attributes. It is because His character is perfect that we do not see where these two things melt into each other.

I. THE FIRST CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD. "Slow to anger." 1. Because He never smites without first threatening. 2. But He is very slow to threaten. God's lips move swiftly when He promises, but slowly when He threatens. 3. When He threatens, how slow He is to sentence the criminal. 4. Even when the sentence against a sinner is signed and sealed, how slow God is to carry it out. Illustrate from case of Sodom. Trace this attribute of God to its source. He is "slow to anger" because He is infinitely good. And because He is great.

II. THE LINK BETWEEN THE FIRST SENTENCE OF THE TEXT AND THE LAST. He is "great in power." He that is great in power has power over Himself. When God's power doth restrain Himself, then it is power indeed.

III. THE LAST ATTRIBUTE IS THIS—"HE WILL NOT AT ALL ACQUIT THE WICKED." Never once has God pardoned an unpunished sin. Trace this attribute to its source, and you find it in this, "because He is good." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The patience of God:—I. IMPLIES GREAT POWER. Note—1. This exquisite sensitiveness. He is sensibility itself. 2. His abhorrence of sin. It is the "abominable thing," which He emphatically hates. His whole nature revolts from it. He feels that it is antagonism to His will, and to the order and well-being of the universe. 3. His provocation by the world. 4. His right to do whatever He pleases. He could show His anger, if He pleased, anywhen, anywhere, or anyhow. **II. His patience PRECLUDES NOT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE IMPENITENT.** "And will not at all acquit the wicked." 1. To "acquit" the impenitent, would be an infraction of His law. He has bound suffering to sin by a law as strong and as inviolable as that which binds the planets to the sun. "The wages of sin is death." 2. To "acquit" the impenitent, would be a violation of His Word. 3. To "acquit" the impenitent, would be to break the harmony of His universe. If inveterate rebels were acquitted, what an impulse there would be given in God's moral empire to anarchy. Abuse not the patience of God; nay, avail yourselves of it. (Homilist.)

A discourse upon God's patience:—Slowness to anger, or admirable patience, is the property of the Divine nature. This patience is seen in His providential works in the world. Consider—

I. THE NATURE OF THIS PATIENCE. 1. It is a part of the Divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the object. Mercy respects the creature as miserable, patience respects the creature as criminal. Mercy is one end of patience. It differs in regard of the object. The object of goodness is every creature. The object of patience is primarily man. 2. Since it is a part of goodness and mercy, it is not an insensible patience. 3. It is not a constrained or half-hearted patience. 4. Since it is not for want of power over the creature, it is from a fulness of power over Himself. 5. The exercise of this patience is founded in the death of Christ. The naturalness of God's veracity and holiness, and the strictness of His justice, are no bars to the exercise of His patience. **II. HOW THIS PATIENCE, OR SLOWNESS TO ANGER, IS MANIFESTED.** 1. To our first parents. 2. To the Gentiles. 3. To the Israelites. In particular, this patience is manifest—(1) In His giving warning of judgments before He orders them to go forth. He speaks before He strikes, and speaks that He may not strike. (2) In long delaying His threatened judgments, though He finds no repentance in the rebels. (3) In His unwillingness to execute His judgments, when He can delay no longer. (4) In moderating His judgments, even when He sends them. (5) In giving great mercies after provocations. (6) All this is more manifest if we consider the provocations He hath. **III. WHY DOTH GOD EXERCISE SO MUCH PATIENCE?** 1. To show Himself appeasable. 2. To wait for men's repentance. 3. For the propagation of mankind. 4. For the continuance of the Church. 5. To manifest the equity of His future justice on righteous and wicked. For instruction—1. How do men abuse this patience! 2. The second use is for comfort. 3. For exhortation. Meditate often on the patience of God. (S. Charnocke.)

The God of providence a forbearing God:—

I. THE ADMIRABLE PATIENCE OF THE DIVINE BEING. The prophet adds a refer-

ence to the power of God, and His punishment of the wicked, in order to guard men against presuming on His forbearance. We need not stay to prove that slowness to anger is a property of God. Divine patience could not be displayed unless there were sin. There was abundant evidence of the Divine goodness before man transgressed; but none of the Divine patience. When our race rebelled, Divine patience displayed itself. There could be no forbearance, no long-suffering, in the sense in which we now use the word, unless there were the possibility of ultimate pardon. When the Almighty spares a sinner, He is even more wonderful than when He builds a universe. But the Divine patience is in no degree opposed to the justice and faithfulness of God. It leaves room for the exercise of every other attribute. II. THE MYSTERIOUS AND AWFUL CHARACTER OF DIVINE PROVIDENTIAL OPERATIONS. God has everything at His disposal; and He accomplishes His purposes, and works out the counsel of His own will, through a varied instrumentality. Our text, with its sublime and magnificent imagery, is full of consolation to the afflicted as well as terror to the impenitent. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) And will not at all acquit the wicked.—*God both forgiving and unforgiving*:—Calvin's translation is, "Jehovah is slow to wrath, and great in power, and by clearing He will not clear." God is irreconcilable to the impenitent. He deals strictly with sinners, so as to remit no punishment. He will not clear by clearing, but will rigidly execute His judgment. There seems to be some inconsistency in saying that God is reconcilable and ready to pardon, and yet that by clearing He will not clear. But the aspect of things is different. The ungodly ever promise impunity to themselves, and in this confidence petulantly deride God Himself. The prophet answers them, and declares that there was no reason why they thus abused God's forbearance, for he says, By clearing He will not clear, that is, the reprobate: for our salvation consists in a free remission of sins; and whence comes our righteousness but from the imputation of God, and from this—that our sins are buried in oblivion? Yea, our whole clearing depends on the mercy of God. But God then exercises also His judgment, and by clearing He clears, when He remits to the faithful their sins; for the faithful, by repentance, anticipate His judgment; and He searches their hearts, that He may clear them. As then God absolves none but the condemned, our prophet here rightly declares, that "by clearing He will not clear," that is, He will not remit their sins, except He tries them, and discharges the office of a judge; in short, that no sin is remitted by God which He does not first condemn. But with regard to the reprobate, who are wholly obstinate in their wickedness, the prophet justly declares this to them,—that they have no hope of pardon, as they perversely adhere to their own devices, and think that they can escape the hand of God: the prophet tells them that they are deceived, for God passes by nothing, and will not blot out one sin, until all be brought to mind. (*John Calvin.*) The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind, and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.—*The way of the Lord in the whirlwind and in the storm*:—Philosophers contemplate hurricanes as natural evils, and investigate the material causes of these elementary commotions. But Scripture raises us up to a higher sphere of contemplation, and presents to our minds the terrible operations of nature, under consideration of the works and judgments of the God of nature. He commands the storm, whirls the wind, rules the sea, and superintends the destructions of death. The literal sense of the text appears to have a foundation in fact, and may be traced to the terrible hurricane in which the God of Israel came down, and by a mighty angel destroyed the Assyrian camp before Jerusalem. 1. The way of the Lord in these elementary and violent commotions which have been described. (1) They are awaked and roused by the Word of the Lord. (2) They are directed by the will of God. (3) They are ruled by the providence of God. (4) They are restrained and moderated by the power of God. (5) They are calmed by the goodness and mercy of God. Application—1. The way of the Lord in whirlwinds and storms, and the illustrations of it, are proofs and demonstrations to the world of His existence and providence. 2. Exhibitions to our senses of the glory and terror of His majesty. 3. Declarations to the world that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. 4. Admonitions to the nations, to consider the miseries of war, and to settle among themselves those differences for which they have taken up arms against one another. 5. Calls to the inhabitants of the world, to turn from ungodliness and unrighteousness, and to serve the Lord with reverence and godly fear. Knowing the terrors, and knowing that they are coming upon all who know not God, and obey not the

Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would persuade you who are living in sin and unbelief, to foresee the great day of His wrath, to believe your guilt and danger, and to hide yourselves under His righteousness. (*A. Shanks.*) The clouds are the dust of His feet.—*What are the clouds?*—I. THE WAY OF GOD IS GENERALLY A HIDDEN ONE. When God works His wonders, He always conceals Himself. Even the motion of His feet causes clouds to arise. II. GREAT THINGS WITH US ARE LITTLE THINGS WITH GOD. What great things clouds are to us! Great things are they? Nay, they are only the dust of God's feet. III. THE MOST TERRIBLE THINGS IN NATURE HAVE NO TERROR TO THE CHILD OF GOD. Sometimes clouds are fearful things to mariners. But there is nothing terrible now, because it is only the dust of my Father's feet. IV. ALL THINGS IN NATURE ARE CALCULATED TO TERRIFY THE UNGODLY MAN. Sinner, hast thou ever seen the clouds as they roll along the sky? Those clouds are the dust of the feet of Jehovah. If these clouds are but the dust, what is He Himself? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 3-6. He rebuketh the sea.—*God's power*:—Here is a description of God's power unrivalled in its sublimity and soul-stirring force. Power belongeth unto God. It is absolute, inexhaustible, ever and everywhere operative. "He fainteth not, neither is weary." His power is here presented in two aspects. I. AS OPERATING IRRESISTIBLY IN NATURE. 1. It works in the air. "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet." 2. It works in the sea. "He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers." There is undoubtedly an allusion here to the Red Sea and the Jordan. "He holdeth the winds in His fists, and the waters in the hollow of His hands." His "way is in the sea," and His "path in the great waters." 3. It works on the earth. "Bashan languisheth, and Carmel and the flower of Lebanon languisheth." No spots in Palestine were more fruitful than these three. But their life and their growth depended on the results of God's power. Nor is His power less active in the inorganic parts of the world. "The mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at His presence, yea, the world and all that dwell therein." God's power is seen in all the phenomena of the material world. How graphically and beautifully is this presented in Psalm civ. The fact that God's power is ever acting in the material universe is—(1) The most philosophic explanation of all its phenomena. The men who ascribe all the operations of nature to what they call laws, fail to satisfy my intellect. For what are those laws? The fact that God's power is ever acting is (2) The most hallowing aspect of the world we live in. God is in all. Then walk the earth in reverence. II. AS IRRESISTIBLY OPPOSED TO THE WICKED. "Who can stand before His indignation?" (*Homilist.*) *God's control over nature, and deliverance of His people*:—In these words there is a striking display of the power, the severity, and the long-suffering and mercy of God. I. GOD'S CONTROL OVER THE POWERS OF NATURE. With the terrible effects of His wrath. He ruleth in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth. II. THE ESSENTIAL GOODNESS OF GOD'S CHARACTER, AND THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF HIS PROTECTION. Both the scenes of external nature, and the general condition of nations and individuals will, on the slightest reflection, convince you of the prevailing goodness of God. If there is any doubt on the subject, turn to the book of inspiration. III. THE MEANS WHEREBY MAN MAY AVERT GOD'S ANGER, AND SECURE HIS FAVOUR (ver. 7). "He knoweth them that are His." Trust in Him is the grand means to be employed. The faith that is wrought in your hearts by the Holy Spirit of God. This faith will work submission to His will, and repentance towards Him. This faith will lay hold of the stronghold that can defend in the day of trouble. This faith worketh by love. (*Hugh Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 6. Who can stand before His indignation?—*Repentance through fear*:—This and similar passages address themselves directly to our fears. The term "fear of God" in Scripture, does not always bear the same meaning. There is a filial fear, and there is a servile fear. Servile fear gives place to filial when God becomes known to us as our reconciled Father in Christ. We begin with the dread of God. The dread drives us to the Cross. Mistakes are often made as to that fear of God which we denominate servile. Christians are afraid of fear, looking with suspicion on any part which fear may have had in moving them to forsake evil ways, as if it were a base and ungenerous agent,

which ought not to have had share in the great work of conversion. Whilst so much of the Bible speaks of fear, fear cannot be without its use in religion. I. **WHAT MISAPPREHENSION MAY THERE BE IN REFERENCE TO THE USE OF FEAR?** Noah, in preparing the ark, is said to have been "moved with fear." It was dread of impending wrath. Fears may rightly move us to genuine and acceptable repentance. We are so constituted as to be just as accessible through fear as through hope. We feel that with the great mass of men we can make no way without appealing to their fears. Men must commonly be wrought upon by fear through what they are incurring rather than through what they are losing. We must come down upon them with tidings of disaster. Let a man continue his struggles and his endeavours even though he feel actuated only by fear, and in due time other motives shall gain sway in his breast. II. **THE LEGITIMATE USE OF SUCH AWFUL DENUNCIATIONS AS THESE IN THE TEXT.** Or the way in which threatenings ought to be employed by the preacher. St. Paul says, "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men." Neither should the engine of terror be otherwise used by the present ministers of Christ. Threatenings are to be employed as inducements to the laying hold on the succour provided by Christ. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 7. **The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.**—*Goodness a stronghold*:—The great design of religion is to bring us to God and true blessedness. In order to this, there must be full and practical confidence in God,—submission to His providence and law,—unquestioning repose in Himself. The text, though not possessing the form of a promise, is a declaration concerning God Himself, which includes the whole system of promise. Such is God. If such is God, then happy the people that is in such a case; yea, blessed they whose God is the Lord. I. **"THE LORD IS GOOD."** 1. The expression reminds us of the absolute goodness of the Divine nature, and especially of the Divine benevolence. Whatever goodness there is in the creature is derived—God is its source; it is limited—in God it is unbounded; *dependent*—in God it is essential and independent; *mutable*—in God it is changeless. 2. The active character of the Divine goodness. He "doeth" good. In inanimate creation are displayed His perfections. All living beings look up to God. He universally provides. But we are of more value than many sparrows. And He cares for us. 3. God's goodness in its suitability to man's present condition. He is a sinner. Providential blessings continued. Evil tendencies of sin checked. A wisely ordered scheme of redemption; and hence, forbearance, salvation. II. **"A STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE."** Figure forcible in the East, where predatory expeditions are usual. God a "stronghold for defence of His people." Recollect what He is in Himself. All His attributes are employed for the benefit of His people. In the day of trouble they are shut up with God. III. **"HE KNOWETH THEM THAT TRUST IN HIM."** To trust in God implies satisfied persuasion He will be and do as He has said. Two results—we shall seek all good in Him. We shall abide with Him. Trust in God and doing good are ever conjoined—in nature as well as duty. (*G. Cubitt.*) *The goodness of God in seasons of calamity*:—This book is "The Burden of Nineveh." Nahum was contemporary with Hezekiah. The immediate design of the prophecy was to minister comfort to the afflicted and alarmed Jews; for the defeat of the enemies of the Church involves its deliverance. The name of the prophet indicates this design;—it signifies comfort or comforter. The text teaches that the Lord is good, even in seasons of calamity. 1. Such seasons are not only not inconsistent with the Divine goodness, but in various ways manifest it. There is always much affliction in the world. When we suffer under calamities, unworthy thoughts of God are apt to rise within us, and especially suspicions of His goodness. If we indulge these suspicions, they will alienate our hearts from God and His service, and prompt us to impatience, murmuring, and impiety. But they are not inconsistent with God's goodness. The punishment of transgression is not inconsistent with goodness. Days of judgment on us may be merciful warnings to others. They are often means of delivering and purifying the Church. They are instructors and monitors to future ages. 2. In seasons of calamity the Lord is good, for He reveals Himself to us as a stronghold, and invites us to flee to Him for safety and comfort. 3. In days of trouble the Lord is good, for He affectionately watches over all who honour Him with their trust. (*James Stark, D.D.*) *The Divine goodness a refuge in trouble*:—These words have been well compared to a burst

of sunshine on a cloudy tempestuous day. The prophet opens his commission with setting forth the terrors of the Lord. But on a sudden this appalling strain ceases. As though impelled by an inward feeling which had obliged him to look around for something to uphold him amid these terrors, he thinks and speaks of the goodness of the Lord. I. WHAT THIS GOODNESS IS. We are not to understand here the Divine purity, or holiness, but the benevolence, the kindness, the graciousness of the Lord. The goodness of God, taken in this sense, is that perfection of His nature which inclines Him to deal graciously with His creatures; rich and happy in Himself, to give out of His riches and happiness, and make His creatures partakers of them, as far as their different capacities will admit. This goodness of God is, like every other perfection of His nature, infinite. By this I mean, it cannot be added to, it could not be greater. And His is holy goodness. It always moves and acts in conformity with His just and holy nature. Here it is that we make such mistakes in thinking of God. We take one of His attributes, and we look on it alone, as though God had no other attribute but that; and then a mystery comes over His nature and doings. This goodness is also self-moved, spontaneous, free. It requires nothing in us to call it into exercise towards us; it requires nothing whatever out of God to bring it into operation. It is not the Cross and work of the Lord Jesus that makes God good and gracious to us sinners. He was good and gracious to us before. It was God's love to us that found for us a Saviour. The Cross and mediation of Christ is the way the Divine goodness has opened for itself into our world. It is the channel through which it flows to us, not the fountain whence it takes its rise. II. WHAT THIS GOD OF GOODNESS IS TO HIS PEOPLE IN THE DAY OF THEIR TROUBLE. "A stronghold." This language conveys the idea of protection and defence. The countries in which the Old Scriptures were written were scenes of almost incessant warfare. Men were continually exposed to hostile inroads and invasions, and were obliged to have fortresses or holds to flee to for security. God is this refuge to the troubled soul in various ways. Sometimes keeping impending trouble off. At other times removing His people out of reach of trouble. More frequently giving them strength to bear their trouble. The prophet here intimates that the Lord's *goodness* shall be the stronghold, the strength and the support. The mere thought of His goodness is to be a consolation and a stay. III. WHAT ASSURANCE THEY WHO TRUST HIM HAVE THAT HE WILL BE THIS TO THEM. "He knoweth them that trust in Him." This brings the infinite knowledge of God to bear upon their case. When I make a living Being my refuge, when I fly to Him to protect me, it is clear that He must know I am come to Him for protection, and know too what my dangers are that He may shield me against them. He knows both us and our troubles. It is impossible for words to exaggerate the attention God pays to His suffering people. The mere act of trusting in God seems to be something spoken of here as something like a claim on His attention and care. Then if you are in affliction, encourage yourselves in the Lord your God. He is all-sufficient in Himself. Make Him the centre of your affections, desires, and consolations. Flee to Him to hide you. (*C. Bradley.*) *God a refuge*.—At Holyhead there is a splendid breakwater which cost a million and a half of money. Rising thirty feet above the waves it defies their utmost fury. We are not surprised that it should be built on so massive a scale, for in a great storm each wave strikes with the sledge hammer force of three tons to the square foot. Though a hurricane blow, and the sea be mountains high, shipping sheltered behind it ride in perfect safety. This is a type of the security God is to those who trust Him. *God is our refuge*.—A heathen could say, when a bird, scared by a hawk, flew into his bosom for refuge, "I will not kill thee, nor betray thee to thine enemy, seeing thou fliest to me for sanctuary": much less will God either slay or give up the soul that takes sanctuary in His name. (*W. Gurnall.*) *Secure in God*.—Readers of Darwin will recall the description he gives of a marine plant which rises from a depth of one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet, and floats on the great breakers of the western ocean. The stem of this plant is less than an inch through; yet it grows and thrives and holds its own against the fierce smittings and pressures of breakers which no masses of rock, however hard, could long withstand. What is the secret of this marvellous resistance and endurance? How can this slender plant face the fury of the elements so successfully, and, in spite of storm and tempests, keep its hold, and perpetuate itself from century to century? The answer has leaped to every lip: It reaches down into the still depths, where it fixes its grasp after the fashion of the instinct that has been

put into it, to the naked rocks; and no commotion of the waters can shake it from its fastenings. When a man has deep and inner clings to God, when the roots of his life go down and take hold on God, mere surface agitation and pressures will not overcome him. He may be floated here and there within a given sweep like a plant bosomed on the sea, and there may be times when it is very rough and the strain is great, but he will survive it all and preserve his integrity. (*F. A. Noble.*) *God's shielding love*:—Astronomers tell us that every year millions of meteoric bodies make their way towards our earth with a speed many times greater than that of the swiftest cannon-ball. These, beyond doubt, would strike the earth and destroy its inhabitants but for the air which surrounds it. That air, soft and yielding as it seems, offers so powerful a resistance to the swift motion of the falling meteors that they become vaporised through increased heat, and if they reach the earth at all, it is only in the form of minute meteoric dust. This physical fact has its counterpart in the spiritual realm. The influences of evil which assail the Christian as he goes through the world are often enough to crush and kill in him all spiritual life and joy and beauty, but round about him there is the atmosphere of the Divine love, and that love resists all evil, being as a consuming fire, keeping back from contact with the trusting soul everything that would destroy its purity and blast its blessedness. The love of God is a perfect protection to every Christian believer; with it around us we can walk with untrembling tread, knowing that no "weapon formed against us can prosper." (*Great Thoughts.*) *God a refuge*:—I once heard of a lonely traveller who sought to cross one of the western prairies. The only thing he had to guide him was a path that had been made by other travellers in the rank grass. But he had not gone very far before the snow began to fall, at first in scattered flakes, like large white feathers, but by and by with thick and blinding fierceness. He soon lost every trace of the path along which he travelled. He was lost, bewildered, and as the darkness began to gather around him he was greatly alarmed. He cried out for help, but the wild winds only laughed at him as he swept by. He was almost in despair when he saw through the blinding flakes a flickering light. Toward it he bent his exhausted energies. Stumbling and falling over the drifts that had accumulated here and there, he at length came to a settler's cottage. Can you imagine his thankfulness and joy when he found the storm behind him, in that friendly hut? He was safe. He was happy. In the moment of greatest peril he had found a refuge. Now that is just what God is to every traveller caught in the storm of life. If you but see the light that streams out from the windows of His palace, of His heart, and follow it, you will be safe from harm. The door of mercy is always open; the fires of His love and forgiveness are always glowing; the welcome which He gives is always abundant. *God's ways with friends and enemies*:—The sentiment of the passage is, that the same power which the Almighty displays for the destruction of His enemies, He employs for the protection of His friends. I. THE BENIGNITY OF THE EVER-BLESSED GOD. "The Lord is good." Goodness is associated with every idea it is possible to form of the Most High. Goodness is the perfection of His nature, the foundation of His actions, and comprehends all His other attributes. When His goodness supplies the needy, it is bounty; when it visits the miserable, it is pity; when it pardons the guilty, it is mercy; when it performs His promises, it is faithfulness; when it protects our persons, it is His power; when it orders events to our advantage, it is His wisdom; and when it converts and saves the soul, it is His grace. But where shall we look for its especial display? Not in providence but in redemption. His goodness here is love. This love is—1. Comprehensive in its objects. 2. Satisfying in its nature. 3. Exalting in its influence. 4. Perpetual in its existence. II. THE REFUGE HE AFFORDS HIS AFFLICTED PEOPLE. "He is a stronghold." 1. The distressing period to which the text refers. Such as national calamities; family trouble; soul trouble. 2. The refuge unfolded to our view. A stronghold, *i.e.*, a fortification, a place of strength and defence. III. THE APPROBATION HE EXPRESSES IN THEIR CONFIDENCE. "He knoweth them that trust in Him." It is supposed that we betake ourselves to the shelter which Divine goodness provides for our safety. A refuge, unless it be embraced, is no refuge at all. 1. What is the *trust* of which the text speaks? It is the fruit of faith. 2. What is the import of the term, "He knoweth them"? It is designed to express a distinguishing and an approving knowledge. He regards their confidence in Him with peculiar favour. (*J. E. Good.*) *How good God is!*—Two kinds of persons are spoken of here.

I. THOSE WHO ARE IN TROUBLE. 1. Trouble may be the result of our own imprudence. Or perhaps worse, of our sinfulness. 2. It may arise from family or business perplexities. Sometimes trouble is allowed to come and go unheeded. The rod is felt, but not the hand that brought it down. Sometimes trouble is received angrily or peevishly. It is very hard to contend against these feelings.

II. THE CHARACTERS THAT CALMLY WAIT FOR GOD; expecting some further development of His mind, and not venturing to judge according to present appearances.

1. Trusting in God supposes there is some occasion for trust. The work of faith is to trust in God when all outward things go wrong, and there is nothing but the Word of God to rely on. 2. Trusting in God is the highest manifestation of real principle. 3. Trusting in God is not an adventure. His revealed will puts a peradventure out of the question. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *The Lord's favour to those who trust in Him.*—The Bible abounds with the most sublime descriptions of God, and represents, in a variety of passages, His awful character and glorious perfections. "On reading the description in the passage connected with the text it may appear to contain a contradiction. It may seem to represent the Almighty under two different characters. We may be ready to think that He cannot be at once "a jealous God" and "good, slow to anger." There is no real difficulty. God is in Himself the same, infinitely glorious in all perfections. The seeming differences in His character arise from the different characters of those with whom He has to deal. In this respect His character, like the cloud which accompanied Israel, has a dark side and a bright side. To His adversaries He is a "jealous God." To His people He is "rich in mercy." The description here given—

I. OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. "They that trust in Him." Trust is often used for the whole of religion. It signifies a confidence in His power and faithfulness for protection and support, and for a supply of all things necessary to life and godliness. Things which characterise this confidence are—1. It is habitual. 2. It is practical. 3. It is a patient and persevering trust. 4. It is a solid and well-grounded confidence. Trust in God must be founded on His promise.

II. OF THE FAVOUR OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. "The Lord is good." God is goodness. Even His severity against sin is the effect of His goodness. 2. He is "a stronghold in the day of trouble." The Lord's people are not exempt from trouble. But if they have peculiar trials they have peculiar support under them. 3. The Lord "knoweth them that are His." He sees, distinguishes, approves. Especially has He respect to them as putting their trust in Him. He sees the humble confidence with which they repose in His truth and faithfulness. Surely blessed are the people who make the Lord their trust. (*E. Cooper.*)

Vers. 7, 8. He knoweth them that trust in Him; but with an overrunning flood He will make an utter end of the place thereof. — *Opposite types of human character, and opposite lines of Divine procedure* :—**I. OPPOSITE TYPES OF CHARACTER.**

1. The friends of God. (1) They trust in Him. This is the universal character of the good in all ages. They trust His love ever to provide for them; His wisdom as their infallible guide; and His power as their strength and shield. (2) He acknowledges them. "And He knoweth." This means, that He recognises them as His loyal subjects and loving children, His people. In Hosca xiii. 5 He saith, "I did know thee in the wilderness," which means, "I did acknowledge thee and took care of thee"! The words imply the cognisance of special sympathy with the just. Here we have the enemies of God. "Darkness shall pursue His enemies." Those who pursue a course of life directly opposed to the moral laws of heaven, whatever they may say, are His enemies. How numerous are God's enemies!

II. Two opposite LINES OF DIVINE PROCEDURE. God's procedure is very different towards these two opposite classes of men. 1. He affords protection to the one. When the hosts of Sennacherib were approaching Jerusalem, Hezekiah, the king, under Divine inspiration, said to the people, "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah." Thus it is ever; God is always the refuge and strength of His people in times of tribulation. As a refuge He is—(1) Ever accessible. However suddenly the storm may come, the refuge is at your side, the door is open. "I will never leave thee," &c. He is—(2) Ever secure. Once entered, and no injury can follow. He sends destruction to the other. "But with an overrunning

flood He will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue His enemies." The primary allusion here, no doubt, is to the way which Nineveh was captured by the means of the Babylonians. Conclusion—The grand question for every man to ask is, How do I stand in relation to God? (*Homilist.*) *The varied destinies of men:*—How various are the destinies of men! One goes to honour and life, another to disgrace and death. There are two lakes high up in the Alps, which lie so near that the bystander may throw a stone from the one to the other. Lago Blanco the one is named, or the White Loch, because it is of a light green colour; while its neighbour is Lago Nero, or the Black Loch, because it is dark and gloomy looking. But though they are so close, they are on different inclines of the watershed. Lago Blanco sends its overflow down to the Adriatic, but Lago Nero is connected with the Black Sea. I look at the one, and I think about Venice and sunny Italy; I look at the other, and I think about Sebastopol and the wintry Crimea. So I may be side by side in one home, in one business, in one Christian congregation, with a man who is yet on the different slope of the watershed. We receive the same messages of warning and of salvation. We enjoy much the same opportunities. But one of us believes God, and the other does not. One of us passes into glorious liberty, and the other into darkness and despair. Ah, let me watch in which direction I turn. (*A. Smellie, M.A.*)

Vers. 9, 10. What do ye imagine against the Lord?—*Sin:*—I. THE ESSENCE OF SIN IS SUGGESTED. It is hostility to God. It is opposition to the laws, purposes, Spirit of God. It involves—1. The basest of ingratitude. 2. The greatest injustice. 3. Impious presumption. II. THE SEAT OF SIN IS SUGGESTED. It is in the mind. Sin is not language, not mere actions. Sin is in the deep mute thoughts of the hearts. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." III. THE FOLLY OF SIN IS SUGGESTED. It is opposition to Omnipotence. In opposing Him, remember—1. He will completely ruin you. 2. He will completely ruin you, whatever the kind of resistance you may offer. Fighting against God is a mad fight. (*Homilist.*) *Folly of opposing God:*—Sin, when it is mightiest and most successful, is transitory. Lord Rosebery has been telling us the story of Napoleon the Great. His energy, his intellect, his genius were such that he "enlarges the scope of human achievement." Once he "fought the Austrians for five consecutive days without taking off his boots or closing his eyes." "He was as much the first ruler as the first captain in the world." "Ordinary measures do not apply to him; we seem to be trying to span a mountain with a tape." Napoleon was the largest personal force that has come into the modern European world. But his career ended in defeat and exile. At forty-six the man who had dreamed of governing a continent was a captive. His conquests left no mark. The kings whom he made lost their thrones. France was beggared and exhausted by him. Why? Because God was not his God. "I am not a man like other men," he asserted himself; "the laws of morality could not be intended to apply to me." Therefore I will fear nothing, though wickedness seems to prosper for a time. Such prosperity has no permanence about it. It is better to walk humbly with God than to stand alone on the proudest eminence in the world. (*A. Smellie, M.A.*) While they be folden together as thorns.—*National undergrowth:*—Illustrate by the undergrowth in a great forest. It must be cut down before anything hopeful can be done with the soil. There is a national moral undergrowth: a brutal, vile, wretched population of a most repulsive and dangerous character. Ignorance, sensuality, violence, and irreligion, fostered and perpetuated by drunkenness, forms a dismal moral undergrowth, where human tigers watch for prey, where foul habits breed disease, where women lose all beauty and joy, and where children—the offspring of immoral parents—are like "a nest of unclean birds." What is to be done with this deadly moral undergrowth? Soft measures, easy-going, self-indulgent Christianity are of no use here. 1. Let us take increased care that good and precious seed shall be sown in the hearts of the young. This is of paramount and urgent importance. Take care of the little ones. 2. Seek to reach the people who never enter places of worship. 3. Endeavour to abate incentives to drunkenness. 4. Consecrate yourselves afresh to God, and the work of His kingdom. (*George W. McCree.*)

Vers. 11-14. There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor.—*Corrupt kings:*—These words suggest a few thoughts

concerning human kings and kingdoms. I. HUMAN KINGS ARE SOMETIMES TERRIBLY CORRUPT. "There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor." This evidently means Sennacherib, the king of Nineveh. II. CORRUPT KINGS OFTEN RUIN THEIR KINGDOMS. "Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more." These words seemed to be addressed to Judah concerning the utter destruction that will befall their enemies, and their consequent deliverance from all fear from that quarter. It was here said they should be destroyed—1. Notwithstanding their military completeness. "Though they be quiet." The word "quiet" means complete. No doubt the military organisation, discipline, and equipment of Sennacherib's mighty army, as he led them up to attack Jerusalem, were as complete as the intelligence, the art, and the circumstances of the age could make them. Notwithstanding this, ruin befell them. 2. Notwithstanding their numerical force. "Likewise many." III. THE RUIN OF CORRUPT KINGDOMS IS A BLESSING TO THE OPPRESSED. "Yoke" here refers to the tribute imposed upon Hezekiah by Sennacherib. And so it ever is, when despotism has fallen, the oppressed rise to liberty. Conclusion—1. Realise the truth of prophecy. 2. Realise the importance of promoting education among the people. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 15. Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.—*Three things worthy of note* :—I. PEACE PROCLAIMED. Glorious to the ears of the men of Jerusalem must have been the intelligence that their great enemy was destroyed, that the Assyrian hosts were crushed, and now peace had come. A proclamation of national peace is "good tidings." But the proclamation of moral peace is still more delightful. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. x. 15). "My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you." II. WORSHIP ENJOINED. "O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows." "During the Assyrian invasion the inhabitants of Judah were cut off from all access to the metropolis; now they would be at liberty to proceed thither as usual in order to observe their religious rites, and they are here commanded to do so." 1. War disturbs religious observances. As peace in nature is the time to cultivate your ground and sow your seed, peace in the nation is the time to promote growth in religion and virtue. 2. In war men are disposed to make religious vows. III. ENEMIES VANQUISHED. "For the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." (*Homilist*.) *Peace proclaimed* :—"At the close of the last war with Great Britain," says an American writer, "the prospects of our nation were shrouded in gloom. Our harbours were blockaded. Communication coastwise between our ports was cut off. Our immense annual products were mouldering in our warehouses. Our currency was reduced to irredeemable paper. Differences of political opinion were embittering the peace of many households. No one could predict when the contest would terminate, or discover the means by which it could much longer be protracted. It happened that one afternoon in February a ship was discovered in the offing, which was supposed to be a cartel, bringing home our commissioners at Ghent from their unsuccessful mission. The sun had set gloomily before any intelligence from the vessel had reached the city. Expectation became painfully intense as the hours of darkness drew on. At length a boat reached the wharf, announcing the fact that a treaty of peace had been signed, and was waiting for nothing but the action of our Government to become a law. The men on whose ears these words first fell rushed in breathless haste into the city to repeat them to their friends, shouting as they ran through the streets, 'Peace! Peace! Peace!' Every one who heard the sound repeated it. From house to house, from street to street, the news spread with electric rapidity. The whole city was in commotion. Men bearing lighted torches were flying to and fro, shouting, 'Peace! Peace! Peace!' When the rapture had partially subsided, one idea occupied every mind. But few men slept that night. In groups they were gathered in the streets, and by the fireside, beguiling the hours of midnight by reminding each other that the agony of war was over, and that a worn-out and distracted country was about to enter again upon its wonted career of prosperity. Thus, every one becoming a herald, the news soon reached every man, woman, and child in the city, and filled their hearts with joy."

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1, 2. *He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face.—God the Vindicator of the oppressed:—*I. THE OPPRESSION OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE BY THE ASSYRIANS. 1. This is expressed figuratively. "The emptiers have emptied them out" (ver. 2), had exhausted their resources, as the contents of a vessel poured out until every drain had been withdrawn, so had both Israel and Judah been impoverished by the Assyrians. "And marred their vine branches." Ancient Israel was often described as God's vineyard (Isa. v. 1; Psa. lxxx. 9). This vineyard the foe had ruthlessly invaded, casting down and injuring its fruit-bearing trees. 2. These figurative representations are sustained by historical fact. The more familiar we become with Assyrian history the more do we trace in that vast heathen power the prevalence of the haughty, overbearing spirit. Its rulers and people vainly supposed that national greatness consisted in the possession of might to be used in oppressing other nations and peoples. To be able to depict upon the walls of the palaces of Ninus battle scenes indicative of military triumph, accompanied by great spoil and cruel chastisement inflicted upon their adversaries, seems to have been their highest ambition. Their whole relationship to Israel and Judah was based upon this principle. The favoured of heaven, having forsaken their God, and hence lost His protecting care, turned in their exigencies to Assyria for aid, but only to find, in this supposed helper against their foes, a more powerful enemy. In this way the kingdom of Israel was first made tributary to Assyria by Paul (2 Kings xv. 17-20), and, soon after, its tribes were carried away into captivity by Shalmaneser (2 Kings xvii. 3-23), whilst the kingdom of Judah in like manner became compelled to acknowledge the lordship of Tilgath-Pilneser (2 Chron. xxviii. 16-21). Hezekiah sought to cast off the Assyrian yoke, but this only resulted in the nation, in Nahum's time, being brought into circumstances of extreme peril (2 Kings xviii. 13-17), and from which eventually supernatural help alone was able to deliver it (Isa. xxxvii. 36). II. DIVINE INTERPOSITION PROMISED ON BEHALF OF THE OPPRESSED. (Ver. 2.) Such interposition had in a measure but recently taken place (Isa. xxxvii. 36). "The angel of death" had "breathed in the face of the foe," and had caused "the might of the Gentile" to "melt like snow," and the oppressor to return humbled to his capital (Isa. xxxvii. 37). The time, however, for the complete and final interposition of heaven had not yet arrived. Still, it should come. The seer in rapt vision beheld it as though it had been then in operation, and for the encouragement of the oppressed he declared that the Divine eye observed all that was being endured, that the Lord Almighty still regarded them with favour (ver. 2), and would yet make them "an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations" (Isa. lx. 15). III. THIS DIVINE INTERPOSITION EVENTUALLY TO BE EXPERIENCED VIEWED AS CARRYING WITH IT THE ENTIRE OVERTHROW OF THE OPPRESSOR. (Ver. 1.) Asshur should in due course be brought low, and the yoke of bondage should fall from off the necks of the captives. In "the day of visitation"—1. Agents should not be wanting to carry out the Divine behests. The defection of the Assyrian general, the forces of the King of Media, and the overflowing of the Tigris, should all combine to bring about the accomplishment of the Divine purpose; and these forces are here personified as "the dasher in pieces" (ver. 1). 2. Resistance should be in vain. They might "keep the munition, watch the ways," &c. (ver. 1), but all to no purpose. The proud power must inevitably fall, and in its overthrow proclamation be made that it is not by means of tyranny and oppression and wrong-doing that any nation can become truly great and lastingly established, but by the prevalence in its midst of liberty, virtue, and righteousness. Nineveh in her downfall

". . . seems to cry aloud
To warn the mighty and instruct the proud
That of the great, neglecting to be just,
Heaven in a moment makes a heap of dust."

(S. D. Hillman, B.A.)

Vers. 3-13. *The shield of His mighty men is made red.—The downfall of Nineveh, as illustrative of the Divine and the human elements in revelation:—*There are two elements in the Bible, the Divine and the human. God speaks

to us in every page, nor does He speak the less emphatically, but all the more so, in that He addresses us through men possessing throbbing hearts, and who were passing through experiences like our own. The account given in these verses of the predicted ruin of Nineveh must be taken as a whole, and in the graphic picture here presented to us we have strikingly illustrated this twofold character of the Scriptures of eternal truth. I. THE ACCOUNT CONTAINED HERE OF THE PREDICTED OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE THE DIVINE ELEMENT IN REVELATION. Nahum flourished in the reign of Hezekiah (B.C. 725-696), and Nineveh was destroyed between B.C. 609 and 606. He lived and prophesied thus say a hundred years before the occurrence of the events he so vividly described, and when the Assyrian power was in the zenith of its prosperity. His announcements were very distinct and definite, and by placing these and the records of secular historians given at a subsequent period side by side, we see how minutely the predictions of this seer have been fulfilled, and that hence, in making these, he must have been God's messenger, uttering, not his own thoughts, but those which had been communicated to him by "visions and revelations of the Lord." In chap. i. 10 we read, "For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." The secular historian writes: "While all the Assyrian army were feasting for their former victories, those about Arbuce, being informed by some deserters of the negligence and drunkenness in the camp of the enemies, assaulted them unexpectedly by night, and falling orderly on them disorderly, and prepared on them unprepared, became masters of the camp, and slew many of the soldiers and drove the rest into the city" (Diodorus Siculus, bk. ii. p. 80). In chap. ii. 6 we read, "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved." The secular historian writes: "There was an oracle among the Assyrians that Nineveh should not be taken till the river became an enemy to the city; and in the third year of the siege the river, being swollen with continual rains, overflowed part of the city, and broke down the wall for twenty furlongs. Then the king, thinking that the oracle was fulfilled, and the river had become an enemy to the city, built a large funeral pile in the palace, and, collecting together all his wealth and his concubines and eunuchs, burnt himself and the palace with them all, and the enemy entered at the breach that the waters had made, and took the city" (Diodorus Siculus, bk. ii. p. 80). In chap. ii. 9 the prophet, as though addressing the adversaries of Nineveh, said, "Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture"; and the same secular historian already quoted informs us that the conquerors carried many talents of gold and silver to Ecbatana, the royal city of the Medes. No language could be more explicit than that in which Nahum predicted the total destruction of the city (chap. ii. 10-13, iii. 7, 15-17). The prophet Zephaniah used words equally plain (ii. 13-15). Their utterances would have appeared very strange to the Ninevites at the time they were spoken; as strange, indeed, as similar utterances would appear if addressed at the present time to the inhabitants of our own metropolis; but they were true, nevertheless, and the facts of history furnish abundant confirmations. For upwards of two thousand years after its overthrow Nineveh lay buried in the earth. II. THE ACCOUNT CONTAINED HERE OF THE PREDICTED OVERTHROW OF NINEVEH SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN REVELATION. Holy Scripture is remarkable in its variety—not variety in purpose, for this is single throughout, but variety in expression. History, prophecy, poetry, parable, proverb, miracle, biography, vision, epistle, are all laid under tribute. As there is a Divine element in the Bible, so also there is a human element therein. Biblical critics are agreed in recognising "the classic beauty and the finished elegance" of the style of Nahum, and in assigning to this writer a place in the first rank of Hebrew literature. "The variety in his method of presenting ideas discovers much poetic talent in the prophet. The reader of taste and sensibility will be affected by the entire structure of the poem, by the agreeable manner in which the ideas are brought forward, by the flexibility of the expressions, the roundness of his turns, the delicate outlines of his figures, by the strength and delicacy, and the expression of sympathy and greatness, which diffuse themselves over the whole subject" (De Wette's Introduction). His description of the siege and fall of Nineveh, contained in this chapter (vers. 3-13), is wonderfully vivid. As we read the account, even at this distant date, the stirring scenes seem to live again, and to pass in review before us. We see the attacking warriors

in their scarlet attire and with their chariots armed with sharp instruments of steel (ver. 3), and the defenders of the city, suddenly startled, hastening their preparations, their chariots in the hurry jostling against each other in the streets, and the gallants summoned by the king hastening to the ramparts, which the foe is seeking with battering-rams to cast down (vers. 4, 5). We behold the overflowing of the river, facilitating the advance of the enemy, and paralysing the people by reason of the popular tradition now seemingly being fulfilled (ver. 6). We witness the inhabitants brought low in shame and dishonour, moaning like a captive woman (ver. 7), or fleeing for their very life in hopelessness and despair, conscious that resistance is vain (ver. 8). We view the spoiling of the city—the conqueror carrying away the gold and the silver to the Median capital, trophies of victory (ver. 9). Finally, we picture to ourselves the prophets of the Lord gazing upon the waste and desolation, reflecting upon the proud being abased, their offspring cut off, their gains confiscated, their boastful messengers silenced, and ascribing all the terrible reverses thus experienced to the righteous retribution of the Lord of hosts (vers. 10–13); and we feel, as we linger upon the scene thus graphically portrayed, that whilst rejoicing in this volume of revelation as having been given by inspiration of God, and as containing Divine lessons abounding both in encouragement and warning, we may well prize it also even on the lower ground of its literary merit, and heartily rejoice in the infinite variety of human powers and endowments here consecrated to the presentation of the loftiest and grandest spiritual teaching. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 13. Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.—*Man incurring the Divine displeasure*:—This attitude of God towards man—I. **IMPLES WRONG-DOING ON MAN'S PART.** God is not thus adverse to man for naught. "His delights are with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 31). Sin alienates man from God, and causes God to be righteously displeased with man. II. **INVOLVES MAN IN PRESENT DISTRESS.** Man cannot be at ease whilst under the ban of Jehovah. "In His favour is life" (Psa. xxx. 5). Separation from Him through sin means disquietude and unrest. "The worst troubler in the world is a wilful heart." "Conscience makes cowards of us all!" "The heart melteth, the knees smite together" (ver. 10). III. **RESULTING IN ULTIMATE RUIN TO SUCH AS WILFULLY PERSIST IN SIN.** God is "the Lord of hosts." All power is His. "Who shall stand when He is angry?" (Psa. lxxvi. 7). All have sinned, and hence have incurred the displeasure of Him who "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," but in Christ, whose day the seers saw afar off, God is reconciled to man; so that the distress and ruin indicated can alone result from man refusing to be reconciled unto God. (*Ibid.*) And the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard (with chap. i. 15).—*The messengers of Nineveh and the messengers of Zion: a comparison*:—"And the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard" (ver. 13); "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" (chap. i. 15). The messengers of Nineveh and the messengers of Zion are alluded to in these passages. A comparison of these respective messengers may prove suggestive and useful in its application to certain developments in these modern times. From the Second Book of Kings and the Second Book of Chronicles we learn that the heralds or messengers of Nineveh cherished the spirit of blasphemy with reference to the God of heaven. The faith of the pious Hebrews consisted in the recognition of the one living and true God, and of His providential care over all His creatures; and it was against this bulwark that the emissaries of Assyria constantly directed their assaults in words foul and filthy (see Rabshakeh's appeal to the Jews, 2 Kings xviii. 33–35; and his letter, 2 Chron. xxxii. 17). The great and distinguishing characteristic of the messengers of Zion was loyalty to the God of heaven. Their feet stood upon the mountains, and their voice proclaimed to the people, "Behold your God!" (Isa. xl. 9); "Thy God reigneth!" (Isa. lii. 7). In the present age there are messengers who boldly declare their non-acceptance of the teaching that recognises the Divine Being and His working, and who seek to disseminate their views, and in doing so are not particular if they blaspheme the God of heaven. And whilst there are such messengers in the world doing their injurious work, there are also those who are thoroughly loyal to the King of kings, who delight to show forth His praise, to tell the story of His love in the gift and work of Christ, and to seek to draw men in loving obedience to His authority and will. Note certain contrasts, then, suggested;

thus—I. CAPTIVITY IN CONTRAST WITH FREEDOM. The messengers of Nineveh approached Jerusalem, to which Sennacherib was laying siege, but they bore no tidings of liberty. They claimed full submission, and declared that even this must be followed by captivity in a strange land (2 Kings xviii. 31, 32). The assurance of ultimate deliverance came from the messengers of the Lord (chap. i. 12, 13). Sin is bondage. Transgressors are slaves. And scepticism has nothing to offer such by way of helping them to escape. Lo! the messengers of Zion come. They tell him of the great Father's unwearying love, the Saviour's obedience unto the death of the Cross, the energising and sanctifying Spirit ready to gird him with all-sufficient strength. II. STRIFE IN CONTRAST TO PEACE. The messengers of Nineveh to Judah had nothing conciliatory to convey; they told only of contention and strife. The assurance that peace should ultimately be enjoyed came to the anxious King of Judah from God's messengers, who published peace. The messengers of scepticism have no proclamation of peace to make. It is the privilege, however, of the messengers of Zion to proclaim those spiritual and eternal verities in which the heart may securely and tranquilly repose, and to point to him who can quell every storm and give rest unto the soul. III. GLOOM IN CONTRAST TO GLADNESS. Hezekiah and his people were in extremity; it was to them a time of "trouble"; but not a ray of hope came to them through the messengers of Nineveh. Their worst fears were confirmed; the foe was unrelenting. Their hope was in God, and in the words spoken by His holy prophets. So in the extremities of life—in sickness and sorrow, and especially at life's close, hope springs not from unbelief, but from the words God has addressed to us through His servants. The Gospel has no rival in such seasons. Scepticism has no voice then, or, if it speaks, it but deepens the prevailing gloom; but the good tidings God has revealed dispels our sadness and fills the soul with immortal hopes. Happy messengers who are thus enabled to "comfort all that mourn," &c. (Isa. lxi. 2). IV. SHAME IN CONTRAST TO HONOUR. The voice of all messengers who blaspheme the holy name of God "shall be no more heard," for God will put them to silence; but voices publishing His love and grace shall go sounding on through the ages,—the bright succession of proclaimers shall not cease. Growing numbers shall be raised up who shall find their way to all nations and kindreds and tribes, until the glad tidings shall reach every shore, and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth (Isa. xi. 9). (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 10. Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity.—*Environments*:—These were certainly close environments; but whence had they come? From still closer ones, like those of pride and enervating habits among a luxurious people; from neglect of the higher demands of the spiritual life; from living too much on the lower plane, which prophets in all ages have warned against. It did not require miraculous power *then* to discern what causes would be sure to produce disintegration of a city or nation. It does not require any superhuman gift to-day. Every clear seeing mind knows that dissipation will make nations and individuals weak and easily overcome. Certain courses will tend to strengthen and fortify; opposite courses will produce final disaster. There is no power enduring and sufficient but the power of the Spirit; and if this be neglected there remains, of course, nothing with which to repel invasions. This is true of a single individual, or of many united. Not the force from without, but the weakness within, should cause apprehension. We have often seen good work done in overcoming environments. Hard, crushing, discouraging environments do not hinder brave spirits. There have been crises in the world's history when the massed power of dauntless spirit has finally swept away seemingly immovable environment. It is not in the nature of our surroundings to hold us caged for ever, or even for this life. There are no chains for the free spirit. Let us beware of the chains of pride, resentment, envy, of criticism and complaint, and break those that we can break. (*Mrs. E. M. Hickok.*)

Ver. 17. Which camp in the hedges in the cold day.—*Locusts affected by the cold*:—Paxton and others have remarked that there is much difficulty in this

passage ; but to anyone who has attentively watched the habits of the locusts it is not only plain, but very striking. In the evenings, as soon as the air became cool, at Abeih, they literally camped in the hedges and loose stone walls, covering them over like a swarm of bees settled on a bush. There they remained until the next day's sun waxed warm, when they again commenced to march. One of the days on which they were passing was quite cool, and the locusts scarcely moved at all from their camps, and multitudes remained actually stationary until the next morning. Those that did march crept along very heavily, as if cramped and stiff ; but in a hot day they hurried forward in a very earnest, lively manner. It is an aggravation of the calamity if the weather continues cool ; for then they prolong their stay, and do far more damage. (*Thomson's "Land and Book."*)

INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK.

I THINK that an argument for the divinity of Scripture might be found in its silence as well as in its speech. It draws a veil, thick and impenetrable, over very much which men, left to themselves, would have been certain to bring forth to the light of open day. How remarkable, for example, is the reticence of the sacred writers about themselves! But for their names at the commencement of their books we should never have known in many instances to whom we owed these Scriptures which are "beyond all Greek, beyond all Roman fame." That is not the manner of men. They are very prone to obtrude themselves. The workman does not care to lose his own personality in the work which he performs, or to be remembered only by what he has done; he likes to carve his name over his achievement in bold and striking letters which all can read. We are too self-conscious, too proud, too anxious for praise, to be mere voices crying in the wilderness for God's glory and the world's good. There is no better biography in existence than that which James Boswell wrote of Dr. Johnson; it makes the very man live before us once more: but the biographer shows himself at every turn; he must be seen and known and recognised in the company of his hero, for good or for ill, in wisdom and in folly; rather than go unnoticed, he will reveal to us his own weaknesses and foibles. But the methods of the human authors of the Bible are altogether different. God inspired them; and, if there were any uprisings within their minds of the egotism and pride which are so natural to us, His Spirit reprov'd and suppressed the unworthy thought. To disclose God in His character and will, they wrote; and therefore they kept themselves sedulously in the background. Thoughts like these can scarcely fail to be awakened within us in connection with this prophecy of Habakkuk. Short as it is, it is one of the sublimest books in the Old Testament. It speaks a great and lofty language. It throbs with an intense and ardent feeling. Yet how exceedingly little we know of its author! He is a mere name to us, and not a very pleasant or melodious name, as we imagine, although we may find some cause to modify that opinion by and by. So much were the old Jewish rabbis impressed by this doubt and uncertainty that enveloped the prophet—so unwilling were they to rest content with the obscurity in which Habakkuk himself was perfectly satisfied to remain—that they framed all manner of legends about him. They declared that his mother was the Shunammite woman who built a little chamber in the wall of her house for Elisha, the man of God; that thus he was himself the lad to whom death came so suddenly in the harvest-field as he played among the reapers, but whom Elisha restored to life and gave back to his mother; that, in after years, when the Holy Land was overrun and conquered by the Chaldeans, he fled to a place of hiding in Arabia, and returned again when the foreigner had gone, to live for a long period in peace and to die at last in his own home. It is all a tissue of fables, originating in man's unwillingness to be contented with the silence of Scripture. One or two facts, however, about the prophet it is possible for us to gather. So let us think first of the man, and then of the book which he has bequeathed to us.

I. HIS NAME IS FULL OF MEANING. To all of us, I suppose, it is a name which sounds harsh and untuneful in the extreme; and others beside ourselves have had the same feeling. About the rough and uncouth title one good expositor of our own writes, "We apprehend that this name has been a great disparagement to our prophet, and has operated in no faint degree in causing many readers to hold the book in less regard than they might otherwise have done." But such readers have been very superficial, and have not looked below the surface of things. For this ragged name has a beautiful significance. It is like some costly stone, unlovely and apparently worthless at first sight, but needing only to be examined and polished to brighten into the lustre of the diamond or to deepen into the glow of the ruby. Habakkuk means one who "strongly enfolds," or one who "firmly and closely and tenderly embraces." Luther puts a delightfully simple interpretation upon the word. The prophet, he says, "embraces his people and takes them to his arms; that is, he comforts them and lifts them up as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that, if God will, all shall be right ere long." But while it is true that Habakkuk had a very deep and fond love for his people, being patriot no less than prophet, I prefer to regard the name as descriptive of his attitude towards God. He embraces the Almighty; he clings with fast and faithful hold to the Lord of heaven and earth; "in God's breast, his own abode, he lays his spirit down." That is no fanciful meaning to extract from the Hebrew word. It indicates the real character of the man. In the fellowship of the Old Testament seers Habakkuk stands out pre-eminent as the prophet of faith. More than most, he believed God. His was not always a victorious and jubilant faith, an unclouded assurance. Sometimes it had a sore battle to wage with doubt. Frequently he was cast down. It was an enigma to him, as it has been to many, that the Judge of all the earth should act as He did. "Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil," he exclaimed, "wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?" But it was the very simplicity of his dependence, the very thoroughness of his confidence, which led him to speak in these expostulating tones. He could not satisfy himself, as we do, with empty phrases, telling his heart that no doubt the mystery would be solved in good time, and that all was for the best. Just because he had an absolute faith in God's rectitude and mercy—just because he leaned on Him entirely and had an unquestioning trust in His character and ways, it was puzzling to him to see the unrighteous prosperous and the good downtrodden. And when the gloom and the perplexity have passed, Habakkuk's eyes are still directed heavenward; his affections are above. Through the calm and the storm; in the daytime of peace and the night-season of sorrow; when the fields wave with the yellow grain, and when the fig-tree does not blossom and there is no fruit in the vines—he keeps the even tenor of his way; his heart is fixed; he rests in the Lord and waits patiently for Him. We learn from his prophecy, too, what his calling and occupation were. The closing chapter of his book contains a magnificent ode or hymn in praise of God—a hymn to which he has appended the words, "For the chief musician, on my stringed instruments," meaning thereby, no doubt, "Let this ode be sung in the Temple service to the sound of the harps, viols, psalteries, which I am myself accustomed to employ when I minister in God's sanctuary." And so it has been reasonably inferred that Habakkuk was an accomplished musician as well as a poet of the highest order—that he belonged to those bands of Levites who were set apart to sing and play before the Lord—that perhaps he was even a choir-master in the holy house on Zion, one whose duty and privilege it was to arrange appropriate harmonies for the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs which were sung there, and to see that they were rendered well and fitly, with grave sweet melody. We may think of him going out and in, like Samuel, in the sacred courts; praising the Lord with heart and voice; delighting to join in the glad and solemn and thrilling music of the hallowed place. He tells us—does he not?—that we should worship God by our songs as well as invoke His mercy and succour by our prayers. God looks for this glad and open tribute, and we disappoint Him when we withhold it or when we render it only in a formal way. Let Habakkuk teach us to praise the Lord, for He is good and His mercy endureth for ever. One other question about the man we can decide, in part at least—the question of the age in Jewish history at which he lived and prophesied. There has, indeed, been a difference of view regarding the matter. Habakkuk has received an earlier date from some, who have placed

him in the closing years of Manasseh—the years when the king, as quaint Thomas Fuller says, “being carried into a strange land, came home to himself”; a later date from some others, who assign his preaching and activity to the days of Jehoiakim when Judea was tottering to its fall, so making him one of the prophets of the Captivity. But we may follow those who steer a middle course, and who fix upon the reign of Josiah as the most probable period of Habakkuk’s life and work. His prophecies were spoken, we know, before the Babylonian invasion, for he predicts it in graphic and powerful words. But that invasion took place very soon after good King Josiah had fallen in battle with Egypt, and after all Jerusalem and Judah had mourned for him who seemed to be taken away from the evil to come. What more likely, then, than that this seer and singer lived and wrote and sang in the short epoch of prosperity which preceded the catastrophe? In those days there was stern work to be done by the preacher of righteousness and judgment; for though it was a time of revival, wickedness still dwelt in the land, and God’s punishment was not far away.

II. Let us turn to look at THE BOOK WHICH HE HAS LEFT TO US. It divides itself into two parts, the one containing the first and second chapters, the other the sublime poem of the third. But the opening division breaks itself up, again, into two lesser sections, in the earlier of which God’s judgment on Judah is described; in the later, God’s judgment on the Chaldeans who had led Judah captive and wasted and destroyed it. Habakkuk, the prophet of faith, shows us, first of all, faith struggling and perplexed at the sight of the sufferings measured out to the Lord’s chosen people; and then faith filled with a stern joy when it beholds the utter overthrow of the conqueror and tyrant. And in the end he sings a song which has faith for its theme—how it takes comfort amid the fears and glooms of the present from the deliverances of the past; how it bates not a jot of heart or hope; how it rejoices in the Lord and exults for joy in the God of salvation.

I. Habakkuk speaks of the doom that is about to fall on his own country and people. It is a daily grief to him, he says, to see the violence and oppression and strife and plunder which prevail around him, the powerlessness of the law, the crookedness of justice, the entrapping of the righteous by the wicked. He finds it hard to understand why God does not interpose to take vengeance on the evil and to diadem the right. “How long shall I cry,” he complains, “and Thou wilt not hear?” But, even while he wonders and questions, God answers that a day of terrible retribution is fast approaching; that He is about to raise up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation, against His erring children; that a sore and fearful experience, a furnace heated seven times, lies before them in the near future. It is a vivid picture which the prophet draws of these Chaldeans, the instruments of God’s anger. What ruin they bring with them, what misery, what helplessness and despair! The desire of Habakkuk for the punishment of those who were evildoers in his nation was more than satisfied now. It seemed to him, indeed, that this penalty was too severe, this chastisement too sweeping and terrible. It fell on all alike, the good as well as the bad. It overwhelmed land and people in utter destruction. Once again, therefore, he ventured to plead with God. Was it just and fitting to go so far? Was it right to give free rein to so godless a power—one which sacrificed to its own net, and lifted itself in pride to the very heavens? Thus the doom of Judah, the burden which the seer beheld with reference to his native land, is brought to a close. Here let us pause for a moment, that we may learn something for ourselves from the attitude of the prophet. He is a pattern to us. Ought we not, like him, to desire that evil may be wholly rooted out from among God’s redeemed and renewed people; that, at whatever cost and with whatever trying discipline, they may be made entirely pure? And ought we not to pray, too, that the chastisement be not too sharp and grievous, and that God may stay His rough wind in the day of His east wind? The entreaties of Habakkuk were heard. He waited for a while, tarrying in patience like a sentinel on his watchtower; and then again the Lord spoke to him. It was the doom of the arrogant Chaldeans which was disclosed now. The mighty were ultimately to be cast down from their seats; the proud were to be abased. Over and over again the prophet reiterates this assurance of his Lord; he glories in it; it is hard for him to let it go. He tells how the Babylonian plunderer, who had increased that which was not his, and had loaded himself with pledges, should become in turn the booty of others; how the Babylonian tyrant, who had set his nest on high, was really flinging away his life and exposing himself to the wrath of the Almighty; how the Babylonian league-breaker, who had enticed other people into alliances which were

turned to their shame and ruin, should drink of the same cup with which he had intoxicated them; how the Babylonian idolater, who forsook the living God for dumb idols, should be left unanswered and unaided in the hour of his need. These seem pitiless threats to utter even against a sinful race, and this mood of the prophet looks harsh and intolerant. But when men cry out against the denunciations and judgments of the Bible, they should remember that God only puts into exercise that right with which no earthly sovereign would or could dispense—the right of removing offenders from the earth. And Habakkuk did well to approve of it. Finally, he breaks out into that glorious song in honour of the God whom he trusted and loved. It is a song which is to be sung, he declares, *'al shiggyónóth*, that is, in wandering measures, in music of an impulsive and passionate kind, full of sudden changes and transitions, such as the words of the ode demand. For it passes rapidly from one theme to another, from one mood and feeling to another. It is like the slave whom Longfellow heard singing the Psalms at midnight; its tones “by turns are glad, sweetly solemn, wildly sad.” Habakkuk sets out with the request that those judgments which he had foreseen may come quickly, but that mercy may be mingled with them too. Then, to revive his faith, he recalls the years of the right hand of the Most High, the mighty deeds done of old by God. He speaks of the Lord’s giving of the law from Sinai, when “His brightness was as the light, and He had rays coming forth from His hand, and there was the hiding of His power”; of the ravages of plague and pestilence in the desert; of the terror of the inhabitants of Canaan when the hosts of Israel crossed their border; of the memorable victory gained by Joshua, when “the sun and the moon stood still in their habitation.” All these had been manifestations of Jehovah’s power, terrible to His enemies, but most gracious and comforting to such as confided in Him. From the contemplation of them Habakkuk takes hope and courage. All will be well, he assures himself, with him who has God on his side. And so he closes his hymn with those confident and victorious lines, whose beauty and music are not surpassed in any literature. In his song the prophet shows us the secret of real tranquillity in the midst of outward alarms and distresses. It lies in the possession of a personal trust in the Lord. “The just shall live by his faith,” we are told in another part of this book—live in calm through trouble and danger and temptation, if he believe God and cling to Him. No evil will befall him, and no plague come nigh him. God, he feels, has wrought wondrously in the past, and He can save him still. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

HABAKKUK.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1-4. The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.—*Responsibilities*.—We can see how appropriate is the word “burden” used by the prophets to describe their gift and duty. The obligation laid on them often involved strain and danger. And yet it was a glorious privilege to be commissioned by God, to act for Him, to be His mouthpiece to the people. Habakkuk’s burden was the sight of the general evil and corruption prevalent in the Holy Land, among the chosen people. What burden can be heavier than this, to see evil prevail among God’s people, and to be unable to remedy it? Two lessons—1. Every privilege entails suffering. 2. Do not lose heart. The burden is laid on you by the Lord who gave you your glorious privilege. Look at the vocation, not at the burden. (*S. Baring-Gould.*) *The burden of enlightenment*.—The light of Divine favour bestowed upon Habakkuk was the source of much perplexity of mind and distress of soul to him. This paradox is common in Christian experience. The prophet’s mission of mercy was a burden to himself. **I. A BURDEN OF ENLIGHTENMENT.** He was—1. A spectator of evil; looking upon the great and terrible disorders that devastated his country. 2. An inspired spectator of evil. “God showed him iniquity,” &c. To see, in the light of heaven, the fearful ramifications of evil in society is an essential condition of Christian service. 3. A troubled spectator of evil. His heart-strings vibrated with jarring discords at the touch of the workers of evil. **II. A BURDEN OF PRAYER.** With a vivid consciousness of God’s almighty power the prophet called upon Him to interpose and save His people. But days rolled on and lengthened into months, and still evil abounded. Oh, the burden of prayers unheard! Oh, the burden of unanswered prayers! Oh, the burden of delay! The heart grows sick with hope deferred. **III. A BURDEN OF DISCIPLINE.** Designed—1. As a test to see if they will continue to work and witness for God. 2. Still trust in the Lord, even in the presence of the great mystery of iniquity. The burden is—3. For training, that God’s servants may become strong in faith, giving glory to God. (*Joseph Willcox.*)

Ver. 2. O Lord! how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear?—*The crisis of prayer*.—The question to be answered is this: How long will God suffer His people to pray, and still neglect to hear? Answer—1. Till they see the plague of their own hearts—till each one sees his own individual iniquities, and lies in the dust before God. 2. Till the Church feels that she stands in the gap between God and a sin-destroyed world. 3. Till they are willing to do whatever of duty He requires, in addition to praying. 4. Till they move the stumbling-blocks out of the way of a revival of His work. 5. If God sees in His people any disposition to withhold from Him the glory of the work He does. We see from this subject—(1) Why so many prayers seem to be offered in vain. (2) We see some of the causes of spiritual declension in the Church. (3) The subject shows how we should set about raising the Church from her low estate. (4) We see the duty of every Christian to search well his own heart. The hindrances to revivals are the sins of individuals. Each Christian, therefore, must search

and purify himself. (5) How fearful is the Church's responsibility; and how great should be her watchfulness, lest by her apathy, her selfishness, or her unbelief, she hinder the work of the Lord. (*National Preacher.*) *The cry of a good man under the perplexing procedure of God.*—I. GOD'S APPARENT DISREGARD TO HIS EARNEST PRAYER. Under the pressure of that "burden" which was resting on his heart, namely, the moral corruption and the coming doom of his country; it would seem that he had often cried unto the Almighty and implored His interposition; but no answer had come. Why are not the prayers of good men immediately answered? In reply to this question three undoubted facts should be borne in mind. 1. That impurity of soul is necessary to qualify for the appreciation of the mercies sought. It is not until a man is made to feel the deep necessity of a thing that he values it when it comes. "How long shall I cry?" Until the sense of need is so intensified as to qualify for the reception and due appreciation of the blessing. Another fact that should be borne in mind is—2. That the exercise of true prayer is in itself the best means of spiritual culture. Conscious contact with God is essential to moral excellence. You must bring the sunbeam to the seed you have sown, if you would have the seed quickened and developed; and you must bring God into conscious contact with your powers, if you would have them vivified and brought forth into strength and perfection. True prayer does this; it is the soul realising itself in the presence of Him "who quickeneth all things." 3. That prayers are answered where there is no bestowment of the blessing invoked. "Not my will, but Thine be done." This is all we want. Acquiescence in the Divine will is the moral perfection, dignity, and blessedness of all creatures in the universe. With these facts let us not be anxious about the apparent disregard of God to our prayers. II. GOD'S APPARENT DISREGARD TO THE MORAL CONDITION OF SOCIETY. "Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." The substance of this is the old complaint, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" Two facts should be set against this complaint. 1. The good have the best of it, even in this life. 2. The evil will have the worst of it in the next life. (*Homilist.*) *The expostulation of faith.*—The prophet is deeply afflicted, for there is little religion in the land, and as little of the true service of God. The one in reality is the measure of the other, although there may often seem more religion than righteousness. He does not, however, begin with attacking vice and irreligion and sin. He knows better than to do this. He carries his complaint to God, and in this way he would find some relief from his perplexity. The prophet expostulates with his God. His work seems almost hopeless, but he is a godly man, and he turns instinctively from man to God. Assuredly there is an expostulation of faith as well as of presumption. It may be good for the prophet, and for those in like circumstances, that at times God is silent. It is not that the prophet distrusts the justice or the mercy of God; it is rather, that in his impatience he would set times and seasons for His working. The times in which the prophet lived were times of ungodliness, of violence, and of misrule. Every one did that which was right in his own eyes. To correct this, the merely human sense of right is powerless. In such times, righteous men, such as wished to "lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity," must go to the wall. Even thus they cannot escape injustice and violence, scorn and oppression, from the many who have no belief in the Unseen, and who act accordingly. And so they are compassed about with wickedness. The mercy of God may be compassing them about, but for the time they can hardly see any evidences of it, and they are almost in despair. They are tempted to think that "all the foundations of the earth are moved," and to say, "God hath forsaken the earth." (*P. Barclay, M.A.*) *Freedom allowed in prayer.*—The prophet does not here teach the Jews, but prepares them for a coming judgment, as they could not but see that they were justly condemned, since they were proved guilty by the cry and complaints made by all the godly. Now this passage teaches us that all who really serve and love God, ought, according to the prophet's example, to burn with holy indignation whenever they see wickedness reigning without restraint among men, and especially in the Church of God. There is indeed nothing which ought to cause us more grief than to see men raging with profane contempt for God, and no regard had for His law and for Divine truth, and all

order trodden under foot. When therefore such a confusion appears to us, we must feel roused, if we have in us any spark of religion. If it be objected that the prophet exceeded moderation, the obvious answer is this,—that though he freely pours forth his feelings, there was nothing wrong in this before God, at least nothing wrong is imputed to him: for wherefore do we pray, but that each of us may unburden his cares, his griefs, and anxieties, by pouring them into the bosom of God? Since then God allows us to deal so familiarly with Him, nothing wrong ought to be ascribed to our prayers, when we thus freely pour forth our feelings, provided the bridle of obedience keeps us always within due limits, as was the case with the prophet; for it is certain that he was retained under the influence of real kindness. Our prophet here undertakes the defence of justice; for he could not endure the law of God to be made a sport, and men to allow themselves every liberty in sinning. He can be justly excused, though he expostulates here with God, for God does not condemn this freedom in our prayers. The end of praying is, that every one of us pour forth his heart before God. (*John Calvin.*) *The deeper plan in human events.*—In listening to a great organ, played by the hand of a master, there is often an undertone that controls the whole piece. Sometimes it is scarcely audible, and a careless listener would miss it altogether. The lighter play goes on, ebbing and flowing, rising and sinking, now softly gliding on the gentler stops, and now swelling out to the full power of the great organ. But amid all the changes and transpositions this undertone may be heard, steadily pursuing its own thought. The careless listener thinks the lighter play the main thing; but he that can appreciate musical ideas, as well as sounds, follows the quiet undertone of the piece, and finds in it the leading thought of the artist. So men see the outward events of life, the actions, the words, the wars, famines, sins; but underneath all God is carrying out His own plans, and compelling all outward things to aid the music He would make in this world. (*Christian Age.*)

Vers. 5-10. **I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.**—*The doom of a nation of conventional religionists.*—The Jews were such a nation. They prided themselves in the orthodoxy of their faith, in the ceremonials of their worship, in the polity of their Church. The doom threatened was terrible in many respects. **I. IT WAS TO BE WROUGHT BY THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF A WICKED NATION.** “I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs.” “Nabopolassar had already destroyed the mighty empire of Assyria, and founded the Chaldeo-Babylonian rule. He had made himself so formidable that Necho found it necessary to march an army against him, in order to check his progress; and though defeated at Megiddo, he had, in conjunction with his son Nebuchadnezzar, gained a complete victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish. These events were calculated to alarm the Jews, whose country lay between the dominions of the two contending powers; but, accustomed as they were to confide in Egypt and in the sacred localities of their own capital (Isa. xxxi. 1; Jer. vii. 4), and being in alliance with the Chaldeans, they were indisposed to listen to, and treated with the utmost incredulity, any predictions which described their overthrow by that people” (Henderson). God employs wicked nations as His instruments. “I will work a work,” He says, but how? By the Chaldeans. How does He raise up wicked nations to do His work? 1. Not instigatingly. He does not inspire them with wicked passions necessary to qualify them for the infernal work of violence, war, rapine, bloodshed. God could not do this. 2. Not coercively. He does not force them to it, in no way does He interfere with them. They are the responsible party. How then does He “raise” them up? He permits them. He could prevent them; but He allows them. He gives them life, capacity, and opportunities. Now, would not the fact that their destruction would come upon them from a heathen nation, a nation which they despised, make it all the more terrible? **II. IT WAS TO BE WROUGHT WITH RESISTLESS VIOLENCE.** 1. The violence would be uncontrolled. “Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves.” They recognise no authority, and proudly spurn the dictates of others. “They recognise no judge save themselves, and they get for themselves in their own dignity, without needing others’ help.” 2. The violence would be rapid and fierce. “Swifter than the leopard.” “Evening wolves.” **III. IT WAS TO BE**

WROUGHT WITH IMMENSE HAVOC. As the east wind, or simoom; spreading destruction everywhere. (*Homilist.*) **The Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation.**—*The Chaldeans* :—Very graphic is the description of this new and formidable enemy. Gather four lessons for ourselves. I. **THE EVIL OF SIN.** It separates the soul from God. Wherever sin is it makes the prophet's roll to be written within and without. "Lamentation, and weeping, and woe." "All unrighteousness is sin." II. **NATIONAL SINS LEAD TO NATIONAL JUDGMENTS.** They are said to "defile" a land, and to be a "reproach" to any people. Direct judgments come on a nation for its sin; as on Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, Israel, &c. Then let our nation take heed. III. **THE POWER OF LITTLE THINGS.** "He heapeth up dust, and taketh it." That is, the king of Babylon, by means of mounds of dust, would put himself on a level with the besieged, and rapidly overcome them. It needs no great means when God is using the instrument. IV. **THE DANGER OF FALSE SECURITY.** "They shall deride every stronghold." When the Lord God is not there, the defence is vain. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth in, and is safe." Every false hiding-place will be swept away in the coming storm. Last year I saw in Pompeii a cellar where eighteen persons had fled for safety in the time of the great overthrow, but it was a false refuge. They were all lost. There is something like that in spiritual things. Many souls are hiding in a refuge of lies. They are trusting to their own merits, or to God's uncovenanted goodness apart from Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Without Christ, the God Man, you are defenceless and exposed to storm and tempest. (*A. C. Thiselton.*)

Ver. 12. **Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die.**—*The Christian conception of immortality* :—We know that this prophet was inspired, from the profound moral insight and far-reaching spiritual vision revealed in his utterance. His words are his only credentials, but they are amply sufficient. The prophecy dates near the close of the seventh or the beginning of the sixth century, B.C. The circumstances of Habakkuk's time largely determined the contents as well as the form of his prophecy. What were these circumstances? On the one hand grave disappointment in the development of his own nation. The hope centring in Josiah was dispelled by his death in ill-advised battle. Simultaneously the power of Assyria waned, and the power of Babylon grew. The politician's despair is the prophet's opportunity, and grandly does Habakkuk rise to the occasion. The prophet saw that though Babylon was a hindrance to Judah's political emancipation, yet it was one of the necessary agents of its moral deliverance. Chaldea is to this extent God's agent, that it will compel Judah to fall back upon its religion and its God. Because the Eternal God is holy, Judah cannot die. The argument deals, strictly speaking, only with the persistence and decay of earthly societies and kingdoms. The life which is inferred from ethical kinship with God is victorious national life. The individual counterpart of the prophet's argument is given by our Saviour in His inspiring words, "Because I live, ye shall live also." The relation of the principle to the individual, and individual immortality is, no doubt, more subtle and complicated, especially with regard to the negative results of the principle; but there is a wide field of positive conclusions, where the argument is quite as strong and clear and inspiring in the case of the individual as of the nation, and this profounder and richer application has been fully made in the New Testament. Indeed the whole progress of revelation has been the unfolding of old principles into ampler significance rather than the addition of new ones. In the New Testament the individual is emphasised, and all ethical and religious considerations are first of all studied in reference to the individual. There is a little danger nowadays of losing sight of the individual again, of going back to the old world immature conceptions of society, in which the individual lay latent in the mass. This is a mistake. We shall not create an ideal society by accomplishing superficial reformations in the mass; we must be ever searching through the mass for the individual. The religion of Christ is primarily for the individual. Primarily, therefore, in the application of the Divine message, we have to deal with the spirit of man in its individual relation to God. I. **THE SPIRITUAL MAN'S CONVICTION OF IMMORTALITY.** The Scriptures nowhere assert the general principle of human immortality. There is certainly no clear indication of conditional immortality. The biblical revelation of immortality is in part bright and clear as the noonday, in part obscure

and shadowy. We must not confound the method of Plato and Butler with the biblical method. One thing is clear. As man is, like God, an essentially ethical being, he cannot be destroyed by a merely physical change like death. The sense of spiritual kinship with God gradually compelled the personal conviction of immortality. The revelation has always come in the intense individual conviction, "I live in God, and so live for ever." The manifest aim of revelation has been to develop the Christian consciousness, not to satisfy all our curiosity about the eternal future. It is sometimes said that the only certain proof of immortality is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is correct, if it is carefully stated. It is correct, when the resurrection of Christ completes the Christian consciousness, and is vitally related to it. Paul argues thus, "If the resurrection of Christ be not a historic fact, then the deepest and noblest spiritual consciousness of men is a vanity and a falsehood, for that depends upon and demands a risen Christ." The Christ within me is the final assurance of life and immortality.

II. THE CHRISTIAN CONTENTS OF THIS CONVICTION. It is a conviction, not of mere continued existence, but of eternal life, rich and varied in its content, a life filled to overflowing with the fulness of the Eternal. 1. The Christian conviction of immortality involves the assurance of a great increase and expansion of life after death. This assurance of expansion of life does not imply a breach of continuity between this life and the next. 2. The contents of this conviction include the resurrection of the body. Scepticism on this subject has arisen from supposed intellectual difficulties which have been allowed to obscure the utterance of the living voice of the Christ-spirit within. The denial of the resurrection of the body is virtually a denial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Are there then no difficulties? None at all, except those created by superficial theories of the resurrection. The continuity and redemption of our wonderful complex life will be complete. (*John Thomas, M.A.*) *The eternity, providence, and holiness of Jehovah* :—

I. THE PROPHET REGARDS THE ETERNITY OF JEHOVAH AS AN ARGUMENT FOR THEIR PRESERVATION. "Art Thou not from everlasting?" The interrogatory does not imply doubt on his part. The true God is essentially eternal, He "inhabith eternity." From His eternity the prophet argues that His people will not perish,— "we shall not die." There is force in this argument. His people live in Him. Christ said to His disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Man's immortality is not in himself, but in God. II. HE REGARDS HIS PROVIDENCE AS A SOURCE OF COMFORT. "O Lord, Thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O Mighty God, Thou hast established them for correction." "Jehovah, for judgment Thou hast appointed it, and, O Rock, Thou hast founded it for chastisement" (Delitzsch). Whatever evil of any kind, from any quarter, comes upon the loyal servants of God, comes not by accident: it is under the direction of the All-wise and the All-beneficent. These Chaldeans could not move without Him, nor could they strike one blow without His permission; they were but the rod in His hand. All the most furious fiends in the universe are under His direction. Whatever mischief men design to inflict upon His people, He purposes to bring good out of it; and His counsel shall stand. III. HE REGARDS HIS HOLINESS AS AN OCCASION FOR PERPLEXITY. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" Jehovah is the Holy One. As if he had said, Since Thou art holy, why allow such abominations to take place? why permit wicked men to work such iniquities, and to inflict such suffering upon the righteous? This has always been a source of perplexity to good men. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 13. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity.—*The holiness of God* :—There is in our Maker a purity of nature, and an essential sort of holiness which render Him incapable of enduring sin in any person, or under any circumstances. I believe this is the very foundation of all religious feeling whatever. The true fear of God is the fear of His holiness. 1. This is no contradiction to the character in which God is exhibited to us in the Gospel, as a God of love. But we must notice the limits under which the love of God must be taken in application to ourselves. Only in the Gospel is it revealed. 2. God has always shown a sort of instinctive abhorrence of sin, which no worth of the individual sinner could induce Him to overcome. This holiness of God is opposed to sin in every form and degree. There is nothing in man which can reconcile the nature of God to sin. Is sin regarded by us, as we must know and believe

it is regarded by God? (*H. Raikes, A.M.*) *The holiness of God.*—I. HIS HOLINESS IS UNIVERSALLY MANIFEST. 1. It is manifest to man. (1) In law. The principles of His moral law are holy, just, and good. (2) In providence. Justice is but holiness in action, and through all ages God has expressed His abhorrence of sin in the judgments He has inflicted. (3) In Christ. He sent His Son into the world. What for? “To put away sin.” To cleanse humanity by His self-sacrificing life. (4) In conscience. The moral constitution of man, which recoils from the wrong and sympathises with the right, manifests God’s holiness. There is no room for man, then, to doubt God’s holiness. 2. It is manifest to angels. They live in its light. They are adorned with its beauties, they are inspired with its glories, and their anthem is, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” 3. It is manifest to the lost. They are bound to exclaim, “Just and right are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.” II. HIS HOLINESS IS ETERNALLY ORIGINAL. The holiness of all holy intelligences is derived from Him. III. HIS HOLINESS IS GLORIOUSLY EFFULGENT. “He is glorious in holiness.” He is light, in Him there is no darkness at all. IV. HIS HOLINESS IS ABSOLUTELY STANDARD. It is that to which the holiness of all other beings must come, and by which it must be tested. The law is, we are “to be holy as He is holy.” But how can fallen man be raised to this standard of holiness? Here is the answer, and the only satisfactory answer: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,” &c. (*Homilist.*) **Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously?**—*Things that suggest mistrust of God.*—St. Hierom’s opinion is that the name Habakkuk is derived from a word that signifies embracing, and may imply the embraces of a wrestler, who clasps his arms about the person he contends with. In this chapter we have the prophet contending with no less an antagonist than the great God, and upon no lower subject than His holiness, justice, and goodness. Is it not a very bold and daring thing for a creature thus to arraign the justice of His Creator? The father fore-mentioned explains that the prophet in his own person represents the frailty and impatience of man. We understand Habakkuk to be really saying, “True it is, O Lord, we are a very wicked and sinful people; but yet not so bad as the tyrannous Nebuchadnezzar, and his idolatrous Chaldeans. How then can it be consistent with Thy justice and hatred to sin, to permit the greater sinners to prosper in their oppression of the less, of those that are better than themselves?” “Why dost Thou favour them in their treacherous enterprises?” The words of the text contain an expostulation with God, concerning that seemingly strange dispensation of His providence in suffering the wicked to prosper and thrive, and that by the afflictions and oppressions of the righteous. I. THE GROUND AND OCCASION OF THIS EXPOSTULATION OF THE TEXT. Good men cannot oppress, or take indirect methods to thrive; they have a God above, and a conscience within, which overawe them, and will not suffer them to do it. Nor can they be supposed to use such means as may effectually secure them from the violences and oppressions of others; for the good man, charitably measuring others by himself, does not stand upon a constant guard, nor use preventive methods to keep off those injuries that he is not apprehensive of. But a bad man has none of those restraints of God, or conscience, or charity, to hinder him from falling upon the prey that lies exposed to him. It is not then to be wondered at that “those who deal treacherously prosper,” or “that the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he.” II. INQUIRE INTO THE OBJECTIONS THAT ARE MADE AGAINST GOD’S PERMISSION HEREOF. How comes it to pass that God does not interpose, that He does not hinder the evil and defend the good? This has been a stumbling-block in all ages. It was to holy Job; to Jeremiah; and to Asaph. It is a great argument of the athcists to banish the belief of a God and His providence out of the world. They say, If God would hinder them but cannot, then is He not omnipotent; if He can, but will not, then is He not just and good; so that either His power, or His justice and goodness, must be given up; or else those attributes must be salved by the imperfection of His knowledge. But the true notion of God is a Being infinite in all perfections, and therefore he that is defective in knowledge can no more be God than he that is not infinite in power, justice, or goodness. And so they would dispute God out of being. III. VINDICATE THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE BY SHOWING THE WEAKNESS OF THESE OBJECTIONS. It may be very consistent with the justice and goodness of God to permit these things. The objection is built upon the contrary supposition. 1. It is not inconsistent with God’s justice and goodness to suffer good men to be afflicted

in this world, because—(1) Afflictions are not always punishments, but means whereby God does a great deal of good and benefit to them that are exercised with them. He weans them from the world, reduces them (leads them back) when they are going astray, tries and proves their faith, patience, submission, resignation, &c. 2. Supposing afflictions to be punishments, the best men will find failings and sins enough in themselves to make the punishment reasonable. They may well think God good and merciful in thus chastising them. 3. He has appointed a day wherein He will abundantly recompense all the troubles and sorrows and sufferings of pious men with joys unspeakable. 4. It is not inconsistent with God's justice and goodness to suffer bad men to be prosperous here. (1) Prosperity is not always a blessing. If the impunity of the wicked be their hardening and judgment, it is certainly not unjust with God to suffer it. (2) There is hardly any man so bad but has something of good in him, by which he is useful and serviceable to the world. For God to reward the natural or moral goodness of otherwise bad men, with outward temporal blessings, is agreeable to His rule of rewarding every one according to his works. (3) It cannot argue want of justice or goodness in God to try all means to reduce wholly wicked men and make them better. (4) There is a day of retribution coming. 5. It is not inconsistent with God's justice and goodness to suffer bad men to be the instruments whereby good men are afflicted. If a thing has to be done, and is right to do, it cannot matter whether the agent employed is good or bad, so long as he is efficient for the work. And can the good be employed in many of these judgments, or calamities, or wrongs? If God may work by such things, He must use the sort of people who can do them. Inferences—1. This subject gives us an irrefragable assurance of a future judgment and state. 2. Learn not to "love the world, nor the things of the world." 3. The facts dwelt on should excite and inflame our desires and longings after the other world, where the wicked shall be made miserable, and the good man happy. 4. Learn not to think hardly of God, nor to envy wicked men when He permits them to persecute His Church, and to triumph in the miseries and ruin of His best servants. (*W. Talbot, D.D.*) "*Wait, and you will see*":—Linnell, the artist, had a commission to paint a picture, for which he was to receive £1000. Not wishing any one to inspect it until perfected, he veiled it when not working at it, and wrote over it in Latin, "*Wait, and you will see.*" The final issue of much of God's work is now hidden from us, but assured that, even in times of affliction, God is acting wisely, we must wait until He is pleased to let us see the finished glory of His work. (*Gates of Imagery.*)

Vers. 14-17. And makest men as the fishes of the sea.—*Rapacious selfishness in power*:—Illustrated in Nebuchadnezzar. Selfishness is the root and essence of sin. All unregenerate men are therefore more or less selfish, and rapacity is an instinct of selfishness. Selfishness hungers for the things of others. I. IT PRACTICALLY IGNORES THE RIGHTS OF MAN AS MAN. "And makest man as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them." The Babylonian tyrant did not see in the population of Judea men possessing natural endowments, sustaining moral relationships, invested with rights and responsibilities similar to his own fellow-men; but merely "fishes";—his object was, to catch them and turn them to his own use. It is ever so with selfishness: it blinds man to the claims of his brother. What does the selfish employer care for the man in those who work in his service and build up his fortune? He treats them rather as fishes to be used, than as brethren to be respected. What does the selfish despot care for the moral humanity of the people over whom he sways his sceptre? He values them only as they can fight his battles, enrich his exchequer, and contribute to his pageantry and pomp. What were men to Napoleon? &c. II. IT ASSIDUOUSLY WORKS TO TURN MEN TO ITS OWN USE. "They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; therefore they rejoice and are glad." Ah me! Human life is like a sea—deep, unresting, treacherous; and the teeming millions of men are but as fishes, the weaker devoured by the stronger. The mighty ones use the hook to oppress individuals one by one, the net and the drag to carry multitudes away. As the fisherman works by various expedients to catch the fish, the selfish man in power is ever active in devising the best expedients to turn human flesh to his own use. III. IT ADORES SELF ON ACCOUNT OF ITS SUCCESS. "Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous." Because men are everywhere selfish,

they are everywhere "sacrificing unto their net, and burning incense unto their drag." The selfish statesman says, There is no measure like mine; the selfish sectarian, There is no Church like mine; the selfish author, There is no book like mine; the selfish preacher, There is no sermon like mine. IV. IT REMAINS UNSATIABLE NOTWITHSTANDING ITS PROSPERITY. "Shall they therefore empty their net?" &c. An old author thus paraphrases the language, "Shall they enrich themselves and fill their own vessels, with that which they have by violence and oppression taken away from their neighbours? Shall they empty their net of what they have caught, that they may cast it into the sea again to catch more? And wilt Thou suffer them to proceed in this wicked course? Shall they not spare continually to slay the nations? Must the numbers and wealth of nations be sacrificed to their net?" Conclusion—What an awful picture of the world we have here! (*Homilist.*) *The baits of Satan*.—All sorts of baits are used to catch human souls. One of the old fathers of the Church says that Satan is the ape of God. That is, Satan imitates whatever God does, but with a different object. God uses the beautiful things He has made to draw you to Him. Satan uses the same things to lure you into his power, and draw you away from God. Since man has been in the world, he has had to work. And God has blessed work. But Satan takes work, and tries to make mischief with it. He tries to make you care for your work apart from God, and thus it is turned into dead, graceless, unprofitable work. The world—the society of your fellows—may draw the souls of those who move in it to God; for there is a great deal of good in the world. You cannot always say that this or that is bad in itself. It is bad only when Satan has put his hook through it. Consequently you must not rashly denounce an amusement or a pursuit, as bad, unless you can see the hook in it. Look at some scriptural instances of Satan's fishing. Case of Job; of David; of Judas Iscariot. As you go through life you will meet with all sorts of temptations. Temptations are Satan's baits. Then, whatever you undertake, keep God before your eyes: keep God in your thoughts. Directly you begin to lose sight of God and to forget Him—then beware! Recover yourself as quickly as you can; you have somehow got hold of a bait which Satan is pulling towards him. (*S. Baring-Gould, M.A.*)

Ver. 16. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense to their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous.—*Self-worship*.—Nebuchadnezzar is here represented as gathering the people into his net, and then, forgetting that he was only an instrument, doing homage to his own power and skill, as though they had won for him the victory.

1. The most numerous illustrations of this spirit are those which may be found in the conduct of our secular work. The ungodliness of the daily life of men is a fact too manifest to be disputed. They see in every increase of their wealth and power a fresh evidence of their skill and strength; and, intoxicated with pride or vanity, burn incense only to their own net. Among those who bear the Christian name there are evidences only too palpable of its presence and power. How prone are we, in secular matters, to forget the relation in which we stand to God. The precept, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him," is either wholly ignored, or its application restricted to special spiritual exercises and duties. We need a more thorough and pervading sense of God's presence, and our reliance on Him to penetrate our lives. The danger is one to which we are specially liable in an age when the science and industry of man have achieved so much. Science has unveiled so many secrets of nature that we begin to fancy that there is nothing so hidden that the same skill may not drag it from its retreat. It is not wonderful that man should deify intellect, and forgetful of Him from whom comes every talent, should ask, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" Everywhere, in fact, do we see men thus exalting themselves and their own wisdom. They would fain put God out of His own world, by enthroning man in His place. To correct these godless views of life, God, from time to time, sends us solemn and emphatic warnings of His power and our dependence. The wise hear the rod, and who hath appointed it. Judgment instructs those whom the gentler voice of mercy did not reach.

2. Mark the development of this spirit in our spiritual life. Much apparently Christian service would not abide the Master's test, because so much of this earthly element enters into the spirit by which it is inspired. Is there not too often a disposition to trust in the wisdom of our plans and the efficiency of our instruments, rather than in that blessing which alone can make rich? Self-reliance,

self-conceit, self-exaltation, self-seeking, self-worship, are evils that intrude even into religious institutions. (1) This spirit may reveal itself in the motives that induce activity in the service of the Church. Love to Christ is the only true and enduring motive of all Christian labour. But we may work to extend our party rather than to glorify God. There is danger in mere sectional attachments. Our motives may be more directly personal. We may labour only to gratify our own ambition or fancy. Our vanity may be pleased by the rich incense of flattery. Our desire for power may be gratified by the influence we gain over other men. There are tests which we may all employ with advantage to prove the character of our work. (2) The spirit displays itself in regard to the modes of Christian labour. There are two opposite extremes against which we have to guard. There are not a few who are crying out for a new Gospel. There are those who are sticklers not only for truth, but for the very phrases in which it is set forth. These two parties are wide as the poles asunder, yet they agree in this—they are both burning incense to their own net. (3) This spirit may reveal itself in the way in which we regard the results of Christian labour. In the hour of success we think more of the efficiency of the instrument than of the grace of the Divine Spirit. The greatest talent is insufficient if alone. We want all the power that Christians possess sanctified to Christ. We want to see the most perfect instrumentality, but we want something beyond that. There is no real power unless the Spirit of God be in our midst. (*J. Guinness Rogers, D.D.*) *The worship of the net* :—The word “drag” simply means a large fishing net. The bold metaphor of the text is that of a fisherman whose mind is so overborne by the large draughts of fish which he is continually taking that he begins actually to worship those nets which are the instruments of such wonderful success. The prophet is portraying the condition of the Babylonian Empire. It had been swallowing up the smaller nations. Puffed up by its military successes, it had sunk into a condition of practical atheism. They came to worship the resources which they had at their disposal. They paid homage to material power. In answer to his prayer the prophet receives a vision of judgment. Haughty, idolatrous Babylon will not continue for ever. They worshipped the *net*; they would be captured by the net of another military empire. The sin of man keeps repeating itself throughout the ages. Notwithstanding all the lessons of the past, there are still multitudes who forget the living God. They seek their own gratification and aggrandisement. When they are successful they are puffed up with pride. They boast themselves of the means and methods which have been the instruments of their success. Let us be thankful that the righteousness of God keeps repeating itself too. The principles of the Divine government are eternal. God was in the history of old Judæa and Assyria, but He is also in the history of every nation of modern Europe. His providence must not be left out of human calculations. Have we in England learnt the lesson that only “righteousness” can really and permanently exalt any nation? How prone are we to magnify the instruments of our national greatness! We worship rank, wealth, intellect, business. But God is not mocked, and in many ways He breaks men’s idols before their eyes. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The idolatry of work* :—In our times the idolatry of work has replaced the thirst for wisdom; there is no time to fill the treasure-house, and there is no time to dispense its stores. The consequences of this sort of life are sufficiently mischievous before we bring in on it the light of Christ and the Gospel. What was our Lord’s teaching in correction of this tendency to an idol-worship of work? He taught that work is not an end, but a means. It may be fruitful or unfruitful, stopping with itself, or producing something. It is essentially of two kinds—it may begin with itself, or it may have a beginning behind it; it may be (so to say) its own life, or it may be the manifestation of a life prior and ancient. Not the work, but the workman, is the all-important thing. All depends, not upon what the man wrought, but upon what he was. (*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*) *Self-conceit* :—The over-estimate of one’s capabilities and powers, and the depreciation of the capabilities and powers of all other people. Self-knowledge is not self-conceit. Nor is the right and diligent use of the talents with which God has entrusted us any indication of self-conceit. Illustration.—The principle contained in the words, “They sacrifice unto their own net,” &c. I. MEN DO THIS WHEN THEY ATTRIBUTE THEIR TEMPORAL PROSPERITY TO THEIR OWN SKILL AND ENERGY, AND NOT TO GOD. Wealth may, or may not, be a proof of skill and industry. Self-reliance is a noble quality; it is different from self-sufficiency. But we are dependent upon God. II. WHEN THEY ATTRIBUTE THE DISCOVERIES OF SCIENCE AND THE INVENTIONS THAT HAVE

BENEFITED THE WORLD TO THE HUMAN INTELLECT AND NOT TO GOD. Man's discoveries are God's revelations. III. WHEN THEY ATTRIBUTE THE PROSPERITY OF A COUNTRY TO ANY OTHER SOURCE THAN TO GOD. Patriotism is a virtue. Our prosperity may be ascribed to different causes. Let us honour God; let not our pride weaken us. IV. IN THEIR TREATMENT OF GOD'S MERCIFUL REVELATION TO THE WORLD. V. WHEN THEY DEPEND FOR THE SPREAD OF GOD'S RULE ON HUMAN PLANS AND ORGANISATIONS, AND NOT ON THE BLESSING OF THE HIGHEST. "The excellency of the power is of God." Without God's presence and blessing all that we do is in vain. (*James Owen.*) *Conceit born of success*:—This passage discovers to us the secret impiety of all those who do not serve God sincerely and with an honest mind. There is, indeed, imprinted on the hearts of men a certain conviction respecting the existence of a God; for none are so barbarous as not to have some sense of religion; and thus all are rendered inexcusable, as they carry in their hearts a law which is sufficient to make them a thousand times guilty. But at the same time the ungodly, and those who are not illuminated by faith, bury this knowledge, for they are enveloped in themselves; and when some recollection of God creeps in, they are at first impressed, and ascribe some honour to him; but this is evanescent, for they soon suppress it as much as they can; yea, they even strive to extinguish (though they cannot) this knowledge, and whatever light they have from heaven. This is what the prophet now graphically sets forth in the person of the Assyrian king. He had before said, "This power is that of his God." He had complained that the Assyrians would give to their idols what was peculiar to God alone, and thus deprive Him of His right; but he says now, that they would "sacrifice to their own drag, and offer incense to their net." This is a very different thing; for how could they sacrifice to their idols if they ascribed to their drag whatever victories they gained? Now by the words "drag" and "net" the prophet means their efforts, strength, forces, power, councils, and policies, as they call them, and whatever else there be which profane men arrogate to themselves. But what is it to sacrifice to their own net? The Assyrian did this, because he thought he surpassed all others in craftiness; because he thought himself so courageous as not to hesitate to make war with all nations, regarding himself as well prepared with forces, and justified in his proceedings; and because he became successful, and omitted nothing calculated to ensure victory. Thus the Assyrian regarded as nothing his idols; for he put himself in the place of all his gods. But if it be asked, whence came his success? we must answer, that the Assyrian ought to have ascribed it all to the one true God; but he thought that he prospered through his own valour. If we refer to counsel, it is certain that God is He who governs the counsels and minds of men; but the Assyrian thought he gained everything by his own skill. If, again, we speak of strength, whence is it? And of courage, whence is it but from God? But the Assyrian appropriated all these things to himself. What regard, then, had he for God? We see how he now takes away all honour even from his own idols, and attributes everything to himself. But this sin belongs to all the ungodly; for where God's Spirit does not reign there is no humility, and men ever swell with inward pride until God thoroughly cleanse them. It is, then, necessary that God should empty us by His special grace, that we may not be filled with this Satanic pride, which is innate, and which cannot by any means be shaken off by us until the Lord regenerates us by His Spirit. God cannot be really glorified except when men wholly empty themselves. (*John Calvin.*) *Sacrificing to the net*:—There is a curious passage in the prophecy of Habakkuk which speaks of fishermen who "sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag." I think that sometimes very true and earnest Christians are in danger of doing that. They almost worship the visible Church, which, after all, is only a net "to catch men" for Christ. They delight in its historic character. They glory in its apostolic order. They venerate every feature of its organic structure. In one word, it becomes no more a spiritual Church, but a kingdom of this world. But by and by a terrible shock shakes them like an earthquake. Some iniquity appears in Zion. Wickedness shelters itself under the robes of piety. Political scheming creeps into ecclesiastical councils. The very law of the Church is made an instrument of oppression. They stand confounded and amazed. What means it all? Why, it means just this, that Christ is telling you that no earthly kingdom is the Church of Christ. This is not your rest. The marriage supper of the Lamb is not in the poor feast of a visible Church. The "New Jerusalem" is not yet let down from God out of heaven. (*Bishop Cheney.*)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower.—*Awaiting the Lord's message* :—Nothing definite is known of this man Habakkuk. In the text we see him preparing himself for his holy task—ascending his tower, that he may see; secluding himself, that he may hear; making his bosom bare, that he may feel the message of the Unseen. I. THE SECRET OF LIFE IS TO REALISE THE UNSEEN. To this man the world is full of an unseen, majestic presence. The very air he breathes throbs with the pulse of God, and the silence may be broken at any time by God's voice. So he spends life watching, listening, waiting. Is not every life noble and grand and true just in proportion as it realises this, as it seeks the Unseen? This is indeed the Gospel—that God is now reconciled to us, and that His presence broods over us in unutterable love. To realise this and enter into its blessedness is not only the secret of life, but it is the whole duty of man. II. WE OUGHT TO EXPECT MESSAGES FROM THE UNSEEN. To the prophet this great Unseen One is no dumb God. The truth is, that God seems to be always seeking some heart sufficiently at leisure from itself that He may talk with it. He found such an one in Abraham and in Moses. In the days of Eli we read there was “no open vision.” God was silent, for none could hear His voice; God was invisible, for earth-blinded eyes could not see Him. If we could but hear, He has much to say unto us—much about His purposes of grace toward ourselves, and about His purpose toward the world; much about the coming glory. In three ways—1. By His Spirit through the Word. 2. By His Spirit through our conscience. 3. By His spirit through His Providence. We need these voices from the Unseen to guide and help us in the sorrows and perplexities of our lives. If it be a miracle for the Unseen to speak with men, then that is a miracle that happens almost every hour. III. HOW WE SHOULD DISPOSE OURSELVES TO RECEIVE GOD'S MESSAGES. 1. We should get up, up above the heads of the crowd, up above the crush and clamour of the worldly throng, to where there is clearer air and greater peace. It is not the new play we want, nor the most fashionable church, but the new vision of His face. Wherever we can get most of that is the place for us. 2. We are next to quicken our whole being into a listening and receptive attitude. 3. Quiet is needed also; for God most often speaks in a still, small voice. (*J. C. Johnston, M.A.*) *The watch-tower* :—Almost nothing is known about the personal history of the author of the prophecy contained in this book. He himself retires into the background, as one content to be forgotten if the Word of God uttered by him receives the attention it deserves. The self-abnegation of many of those whom God employed to do a great work among His ancient people teaches a lesson that is much needed. It implies a whole-hearted consecration to God's work and interests in the world that ought to be more aimed at than it sometimes is. It is a trial that comes to the prophet's faith, and how he met it, that are brought before us in the whole passage of which our text forms a part. What was the trial of his faith? In answer to his cry to God to interpose to put a stop to abounding wickedness in the Covenant nation, the reply is given to him that terrible judgment was about to fall upon it, and from an unexpected quarter—from Babylon. The havoc that would be made by this fierce, proud, self-sufficient world-power is made in vision to pass distinctly and clearly before him. He sees its terrible army marching through the land—a garden of Eden before it and a wilderness behind it. The scene that thus fills his mind's eye, his patriotic spirit would not allow him to contemplate unmoved. He trembles for the safety of his people under this dark cloud of judgment. He seeks refuge from them in God, holding fast the conviction that a righteous God would not allow a wicked, proud nation like that of the Chaldeans to hold His people for ever in cruel bondage. “Art Thou of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst Thou not look upon iniquity? Wherefore lookest Thou, then, upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” As he contemplates the Chaldean army, conscious of its own strength and making a god of it, ravaging the whole land, this conviction grew doubtful to him. It seemed sometimes to slip away from his grasp. This was the trial of his faith, and the greatness of it can only be measured by the sincerity of his religion and the strength of his patriotism. How does he meet this trial? The words of our text inform us. “I will stand upon my watch-tower, and set me upon the fortress, and will watch to see what

He will say in me, and what I shall answer to my plea." He resolves to lay his doubts before God, and to wait upon Him—*withdrawing his attention from all earthly things—for solution.* In carrying out this resolution he compares himself to one who mounts the watch-tower—attached to ancient towns and fortresses—that he may scan the surrounding district to see if any one might be approaching, whether friend or foe. Like one on the watch-tower in the eager strained outlook for some messenger, would the prophet be in relation to the expected explanation from God. When he himself tells us that on this watch-tower he was watching to see what God would say in him—for this is the proper rendering of the words—waiting for an inward voice he could recognise as God's, the spiritual nature of the transaction is placed beyond all doubt. The revelation which came to his soul thus waiting, of which we have an account in the subsequent part of the chapter, solved his difficulties and strengthened his faith and hope. The assurance was given to him, as we learn from the 14th verse, that not only Canaan, but "the whole earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." I. THE MOUNTING OF THE WATCH-TOWER. This is an exercise to which we must be no strangers if we are to have God's light shining on our path, God's voice saying to us: "This is the way, walk ye in it," and God's hand laid upon us to strengthen us for every trial and conflict. 1. May we not regard it as laying before God the difficulties caused by his own dealings? There was a mystery in the events of Providence which the prophet felt that he could not penetrate. Was it possible that God's chosen people—to whom pertained the adoption and the glory and the covenants—would be overwhelmed in the disasters in which he saw them plunged? Would the ungodly might of Chaldea be allowed to crush them altogether, and all the hopes bound up in their life? To the eye of sense this seemed likely, but the prophet knew that behind all events and forces there was a personal God—Jehovah the Covenant God of Israel. He knew that they were but carrying out His will, and he would not believe, even though the appearances of things pointed to it—that that will was seeking the destruction of the Covenant nation. Sense was drawing him one way, his faith was drawing him another, and the questions born of this conflict which were agitating his mind he wisely resolves to lay before God. What are Job's wonderful speeches in his conversations with his friends, but a series of impassioned reasonings with God about His dealings with him? What, again, was Asaph's exercise under the triumphing of the wicked as recorded in a well-known Psalm, but a talking with God about His dealings? And do we not find the plaintive Jeremiah, when his soul was sore vexed with cruel opposition, saying, "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee; yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" It is not a blind impersonal force that the believer sees behind the events that take place, compelling sullen submission to whatever happens? No! It is a loving Father to whom appeal may be made about the perplexing questions that may be aroused by His own dealings. Fatalism—in which things are accepted simply because they cannot be changed—is not Christian resignation, and falls far short of the attitude in which the believing heart can find rest. Openness in our dealings with God is what He delights in, and what will lead us to the knowledge of that secret of His that is with them that fear Him. Faith will have its difficulties both with the wondrous revelation God has given to us in His Word, and with the unfolding of His purposes in the course of His Providence. The finest natures—those touched to finest issues—are very often those who feel these difficulties most keenly, and have to fight their way to the bright shining shore of certainty and rest by buffeting with many a storm. And the best way of dealing with all those difficulties is just to take them to the watch-tower and lay them before God. 2. But this dealing with God about questions that may perplex us implies the stilling of our souls before Him, that He may give us light and guidance. The prophet after pleading with God, expostulating with Him on the apparent contradiction between the Divine providence and the Divine promise, places himself before God and waits for His voice. That he may hear it all the better—may catch the slightest whisper of the Divine voice within him—he retires into himself, quiets his own spirit, and intently waits. The expressive language of the Psalmist may be used to describe his attitude, "My soul is silence unto God." And this exercise, need we say, is essential to the obtaining of any deep insight into God's will, to our receiving those discoveries of Himself as a

God of grace and love, that will give us rest even under the most trying dispensations. It is by the Divine voice within us that the Divine voice without us in His written Word is clearly, distinctly understood, and is made to throw its blessed light upon Divine Providence. Without the inward revelation that comes to us by the teaching of God's Spirit, the outward revelation given in our Bibles will remain dark and unintelligible. If we do not withdraw now and again from the bustle and noise of the world, and commune with our own hearts, the Divine voice will be lost to us. It will remain unheard, as the bell striking the hour above some busy thoroughfare is often unheard by those in the throng. It is the calm lake which mirrors the sun most perfectly, and so it is the calm soul that will catch the most of the heavenly glory that shines upon the watch-tower, and reflect it on the world around. But we must not think of this calmness or silence of the soul toward God as a mere passive attitude. "It requires the intensest energy of all our being to keep all our being still and waiting upon God. All our strength must be put into the task; and our soul will never be more intensely alive than when in deepest abnegation it waits hushed before God." 3. Though it may involve an apparent contradiction, the silent soul will be one full of the spirit of prayer. The prophet had been pleading with God for light to guide him in dark days, and it is with a longing pleading soul that he mounts the watch-tower and waits for an answer. He has directed his prayer to God, and he looks up expecting an answer. There is really as much prayer in this silent submissive waiting for an answer to his cry as there was in the cry itself. The expectant look of the beggar after his request has been made has often more power to move the generous heart than the request itself. And the mounting of the watch-tower after prayer to maintain an outlook for the promised answer puts beyond all doubt that we have been sincere and earnest in the exercise, and will have power with God. The place on the watch-tower may have to be maintained for a time before the answer comes, but it is sure to come in some form or another. 4. But last of all here, this standing upon the watch-tower has been regarded by some as the prophet's continuance at his work notwithstanding the difficulties that encompassed it. Not unfrequently in the Old Testament is the prophet's office compared to that of a watchman. What the watchman in the tower did in the earthly sphere—keeping an outlook for the people and warning them of coming danger—the prophet was to do in the spiritual sphere. And so when the prophet here says: "I will stand upon my watch-tower," he is regarded as meaning, "I will not leave my post—the place in which God has put me, but will wait in the faithful discharge of every commanded duty for the solving of my doubts and the removal of my difficulties." Certainly in acting in such a way he took the very best plan of getting his way made clear. When we allow our perplexities, whatever they may be, to keep us back from work God is plainly laying to our hands, they will increase around us. Activity and steadfastness in duty will purge our spiritual atmosphere, while melancholy inactive brooding will laden it with pestilential vapours. A higher attainment still is to have the soul stilled before God, and expectant even in the midst of our labour.

II. WHAT IS ENJOYED IN THIS WATCH-TOWER. The prophet's experience was one so rich and blessed that a glimpse of it may well stir us up to follow his example: 1. He heard the Divine voice for which he listened. "Then Jehovah answered me and said." He became aware of a Divine presence within his soul, and conscious of a Divine voice speaking to his heart. His waiting and looking up met with a rich reward. Though this experience cannot now come in the same form to the trustful waiting soul, yet, in its inner essence, it may and does come. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit within believers as their teacher is a blessed reality. They who submit themselves to His guidance will be led by Him into all truth, will not only gain a deep insight into God's will, but will see its bearing upon events in Providence. It was a very simple truth that was now divinely spoken to the prophet: "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." The man or the race of men that are lifted up with vain self-confidence shall experience no tranquillity, but they who abide firm in their allegiance to God and make Him their trust shall be maintained by His mighty gracious power. The simplest truths, that may in some of their aspects have long been familiar to us, are often used in the teaching of the Spirit to lift the soul above the mists that obscure its vision. It will be the declaration of truths thus divinely spoken to our hearts that will be accompanied with greatest power. 2. Again, let us notice that this experience

brought him a new sense of the Divine presence with His people. The song with which the sad prophecy ends, recorded in the third chapter, expresses this sense of the Divine nearness to His people. The land that had witnessed such marked manifestations of His presence and power, the memory of which was fondly cherished by the pious, had not been forsaken by Him. What had been done when "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran," would again be done for the overthrow of the proud oppressor, and for the deliverance of the humble fearers of His name. The eternal order lay behind the confusion caused by the wicked, and would in due time assert itself, for the God of this order was behind all. 3. So the prophet finds his labours for the land and people he loved sustained by a restful hope. Dark days may come in which the fig-tree shall not blossom, and there shall be no fruit in the vine, and the field shall yield no meat, but when their purifying work is accomplished brighter times shall dawn. His labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Neither will ours if done in the right spirit. (*R. Morton.*)

Watchfulness:—I. THE DUTY OF WATCHFULNESS. 1. This duty arises from various causes which affect us in our outward circumstances, as well as in our minds and hearts. They are our enemies or our friends; such as build up the character of man for good, and lift it heavenwards, or mar it and force it downwards to destruction. The ever-present, active, and all-pervading causes of good and evil, acting upon man's moral and spiritual nature, provide a powerful reason for this duty. For while a man is thus taught his dependence upon God for strength, and is shewn his own weakness in the battle of life, he is at the same time taught to use every precaution against his foes, to guard every avenue of his heart against their influence, and to be vigilant and watchful in all his daily undertakings. 2. But watchfulness as a moral duty may be considered as a recognition of God's laws and government. The man who waits, like Habakkuk, for the Almighty, will see the hand of God everywhere. He recognises God as the watchful Father, noting every tear and hearing every sigh that inspires the watchful heart with hope, and that sheds a bright ray of comfort through the gloom. II. FAITH FOUNDED UPON THE REVELATIONS OF GOD IS AN ARGUMENT AGAINST ALL MISTRUST AND DOUBT OF HIS POWER AND GOODNESS. 1. The answer which God gave to the prayers of Habakkuk was the authority by which he met every quibble of his opponents, and by which he confronted his enmity. 2. A true faith acts on the revelation of God in the life history of Christ, and on the soul's immortality. In the life of Christ, weighted with suffering the most intense, we find a solution to our own troubles, as well as their sanction. Then let us "stand upon our watch." (*W. Horwood.*)

On the watch-tower:—There is no remedy, when such trials as those mentioned by the prophet in the first chapter meet us, except we learn to raise up our minds above the world. For if we contend with Satan, according to our own view of things, he will a hundred times overwhelm us, and we can never be able to resist him. Let us therefore know that here is shown to us the right way of fighting with him: when our minds are agitated with unbelief, when doubts respecting God's providence creep in, when things are so confused in this world as to involve us in darkness, so that no light appears, we must bid adieu to our own reason; for all our thoughts are nothing worth when we seek, according to our own reason, to form a judgment. Until then the faithful ascend to their tower, and stand in their citadel, of which the prophet here speaks, their temptations will drive them here and there, and sink them as it were in a bottomless gulf. But that we may more fully understand the meaning, we must know that there is here an implied contrast between the tower and the citadel, which the prophet mentions, and a station on earth. As long, then, as we judge according to our own perceptions we walk on the earth; and while we do so, many clouds arise, and Satan scatters ashes in our eyes, and wholly darkens our judgment, and thus it happens that we lie down altogether confounded. It is hence wholly necessary that we should tread our reason under foot, and come nigh to God Himself. We have said that the tower is the recess of the mind, but how can we ascend to it? Even by following the Word of the Lord. For we creep on the earth; nay, we find that our flesh ever draws us downward,—except when the truth from above becomes to us, as it were, wings, or a ladder, or a vehicle, we cannot rise up one foot, but, on the contrary, we shall seek refuges on the earth rather than ascend into heaven. But let the Word of God become our ladder, or our vehicle, or our wings, and, however difficult the ascent may be, we shall yet be able to fly upward, provided God's Word be allowed to have its own authority.

We hence see how unsuitable is the view of those interpreters who think that the tower and the citadel is the Word of God ; for it is by God's Word that we are raised up to this citadel, that is, to the safeguard of hope, where we may remain safe and secure while looking down from this eminence on those things which disturb us and darken all our senses as long as we lie on the earth. This is one thing. Then the repetition is not without its use ; for the prophet says, " On my tower will I stand, on the citadel will I set myself." He does not repeat in other words the same thing because it is obscure, but in order to remind the faithful that, though they are inclined to sloth, they must yet strive to extricate themselves. And we soon find how slothful we become, except each of us stirs up himself. For when any perplexity takes hold on our minds we soon succumb to despair. This, then, is the reason why the prophet, after having spoken of the tower, again mentions the citadel. (*John Calvin.*) *Watching for God.*—1. It is our safest way, in times of temptation and perplexity, not to lie down under discouragement, but to recollect ourselves, and fix our eyes on God, who only can clear our minds and quiet our spirits ; therefore the prophet, after his deep plunge in temptation, sets himself to look to God, and get somewhat to answer upon his arguing, or reproof and expostulation, that so his mind may be settled. 2. It is by the Word that the Lord clearth darkness, and would have His people answer their temptations and silence their reasonings. 3. Meditation, earnest prayer, withdrawing of our minds off from things visible, and elevating them towards God, are the means in the use whereof God revealeth Himself, and His mind from His Word, to His people in dark times. 4. Faithful ministers ought to acquit themselves like watchmen in a city or army, to be awake when others sleep, to be watching with God, and over the people, seeking after faithful instructions which they may communicate, seeking to be filled from heaven with light and life, that they may pour it out upon the people ; and all this especially in hard times. 5. Albeit the Lord's people may have their own debates and faintings betwixt God and them, yet it is their part to smother these as much as they can, and to bring up a good report of God and His way to others. (*George Hutcheson.*) *On noting the providences of God.*—The observer of grace should be studious to discern the workings of Divine providence, and to consider their purposes in the counsels of the Most High. We inquire into the importance of observing the various ways in which the Almighty is pleased to address us, and of determining how far we have hitherto regarded them, and turned them to our individual improvement. In reply to the complaints of His servant, the Almighty shows that mercy would not be long extended ; that the Chaldeans would soon inflict summary vengeance on the Jews. To these declarations of the Divine displeasure the prophet rejoins by stating the conviction of his own safety, and of the protection which would be extended to the rest of God's people. He had hoped that God would have been satisfied with gentler corrections, and not have employed an idolatrous nation to punish His chosen people. But he resolves to wait patiently, in quietness and in confidence, for the answer of God, that he may know what statement he was to publish. Every Christian is as a man standing on the watch, as one who will have to give account ; who watches to see what God will say to him. The will of God is declared both in His Word and in His works. The great end to be effected by watchfulness is, that we may know our actual state, and be ready at any time for aught that may befall us. It is that we may not be surprised, that we may not be taken at unawares. What do you propose to answer when you are called to appear before an all-seeing God ? He has not only spoken to us in national judgments and mercies, He has said a word privately to each one of us as individual. (*Richard Harvey, M.A.*) *Man's moral mission in the world.*—Wherefore are we in this world ? We are not here by choice, nor by chance. *Man's moral mission.*—I. CONSISTS IN RECEIVING COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE ETERNAL MIND. This will appear—1. From man's nature as a spiritual being. (1) Man has a native instinct for it. (2) A native capacity for it. (3) A native necessity for it. 2. From man's condition as a fallen being. As a sinner, man has a deeper and a more special need than angels can have. Communications from God are of infinite moment to man. 3. From the purposes of Christ's mediation. Christ came to bring men to God. His Cross is the meeting-place between man and his Maker. 4. From the special manifestations of God for the purpose. These we have in the Bible. 5. From the general teaching of the Bible. In the Book men are called to audience with God. II. HOW ARE DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS TO BE RECEIVED ? Two things are necessary—1. That we resort to the right

scene. The prophet to his "tower." 2. That we resort to the right scene in the right spirit. III. MAN'S MORAL MISSION CONSISTS IN IMPARTING COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE ETERNAL MIND. That we have to impart as well as to receive is evident—1. From the tendency of Divine thoughts to express themselves. Ideas of a religious kind always struggle for utterance. 2. From the universal adaptation of Divine thoughts. 3. From the spiritual dependence of man upon man. 4. From the general teaching of the Bible. IV. MAN'S MORAL MISSION CONSISTS IN THE PRACTICAL REALISATION OF COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE ETERNAL MIND. In the Divine purpose there is a period fixed for the realisation of every Divine promise. However distant it may seem, our duty is to wait in earnest practical faith for it. Learn who it is that fulfils his moral missions in the world. The man who practically carries out God's revelation in the spirit and habits of his life. Notice—(1) The reasonableness of religion. (2) The grandeur of a religious life. (2) The function of Christianity. What is the special design of the Gospel? To qualify man to fulfil his mission on earth. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 2. Write the vision, and make it plain.—*Teaching must be plain*:—Think of that railway excursion train as it hurries onwards with impetuous speed! A vast crowd is collected there, and how various and complicated are the interests of each! A rapid impulse bears forward the whole; that impulse resides in every member of the group; one single bystander directs and controls it all. In an unexpected moment a shock, as of a thunderbolt, crushes them together; in the twinkling of an eye the elements of destruction are terribly let loose; each hapless one becomes an instrument of injury or death to his neighbour. What pain can paint the terror, the agony, the anguish of such a scene! They will be remembered for long, long years in mutilated forms, in shaken nerves, in bereaved or orphaned homes; the records will make multitudes shudder by their firesides, or will haunt them in their slumbers. Such have been the effects of one false or mistaken signal! Let us who are ministers of the Gospel remember what interests we hold, and by how much the soul is more precious than the body. Let us beware! There are, in the age in which we live, spiritual impulses innumerable, strange, impetuous. And we are the signal-men! (*J. G. Miall.*) *The voice of the old pulpit*:—I. THE OLD PULPIT'S APOLOGY FOR SPEAKING. I am old. My outward appearance has been diversified at different times and places. I have a variety of experiences. My great influence is acknowledged by a large majority in every age and clime. II. THE OLD PULPIT'S COMPLAINTS AND BOASTINGS. 1. My complaints—(1) I complain because some very ungodly characters have taken the liberty of ascending my steps. (2) Because some look at me as a mere workshop to make a living in. (3) Because I have been compelled to serve as a stage to exhibit men, and not Christ. (4) Because I have been too long used as a place of refuge for blind bigotry and prejudice. (5) Because many who have stood on my floor did not do my work with all their might. (6) Because there is not more attention paid me. 2. My boastings—(1) In the multitude of my sons. (2) Of the fame of my sons. (3) In the greatness and glory of my themes. (4) In the extent of my influence in the world. (5) In the preservation of my life in spite of numerous and powerful enemies. (6) That I am the great favourite of heaven. (*J. Roberts.*) *The simplicity and freeness of the Gospel salvation*:—The vision was to be written upon tables, and made plain, that every one who read it might run. He who gave the vision commanded that it should be made plain upon tables, that the way of escape might be at once learned by those that were in peril, and that without a moment's delay they might run in that way and be delivered. What was the danger with which the people were threatened, and from which this vision was to indicate the way of escape? It is usually thought to be an anticipated invasion of the Chaldeans. It seems to me the danger is that to which all men as sinners are exposed; and that the way of escape indicated is that which is revealed to us by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I regard the prophet as here commissioned to announce to his countrymen, and ultimately, through the volume of inspiration, to the world at large, the folly, sin, and danger of rebellion against God, and forgetfulness of Him; and having thus warned them of the evil and peril of their ways, to urge upon them the importance of running in that way which has been opened for their escape. In favour of this interpretation the following considerations may be adduced—1. Look at the circumstances in which the prophet tells us this commission was delivered to him. 2. In verse 4 is a passage three times quoted by

the apostle Paul, as applicable to the salvation of the Gospel—to the enjoyment of eternal life. 3. Peter (Acts x. 43) tells Cornelius that *all* the prophets preached the doctrine of salvation by faith through Christ. 4. The interpretation proposed seems to give greater unity and appropriateness to the prophet's subsequent declarations. The commission, then, which the prophet received from God was a commission to declare plainly and faithfully to men their guilt and danger as sinners against God, and to point them to that salvation in connection with which God has revealed Himself to them, that they may escape the calamities to which their iniquity has exposed them. It is plain, then, that in order to ascertain correctly the way of salvation we must go to the written records of God's will, and read. (*W. Lindsay Alexander, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. For the vision is yet for an appointed time.—*Visions* :—He whom men style a visionary has for the most part little or no honour among them. But no one can help having visions unless he be devoid of imagination. A vision is an inward view, an image, or series of images, broader, larger, grander, deeper than aught that the bodily eye can see; it is evoked by some outward sign, on which a spiritual force acts. Visions may come from God; they may bring men near to God. There are day visions. It was to be a sign of the latter days, that in them there should be second sight far into hidden things. And a life without visions is not that which an imaginative and sympathetic man or woman would care to live. There are false visions and true; some that never come, and some that will come, and truly. The false visions are those which have this world for their boundary, and the things of this world for their substance. They generally relate to self: to one's own aggrandisement, to one's own enjoyment, or to the gratification of some desire of the natural heart. There is a great variety in them, even at that rate. It is sometimes the will of God that men should get the discipline they need, and without which they would be lost for ever, by making the pilgrimage of life with visions before them which for ever fly pursuit. Turn from visions that fade to one which does not fade. That vision is supernatural; it is pure vision, for it is seen by faith, and by faith only. What is that vision of these latter days? Jesus came to earth, lived, disappeared. But with that departure came a vision such as never mortals beheld before. The vision of a ransomed and purified race of men and women; of the destruction of all that is false, and the setting straight all that is wrong; of perfect truth, and a clear view thereof. Then never lose faith, never fear. God's light will grow brighter and stronger every year as you fight off the powers of darkness and hold faster to Him, and at last you shall see what made the light of your life, and you shall find all truth and all knowledge and full reward in the beatific vision of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (*Morgan Dix.*) Though it tarry, wait for it.—*Waiting on God* :—In these words we have something supposed, and a duty prescribed. "Though it tarry." This implies some degree of impatience, which may be due either to unbelief or strength of desire. "Wait for it." The vision is at present hid in the Divine purposes, but will at length break forth and be revealed. I. INQUIRE WHAT IS IMPLIED IN "WAITING." 1. A firm persuasion of the being and reality of what God has promised. Faith makes unseen things visible, and future things present; and as to things of a spiritual nature, it so demonstrates their excellency as to engage us to choose and give them the preference to all other things, while it excites strong desires after them. Faith therefore enters into the very essence of the duty here enjoined. 2. The deepest humility, joined with reverence and love. In order rightly to wait upon God we must have high apprehensions of Him and low apprehensions of ourselves. The waiting soul is sensible of its own dependence on the Divine all-sufficiency. 3. Fervent and continued desire. For these two are joined together in Isa. xxvi. 8. Waiting will cease when desire fails; but when everything else in a Christian seems to be gone, this remains. Waiting upon God is opposed to a stupid and lethargic frame of spirit. 4. Patience must be exercised in waiting. Not despairing patience. Not merely natural patience. A truly Christian patience, whereby we bear without murmuring the greatest afflictions, and are not totally discouraged by the longest delays. A patient spirit is neither timorous and distrustful on the one hand, nor rash and hasty on the other. For an apostolic similitude, see James v. 7, 8. We expect from God; we must not prescribe to Him. 5. Fixedness and stability, in opposition to a fluctuating and unstable temper of mind; constancy and resolution, in opposition to fickleness and levity. The prophet

calls it "standing upon a watch-tower." 6. Diligence and constancy, in opposition to sloth and weariness. Waiting upon God does not imply indolence, but activity; not neglect of the means, but diligent use of them. Diligence without dependence is the greatest folly; and dependence without diligence is no better than presumption. II. THE REASONABLENESS OF THE EXHORTATION. Consider—

1. We are but servants; and what should servants do but wait?
2. What God has promised must be worth waiting for. Surely those put a great slight upon the promised blessings who will not earnestly seek and patiently wait for them.
3. God has long waited upon us. He has had great patience with us, and shall we not patiently wait for His mercy?
4. It is one end for which God bestows His grace upon us, that we might be able and willing to wait. It is this which calms the boisterous passions and stills the tumult of the soul.
5. God seldom performs His promises or answers our expectations till we are brought to this state of mind. When we are submissive in the want of blessings we are most likely to enjoy them; whereas fretfulness and discontent will provoke God to withhold them. When we contend with Him, He will contend with us; but when we resign ourselves up to His will, He will gratify us in our wishes.
6. The sweetness of blessings is generally proportioned to the time we have waited for them, and the longer they have tarried the more welcome they are when they come. Learn from hence that when grace has reached the heart there is still much for the Christian to do. Our present state is oftentimes a state of sore and pressing want, and always of imperfect enjoyment; and therefore we should wait, and our waiting should be accompanied with cheerfulness; and to secure this we should regard promises more than appearances. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

A three-fold tarrying:—Three different Hebrew words are in English rendered by the one word "tarry." One means, to tarry for a reason, because constrained to do so by some rational necessity exterior to the actor. One signifies to tarry for shame, to remain in a place because ashamed to leave it. One word has in it the idea of choice, and means to remain behind willingly. Illustrate by Gen. xxiv. 56; Deut. vii. 10; Gen. xix. 16. Habakkuk is speaking of the second advent of Christ. To the yearning inquiry of the Church, spiritually heard by the prophet, "Lord, when wilt Thou come in Thy glory?" the answer comes—"The time for His coming is appointed, though He tarry for some reason"; such reasons there are in the conditions of this wicked world which delay His coming; still, wait for Him; because it (He) will surely come; it (He) will not tarry freely, willingly, upon His own account, of His own arbitrary choice. (*Alex. Mrywvitz, A.M.*)

God's delays:—There is nothing so painful or mysterious in the experience of the children of God as the Lord's frequently long delay in coming to their help in answer to their cry. This experience is not only painful in itself, but it often implies much spiritual conflict. It tends to shake faith to its foundations. Yet this is often God's way. And since it is His way, our first source of comfort under this trial is—I. To be still, and know that He is God. In all extremities we must fall back upon this, the sovereignty of God. 2. However dark be our path, we have no reason to doubt His love. 3. We can sometimes discern reasons why the Lord delays His coming. The expression, "the fulness of time," reveals to us much of the secret of God's delays. The waiting time is usually a time of growth. The suppliant sees things very differently at the close of his struggle from what he did at the outset; and the blessing so ardently sought becomes now a real blessing from his being thus prepared to receive it. 4. It will follow from this that when our prayers are offered up for blessings for others they too, at that time, may be unfitted to receive them. 5. As it is with human souls, who cannot, without a miracle, be in a moment transformed from childhood to maturity, there must be in all mental and spiritual processes, first, the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. So it is with the constitution of things. Sometimes before prayer can be answered many things must happen. (*Evangelical Advocate.*)

The Divine slowness:—This word is the one word which the Divine wisdom often seems to utter in rebuke of human impatience. God is never in haste. I. THE DIVINE PROCEEDINGS ARE SLOW. 1. The history of the earth illustrates this principle. Creation was the work of long eras. 2. There is something in the movement of the seasons tending to remind us of this great law. How silently and slowly winter retires before spring, and spring gives place to summer and autumn. To the Divine mind that orders it all there is a majesty in slowness. 3. The history of all life conveys the same lesson. Life, whether in plants or animals, is everywhere a growth; and all growth is silent, gradual,—so

gradual as not to be perceived. The education of an individual is slow; the education of a people must be very slow. II. GUARD AGAINST IMPATIENCE IN JUDGING THE WAYS OF GOD, AND KNOW HOW TO WAIT. Religion, revealed religion, includes much in harmony with these facts of nature and providence. 1. Note the long interval which was to pass between the promise of a Saviour and His advent. 2. So, when the Saviour did come, the manner of His coming was not such as the thoughts of men would have anticipated. The kingdom of heaven was to come without observation. 3. It is not without mystery to many minds that the history of revealed religion since the advent should have been such as it has been. We might have anticipated that the doctrine of Christ would be retained in its purity, and that its subduing power would be everywhere felt. But on reflection we find analogy suggesting that this was by no means probable. 4. If we descend from the general life of the Church to the spiritual history of the individual believer, we may find much there to remind us that the experience of the Church at large, and the Christian taken separately, are regulated by the same intelligence. With regard to much of our personal history, we are expected to wait for the revelations of God. (*Robert Vaughan, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **The just shall live by his faith.**—*Faith and the higher life*:—All men live by faith, and in our world man is the only creature who lives by faith. A world altogether without faith, where no man could trust another in anything, would be a most miserable world. Take away faith altogether, and all the social fabric would be one heap of ruins. Man is the only creature in this world who can live by faith. All creatures and all things depend upon God for the continuance of their existence as truly as man does, but it is man only who can trust in God. The fact that man can know God and trust in Him is a proof of his greatness and glory, and shows him to be the object of God's special care and tenderness, as was shown by Christ in His Sermon on the Mount. Yet there are many men who do not trust in Him for His blessings, and live for His glory, in the enjoyment of them. Faith in Him is not a condition of the bestowal of His temporal blessings upon men. But men cannot have God's spiritual blessings without faith in Him. To live for the spiritual and invisible is impossible without faith in God, and man is too great and glorious a being to live only for the present. The truth is, that the man of faith in God is the only man who truly lives. I. **THE NOBLEST CHARACTER.** In the Bible men are divided into two great divisions, the righteous and the wicked. The righteous is a man who trusts God's Word, submits to God's will, and lives in conformity with God's righteous and holy law. He is a straight, or right, man—right in mind, in heart, and in life. The unjust man is a man with a crooked soul. In the Old Testament the word righteousness refers more to conduct than to the inward principle of spiritual life, and the righteous man is characterised by truthfulness, honesty, uprightness, tenderness, and unswerving fidelity to duty in relation to God and man. II. **THE HIGHEST LIFE.** Man's highest life is a life of trust in God. No man can live to himself in the highest sense of life, and if he tries to do so he will die in the very attempt. It is through the death of the lower self that the higher and true self can live. To enable men to do this was Christ's object in coming to the world to live and die for us. Through faith men die in His death and live in His life, and this is the only way in which fallen man, who is dead in trespasses and sins, can find his life. The greatest thing the blessed Saviour could give for man was life, and the greatest thing He can give to man is life. In giving life Christ gives to men all they stand in need of for time and eternity. There is more in life than correspondence of an organism with its environment. There is a vital, mysterious principle, which manifests itself through the correspondence of the organism with its environment, and reaches its perfection when that correspondence becomes perfect. The highest life is the spiritual, which, said Christ, consists in the knowledge of God and Himself. The spiritual man not only lives and moves and has his being in God and His Son, as the true environment of spiritual and eternal life, but God in His Son must live in him. What is it to *live* according to the sense of the word in the text? It consists of three things—1. Participation of God's nature. Men live in God and unto God by becoming partakers of the Divine nature. 2. Perfect delight in God. We associate enjoyment with all conscious life. God has no way of giving joy but by giving life. 3. Usefulness for God. The crown of every life is its usefulness; its highest end is service. There is no true joy of life possible without life of service. The life which consists

of the knowledge of God in His Son will be eternally progressive. **III. THE CONDITION OF THE BLESSED LIFE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.** "By his faith." Man's highest life is a life of living trust in a living God. Faith in God is the animating and sustaining principle of the life of the righteous. Only a *person* can be an object of *trust*. Faith cannot live but in the constant vision of its object. This living faith in God is given to man to enable him to do his work for God. The only faith worthy of the name is that which enables us to live the truest and highest life. (*Z. Mather.*) *The just*:—When we repent and believe the Gospel, we live—are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. **I. THE JUST.** Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him. Works which are supposed to merit, naturally puff up the mind with pride. The prophet says, that proud disposition which you think merits, because of your works, is not an upright disposition. Good works cannot avail to justification. You must believe, not works. Good works are evidences of faith. The just are such as God justifies by faith in His own beloved Son. For Christ's righteousness is to all, and upon all them that believe. **II. THEY ARE ALIVE.** Did they not live before? Yes, a natural life. They are quickened to a new and higher life. None are alive till born again of the Spirit. We must experience the "washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." **III. HOW THE BELIEVER LIVES THIS SPIRITUAL LIFE.** By his faith. The man who is justified by faith is made spiritually alive, and this life is maintained and supported by repeated acts of faith in the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Faith in Christ justifies, and by believing we receive righteousness and strength, and are made holy and acceptable to God. (*R. Horsfall.*) *Nothing better than reliance on God*:—The prophet means to show that nothing is better than to rely on God's Word, how much soever may various temptations assault our souls. He sets the two clauses of the verse, the one opposed to the other: every man who would fortify himself, would ever be subject to various changes, and never attain a quiet mind; then comes the other clause—that man cannot otherwise obtain rest than by faith. The first clause I would render, "Where there is an elation of mind there is no tranquillity." When the prophet says that there is no calmness of mind possessed by those who deem themselves well fortified, he intimates that they are their own executioners, for they seek for themselves many troubles, many sorrows, many anxieties, and contrive and mingle together many designs and purposes; now they think of one thing, then they turn to another; for the Hebrews say that the soul is made right when we acquiesce in a thing, and continue in a tranquil state of mind; but when confused thoughts distract us, then they say that our soul is not right in us. We now perceive the real meaning of the prophet. "Behold," he says: by this demonstrative particle he intimates that what he teaches us may be clearly seen if we attend to daily events. The meaning then is, that a proof of this fact exists evidently in the common life of men—that he who fortifies himself, and is also elated with self-confidence, never finds a tranquil haven, for some new suspicion or fear ever disturbs his mind. Hence it comes that the soul entangles itself in various cares and anxieties. This is the reward which is allotted by God's just judgment to the unbelieving. The prophet, in the second clause, places faith in opposition to all those defences by which men so blind themselves as to neglect God, and to seek no aid from Him. (*John Calvin.*) *Life by faith*:—In this connection there is a peculiar shade of meaning in living by faith. Immediate reference is to approaching trials of an extraordinary kind. There is a vision of national calamity, an impending invasion of the Chaldeans. It is declared that humility is the only upright attitude of soul, in such circumstances: and contrasted with the proud impatience which cannot wait for God, in His appointed time, is the meek reliance of the just man. "But the just shall live by his faith." **I. ORDINARILY, THE JUST MAN LIVES BY FAITH.** 1. As it is the first act of that new spiritual life which the Holy Ghost produces in the soul. It is that coming to Christ which the Scriptures make anterior to every other gift or exercise of grace. 2. We live by faith, as it apprehends the plea by which the condemnation of death is set aside, or as it is a justifying instrument. We are said to live by that instrumentality which delivers us, and shields us from the operation of death. 3. We live by faith, as it unites the soul in mystical union with the Head, in whom there is all the fulness of life. 4. We live by faith, as it is in the range of its appropriation the highest and best condition of life. 5. We live by faith, as it is a principle essentially indicative of life, active, operative, and fruitful. **II. HOW DOES SUCH FAITH SURVIVE IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF EXTRAORDINARY TRIAL ?**

1. Calamity, that which exceeds the bounds of ordinary affliction. Such as war, famine, pestilence, earthquake. 2. Reproach for the faithful maintenance of truth and holiness. 3. The return of infidelity—extraordinary in that no completeness of defeat can prevent its returning invasion. 4. Another trial is apostasy. Faith is first in order; every other grace in the soul implies the precedence of this faith; hope herself must give up the sure and steadfast anchor, before this inner and ultimate life of faith can be destroyed. (*A. T. M'Gill, D.D.*) *Life is due to faith* :—The prophet here places faith in opposition to all those defences by which men so blind themselves as to neglect God, and to seek no aid from Him. As men therefore rely on what the earth affords, depending on their fallacious supports, the prophet here ascribes life to faith. But faith, as is well known, depends on God alone. That we may then live by faith, the prophet intimates that we must willingly give up all those defences which are wont to disappoint us. He then who finds that he is deprived of all protection, will live by his faith, provided he seeks in God alone what he wants, and leaving the world, would fix his mind on heaven. The prophet understands by the word *amunat*, that faith which strips us of all arrogance, and leads us naked and needy to God, that we may seek salvation from Him alone, which would otherwise be far removed from us. We perceive why Habakkuk has put these two things in opposition the one to the other—that the defences of this world are not only evanescent, but also bring always with them many tormenting fears—and then, that the just shall live by his faith. Faith is not to be taken here for man's integrity, but for that faith which sets man before God emptied of all good things, so that he seeks what he needs from His gratuitous goodness: for all the unbelieving try to fortify themselves; and thus they strengthen themselves, thinking that anything in which they trust is sufficient for them. But what does the just do? He brings nothing before God except faith: then he brings nothing of his own, because faith borrows, as it were, through favour, what is not in man's possession. He, then, who lives by faith, has no life in himself, but because he wants it, he flies for it to God alone. The prophet also puts the verb in the future tense, in order to show the perpetuity of this life; for the unbelieving glory in a shadowy life; but the Lord will at last discern their folly, and they themselves shall really know that they have been deceived. But as God never disappoints the hope of His people, the prophet here promises a perpetual life to the faithful. (*John Calvin.*) *The use of faith in a time of general declension in religion* :—What is a calamitous season? 1. When it exceeds the bounds of affliction, or when the dispensations of God's anger in it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction. 2. When judgments fall promiscuously upon all sorts of persons, and make no distinction.

I. HOW WE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; WHAT FAITH WILL DO IN SUCH A SEASON. 1. Faith will give the soul a reverential fear of God in His judgments. 2. It will put the soul upon preparing and providing an ark for itself. (1) This ark is Jesus Christ. (2) There must be a door in this ark. To obtain an interest in Christ is the general work of faith in these days. (3) It will put us upon the search and examination of our own hearts, what accession we have made to the sins that have procured these judgments. The sins which do and have procured these judgments are—open and flagitious sins of the world. And the sins of Churches and professors. These latter include lukewarmness; contenting ourselves in outward order; want of love among ourselves; earthly-mindedness. **II. HOW FAITH WILL CARRY IT UNDER OTHER PERPLEXITIES THAT MAY BE COMING ON US.** 1. How we may live by faith under reproaches. (1) Faith will give us such an experience of the power, efficacy, sweetness and benefit of Gospel ordinances and Gospel worship, as shall cause us to despise all that the world can do in opposition to us. (2) It will bring the soul into such an experimental sense of the authority of Jesus Christ, as to make it despise all other things. Faith will work this double respect unto the authority of Jesus Christ—as He is the great Head and Lawgiver of the Church, and as He is Lord of lords and King of kings. (3) Faith will bring to mind, and make effectual upon our souls, the examples of them that have gone before us, in giving the same testimony that we do, and in the sufferings that they underwent upon that account. (4) Faith will receive in the supplies that Christ hath laid up for His people in such a season. (5) It is faith alone that can relieve us with respect unto the recompense of reward. (6) Faith will work by patience when difficulties shall be multiplied upon us. **2. HOW** we may live by faith, under an apprehension of the great and woeful decays in Churches, in Church members, in professors of all sorts; and in the gradua

withdrawing of the glory of God from us all on that account. (1) This is such a time of decay among us. A sense of it is impressed upon the minds of all the most judicious and diligent Christians, that do abound most in self-examination, or do take most notice of the ways of God. They recognise the open want of love among Church members; want of delight and diligence in the ordinances of Gospel worship; and our worldly-mindedness, conformity to the world, and security. A sense of this general decay ought to be an exercise and concern to our minds. God is dishonoured by this general decay. The world is offended and scandalised by it. The ruin of Churches is hastened by it. (2) What is the work of faith under this condition? It will remind the soul that, notwithstanding this, Christ hath built His Church upon a rock, that it shall not be utterly prevailed against. It will remind the soul that God hath yet the fulness and residue of the Spirit. Faith will cheer us by saying, "Are not all these things foretold thee?" And it will put every soul in whom it is upon an especial attendance unto those duties God calls him unto in such a season. Such as self-examination; great mourning, by reason of God's withdrawing Himself from us; watchfulness over ourselves, and over one another, that we be not overtaken by the means and causes of these decays; zeal for God and the honour of the Gospel, that it may not suffer by reason of our miscarriages. (*J. Owen, D.D.*) *The life of faith*:—

The text may be taken in two ways. In a moral sense, as regards the circumstances of the Jews. In a theological sense, as respects that great object on which believers have fixed their eye in all ages of the Church. The Rabbis give a very curious exposition of the words, "I will stand upon my watch." They translate, "I will confine myself in a circle," and explain that the prophet drew a circle, and made a solemn vow that he would not go out of it, until God had unfolded those dark dispensations to him, which seemed so injurious to His perfections.

I. EXPLAIN THE TERMS OF THIS PROPOSITION, "The just shall live by faith."

1. Who is the just or righteous man? There are two sorts of righteousness, according to the law, and according to faith. By righteousness after the law understand that which man wishes to derive from his own personal ability. By righteousness of faith understand that which man derives from his own personal ability. To have faith, or to believe, is a vague expression. Faith is sometimes a disposition common to the righteous and the wicked; sometimes the distinguishing character of a Christian; sometimes it is put for the virtue of Abraham; sometimes it stands for the credence of devils. Faith is a disposition of mind that changeth its nature according to the various objects which are proposed to it. We are inquiring about saving faith, and have to inquire what is its object. It is Jesus Christ as dying and offering Himself to the justice of the Father. We must distinguish two sorts of desires to share the benefits of the death of Christ. A desire unconnected with all the acts which God is pleased to require of us; and a desire that animates us with a determination to participate these benefits. Jesus is proposed to the believer's mind and heart and conduct. There are two kinds or causes of justification. 1. The fundamental or meritorious cause. 2. The instrumental cause. That is the fundamental which acquires, merits, and lays the foundation of our justification and salvation. By the instrumental we mean those acts which it hath pleased God to prescribe to us, in order to our participation of this acquired salvation. If faith justifies us, it is as an instrument, that of itself can merit nothing, and which contributes to our justification only as it capacitates us for participating the benefits of the death of Christ. Justifying faith is a general principle of virtue and holiness. 1. Justifying faith is lively faith, a believer cannot live by a dead faith. 2. Justifying faith must assort with the genius of the covenant, to which it belongs. 3. Justifying faith must include all the virtues to which the Scriptures attribute justification and salvation. 4. Justifying faith must merit all the praises which are given to it in Scripture. 5. Justifying faith must enter into the spirit of the mystery of the satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

II. OBJECTIONS MADE AGAINST THIS DOCTRINE. 1. Is it pretended that the design of excluding holiness from the essence of faith is to elevate the merit of the death of Christ? 2. Dost thou say, thy design is to humble man? What can be more proper to humble man than the system we have expounded? 3. Dost thou say, our system is contrary to experience? 4. Or that our justification and salvation flow from a decree made before the foundation of the world, and not from our embracing the Gospel in time? 5. Or dost thou still object, that, although our system is true in the main, yet it is always dangerous to publish it; because man has always an inclination to "sacrifice unto his own net," and by press-

ing the necessity of good works, occasion is insensibly given to the doctrine of merit? (*J. Saurin.*) *Faith, a life-giving power*:—Righteousness has been defined as the fulfilment of relations. But those relations are not primarily relations of earth. The higher relation rests on revelation. It is our relation to God. "Life" is not here, living in the sense of existing, nor in the sense of exercising existence. Three ideas have to be added to the primary idea of existence. This life is conscious, satisfying, everlasting existence. "Faith" is the realisation of a future, the conviction of the invisible. Faith in a person is the realisation of that person, the having him so present to the eye of the soul that the presence is a power. Too often by faith is meant the realisation not of a person, but of a thing; not of Jesus Christ as all that He is, and God in Him, but of one single thing about Jesus Christ—His atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and even this rather in the aspect of the death than in the aspect of the life, rather as a fact accomplished and done with than as a reality having in it the motive of a dedication, and the power of a life. (*Dean Vaughan, D.D.*) *The just shall live by his faith*:—The great Babylonian empire was swallowing up the smaller nations round about. To the prophet who believed in the Holy Almighty God, ruling in the earth in righteousness, this was a mystery. It was a strange problem. He could not understand why that great empire should grow greater, and why the nations round about should thus be turned into their net, and brought under their rule. Bad as the Jewish people were, they were not so far astray from the true God and from righteousness as were the men of Babylon. Why then should this nation control? He stands and looks at this mystery, and finds that he has no solution for it. He is perplexed and baffled. But like a wise and true prophet, he goes aside and stands upon what he calls his watch-tower that he may see what God will say. He will be quiet and still in heart, waiting for the Divine message to come to solve the difficulty. The text is the answer. I. THE UPLIFTED SOUL AND ITS PENALTY. What is it for a man to be lifted up? It is to be proud, haughty, to have a feeling of self-dependence and self-sufficiency. It is to forget God, and to assume that a man's life is in his own hands. There are many things that will produce an uplifted soul. Such as worldly success; intellectual culture; a man's unbelief. There is hardly a step between unbelief in God and a man having a vain, proud, self-satisfied, and uplifted soul. Such a soul is not upright. It is crooked, perverse, froward. That is the penalty. For what is the glory of man? It is to know God, and to live in fellowship with Him. The great glory of man is righteousness. How do those who are "lifted up" carry themselves in times of trouble? They are ground to pieces—broken up. What strength have they for the day of adversity? II. THE TRUE LIFE FOR MAN. It is a Divine message spoken to the just man. "Your duty is to live by faith." This faith is the antithesis of "lifted up." It is a spirit of trust in God, a devout belief in God, in the righteousness and the love of God: it is lowliness and humbleness of mind; it is a feeling of true dependence upon the great Father in heaven. All the holy and just men who ever lived a true and noble life, have done so because they have lived by their faith. How will this work? God becomes a reality to the soul that is full of trust and prayer. God draws near to us as we live in faith and spirituality to Him. We make great mistakes in the matter of realising God and the love of God. Try by argument, by subtle process of reasoning, by investigation, to find out God and to know Him, and you are baffled. It is by faith God becomes known. And a life of faith and devoutness gives strength for obedience. Faith brings us into union with the great Source of all life, and causes us to be equipped with power for obedience in righteousness. The path in which Christ walked, and we are called to walk—the path of self-sacrifice, purity, meekness, love to enemies, trust in God, moral courage—this path is one which severely strains and taxes all the powers of a man. Hindrances and temptations throng around you at every step. Christian victory is not so much a stern exercise of resolution as a devout consecration to God; not so much self-straining as self-surrender to God; a loving consent to the guidance and inspiration of the Divine Spirit. The hour of quiet, simple yielding up of self to God, with utter dependence on His moulding touch and strengthening grace, is always the hour of our fullest power for obedience. There is another element that enters into the life of faith—peace, serenity, joy. The outward circumstances of life are never without some kind of discord or pain. If we make ourselves dependent upon the perfect adjustment of outward things for peace, then never will peace be ours. Open the portals of the soul, with lowliness and childlike dependence before God, bow in hushed

submission, and then into the soul, noiselessly, yet with living power, like the calm dawn of a summer day, peace will come. Live the life of faith, and you will find God everywhere, and your character will grow in righteousness, and your peace and joy shall flow and abound like the waters of a great sea. (*Thomas Hammond.*) *Life by faith*:—Take the text as it stands on the page of the Hebrew prophet. This oracle of Habakkuk really means, “A righteous man shall live by his fidelity.” You will best understand the beauty of a Scripture passage when you look at it in its original setting. Habakkuk lived near the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity. In his large insight, in his poetic fire, he claims kindred with his mightier predecessors, Amos, Micah, Isaiah. He was faced by a new and eminently painful problem, he was precluded from holding out to his people any near or direct hope. And he was right. Habakkuk had to face the problem of the strength of the wicked and the humiliation of the just. The aggravations of the problem arose from the struggles of suffering innocence, but hitherto they had mainly presented themselves in individual instances. When the sufferer was a nation, and God’s chosen people, it was natural that terrible misgivings should overcloud the souls of men. In the very moment of repentance and reform came the threat of exile terrible and remediless. The Chaldean power was upon them; there was no remedy, save in comfortless endurance, and a hope yearning but still deferred. In those days of endurance and hope deferred, the lives of men, the life of the prophet himself, the life of that whole generation might ebb away. But the faithful are never utterly forsaken. For the prophet himself and for his nation, for all time, it was granted him to see at least in germ, to set forth at least in outline two of the universal truths on which the consolations of our little human life must rest. The answer that came to the prophet in his watch-tower was this, “The righteous man shall live by his fidelity.” Does this seem obscure, meagre, and unsatisfactory? The prophet caught its meaning. He breaks out, and concludes his book with one of the most splendid poems in the whole Bible. Nothing, neither drought nor desolation, could shake Habakkuk in his inextinguishable trust in God. The soul of the Chaldean is arrogant and wicked. That is enough. Then because God is God, in the pride and injustice of the oppressor lie the certain germs of his final overthrow. “The moral law is written on the tables of eternity.” And the righteous shall live by his faithfulness. Is he faithful? That is enough. Because God is God, righteousness not only contains the promise of life, when rightly understood, it is the only life. The just man, the ideal nation is not under the crushing disadvantage which he imagines. The power to serve God never fails, and the love of God is never rejected. There is the oracle to the troubled prophet, and to the trembling nation. It has two sides. The first is the old law, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The other is, “The righteous man shall live by his fidelity.” What more would you have? Righteousness may be hated and persecuted. Wickedness may be lapped in luxury; but nevertheless, righteousness is life, sin is death. (*Dean Farrar.*) *Habakkuk*:—The design of this prophecy is to confirm the servants of God in their belief of His power, and reliance on His providence, as the Ruler and Disposer of the universe, notwithstanding the prosperity wherein wicked men are sometimes seen to flourish in the earth, while the pious and godly are tried with affliction and adversity. The practical principle of religious faith is that, let the probable consequences of present advantage or loss be what they may, it is our true wisdom always to hold fast by God, and put our trust in Him. Habakkuk prophesied in the reign of Jehoiakim, son of the pious Josiah. But he, instead of imitating the piety of his father, followed the evil practices of his more distant ancestors, Amon and Manasseh. He and his subjects abandoned themselves to every sort of profaneness towards God, of violence, oppression, deceit, and dishonesty towards each other, and of sensuality and debauchery in their own lives. Such was the state of the kingdom of Judah when Habakkuk saw his “burden.” He first inquires of God why injustice was suffered to prevail in Judah, and the wicked to oppress and get the advantage over upright and religious persons. The answer of God proclaims the speedy arrival of the Chaldeans, as a scourge of God. The mind of Habakkuk was even more disturbed with the expectation of the dreadful excesses of the Chaldeans, than it had been at the sight of the enormities already practised in Judea. He therefore, with all humility, proceeds to ask the reasons of so apparently strange a dispensation. He professes his own confidence in God, and his persuasion that the Chaldeans are not really the favourites of God, but

only the executioners of His wrath. Having been allowed to put these questions, the prophet describes himself as anxiously waiting to have them answered. Here the second chapter opens. The "lifting up" in the text means the withdrawing of our trust in God, either through careless arrogance, which makes men forget their dependence upon Him, or through unsteadiness of faith, which leaves them to be tossed about, without stay or foundation, like a feather, a leaf, or any other light and worthless body, that is lifted up and whirled about in the air. "His soul which is lifted up," withdrawn from an entire dependence on God, "is not upright in him," for he murmurs and is discontented at the arrangements of God's providence in things pertaining to this life. A man's "soul is not upright in him," who makes light of the expectation of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments to be therein distributed by the righteous judgment of God. Or who cavils at, and finds fault with any of the commandments of God, as burthens grievous to be borne. Or who trusts to his own performance of the law for acceptance. "The just shall live by his faith." Faith has always been the support and comfort of the humble and confiding servants of God. (*Jas. Randall, M.A.*) *Faith crowned* :—He that believeth God's Word so as to walk worthy of the great things which He has promised to do for him, shall have his faith crowned with a happy accomplishment. From these words we raise the following observations—1. We see the method which God has taken in revealing to us things to come. He has thought it sufficient to reveal to us the things themselves, without notifying the time when they shall be performed and manifested in the world. 2. We see the great sin of infidelity, and how much of the Divine displeasure we incur, when we disbelieve any Word of God, only because the completion of it falls not within the time which we had reckoned upon for the doing of it. 3. We hear the blessing which accompanies our sincere belief and dutiful observance of God's Word. "The just shall live by his faith." This is the only true life that men can live. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *The life by faith* :—The immediate cause which gave rise to these words was the strong temptation of the prophet to distrust the providence of God, arising from the prosperity of the wicked, and their cruel oppression of the righteous. He points to faith in God as the sustaining, animating principle of the righteous man until his trial should be over. Consider the various ways in which it is true of the just man that he lives by faith. The just man's faith in God is the belief and conviction of his mind of the reality and truth of all that God has been pleased to assure him of. It is the persuasion that all God's promises to him are true, and will be fulfilled—a persuasion so real that he is supported by it, and acts upon it. What is this life of the just man that is spoken of here? Not mere animal life. Not mere intellectual life. It is the spiritual life of the soul before its redeeming Lord. It is a life peculiar to the just, such as none else lives. A life of acceptance with God, of love to God, of obedience and submission to Him. 1. Man is justified, declared just before God, through this great principle of faith. 2. To his faith in God the just man owes the life of obedience and holiness which he lives before Him. 3. Faith represents God as the source of strength in present trial, and of comfort in all affliction. Such a belief is absolutely necessary, in order to stir up man to exertion and perseverance in his spiritual contest with evil. 4. Faith, assuring the mind of the Christian of the glory that awaits him in the future life, prevents the discouragements that he meets with, and the denial to which he submits, from overcoming his patient perseverance in well-doing. (*H. Constable, M.A.*) *The portraiture of a good man* :—Whether the man whose soul here is represented as "lifted up," refers to the unbelieving Jew, or to the Babylonian, is an unsettled question amongst biblical critics; and a question of but little practical moment. I. A good man is a HUMBLE man. This is implied. His soul is not "lifted up." Pride is not only no part of moral goodness, but is essentially inimical to it. A proud Christian is a solecism. Jonathan Edwards describes a Christian as being such a "little flower as we see in the spring of the year, low and humble in the ground, opening its bosom for the beams of the sun, rejoicing in a calm rapture, suffusing around sweet fragrance, and standing peacefully and lowly in the midst of other flowers." Pride is an obstruction to all progress and knowledge and virtue, and is abhorrent to the Holy One. "He resisteth the proud, but gives grace to the humble." II. A good man is a JUST man. "The just shall live by his faith." To be good, is nothing more than to be just. 1. Just to self. Doing the right thing to one's own faculties and affections as the offsprings of God. 2. Just to others. Doing unto others what we would that they should do unto

us. 3. Just to God. To be just to self, society, and God, this is religion. III. A good man is a CONFIDING man. He lives "by his faith." This passage is quoted by Paul in Rom. i. 17; Gal. iii. 11; it is also quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. x. 38). (*Homilist.*) *Justifying faith*:—It is as if the prophet had said, Depend upon it, when this world has done its best and its worst, it will plainly appear that the great question between it and the Church is, whether it is better to trust in one's self, one's own wisdom, and fame, and riches, and high spirit, or to go altogether out of one's self, and to live entirely on the heavenly righteousness which God gives to His own people. The world rests upon itself, the Church lives by faith. Faith is that by which we abide in Christ. The spiritual life within us depends in some special manner on this grace. How impossible that those men should have true faith who allow themselves in self-righteousness. What difference can it make in point of pride and presumption, whether a man trusts in his own faith, or in his own works? In either case he trusts in something of his own. The true faith in Christ leads immediately to the obeying of all His commandments. Faith in Christ will make our fortunes in the world of small consequence: and will help us to endure trials patiently. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to "Tracts for the Times."*) *The life of faith in the midst of a self-confident world*:—The subject here is, how they that are just continue to live. The bond of this union, whereby a man becomes just is confidence—trust—faith. What is this living? It is put in opposition to the characters on the other side, who are not upright, the man shall live unto God by this principle of confidence. The very same principle that brings him to Jesus for righteousness that he may be just, works in him when he is in Jesus, and by it he lives. It requires such a principle as this to live consistently. There is no such thing as Christianity made easy. The power of uprightness is in faith, and no man but a man of faith will be found thoroughly upright. (*Hugh M'Neile, M.A.*) *Faith*:—These words were spoken to Habakkuk, to check him for his impatience under God's hand. They are just as true for every man that ever was and ever will be as they were for him. It always was true, and always must be true, that if reasonable beings are to live at all, it is by faith. Because everything that is, heaven and earth, men and angels, are all the work of God. We do not remember enough what we do know of God. All things lie, like a grain of dust, in the hollow of God's hand. Think of the infinite power of God, and then think how it is possible to live, except by faith in Him, by trusting to Him utterly. After all, what can we do without God? The life of our spirits is a gift from God, the Father of spirits, and He has chosen to declare that unless we trust to Him for life, and ask Him for life, He will not bestow it upon us. If we wish to be loving, pure, wise, manly, noble, we must ask those excellent gifts of God, who is Himself infinite love and purity, wisdom and nobleness. And it is by faith in Christ we must live,—in Christ, a man like ourselves, yet God blessed for ever. It is a certain truth, that men cannot believe in God, or trust in Him unless they can think of Him as a man. All that men have ever done well, or nobly, or lovingly, in this world, was done by faith—by faith in God of some sort or other. Without Christ we can do nothing—by trusting in Christ we can do everything. (*C. Kingsley.*) *Living by faith*:—The prophet is speaking of a time of terrible calamity, which was to come upon himself and upon all his people. One event is to happen to all,—to the righteous, and to the wicked. Some of his people shall meet these terrible calamities with the spirit of pride, refusing to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. And, seeing that those who do not bend under God's providences, are invariably broken by them, the prophet contrasts the position of such persons with the position of those whom he describes in the text, and he remarks, "The just shall live by his faith." What is it for a man to *live*, in God's sense of the word, and to live in a time of calamity? Such a man will hear God's voice in the calamity; he will hear the rod, and Him who hath appointed it. The man who really *lives*, in a time of calamity, will see God's face even in that time; he will see the face of God behind the cloud. He will not be crushed by calamity. "The just shall live by his faith" means, he shall be equal to the claims which are made upon him, even in times of calamity, by the support which he derives through the operation of his faith. Faith is not mere assent. It follows belief in a particular kind of testimony. If we believe a worthy testimony, a certain state of heart must follow that belief. It is trust or reliance. Take the word "just" to represent a justified sinner, and that man shall live by his faith. 1. Man is introduced into a new life by this faith. Trusting in God's beloved Son, life is immediately given to him. He no

sooner trusts, than all that is involved in everlasting life becomes his. This is God's free gift to him. 2. Man has support in time of trouble through faith. Hope is closely related to faith. If you would have a stronger hope, you must have a stronger faith. There is a work which faith performs that hope cannot accomplish. Hope has a limited sphere, faith has not. Faith has to do with all that God has said about Himself, and about His Son, and about His Spirit, and about the privileges of the redeemed, and about the destiny of the redeemed. Faith is the principle whose operations render God's descriptions of unseen things real to us, so that His words take the place of facts. One effect of the faith of a Christian is to bring us into an entirely different style of life from that in which those men live who walk by sight. It must be so. Note some of the points of difference between a believer and an unbeliever. One holds the world tight, the other holds it with a slack hand. One orders his life by the will of his fellow-men, the other by the will of God. Then ask yourselves whether you have what the Scriptures call "faith," the faith that saves. (*Samuel Martin.*)

Ver. 5. Who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied.—Moral wrong ; some of its national phases :—Evil, like good, is one in essence, but it has many forms and phases. The branches that grow out of the root, whilst filled with the same sap, vary widely in shape and hue. I. DRUNKENNESS. This is one of the most loathsome, irrational, and pernicious forms which it can assume. Drunkenness puts the man or the woman absolutely into the hands of Satan, to do whatsoever he wills. II. HAUGHTINESS. "Is a proud man." Babylon became inspired with a haughty insolence. She regarded herself as the queen of the world, and looked down with supercilious contempt upon all the other nations of the earth, even upon the Hebrew people, the heavenly chosen race. Nebuchadnezzar expresses the spirit of the kingdom as well as his own, when he says, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty ?" It is suggested that their love of wine had much to do in the developing of this haughty spirit. We read, chapter 5th, that Belshazzar at his feast drank wine with the thousands of his lords, his princes, his wives, his concubines. III. RAPACITY. Two things are suggested concerning the rapacious form it assumed in Babylon. 1. It was restless. "Neither keepeth at home." Not content with its own grandeur, wealth, and luxuries, it goes from home in search of others ; goes out into other countries to rifle and to rob. 2. It is insatiable. "Who enlargeth his desire as hell,"—that is, as Sheol the grave,—"and is as death, and cannot be satisfied." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 6. Him that ladeth himself with thick clay.—Heavy clay :—It is the glory of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ when it is regarded in its moral aspect, that it is not the religion merely of transcendental and unpractical truths, but that its motives and precepts go down to the minutest details of every-day duty. Note—1. The danger of a false start and a false aim in life. God has given us a complex nature, and He has given us the use of our reason and the other faculties, physical and mental, which He bestows upon men. And the great end of man is to glorify God. If a man uses his powers only to found a family or amass wealth, we earnestly warn that man. He has mistaken the great end of his being. 2. A form in which the lading of thick clay is found is greed of money. Covetousness in some one or other of its forms or specious disguises is one of the besetting idolatries of the day. This greed of money manifests itself in money-getting and in money-losing, and also in money-spending. Comparatively few recognise the principle of stewardship to God in the expenditure of their income. 3. Another form in which this heavy clay is sometimes found is anxiety. What our Lord and His apostles tell us to avoid is the carking, distracting care which turns a man's mind away from God, and keeps him continually on the rack, forgetting the loving Father who is willing to be the bearer of all his cares. 4. Another form of this clay among business men is sharp practice. Sharp practice is in our manufactories, upon the exchange, with lawyers, and not only among the little petty hucksters, but among tradesmen who make a much fairer show in our streets. 5. Another form is a worldly tone and spirit. To be a Christian, there is no necessity to leave your work and to lead the life of a recluse. Go into the world and make your money, but do not worship it. (*Canon Miller, D.D.*) **Under a heap of clay :—**The avaricious "accumulate

on themselves thick clay." Hardly, indeed, an avaricious man can be found who is not a burden to himself, and to whom his wealth is not a source of trouble. Everyone who has accumulated much, when he comes to old age, is afraid to use what he has got, being ever solicitous lest he should lose anything; and then, as he thinks nothing is sufficient, the more he possesses the more grasping he becomes, and frugality is the name given to that sordid and, so to speak, that servile restraint within which the rich confine themselves. In short, when anyone forms a judgment of all the avaricious of this world, and is himself free from all avarice, having a free and unbiassed mind, he will easily apprehend what the prophet says here,—that all the wealth of this world is nothing else but a heap of clay, as when any one puts himself of his own accord under a great heap which he had collected together. The general truth to be drawn from the expression is, that all the avaricious, the more they heap together, the more they lade themselves, and, as it were, bury themselves under a great load. Riches acquired by frauds and plunders are nothing else than a heavy and cumbersome lump of earth; for God returns on the heads of those who thus seek to enrich themselves whatever they have plundered from others. Had they been contented with some moderate portion, they might have lived cheerfully and happily, as we see to be the case with all the godly, who, though they possess but little, are yet cheerful; for they live in hope, and know that their supplies are in God's hands, and expect everything from His blessing. (*John Calvin.*) *Making money*.—Whatever we do to please ourselves, and only for the sake of the pleasure, not for an ultimate object, is "play," the pleasing thing, not the useful thing. . . . The first of all English games is making money. That is an all-absorbing game; and we knock each other down oftener in playing at that than at football or any other rougher sport; and it is absolutely without purpose. No one who engages heavily in that game ever knows why. Ask a great money-maker what he wants to do with his money; he never knows. He doesn't make it to do anything with it. He gets it only that he may get it. "What will you make of what you have got?" you ask. "Well, I'll get more," he says. Just as at cricket you get more runs. There's no use in the runs, but to get more of them than other people is the game. And there's no use in the money, but to have more of it than other people is the game. (*John Ruskin.*)

Vers. 9-11. *Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house.—Covetousness and self-trust*.—I. THE NATIONAL WRONGS here indicated. 1. Coveting the possessions of others. "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house." "An evil covetousness"? There is a good covetousness. We are commanded to "covet earnestly the best gifts." But to hunger for those things which are not our own, but the property of others, and that for our own gratification and aggrandisement, is that which is prohibited in the Decalogue. 2. Trusting in false securities. So "that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil." The image is from an eagle (*Job xxix. 37*). The royal citadel is meant. The Chaldeans built high towers like the Babel founders, to be delivered from the power of evil. They sought protection, not in the Creator but in the creature, not in moral means but in material. Thus foolishly nations have always acted, and are still acting; they trust to armies and to navies, not to righteousness, truth, and God. A moral character built on justice, purity, and universal benevolence is the only right and safe defence of nations. 3. Sinning against the soul. "And hast sinned against thy soul," or against thyself. Indeed, all wrong is a sin against oneself—a sin against the laws of reason, conscience, and happiness. II. THE NATIONAL WOES here indicated. "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house," &c. What is the woe connected with these evils? It is contained in these words: "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." Their guilty conscience will endow the dead materials of their own dwelling with the tongue to denounce in thunder their deeds of rapacity and blood. Startling personification this! "Note," says Matthew Henry, "those that do wrong to their neighbour do a much greater wrong to their own souls. But if the sinner pleads Not guilty, and thinks he has managed his frauds and violence with so much art and contrivance that they cannot be proved upon him, let him know that if there be no other witnesses against him the stone shall cry out of the wall against him, and the beam out of the timber in the roof shall answer it, shall second it, shall witness it, that the money and materials wherewith he built the

house were unjustly gotten (ver. 11). The stones and timber cry to heaven for vengeance, as the whole creation groans under the sin of man, and waits to be delivered from that bondage of corruption. (1) That mind gives to all the objects that once impressed it a mystic power of suggestion. Who has not felt this? Who does not feel it every day? The tree, the house, the street, the lane, the stream, the meadow, the mountain, that once touched our consciousness, seldom fail to start thoughts in us whenever we are brought into contact with them again. It seems as if the mind gave part of itself to all the objects that once impressed it. Hence, when we leave a place which in person we may never revisit we are still tied to it by an indissoluble bond. Nay, we carry it with us and reproduce it in memory. (2) That mind gives to those objects that impressed us when in the commission of any sin a terrible power to start remorseful memories. No intelligent personal witness is required to prove a sinner's guilt. All the scenes of his conscious life vocalise his guilt. (*Homilist.*) *Deceitful riches*.—Usually, when a worldling is dead, we ask how rich he died. "Oh," say many, "he died rich; he hath left a great estate." Alas! the poor man has slept his sleep, lost his dream, and now he awakes he finds nothing in his hand. Where lies his golden heap? Only the rust of that heap is gone to witness against him; his mansion fails him; only the unrighteousness of it follows him; others have the use of it; only the abuse of it he carries to judgment with him; he hath made his friends (as we say), but he hath undone himself; so that I may justly write this motto upon every bag: "This is the price of blood." Shall I then treasure up the price of blood?

Ver. 10. *Thou hast consulted shame to thy house.*—*Consulting shame*.—The prophet again confirms the truth, that those who count themselves happy, imagining that they are like God, busy themselves in vain; for God will turn to shame whatever they think to be their glory, derived from their riches. The avaricious indeed wish, as it appears from the last verse, to prepare splendour for their prosperity, and they think to render illustrious their race by their wealth; for this is deemed to be nobility, that the richer anyone is the more he excels, as he thinks, in dignity, and the more is he to be esteemed by all. Since, then, this is the object of almost all the avaricious, the prophet here reminds them, that they are greatly deceived; for the Lord will not only frustrate their hopes, but will also convert their glory into shame. Hence he says that they consult shame to their family. He includes in the word "consult" all the industry, diligence, skill, care, and labour displayed by the avaricious. We indeed see how very sagacious they are; for if they smell any gain at a distance, they draw it to themselves, night and day they form new designs, that they may circumvent this person and plunder that person and accumulate into their heap whatever money they can find, and also that they may join fields to fields, build great palaces, and secure great revenues. This is the reason why the prophet says that they "consult shame." What is the object of all their designs? For what purpose are all these things? Even for this, that their posterity may be eminent, that their nobility may be in the mouths of all, and spread far and wide. But the prophet shows that they labour in vain; for God will turn to shame whatever they in their great wisdom contrived for the honour of their families. The more provident, then, the avaricious are, the more foolish they are, for they consult nothing but disgrace to their posterity. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 11. *The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.*—*Retribution*.—The prophet in this connection is declaring that the Chaldeans shall be punished for their cruel rapacity. Retribution is everywhere assumed as a great first-truth, which nature itself constantly teaches, and to which man's universal conscience as constantly responds. I. **THE SIN.** What was the iniquity for which the Chaldean monarch is here so solemnly denounced? Not the mere outer act of building a great city, but in the manner and motive of his doing it. "He had built his city in blood, and established it in iniquity." There was sin in the motive, for the monarch only built for his selfish aggrandisement. We perceive, then, glaring ungodliness in both manner and motive of this great work of Babylon. II. **THE PUNISHMENT.** The Bible does not teach that men are punished eternally for the sins committed in time. Man goes on sinning for ever, and therefore is punished for ever. By a law of a man's own mental constitution, memory and conscience are summoning from the past both ministry

and material of a righteous retribution. This is retribution—a punishment really more dreadful than any material imagery whereby the Bible sets it forth—a retribution which becomes, of itself, eternal torment. We do not say that in this is all of retribution. (*Charles Wadsworth, D.D.*) *The handwriting on the wall*:—Very startling was the vision which appeared to Belshazzar and his courtiers when their feasting and mirth were at their height. But not in terrible omens and supernatural visions alone do we see the Divine handwriting. To thoughtful men on every wall by the wayside appear mystic letters of profound significance. The hand itself is unseen behind the veil of nature, but the words are formed clear and distinct upon the stones of the wall, and they remain as if graven with a pen of iron. Botanists are familiar with a peculiar genus of lichen called *Opegrapha*, from the resemblance which the fructification of all its species bears to written characters. On the surface are numerous dark intricate lines, like Arabic, Hebrew, or Chinese letters. The likeness in some instances is remarkably close. Nature has thus mimicked in almost every wood, and on almost every rock and wall, the latest and highest result of man's civilisation; and in her humblest plant forms has written her wonderful runes. It can, indeed, be said in the highest sense of the whole family of lichens that they are God's handwriting on the wall. Lichens form the nebulae, so to speak, of the firmament of life. Lichens are in the ocean of air that covers the dry land what seaweeds are in the ocean of waters that covers the depths of the sea. They are as the pioneers of vegetation, climbing the bare crag, and penetrating into the lonely wilderness, and planting there the flag of life. As elements in the picturesque, lichens have long held a high place in the estimation of all lovers of nature. What would a ruin be without them? Lichens run through the whole chromatic scale, and show what striking effects nature can produce by an harmonious combination of a few simple lines and hues. Not less worthy of examination is the specialised organ with which the lichen decks itself than the blossom of the brightest flower. Nothing is lost in nature. God's handwriting on the wayside wall and the weather-beaten rock writes no sentence—"Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting." (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood.—A curse denounced against bloodshed**:—I. THE GROUND OR CAUSE OF THIS CURSE. The crying, crimson sin of bloodshed. In all generations it has been the care of providence, both by civil and religious means, to extinguish all principles of savageness in the minds of men, and to make friendship and tenderness over men's lives a great part of religion. By nothing has this been so highly endeavoured as by the rules and constitution of Christianity. II. THE CONDITION OF THE PERSON AGAINST WHOM THIS WOE OR CURSE IS DENOUNCED. He was such an one as had actually established a government and built a city with blood. As soon as Cain had murdered his brother he presently betook himself to the building of a city. Bloodiness has usually a connection with building, which represents the setting up of government. Nebuchadnezzar seems to be the person here spoken of. III. THE LATITUDE AND EXTENT OF THIS WOE OR CURSE, AND WHAT IS COMPREHENDED IN IT. It includes the miseries of both worlds, present and future. 1. It fastens a general hatred and detestation upon such men's persons. Cruelty alarms and calls up all the passions of human nature, and puts them into a posture of hostility and defiance. The tyrant is universally hated and scorned. 2. The torment of continual jealousy and suspicion. 3. The shortness and certain dissolution of the government that endeavours to establish itself with blood. 4. The sad and dismal end that usually attends such persons. IV. THE REASONS WHY A CURSE OR WOE IS SO PECULIARLY DENOUNCED AGAINST THIS SIN. 1. It makes the most direct breach upon human society. 2. Because of the malignity of those sins that go in conjunction with it. V. APPLY TO THE PRESENT OCCASION. All unjust bloodshed is twofold. Either public, and acted by or upon a community, as in a war. Or personal, in the assassination of any particular man. (*R. South, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.—The knowledge of God**:—There shall be such a revelation of God's character and attributes as shall win the faith and love and adoration of the human family. Now, where is that revelation made?

In nature you get only glimpses of God; it tells us something of His wisdom and His power, but it tells us nothing about His mercy and His forgiving love. Every word that nature utters to a sinner is a word of terror. God has so loved us that He has sent His "only-begotten Son," through whom we may learn to know the Father. This knowledge of God in Christ meets every want. It is of this knowledge the text speaks—an experimental knowledge of Christ which brings us to God, and fits us for heaven. This knowledge gives us life. It has a quickening power. The man that knows and receives Christ lives—lives a spiritual life that shall last for ever. This knowledge also produces love. And it produces holiness in the heart and life. It prepares us for heaven, which is the home of love. This knowledge is to be universal! Reason teaches us to expect it. 2. The Bible proclaims it. 3. There are signs of the near approach of this glorious day. The first sign is the decay of idolatry; the second is the decline of popery. A third is the increase of knowledge. A fourth is the uprising of humanity. A fifth is the condition of Christianity. (*Charles Garrett.*) *God's glory universally known*:—The prophet teaches here, that so remarkable would be God's judgment on the Babylonians that His name would thereby be celebrated through the whole world. There is in the verse an implied contrast; for God appeared not in His own glory when the Jews were led away into exile; the temple being demolished and the whole city destroyed; and also when the whole eastern region was exposed to rapine and plunder. When, therefore, the Babylonians were, after the Assyrians, swallowing up all their neighbours, the glory of God did not then shine, nor was it conspicuous in the world. The Jews themselves had become mute; for their miseries had, as it were, stupefied them; their mouths were at least closed, so that they could not from the heart bless God, while He was so severely afflicting them. And then, in that manifold confusion of all things the profane thought that all things here take place fortuitously, and that there is no Divine providence. God, then, was at that time hid; hence the prophet says, "Filled shall be the earth with the knowledge of God"; that is, God will again become known when, by stretching forth His hand, He will execute vengeance on the Babylonians; then will the Jews, as well as other nations, acknowledge that the world is governed by God's providence, as it had been once created by Him. We now understand his meaning, and why he says that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of God's glory; for the glory of God previously disappeared from the world, with regard to the perceptions of men; but it shone forth again when God Himself had erected His tribunal by overthrowing Babylon, and thereby proved that there is no power among men which He cannot control. We have the same sentence in Isa. xi. 9. The prophet then speaks, indeed, of the Kingdom of Christ; for when Christ was openly made known to the world, the knowledge of God's glory at the same time filled the earth; for God then appeared in His own living image. But yet our prophet uses a proper language when he says that the earth shall then be filled with the knowledge of God's glory, when He should execute vengeance on the Babylonians. Hence incorrectly have some applied this to the preaching of the Gospel, as though Habakkuk made a transition from the ruin of Babylon to the general judgment. This is (surely) a strained exposition. It is, indeed, a well-known mode of speaking, and often occurs in the Psalms, that the power, grace, and truth of God are made known through the world, when He delivers His people and restrains the ungodly. The same mode the prophet now adopts; and he compares his fulness of knowledge to the waters of the sea, because the sea is so deep that there is no measuring of the waters. So Habakkuk intimates that the glory of God would be so much known that it would not only fill the world, but in a manner overflow it; as the waters of the sea by their vast quantity cover the deep, so the glory of God would fill heaven and earth, so as to have no limits. If, at the same time, there be a wish to extend this sentence to the coming of Christ, I do not object; for we know that the grace of redemption flowed in a perpetual stream until Christ appeared in the world. But the prophet, I have no doubt, sets forth here the greatness of God's power in the destruction of Babylon. (*John Calvin.*) *The triumph of the Gospel*:—If we seek at all times to trace the providences of God we shall often find that He makes His throne darkness to us; and from the thick darkness we hear a voice saying, "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." But in tracing the operations of the word of His grace, and the state of His Church, we find this clearly made known. The eternal fiat has gone forth, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." I. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THIS

PROPHECY. The "glory of the Lord" has various meanings. A grand display of it was made when Moses and Aaron and the seventy elders were called up into the mount. Any particular visible display of God's presence was His glory. But the term has also reference to the Gospel. There was a glory attending the law, but this was much more glorious. It is more glorious than the law in its Author, His Person, and His work. The Gospel is peculiarly glorious above the law—1. In its extent. If we look at former times we might perhaps think that God had selected a few—one family—as His peculiar treasure; but now we find this was only that the coming of the Messiah might be more clearly marked. 2. It represents the Divine attributes more gloriously than the law. Majesty, justice, hatred of sin were shown. Here is the richest display both of grace and justice. Here God's glory is concentrated as in a focus. 3. It is more glorious as life and immortality are more clearly revealed. . . . "The knowledge," &c. This word has also various meanings. Sometimes it means "discrimination"; at others, "publication"; and when applied by a believer, it is full assurance. The knowledge in the text implies—(1) Clearness; (2) impression. All the theoretical displays of the Gospel are of no avail without the impression of its truth. The design of the Gospel is to change him who heartily believes it into its own nature. It is the glory of God, and it changes the soul from glory to glory, and makes it partaker of the Divine nature. 3. Performance. Believe and obey the Gospel. The sinner believes; the believer works. 4. This leads us to the universal tendency of this knowledge. Like leaven, it will work its way. II. WHAT IS SAID CONCERNING THIS GLORY. The margin of some Bibles reads, "the channels of the sea." 1. Clearness. These channels are very deep; so is Divine science—not superficial. 2. Experience. The waters do touch every surface of land; they wash every shore. The glory of God shall be felt by every people. 3. Universal. The channels are effectually covered; so shall the world be filled. III. REMARKS IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPHET'S DECLARATION. 1. God's covenant with Abraham. "All the families of the earth were to be blessed in him." 2. It was renewed to Isaac, Jacob, &c.; but especially to Jesus Christ. 3. It was the burden of all the prophecies. 4. See the commission of the apostles. 5. We may refer the accomplishment of this to the promised agency of the Holy Ghost. 6. We argue it from the effects which have been produced. Application—(1) You are interested in this individually. (2) See what God expects from us. (*J. Summerfield, A.M.*)

Vers. 18, 19. What profiteth the graven image, that the maker thereof hath graven it.—*National wrongs ending in national woes*.—I. That men often GIVE TO THE WORKS OF THEIR OWN HANDS THE DEVOTIONS THAT BELONG TO GOD. These old Chaldean idolaters gave their devotions to the "graven image" and to the "molten image" that men had carved in wood and stone or moulded from molten metals. It was the works of their own hands they worshipped. Are men's sympathies in their strong current for God, or for something else? Do they expend the larger portion of their time and the greater amount of their energies in the service of the Eternal, or in the service of themselves? II. That men often LOOK TO THE WORKS OF THEIR OWN HANDS FOR A BLESSING WHICH GOD ALONE CAN BESTOW. These old idolaters said to the "wood, Awake, to the dumb stone, Arise." Now, it is true that men do not say formal prayers to wealth, or fashion, or fame, or power, albeit to these they look with all their souls for happiness. Men who are looking for happiness to any of these objects are like the devotees of Baal, who cried from morning to evening for help, and no help came. III. That in all this MEN ENTAIL ON THEMSELVES THE WOES OF OUTRAGED REASON AND JUSTICE. "Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake, to the dumb stone, Arise." 1. It is the woe of outraged reason. What help could they expect of the "molten image, and a teacher of lies"? What answer could they expect from the dumb "idols" that they themselves had made? How irrational all this! Equally unreasonable it is for men to search for happiness in any of the works of their hands, and in any being or object independent of God. 2. It is the woe of insulted justice. What has God said? "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." All this devotion, therefore, to the works of our own hands, or to any other creature, is an infraction of man's cardinal obligation. (*Homilist.*) *The misapplication of the teaching of art in the service of religion*.—There is some difference of opinion as to the exact time at which the prophet Habakkuk delivered his message. But there is no question that it coincided with the period in which Israel came in contact with the great empires of the East, and was allowed

to be humbled and punished by them. One of the consequences of intercourse with these empires, ending in the Captivity, was to familiarise their minds with buildings and workings of art which, while they marked the absence of a knowledge and worship of the true God, presented marvellous instances of the power and skill of man! The mind of man, in his fallen state, is ever prone to forget God and to reject Him; it is ever prone to corrupt the simple idea of His majesty and power. The idolatry of power was expressed in the architecture and image-worship of this period. The words of the text refer to it. The dumb stone (of the monuments) speaks still; it speaks of abject submission to irresistible power. It speaks of rule and might and iron will; but there is no love, no tenderness, no hope in its utterances. History re-echoes the prophet's denunciation, and extends it to after generations, embracing the later and more engaging forms of art thus employed. The message of works of art addresses itself to the carnal and the sensuous that is in us. It does not bring us into contact with the unseen and the infinite. There is a woe in it. May we not, descending the stream of time, go on to point out that the prophet's woe also lights upon what is called Christian Art—on them who, in the Church of Christ, have said unto the wood, Awake, and have called upon the dumb stone to teach? The woe has taken effect in bringing down a thick pall of dark superstition and loss of spiritual life wherever the practice has prevailed. It is not to the wood or to the stone that we are directed for our instruction in Divine things, but to the Word and to the testimony. And therefore it is that in the arranging of our churches and the adjusting of their ornaments, at the time of the Reformation, it appeared right to those who were charged with this work that the wood and the stone which had been set up to speak and to teach should be excluded from this office; that no attempt should be made, by an exhibition of the passion and death of our blessed Lord, to the outward eye, to move the feelings and to strengthen the faith; but rather that such things were to be removed as a danger and a hindrance to acceptable worship. In place of ornaments and images the Reformers put the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. It cannot be denied that in our day there is some danger lest too much importance be attached to external appearance, to architecture and decoration. While we do not look to the wood to speak, or to the dumb stone to teach, we will not hesitate to make both minister to the comeliness of the sanctuary. In so doing we shall not impede but assist devotion. Holding fast the essential truths, and taught by the Word of the living God, we may rejoice with thanksgiving for the comeliness of the sanctuaries which now cover our land in every direction, and cheerfully do our part, that the wood and the stone may be made worthily to set forth the honour of God's service, and furnish us fitting accompaniment for the prayer and the praise we offer in His name. (*Archdeacon Cooper, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. *But the Lord is in His holy temple.* — *The Lord in His holy temple*:—What comparison can be formed between an idol which is nothing, and the great God who made heaven and earth? What stronger proof can be given that man is far gone from original righteousness, and inclined to evil continually, than this,—he has chosen idols, and bowed the knee before them, in preference to that Being who is, and was, and is to come? Notwithstanding, however, the indifference and rebellion of His creatures, their neglect and contempt of His word, “The Lord is in His holy temple.” The Lord, that is Jehovah, is self-existent. He is indebted to no other for His being, for He has life in Himself. He is accountable to no one. He is indebted to no one. In this vast temple of creation He dwells. Though God is everywhere present, He is present in some places in a more peculiar sense. The Lord's throne is in heaven. In order that we may be worshippers in that temple which is above, it behoves us to be constant in our worship in the Lord's temple here below. In a peculiar sense also the house of prayer is His temple. The Jewish temple was. “Keeping silence” indicates a sense of weakness and unworthiness, reverence and devout attention. It points also to the glory, majesty, and power of the Lord God omnipotent. God, indeed, permits us to speak to Him, whether with the voice of confession, of prayer, or of thanksgiving. Notwithstanding our own unworthiness, God does not reject our sacrifices. Keeping silence is indicative of fear. There is a fear of God without which there can be no religion; a fear which is the beginning of wisdom, and which is productive of much spiritual fruit. There is a fear of God which has respect chiefly to His power, greatness, or majesty. Such a fear is

reasonable. But the fear is tempered with love, and thus it grows into reverence. It is the feeling entertained toward those who are our seniors in age or station, piety or virtue. This reverence of God is the perfection towards which we tend. Keeping silence before God betokens attention. It implies not merely the dread of God's power and majesty, but attention to His words. God speaks to man in nature and in providence. But especially by His Word. He, in a sense, speaks to man by His ministers and through His sacraments. Let me urge upon you the solemn truth that the Lord is in His holy temple, and press upon you the sacred duty of drawing nigh unto Him constantly, and with reverence. If on His throne in the heavens He waiteth to be gracious, here in His temple He ordinarily dispenses His benefits. Let me impress upon you the importance of joining not only heartily, but with your voice also, in those parts of our service which are proper to a congregation. God waiteth to be gracious to us, and ought we not gladly to avail ourselves of every opportunity of hearing His voice and receiving His mercy? (*H. J. Hastings, M.A.*)

God in His temple:—I. WHO IT IS TO WHOM ALL EYES ARE TO BE DIRECTED. The "Lord Jehovah." He is the God who seeth. "Thou, God, seest me." The "Lord our Righteousness." The "Lord my Banner." The "Lord my Shield." II. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN HIS PRESENCE. God loves the tents of Jacob, He loves the dwellings of Israel, but He loves His own house above them all, as the place where He makes His honour to be known. Inferences—1. See why it is that some of you have been attending God's house for years and are none the better for it. 2. Though a minister may leave his people, he does not take God away from his flock. (*Thomas Mortimer, B.D.*)

The presence of God in His temple:—This forms—

I. THE GRAND ELEMENT OF ITS CONSECRATION. Consecration implies—1. That there are subordinate elements in the dedication, or the setting apart of it as the house of God. A Church is sanctified by the Word of God, prayer, and praise, independent of all other ceremonies. 2. During the dedication we are to look and wait for demonstrations of the Divine presence therein. The "cloud," at the consecration of Solomon's temple, "filled the house of the Lord." This was a visible and special token of the Divine Presence suited to the auspicious event. There were five permanent symbols of God's presence in the temple. (1) The Shekinah. (2) The Ark and Mercy-seat. (3) The Urim and Thummim. (4) Fire from heaven. (5) The spirit of prophecy. These were "shadows of good things to come" in the spiritual temple. 3. Consecration of a church to the service of God should be accompanied with firm resolution and vigilant watchfulness, lest any exercises of common or unclean character be tolerated therein. II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS TEMPLE DEMANDS THE SPIRIT OF ADORATION. A spirit manifesting itself in "reverence and godly fear." Our sole object in coming into the temple should be to worship God. When we attend to our duty in the house of the Lord we may reasonably expect the blessing of God to rest upon us. III. THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IN HIS TEMPLE JUSTIFIES AND ENCOURAGES THE EXERCISE OF EXPECTATION. Sinners may expect the blessing of regeneration and conversion. Warrants of expectation are God's express promise, the atonement, and recorded instances of God's gracious dealings. IV. BY THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS TEMPLE WE HAVE SWEET AND HOLY COMMUNION WITH HIM. This is the highest honour that can be conferred upon sinful men; it is an indispensable qualification for the enjoyment of His presence in heaven. (*William Roberts, D.D.*)

God's house:—The conception is partly Christian and partly pagan, partly true and partly false. We find it in the religions of ancient Greece and Rome. For every god there must be a temple or shrine, where that god would be sure to hear the prayers of his suppliants. Even in the purer worship of Israel the same idea prevails, God making His dwelling in the tabernacle, and especially in the awful holy of holies. To the unspiritual the thought would be narrow and misleading. It behoves us to take heed lest the very aids to worship should shut in our thought of God, and make it small and mean. The common idea that God is to be found especially in some building sacred to Him is right, after all. No idea can be universal in which there is not something good. While God is alike everywhere, practically to us He is most present where the soul can most feel Him. We know the power of association. True, God can be found everywhere; and worshipped anywhere. The place, the forms, the times of worship are things of comparatively small importance. Vain are all efforts, and vain all gifts, if we depend upon a place to draw near to God. The temple is holy, not because it has been made so by the skill of man, but because

the Lord is in it. No less holy should be the home of every Christian. But Paul teaches that God is especially to be found in man. God in man we find in Christ. The real temple, where God most certainly dwells, is man himself. Only as we reverence man, then, can we worship God. Because of the life and work and death of the Son of Man, who was also Son of God, every man is to know himself a son of God. Does not this make all life sacred? What principles ought to guide us in worship? 1. That all men are brothers. 2. That we come hither seekers for truth. We are to ask, not what do others believe, what is it politic to believe, what did former generations believe,—but what is truth? What is God's revelation of Himself to-day? (*Walcott Fay*.) *The presence of God in the Churches of His saints*:—The universe is the temple of Jehovah. The idea of the omnipresence of God is calculated to have a commanding influence over the mind, and consequently over the conduct. The feelings produced in a mind rightly affected by it are altogether of a religious nature. In no situation is the influence of this doctrine more felt than when the true Christian is engaged in the more immediate performance of religious duty. Wherever we are, the Lord is there. The text makes known the presence of the Lord in the place appointed for His worship. His presence has been peculiarly with the Church in all ages. The presence of God in His holy temple is felt by all true worshippers as the life of all the services which are performed. It is to be feared, however, that with all that is outwardly becoming, in many there is a total want of all that is inwardly required of those who would worship God. Bodily exercise profiteth little. 1. The Lord is in His holy temple, to receive the adoration of His people and hear their prayers. To worship God is the duty of every rational being. 2. The Lord is in His holy temple, that He may manifest Himself to His worshipping people in the way of gracious communication. In the performance of duty there is always a feeling in itself agreeable. 3. The Lord is in His holy temple, for the purpose of bringing back wandering sinners to Himself. This was the great purpose for which Jesus came from heaven to earth. Seeing that the Lord is in His holy temple, how unbecoming must everything like levity be in His presence! How utterly vain must hypocrisy be in the service of God! Let believers study to improve the privileges of the temple below, that by means of them they may be fitted for the more exalted service of the temple above. (*Archibald Jack*.) *The spiritual temple*:—Heaven is not merely the seat of royal power and grandeur; it is a temple, and as such is the seat of exalted and sacred worship. The Redeemer appears there ministering in His official character. His life there, no less than His death on earth, is necessary to our salvation. By the temple here is meant the Church of the living God. There are particular churches, there is the one Church universal. All who rest by faith on the atonement offered on the Hill of Calvary, and who exhibit by their holy life and conversation their attachment to the Saviour, are members of this Church. Take a survey of this spiritual temple. I. ITS FOUNDATION. It is built upon the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. II. ITS MATERIALS. Countless myriads of saints. There is a beautiful variety, though at the same time a substantial sameness, in the precious stones of this grand superstructure. III. ITS SYMMETRY. The unity of the Church of Christ, when her members are knit together in love, perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment, and keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. What are the heavenly graces of the Spirit of Christ but the exercises of the mind in a state of moral order? IV. ITS DESIGN. "A habitation of God through the Spirit." V. ITS PURITY. The spiritual temple, the members of the invisible body of Christ are sanctified worshippers, reflecting in the transforming light of the Holy Spirit, the glory and power of the Divine perfections. (*J. C. Edwards, M.A.*) *The Lord in His temple*:—I. A REASON FOR CONSECRATION. Where God is should be holy. God gave symbols of His presence—the Shekinah, Mercy Seat, &c., which were shadows of that which was to come. Consecration is the devoting anything entirely to the service of God, and demands—1. Purity. There should be nothing unholy. 2. Sacredness. There should be nothing secular. 3. Perfectness. Nothing common so far as it is in the sphere of our power to exclude it. II. A REASON FOR ADORATION. 1. The object of going to God's house is to honour Him. Hence we should—(1) Watch our motives; (2) Watch our conduct; (3) Watch our thoughts. 2. To worship Him. 3. To carry out our profession in the sight of the world, and let others take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. III. A

REASON FOR EXPECTATION. God is there—1. To hear His people. 2. To bless His people. 3. To sanctify His people. The Bible is full of promises of this great truth and its reality. IV. A REASON FOR SATISFACTION. How high an honour to meet with God! It is a preparation and a prelude to heaven. (*Homilist.*) *God in His temple*:—This sublime declaration and solemn precept of the prophet, may be considered as relative to the proper worship of God both in public and private. Indeed, these two kinds of worship are necessarily connected, one being always preparatory to the other. The knowledge of God must be first obtained, before we can have any idea of the worship that will be acceptable to Him. But how is this knowledge of God to be obtained? In vain do we seek for God in arguments and reasonings; the knowledge of His existence and attributes, collected from the works of nature, may satisfy our understandings, but cannot comfort our hearts. His own blessed revelation, without which we could never have known where to look for Him, directs us to our own hearts. There is His holy temple, in which He is to be spiritually worshipped—we must find, we must feel His presence there—till we do so, we cannot be said to have any true knowledge of Him. Every good and virtuous thought; every sensibility of meekness, humility, patience, resignation, and love; every little rising of conscience against the suggestions of vice; every little check or reproach thou feellest for an unworthy thought, or a shameful action,—all bespeak a present Deity, a God and Saviour, seeking to make Himself known to thee in His holy temple. It is true, the first appearances of the Divinity to the fallen spirit of man, are faint and shadowy, like the first feeble ray of morn that shoots athwart the gloom of night. But do thou observe the precept of the prophet in the text. Wait and watch in awful stillness; impose silence on the clamorous calls of every earthborn passion and appetite; stand in meekness and humility, with thine inward eye turned towards these first emanations of Divine light, and thou shalt soon perceive “the day dawn, and the day-star arise upon thy soul.” By this awful silence, and waiting upon the Lord in His temple, we place ourselves, as it were, upon hallowed ground; and if I may borrow an image from ancient superstition, a magic circle of heavenly light and lustre is drawn round us,—nor will the dark malicious enchanter, who only rules in earth and hell, dare to approach its radiant limits. What does this awful silence mean when applied to public worship? Were we all pure spirit, unembarrassed with these gross vehicles of clay, there is no doubt but we might, even publicly, join in silent worship, and catch the fervours of devotion from each other, without the intervention of speech or corporeal sound. “There is a communion which language cannot express, a worship that wants not the aid of words, nor is it to be defined by a harmony of sounds, in which we approach the sacred Author of unutterable love.” There are times when the sanctified soul is constrained, as it were, to offer up the silent sacrifice of the spirit, and when the sacrifice of words must fail. When applied to public worship, the silence here enjoined means that reverential awe and profound submission, which, though due at all times and in all places, from the creature to his adorable Creator, seems to be more immediately so, when we assemble together in places dedicated to His worship, which, according to His own declaration, He favours with His more immediate presence, and where “His honour more particularly dwells.” (*Jacob Duché, M.A.*) *God present in His holy temple*:—I. WHAT THE PROPHET HERE INTIMATES. There are several senses in which we may understand this expression of the prophet, and all equally in accordance with the Word of God. 1. God dwelling in the temple of the universe—inhabiting all space: omnipresent. 2. In the person of Jesus Christ, in whom dwelt “the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” 3. In the congregation of His saints, wherever they meet together; but more especially in those buildings set apart for His public worship. 4. Every true believer is himself a temple of the living God; a holy temple, filled with “all the fulness of God.” II. PRACTICAL LESSON. “Let all the earth keep silence before Him.” It behoves us at all times to cherish such feelings of reverence and submission as become the sinner in the sight of his God, and worms of the dust before the Creator of heaven and earth. In all circumstances of life a ready acquiescence and un murmuring spirit should mark the Christian’s conduct. Attend especially to the disposition of heart and mind in which God should be approached in His holy ordinances. Here the King of kings invites rebellious subjects to meet Him; here He is present and ready to receive the humble suppliant, and to offer him a full and free pardon, and an incorruptible

and heavenly inheritance, secured through the merits of His beloved Son. (J. L. F. Russell, M.A.)

Ver. 20. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.—*Keeping silence*:—Habakkuk commends the power of God, that the Israelites might proceed with alacrity in their religious course, knowing it to be a sufficient security to be under the protection of the only true God, and that they might not seek after the superstitions of the nations, nor be carried here and there, as it often happens, by vain desires. “Keep silence,” then, he says, “let all the earth.” He shows that though the Israelites might be far inferior to the Babylonians, and other nations, and be far unequal to them in strength, military art, forces, and in short, in all things of this kind, yet they would always be safe under the guardianship of God; for the Lord was able to control whatever power there might be in the world. We now see what the prophet had in view; for he does not here simply exhort all people to worship God, but shows that, though men may grow mad against Him, He yet can easily by His hand subjugate them; for after all the tumults made by kings and their people, the Lord can, by one breath of His mouth, dissipate all their attempts, however furious they may be. This, then, is the silence of which the prophet now speaks. But there is another kind of silence, and that is, when we willingly submit to God; for silence in this respect is nothing else but submission: and we submit to God, when we bring not our own inventions and imaginations, but suffer ourselves to be taught by His Word. We also submit to Him, when we murmur not against His power or His judgments, when we humble ourselves under His powerful hand, and do not fiercely resist Him, as those do who indulge their own lusts. This is indeed a voluntary submission: but the prophet here shows that there is power in God to lay prostrate the whole world, and to tread it under His feet, whenever it may please Him; so that the faithful have nothing to fear, for they know that their salvation is secured; for though the whole world were leagued against them, it yet cannot resist God. (*John Calvin.*) *The teaching of silence*:—There is an eloquence that lives not in words. There is an appeal to the heart, ay, and to the reason too, in the language of silence. The child that wakes in the night and listens for a sound and hears none, realises loneliness, and vastness, and the sense of mystery, and cries out for fear. There is a voice in the silence of old associations, as we stand amid the relics of the past. There is a silence too amongst men that speaks most unmistakably,—the silence of deep feeling, whether of sorrow, or rage, or attention, or determination, when men have ceased to talk, because they feel words are out of place, and the time for work has come. The silence spoken of in the text is a silence created by a sense of the present majesty of God. I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD. He has Himself declared His omnipresence. He condescended to dwell in the tabernacle and the temple. In the newer dispensation there were manifest declarations that God is among His worshippers of a truth. It is no relic of a bygone superstition to assert that God is in the midst of us. At the present day, with altered circumstances externally, are we to suppose the reality is changed? Because the temple gave way to the riverside or the catacombs, and they in turn to the Basilica and the Church, are we to think that God has failed His people or broken His covenant? Are we to imagine that God does not now draw near to hear the prayer addressed to Him, or that, while He is present everywhere else, He excludes Himself from those sanctuaries where His people specially desire His presence? We are here for a festival of parochial choirs. But in whose honour is that festival? Our own or God’s? II. THE WORK OF MUSIC. Regard it as an influence. Which of us is altogether insensible to it? And as a means of expression. The influence of music must lead on to something further. If we feel it in any degree, we are bound to make it our own, and employ it till we realise something of the worth of music as a means of expression. When Mendelssohn, as a boy, had seen anything very beautiful, if he was asked to describe it, he would say, “Oh, I can’t speak it, I will play it to you,” and would then sit down and draw out of the instrument tones that expressed the deep impression which the beautiful had made on him. We are not all so. Still we all have some such power in some degree. III. WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH SILENCE? A great deal. For all great works great preparation is needed. For the true preparation of the music of the sanctuary, silence is necessary. The music we have been speaking of is the music of worship, and the music of hearts. Silence is the attitude of listen-

ing and attention. What is necessary in God's house is silent reverence. And it is the condition of real work,—of most work with the hand, of all real work with the head. The silence of preparation is like a dam across a stream. In the silence of thought, in the silence of humility, in the silence of reverence, in the silence of deep feelings, in the silence of earnest determination, we prepare an offering of prayer and praise, which wells forth, not from the noisy utterance of our lips, without influence and without expression, but a strong deep flood from the heart itself, which flows, and will flow on and on for ever, which has God for its object, our own deepest interest for its subject, our whole life for its channel, and eternity for its end. (*G. C. Harris.*) *Sentiments for a great crisis*.—This prophetic book was written in troublous times. I. THE ATTITUDE OF GOD TOWARDS THE EARTH IN THE GREAT CRISIS OF ITS HISTORY. Some think by Jehovah's temple the prophet means the Church; others the universe; others heaven; others the temple at Jerusalem. We understand our text to speak of *heaven* as the temple of the Lord. 1. The fact that the Lord is in His temple speaks to us of the hiding of His purposes. To us, in this lower world, God's face is often veiled. Our vision is not keen enough to pierce the mysteries of that temple into which He withdraws Himself. 2. Indicates the interest which He takes in human affairs. Though the Lord is hidden, He is not unobservant. It is our consolation to know that our Heavenly Father, though unseen, is all-seeing and all-pervading. And if God care for the most insignificant individual, must He not care much more when the fate of nations hangs in the balance? 3. Intimates His infinite repose in spite of all external changes. No disquiet can be felt by the Almighty. 4. He is ready to interfere effectively at the proper moment. As a rule, He conceals His designs, until the time comes for action. II. THE FITTING ATTITUDE OF MAN TOWARDS GOD IN EVENTFUL TIMES. "Let all the earth keep silence before Him." There should be—1. The silence of humiliation. 2. The silence of adoration. 3. The silence of submission. 4. The silence of expectation. 5. The silence of quiet resolution—the resolution to follow implicitly the guidance of providence, and, at whatever cost, to do our duty to our country, the world, and to God. *The expressiveness of devout silence*.—Addison professes to have been wonderfully delighted with a masterpiece of music, when in the very tumult and ferment of their harmony all the voices and instruments have stopped short on a sudden, and after a little pause recovered themselves again as it were, and renewed the concert in all its parts. "Methought this short interval of silence has had more music in it than any one same space of time before or after it." And he goes on to cite from Homer and from Virgil two instances of silence, "which have something in them as sublime as any of the speeches in their whole works." (*Francis Jacox.*) *Silence*.—What is silence? You often use the word, but are you sure that you always use it correctly? or that you are able to discriminate between the literal and the metaphorical use of the word? Strictly speaking, silence is the suspension of articulate speech, though by a metaphor we transfer the term to a cessation of any sound whatever. Thus, we read of the hushed silence which, in tropical countries, precedes the shock of the earthquake; and we have all been awed by the silence which fills up the intervals between the peals in the thunderstorm. But in these instances the word silence, which strictly means the pause of articulate speech, is not used in its primary and literal sense, but figuratively or metaphorically. The Psalmist calls the human voice "man's glory"; and so it is, as sharing with the possession of reason "the glory" of distinguishing between man himself and the beasts that perish. And our Lord warns us against the vain and idle use of this great gift, by the solemn declaration that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"; and again, that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." But if the faculty of speech be thus wonderful and sacred, and if a responsibility thus strict and awful attach to its right employment, must not something of the like sacredness, something of the like responsibility, belong also to that correlative power—the power of silence? I. THE SILENCE OF WORSHIP, OF AWE AND REVERENCE. "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." When we come up to the house of prayer, to meet Christ upon the mercy-seat,—to hear His voice speaking to us in the read and spoken word,—to receive Him into our very souls in the Sacrament of His broken body and shed blood, we are bound to observe the silence of awe and reverence. Except when we open our lips to join in prayer or praise to God,

our attitude within these hallowed walls should be that of silence, of those who are impressed with the sanctity of the place, and who know and feel that the Almighty God is indeed in their midst. Yes; and it would be well, could we put more of this holy silence into all our religious acts. Our religion shares too much in the faults of the age in which we live. It is too public, too outspoken, conducted too much as a business; and so the inner and contemplative element is too much lost sight of. "Commune with thine own heart, and in thy chamber, and be still"; this is the direction of the Psalmist, and it is a direction to which we shall do well to give heed in this busy, noisy, bustling generation. Do not suppose that it is only the clergy, or persons of retired life, or those who have given themselves up to the attainment of a higher sanctity, who must court the silence of prayer and meditation. It is even yet more necessary for you whose lives are spent amid the busy competition of trade, or professional enterprise, or manual labour,—whose thoughts from early morning till late night are almost uninterruptedly engrossed with the cares and riches and business of this life,—it is absolutely necessary for you if, while living in the world, you would live with God and for God, that you make a point each day of withdrawing yourselves, if it be but for a quarter of an hour, from the outer world, and retiring into yourselves, to meditate on your own spiritual state, and on God's great love and goodness towards you. Devotion is possible even in the busiest life. Never plead worldly business as an excuse for irreligion, or for deficient fervour in religion. On the contrary, worldly business will be a great help to your religion if only you recollect that, in order to make it such, you must ever cultivate—educate that inner life of the soul which naturally aspires after God. And how will you cultivate and educate it? You can only do it by diligent seeking, and faithful use each day of a period of silence,—silence for prayer, for penitence, for communion with the Unseen and the Eternal. II. THE SILENCE OF PREPARATION. Every great achievement, whether in the moral or the intellectual world, has been in a sense like Solomon's temple,—it has risen noiselessly, silently, without sound of axe or hammer. Therefore is that great primary act in religion—the conviction of sin—invariably preceded by deep and solemn silence, while the sinner stands before God self-accused and self-condemned. Therefore, also, is silence ever present at all the more solemn passages of our life. Sorrow—real, genuine sorrow—is ever silent. A cry!—a tear!—what relief would these be,—but they must not intrude into the sacred ground of sorrow,—the sorrow of the just-bereaved widow or orphan. And so, too, sympathy with sorrow is ever silent. Idle words, or still idler tears,—these are for false comforters, like those that troubled the patriarch Job: the true sympathy is the sympathy of a look,—of the presence of silence, not of uttered consolation. III. But I must name that last silence,—a silence that we must all experience, and for which, by silence, we must prepare now—THE SILENCE OF DEATH. What exactly the silence of death is, none but the dying can know. When that silence comes upon us, and come upon us it must, with a certainty to which no other future certainty bears the slightest resemblance, may it find us experienced in silence. May we have sought it, may we have profited by it, may we have practised it, while it was still ours to choose or to refuse. May we have known what it was, day by day, to be many times alone with that God who must then be alone with us, to judge or else to save. (C. H. Collier, M.A.) *The religion of silence.*—We all speak too much, and make too much noise. Every one has felt irritated sometimes, when in thoughtful mood he could not escape from people's voices. A panorama of the Alps from a Swiss mountain-top may be spoiled even by the cries of "*Wunder-schön!*" No one can worship rightly, no one can even hear the call to worship, who does not often feel that he must be silent. This is the religious aspect of the modern demand for more leisure time. And one of the things we most of all need to learn and teach, is how to use the leisure that we are demanding, so that our "silences may be blessed with sweet thoughts." For worship, there are three main uses of silence—1. To get rid of evil voices that speak within us. Passion, selfishness, self-assertion, lust, fear, are voices that cry within the souls of most men more than they know. Their cries mingle with the other noises of life, and so escape notice. But when the soul is hushed for worship it can distinguish any such voice, will feel its wrongness, and be at pains to silence it. There are many thoughts we dare not allow when we realise ourselves in God's holy temple. The silence which discovers and banishes these is a means of moral victory. 2. To let the "still small voices" be heard within. Often

busy people feel that there are many things in their mind and heart which they can only half express, even to themselves. Wordsworth describes these in his Ode on Immortality. The reason why these are so inexpressible is often our want of silence rather than our spiritual incapacity. There are some scientific instruments so fine that to do their work they must be set at night in a quiet country-house far from traffic. The mind and heart and conscience are such instruments. All that is best in us of thought and feeling exceeds speech. When we try to speak out all that we want to say, we know how true it is that "language is a means of concealing thought." But in reverent silence, thought and love and the sense of right and wrong, in finer shades than language can match, may be drawn out, and the soul attain a richer and fuller being in this temple of God than elsewhere. 3. To know God. For there is more to be had than the quickening of human nature to its fullest life. There is a Presence in the world; one whose thought we share, whose love we feel, and whose voice speaks in conscience. That which the finest spirits prize most in silence and loneliness is the real companionship they reveal. We know ourselves alone, yet not alone, for the Father is with us. The holy temple is the place of revelation and communion for its silent worshippers. (*John Kelman, M.A.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1, 2. A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.—God devoutly addressed.—This chapter presents to us God in three aspects, as devoutly addressed, as poetically portrayed, and as triumphantly enjoyed. I. IT WAS COMPOSED FOR GENERAL USE. It is not an extemporaneous address; it is a settled form of devotion. Pre-arranged forms of devotion are both scriptural and expedient. There is a set form given to the priests for blessing the people in Numbers vi. 2, 3. Psalm xcii. is called a psalm for the Sabbath, and ciii. a prayer for the afflicted. Hezekiah commanded the Levites to "praise the Lord in the words of David and of Asaph the seer," which is Psalm cvi. And Christ Himself gave His disciples a form of prayer. Whilst it is scriptural it is also expedient. To get a whole congregation into the channel of devotion, a pre-arranged form seems desirable. II. IT WAS IN PROSPECT OF A TERRIBLE CALAMITY. "O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid." Terrible was the calamity now looming on the vision of the prophet. The Chaldean army was approaching; the ruthless troops would soon be in his country, sack Jerusalem its metropolis, and bear his countrymen away into captivity. In view of this the prayer is addressed. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," &c. Surely, if men fully realised the predicted judgments that will fall on this world, prayer would be the habitude of their souls. III. IT WAS FOR A REVIVAL OF DIVINE WORK. "Revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." Kiel thus renders the passage—"Jehovah, Thy work in the midst of Thy years call to life, in the midst of the years make it known." This may mean, Perfect the work of delivering Thy people; let not Thy promise lie as it were dead, give it new life by performing it. Do it now, in the midst of the years, when our calamities are at their height, when Thy wrath seems to be at high tide and terrible. Now "revive Thy work." Three thoughts are suggested—1. The work of human deliverance is the work of God. 2. This work of God may appear to decline. 3. This decline of God's work can only be overcome by His intervention. "Revive Thy work." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 2. O Lord, revive Thy work.—Revival.—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE WORK OF THE LORD, AND ITS REVIVAL? 1. It may mean the work of creation. Or the preservation and government of the world. At other times it means the works of Christ; or the work of the ministry. 2. What is meant by a revival of this work? (1) A deeper work of grace in the hearts of those who are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. (2) When the number of believers increases. When conviction seizes the hearts of sinners, and causes them to become true penitents; when that conviction ends in true conversion. II. WHAT

IS COMPREHENDED IN THIS PRAYER? 1. That the Lord would pour out of His Spirit upon His people, and accomplish in them His gracious promises. 2. That the Lord would have mercy upon sinners. 3. That the end may be answered for which Jesus Christ came into the world, the Spirit was given, and ordinances instituted. III. WHAT INDUCES THE SAINTS THUS TO PRAY? 1. The love they have to the children of God. 2. The love they have to sinners. 3. The hatred they have to sin. 4. A desire that all those evils may be removed out of the world which are the consequences of sin. 5. The promises of God. IV. WHAT MANNER OF PERSON OUGHT HE TO BE WHO THUS PRAYS? In order to ensure a suitable correspondence between his prayer and practice—1. He himself must abstain from every appearance of evil. 2. The person who prays for a revival must use all the means in his power to do good. By example, reproof, speech in season, &c. 3. He must cultivate a spirit of tender affection for all his Christian friends, that love and unity may reign in the Church. (*B. Bailey.*) *Revival of the Lord's work*:—This prophecy was probably written during the reign of the good King Josiah, who attempted a serious religious reformation. It proved to be only partial and temporary. It was reluctant and counterfeit on the part of many of the people; as was evinced by their speedy return to idolatrous practices after the untimely death of the distinguished reformer. What was the "burden" the prophet saw? It was intimated to him that the decree of God was unalterable, and that the day of visitation was at hand; and the very people are named who should be the instrument of God's righteous judgments on treacherous Judah. Turn now to the exercise in which the prophet engaged, in the certain anticipation of national calamity. It was the exercise of prayer. In his prayer there were three special petitions. Although the condition of his countrymen was dangerous, and their banishment inevitable, yet so long as a remnant was preserved, their case was not desperate. If he could not see his friends reformed and regenerated in their native country, he would plead for their conversion in a foreign land. "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years." This is an earnest supplication for the revival of God's work of grace, in the hearts of His people, in the time of outward distress. Do this "in the midst of the years," that is, during the seventy years of captivity. While these melancholy years pass heavily along, let the work of repentance commence; let the tears of godly sorrow flow. The second petition is, "In the midst of the years make known." Make known Thy character, and perfection, and grace, during the years of captivity, to those now estranged from Thee. If they were unmindful of Thee in the time of prosperity; in the day of adversity let them consider. Make Thy faithfulness known as a God still in covenant with them, as still willing to be reconciled to them. The third petition is, "In wrath remember mercy." Wrath is incurred, judgment is threatened, the sword is unsheathed, and vengeance must be inflicted. But see how the man of God perseveres in prayer. If judgment may not be altogether averted, it may be mitigated. We must bear the indignation of the Lord, in submitting to slavery in a foreign land, and in being deprived of the soul-refreshing ordinances of religion. But, gracious Father, "in wrath remember mercy." It were easy to prove that all the petitions in this prayer were literally and remarkably fulfilled. That there was a revival of religion during the captivity, may be proved from the grateful and devout sentiments of the captives in the announcement of their enlargement. "When the Lord turned again the captivity," &c. We find a confirmation also in the character of those who returned from Babylon. God had evidently granted them, in the words of Ezra, "a little reviving"; and their first care on their return to Palestine was to rebuild the temple, which was lying in ruins. And as a decisive proof that the prayer of the prophet had received a gracious answer during the captivity, we find that the Jews were henceforward cured of what may be called their hereditary and besetting sin—the degrading and God-dishonouring sin of idolatry. The second part of the prophet's prayer was not less clearly answered. Was not much made known to Ezekiel, by the spirit of prophecy, during the captivity? Was not much made known to Daniel? Behold then the efficacy and fruit of prayer. The third part of the prayer was as remarkably answered as the other two parts. "In wrath remember mercy." In every circumstance that tended to mitigate the rigour of their bondage, God was fulfilling the prayer of the prophet. Learn—1. That sin incurs the displeasure of God. 2. That prayer is the only way of averting the judgments of God. 3. That the extension of religious knowledge is the only rational means for effecting a

national reformation. 4. That while Jehovah is the Supreme Governor of the universe, religion is His great work in the world. (*James Glen, A.M.*) *On revivals of religion*:—I. WHAT, IN A CHRISTIAN SENSE, IS A REVIVAL OF RELIGION? It cannot better be described than by a representation of its origin and effect in the case of individuals and Christian communities. When is there a revival of religion in individuals? Suppose such as need this revival to consist of two classes. One made up of such as have a "form of godliness." They have a general faith in Christianity, and educational relations with it, and they do not openly violate any of its moral rules. Still, these persons may be examples of a sort of negative religion only. They may be spiritually inanimate and drowsy. If these men are the subjects of a genuine religious revival, their lukewarmness is abandoned. Then there is in them a consistency of character. The other class is formed of the notoriously abandoned and corrupt. In these, there is a general abdication of restraint, both moral and religious. When these are the subjects of a revival, their moral taste is changed. Their hatred of sin is excited. Their respect for Divine ordinances is enkindled. Survey the operation of a revival of religion on Christian communities. Since the first age of the Gospel, Churches and societies have been found in the lukewarm condition of the Church in Laodicea. A more awful state of a Christian community is supposable, a state not merely of lukewarmness, but of positive corruption and wickedness. If a revival of religion take place, there will be an united, vigorous, persevering effort, on the part of the members, to display in all its excellence and worth the Christian character. Nor is this revival manifest in things exclusively religious. It will appear in their worldly and social state; in their habits of industry and sobriety, &c. Give the reasons why the class of Christians, denominated liberal, have not thought favourably of, nor promoted revivals. 1. The means used to bring them about do not appear to be in accordance with the spirit and instructions of Scripture. (1) These means are heated and impassioned addresses to the feelings and passions, tending to produce an unnatural excitement of the imagination, and of the whole man, which interrupts cool reflection, and a sober and edifying attendance on religious duties. What an entire contrast do these means exhibit to those adopted by the Saviour and His apostles! (2) The persons who are held up to the world as having experienced a revival of religion, too often display fruits which are equally at variance with the test of character established by Him who spake as never man spake. Review the lessons of Jesus, enforcing secret devotion, guarding His disciples against ostentation and vain boasting, inculcating upon them humility. We cannot persuade ourselves to believe that a suspension of Christian charity is evangelical proof of advancement in religion. (3) The reason which has equally operated with others, is a knowledge of the unhappy consequences which have followed. Review the state of our Churches and towns. Where such revivals have been brought about, there will be seen a multiplication of religious societies; Christians engaged in bitter contentions and controversies; members of families alienated from each other.

II. WHAT ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH A TRULY CHRISTIAN REVIVAL OF RELIGION MAY BE BROUGHT ABOUT? 1. Every member of society, however ignoble and obscure, may have an agency in this great work. 2. Those more elevated either by wealth, rank, education, &c., have a still greater degree of responsibility. See in this matter the importance of family religion, and the value of attendance on the duties of the Sabbath, habitual piety, and the solemn act of prayer. (*W. Thayer.*) *Revival of the Lord's work*:—The writer of this book mourned over the spiritual degeneracy of his times, and was apprehensive of the entire removal of the privileges which were so much despised. The "years" mentioned were years of spiritual declension and backsliding, and prevailing wickedness, and consequently years of God's righteous displeasure; and therefore he says, "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years." 1. In what does this work consist? By the "work of the Lord" we are to understand the redemption and recovery of this ruined world. This is the work which the Holy Spirit, through the medium of His enlightening, renewing, and sanctifying influence on the human heart, is ever active in promoting. Surely it is a work of the greatest interest and importance. This work may be said to be making progress in the world, when a general interest is felt in matters of religion. 2. What is the object of the prayer in regard to the work of the Lord? In the moral government of God, there exists an inseparable connection between the offering of prayer and the obtaining of spiritual blessings. In answer to prayer we find that in Scripture

God has often promised the richest manifestations of His grace. But nowhere has He warranted us to suppose that without prayer these blessings can be obtained. The object of the prophet in this prayer was that God would grant a revival to the Jewish Church. And we have no reason to doubt that in answer to prayer, God will yet arise, and plead His own cause in the world, and revive His own work. Whatever be the relationship in which we stand to those around us, we have, as Christians, a message given to us all, and that is the message of God the Father's love, and of God the Son's death, and of God the Spirit's sanctifying grace, a message so plain that none can mistake it, so imperative that none with impunity can neglect it, and so pressing that none can delay it. (*John Lindsay.*) *God's work in the midst of the years* :—Time, like eternity, is full of God, and of the glory of His power. God's ceaseless work in nature is maintained unchanging "in the midst of the years." But there is a work of God to which everything in nature is subordinate. It is His work of grace; His work of redemption and recovery in this lost world; His work of establishing His own kingdom in the hearts of men. In the mind of the prophet, this work of God was identified with the welfare of that chosen nation, that peculiar people, which God had placed in covenant relation with Himself. What lessons may we gather from the prophet's words? In the first and second chapters of his prophecy, the prophet sees God's judgments coming upon Israel, then upon Israel's oppressors. We see what years those were of which the prophet speaks in the text. They were years of declension and prevailing wickedness, and years of God's displeasure. The prophet's first and foremost thought is that of the paramount importance of God's spiritual and saving work. Then he knows—the spirit of faith assures him—that God's great work *will* live, and will outlive every catastrophe. He not only prays that God will make His work to live, but that He will make it known. Learn—1. The prayer for the revival, or the keeping alive of God's work, is the spontaneous utterance of a heart touched by God's Spirit. 2. God's work is often going on in the world when it is not seen or made known, when even His own people are not permitted to discern its progress. 3. Sometimes it is necessary for God to carry on His work by dispensations of wrath. 4. Blessed are the years in which God makes known His work as a work of power and mercy. (*Leonard Bacon, D.D.*) *Revival in the midst of the years* :—The utterance of God made the prophet afraid. The period of chastening must be fulfilled. But one thought fills the prophet's mind: during this period of suffering the work of God might be revived. God in His wrath remembers mercy most when He does not stay His chastening, but deepens penitence, stirs up prayer, creates heart-searching, and earnest endeavours after a new life. I. THE FIRST PART OF THE PRAYER IS THAT GOD WOULD REVIVE HIS WORK. We believe in a God who works, now and always, both in the natural and in the spiritual. God not merely wills, He works. Work occupies a foremost place in the Divine arrangement. God's works on matter illustrate and explain His working on mind. There is one feature common to both the natural and the spiritual sphere, the requirement of human co-operation. God waits on man's working. On account of the sin and sloth and heedlessness of man, God's work declines, and God seems to withdraw. It is here that a place for revival is found. And explanation of it includes both the Divine sphere and the human. God's working in nature goes on in cycles. So does man's working all through. Uniformity of action would not be adapted to man. The fluctuation which covers the regions of politics, literature, science, and art, extends also to religion. Religious earnestness is under the same law. An enthusiasm is awakened at times for the supreme object of religion which it is not in human nature to sustain. The departure of such a period may be either the deepening and broadening of the channels of life, or it may be a period of stagnation. This is true of the individual, as well as of society at large. Revival is a fervour or intensity resolved on the highest aims, a deeper sense of the meaning of life, a determination to subordinate all to God. The fact that such times in a community are often characterised by excitement, and by a kind of contagion in which religion seems to be less a matter of individual conviction than a diffused influence is, again, only in accordance with the laws of human nature. Why should the spread of religious conviction not be aided by the contagion of feeling? May not genuine and deep feeling be aroused in this way? Why may not the surging of a vague enthusiasm through the hearts of men work great things in religion as in other matters? If religion is a genuinely human thing; if it is in the true sense the most human of all, must it not partake

of the usual characteristics of human feeling? What a force there is in the expression of the text, *Make Thy work to live: put life into Thy work.* How often the work seems to have everything but life. Life comes, and all is changed. God's working is the hope of the natural world, and equally of the spiritual. We wait for God. And our waiting utters itself. It is an eager, earnest feeling that pours itself out in supplication. It is in this way that our energy most fully unites itself with the Divine. II. THE PRAYER IS ALSO THAT GOD WOULD "MAKE KNOWN." That is, reveal Himself and Divine truth. The prayer is, that God would not only work but reveal; that God would show men the reality. Clouds lie between them and the spiritual and eternal. It is well that these two things are joined together, reviving of God's work, and making known. III. WHAT WEIGHT IS GIVEN TO THE PRAYER BY THE ADDITION, "IN THE MIDST OF THE YEARS"? There is an argument, or plea, in the thought, that many years are gone beyond recall, and that so many years fewer are to come. The irrevocable past, as it rises before us, brings bitter regrets. How different those years might have been! The words seem suggestive of the confusion and darkness of time. And the fleetingness and evanescence of the years rise before us in contrast to the immutable and eternal of the Divine life. (*J. Leckie, D.D.*) *The necessity of a great spiritual change throughout the world.*—I. AS TO THE STATE OF THE PROFESSING CHURCH OF CHRIST. 1. Note the ignorance of the Church. 2. The divisions of the Church. 3. The worldly conformity of the Church. 4. The want of activity in the Church. 5. The deadness of prayer in the Church. II. AS TO THE STATE OF THE UNCONVERTED AND UNGODLY WORLD. 1. In relation to civil governments, and to publicly recognised social institutions and authorities. Refer to despotism, corruption, war, &c. 2. In direct relation to religion. Nominal Christians. Note the positive crimes by which the country is stained; Sabbath-breaking, profane-swearing, fraud, drinking, &c. III. CERTAIN SYSTEMS WHICH MUST BE SWEEPED AWAY. Such as popery, Judaism, infidelity, Mohammedanism, heathenism. Surely we may well pray, "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years." (*James Parsons.*) *Means of promoting the revival of religion.*—1. Does the man of sincere goodness observe vice prevalent, and spreading its unhappy influence through all ranks and degrees of the community? This is a powerful inducement to desire and to work for its reformation. 2. The decay of religion is not more owing to open wickedness than to inconsiderate negligence. A good man, who has the happiness of the species at heart, will offer up his most fervent petitions to the Father of Lights, that He would be pleased to spread abroad in the breasts of the people a spirit of prayer and reformation. (*James Rudge, D.D.*) *The revival of the Lord's work.*—1. The prayer of the text rises to heaven in the time of affliction. 2. The prayer of the prophet is founded upon need. 3. Observe whose work it is that is implored to be revived—it is the work of God. And He alone can accomplish it. 4. Consider the use of certain means for the spread and establishment of the Divine work. He has commanded us to call upon His name, to trust in Him, to seek Him, to repent of our misdoings, to do battle against evil wherever found, and to assemble ourselves together for Divine worship. (*W. Horwood.*) *Nature and origin of revivals.*—I. THE STATE CALLING FOR A REVIVAL. A revival is a return to life and vigour from a state of languor and decay. The Church of Christ needs revival. It is not in a lively state as to deep and practical godliness. There are comparatively few flourishing Churches. There is much disunion. There is a low standard of devotedness to Christ. This state of things calls for a revival in the Church generally. As individuals is our condition satisfactory? Is there not a state of worldliness, lukewarmness, and formality? The apostle speaks of many in his day as having "the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." This surely is a state calling for a revival. II. THE NATURE OF THE REVIVAL OF GOD'S WORK. What is God's work in the heart of man? It is very different from man's work. It is marked by a new birth. It is marked by Christian graces. It is marked by walking in all good works. It is the work of grace in the heart of man. What is the revival of this work? 1. An increase of zeal on the part of God's people. 2. An awakening among careless sinners. III. THE ONLY SOURCE FROM WHICH IT CAN FLOW. "O Lord, revive Thy work." The Holy Spirit is the great source of the revival of the work of grace in the heart of man. If you desire revivals, the means must be diligently used—reading God's Word, prayer in secret, social prayer, public worship, self-examination; but if you stop at the means you deceive yourselves; this is the proper posture

for the Christian, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him." IV. THE TIME IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE SOUGHT. "In the midst of the years." Before the day of sickness comes. Before the day of old age comes. Before the judgments of God come on the world. Before the Saviour appears. Before the final sentence is pronounced. Seek a revival, while the day of grace continues; while God's ministers invite you. While opportunity is afforded. Then—1. Search into the state of your own hearts. 2. Seek revival from God by prayer in private. Devote yourselves afresh unto God. (*E. Bickersteth, A.M.*) *God's work revived*.—I. THE WORK ITSELF. The salvation of the sinner is the peculiar work of Jehovah. It implies the exercise of infinite mercy. It requires Divine care. II. WHY MAY IT VERY PROPERLY BE CALLED GOD'S WORK? Because it glorifies God. III. WHEN MAY GOD BE SAID TO REVIVE HIS PEOPLE? When His people are preserved alive. When His people grow in grace. When His people are led to surmount trouble, affliction, and sorrow. When the backslider is restored. (*Hugh Allen, M.A.*) *Lent, a season of revival to the soul*.—The Christian life has its ebb and flow, like the currents of the ocean, and no one need hope to preserve the same uniform frames and feelings at every step of his earthly probation. If we are ever enabled to do right, it is because the good Lord has helped us. There is a revival which we all need; such a revival as shall lead us to forsake our sins, and crucify our corrupt affections and lusts; such a revival as shall render us more devout and devoted to God's service. I mean nothing akin to the unwholesome modern system of revivals. The Church has a revival system of her own, which has been practised with most abundant success from the earliest days of Christianity until now. Her revival season begins with the four weeks of Advent, when she calls men to repentance and amendment, that they may make themselves ready to welcome the Saviour afresh on the return of His birthday. Another revival season is the forty days of Lent; when the motive appealed to is the love of God, manifested in the gift of His only Son. Throughout the whole sacred season, His life, His teaching, His miracles are kept constantly before us, deepened in its penetrating power by fastings and prayer. (*John N. Norton.*) *Revivals*.—I. THE CHIEF NEED OF THE WORLD TO-DAY IS A GENERAL REVIVAL OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. The preconceptions of most of us are not favourable to revivals. Theories, however, cannot stand for a moment against stubborn facts. There is one fact which renders a revival necessary for a vast number of people. All scientists recognise that retrogression is as much a fact of nature as is evolution or progress. History is full of illustrations of the decay of races and the decline of nations. Only one remedy is open to us, when the decay concerns our religious life. It is a revival—the regaining, by a supreme moral effort, of the spiritual heights which have been lost. II. REVIVALS ARE NORMAL. We are inclined to think that with the world and the Church in an ideal state, a movement closely corresponding to revivals would still take place. Life moves in periods or cycles. III. BOTH THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE CONFIRM THIS VIEW OF CHRISTIAN PROGRESS. The Church has always made her great conquests under revival influences. Revival of religion was inaugurated by the Wesleys and Whitefield. Puritanism was a great religious revival. The Reformation began as a revival of religion. The Christian Church was born in a revival which swept three thousand souls into the kingdom on the day of Pentecost. IV. HOW MAY WE PROMOTE A REVIVAL? 1. By earnest prayer. 2. By determined, personal effort. (*J. W. Bashford.*) *Lessons of the Reformation*.—1. The Reformation was providential. It was the handwriting of God visible to men. 2. It was a reformation of the Church. It was a contention raised within, about, and by the Church. 3. It was a reformation of doctrine. It began on a point of doctrine. Its weapons were argument and learning. 4. It was a reformation of public worship. Here, most especially, it came in touch with the people. 5. It was a reformation of personal piety. If it had not led to this, all else would have been of little moment. But this it did. Upon us it devolves not to be heedless of the lessons of the Reformation, but to profit by them, and transmit them to others. (*J. B. Remensnyder, D.D.*) *Religious revivals*.—I GENUINE RELIGION IS THE WORK OF GOD IN THE SOUL. "Thy work." What is genuine religion? Not theology, not ceremony, but simply this, supreme love to God. The production of this in the soul is the work of God. He produces it, it is true, by means; nevertheless, no one else can or does produce it but Himself. II. THIS WORK OF GOD IN THE SOUL IS LIABLE TO DECAY. There are many things in and outside of man that tend to impair, weaken, and destroy this supreme

love. Carnal impulses, impure associations, social influences, engrossing worldly cares, these are all detrimental. They are to it like a blighting atmosphere to vegetation. III. THIS DECAY SHOULD BE OVERCOME BY A REVIVAL. "Revive Thy work." Revive this supreme love—quicken, energise it, give it more force and influence in the soul! This is the true revival. (*Homilist.*) *The revival of God's work implored* :—I. SOME PARTICULARS RESPECTING THIS WORK. 1. The work itself; or what is meant by the work here spoken of? It is certainly the work of Divine grace in the souls of mankind. 2. Why it may be called God's work. Because no one but God can effect it. 3. When God may be said to revive it. God revives His work when souls are raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; and when they grow in grace. II. HOW WE MAY AND SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS ITS REVIVAL. 1. We should labour for it. 2. We should live for it. 3. We should pray for it. III. WHY WE SHOULD THUS INTEREST OURSELVES IN ITS REVIVAL. 1. We are excited to this by piety. 2. We are urged to this by philanthropy, or love to mankind. 3. We are obligated to this by prudence. 4. We are animated to this by a well-supported hope. Applications—(1) The state of God's work among us should excite correspondent affections in us. (2) We should consider and deplore our deficiencies. (3) We should improve our convictions by renewed application to God; for pardoning mercy, and gracious help. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Revivalism* :—Following closely upon Jeremiah, Habakkuk was face to face with the woes which were hastening for the dissolution of the kingdom of Judah. He, more than any other of the prophets, represents the perplexities, not of the nation, but of the individual soul, the peculiar trial which tormented so many exalted spirits of his day. He saw with grief the increasing contrast of sin and prosperity, innocence and suffering—this was his burden. It is essentially personal: he takes it all upon himself. Our text is always a good, a wise, a necessary prayer. The work of the Lord is never so forward that we need not pray for its further advance. But what is to be said about the movement known as "Revivalism"? It begins with, and proceeds upon the assumption that man can only be reconciled to God in one particular way. It recognises but one type of religion, and that the most delusive one. It repudiates the idea that God is ever pleased with a dutiful, earnest, moral life. It regards as positively dangerous a mere intellectual grasp of the Christian faith. Revivalism tells you that, unless at a certain time, and at a certain place, and under conditions that you can recall and define, you have undergone an emotional process which has changed the whole drift of your life, and given you an assurance of nearness to God hitherto unfelt, you are not a Christian at all. Revivalism confronts you like a spiritual footpad, and holds to your head the pistol of modern pharisaism: "Are you a Christian? Is your soul saved? Have you found the Lord?" The answer involves an awful alternative. You must either surrender the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free to the monstrous claims of this pretentious crusade, or consent to be branded as an outcast from the flock of the Good Shepherd. This barrier of separation between converted and unconverted has no sanction to which any follower of Jesus Christ is called upon to submit. We must not, however, cease to pray, "O Lord, revive Thy work." Revive it, O Lord, in politics, in public life, in commerce, in trade, in toil of every kind, so that in all places and at all times men shall realise Thy presence. (*R. H. Haddew, B.A.*) *The law of revivals* :—Are revivals of religion under law, or the result of any previously operating and well-defined cause? By the revival of religion we mean a quickened state of religious activity and prayer, resulting in the conversion of sinners, the increased efficiency of the Church, and all the effect of the Divine Spirit in conjunction with the appointed means of grace. Our position is, that it is a rule of God's economy to bestow His grace or Spirit upon the employment of means, just in proportion as those means are adapted to the result. Observe that the results are predicated, not of the means as a power in themselves, but of the Spirit's conformity to this law of operation. 1. In favour of our position our first argument is from analogy. There is such a law of adaptation in all the world of nature—an established and reliable connection between means and end, and results correspond with the nature—the perfection or imperfection of the antecedent cause. This law is observable in all the world of industry, science, and art. It is fair to infer that the same law is observed in the spiritual world, and that the results—the quickened graces, the conversions, the ingatherings to the Church—will be in proportion to the wise, diligent, and prayerful use of the

means of grace. 2. The second argument is derived from the facts of Christian experience. The early apostles and Christians were successful, in a very remarkable degree, in producing moral changes, in the conviction and conversion of sinners. Everything objective and visible seemed to forbid success. But they were filled with the Spirit. They went forth to their work with an ardour unparalleled. They preached to save, they were wise to win souls. We can trace the connection between appropriate means and the sublimest results. This principle of wise adjustment of means to ends is universally acknowledged. 3. This law must be acknowledged as true, else there is no ground of confidence in the use of Gospel means. Learn—1. As Christian workers, to graduate our success. As a general rule it will be in proportion to the aptness, skill, persistency, and prayerfulness of our labours. 2. The responsibility and guilt of those Churches who reap no fruit of their labour. There must be responsibility and guilt somewhere. (*S. D. Burchard, D.D.*) *Spiritual revival*:—The “work of the Lord” means the salvation of immortal souls, and the extension of our Redeemer’s kingdom. I. THE PROSPERITY OF GOD’S WORK IS THE CHIEF BUSINESS OF GOD’S PEOPLE. The prophet sees into the future, and instead of being overwhelmed by coming calamities, he realises how immeasurably greater is the welfare of the soul than the welfare of the body, and his earnest, heart-prompted entreaty is, “O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years” II. THE WORK OF GOD IN THE SOUL MAY SO DECLINE AS TO STAND IN NEED OF REVIVAL. Does our spiritual life still retain all the freshness and charm of its birth? Is it, as it ought to be, more real, more intense, more earnest, more fully developed by the lapse of time? III. ALTHOUGH THE WORK OF GOD WITHIN US MAY DECLINE, YET THERE IS A POWER THAT CAN REVIVE IT. God can make the dry bones to live, and God can breathe a new life even into the soul that seems to be dead, so deathlike is its sleep. Why does God every year perform the miracles of the spring-time? That we may have perpetually before our eyes illustrations of His reviving power. Then are you not anxious that a mighty revival of this spiritual life should be experienced in your own souls, and in the souls of those who are dear to you? If you are, pray for it. (*John F. Haynes, LL.D.*) *Revivals*:—Literally, to revive is to live again. It supposes life possessed, life departed, life restored. Sometimes it means to infuse fresh vigour, increased animation, where life is weak and drooping, though not extinct. When Habakkuk says, “O Lord, revive Thy work,” he does not imply that God’s work had died out, only that it was in a low and declining state. Mercy he implores—pardoning, restoring, reviving mercy. This is the object we seek when we ask God to revive His work in us and amongst us. A revival of religion supposes it to exist, but to be in a low and declining state. Let every Church be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain. The Divine favour will be restored, and the Church will be revived. Such a Church God will own and bless. What is necessary to a revival? 1. To recognise the fact that a revival is needed. Well satisfied with our present need, we neither desire nor seek anything better. 2. We must know and feel that guilt is incurred by our lukewarmness and worldly-mindedness. Are we in a declining state? Then it is not simply our misfortune, but our sin, for which God will call us to account. We must see, too, the individual and personal character of our responsibility and guilt. 3. If a better state of things is to be brought about, we must sincerely and heartily repent of our sins, confess and forsake them all, and look to Him who has graciously promised, “I will heal their backslidings.” The invitations and promises of our God are all based on this principle, “Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you.” This humility, this repentance, this brokenness of heart generally precedes a revival of religion in our Churches. 4. There must be faith in God, in Christ, in His Holy Word. Faith in God’s character, His perfections, His excellences. Faith in the promises of God. 5. Faith must lead to prayer. Each must pray, all must pray; only ask in faith, nothing doubting. If there be an increase of real prosperity in the Church, there must be an increase of believing prayer. When once Christian Churches and Christian ministers shall thus wrestle with God in prayer, depend upon it, God is on His way, and soon shall they behold the wonderful workings of His power. (*Thoughts for Week Evening Services.*) *Revival*:—The symptoms and evidences of spiritual life in possession and active operation, on the part of the Church collectively and of the individual believer, are many, and are such as may be easily recognised. I. A DEEP SENSE OF THE NEED OF REVIVAL. It is in this as in regard to personal spiritual concerns. There must be felt need before there can be fervent prayer.

Let us now consider more particularly what is really needed at the present time, or in what respects revival may be said to be needed. 1. We require a revival of personal religion. The influence and power of personal religion and of well-founded, deeply rooted convictions of the efficacy and power of the Word of God, and of the Gospel of His Son in the hand of the Holy Spirit, cannot be over-estimated. 2. We require a revival of family religion. Let there but be a revival of personal holiness vouchsafed throughout the land, and religion in a more open and public form would be sure to follow. 3. We require a revival of national religion. II. AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD AS THE AUTHOR OF THIS MUCH NEEDED REVIVAL. The prophet calls it His work. Yes, the revival of the work of grace in the individual soul, of spiritual vitality in the Church, and of real and lively regard for the glory of God and the supreme authority of His law, in the supreme and subordinate legislative assemblies of the nation, is the work of God. Hence God alone can revive it. III. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER TO PRODUCE THE REVIVAL OF GOD'S WORK. As well as Zerubbabel, the prophet Habakkuk knew that this great work was not to be accomplished by might or by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord; but clearly as he understood this, no less strongly did he feel his obligation to pray for it. (*A. Stirling.*) *How can a Church be brought into a revival condition?*—This is a very important question; for the conversions in any Church will generally be in proportion to the average spiritual life of the Church. This is the law. Of course, there are exceptions. Men fish through the ice in midwinter and catch a large supply; and so it is possible for a pastor to dip right through the crust of worldliness and formality, with which the Church is covered, and bring out converts by the score. But a fisher of men that can do this must be endowed with a powerful personality and an uncommon zeal. But taking it for granted, then, that the first thing is to bring the Church into a revived condition, how shall we proceed? Now, we remember that in physics it is said, that, in thawing a cake of ice, all the heat which you pour in below the melting point becomes latent and disappears, but that having raised the whole temperature up to the melting point, it takes but little heat to keep it thawing. It is exactly so with a Church. There is what may be called the zealothermial point in the spiritual thermometer. When the temperature of the body is below that point, you may pour in sermons and prayers and pleadings, and all will soon be absorbed and lost. But once bring the condition above that point, and a little effort will keep converts coming constantly. (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*) *Stimulants not required for a revival:*—Use nourishments instead of stimulants in your efforts to bring up the spiritual tone of the Church. By stimulants, we mean frantic appeals, severe denunciations, stinging rebuke. These rouse for the Sabbath on which they are employed, but their effect is exhausted before the week is over, and the application must be repeated next Sunday, and so on, week after week. By nourishment, we mean the Scriptures unfolded, expounded, and steadily applied. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (*Ibid.*) *Revivals commence with the few:*—Begin with a part of the Church instead of attempting to move the whole mass together. Those of us who were country boys know how impossible it is to make a fire out of green logs alone; but if we can get some dry sticks kindled around and underneath these green logs, we can make a very hot fire with them. Don't begin your revival by trying to rouse the whole unseasoned mass of Church members, but begin with a few of the most spiritual, and from these work out towards the others. Lyman Beecher said, in answer to the question, How can we promote a revival in the Church?—"First get revived yourself, then get some brother Church member revived, and the work has begun." That is practical wisdom. (*Ibid.*) *In wrath remember mercy.*—*The limitations of Divine wrath:*—What the prophet now subjoins is intended to anticipate an objection; for this thought might have occurred to the faithful—"there is no ground for us to hope pardon from God, whom we have so grievously provoked, nor is there any reason for us to rely any more on the covenant which we have so perfidiously violated." The prophet meets this objection, and he flees to the gracious favour of God, however much he perceived that the people would have to suffer the just punishment of their sins, such as they deserved. He then confesses that God was justly angry with His people, and yet that the hope of salvation was not on that account closed up, for the Lord had promised to be propitious. Since God then is not inexorable towards His people,—nay, while He chastises them He ceases not to be a Father,—hence, the

prophet connects here the mercy of God with His wrath. The word "wrath" is not to be taken according to its strict sense, when the faithful or the elect are spoken of; for God does not chastise them because He hates them; nay, on the contrary, He thereby manifests the care He has for their salvation. Hence the scourges by which God chastises His children are testimonies of His love. But the Scripture represents the judgment with which God visits His people as wrath, not towards their persons, but towards their sins. Though then God shows love to His chosen, yet He testifies when He punishes their sins that iniquity is hated by Him. When God then comes forth as it were as a judge, and shows that sins displease Him, He is said to be angry with the faithful; and there is also in this a reference to the perceptions of men; for we cannot, when God chastises us, do otherwise than feel the accusations of our own conscience. Hence then is this hatred; for when our conscience condemns us, we must necessarily acknowledge God to be angry with us, that is with respect to us. When therefore we provoke God's wrath by our sins, we feel Him to be angry with us; but yet the prophet connects together things that seem wholly contrary—even that God would "remember mercy in wrath"; that is, that He would show Himself displeased with them in such a way as to afford to the faithful at the same time some taste of His favour and mercy by finding Him to be propitious to them. Whenever, then, the judgment of the flesh would lead us to despair, let us ever set up against it this truth—that God is in such a way angry that He never forgets His mercy—that is, in His dealings with His elect. (*John Calvin.*) *Habakkuk's prayer*:—Wrath and mercy are here put in juxtaposition the one to the other. The wrath spoken of is the wrath of a holy, omnipotent God. Who can dare to meet that wrath? If we want to know the extent, the fury, the power of that wrath, we have only to look to the Saviour, the very Son of the very eternal God, the Father's co-equal, co-eternal Son, when He stands as the substitute of His people, as the representative of His Church, the sword of God's wrath falls upon Him. This wrath will come upon a guilty and sinful world in the last days. It will come as the messenger of God to purge His Church from its alloy, and its imperfections, and its impurities, and the fire shall burn them up. But in the text there is a word of mercy for God's Church. Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him. Whatever judgments may come upon us, nothing can come beyond what we deserve. What then have we to do? To pray for mercy. Nothing can be done without mercy. (*T. Mortimer, A.M.*)

Vers. 3-15. God came from Teman.—*God poetically portrayed and practically remembered*:—The Bible contains many grand songs and odes. But this song of Habakkuk stands in peerless splendour amongst them all. I. POETICALLY PORTRAYED. God is here presented, not as the Absolute One, whom "no eye hath seen or can see," nor as He appears to philosophical or logical minds, but as He appears to a lofty imagination Divinely inspired. To the prophet's imagination He appears as coming from Teman and Mount Paran, which refers to the visible display of His glory when He gave the law upon Mount Sinai amidst thunders and lightnings and earthquakes. Then indeed His glory covered the heavens. But whilst we take this as a poetic representation, we must not fail to notice some of the grand truths which it contains. 1. That God's glory transcends all revelations. The brightness of the Shekinah, in which He appeared on Sinai and elsewhere to the Jews, however effulgent, was but a mere scintillation of the infinite splendour of His being, the mere "hiding of His power." All His glory as seen in nature, both in the material and the spiritual universe, is but as one ray to the eternal sun. 2. That God's power over the material universe is absolute. He makes the mountains tremble, and the seas divide, and the orbs of heaven stand still. 3. That God's interest in good men is profound and practical. All His operations, as here poetically described, are on behalf of His chosen people. II. PRACTICALLY REMEMBERED. Why did the prophet recall all these Divine manifestations to the Hebrew people in past times? Undoubtedly to encourage in himself and in his countrymen unbounded confidence in Him, in the critical and dangerous period in which they were placed. The Chaldean hosts were threatening their ruin. Under these perilous circumstances he turns to God, he calls to mind and portrays in vivid poetry what He had been to His people in ancient times. 1. He recalls the fact that God had delivered His people in ancient times from perils as great as those to which they were now exposed. From the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Philistines, &c. 2. That God had done

this by stupendous manifestations of His power. Manifestations of His power in the sea, in the mountains, in the orbs of heaven, &c. 3. That what God had done for His people, He would continue to do. "His ways are everlasting," or, as Kiel renders it, His are ways of the olden times. The idea perhaps is, that He has an eternal plan, fixed and settled. What He has done for them, He will still do. Thus the prophet remembered the days of old and took courage. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 4. He had horns coming out of His hand.—*The horn as a symbol* :—The use of the word "horn" as a metaphor to express strength and honour is of very ancient origin. It appears to have arisen from the expression in Exodus xxxiv. 29, Moses' "face shone," or, literally, "emitted rays," where the Hebrew word *karan*—from *keren*, a horn—means "to shoot forth horns," hence applied to the horn-like rays of light. But it was frequently translated, as in the Latin Vulgate, "put forth horns"; and from this absurd translation arose the belief that Moses actually had horns, and, as we know, he is always so depicted in mediæval paintings when bearing the tables of stone, and the grotesque error has been too often followed by modern artists. The horn was naturally a symbol of strength; for in its horns lay the strength of the aurochs or bison, long since extinct, erroneously translated "unicorn" in our version, and which was the strongest and mightiest land animal known to the Israelites. When represented as worn by Moses, horns became naturally an emblem also of honour, and thus of royal power and dignity. One of the daily prayers of the Jews at the present day is, "Soon may the Branch, the Root of David, spring up, and His horn be excellent." This petition may have been in use before the time of Zacharias, and may have suggested this utterance. The metaphor was also used among others than the Jews. An Arabic expression speaks of the sun's rays as the horns of a deer. The horn on either side of the head is employed on the coins of Alexander the Great, and of some of his successors, the Seleucid kings of Syria, as well as by the Ptolemies. From his well-known coins is doubtless derived the Arabic epithet of Alexander the Great, "the two-horned king." In the prophetic books of the Old Testament, as well as in the Apocalypse, the horn is frequently used as a metaphor for a king or kingdom, as in this song of Zacharias; for example, the two horns of Media and Persia, the horn of the king of Grecia, the ten horns or kingdoms, the horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake great things. In former times, a single horn, generally of silver, fastened over the forehead, was not an uncommon Syrian decoration of great men; but the fashion now lingers only in the Lebanon, where on gala days the married women of rank wear a silver horn about a foot long, fixed upright on the head, over which is thrown the veil. I have only once seen the horn worn, though specimens have several times been offered to me for sale by the villagers. In the vision in Habakkuk iii. 4, "He had horns coming out of His hand," the rendering should be, as in Exodus, "rays of light, or lightnings, darted from His hand." (*H. B. Tristram, D.D.*) And there was the hiding of His power.—*God's reserved power* :—The prayer with which this prophecy concludes is one of the most remarkable pieces of composition ever written with pen, whether inspired or uninspired. The imagery employed is an impassioned setting forth of God's majesty and beneficence as He led His people through the wilderness. The prophet comforts himself in the assurance that the same Jehovah is the God of Israel still. The chief interest of the text lies in its concluding words—"the hiding of His power." The thought is, the Divine concealments which accompany all Divine revelations. I. WHAT DO THE WORDS MEAN, AS APPLIED TO THE EVENTS HE MAINLY HAS IN MIND? The imagery here may have been suggested by the pillar of cloud and flame which led the host. When God's hand was stretched out to work some miracle of deliverance, to feed the famishing multitude, to make rivers for them in the desert, or to smite the foe that withstood them, a glory streamed from it wholly Divine. In the imagery of the prophet, these rays of glorious manifestation were as horns, so often, in the poetical and prophetic Scriptures, used as symbols of power and sovereignty, coming out of His hand. And yet, so far from all these great acts of God constituting a full display of Him as He is, in reality they were but as hidings of His power. If you study closely those manifestations of God's goodness and power which were then and thus made, you will see that this was so. Look at them—1. As His providences on behalf of His people. Behind the providences there was a

grace—more mighty, more amazing than the providences. Incidents then which seemed to intend some present deliverance, or some national institution merely, we find now to have meant far more. Of even the smitten rock we read, "That Rock was Christ." Concerning the manna, we find Christ declaring, "I am that Bread from heaven." And the innocent victim from the flock, brought for sacrifice, led one, in the power of inspiration, to point to Jesus and say, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

II. THIS OF WHICH WE SPEAK CANNOT BE A MERELY ARBITRARY THING IN GOD. Something in His dispensations without an adequate Divine reason. It results partly from the fact that in all the Divine dealings with us, it is God dealing with man. It must be the study of a whole eternity for man to find out God or God's doings unto perfection. He must be full of concealments. And this applies even to the most common events and exigencies. It is impossible that God should, at each stage in our onward course, make us understand all things as He understands them. God leads us blindfold. God's concealments are not arbitrary; they are a necessity; and while they are so, they serve, in a most Divine way, the purposes of human instruction.

III. WHAT IS MEANT HERE BY THE HIDING OF GOD'S POWER IS THE KEY TO MUCH OF THE MYSTERY OF HIS DISPENSATIONS, BOTH IN PROVIDENCE AND IN GRACE. It is easy to say that what we see is the result of the operation of instituted laws and conditions. But this cannot be an exhaustive theory of the universe and of man's relation to it. The difficulties of providence have their solution, if not in any of our expedients for accounting for events, still in what we know of God's infinite power and resources. What a hiding of power it was which the world saw in Jesus;—a wonderful manifestation indeed, yet a far more wonderful concealing, with the great reality breaking through only as the fit occasion served. (*J. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The hiding of His power:*—They saw marvellous light, exceeding power and magnificence; but, after all, there was even then only a partial display. Omnipotence had not shown itself, more was concealed than was unfolded.

I. IN THE REALM OF NATURE THERE ARE HIDINGS OF GOD'S POWER. When the geologist, physiologist, chemist, have told us all they know, we find they have left wondrous secrets unrevealed. Concerning the world of creation there is more unknown than known. We have not exhausted, and surely we cannot exhaust the resources of God.

II. IN THE REVELATIONS OF SPIRITUAL TRUTH THERE ARE HIDINGS OF GOD'S POWER. The universe is a revelation. But by "revelation" we understand direct knowledge of the character and the will of God, His relation to His creatures, His purposes and work in them, and their future destiny. Revelation, like all other things, has been progressive. While much was given, much was withheld for the "fulness of time." What an enormous difference is perceptible between the knowledge of God which the earliest people possessed and that which shines full orb'd in Jesus Christ! And is it not still true? Do we know all, though we know so much? Are there not fresh revelations to come, through the power of the promised Teacher of the Church in every age?

III. IN HIS PROVIDENCES THERE IS THE HIDING OF HIS POWER. By Divine providence is meant the foresight and control which God exercises over national and individual life. He does not reveal all He has in store for us at any one moment. There are reserves, hidings of Divine help until want presses, then the help will come, and come in fullest measure. As individuals we do not know for what we are now being prepared. God is educating and disciplining us by various processes. What truths should we learn from this? Reverence; confidence; hope. (*William Braden.*) *God's hidden power:*—Habakkuk seems to have been wonderfully impressed with a sense of God's majesty and power. And well he might be. We are astonished at the exhibitions of His creative power. But there is an unseen power—an invisible and subtle agent in the Divine arm, and in the Divine government. The Almighty often works in disguise, in a way, at least, in which we do not at the time recognise His hand. He often throws a thick cloud around His plans, and a mask about His operations which even the eye of faith cannot penetrate. Behind a screen He devises His most stupendous purposes. Look at some manifestations of hidden power.

I. AS NATURAL AND PHYSICAL FORCES. Illustrations in nature. Acorn. Corn grains in mummy cases. Elements of gunpowder. Steam, or power concealed in water-drops. Electricity. Telephone.

II. AS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL FORCES. The latent power there is in the simple Gospel of Christ and its institutions. There is power sufficient in the Gospel to evoke a spirit of faith and Christian heroism that will lead a million martyrs to the stake. How

small and feeble in the beginning was the Church! The little mustard seed was the fit emblem to represent it. Is not the thought of the concentration of God's vast powers—His hidden resources, as they shall be developed and brought to bear upon the Church and the world in the next century, well-nigh overwhelming? When art, science, and philosophy shall walk hand in hand with religion, there will be such a revelation of power as shall astonish both men and angels. (*J. L. Harris.*) *The hiding of God's power*:—In this chapter we have Habakkuk's earnest prayer for deliverance from the foes of his people. He describes Jehovah's revelation of Himself at Sinai and at Gibeon as ground for believing that He will again interpose in behalf of Israel. I. IN THE WORKS OF CREATION GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE IS HIDDEN. God never makes display; in all His works we have evidences of restrained power. In nature nothing is forced to its utmost tension. All the objects of creation around us show marks of deliberate wisdom and restrained strength. The fruits of the earth. The flowers of the garden, the seasons, &c. Through all nature we see horns coming out of His hand—rays from the central sun of His omnipotence. But with regard to omnipotence, in all its essential grandeur, there is the "hiding of His power." II. IN GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL DEALINGS WITH THE RACE THERE IS THE HIDING OF HIS POWER. There are many wrongs on earth that need righting. All things in providence proceed according to an eternal plan. His worlds circulate, so do His providential dealings. God's worlds circulate quietly and without clashing; so do His providences; issuing from the source of all harmony and light they are gradually evolving light out of darkness, harmony out of discord, life out of death, happiness out of grief. III. IN CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE WORK THERE WAS THE HIDING OF HIS POWER. Through our Saviour's life there was "the hiding of His power." Two methods are used to impress people with the idea of power. The passive method. The stock in trade of some public speakers is the trick of appearing wise. The demonstrative method of manifesting power is more popular. But how remarkably free from all display was the life of Christ. The death of Christ brings out this idea very forcibly. Lessons—1. The hollowness of mere religious display. 2. That God has no absolute need of man's help in forwarding the interests of His kingdom. 3. Our need to get into sympathy with God. (*Alex. Macfarlane.*) *The hiding of Divine power*:—"It is the glory of God," says an inspired writer, "to conceal a thing." "He holdeth back the face of His throne, and spreadeth a cloud upon it." Up to a given point all is clearness, beyond that all is mystery. It is revelation so far, it is reservation onward. And *this*, not to keep our curiosity and sense of wonder on perpetual stretch of seeking to pry into the hidden, but out of *pity* to our feeble finite eyes, which would be blinded for ever were the infinite blaze to be outpoured upon us. Concealment is absolutely necessary: the "holding back" is a boon. Full unfoldment would be cruel on the Divine side, and inevitable death on the human side. Mystery, however, is a comparative term: what is mystery to a child is plain to a man. What is mystery to a peasant is intelligible and simple to a philosopher. What is mystery to a philosopher is easy reading to the saint in glory. The finite will never outgrow mystery. The depths of infinity, whether of power, of wisdom, or of love, can never be sounded by any human plumb-line of thought. However vast and rich may be the revelations given, Deity ever must be hidden in the abstract and absolute sense. Seeing God in His works is not seeing Him in His essence; beholding Him in His Word is not beholding Him as He is; even gazing on Him as incarnated in His beloved and sinless Son is not to see Him in the unclouded majesty and mystery of His Being. As the sun conceals more power than it can ever display, so Jehovah hides more might in the abysses of His nature than He can ever show. Bright beamings He gives apportioned to our strength of vision, but beyond that there is gracious reservation, there is merciful "hiding." "POWER!" Habakkuk was awed and impressed by the "horns" and "hidings" of this glorious attribute. "Once have I heard this," says the Psalmist, "yea, twice have I heard it that power belongeth unto God." A God without power—power to will, to think, to act, to create, to conserve, to govern, to reward and punish—would be, could be no God at all. Almightyness is an essential of Godhood. Omnipotence as well as eternity must inhere as an attribute in a Being existing from necessity. Its evolutions are vast, varied, minute, and majestic. In type of careering worlds and wheeling systems Jehovah has written the language of His power on the glorious page of the heavens. And what voluminous emblems and evidences of mightiness we have in the world of mind, and what in the universe

of truth! Next to God Himself, man wields a power almost omnipotent; and through him Jehovah is bringing to bear upon races, tribes, nationalities, soul-worlds, evolutions of His almightiness, which effect magnificent reforms in mind and morals, and lead them up to imperial heights of moral and immortal honour, holiness, and truth, or sink them by wilful obstinacy and rebellion to depths of ruin and woe. Are storms and earthquakes, and rolling seasons and fruitful showers, and quickening sunshine the result of wilful rebellious forces of caprice, or rioting powers of accidentalism? Do they look like it? Is it in the nature of caprice to be so unerringly regular in its freaks and doings as the revolutions of the seasons? Could an unconscious energy—a blind force—which is only another name from the vocabulary of scepticism for "CHANCE"—could it possibly be so transcendently wise in its exploits and infinitely clever in its achievements as the miracles and manifestations of the power to be witnessed on the theatre of our globe? A thousand times no! These are the workings of Omnipotence through the medium of the material by which humanity may learn and receive constant assurance that verily there is a God to whom power belongeth, and that despite the most astounding manifestations thereof there still is and ever will be what the prophet has declared, "the hiding of His power." But, I am asked, does creation apart from revelation afford proof that this power, the effects of which we see, is centred in and exercised by a *person*? Decidedly so. I would ask, in reply, do the effects beheld show evidences of thought, intelligence, wisdom? "Laws" argue a lawgiver, and a lawgiver argues an intelligent, personal being. Therefore nature does afford presumptive evidence that *power*, the effects of which we see, has behind it personality—that it is wielded by an imperial will, governed by an all-wise mind, and obedient to an infinite spirit. To supplement nature, Jehovah has graciously given us revelation. Power uncentred in an intelligent Personality, supposing it were possible, would be lawless, reckless, ruinous! Power is centred in the Living God. And His presence and power in nature is the source of all force, energy, and law, and the necessary condition of any course of events. While omnipotence in Jehovah is *one* as an attribute, nevertheless it is varied in its exertions and manifestations according to the mediums through which it operates. Seen in creation over matter, it is physical; in prophecy over mind, it is intellectual; in providence over events and circumstances, it is sovereign and judicial; in religious influences on conscience, character, life, it is moral. The seat of power is the WILL. According to the teaching of this sacred book, the infinitude of power has been hidden in Jesus Christ. God, so to speak, has compressed Himself into the limits of the human. Omnipotence, with every other attribute of Divinity, has been presented in mysterious condensation in the person of the Logos. "Christ," says St. Paul, "is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 24). What demonstrations thereof He gave when tabernacling in human form. From His look and touch and word outbeamed the "horns," while behind the veil of flesh were the "hidings" of Omnipotence. The Cross is the centralisation of the highest power—the concentrated power of love! Christianity is moral plenipotence. "The Gospel is the power of God." It creates not new worlds, but clean hearts. It subdues not earthly kingdoms, but rebel wills. Yes; the world is what it is to-day through the living revolutionising power of Christianity. "Without Jesus Christ," says Pascal, "the world would not even exist; for either it would have been already destroyed, or it would have become like a hell." Remember, it is not the human, but the Divine through the human, which has produced such effects. It is not the instrumentality, but the God-power through which it has wrought such supernatural changes in all lands where it has had full and unfettered sway. The age of physical miracles may be among the vestige of the past, but moral miracles, perhaps, were never so plentiful and constant as to-day. This, indeed, is the mighty power of God. The power of truth over mind, light over darkness, love over hate, divinity over human sin, sorrow, woe. Nothing can withstand it. What? I am not quite so sure of that. Moral power with Jehovah is powerless to effect a moral change in man if there be no concurrence of will. Physical might with Him is illimitable, nothing can withstand it; but moral might can only successfully work when and where there is voluntary acquiescence on the creature-side in the Divine will. Hence the slowness of Gospel progress of which our sceptical enemies accuse us, far from being evidence of failure, is a glaring and terrible illustration of man's deep-seated depravity and stubborn unwillingness to accept salvation. Did He proceed on the principle

of coercion in the realm of truth, human hearts and wills would bend in subjection before Him as golden grain before the breeze; but it would be the subjection of trembling slaves, and not the loyal, loving homage of sons. Compulsion makes serfs, but not saints. From "the hiding of His power"—His grand reserve of forces—at His bidding, shall yet sally forth battalions of might to accomplish His purposes and promises of love, or execute His threatenings of wrath; for the "kingdoms of this world" are to become "the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers?—*The destruction of forests.*—We secure dominion over the forces of nature only through recognition of the laws that govern them. The floods that have made so great havoc in Europe and America this season are the natural results of violated law. 1. The forests of the hills and mountains are God's natural check on the overflow of streams. 2. As a nation we are guilty of violation of this law for protection of the valleys. The plunder of the leafy wealth of the hills has been most wanton. The penalty has been visited upon the valleys. 3. The protection must be secured through the dissemination of knowledge upon the subject, and through the State and national law. Otherwise the floods will augment each year until they become immeasurable calamities. (*Homiletic Review.*)

Ver. 9. The bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even Thy Word.—The prophet's closing prayer is that God would, in wrath, remember mercy. For this he is encouraged to hope by a remembrance of God's past dealings with His people, which he reviews in a strain of sublime eloquence. Lifting up his heart to God with devout acknowledgment of past help, he exclaims, "Thy bow was made quite naked," &c. Apply—I. TO THE DEFENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES. There is allusion to the Eastern mode of warfare. The bow was taken out of its case, and placed upon the string ready to go forth on its errand of destruction against those who assailed the servants of God. 1. The opposition of the ungodly. There has always been a wide distinction between those who serve God, and those who serve Him not. The latter have always set themselves in fierce antagonism against the former. But God's people have never wanted an avenger in God. 2. The designs of evil spirits. We have enemies in the invisible world. One arrow from the bow of the Almighty will put to flight the hosts of Satan. 3. The plague of our own hearts. We often carry our most dangerous enemies within us. If we allow sin to dwell unmolested within us, we carry about with us a combustible material. Until you get rid of these, you can have no abiding peace. The blood of Christ can wash them all away, the fire of the Holy Spirit can consume them all. II. THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S TRUTH OVER EVERY FORM OF ERROR. 1. The abominations of idolatry. 2. The delusions of superstition. 3. The fallacies of human reasoning. Intellect alone is insufficient to guide us in our search after truth without some directing power from heaven. But the issue of conflict with all error is certain. These things will surely be accomplished "according to the oaths of the tribes," that is, the covenant of God with His people, according to His infallible Word. (*W. J. Brock, B.A.*)

Ver. 16. And I trembled in myself.—*Horror of God.*—I. IT IS AN ABNORMAL STATE OF MIND. The benevolent character of God, and the moral constitution of the soul are sufficient to show that it was never intended that man should ever dread his Maker or be touched with any servile feelings in relation to Him. Unbounded confidence, cheerful trust, loyal love, these are the normal states of mind in relation to the Creator. How has the abnormal state arisen? The history of the Fall shows this. "I heard Thy voice in the garden and was afraid." II. IT IS AN UNNECESSARY STATE OF MIND. God is not terrible. There is nothing in Him to dread. His voice to man—1. In all nature is, "Be not afraid." 2. In all true philosophy. Things show benevolence of intention. 3. In all true Christianity. The Christianity of Christ reveals Him as love, and love only. III. IT IS A PERNICIOUS STATE OF MIND. It is pernicious to the body. Horrific feeling is inimical to physical health. But dread of God is even more pernicious to the soul. 1. It destroys its peace. 2. It depresses its powers. 3. It distorts its view. It is fear that has given men that Calvinian Deity which frightens the millions away from the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. (*Homilist.*)

I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble.—*Trembling into rest*.—We know things which do tremble that they may rest—the magnet, the planet, the bird, the heart. Do not regard this text as any melancholy and prophetic foreboding. It is a wise repression of a too vehement self-consciousness—the assurance that our labour is not guaranteed by our present exuberance, but by a wise and thoughtful fear. Wise fear is forethought and safety. This prayer of Habakkuk grounds the hope of future mercy on the remembrance of the past; it is the history of a state of humbled feeling, and a hope from this to rest in the day of trouble. I. THE PRINCIPLE OF FEAR IS EXCITED BY THE SENSE OF GOD. Job said, “When I consider, I am afraid of Him.” When we think wisely and thoughtfully of God we may well tremble. It is the dictate of natural religion. II. THERE IS A USE IN THIS TREMBLING WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT RECOGNISES. The apostle says, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”; and this is ever the effect of this. Fear not to paralyse. There is a wise and healthy trembling. We are often shaken by undefined terrors. There seems nothing to make us afraid; but the spirit is overwhelmed—all within us sinks. You may tremble beneath some highly wrought sermon; but this is different to trembling beneath the Spirit’s touch of power. III. WHAT IS THE ISSUE? Rest in the day of trouble. Holy fear is the guardian of the soul; it bears us into real life, into a soothed life. This trembling is a sense of the soul, the vision and knowledge of the soul,—it is all the soul,—it is within, it is ourselves. And as we tremble so we rest. Rest in the day of trouble means that a kingdom of peace is set up in our soul. (*E. Paxton Hood.*) *The prayer of Habakkuk*:—1. Unfold the maxim which these words contain. Fear, excited by the threatenings of God, issues in “rest,” followed by the mercies of God. As a moral proverb only this maxim is susceptible of much powerful and practical illustration. The maxim presents itself in accordance with the whole Gospel of Christ. 2. The use which the Holy Spirit makes of the threatenings of the Word—the sinner is brought to tremble in himself. It was never designed that the threatenings of the Word should seize on a man with a paralyzing grasp. They were intended to subserve the purpose of solemn and salutary warning. Threatening preaching is not in general effective preaching. He who trembles beneath the Spirit’s teaching, trembles in himself. It is an internal shock. There may be no outward sign. The converted man is one who must have trembled in himself. 3. The state into which such trembling conducts a sinner. There is a close connection between the “trembling” and the “resting.” Let the empire of Satan be overthrown, and the empire of Christ is instantly set up. “The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And must there not be resting then? (*Henry Melville, B.D.*)

Vers. 17, 18. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, &c.—United prayer for removal of temporal afflictions*:—We are called in a special manner to humble ourselves before God, on account of a great national calamity—an outbreak of cattle plague. So far as we can see, it comes directly from God. Some will say that the remedy is proper attention to the conditions of the disease, and not humiliation or prayer. But shall we admit the uselessness of prayer? Shall we say prayer must be confined to spiritual things? Surely we may ask what we need, “both for the body and the soul.” We must not ask God to alter the laws of nature, or work miracles for our deliverance. God does not take away a plague, either from nations or from individuals, simply because they asked Him to do so. In relation to such a plague, human endeavour can find appropriate spheres, and yet room be left for prayer. Our praying, and humbling ourselves before God, is sure to do us good, if we engage in it with sincerity of heart. (*G. G. Lawrence, M.A.*) *Hard times*:—It is easy to understand how a soul should, in poverty and great straits, be induced to seek after God; indeed, the goad of want more frequently drives men to Him than the enjoyment of plenty draws them. There is no doubt that if, in times of want, either an individual or a nation desires to find Him, and secure His help, He will hear their prayer and deliver them. We shall never get forward until we see what Habakkuk saw—that God is our strength, and that He will uphold us through the trial by which we shall come into the possession of our purer blessings. No experience is so uniform among the people of God, as that they enjoyed more of the presence of God in their trouble than at any other time. But there is more than the experience of the nearness of God, more than a vision of His glory and grace. There is deliver-

ance out of our straits. (*J. P. Gledstone.*) *Man facing calamity* :—This passage sets down the entertainment which the prophet gave to a sad prediction. He entertains it with fear, and with faith and confidence. A sweet combination. These are the two blessed entertainments of any threatened judgment. A deep humiliation, and a steadfast faith and consolation. 1. The supposition. The strength and comfort of the creatures may fail us. In their production and breeding there is a great deal of uncertainty. And also in their use. And the very being and substance of these natural helps, carry with it this condition, that they are vanishing and fading. When scarcity and want come as a judgment from God, then it is extreme and extraordinary, and beyond the course of nature. God's displeasure oft breaks out in this kind of judgment. God sometimes vouchsafes a special exemption to His Church and children: but the saints have their share and portion in these calamities upon divers reasons. The privileges of God's people are not temporal, but spiritual. The saints are members of those societies and people who are thus punished. The servants of God are often contributors to the common heap of sin that brings down judgments. 2. The resolution. "Although," forecasts the misery. "Yet," forelays the remedy. The piety of the prophet appears in two degrees. Here is the low degree of the affliction, and the high degree of the affection. He will suffer patiently and meekly. He will not only be content with it, he will be well pleased with his condition. He knows how even to rejoice in affliction. (*Bishop Brownrigg.*) *The possibilities in the life of a good man* :—I. THE GREATEST MATERIAL DESTITUTION is possible to a good man. It is possible for the fig-tree not to blossom, &c. Man lives by the fruits of the earth. They may fail from one of two reasons. (1) From human neglect. It is the eternal ordination of God, that what man wants from the earth for his existence he must get from it by labour—skilful, timely, persevering labour. They may fail (2) From Divine visitation. The mighty Maker can, and sometimes does wither the fruits of the earth, destroy the cattle of the fields. II. THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL JOY is possible to a good man. "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." "Spiritual joy," says Caleb Morris, "is a free, full, and overflowing stream, that takes its rise in the very depth of the Divine Essence, in the immutability, perfection, abundance, munificence of the Divine nature. While there is a God, and that God is happy, there is no necessity that there should be any unhappy Christians." What is it to "joy in God"? 1. It is the joy of the highest contemplation. The joys of contemplation are amongst the most pure and elevating which intelligent creatures can experience. These rise in the character according to their subjects. The highest subject is God, His attributes and works. 2. It is the joy of the most elevating friendship. The joys of friendship are amongst the chief joys of earth; but the joys of friendship depend upon the purity, depth, constancy, reciprocity of love; and friendship with God secures all this in the highest degree. 3. It is the joy of the sublimest admiration. Whatever the mind admires it enjoys, and enjoys in proportion to its admiration, whether it be a landscape or a painting. Moral admiration is enjoyment of the highest kind, and this in proportion to the grandness of the character. Admiration of Divine excellence is the sublimest joy. "I will joy in God." III. THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL JOY IN THE MIDST OF THE GREATEST MATERIAL DESTITUTION is possible to a good man. "Although" every material blessing is gone, "I will rejoice." Good men have always been enabled to do so. Like Paul they have "gloried in tribulation," &c. All things have been theirs. In material destitution they felt—1. In God they had strength. "The Lord God is my strength." "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." 2. In God they had swiftness. "He will make my feet like hinds' feet." The reference is here perhaps to the swiftness with which God would enable him to flee from the dangers which were overtaking his country. It is, however, a universal truth, that God gives to a good man a holy alacrity in duty. Duty to him is not a clog or a burden, but a delight. 3. In God they had elevation. "He will make me to walk upon mine high places." "They that wait upon God shall renew their strength, and shall mount as on the wings of eagles," &c. (*Homilist.*) *Habakkuk's faith* :—I. THE APPREHENSION OF GREAT SUFFERING AND WANT. Our apprehensions concerning the future are of a totally different character to the prophet's. Ours are not national, but personal and relative afflictions. II. THE EXPRESSION OF THE PROPHET'S CONFIDENCE AND JOY. Here is a very wonderful exhibition of a devout and holy character. This language of hope and joy is a striking contrast to three things—1. The language and conduct

of idolaters. 2. The low, dull, heavy feeling of the man who does not believe in the providential government of God. 3. The faint and feeble feelings of confidence in God which distinguish many real Christians. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *On the influence of religion under privations and afflictions*:—We may learn that nothing should withdraw us from our trust in God and the consolations of His Divine Word. I. CHERISH A PROPER SENSE OF THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND OUR OWN DEPENDENT STATE. Perfect and unbounded confidence in God, in the wisdom, power, and mercy of God, must be the ground of all our religious hope. II. ADMIRE THE CHEERFUL HOMAGE OF THE PROPHET, AND CONSIDER SOME OF THE PRACTICAL USES OF ADVERSITY. 1. Consider it as opening to us a new field of virtue and of knowledge. 2. As effectually curing the insolence of pride and the follies of prosperity. 3. As proving the sincerity of some, and laying bare the treachery and baseness of others. 4. As teaching us to estimate, as we ought, the many blessings which the Divine love has showered upon us. (*J. Hewlett, B.D.*) *The great calamity*:—I. THE DIVINE RULE IS TO MAKE AN ABUNDANT PROVISION FOR MAN'S PHYSICAL WANTS. The Great Creator gives him the fig tree, the vine, the olive, the fields, the flock, and the herd. Observe—1. The vastness of God's wealth. 2. His supreme regard for man's comfort. II. THE GOOD MAN RECOGNISES THE POSSIBILITY OF A TOTAL FAILURE IN THIS PROVISION. "Although the fig tree," &c. Such a failure is fearful to contemplate. III. THAT IN THE VERY FACE OF THIS GREAT CALAMITY THE GOOD MAN TRIUMPHANTLY CONFIDES IN GOD. "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord." The wisdom of this conduct is seen in two things—1. In the Divine immutability. 2. Great calamities afford scope for the development of great principles. Trials, if very heavy, kill little men, but make great ones. Just as an Atlantic billow bears the reeling ship aloft, so does the mighty wave of trouble lift to notice a true son of God. Trials strengthen and develop love and faith. IV. THAT THIS SUBLIME CONFIDENCE IS EXERCISED BY THE GOOD MAN BECAUSE HE HAS EXPERIENCED A GREAT DELIVERANCE. "I will joy in the God of my salvation." 1. This is a deliverance from the greatest evil. 2. This is a deliverance to the possession of the greatest good. This man has in him the elements of immortality. He is a King's son, and an heir of heaven. Heaven is his future residence, and the universe his estate. (*Homilist.*) *A daring faith*:—I. A MOURNFUL SUPPOSITION. Every sentence in this verse is pitched in the minor key. Every symbol is fringed with mourning. 1. The prophet supposes a condition in which he is deprived of the common luxuries of life. The Jews were a favoured people. God had made special provision for their welfare. But the prophet foresaw that He who gave these possessions could take them away. All the agencies of nature and providence were in God's hand. 2. The prophet supposes a condition in which he will be deprived of the common necessities of life. Some of the fruits of the earth are for enjoyment, and others for our support. We can do without the former, we cannot do without the latter. The prophet supposes a time when not only the luxuries but the necessities of life might fail, when the tree should be without fruit, the fields without pasture, and the stalls without herd. It is foolish to brood over imaginary troubles, and to magnify the evils of life. Fear not only weakens our strength, but it intensifies our misery. But it is wise to consider how uncertain all material possessions are, and to fortify the heart against the probable calamities that may overtake us. II. A CHEERFUL RESOLUTION. "I will rejoice in God." How could there be inward joy amidst so much outward sorrow? 1. This was a Divine joy. "Rejoice in God." There is a great difference between a human and a Divine joy. One arises from without, but the other from within; one comes from the creature, the other from the Creator. If our joy depended upon our wealth, it might fail; if upon our friends, it might change; if upon our health, it might be broken. But it depends upon God, and we know that "He will supply all our need according to His riches in glory, through Jesus Christ." 2. This was an experimental joy. It refers to the present, and includes forgiveness, fellowship, and expectation. III. A DELIGHTFUL EXPECTATION. "The Lord God is my strength." That is experience. "He will make my feet like hinds' feet." That is expectancy. The Christian life is both a service and a hope; an experience and an expectation. (*J. T. Woodhouse.*) *Faith triumphant in the day of calamity*:—The text exhibits a season of peculiar distress, and the exercise of a gracious heart in the time of calamity. I. A SEASON OF PECULIAR DISTRESS. 1. Such seasons are effected by the hand of God. He is not a mere spectator, He is the great agent in bringing these things to pass. 2. Such seasons are the

consequence of man's sin. Sin introduced this and every other misery. 3. Such seasons are designed by Infinite Wisdom to answer some important end. To manifest His absolute right over all creatures and things. He claims them all as His own. And He makes it manifest that they are His own, by taking them away at His pleasure. To convince us of our entire dependence upon Him for all our temporal enjoyments. Without the Divine blessing, all men do is ineffectual. To prove to us that earthly comforts are uncertain and perishing. The design of God, in bestowing temporal benefits, is to help us through life, not to make us too much in love with it. To lead us to the exercise of gratitude, when temporal blessings abound, and for the exercise of Christian graces in the hearts of His people. Now is the trial of their faith, patience, and resignation.

II. THE EXERCISE OF A GRACIOUS HEART IN TIMES OF CALAMITY. 1. Gracious souls have a source of joy, when those of the ungodly are all dried up. 2. This rejoicing in God, in the midst of calamity, is the fruit of our Divine faith. If the promises were not believed, the soul would not rejoice. 3. It is a view of the gracious character of God, as a Saviour, that causes the sinner to rejoice in Him. Improvements—(1) God can as easily take away the whole of our possessions as part of them. (2) You will continue strangers to true happiness, while you remain strangers to the spirit of the prophet. (3) In such seasons beware how you endeavour to add to your own enjoyments at the expense of any others' comfort. (4) Let the oppressed poor remember to whom vengeance belongeth. (5) If you can rejoice in God, you shall soon be in a country where neither famine nor scarcity can ever be experienced. (*T. Hannam.*)

The triumph of piety over adversity :—Pleasure and pain are the alternate companions of every man through the journey of life. Surrounded by uncertainty, prudence would suggest the propriety of being prepared for calamities which cannot be avoided, so as to contemplate them without alarm, and to bear them with becoming fortitude. Religion proposes no exemption from sorrow, but promises that support under the troubles of life, which reconciles the mind to every event. The prophet's anticipation of evils proceeded not from a melancholy disposition, but was intimated to him by the sins of the people,—the complexion of the times,—and above all, by the Holy Spirit, which dwelt in him. I. THE EXPOSITION OF THE TEXT. He supposes, in the first instance, the fig-tree to fail in its accustomed produce. The failure of the vines is the next calamity. Then the usual supply of the oil-olive trees is cut off. Then the "fields may yield no meat," and as a consequence, the "flocks may be cut off from the field." Merciful God! In the midst of distress like this, where shall the wretched flee? The prophet's ardent soul breathed the trustful language of our text. II. REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED. The text reminds us of the uncertainty of temporal enjoyments, and of the peculiar felicity of a good man. The text reminds us of the insecurity of our temporal enjoyments, as it respects the produce of the earth. It is the privilege of good men not to be wholly dependent for happiness upon temporal things. Joy in God is the peculiar and the supreme delight of a pious mind. Let us learn that it is of unspeakable importance that we stand prepared for trials which cannot be avoided. (*S. Lowell.*)

Joy in the face of adversity :—I. THE OBJECT OF OUR JOY. Our God in whom we rejoice. He is Lord. Jehovah is both His name and His description. He is "God of salvation." He is the God of my salvation. Our joy is spiritual joy; it comprehends in its object the characters and offices of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the administration of redemption. The essence of this joy is complacency in its object. The joy is nourished and increased by the Spirit, with scriptural discoveries of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And joy in the Lord God of our salvation hath little in it which is vehement, but much that is operative and practical. II. FORMING RESOLUTIONS TO ABOUND IN THIS JOY. Such resolutions have been formed. Such resolutions may be formed. Such resolutions should be formed. They are always formed under spiritual influence. Bold professions are founded on the revealed glory of God's faithfulness and all-sufficiency, He is the Almighty God, and His faithfulness is engaged to support the people of His love and care. These bold resolutions look out of countenance all the evils that would intimidate and shake the confidence of God's people. Of these bold resolutions we have some eminent and illustrious scriptural examples. Such resolutions are neither formed nor executed without a conflict. Then suffer the word of exhortation. Be not surprised that the word is, "Rejoice evermore." Nothing in the subject should hinder our joy. And the honour of our profession

calleth us to rejoice. Attend to the following instructions—1. Be well assured of the solidity of the foundation on which the joys of faith are built. 2. Seek to attain clearness concerning your interest in the God of salvation, through union with Christ in effectual calling. 3. Be followers of that which is good. 4. Look to the Lord in the administration of providence, and submit to His will manifested in it. (*A. Shanks.*) *Rejoicing in God*:—Mr. Garrett preached again in the afternoon. The text was Psalm cxxviii. 12. Again the preacher drew several lifelike pictures. He took his hearers to the mansion of the rich, to the study of the learned, and to the palace of royalty, in search of true happiness, but found it not. Then we were conducted to a little straw-thatched cottage, the lowly home of a humble Christian toiler, who had a sick wife and child and no work to do. As we approached it, the preacher paused and cried, “Hark! he is singing. What is it?” Just before we reached the cottage door, the preacher again cried, “Hark!” We listened, and heard the verse beginning, “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath.” The effect was simply overpowering. (*Memoir of Rev. C. Garrett.*) *Constant joy*:—Bishop Tucker, on the occasion of his recent visit to Toro, ordained a native of Uganda who has worked for five years on the edge of the great pigmy forest. “This remarkable man,” says the bishop, “has been beaten, imprisoned, put in the chain gang, had his house burnt down, and all his property destroyed; and yet he has borne it all with a smile upon his face and a song upon his lips!” *Opalescent men*:—In ancient times, before men learned how to cut the diamond, the opal was the most fashionable stone, most highly prized, and most costly. There are not lacking men in modern times who still hold to this ancient estimate of that beautiful stone. No jewel, in all the range of precious stones, displays a finer range of splendid colours—the brightest tints of the rainbow, softened as if seen through a silver haze. As you look at it from different angles, or as you turn the stone, there come glimpses of the richest azure, the deepest emerald, the most fiery ruby, yet all of them mellowed by the opal’s own charm, and very different from the dazzling brilliancy of the diamond and sapphire. Whence comes this beautiful play of colour that takes its name from the opal, and is called “opalescence”? It is not in the stone. Hold the opal up to the light, and it has nothing but a yellowish tinge. Besides, the colours shift and vary, as the stone is changed in position. Let me tell you the secret of the opal’s beauty. The stone is filled with fissures—minute rifts in its substance, too small to be seen by the eye, yet not too fine to be seen by the light. These fissures catch up the light, beat it back and forth between their sides, and break it up into its constituent colours, very much as a prism would do. And so the stone, out of what might seem to be a flaw or blemish, draws its wonderful crown of beauty. Have you ever seen opalescent men and women? They are all around you, shining with loveliness in many a Christian home. They are men and women whose lives are fissured with poverty, seamed with sickness, cleft with some deformity, shattered by blindness, or deafness, or ugliness; and yet these opalescent Christians make the very shattering of their body, and the flaws in their fortune, a trap for God’s sunlight. They catch in these clefts of misfortune the rays that come from heaven. They toss them back and forth and from side to side of their seamed and fissured lives, and lo! we see them glowing with a beauty far more wonderful than any opal of earth, or any rainbow of heaven. (*Amos B. Wells.*) *Satisfied with the best*:—“I was going down town in a car, one day,” says a New York merchant, “when I heard somebody cry out, ‘Hallo, Mr. Conductor, please stop your car a moment; I can’t run very fast.’ The car stopped, and presently there hobbled into it a little lame boy, about ten or twelve years old. His face told such a tale of suffering, and yet he was bright and cheerful. He put his crutch behind him, and placing his leg in an easier position, he began to look round. A happy smile played over his pale face, and he seemed to take notice of everything. Presently I got a seat next to him, and had a little talk with him. I found that he knew and loved the Saviour, and it was this which made him so contented and cheerful. He told me that the doctor said his leg would never be any better. ‘Well, my dear boy,’ I said, ‘how can you be so happy and cheerful?’ His reply was, ‘Jesus, my Saviour, has sent this trial for me to bear. Father tells me He would not have sent it, unless He knew it would be best for me. And don’t you think, sir, that I ought to be satisfied with the best?’ When I said good-bye to the boy, I thanked him for the lesson he had taught me, which I shall never forget.” **Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.**—*Joy in being in God’s hands*:—The prophet

teaches us what advantage it is to the faithful assembly, seasonably to submit to God, and to entertain serious fear when He threatens them, and when He summonses them to judgment: and he shows that, though they may perish a hundred times, they yet would not perish, for the Lord would ever supply them with occasions of joy, and would also cherish this joy within, so as to enable them to rise above all their adversities. Though the land was threatened with famine, and though no food would be supplied to them, they would yet be able always to rejoice in the God of their salvation; for they would know Him to be their Father, though for a time He severely chastised them. We now perceive more clearly, that the sorrow produced by the sense of our guilt is recommended to us on account of its advantage: for nothing is worse than to provoke God's wrath to destroy us; and nothing is better than to anticipate it, so that the Lord Himself may comfort us. We shall not always escape, for He may apparently treat us with severity; but though we may not be exempt from punishment, He will give us reasons to rejoice; and then in His own time, He will mitigate His severity, and by the effects will show Himself propitious to us. During the time when want or famine, or any other affliction is to be borne, He will render us joyful with this one consolation, for relying on His promises, we shall look for Him as the God of our salvation. We may hence gather a most useful lesson,—That whenever signs of God's wrath meet us in outward things, this remedy remains to us,—to consider what God is to us inwardly; for the inward joy, which faith brings to us, can overcome all fears, terrors, sorrows, and anxieties. (*John Calvin.*)

Religion the secret of contentment.—There is nothing here of the exuberance of Oriental imagination. It is absolute matter of fact, capable of being proved by countless witnesses. Various lessons are to be drawn from it, but the most valuable of all for these times is the overwhelming testimony borne by it to the religious nature of man, and to the high degree of probability of the existence of a God of love who can inspire such absolute trust in Himself under the most crushing temporal misfortune. It places the efforts to uproot all faith in God in the light of an inexpressible folly, not to say of a flagrant crime. Is it not folly to take away from any man the power by which he becomes able to behave in a more manly way than he could have done without it? Viewed even from atheistic ground, mankind at large are all the better for the calm and resigned behaviour of those who suffer adversity. We go further, and say, it verges closely on criminal blindness to the interests of humanity to proclaim an atheism which, if accepted, would leave the souls of the afflicted absolutely without anything to cling to, without consolation, without hope; worse still, to deprive them of that conviction by which all the nobler part of their nature is sustained and called into vigorous exercise. How shall we bear the storm of adversity when it breaks upon us? Shall we prove our sovereignty over things of time and sense, or shall we disclose our shame in exhibiting ourselves as their slaves? The alternative depends upon what is the ground of our daily hopes. Not in Stoicism is to be found the normal type of manliness under adversity. Contentment is a virtue of soul which, when healthy, exercises itself in various ways. A great deal of so-called contentment is nothing more than physical indifference or mental inactivity. Habit is the parent of such contentment, and where the habits have been always moderate and temperate, contentment with a small portion is easy and natural. But the virtue of contentment is something much higher than this. Virtue is always active; when it is passive it ceases to be virtue, and becomes only an admirable quality, or enviable habit. Contentment, to be virtuous, must spring from opposition to our wills and desires, can only exist in circumstances which are trying and painful. It is our task to show how certain virtues can best be attained by those who are deficient in them, to point out by what spiritual forces the native weakness of our nature may be justified, and what relation true religious faith bears to the necessities of our lot, and the exigencies of our moral character. I would show, if I could, whence the blessed springs of virtue can be drawn; to whom we may look for the light and warmth needful for its birth and fertility. If a discontented man would fain possess the virtue of contentment, he will never get it by altering the conditions of his lot, but by the elevation of his soul above them, by finding, in a will higher than his own, complete and boundless satisfaction. This virtue is largely begotten and cultured by faith in the living God. But what is this faith in the living God? It is not merely the assent of our intellect to certain propositions about God, though it must be such as the reason entirely endorses. First,

it implies the possession of a soul which cannot be satisfied with earthly good or animal pleasure. He who believes in God has a life of conscious existence, of hopes, and fears, and appetites, which find activity and satisfaction in a purely spiritual region of its own. To such a soul God is not less a reality than the earth on which the body treads, or the sun shining in the heavens. Out of this conscious communion with God grow two important constituents of faith—perfect acquiescence in the Divine will, and a supreme desire to obey its behests. The former of these is the essence of contentment. It differs by a whole heaven from the contentment of the fatalist. No supreme power has a right to demand the assent of man to wrongs and injuries which are the result of blind chance, or inflicted by caprice, still less to wrongs which will not issue in final good. But how different must be the feeling and conduct of man, when the power which seems to crush him is invested with all the attributes of justice and fatherly love. He promptly surrenders, because he knows, at least, that there is a higher wisdom than his own which guides the forces of pain and destruction; more perfect goodness than his own is the cause of misfortune, and best of all, that a love infinite in its benevolence, is the impulse from which every motion in the universe has sprung. This is faith; to see what is invisible to the senses, or to the immature mind. God does not wish us to bear a single sorrow that we can by righteous means avert; all He asks is that we will trust in His wisdom and greater love when trouble comes which we cannot prevent. And if faith consoles us, still more does it purify and refine us. (*Charles Voysey.*)

Joy in God :—Worldly men do not rejoice in God. I. JOY IN GOD IS WELL GROUNDED. 1. Because it is a joy in God considered as the God of salvation. If a man were found joying in an absolute God, he might well be esteemed foolish; for he would be rejoicing in the contemplation of a strong and irresistible enemy. It is in the God of salvation that the believer greatly rejoices. There is the best of all reasons for holy satisfaction. He perceives in Him justice satisfied, and truth magnified; he discerns that, instead of fury, there is overflowing love, and mercy to pardon all his transgressions; he sees in Him omnipotent power, not armed for his perdition, but engaged to preserve his soul through faith unto salvation; he beholds eternal faithfulness to be to him a shield and buckler; he perceives also, that God is omniscient to see all the dangers which may threaten him, and all-powerful to protect in every case. Who is the God of salvation? The Triune God, the one God subsisting in three persons. 2. Joy in God is well grounded, because God is on the side of the believer. This was not always the case. Since he has been justified by the blood of Jesus, there is no longer any condemnation for him. If God acquits, who shall condemn? If God defends, who can injure? 3. Joy in God is well grounded, because of what God has done for the believer. Do we not delight in a deliverer? Here is an unspeakably great Deliverer; and has He been so at little expense? Following the great deliverance are many lesser deliverances; both temporal and spiritual. 4. Joy in God is well grounded, because of what God is now doing for the believer. Do we not rejoice in a healer? 5. Joy in God is well grounded, because of what God will yet do for His people. He will make all things work together for their good. 6. Joy is well grounded, on account of what God has provided for the believer, and on account of what He is to the believer. He has righteousness in Him, and also strength, counsel, provision, and promises. And He is the portion of the believer; a sure portion; an enduring portion; a never-failing portion; an unchangeable portion; and a satisfying portion. II. TO POINT OUT SOME PROPERTIES OF JOY IN GOD. 1. It is a supernatural joy. It springs not from the world, but is derived from above. 2. It is a real joy. Earthly joys have no substance. They cause a momentary flow of spirits, but they only skim the surface of the heart, and do not take full possession of it. There are degrees in the Christian's joy. 3. It is a joy which this world can neither give nor take away. 4. It is a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. 5. It is an everlasting joy. In consideration of the nature and grounds of joy in God, we invite believers to lift up the hands that hang down. Be not cast down on account of the trials of life. (*A. Ross, M.A.*) *Religious joy surmounting temporal adversity* :—That the world is insufficient for our happiness, who does not confess, or, at least, who does not feel? The insufficiency of external objects to furnish the soul with rational fruition or exercise, is demonstrated in the disappointment of those who have made the acquisition of those objects the chief study of their lives. Were they ever content? Things earthly are too fluctuating to be built on with

assurance. They want stability, and leave those who rely on them, in a little while, destitute and spoiled of peace. The Christian has something more solid and unchanging on which his soul reposes. Let none imagine that these sentiments were peculiar to Habakkuk, or may be entertained only by an eminent few among the saints; by prophets, apostles, or men favoured with special distinctions from above; for there is not a reconciled sinner at this day upon earth, who, in the exercise of faith, love, and hope, may not and will not cherish and express sentiments essentially similar. Ye on earth who have known the Lord, fail not to exercise your souls in the same way as the prophet. (*J. Sieveright, A.M.*)

Joy amidst earthly sorrow:—The sentiment is—That no extremity of earthly sorrow should prevent the Christian rejoicing in the God of his salvation. 1. There is implied in the adoption of this truth, a firm belief in the superintending providence of God. Could we set aside the doctrine of a particular providence, the circumstances of life would change their character. Affliction would double her sorrows, and prosperity lose half her joys. 2. There is also implied a well-founded hope of interest in the God of salvation. The doctrine of providence would be a poor substitute to perishing sinners for the grace of the Gospel. Why should the Christian rejoice in God under affliction? It is not necessary to rob the world of any of its beauty, or to disparage the happiness it is capable of communicating. But it is the nature of riches to take to themselves wings and flee away. 1. Consider the sanctifying tendency of afflictions. Sometimes they are sent for the purposes of trial; to prove the integrity of our principles, and to bring into exercise our latent virtues. But for the most part afflictions are corrective, and not for purposes of discipline. They are either to preserve or to extricate you from danger. 2. Affliction does not injuriously affect our best interests. We live for a higher and nobler object than worldly wealth. 3. The Christian may rejoice because he knows his afflictions will have a happy issue. The transitory character of suffering is powerfully calculated to sustain the mind under it. 4. In every conceivable extremity of woe, God is an all-sufficient portion. The enjoyment of God will constitute the happiness of heaven. 5. The joy of the Christian in the season of affliction is the fruit of the Saviour's mediation. It was in the God of salvation that Habakkuk rejoiced. It is only in this character that He is an object of confidence and joy to us. The mediation of Christ is the ground of our hope towards God. But for His interposition, afflictions would have been unmixed evils. They would have possessed no ingredient of mercy, nor given any indication of kindness. (*S. Summers.*)

Spiritual joy:—Spiritual joy does not consist in mere placidity; it is not like the water, which in fertilising showers descends, and does not depend on our volition or agency; but it is like the water we draw from the well, there must be activity and labour. There can be no happiness without thought. Habakkuk thought of God, of His nature, His moral perfections, His covenant, His promise; he not only thought of God generally, but in the particular relation which He sustained to him. "I will joy in the God of my salvation." I understand Him in some measure, I feel an interest in Him and He in me. The mere fact of the existence or benevolence of God cannot make any creature happy; it is the conviction, the intelligent, deeply rooted, legitimate conclusion that He is our God, can produce joy. This was the case with Habakkuk, and must be so with every true believer. I. TRUE RELIGION (*i.e.*, ITS DOCTRINES, PROSPECTS, EMOTIONS) DOES IMPART JOY. Because—1. True religion gives decision to the mind. Indecision or dubiousness is always painful, and painful in exact correspondence to the value of the object to which it refers. 2. True religion imparts true liberty to the mind. While bodily bondage is a great evil, spiritual bondage is greater; religion alone imparts to man the charter of freedom—the moment man receives true freedom he is happy, and not before. (1) Freedom from eternal punishment. When we are brought under the influence of religion, we are led first to perceive our liability to it, and then to accept of deliverance through Christ. (2) Freedom from the government of depravity. The moment a man feels that he is dependent for happiness upon God, he feels desirous to know, love, and please that Being. (3) Freedom from the evils of affliction. Afflictions in themselves are evil, they make a man morose, unkind, bitter, despairing, devilish: it is only when applied by God that they become useful to the believer's mind. 3. True religion imparts exercise and expectation to the mind. In order to be happy, there must be a right end in view—the glory of God; proper rule to guide—the Bible; and right motives to actuate—love to God and love to men. II. THE NATURE OF

THIS JOY. 1. It is always pure. When does the soul experience it? Only when it is pure. This is a question not only of facts but of degrees; not only the pure mind can be happy, but it is happy in exact proportion to its purity. When is it enjoyed? When the soul is raised to contemplate holy objects. 2. It is personal and progressive. It is secret, "I will rejoice in the Lord"; and when seen, seen only in its effects. (*Caleb Morris.*) *Rejoicing in God*:—The language is that of faith, hope, patience, and fortitude. I. **THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY.** 1. It is spiritual. Arising from saving knowledge of God: from pardon: from adoption: from the habitual indwelling of the Holy Ghost. 2. It is satisfying. The Almighty is suited to our capacities; adequate to our necessity; durable as our existence. II. **THE OBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN'S REJOICING.** 1. In the perfection of His nature, we rejoice in God. 2. In His works of creation, providence, and grace. 3. In His Word. 4. In His ordinances. III. **THE PARTICULAR SEASONS WHEN A TRUE CHRISTIAN CAN REJOICE IN THE LORD.** 1. In seasons of poverty. 2. In seasons of persecution. 3. In seasons of national commotion. 4. In the season of death. (*Homilist.*) *The prophet's joy*:—1. The sombre background from which the joy of the prophet sprang. 2. The sublime height to which the joy of the prophet leaped. Habakkuk supposes the loss of all things, and yet he had unwavering faith in God, and supreme love to God. (1) We may rejoice in the works of God's hand. (2) In the bounties of His providence. (3) In the amenities of society. But the highest joy we can know is to "joy in the Lord." His loving-kindness is better than life. (*Ibid.*) *Christian rejoicing*:—1. The conditions. "Yet." In spite of what verse 17 describes—apparent failure of our efforts for God, or apparent desolation of His cause around us. Deep reality of such trials. Success is to be sought and prayed for; we are not to ask for the discipline of failure. But it may come, and in one degree or another it will, in every deep Christian experience, whether as personal failure or as a sense of surrounding failure. On its external side the Lord Jesus Christ's work partook of the pain of failure. 2. The resolve. "I will rejoice in the Lord." The will is called up. Believers "will to do His will" only by His special grace preventing them; but they do really will, the act of willing is their own. We must not sit down passive, and wait for a sensible impulse. It will come through our own will when it comes. Let us, in this spirit, cultivate the habit of holy resolves, as well as holy desires. It is the joy of personal appropriation, of objective pardon and peace—"my salvation." Comp. Micah vii. 7 for a rich parallel. The soul, outwardly tried and tired, goes to Him who is "my hiding-place," and there is "compassed about with songs of deliverance" (Psalm xxxii. 7). 3. The result. Not selfish sloth. Some say "personal enjoyment of present salvation is selfish." On the contrary, it is the spring of deepest sympathy with souls, and of love-animated efforts for them. Personal joy compels affectionate work. (*Handley C. G. Moule, M.A.*) *Cheerful spirits*:—A woman who had had many sorrows and heavy burdens to bear, but who was noted for her cheerful spirits, once said in explanation: "You know, I have had no money. I had nothing I could give but myself, and so I made the resolution that I would never sadden anyone else with my troubles. I have laughed and told jokes when I could have wept. I have always smiled in the face of every misfortune. I have tried never to let anyone go from my presence without a happy word or a bright thought to carry with them. And happiness makes happiness. I myself am happier than I would have been had I sat down and bemoaned my fate." *Cheerfulness*:—Cheerfulness is a duty we owe to others. There is an old tradition that a cup of gold is to be found wherever a rainbow touches the earth, and there are some people whose smile, the sound of whose voice, whose very presence, seems like a ray of sunshine, to turn everything they touch into gold. Men never break down as long as they can keep cheerful. "A merry heart is a continual feast to others besides itself." The shadow of Florence Nightingale cured more than her medicines; and if we share the burdens of others, we lighten our own. (*Sir John Lubbock.*)

Ver. 19. The Lord God is my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet.—*Strength, buoyancy, elevation*:—The expressions are of a highly metaphorical and imaginative character, but they admit of being brought down to very plain facts, and they tell us the results in heart and mind of true faith and communion with God. It is to be noticed that a parallel saying, almost verbatim, the same as that of my text, occurs in the 18th Psalm. I note that the three clauses of our

text present three aspects of what our lives and ourselves may steadfastly be if we, too, will rejoice in the God of our salvation. First, such communion with God brings—I. GOD TO A MAN FOR HIS STRENGTH. The 18th Psalm gives a somewhat different and inferior version of that thought when it says, "It is the Lord that girdeth me with strength." But Habakkuk, though perhaps he could not have put into dogmatic shape all that he meant, had come further than that, "The Lord is my strength." He not only gives, as one might put a coin into the hand of a beggar, while standing separate from him all the while, but "the Lord is my strength." And what does that mean? It is an anticipation of that most wonderful and highest of all the New Testament truths which the Apostle declared when he said: "I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me within." "My grace is sufficient for thee, and My strength is made perfect in weakness." Ah! do not let us deprive ourselves of the lofty consolations and the mysterious influx of power which may be ours. That is the first blessing that this ancient believer, out of the twilight of early revelation, felt as certain to come through communion with God. The second is like unto it. Such rejoicing communion with God will give—II. LIGHT-FOOTEDNESS IN THE PATH OF LIFE. "He makes my feet like hinds' feet." The stag, in all languages spoken by people that have ever seen it, is the very emblem of elastic, springing ease, of light and bounding gracefulness, that clears every obstacle, and sweeps swiftly over the moor. And when this singer, or his brother psalmist in the other psalm that we have referred to, says "Thou makest my feet like hinds' feet," what he is thinking about is that light and easy, springing, elastic gait, that swiftness of advance. What a contrast that is to the way in which most of us get through our day's work! The monotony of trivial, constantly recurring doings, the fluctuations in the thermometer of our own spirits; the stiff bits of road that we have all to encounter sooner or later; and, as days go on, the diminishing buoyancy of nature, and the love of walking a little slower than we used to do; we all know these things, and our gait is affected by them. It is the same thought, under a somewhat different garb, which the apostle has when he tells us that the Christian soldier ought to have his "feet shod with the alacrity that comes from the Gospel of peace." We are to be always ready to run, and to run with light hearts when we do. That is a possible result of Christian communion, and ought, far more than it is, to be an achieved reality with each of us. Of course, physical conditions vary. Of course, our spirits go up and down. Of course, the work that we have to do one day seems easier than the same work does another. Unless that is true, that Christianity gives to a man the Divine gladness which makes him ready for work, I do not know what is the good of his Christianity to him. But not only is that so, but this same communion with God, which is the opening of the heart for the influx of the Divine power, brings to bear upon all our work new motives which redeem it from being oppressive, tedious, monotonous, trivial, too much for our endurance, or too little for our effort. All work that is not done in fellowship with Jesus Christ tends to become either too heavy to be tackled successfully, or too trivial to demand our best energies; and in either case will be done perfunctorily, and, as the days go on, mechanically and wearisomely, as a grind and a plod. If we live in daily communion with God, another thought, too, will come in, which will, in like manner, make us ready "to run with" cheerfulness "the race that is set before us." We shall connect everything that befalls us, and everything that we have to do, with the final issue, and life will become solemn, grave, and blessed, because it is the outer court and vestibule of the eternal life with God in Christ. The last of the thoughts here is, communion with God brings—III. ELEVATION. "He will make me to walk upon my high places." One sees the herd on the skyline of the mountain ridge, and at home up there, far above dangers and attack; able to keep their footing on cliff and precipice, and tossing their antlers in the pure air. One wave of the hand, and they are miles away. "He sets me upon my high places." Communion with God does not only help us to plod and to travel, but it helps us to soar. If we keep ourselves in touch with Him we shall be like a weight that is hung on to a balloon. The buoyancy of the one will lift the leadenness of the other. Are you and I familiar with these upper ranges of thought and experience and life? Do we feel at home there more than down in the bottom, amongst the swamps and the miasma and the mists? It is safe up there. The air is pure; the poison mists are down lower; the hunters do not come there; their arrows or their rifles will not carry so far. It is only when the herd ventures a little down

the hill that it is in danger from shots. But the elevation will not be such as to make us despise the low paths on which duty—the sufficient and loftiest thing of all—lies for us. Our souls may be like stars, and dwell apart, and yet may lay the humblest duties upon themselves, and whilst we live in the high places, we “may travel on life’s common way in cheerful godliness.” So we may go on until at last we shall hear the Voice that says, “Come up higher,” and shall be lifted to the mountain of God, where the living waters are, and shall fear no snares or hunters any more for ever. (*A. Madaren, D.D.*) **And will make me to walk upon mine high places.**—*High places*:—“High places” are the best things in life and experience. They lift a man up to God. I. **HIGH PLACES OF VISION.** On a mountain we see more clearly. There are seasons when we get clear views of Divine truth, when they appear in a new glory. True, the revelation is made,—it is all in the book. But so the landscape exists. Yet unless your feet ascend the high places it is as though it were not there. So the revelation is in the book, but you must get up the mount of vision to see it. II. **THE HIGH PLACES OF FAITH.** On “high places” we see things farthest, and so the mount of faith. Not only is there nothing between you and the distant object, but through a rarefied atmosphere there is the least possible obstruction. Moses on the heights of Pisgah saw the goodly land of promise spread out before him. It is a beautiful type of faith. Gazing upon the land which lies across the “narrow stream,” a man may take out his title-deeds and contemplate his possessions. III. **THE HIGH PLACES OF ENJOYMENT.** In “high places” men breathe more freely, so pure and exhilarating is the rarefied air. So it is with the soul. Drink in the quickening, inspiring influence of the Spirit. “Yield yourselves to God.” “If you live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit.” Be spiritually minded. IV. **THE HIGH PLACES OF EXERTION.** On the heights a man can do more than on the low places of ordinary life. This is an image of spiritual life. God makes a man’s feet like “hinds’ feet”; that is, He makes the heavy, sluggish mortal into a light active being. To reach these heights we must climb. God will lead, but we must walk. If we would be great or high we must bear in mind they must depend on our own labour. (*Homilist.*)



INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH.

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

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

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

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

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

ZEPHANIAH.

CHAPTER I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to fall on evil times. I. THE SUBJECT OF DIVINE JUDGMENTS. 1. They embrace the whole earth. God's moral law is co-extensive with the whole world. God's commandments are one and the same all the world over. 2. It is just as true that, though universal, God's judgments are sometimes particular and special. "I will search Jerusalem." God begins at home. When God comes to make inquisition for sin He begins at the sanctuary. 3. The prophet leads us into yet inner circles,— "I will punish the men that are settled on their lees." The metaphor is drawn from the manufacture. By the expression two classes are intended—(1) The indifferent and ease-loving. (2) The carnally-minded. The man who settles down upon the sediment that is in him takes his tone and standard from the worse and not from the better part of his nature. 3. The innermost circle of all is occupied by those who say "in their heart, the Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil,"—the practical atheists of the Church who swear by the Lord, but relegate Him to a distant corner of His domain. II. THE METHOD OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS. "Search with candles." No half-measures, no compromise with evil will satisfy Jehovah. III. THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS IS NOT SIMPLY PENAL, BUT PURIFYING AND REMEDIAL. OUR God is just to forgive, loving to punish. Let the Lord work His gracious fatherly will in your life. (*J. D. Thompson.*) Punish the men that are settled on their lees.—*Religious indifference* :—We have it here—I. DIVINELY PORTRAYED. It is marked by two elements. 1. Carnality. "The men that are settled on their lees." The image is taken from the crust that is formed on the bottom of wines that have been long left undisturbed. It is marked by—2. Atheism. "They say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." This atheism is—(1) Not a theoretical denial of the existence of God. "They say in their heart, The Lord will not do good." They assume His existence, they have no intellectual conviction for or against. The most popular and pernicious atheism is that which theoretically admits the being of God. It is a stupid, stolid, thoughtless state of mind, and you cannot argue with it. This atheism is—(2) A heart misrepresentation of God. "They say in their heart, The Lord will not do good," &c. They have a God; but He is inactive, dormant, and concerns Himself with neither good nor evil. He is a mere fiction of their depraved heart. We have religious indifference here—II. DIVINELY DETECTED. "I will search Jerusalem with candles," or lamps. The language, of course, is highly figurative. Omniscience does not require lamps to light Him, or to employ any effort to discover. He sees all things. "There is not a word on my tongue but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." The language means, God's complete knowledge of this religious indifference wherever it exists. He sees it. —1. He sees it though it may not reveal itself in any palpable forms to men. Though it may conform to all the rules of social morality and popular religion, He sees it. 2. He sees it though it may be robed in the forms of religious devotion. It may attend churches, join in liturgies, sing psalms,—yet He sees it. III. DIVINELY PUNISHED. I will "punish the men that are settled on their lees." "Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out" (*Amos ix. 3.*) The religiously indifferent must be punished sooner or later. How? By burning moral convictions. Convictions—1. As to the absurdity of their conduct. They will one day have the miserable god of their own hearts and the God of the universe brought into contact within them. 2. As to the wickedness of their conduct. 3. As to the ruinousness of their conduct. "Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out My hand and ye would not; therefore I will laugh when your fear cometh, and mock at your day of calamity." (*Homilist.*) *Stagnant upon their lees* :—This starts questions for ourselves. Here is evidently the same public temper which at all periods provokes alike the despair of the reformer and the indignation of the prophet, the criminal apathy of the well-to-do classes sunk in ease and religious indifference. We have to-day the same mass of obscure nameless persons, who oppose their almost unconquerable inertia to every movement of reform, and are the drag upon all vital and progressive religion. The great causes of God and humanity are not defeated by the hot assaults of the devil, but by the slow, crushing, glacier-like mass of thousands and thousands of indifferent nobodies. God's causes are never destroyed by being blown up, but by being sat upon. It is not the violent and anarchical whom we have to fear in the war for human progress, but the slow, the staid, and the respectable. And the danger of these does not lie in their stupidity. Notwithstanding all their religious profession, it lies in their real scepticism.

Respectability may be the precipitate of unbelief. Nay, it is that, however religious its mask, wherever it is mere comfort, decorousness, and conventionality; where, though it would abhor articulately confessing that God does nothing, it virtually means so—"says so" (as Zephaniah puts it) "in its heart," by refusing to share manifest opportunities of serving Him, and covers its sloth and its fear by sneering that God is not with the great crusades for freedom and purity to which it is summoned. In these ways respectability is the precipitate which unbelief naturally forms in the selfish ease and stillness of so much of our middle-class life. And that is what makes mere respectability so dangerous. Like the unshaken, unstrained wine to which the prophet compares its obscure and muddy comfort, it tends to decay. To some extent our respectable classes are just the dregs and lees of our national life; like all dregs, they are subject to corruption. A great sermon could be preached on the putrescence of respectability,—how the ignoble comfort of our respectable classes and their indifference to holy causes lead to sensuality, and poison the very institutions of the home and family, on which they pride themselves. A large amount of the licentiousness of the present day is not that of outlaw and disordered lives, but is bred from the settled ease and indifference of many of our middle-class families. It is perhaps the chief part of the sin of the obscure units, which form these great masses of indifference, that they think they escape notice and cover their individual responsibility. At all times many have sought obscurity, not because they are humble, but because they are slothful, cowardly, or indifferent. Obviously it is this temper which is met by the words, "I will search out Jerusalem with lights." (*Geo. Adam Smith, D.D.*) *The danger of uninterrupted prosperity*:—God is omniscient. Why, then, should He represent Himself as searching Jerusalem with candles, as though there were the remotest possibility of any acts escaping His detection? These representations are simply intended to work powerfully on our minds. For whom is it that the Almighty institutes this close and piercing search? Not the perpetrators of any very secret and hidden sin; but men who are "settled on their lees," whom prosperity has lulled into a kind of practical atheism, so that they deny the providence of God or His interference in human affairs. God would not employ this strong figure if there may not be a great deal of this sensual indifference, this haughty indolence, even in those in whom prosperity may not seem to us to have acted injuriously.

I. THE NATURAL TENDENCIES OF A STATE IN WHICH THERE IS NO ADVERSE CHANGE. Take the case of a man on whom, from his youth up, everything has seemed to smile. When there is not unbroken prosperity there is often a sudden tide of success. This may apply to both public and private life. To these the description "settled on their lees" may apply. Prosperity is really far harder to bear than adversity. It is a great touchstone, and marvellously exposes the weakness of man's virtues. There is a direct tendency in prosperity to the fostering and strengthening the corruptions of our nature. The more a man obtains, the more will he desire. The bent of our dispositions being towards the earth, if nothing ever happen to turn them from earth there is little ground for expecting that they will centre themselves on heaven. Prosperity has a tendency to keep men at a distance from God. A religious man may be prosperous, and prosperity not prove the grave of his religion; but the prosperous man who is yet a stranger to religion is amongst the most unpromising of subjects for moral attack.

II. WHAT ADVANTAGES FOLLOW UPON UNCERTAINTIES AND REVERSES OF FORTUNE. I. Change admonishes us of the transitory nature of terrestrial good. Every change, but yet more a succession of changes, speaks, saying, "Arise ye, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." It is a gracious appointment of Providence for most of us that we are not permitted to "settle on our lees." The great practical, personal truth is, the necessity, the paramount necessity, of moral renewal. To disciples the Lord presented the necessity of being converted. Regeneration is no argument against the need for conversion. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *That say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.*—*The unheeding God*:—There was widespread apathy and unresponsiveness, a temper which seemed to make the judgments preached by Zephaniah inevitable. Even those who had a theoretical faith in the supremacy of Jehovah looked upon Him as of little practical account in history. This apathetic temper miserably disqualified both for worship and reform. Zephaniah, like others of his goodly fellowship, demanded not only formal allegiance to the authority of Jehovah, but a thousand loyalities of the secret and the solitary thought.

I. The prophet reminds us of THE HABIT OF

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

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

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

Jerusalem were arriving at very great riches. Or it may signify a state of security; like wine settled on the lees, they have been undisturbed. "I will punish" should be "I will visit." The charge here brought against the Jews amounts to this—that their temper and practice were such as would not at all agree to the practical belief of a Providence. They thought and acted as if it were their real and professed belief that the Lord would do neither good nor evil, nor meddle with human affairs. This atheistical affectation of independency, and secret or practical renunciation of Divine Providence, is the fatal thing that generally overturned the empires, and impoverished, enslaved, and ruined the nations of the earth.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF A DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Maybe you already speculatively believe this doctrine, but the grand defect lies in the efficacy of this belief on your hearts and lives. We may argue from the perfections of God, and His relations to us. We may argue from our confessed obligations to religion and the worship of God. The testimony of Scripture is plain. New and unexpected witnesses may be found in the heathen,—such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Plato, Horace, Cicero, and various poets and philosophers.

II. THINGS IN TEMPER AND CONDUCT WHICH ARGUE A SECRET AND PRACTICAL DISBELIEF OF THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE.

1. Would there be so little prayer among us, if we were generally affected with this truth?
2. Is not the general indulgence of vice, and neglect of religion, a plain evidence of the general disbelief of a Divine providence over the country?
3. Is not the general impenitence, notwithstanding the many public calamities under which our country has groaned, a melancholy evidence of this practical atheism?
4. Is not the general ingratitude a plain evidence of the general disbelief of a providential government over the world?
5. How little serious and humble acknowledgment of the providence of God in our disappointments and mortifications is to be found among us.

III. THE WICKEDNESS OF THIS ATHEISTICAL TEMPER AND CONDUCT. To deny the agency of providence is the most daring rebellion against the King of heaven; it is to abjure His government in His own territories, in His own world which He has made. What unnatural ingratitude! What intolerable pride and arrogance! What impiety and insolence! This atheistical spirit is the source of all vice and irreligion. (*S. Davies, A.M.*)

Moral scepticism:—Beyond a doubt there is a great deal of moral scepticism in our own time and in regard to our own lives. And there is excuse enough, explanation enough, of this sort of moral scepticism when we look round at national and political life. We think of the Armenians, of a nation massacred. It passes by, it is half-forgotten, and God is silent. Where is the God of Judgment? Surely He does not care! "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." And from a number of other sources we may feel inclined to draw that same lesson. Of course, those who look deeper will tell us the reasoning is shallow. Look, they will say, at the very empire of the Sultan. It is, by the confession of all men, on its way to ruin. It cannot stand, simply because it is corrupt and vicious and cruel. The mill of God grinds slowly, but it grinds at last, sure and small. Yes, it is certainly true, if you look at any section of human life in the political field you may draw the conclusion that there is no judgment and no moral God governing the nation. It is not so if you take a long enough view of history down its long region. Where there is a luxury and an undue love of pleasure there you see the roots of steadfast industry, and where industry fails the nation fails. Where commercial dishonesty goes beyond a certain point, there the reputation and therefore the position of the nation suffers. Certainly there is always in national vice a tendency, an inevitable tendency, towards national decay. It is sin that is first the reproach and then the disaster of any nation. There is a tendency towards judgment, a tendency very imperfect at present in its manifestation, but even in the great national regions the tendency is there. You cannot, unless you are shallow-hearted, say that the Lord doth not good, neither doth He do evil. But let us leave the wide sphere of national life and think of this moral scepticism as it touches individual lives only. Here, too, the excuse for it is apparent enough. It is only sometimes that honesty appears to be the best policy. There are men whom we would not trust, because we believe they are hard-hearted. And yet they come to no abrupt or signal ruin; they seem to flourish as well as anybody else. There are moral collapses, disgraceful, disgusting to our moral sense, and yet a little while, and without any appearance of repentance, simply by lapse of time, the subjects of them seem to creep back into respectability or even credit. There are struggles, persevering as it seems, against vice and sin which never seem to become effectual or to succeed. The Lord in the region of

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and kingdoms of the earth. No question more frequently and deeply frets our hearts than this,—What is the meaning, what the intention of the innumerable miseries by which we are tormented? What is the true function of the sufferings of which the world is full? The best answer is this,—The miseries of men are intended to purify and elevate them, to make them perfect. Springing from their sins, they are designed to correct their sins, and to lead them to the love and pursuit of righteousness. God deals with us as the goldsmith deals with virgin ore. He tempers it with an alloy, and thus makes it hard enough to endure “the file’s tooth and the hammer’s rap,” and the keen edge of the graver. When the work is done, he washes it in “the proper fiery acid,” which eats out the base alloy, and leaves the pure gold untouched. No grain of the precious metal is lost; but its value is indefinitely enhanced by the artistic labour bestowed upon it. And thus God deals with us. The miseries and calamities which come upon us are but as the edge of the graving tool, the rap of the hammer, the grating teeth of the file. By these He gradually and patiently carries out His conception of us, His purpose in us. And at last, like the fiery acid which separates the base alloy from the pure gold, death comes to divide the carnal in us from the spiritual, and to reveal the beauty and the value of the character which the Divine Artist has wrought in and upon us. “Cure sin, and you cure sorrow,” say the reason and the conscience of man. And “the sorrow comes that the sin may be cured,” says the Word of God. The mercy of judgment is the prophet’s theme in the verse before us. To the image of the final clause of the text—they shall “serve God with one shoulder”—attention is now directed. The image the prophet had in mind was that of a number of men bearing a single burden. If they are to bear it without strain or distress, they must walk with even or level shoulders, no one of them shirking his part of the task, each of them keeping step with the rest. They must stand and move as if they had but “one shoulder” among them. Only thus can they move freely and happily, and make the burden as little burdensome as possible to each and all. The law of God is a burden which all men have to bear; it rests on the shoulders of the whole world. Men can only bear it without strain or distress of spirit as each of them freely assumes it, as they all help each other to bear it, as they pace together under it with a happy consent of obedience.

I. THE DIVINE LAW IS A BURDEN WHICH MEN ARE RELUCTANT TO ASSUME. Does that need proof? Do we not ourselves find it hard to cross our wills, in order to adopt the pure and steadfast will that rules the universe? The will of God is never so full of grace and attraction for us as when it is incarnated in the life of the man Christ Jesus. And yet even this is hard. To our self-will it is hard, and cannot but be hard, to submit even to the purest and tenderest will. Take any of the most distinctively Christian precepts, and there is that in us which resents and rebels against them. We delight in the law of Christ after the inward man; but we find another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind. We can only find rest as we impose a yoke on the flesh with its passions and lusts, and compel them to bear the burden of obedience to the higher law. In the flesh, or in the spirit, we must suffer. The only option before us is—in which? Of course it is the flesh that ought to be subdued and made to serve. Shall we let these weak wavering wills of ours be the sport of the impulses, now good and now evil, which rise within us, and try to be content with yielding at one time to the flesh, and at another time to the spirit? We *must* get unity into our life.

II. THE TRUE FREEDOM CONSISTS IN A WILLING ASSUMPTION OF THIS BURDEN, A CHEERFUL AND UNFORCED OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE LAW. Doing the will of God from the heart. Sooner or later self-will makes us hateful both to ourselves and to our neighbours. It renders us incapable both of social and of spiritual life. Let a man acknowledge no higher will than his own, no law which he is bound to obey, and he becomes a burden to himself and to all about him. We must take up some burden; we must bear some yoke. All we can do is choose the law to which we will yield. The law of God it will be wise for us to accept. This is the law which really rules in human affairs. If we would enter into a true security and an enduring rest, we must make His will our will. It is not enough that we *yield* to the will of God; we must heartily and cheerfully adopt it if we are to be free. Obedience involves self-denial, self-sacrifice. There is but one way in which we can make the hard yoke easy, and the heavy burden light. It is the excellent way of charity, of love. When a true and pure affection has been kindled in the soul, the most difficult tasks grow easy.

III. THE HAPPINESS OF OBEDIENCE DEPENDS LARGELY ON THE UNANIMITY AND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ver. 16. Let not thine hands be slack.—*The Church of Christ exhorted to diligence*.—I. THESE WORDS SUGGEST TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THAT THERE IS A WORK TO BE PERFORMED. The caution "not to be slack" implies an injunction to be diligent, and is supposed to refer first to the rebuilding of the temple, and then to the spread of the Church of Christ in Gospel days. To ascertain the special work to be performed we have only to acquaint ourselves with the sacred character and required employment of the persons addressed. A people of holy character are called to exertion, and their work must be in unison

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI.

It is marvellous how much light has been thrown by recent discoveries in the East upon many passages of Old Testament Scripture. The bricks and inscriptions, the tablets and monuments, of Assyria and Babylonia, after having been hidden from the knowledge of men for thousands of years, have at last disclosed their secrets to us. They carry us back through the long dark vista of centuries. It is possible for us now to frame some adequate idea of that "great Babylon" which Nebuchadnezzar boasted that he had built for the house of the kingdom, and within whose walls many of God's captive people found a home when they were carried away from Judah and Jerusalem. It must have been one of the most splendid cities which the world has ever seen. In the centre of it rose the temple of Baal, towering stage above stage towards the sky, with a gigantic image of the god adorning its summit. The palace of the king stood not far distant, with its courts and corridors and famous hanging gardens. Round the city ran a wall, pierced by a hundred gates of bronze, and itself so broad that two chariots could pass one another without difficulty on the roadway which crowned it. And the great river Euphrates flowed through the midst of the houses and palaces and temples, with handsome quays and frequent drawbridges, and boats plying constantly up and down. Such was the golden city against which Isaiah and Jeremiah hurled their threats, the chosen home of luxury and refinement, and of a people who cared only for their own gratification. Its renown filled the earth. It exalted its throne above the stars of God. There was no other city half so proud or glorious. But it was doomed to shame and defeat, as more than one Hebrew prophet had foretold. Men have loved to think of Cyrus, whom the Lord raised up to do His own work of humbling Babylon and of liberating His captives from thralldom, as a worshipper of one God only. They have imagined that the chief motive which prompted him to attack the great city was his burning desire to destroy its idols. They have said that he allowed the Jews to return to their own land because, like them, he had but one supreme deity—the Ormazd, or good spirit of the Zoroastrian creed. But just as science, according to the poet, has withdrawn "the veil of enchantment" from creation, and has forced its visions of beauty to yield to "cold material laws," so the tablets and inscriptions have robbed Cyrus of this great honour with which succeeding generations had crowned him. He was a devotee, we are compelled now to believe, of the many gods of Babylon. His first care, after making himself master of the town, was to restore some of these gods to the shrines from which they had been removed by Nabonidos. He prayed for their help and blessing on all his enterprises. Bel and Nebo and the countless divinities of the Chaldean pantheon were revered by him with implicit faith.¹ But he was tolerant, too, of other creeds. Moreover, he was

¹ The following is part of the inscription on the cylinder of Cyrus, lately discovered in Babylonia by Mr. Rassam: "The gods of Sumer and Accad, whom Nabonidos, to the anger of the lord of gods (Merodach), had brought into Babylon,

anxious to ingratiate himself into the favour of the Jews, who formed no inconsiderable part of the population of the city. Therefore he dealt kindly with them. He published the decree which permitted them to go back to their native land and to rebuild the ruined Temple of Jehovah. He gave them many privileges which they had not previously enjoyed. The prophet Haggai was in Babylon, we may be sure, that day when Cyrus marched into it "with banner and with music, with soldier and with priest." No doubt he had more than once looked the great conqueror in the face. He lived in the period of the Exile—lived to see its ending, and to witness the dawning of the time appointed by the Lord to favour Zion. He is the earliest of those three prophets whose work lay after the long Captivity. I. I am to try to sketch THE PROPHET'S SURROUNDINGS. He was one of those who had known from personal experience what banishment and exile mean. He had remembered Jerusalem by the rivers of Babylon. And he had rejoiced with all the best souls in the nation when God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to perform His will. We can picture him journeying homeward across the bleak desert with the caravans of pilgrims. At times the only feeling of the travellers was one of overflowing joy. It was all like a dream to them, too good to be true—like the rush of the waters in the rainy season into the dry torrent-beds in the south of Palestine; like the reaper bearing on his shoulder the sheaves in summer which he had sown in the dull days of winter. But at other times there was grief mingled with the gladness. Tears of penitence and words of prayer broke freely forth. They came "with weeping and with supplications," as Jeremiah says, asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. Full of such thoughts as these, he and his companions made the long journey of four months' duration across the stony and arid desert. Guarded by God, they escaped the perils of the wilderness and the perils of robbers. They arrived safely in Jerusalem, the city of their fathers, the home and seat of their Lord. These pilgrims were not the whole of Israel. They were but forty-two thousand men, with their dependants.¹ The great majority of the Jews preferred to remain in exile. Many of them had gained high positions in the state which they could not easily resign; others had acquired property or had formed connections from which they were unable or unwilling to part; numbers were charmed and detained by the glory and greatness of Babylon—its streets, its pleasure-grounds, its storehouses, its busy river. They found it hard to prefer Jerusalem, a town grass-grown and desolate, to this splendid city. So the company of travellers who faced the desert, and made their way to the fatherland which held their hearts captive, was by no means so large as it might have been. And their souls must have been like to fail them when they saw Jerusalem itself. Its walls were crumbled into ruins. Its houses were mere wrecks, blackened with smoke and fire. Its Temple was demolished. Yet, sad-denying though all their surroundings were, they refused at first to be discouraged. This was the city, they reminded themselves, where David and Solomon had reigned; the city in which God had chosen to put His name. They began by erecting the altar of burnt-offering; and then they made preparations for rebuilding the Temple and the walls. But now trouble came. They had righteously refused to permit the Samaritans to aid them in what was really a holy work—the Samaritans who joined to their worship of Jehovah the worship of heathen gods. Thus they turned those Northern neighbours of theirs into bitter enemies, who annoyed them perpetually, who strove to thwart all their undertakings, who maligned and slandered their character at the Persian Court. The intrigues of these unscrupulous foes were only too successful. They persuaded Cambyses and Smerdis, who held the throne after Cyrus, to forbid the prosecution of the Temple works. For fifteen years everything came to a standstill. Worse still, during the long delay the zeal of the people for the sanctuary of God grew cold. They submitted to what appeared to them inevitable. They looked on the unfinished work and

I settled in peace in their sanctuaries by the command of Merodach, the great lord. In the goodness of their hearts may all the gods whom I have brought into their strong places daily intercede before Bel and Nebo, that they should grant me length of days; may they bless my projects with prosperity, and may they say to Merodach, my lord, that Cyrus the king and Cambyses his son deserve his favour."

¹ The whole company that returned with Zerubbabel consisted of 42,360 free men, or some 200,000 free persons—men, women and children, together with 7337 male and female slaves, of whom 200 were "singing men and women."

said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." They turned aside to selfish objects and pursuits, erecting rich and comfortable homes for themselves, and decorating them with that wainscot of cedar which had been reckoned hitherto the peculiar ornament of the sanctuary. It was a sad declension after the hopeful start which had been made. What Haggai thought during this time of retrogression we can have little difficulty in guessing. Surely it cut him to the heart. Surely he mourned for the lukewarmness of his friends. But at length a fresh morning broke and a happier day. Darius Hystaspis¹ ascended the throne of Persia—Darius, who was a Zoroastrian and a worshipper of one God. His sympathies were entirely with the Jews. He promulgated a new decree, bidding them resume the building of the Temple, and giving them revenues for the purpose. And, contemporaneous with the king's accession, came the prophetic activity of Haggai. After long silence the Spirit of the Lord impelled him to speak. It was the autumn of the year 520 B.C.—the month of September, we may say—and by December of the same year Haggai's work as a prophet was finished. But he accomplished a great deal during these few weeks. God gave him a reward which is often denied to men and women whose labours extend over a much longer period of time. II. Remembering that these were the circumstances in which he commenced to speak on God's behalf, let us pass briefly in review HIS PROPHECIES THEMSELVES. There have been some who have thought that, when he stood up to deliver his message to the people, he was already an old man. He refers in his words to the glory of the former house of the Lord, the magnificent Temple of Solomon which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. And it has been argued that he was speaking from his own recollections of that fair and noble structure. It may be a slender foundation on which to base an assertion of any kind, indeed, we can have no certainty about the matter; but I for one like to think of this prophet as going forth to do God's work in the twilight of life, with feeble steps and a face furrowed by age and trouble and hair white as the snow, yet with a childlike faith and a firm and resolute heart. Let this be as it may, however, we know that he appeared at a most critical juncture in the history of the people; and we know, too, that whether young or old, he justified the choice which God had made of him.² Four times over in this autumn of the year 520 the burden of the Lord was laid upon him. Four times over he went out to deliver his short and pregnant messages to his countrymen. The earliest occasion was on the first day of the month Elul, when the harvest had been quite gathered in. Then Haggai broke the silence, addressing himself directly to Zerubbabel, the Hebrew ruler of Jerusalem, and to Joshua the high-priest, but intending to reach through them the whole body of the people. In the name of the God of Israel he summoned his fellow-citizens to arise and work, encouraged by the manifest favour with which the new king regarded them. He did not spare their faults; like a skilful surgeon, he probed the wounds of the little commonwealth to the bottom. Let them look the facts, unwelcome as they were, in the face, Haggai said. Let them return to their first love and their first zeal. Let them resume without further delay the holy Temple work which they had laid aside so selfishly and sinfully (i. 2-11). A month later, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles—the most joyous and gladsome of all the Hebrew solemnities—Haggai spoke again. This time his words were full of good cheer; for his former message of stern rebuke had had an immediate effect, and had roused the people from their lethargy. Some of the builders, he felt, might contrast the new Temple with the old, to the disparagement of that about which they were now busy. There were among them grey-haired men, *laudatores temporis acti*, who passed slighting comments on each feature of the growing structure, and who told with fond regrets of the "exceeding magnificent" house that had once been there. Therefore the prophet urged the workmen to pursue their toil with unflagging earnestness, because God was with them in as real a sense as He had been with their fathers. He went further still. He assured them that the glory of the new Temple would outshine that of the old. It might not ever be so splendid outwardly. But the new sanc-

¹ That is, Darius, the son of Hystaspes.

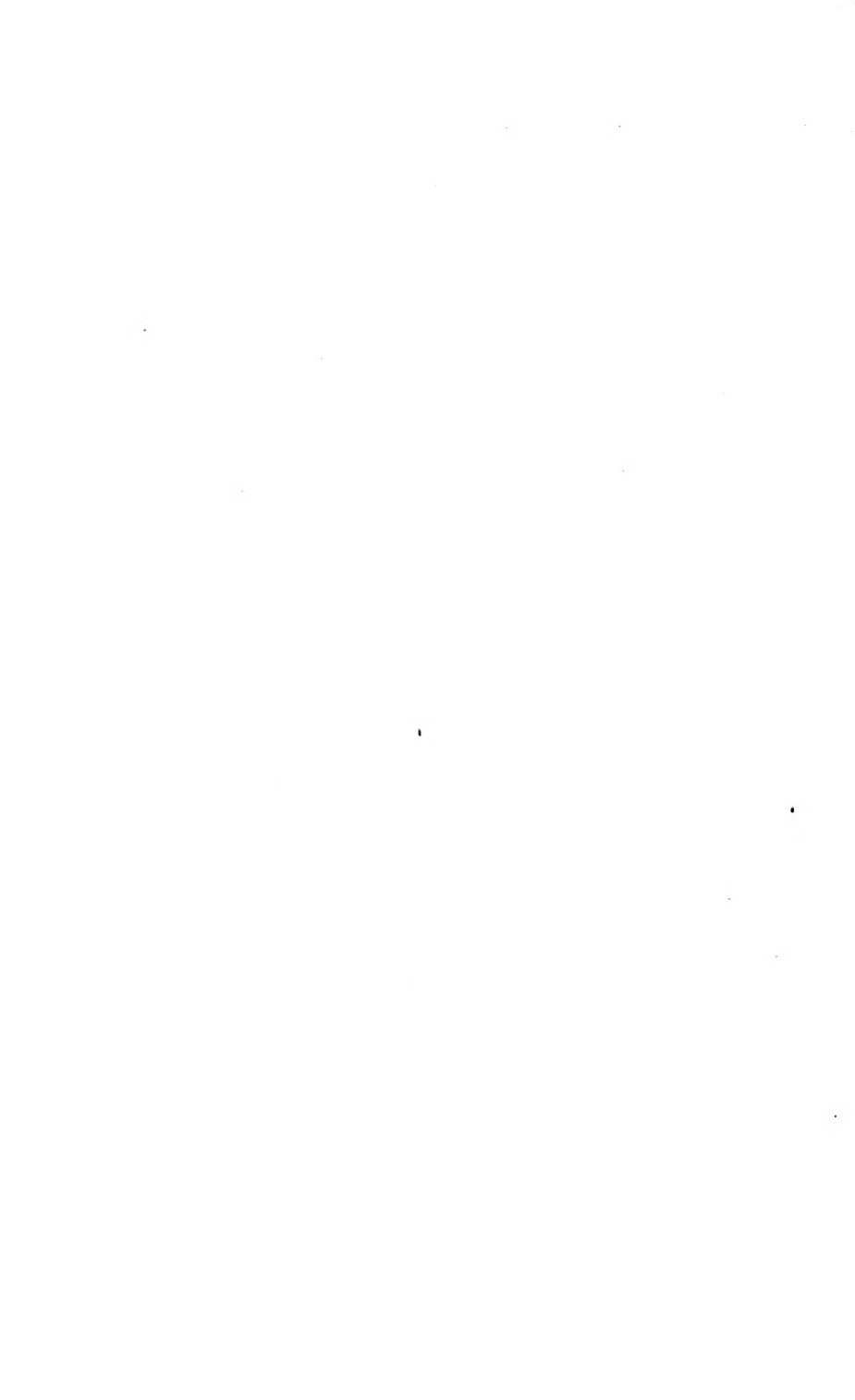
² Other conjectures with regard to Haggai are: that he was one of the men who were with Daniel when he saw his vision "by the side of the great river which is Hiddekel"; and that he was the author, along with Zechariah, of certain of the Psalms, notably Psalms cxlv.-cxlviii., which in the Septuagint and the Vulgate bear these prophets' names. "Haggai" means "festive."

tuary was to be invested with a spiritual majesty to which its predecessor could not lay claim. God was to do wonders of grace and power within its courts. Yet again, having performed his errand and uttered his brief message, Haggai was silent—on this occasion for rather more than two months. Then he spoke a third time. A new fear had arisen among the people—the fear that God was not about to bless them, even although they had given themselves afresh to Him. Dearth and blight and disappointment were still dogging their footsteps; the sky seemed as dark and stormy as before. The prophet of the Lord had a solemn lesson to teach his hearers now. By a reference to the Levitical law, and by a question put to the priests, he reminded the citizens that, while a holy thing did not communicate its holiness to whatever might touch it, a thing which was unclean contaminated all with which it came into contact. The speck within the garnered fruit moulders the whole basketful; the hand that is stained with blood incarnadines the multitudinous seas, “making the green one red.” Just so it had been with the Jews. Their good deeds had not compensated for their lukewarmness; but on the contrary, their lack of zeal for God, their sin in neglecting the Temple, had spread its moral pollution over every work of their hands. But yet they must not despair. God would not deal with them in mere righteousness and unbending justice. Nay, He would forget all their ingratitude. Because they were now seeking to serve Him, He would commence among them a new era of prosperity. “From this day—the four-and-twentieth day of the ninth month—will I bless you”—such was His pitiful and loving assurance. It had been all failure hitherto; it was to be only peace and joy and strength and fruitfulness henceforward (ii. 10-19). Once more Haggai spoke—a little further on in the same day. God bade him tell Zerubbabel that he need feel no alarm about the civil liberties of the people in the future. Disturbances and commotions of no ordinary kind were impending, but through them all the Jewish prince and those committed to his care would dwell secure. The grand words of the 91st Psalm would be realised in their history: “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling” (ii. 20-23). That was Haggai’s latest utterance.

III. THERE WAS NO NEED WHY HE SHOULD REMAIN LONGER IN THE PUBLIC VIEW. He had finished the task which God assigned him, and had finished it successfully. Critics have sometimes found fault with his style. They have said that there is little eloquence or poetry in it—that it is bald and rugged and uninviting. But work that is sharp and stern requires weapons of a similar sort. Haggai’s short emphatic sentences are exactly what was best suited to the occasion. They compelled attention, and not attention only, but obedience too. They pricked men to the heart. They kindled within them that godly sorrow which needeth not to be repented of. The best results followed the ministry of Haggai. He had no sooner uttered the first of his prophecies ere he saw it bear fruit. Moved with holy fear, Zerubbabel and Joshua and the people obeyed the call of God’s messenger. They flocked to the work which had been so long and shamefully neglected. Within a month the building of the Temple was being vigorously pressed forward. Few, indeed, of His ambassadors have had a harvest so speedy and so copious as Haggai had. Haggai is in truth one of the “last” who shall be “first.” How long he had to wait before God called him to utter a single word! How few his opportunities were even after his ministry had commenced! How very quickly his time of speech and action was drawn to a close! Yet he did a mighty and far-reaching work. He quickened a backsliding people to repentance. He restored their souls, and led them again in the ways of truth and holiness.

IV. Finally, let us draw from Haggai’s prophecy one or two TRUTHS SUITABLE FOR OURSELVES, who live at such a distance from him. 1. It seems to me that here we get no little insight into the cause and the cure of dull times. The Jews of the prophet’s day had to complain of depression and hardship. Their harvests had been poor; they could earn little, and what they did earn leaked imperceptibly away. And the preacher told them plainly why. It was because they had forgotten to give to God—to give Him their time and their thought and their substance. Let them contribute heartily to His cause, and their troubles would vanish; from that hour He would bless them and make them prosperous. Do not we require the reproof? 2. Haggai teaches us, too, not to despise our own generation and the work that is being done in it. He condemned the men who spoke of the glory

of Solomon's Temple as if it surpassed altogether that of the later house ; he told them that God would do greater things in the new sanctuary than in the old. The tendency which he combated lives among us yet. We remember the deliverances of the past ; but we question whether there can be any such deliverances in the present. We are proud of the faith and struggles and achievements of our fathers ; but we doubt whether their descendants can ever come within sight of them. And it is good to recall the years of the right hand of the Most High—years long since fled. But it is wrong to speak as if God had departed from the earth to-day. He is active still. He is in intimate relations with mankind even now. He fainteth not, neither is weary. 3. This prophet tells us also that no amount of holy services will cleanse and renew us if we be ourselves unholy. The parable which he drew from the ancient Levitical law has this for its moral. Men are always prone to imagine that, if only they render to God an outward religion, it will atone for the blemishes and shortcomings and selfishness and sin of their lives. It is a fatal and wicked error. Our God looks beneath the surface into the inner man. He demands that we should rend our hearts and not our garments. He asks from us a simple and true and earnest faith in His crucified and risen Son. He bids us welcome His Holy Spirit into our souls. He will not bless us unless this is our attitude and character. Can we say that it is yours and mine ?
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THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

HAGGAI.

CHAPTER I.

VERSES 1, 2. Came the Word of the Lord by Haggai.—Duty revealed.—The grand subject of the whole chapter is duty. Duty revealed, duty postponed, duty vindicated. These two verses direct us to the revelation of duty. Here we have—(1) The time of its revelation. Every duty has its time, every true work has its hour. (2) The organ of its revelation. “Came the Word of the Lord by Haggai.” (3) The order of its revelation. Haggai had to deliver the message to men nearest to him, with whom he was most identified, and the men too who had the most power in influencing others. **I. DUTY IS THE BURDEN OF DIVINE REVELATION.** The great purpose of Haggai’s mission was, in the name of God, to urge his countrymen to the fulfilment of a work which was morally incumbent on them, namely, the rebuilding of the temple. What was the burden of Haggai’s mission is in truth the burden of the whole Divine revelation—duty. It contains, it is true, histories of facts, effusions of poetry, discussions of doctrine; but the grand all-pervading substance of the whole is duty; its grand voice is not merely to believe and feel, but to do; it regards faith and feeling as worthless unless taken up and embodied in the right act. It presents the rule of duty, it supplies the helps to duty, it urges the motives to duty. This fact shows two things—1. That the Bible studies the real well-being of man. Not an assemblage of beliefs and emotions, but an assemblage of acts and habits. The fact shows—2. That unpractised religion is spurious. **II. DUTY IS INCREASED BY SOCIAL ELEVATION.** This is implied in the circumstance that Haggai went directly with the message from God to the most influential men in the state, to “Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest.” This fact serves two purposes. 1. To supply a warning to men in great places. 2. A lesson to ministers. Let the ambassadors of heaven carry their messages first, if possible, to men in authority. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 2. This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.—Church extension.—The people said this, because they thought the undertaking too great, too arduous, too expensive for a nation circumstanced as they were. These returned captives were but a small remnant of the population of the land. They had not yet fully established themselves in their own habitations. They had formidable enemies around them, bent upon impeding their work. They were labouring at present under extraordinary distress, from the failure of their vintage and their crops; and therefore, though they admitted that the work was one needful to be done, they said, “Not yet; not in these days.” How many good works are put by by being put off! How much of the business we are sent into the world to do is not done, under pretence that it is too soon to set about it. But the prophet shows this people that their present poverty and distress were sent by God as a chastisement for their past negligence, and a warning as to their future course. The poverty which they thought to prevent by not building the temple, God brought upon them for not building it. Having thus opened to them the nature of God’s dealings with them, he calls upon them to reflect upon them.

“Consider your ways.” Then he urges upon them the immediate duty of amending their ways—“Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house”; and adds also the promise of encouragement—“And I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.” The message and exhortation of the prophet were not in vain. The message was given on the first day of the sixth month, and on the four-and-twentieth day of the month the people were at work. When the Jews were led, on account of feebleness and poverty, to neglect their duty in the restoration of the temple, God visited and chastised them with the increase of that very distress which was the excuse for their sloth; and though they misunderstood the lesson, He withdrew not His hand till, under the teaching of the prophet, they had learnt its meaning. Has no similar working of Almighty wisdom developed itself in our case? When we have been led to forgetfulness of our duty to God, not by distress, but by the full-fed arrogance of worldly prosperity, has not He drawn for us lessons of chastisement out of that which has been the very cause of our sin? Our great manufacturing and commercial towns are the offspring, the development, the very characteristic embodiment of the sort of prosperity which God has permitted a careless nation to work out for itself. And if such prosperity be a blessing, may we not well question whether the Almighty have not brought upon us the last and worst denunciation of prophetic word, and “cursed our blessings because we have departed from His ways”? Now at length the conviction seems to be slowly forcing itself upon us, that our disabilities are so great because in building up our social fabric we have omitted the temple of God. These are the providential chastisements with which God corrects a nation, which has allowed a population to grow up estranged from Him—untaught in His Divine law. And as yet we seem to be in the state of the Jews when God first visited them with dearth and poverty for their forgetfulness of Him and His temple. We are making the consequences of our sinful neglect reason for its continuance. We need all of us to have our spirits stirred within us to do the work of God, yea, even those who may think that they are already awakened to a sense of their duties. When the foundation of the second temple was laid amid general joy and congratulation, the elders, who had seen the first house, “wept with a loud voice.” They were afflicted at the thought of the humbled state of the Church of God. But if man in his niggardliness now builds meanly, God can give to His temple a splendour of its own. The glory of the latter house may be greater than the glory of the former. Into the second temple came the glory of the incarnate Son of God. And into our temple now may come that spiritual presence which will give it even greater glory. Then be strong in that which your duty calls you to do, and strong in that self-denying devotion by which alone it can be done. And doubt not that God will prosper and bless the work so taken in hand. (*Bishop E. Denison, D.D.*) *Objections to religious work* :—For about four months Haggai was employed in delivering prophetic sermons to encourage the people to rebuild the second temple. The people were disheartened. They prepared their own houses, they were ceiled, and painted, and decorated, but the Lord’s house was permitted to lie waste. This neglect arose from a principle prevalent in the human heart, which leads men to fancy that an exclusive attention to their own selfish concerns is the only way to promote their interests; it does not enter into their narrow calculation that the first interest of man is to glorify God. Indifference to the cause of God has brought many a multiplied sorrow to the person, or community, who have manifested such a spirit; nor has it ever been known that zeal for God and love to His cause have passed unnoticed or unregarded by Him. . . . Every effort, of whatever kind it be, for the welfare of the souls of men, will be liable to objection. If we wait until all such objections are satisfied, we shall act like the fool, who stood by the side of the stream, waiting till all the water was gone by, that he might pass over. Objections arise from three classes of persons. The profane man is disgusted at the enthusiasm and madness of such attempts. Interested persons, whose narrow souls are incapable of a large grasp, have some certain line of action, but are alarmed at every new, magnificent, and extensive undertaking. Good and intelligent men sometimes suffer their minds to be prejudiced against particular forms of work. Illustration may be taken from objections to the “Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews.” 1. The first objection made to the attempts of this Society is this,—That, considering the present state of the Jews, the work of their conversion appears so very arduous, that success can scarcely be hoped for. We admit the difficulty, because our aim is not merely to produce a change of sentiment

concerning the Messiah, but to do an internal and spiritual work in souls. But as this is the work of God, we cannot and must not despair. The power belongeth unto God, and He has promised to work by His servants. 2. Another objection is this,—The time for the conversion of the Jews is not yet come, because the fulness of the Gentiles is not yet brought in. But Christ has said it is not for us to know times and seasons. If I do not know the time, how can I say that it has not come? We are to be guided, not by what God has delivered as a prediction, but by what He has enjoined as a duty. 3. Others are ready to say, Is there anything in the state of the Christian Church at present that flatters us with peculiar hopes of success respecting the Jews? While Christianity continued pure and unsophisticated, there were many of the Jews converted. By what power were they converted? It was by that instrument which God always employs in the conversion of souls, the pure testimony of Jesus. When the Gospel lost its purity and simplicity, the power of preaching was lost also. The inquisition compelled many Jews to become Christians in name. True, when the Church was reformed, little was done for the Lord's ancient people. Little could be done, because party spirit, sectarian bigotry, narrowness of mind crippled and enfeebled all their efforts. 4. It is said a difficulty arises because the Jews find we want to convert them to some particular sect. 5. It is said that the present state of the Jewish nation is specially unfavourable to the reception of Christianity. But these difficulties are not likely to vanish of themselves, if we take no pains to lessen them. 6. It is also said that the plans of this Society are utopian, for where are their means? 7. It is said, There is no door open; wait till God opens a door in His providence, and then go forward. The way to get further opportunity is to seize and use the present. 8. It is said, What right have you to interfere with the religion of the Jews? If we have a *better*, we must share it with others. Other objections are that this Society is actuated by interested motives; that the Jews have to be bribed to make a Christian profession; that none but poor Jews are turned from their ancient faith; that all Jews are impostors; and that this Society uses unjustifiable means. (*E. J. Jones.*) *Procrastination*.—The Lord was displeased with this people for their demur. They should have obeyed the command given them at once and earnestly. The prophet expostulated, and his expostulation was not in vain. I. A REJOINDER WITH WHICH MANY OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR. Such and such things are presented for your consideration, and they are presented kindly and intelligently. And you admit the importance of the things. For example, you listen respectfully when the necessity is set before you for sorrow for your personal sin. Yet, when you have admitted this necessity, you quietly say, "But I must be excused at present—not now—the time is not come." Again, you give heed when the minister points out the necessity for the abandonment of sin. But, many and many a time, when the effort has been made to urge the actual relinquishment of bad habits—the immediate, continuous, and permanent abandonment of them, you have said, "What a case that is!" Well, what then? "Ah! but you must be excused at present. Not now. The time is not yet!" Again, how respectfully you listen when the minister points out the necessity for the forgiveness of sin. It is shown you that however deep may be the sorrow, and however complete and entire may be the abandonment of sin, there is the sin after all; there is the sin, with its pollution, on your conscience; and there is the sin, with its guilt, waiting settlement in the book of God's remembrance. That guilt is to be cancelled; that pollution is to be cleansed. But what was the upshot in this case of pleading? "We must be excused for the present. Not now. The time is not yet." Again, how respectfully you have listened when the effort has been made to show the necessity for co-operation in counteracting sin. Yet this has been met by the same procrastinating response. II. CERTAIN REASONS WHEREBY YOUR REJOINDER IS JUSTIFIED. "The time is not yet." Why not? 1. The answer from some of you is that your situations are especially unfavourable to a religious life. 2. Others say they are so entirely absorbed with secular avocations and with worldly care. 3. Others say, Oh, my passions and predilections are so entirely beyond my control. 4. Others say, I have never yet been visited by any overpowering communication from on high. And all the time you admit that sin shall be confessed and abandoned, that forgiveness shall be solicited, and that you should take your place amongst those who, in God's name, are attempting to counteract sin. III. HOW UTTERLY UNWARRANTABLE, AND HOW UTTERLY UNSOUND YOUR JUSTIFICATION IS. If there is a commandment in this book that is imperative, it is the commandment to be sorry for sin.

If there is a duty incumbent, it is the duty of abandoning sin. If there is an obligation paramount, it is the obligation to seek, through Christ, the forgiveness of sin. If there is a responsibility brought to bear upon human intelligence by the Divine authority at all, it is the responsibility to take your place on the Lord's side. Your reasons are indefensible, untenable. I pray you to mark the untenableness, and to have done with them. (*William Brock, D.D.*) *Not yet* :—The cause of God, in all ages, suffers more from its professed friends than from its open foes. It was the selfishness, sloth, carelessness, and apathy of the Jews which caused the work to cease, after the foundation had been laid. So it is now. If I had a Church of two hundred communicants, all of whom were constantly meeting every claim which they constantly acknowledge, and if I had grace to do the same, I should not be afraid that any opposition would be able to break our moral power over this community. It was not the Samaritan intrigue but the Jewish apathy, which permitted the temple to lie so long unfinished. The apathy, not the opposition. The address of the prophet is to those who admitted the claim, but answered, "Not yet." The work was to be done at some time, but "not yet." This describes the temper of thousands who crowd our Churches in this day. Orthodox but inactive. Your inactivity produces disastrous results, from which your orthodoxy cannot save you. Correctness of opinion and ruinousness of conduct may co-exist in the history of the same individual. A postponement of action, in things that are imperative at the present moment, is a denial by the conduct of that which the intellect affirms and urges. It sets the whole life on a contradiction, which weakens the powers and breaks the influence. 1. There is the subject of attention to one's personal salvation. There can be no controversy as to that. No serious attendant on Christian worship will deny that it is a man's duty to give serious attention to his soul. Yet how many are wholly neglecting the culture of their soul. They intend to concern themselves about this matter, but not yet. 2. "The time is not come," causes also the postponement of honest self-examination. Every reasonable man admits that it is of the utmost importance that every man know all about himself. Self-deception does no good. It is senseless to prefer a brief enjoyment of false security. But a strictly honest self-examination is painful. It is always a revelation of defects, often of deformities. Self-searching would lead to repentance, and faith, and a Christian life. 3. This same plea leads to a postponement of a public confession of Jesus. Christ naturally expects a public acknowledgment of my friendship for Him. It is His due. It is my duty. 4. Lastly, we come inside the Church. Professing Christians all unite in acknowledging that the greatest things should be done for Jesus. Why are not those things done by us? Because we are the people who say, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." There are three influences producing in us this injurious spirit of procrastination. (1) We exaggerate the difficulties. (2) Our covetousness. (3) A disposition to wait until all things are ready. No experience seems able to cure men of this propensity. There probably never was an undertaking of any magnitude for which all things were completely ready. If all the great improvements of the age had been held back until all things were ready, they never would have been brought forward. They have had to fight their way. How many evils come of procrastination, especially to those who admit that what they put off must certainly be done. How it deadens the conscience by blinding the senses, and blunting the sensibilities! This spirit of procrastination sets us in opposition to God's plan, which must be the best plan. God's time is now. There never will be a time for coming to Jesus better than this time. Do not put it off. Let not selfishness, covetousness, or sloth, make you postpone. Your return to God, your acknowledgment of Jesus, your new life must begin in some now; oh, for the sake of your peace, and growth, and everlasting happiness, let it be this "now." (*Charles F. Deems, D.D.*) *Waiting for the right time* :—1. It is a fearful though usual sin in the Church, when that which is the principal fruit and end of all their deliverances, and a chief means of their happiness, and which they seemed to esteem most when they wanted it, is most neglected when they are delivered, and have occasion to testify their affection and thankfulness: such was the building of the temple to this people, and yet this "house lies waste." 2. It is a most dangerous way of sinning, when the sinner pretends affection to God, when he wrongs Him and His matters most, and when he thinks himself able, by fair pretences, to excuse, if not to justify his way: so did this people sin, alleging no disaffection, but that "the time is not come," &c. 3. As the Lord may permit very great obstructions to be laid in the way of

a work which yet He will carry on; so a people, who do not openly disaffect the work, may sinfully concur in obstructing of it. This they do—(1) When they are not sensible of obstructions in the way, but are soon hindered. (2) When they neglect or pass from a known duty upon any pretence of providence, or God's secret will. (3) When they are hindered from their duty in advancing the work of God by any hazard whatsoever. (4) When they look for times wherein there shall be no difficulties, but all advantages for doing God's work in, and in expectation of such times do lie from present duty. (5) When the true cause of men's negligence, which layeth many a lion in the way, is their love to their own things and private interests. 4. Men's own consciences, when they speak impartially, will convince them of heinous sin, when they study to promote their own interest, to the neglect of God's affairs. 5. A people's sinful negligence in God's matters, though times were never so perilous, renders them contemptible, whatever their privileges be, and provokes God to bring them down to know themselves better. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Duty adjourned*:—"The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." They do not question the desirableness or the obligation of the work. During the captivity, we are told elsewhere, that they hanged their "harps upon the willows," and wept when they "remembered Zion." Often, perhaps, in those circumstances did they resolve, should they ever be restored, to rebuild that temple which was the glory of their land; but now that they are there on the spot, and the ruins lying before them, their ardour is cooled, and they say, "The time is not come." I. COWARDICE. They did not say, "We will not build the temple, we will leave it to remain in ruins," they were too cowardly for that. Their consciences rendered them incapable of making such a decision. Men who neglect duty are too cowardly to say, "We will never attend to it, we will never study the Scriptures, worship God." 1. Sin is cowardice. 2. Sin is cowardice because conscience, the truly heroic element, is ever against it. II. SELFISHNESS. They set to work for their own private interests. 1. Selfishness is a perversion of self-love. 2. Selfishness is fatal to self-interest. III. PRESUMPTION. "The time is not come." How did they know that? Were they judges of times and seasons? Are they imperious enough to plead providence as a patron of their disobedience? "Go to, now, ye that say to-day and to-morrow." 1. Such presumption is always guilty. It implies that we know better than our Maker about times and seasons. 2. Such presumption is always perilous. It treads upon an awful precipice. (*Homilist.*) *Excuses for neglecting religious duty*:—"While the people were taking care of themselves, and consulting their own interest, the building of the temple was neglected. That the temple was not built till the reign of Darius, was occasioned by the fact that the prefects of Cyrus gave much annoyance to the Jews, and Cambyses was most hostile to them. But when liberty was restored to them, and Darius had so kindly permitted them to build the temple, they had no excuse for delay. It is however probable that they had then many disputes as to the time; for it may have been, that they, seizing on any pretext to cover their sloth, made this objection,—that many difficulties had occurred, because they were too precipitate, and they had been thus punished for their haste, because they had rashly undertaken the building of the temple. And we may also suppose that they took another view of the time as having not yet come, for easily might this objection occur to them: "It is indeed true that the worship of God is to be preferred to all other things; but the Lord grants us this indulgence, so that we are allowed to build our own houses; and in the meantime we attend to the sacrifices. Have not our fathers lived many ages without a temple? God was then satisfied with a sanctuary; there is now an altar erected, and there sacrifices are offered. The Lord then will forgive us if we defer the building of the temple to a suitable time. But in the meantime, every one may build his own house, so that afterwards the temple may at leisure be built more sumptuously." However this may have been, we find it true, that the Jews were so taken up with their domestic concerns, with their own ease, and with their own pleasures, that they made very little account of God's worship. This is the reason why the prophet was so greatly displeased with them. He declares that they said, "The time is not yet come to build the house of Jehovah." He repeats here what the Jews were wont to allege in order to disguise their sloth, after having delayed a long time, and when they could not, except through consummate effrontery, adduce anything in their own defence. We however see that they hesitated not to promise pardon to themselves. Thus also do men indulge in their sins, as though they could make an agreement with God, and pacify Him with some

frivolous things. We see that this was the case then. But we may also see here, as in a mirror, how great is the ingratitude of men. And how is the case at this day? We see that through a remarkable miracle of God, the Gospel has shone forth in our time, and we have emerged, as it were, from the abodes below. Who does rear up, of his own free will, an altar to God? On the contrary, all regard what is advantageous only to themselves; and while they are occupied with their own concerns, the worship of God is cast aside; there is no care, no zeal, no concern for it; nay, what is worse, many make gain of the Gospel, as though it were a lucrative business. No wonder, then, if the people have so basely disregarded their deliverance, and have almost obliterated the memory of it. As God's temple is spiritual, our fault is the more atrocious when we become thus slothful; since God does not bid us to collect either wood or stones or cement, but to build a celestial temple, in which He may be truly worshipped. When therefore we become thus indifferent, as that people were thus severely reprov'd, doubtless our sloth is much more detestable. The building of the spiritual temple is deferred, whenever we become devoted to ourselves, and regard only what is advantageous to us individually. (*John Calvin.*) *The duty of building the Lord's house* :—These people were glad to have an excuse for turning away from building the Lord's house to build houses for themselves. Though they found plenty of time and means for adorning their own houses in a costly manner, the Lord's house was left to lie waste. Are they the only people who have ever acted after this fashion? Have we not been equally slack in doing the Lord's work? We may not be called to build up the Lord's house of stone and mortar; but there is another work requisite, even soul work; and from that neither we nor any other Christians can be spared. Every Christian is called to bear his part in building up the Church of the Lord spiritually, by prayer and thanksgiving, by faith and righteousness, by holiness and love; for this is the Lord's true Church. The New Testament Church is the congregation of believers. But any hindrance, however petty, is now deemed insurmountable—any excuse, however trifling, is held to be perfectly valid—if it is only to keep a person away from Church. Even when we come to Church, are we all diligently employed in building the house of the Lord? It is not of the bodies of men, but of their hearts, and souls, and minds, that the Lord's house is built. When we come to Church, as members of Christ's congregation, we come, or at least we ought to come to Christ. Moreover, every Christian ought himself to be a temple of God. He is so already, as St. Paul tells the Corinthians; and he ought to become so more and more entirely. This should be the great work of his life, to build himself up as such, with the help of God's Spirit dwelling in him. This is our work—a long and laborious work—to fit all our thoughts and feelings for being built up into the house of God, by purging them from the untempered mortar of this world. When so purged, how are we to cement them together? By good works; by works of holiness and love. It behoves us, one and all, to make it the great work of our lives to build up the Lord's house, both in our own hearts and souls and minds, and in the congregation of His people. We must be careful to carry on both works together; for neither will prosper without the other. (*Julius C. Hare, M.A.*) *The waste house* :—One of the most palpable effects of the Fall is that it has led man to live for himself. Sin is essentially selfish, and one of the first effects of redemption is to make man live for others. Real Christianity always takes a man out of himself. Yet the Christian carries about with him a sinful body, which is always craving for indulgence. The Christian's constant danger is lest his Saviour's glory should cease to be paramount to every other consideration. Christ must be first, or the soul will find a want in everything. Observe the name God takes here—"Lord of hosts." When God is about to ask His people for anything, or to supply His people with anything, this is the name by which He generally addresses them in the Old Testament. Observe the sin of the people here. "The time is not come that the Lord's house should be built." It was not a denial of God's claim upon them, it was a putting God off. Is not *this* the sin of the present day? God asks for His place in the heart of the sinner, and the answer is, "Not yet." The sin of all, converted and unconverted, is that of putting God off. We have not the courage, the straightforwardness, to disallow His claim altogether. We add mockery to our sin by acknowledging the justice of a claim which we have inwardly determined shall never be met. While we are dwelling in our ceiled houses, and the Lord's house is lying in ruins, what is the consequence even in *this* life? The end of everything they did, these people missed. Christ is the end, the satisfy-

ing thing in all. Toil without Him must end in vanity. God reminds them of their disappointment in everything, and the cause of it. "Because of Mine house that is waste." What is this breath wherewith the Lord blows upon everything? The breath of His Spirit withering everything we do, because His house is in ruins. What is the Divine remedy? "Consider your ways." Pass in review your heart, your life, your daily history. Set about the duty of the hour, and put your heart into the doing of it. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*) *The judgment on neglecting to build the Lord's house*:—God is never content with confounding His enemies. He does not confound to destroy; He confounds in order that He may save. The courses by which He brings this purpose to pass are various. One of the commonest is the one set before us in the text. Seeing that the motive why we forsake His service is that we may give ourselves up to our own service,—seeing that self is the mask which Satan puts on, to lure us away from God, and that the baits with which he tempts us are the pleasures of sin and the charms of self-indulgence, God mercifully shows us the vanity of those pleasures, the misery and deceitfulness of that self-indulgence. He sends some heavy affliction to humble our pride, to prove to us that, in leaning on earthly things, we lean on a broken reed. Then, at the height of our distresses, He sends His messengers to explain their meaning and purpose. He sharpens the stings of conscience; He brings out the letters of the law, like the letters which the hand wrote on the wall of the palace of King Belteshazzar. These people regarded the earth as their servant, spread out beneath their feet for no other purpose than to do their bidding, to feed their wants, and to pamper their lusts. Wherefore God vouchsafed to show them that the earth was *not* their servant, but His; that it was not spread out beneath their wings to do their bidding, but His. If the sun and rain were locked up in heaven, the earth would yield no increase, notwithstanding all that man could do to make it. God's prophet bids the people "consider their ways," and that all God's dealings were designed to prove to them how, in the ways in which they were walking, although they were to sow much, they would reap little,—although they ate, they would not have enough,—although they drank, they would not be filled with drink,—that they might clothe themselves, but none would be warm,—and that the wages which they earned would be put into a bag with holes. All this God did, not in order to leave them in their confusion, but in order to raise them out of it. If they will arise and work, and build the house of the Lord, He will still take pleasure in it, and will be glorified in the house they shall build for Him. This message is also sent to us. It is a message of misery; but it is also a message full of warnings, a message of mercy following upon warnings, to the end that the warnings may not be misunderstood, but may be seen in their true light, and may produce the effect they were intended to produce. But the message is not merely sent to nations, it is sent also to individuals. No one ever gave himself up to the work of building the Lord's house, without allowing his heart to be distracted by the desire to build some house or other for himself. The message applies to us in all its parts. We, like them, have been delivered out of captivity. We have been called to the work of building up the house of the Lord who delivered us,—of building it up outwardly, whenever an occasion for doing so comes across us,—of building it up continually by joining with our neighbours in His worship,—and of building it up daily in our own souls. As we are like the Israelites in having this duty, so we are like them in neglecting it. Instead of doing the Lord's work, we do what we regard as our own work. But if self is the lord of the house we build, whatever the materials may seem to be, when the gilding is rubbed off, they are found to be cares, and jealousies, and disquietudes. Every house in which self is set up as master, is a house of death. It may seem full of life; but it is the house of death, of moral death, which is the first death, and always brings the other in its train. This must be the condition of those who neglect their duty of building up the house of the Lord. Whatever they do will be empty and unprofitable. Those who build up the house of the Lord always have enough. (*Julius C. Hare, M.A.*) *National religion*:—Great as any man's duties are which he is called to discharge, or great as his sins may be on account of their past neglect, he is not left either without the hope of forgiveness or the promise of succour. This passage was intended as a rebuke for the neglect of a duty seen and acknowledged. That duty was a pious and holy regard for the temple and service of the Lord. The neglect was that, while they were anxious about the splendour and comfort of their own dwellings, they suffered the Lord's house to lie waste. The fault lay not with the

people only, but also with their princes and rulers. Taking all the circumstances of this case into due account, the following propositions are offered for our due consideration—1. That rulers and heads of nations, being the servants of God, and bound to conform to His will, and to seek above all things to promote His glory, are as responsible to God for all their ways and works, both individually, officially, and supremely, as any other person whatsoever. But we live in strange times. Principles of the most dangerous character, and utterly subversive of all holy feeling and good government, are openly broached and boldly patronised in the grand assemblies of the nation. A double duty is therefore incumbent upon all who wish well for the nation's good, and for the true welfare of their fellow-beings. The mutual responsibilities of each, the governing and the governed, must be plainly and practically enforced, on the ground of the Divine Word, which is their proper authority. (1) We maintain that all men, everywhere, are accountable to God. All souls are in the hand of God. Man cannot be divested of this responsibility, wherever he may be placed, or however he may be circumstanced. (2) This obligation and responsibility rest with a far greater weight upon some. Where more is given, more will be required. (3) Rulers and heads of nations are as responsible in their individual capacity as others, and in their official capacity even more than others. (4) They are the positive servants of God. Not in the *saving* sense of the word, but in the *responsible* sense of the term. (5) Therefore rulers and heads of nations are under the positive, unvariable, and unchanging obligation of seeking above all things to promote the Divine honour and glory. Nothing can release them from these demands; nothing can lessen or alienate these claims. (6) They are as responsible to God for all their ways and works in their ruling or official, as they and others are accountable to God for all their doings in their merely personal or individual capacity. It is often said that the ruling power is above law, and therefore accountable to none. But this is a most dangerous doctrine, and calculated to lead to the most lawless licentiousness. 2. That they are bound, by every motive and consideration, both of alarm and encouragement, seriously to lay this to heart; to consider how the matter stands with them; and to inquire what may be its probable termination, both with themselves and others; whether in judgment or mercy; whether in the gracious approbations, or the heavy wrath of Almighty God. (1) Can any man with safety neglect the duties which God requires at his hands? (2) Must it not be a fearful thing to incur the displeasure of Almighty God? His wrath is like a consuming fire. (3) Will not God, in the final day of account, deal as impartially and justly with the mighty and great as with the humble and mean? (4) Can any man set aside the Divine authority, or nullify the creature's responsibility? (5) Will the Lord ever leave any man, who sincerely aims to do His will, without His help and blessing? (6) What blessings might not the exercise of such an authority, in such a manner, be the means of diffusing! Reflections—1. How needful is it that princes and rulers should be clearly informed of what God requires at their hands. 2. How careful they should be not to abuse the power with which they are charged! 3. How great must be the guilt of all who attempt to hinder such princes and rulers in the conscientious discharge of their duties. 4. How very far are we yet from that state of things which ought to exist. (*R. Shuttler.*) *Temporal consequences of sin*:—In God's dealings with His ancient people, we find the principles of His government in all ages of the world. God took no greater interest in the history of the world than He does now. He did not interfere more constantly in the affairs of men than He does now. The only difference is, men used to see the hand of God where we find no trace of it at all. In all the calamities and blessings of life they heard the voice of God. And God still speaks to us in all the events of life. We can find many philosophical reasons for them, but who ever hears the name of God in connection with them? This persistent denial of the government of God is one of the saddest phases of public life amongst us. The prophet tells the people that their poverty and distress are due directly to their selfish care for themselves, and their neglect of God's house. The underlying principle may be thus stated—neglect of the laws and claims of God, either in this world or the next, never results in any good. . . . In the particular direction which God gave concerning this temple, we may find the principles which should guide us in the erection of all houses for His glory and worship. We find a severe condemnation of that specially modern custom of lavishing wealth in increasing the luxuries and beauties of our private dwellings and public buildings, whilst we are content that the Lord should dwell in a house

scarcely equal to our granaries or our stables. . . . How easy it is to find intimations of providence against a work for which we are little disposed. Indolence, selfishness, a fear of the trouble and expense, were the real causes of the delay in building the Lord's house in Haggai's time. What unbounded faith people have in providence when providence seems to speak on the side of their own inclinations: but how deaf men are to the voice of providence when it contradicts their own desires! God says to these people, "Consider your ways." What have you gained by your neglect of My house? You thought by so doing to escape poverty, yet poverty has come. Have your selfishness and niggardliness produced the results you expected? God says nothing about the insult offered to Himself in this neglect. This is the final argument against sin, and the one which perhaps touches men most. Sin is a violation of God's law; but men care little for that. It is the basest ingratitude; but men care little for that. More still—it is the most consummate folly. The man who does wrong is not only a sinner, he is a fool. Consider,—what has sin done for you? Does sin answer your purpose? The laws of God are for this life as well as the next. The most sure way of securing prosperity and happiness is to acknowledge them. The most certain way to bring upon ourselves adversity and misery is to live in defiance of them. God's laws vindicate themselves now. Prosperity and happiness here are as much dependent on our acknowledgment of God's laws as prosperity and happiness in the world to come. What did this people's neglect of God's house imply, and how would this affect their material prosperity? 1. It implied the fear of a little expense. But niggardliness never pays. 2. It exhibited great selfishness. In time of disaster, who has the selfish man to fall back upon? Selfishness won't do in the world nowadays. In three different ways God may destroy our prosperity. (1) He may make our labour unproductive. (2) He may take away the power to enjoy what we have gained. (3) Our earnings may slip away as quickly as they come. Let me ask you again, What do we gain by neglecting God? What prosperity can we secure or enjoy without His blessing? Of what happiness have we such a firm grasp that He cannot take it away from us? What is our strength if we provoke the Lord to fight against us? Is it wise to forget God? God says, "He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul." (*B. G. Wilkinson.*) *Indolence*.—Indolence in the Lord's work is a great sin. Many a Christian crying out "Oh, my leanness!" had better be honest and cry "Oh, my laziness!" So much of an anomaly is an indolent Christian that Dr. Dwight gives the following testimony:—"Among all those who, within my knowledge, have appeared to become sincerely penitent and reformed, I recollect only one lazy man. And this man became industrious from the moment of his conversion." (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*) *Idle Church members*.—In a former charge, one Sabbath, I took into the pulpit the Church records, and I laid them on the pulpit and opened them, and said: "Brethren, here are the Church records. I find a great many of you whose names are down here are off duty." Some were afraid I would read the names, for at that time some of them were deep in the worst kind of oil stocks, and were idle as to Christian work. But if the ministers of Christ in Brooklyn, and New York, and in all the cities, to-day, should bring the Church records into the pulpit and read, oh, what a flutter there would be! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Shirking the burden*.—Thomas Highat lay dying. He was a foreman in a large ship-building yard in Greenock. There was a long heavy log of wood to be lifted, and he had taken his place along with the men under him to assist in the carrying. As the procession was moving on, one mean fellow who liked to scamp his work, dropped his shoulder and the load came down with sudden force upon the shoulder of Thomas Highat, who was not so tall. There was serious injury done, the doctor pronounced it fatal. As he lay on his death-bed, he said to his minister, the Rev. A. Davidson, "I ought not to be here just yet. It was because so-and-so didn't stand up to his burden." It is in many Churches as in that shipyard, that some are made to suffer seriously and needlessly, because the heavy end of the work is left to them—because certain of their comrades don't stand up to their burden. *Irreligious delay*.—1. Men are always prone to put religion off with scraps and leavings, and serve God with what costs them nothing. In the outward things of religion, they are much more disposed to work for themselves than for God; and if they have time that cannot be otherwise used, or funds that are not very current, to give them to the treasury of the Lord, and if any larger expenditure of either is urged, to plead that "the time has not come" to do this work. In

the inward things of religion the same spirit is shown. The young, the middle-aged, and the old, all alike procrastinate the great work, on the plea that "the time is not come," the convenient season that, like the horizon, recedes as we advance (ver. 2). 2. Our expenditures on ourselves, whilst we pretend to have nothing for God, will bear emphatic and fearful testimony against us. The carved ceilings and costly ornaments will have a tongue in the day of judgment (ver. 4). 3. No man ever gains anything by trying to cheat God. He makes a fool's bargain, bartering a real good for a perishing bauble, and losing at last even what he gained (ver. 6). 4. A careful pondering of God's dealings with us will often indicate to us God's will regarding us. The events of life are the hieroglyphics in which God records His feelings toward us, the key to which is found in the Bible (ver. 6). 5. Obedience to God is an advancement of His glory (ver. 8). 6. Disobedience to God will often, even in this life, issue in disappointment and disaster (vers. 9, 10). 7. God has not abandoned the universe to the sightless action of general laws, but is so related to that universe as to be able to direct its laws to the fulfilment of His purposes, whether in rewarding the good, punishing the evil, or answering prayer, without deranging or destroying the normal action of those laws themselves (ver. 11). 8. True religion manifests itself in fearing the Lord, and in obeying the voice of His servant (ver. 12). 9. The presence of God with a man is the best blessing he can receive, for it includes everything else (ver. 13). 10. God is waiting to be gracious, and will meet the returning wanderer, even before his hand has begun the actual work of His service (ver. 13). 11. Every good impulse, or reviving of religion in the hearts of men, is produced by the direct power of God, through the Holy Spirit (ver. 14). 12. Obedience to the commands of God will always end in a blessing, whilst disobedience will always end in a curse, if not in time, surely in eternity. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

Vers. 3, 4. **Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?**—*Church building*.—The decree of Artaxerxes prohibited the building both of temple and city, but it seems that the people had persisted, spite of the decree, in building dwellings for themselves, though no progress had been made with the temple. The mission of Haggai and Zechariah was to rouse the people to the long-neglected work, to reprove the indolent, and encourage the desponding. The excuses of the people, like those commonly of men who defer religious duties to more convenient seasons, were but marks of a secret resolve to escape, if possible, altogether from a labour which must interfere with more congenial pursuits. Our text contains the prophet's expostulation, meeting the excuse that the time was not come for building the Lord's house. The temple may not be indispensable in spiritual Christianity, but it is certainly valuable. There may be privileges attached to it which we have no right to expect elsewhere. We need not confound our case with that of the Jews, though we address to Christians the expostulation of the text, as if the change in dispensation had made no difference in its pertinence and force. Christianity, unlike Judaism, is not tied to places; its ordinances may be everywhere celebrated. Then what necessity is there, under this new and better covenant, for structures devoted to sacred uses, or what loss is it to us if "this house lie waste"? It is contrary to the established order of providence that miracles should be employed where the result might be accomplished through ordinary means. The propagation of Divine truth has been entrusted to the Church. The public ordinances are therefore indispensable; and suitable places for such ordinances must be provided. We can safely contend for the indispensableness, under the existing dispensation, of sanctuaries, or Churches, maintaining that cities without these sacred edifices would be cities that must ere long be wholly sunk in irreligion, and occupied by a population with no fear of God. We can no better spare our Churches than the Jews could their temple. In proportion as we allow any city, or any portion of our population to be destitute of the public means of grace, we fasten on that city or population something of the same religious incapacity as was fastened on Jerusalem, whilst its temple lay in ruins. The Jews are not blamed for having built their own houses, but for not having, at the same time, built the house of God. Wherever there is a community, there ought to be a house devoted to God. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Diligence in the work of God*.—I propose to excite you to greater diligence, and to a more fervent zeal in the work and cause of God. **I. AN EXISTING DEPRESSION IN THE CAUSE OF GOD.** There is a painful imperfection in the work of God as it exists in the present day. The

cause of God is by no means in the state that Christians desire. What are the scenes presented to our view in lands where Christianity is professed? In our own land, what do we see? What in other Christian and heathen lands? We are compelled to confess that the temple of God lieth waste. We are too apt to triumph: we are prone to forget the present state of things. We despair not; but we do not feel enough. **II. TEMPORAL GRATIFICATION MAY BE PURSUED TO THE NEGLECT OF THOSE EXERTIONS WHICH GOD SO JUSTLY DEMANDS.** These people were dwelling in ceiled houses, while the temple of God was in ruins. We see now wealth, talents, genius, property, fully used for self-interests, and estranged from the cause of God. Especially may be noticed neglect of claims of Christian missions. Viewing our efforts in connection with the claims of God and of men, we must surely confess that there are many claims not answered, many duties not fulfilled. Regard the text. **III. AS CHALLENGING THE EMPLOYMENT OF OUR VARIOUS TALENTS, AND URGING THE CLAIMS OF GOD.** 1. Consider the nature of those obligations under which you are placed by God, with regard to the services you are called to render. 2. Consider the peculiar nature of the system of the Gospel you have embraced. Is there not a sentence pronounced on all those who are ungrateful and disobedient? 3. Consider that, while there is not this energy in the cause of God, there is an amount, an awful amount of misery resting on your fellow-men. 4. Consider the prospect of success. Let then the vast importance of the work, and the consideration of the past neglect of it, urge you to exertion. (*James Parsons.*)

Ver. 5. Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.—*Preparation for self-amendment*:—The design of this prophecy is to persuade the Jews off from that slothful security in the neglect of their duty which had already exposed them to the displeasure of God. They had outward difficulties of circumstance, but their chief hindrance was their own neglect and dulness, their want of respect for God and holy things. It was this state of insensibility that God sent His prophet to bring them out of. His words here primarily import no more than that it was time for that rebellious people to observe and consider diligently of all their labour and pains, and the works of their hands, and see what it all came to. This, however, is not the *only* design. They were to consider with a view to amending their lives, and getting free of those sins which were causing God's displeasure. How much our case is like that of the Jews in Haggai's time. The temple we are now to build up, is the Church and body of Christ; not with stones and wood from the mountains, but with living materials, Christ being the foundation and chief corner-stone. The building up this holy temple consists in advancing the credit and honour of religion among men, and in discountenancing, in the course of our lives, and the whole tendency of our discourse, all vice and profaneness, and everything that is inconsistent with religion; and this, it is too certain, we have not had the courage and the constancy to do. We of this nation, too generally, have not been advancing the public interest, and the Protestant cause, as we ought to have done. The prophet's words are therefore applicable to us. **I. THE PERSON SPEAKING.** It is that Being who has furnished you with all the blessings you have enjoyed; who has been your continual safety and protection. He can never lay any commands on us but what are necessary for us, and highly tending to our own interest. He is infinitely wise, and so knows perfectly well what will conduce most to our interest and happiness. Other arguments there are, perhaps of more force than these. In the text He is called by that awful title, "The Lord of hosts," importing that He has a right to us and all our actions, because He created us and all things. **II. THE ADVICE OR COMMAND WHICH IS GIVEN.** "Consider your ways." A very plain and easy command. The original is, "Set your heart upon your ways." Observe, attend to, watch over all your actions. 1. Show the mischiefs of inconsideration. (1) We give ourselves up by it to the most stupid and insuperable ignorance imaginable. (2) We lay ourselves open entirely to the power of our lusts. (3) It subjects us to the tyranny and insults of our great spiritual enemy. 2. Some of the advantages and necessity of consideration. The blessed advantages of consideration can never be enumerated. It gives us strength and vigour in the performance of all our duties. It is the only means to furnish us with suitable arguments and victorious resolutions against every temptation and artifice of the devil. And as it suffers us to omit no duty, it effectually destroys and conquers every beloved lust and inclination. 3. Answer some objections by the devil

raised in our minds against consideration. (1) It is exceeding difficult and troublesome to be always upon the guard, and watching against ourselves. But the question for us concerns not the difficulty but the necessity and the duty. (2) To be always filled with notions of the power, justice, and vengeance of God, must needs make us very melancholy. But enter into religion aright, and you will soon find that, instead of melancholy, your souls will be filled with the truest and most satisfactory joy and life and vigour. (*John Gale, D.D.*) *The great importance in life of frequent reflection and self-examination*:—The faculty of reviewing our past lives carries with it an evident obligation upon all men to exercise it constantly and uprightly. It is a principle that implies in its very nature an authority over the whole of our conduct; and we every one feel ourselves most intimately bound to obey its dictates. God our Maker saith to each one of us continually, by the inward voice of our own breasts, "Consider your ways." In the midst of so many passions and appetites as compose our frame; so many disorders in it as we are born with; such powerful temptations as surround us on every side, we cannot hope that the carefullest attention to ourselves will keep us entirely free from faults. By a little neglect of culture, a soil so fruitful of ill weeds will soon be covered with them. The best inclinations of the best minds, if left to themselves, will run wild and degenerate. A duty thus plain and necessary, God will doubtless expect us to perform very faithfully. What the Almighty commands, we shall find it our interest to do, never to omit. The cowardice of not searching our wounds will inevitably make them fatal. Possibly we are not convinced that our behaviour is of such infinite and eternal importance. It is important to examine, whether it be or not. Perhaps we have inquired, and think there is reason to doubt of what we are commonly taught concerning these matters. But *when* did we begin to think so? And what do we doubt of? Not surely of all the articles of faith, and all the obligations of life. Have we considered well what the undoubted ones are, and how far they ought to influence our conduct? We find it but too easy, if we will, to judge very favourably of almost the worst actions we have ever done. But God sees everything in its true light and magnitude, and surely then it is our concern to see it so too. Have we then examined, as in His presence, our lives and hearts? By what standard have we tried their innocence or guilt? The practice of others can no more justify us than ours can them. Have we done our utmost to divest our examination of self-partiality, to enlighten it by the instruction of pious and judicious friends and books, and above all, to direct it by the unerring Word of God? Our business is so to examine ourselves now, as to live more Christianly than ever. And whence can we better begin than from what we owe to Him that made us? We owe Him worship, faith in what He teaches, obedience to what He commands. How fully soever we own the authority of religion, do we practise it? Do we live to any unworthy passion? If we are clear both of worldliness and vanity, still what can we answer with respect to pleasure? In regard to other indulgences, have we acted as becomes rational natures, designed to prepare ourselves, by the discipline of this life, for spiritual happiness in a better? Another very material head of examination is our resentments. Do we bear ill-will to no one? Again, what is the tendency of our common discourse and conversation? Is it favourable to religion, to probity, to decency, to goodwill among men, or the contrary? Our behaviour must be regulated, not only towards our fellow-creatures in general, but with a closer view to the more general relations of life. Are we careful what sort of example we set others to copy after? Nor should we stop at considering what our faults have been; that alone would be a speculation of little use: we should proceed to think what must follow from them. Are we deeply sensible that, in all we have done amiss, we have provoked a most holy God; and have no claim to pardon, much less to happiness hereafter, but through the mercy procured by our blessed Redeemer? (*T. Secker.*) *The use and benefit of Divine meditation*:—Two things remarkable in the text. The repetition and enforcing of it again (ver. 7). The benefit that came by it; it brought them to repentance. Doctrine—Serious meditation of our sins by the Word is a special means to make men repent. Meditation is a settled exercise of the mind for a further inquiry of the truth. Four things in meditation—1. An exercise of the mind. 2. A settled exercise. Not a sudden flash of man's conceit, but it dwells upon a truth. 3. It is to make a further inquiry. It would fain know more of those truths that are subject to it. Meditation pulls the latch of the truth, and looks into every closet, and every cupboard, and every angle of it.

4. It labours to affect the heart. Meditation musters up all weapons, and gathers all forces of arguments for to press our sins, and lay them heavy upon the heart. Meditation, having bundled up all items against the soul, and brought in all bills of account, fastens sin upon the soul, makes the soul feel it, so that it must needs be convinced without any evasion. It is with the Word as it is with a salve. If a man have ever so good a salve, it will not heal if it be constantly taken on and off. Only if it be let *lie on* will the salve heal the wound. What shall we think of them who are loth to practise this duty of meditation, but keen enough to meditate on their own worldly affairs? The poor man thinks he has no time for this tedious duty; the rich man thinks he needs it not; the wicked dare not do it; so no man will. The *lets* or hindrances of serious meditation are—1. Vain company. 2. Multitude of worldly company. He that over-employs himself, his meditations of heaven are dreaming meditations; his thoughts dreaming thoughts, he can never seriously meditate on the good of his soul. A good meditating mind no man came to surfeited with employments. 3. Ignorance. A man cannot meditate of a thing he knows not, nor thou of thy sins, if thou be not skilful in God's catalogue of thy sins. 4. Averseness of the heart; which consists in three things—(1) In the carelessness of the heart. (2) In runnings of it. The heart is like a vagrant rogue, he would rather be hanged than tied to his parish. (3) In the wearisomeness of the heart. This may serve for terror unto all those who, for all this that has been spoken, dare sit down without it. If thou wouldst meditate aright, separate yourself for other things. Observe the times of privacy: morning, evening, when the heart is touched at sermon or sacrament. Rub up thyself and thy memory. Rouse up thy heart. Use meditation for reprehension; for men usually make slight account of their sins. But you will say, How shall I come to feel my burden? Three things are here to be discovered. 1. The ground upon which our meditation must be raised. (1) Meditate on the goodness, patience, and mercy of God, that hath been abused by any of your sins. (2) Meditate on the justice of God; for He is just as well as merciful. (3) Meditate on the wrath of God. (4) Meditate on the constancy of God. 2. The manner how to follow meditation home to the heart. (1) Weigh and ponder all these things in thy heart. (2) Strip sin, and look upon it stark naked; for sin has a way of covering and disguising itself with pleasure, profit, ease. (3) Dive into thy own soul and heart. There is a tough brawn over thy heart, that it feels not its sins. (4) Anticipate and prevent thine own heart. Meditate what thy heart will one day wish, if it be not humbled; and tell thy soul as much. 3. How to put life and power into meditation. (1) Let meditation haunt the heart, dog thee with the hellish looks of thy sins, and follow it with the dreadful vengeance of God. (2) Let meditation trace thy heart, as it should haunt thee, so let it trace thee in the same steps. Because the heart is most cunning, and hardest to be tracked by its scent, when the heart hath taken up with abundance of good duties, and attained unto sundry graces. These good duties and common graces drown the scent of the heart's wickedness. (3) Hale thy heart before God, and let meditation bring it before His throne. Make complaint to God; and thy complaint must be full of sorrow. It must be a full complaint of all thy sins, and of all thy lusts. It must be with the aggravation of all the circumstances of thy sins, which may show them to be odious. It must be a self-condemning complaint. Let meditation, when it hath haled thy heart before God, there cast thee down before Him. Motives—1. It is a folly not to meditate. 2. Thou wouldst be loth to have the brand of a reprobate. 3. Thou wouldst be loth to rob God of His honour. 4. Or that all the worship thou givest to God should be abominable; but so it will be without meditation, before it, and after it. (*W. Fenner, B.D.*) *Consider your ways*:—Nearly twenty years had passed away since a remnant of God's people had returned from captivity. During the whole of that time nothing had been done to restore the temple. Yet the people had thought of their own comfort. They dwelt "in ceiled houses." Haggai arose to point out their mistake. He cries, "Consider your ways." So they would discover—1. The reason of their misfortunes. Which was that they had thought of themselves and had forgotten God. It is the explanation of all unhappiness. If you wish to be miserable—be selfish. Selfishness looks not at what it has, but at what it has not; casts covetous eyes on what others have. The selfish man thinks more of what he has than what he is, and disregards the needs of others. All these are so many doors to unhappiness. He that will save his life shall lose it. 2. The secret of blessed-

ness. "Render to God the things that are God's." "Build the temple," said Haggai. Put yourselves in harmony with God and His purposes. Philosophers have discovered that happiness is not found when it is sought directly. Seek it obliquely. "Live for others." But the doctrine fails because men are sinful. To join them is to join them in their sin, and sin is the gate of all wretchedness. Happiness can only come by living for another, when that other is sinless. Live for God, and the secret of all blessedness is discovered. This is the true "Imitation of Christ," whose "meat and drink" it was to do His Father's will. (*Herbert Windross.*)

Lenten thoughts.—Lent is the season which our forefathers have appointed for us to consider and amend our ways, and to return, year by year, heart and soul to that Lord and Heavenly Father from whom we are daily wandering. We need a particular time in which we may sit down deliberately and look our own souls steadily in the face, and cast up our accounts with God, and be thoroughly ashamed and terrified at those accounts, when we find, as we shall, that we cannot answer God one thing in a thousand. The hurry and bustle of business is daily putting repentance and self-examination out of our heads. Much for which a man ought to pray, he forgets to pray for. Many sins and failings of which he ought to repent slip past him out of sight in the hurry of life. Much good that might be done is put off and laid by, often till it is too late. It may be said that the bustle will go on just as much in Lent as ever. "How can we give up more time to religion than at other times?" There is a sound and true answer to this. It is not too much more *time* which you are asked to give up, as it is more *heart*. The time will come when you will see yourselves in a true light; when your soul will not seem a mere hanger-on to your body, but you will find that you *are* your soul. Then there will be no forgetting that you have souls, and thrusting them into the background, to be fed at odd minutes, or left to starve,—no more talk of giving up time to the care of your souls; your souls will take the time for themselves then—and the eternity too; they will be all in all to you then, perhaps when it is too late! Then try, for this brief Lenten season, the plan which the Lord of heaven and earth advises, and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. You need not be idle a moment more in Lent than at any other time. You can get ten minutes more in the morning, and ten at night. When there is a will there is a way. Then make up your minds that there shall be a will. Examine yourself and your doings. Ask yourself, "Am I going forward or back?" Can we not all find time this Lent to throw over these sins of ours,—to confess them with shame and sorrow,—and to try like men to shake them off? (*C. Kingsley, M.A.*)

Of consideration and meditation attended with resolution.—I. THE NATURE OF THIS RELIGIOUS EXERCISE. Meditation seems to be of a higher nature than consideration. This latter is an operation of the mind in order to conversion and reformation of life; but the former is the continued work of those that are already changed in their hearts and lives, and have attained to some improvements in religion and godliness. Meditation includes in it consideration, but it is something more, yea, much more. They agree in this, that they are both of them a serious reflecting and animadverting on those matters relating to religion that are set before us, to the end that we may receive advantage by fixing our thoughts on them, and thereby become more pious and holy. Consider the proper objects of meditation. These are ourselves; God; His Word; His works; men's actions; those solemn entertainments of our thoughts, which are commonly called the "four last things."

II. THE WORTH AND EXCELLENCY, THE VAST USEFULNESS AND ADVANTAGE OF MEDITATION. 1. It is the proper employment of rational minds. 2. This exercise well ordered, will banish idleness and vain diversions. 3. It mightily improves the faculties of the soul. Knowledge, reason, judgment, and a right apprehension of things, with composedness and consistency of mind, are the fruits of it. 4. It wonderfully promotes all the parts of devotion and religion. (1) It fixes the mind, and thereby is useful to preserve in us a constant sense of God in our souls, and to keep up a steady disposition in our minds towards goodness and holiness. (2) It begets heavenly-mindedness. (3) It promotes prayer, which is the very key of devotion, and the chief office of our religion. (4) It helps all the duties of religion and the exertment of all the graces of the Holy Spirit, by seasoning the heart with savoury and pious thoughts. (5) It not only promotes religion, but also the comforts and solaces which attend it.

III. THE MISCHIEF OF INCONSIDERATION; or the neglect of this excellent duty of meditation. This is the fault of Christian men, and that by which they generally miscarry,—they

will not reflect on their ways. The complaint is, "My people doth not consider." Men seldom sin out of ignorance. Want of consideration is the great spring of all their disasters. IV. DIRECTIONS FOR THE RIGHT MANAGING OF OUR MEDITATIONS. 1. You are not to give yourselves up to immoderation in this exercise, but to use prudence and discretion. 2. When we meditate on Divine things we should keep ourselves within due bounds. Many are too inquisitive and curious in their contemplations. They would be "wise above that which is written." 3. Some fit place for meditation should be chosen: some retreat from the noise and bustle of the world. 4. When thus alone, you must be very busy; for privacy and solitude are not commendable unless well employed. 5. Some appropriate time must be set apart. The close of the day is very suitable. The Lord's day is arranged to provide opportunity. After reading or hearing God's Word a time of meditation is useful. At the Lord's Supper. In time of trouble or distress. And in times of great mercy and deliverance. The proper qualifications of this duty are the following. Prayer must always accompany meditation. It must be accompanied with the affections, or else it is a very dry and useless exercise. And resolution should follow meditation. Meditation must not only produce resolution, but also action. Devout thoughts minister to religious endeavours and enterprise. (*John Edwards.*) *On the duty of considering our ways*:—"Lay them to heart." Ponder them, meditate upon them, maturely weigh them. It is the want of this reflection and consideration that now brings difficulties and distress upon us, and will soon bring severer judgments. To the warning voice of Haggai the people prudently listened. To us, however, the words would convey a meaning not precisely the same with that which the Jews would collect from them. To us the command would enjoin the scrutiny of our lives and conduct, but it would bid us compare them with the precepts of a new and more perfect law, the covenant of grace. But how few *do* consider their ways! How seldom is it possible, even by alarm, to bring to life those that are dead in trespasses and sins! Without considering your ways, without practical reflection, your state is one of imminent danger. To the young, more especially, this advice is most necessary. (*A. B. Evans, D.D.*) *Self-examination*:—At the encouraging voice of their Divine Protector, through the prophet, the spirit of the Jews revives, their zeal is inflamed, and their hands are joyfully given anew to do the work of the Lord. We may learn that the Almighty knows and observes all human actions, and will sooner or later in this life, and certainly in the next, punish the negligence of those who disobey His commands. The text contains "instruction in righteousness." The power of reflection is one of those characteristics by which our nature is adorned. The other animals enjoy or suffer only for the present. The exalted spirit of man, made in the image of supreme intelligence, subjects to his view the future and the past. As this power distinguishes us from all other animals, it is most becoming in us to employ it. We should strive to be acquainted with our spiritual state, that we may know, when at a throne of grace, what we have to confess, what to ask to be forgiven, wherein to pray to be encouraged and strengthened. The negligent and careless worshipper cannot be acceptable unto God. This self-examination is a matter of some difficulty. I. ILLUSTRATE THE NATURE OF THIS DUTY. For the regulation of our conduct we have the power of judging between right and wrong: the knowledge of God and His perfections: a revelation of the Divine will, and promised assistance of God's Spirit: and the certainty of a future state of retribution. All these means for regulating our ways point out the same line of conduct. Christians should consider their ways in reference to each of these different means of direction, and they will enable them to ascertain their state with regard to knowledge, faith, love, repentance, and new obedience. 1. Consider your ways by the power of knowing right from wrong. Though we be called into the "marvellous light of the Son of God," this original power of our minds is not extinguished, neither is its exercise superseded. In many cases it must be our sole guide, because Divine revelation does not descend to minute particulars. This power is often biassed and weakened by prejudice and passion. 2. Consider your ways in reference to God. Consider in what light your actions must appear to this all-seeing God: whether they have been such as He had a right to expect, and it became you to perform. Compare your conduct with the rectitude of the Divine nature, and with the obligations under which you lie. 3. Consider your ways in reference to the revealed will of God. As our judgments are often defective, it is expedient that we examine ourselves by that clearer

rule which is given us in the Scriptures, in which are distinctly unfolded the duties which we owe to God, to society, to individuals, and to ourselves. 4. Consider your ways with reference to immortality, and a state of retribution. This life is of uncertain continuance. II. MAN SHUNS THE PERFORMANCE OF THE DUTY OF CONSIDERING HIS WAYS. He is unwilling to weigh his actions, because he knows that, in so doing, most unpleasant feelings are prepared for him. But is this conduct rational or judicious? From considering our ways there arises perseverance in holiness. A man must examine himself that he may reform. There can be no apology for setting aside this work. It is difficult, indeed, but it is commanded by our God, on whom our fate depends. It is necessary for promoting that holiness on which our happiness must be founded. Shall we be deterred by this difficulty from taking those salutary measures which are essential to our everlasting peace? (*L. Adamson.*)

Ver. 6. He that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.—*The bag with holes*.—The prophet lifted his warning voice, and entreated his sinful brethren to “consider their ways,” to solve for themselves the curious and alarming fact, that while toiling for their temporal gratification, and sowing broadcast with liberal hand, the return for such labours was so meagre and unsatisfactory, even as if one had been shortsighted enough to deposit his hard-earned wages in a bag with holes. The history of nations, like that of individuals, is ever repeating itself. 1. Those persons come under this description who pride themselves on the accumulation and possession of wealth. 2. That man is dropping his money into a “bag with holes,” who is spending any large proportion of it in things which minister chiefly to pride and vain glory. Ruskin says, “A tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaningly lost in domestic comforts and incumbrances, would, if wisely employed, build a marble church for every town in England.” 3. Those persons are putting their wealth “into a bag with holes,” who are robbing God’s Church of her lawful tithes, that they may have the more to leave to their children. Inherited wealth is as often a curse as a blessing. Idleness is a source of misery, and there is no deadlier bane of character. The wise father will give his son the education which will fit him for the trade or the profession which he may prefer, and then allow him the privilege of pushing his own fortune in the world. Bishop Doane said of the men who should “make a State,” that “they are made by self-denial.” Instead of the selfish question of the votary of the world, “How much can I get out of this life in the way of dress, high-living, envy, admiration, amusement?” may our endeavour be this, “How much shall this life of mine (so short and so uncertain) get out of me in loving devoted service to my Lord?” (*John N. Norton, D.D.*) *A bag with holes* (a talk with children):—In olden times folk kept their money in bags, and still people keep it in little bags which we call purses. “What is the good of a money-bag if it is full of holes?” Yet the prophet says that the people of his day put their money into such bags. He means that they tried to keep something far more precious than money in this reckless fashion. He speaks of their “wages.” We are always sorry to lose anything valuable. Yet the way to lose anything is to put it in a bag with holes. What disappointment therefore is expressed here by the prophet! The feeling of loss is all the keener when we lose something that we have earned. There are some people who have what we call windfalls. Such a “windfall” has generally, like fallen apples, a bruise about it. It is not half so good as when we earn it ourselves. Now these people in the text had earned what they lost. The word here used for “wages” denotes hard earnings. I hope you children will learn in life to earn wages of your own. The best thing in life is to work for what we get. They are few who know how to use money without first knowing how to earn it. These people knew how to earn money, but they did not know how to take care of it. Half the battle of life is to earn; and the other half is to know where to place and how to use what we earn. But I have seen people who worked very hard, and yet at the close of life entered eternity as paupers. They took care of what we call money: they did not put their wealth into a bag with holes. But they never remembered that the money of this world does not pass current in the next. There is another kind of coin necessary for the next world. To die rich in the things of the world very often means to die poor with regard to the world to come. (*David Davies.*) *The worst foe of labour*:—The most persistent, most overpowering enemy of the working-classes is intoxicating liquor. It is to labour a worse foe than monopoly, and worse than associated capital.

It annually swindles industry out of a large percentage of its earnings. I proclaim a strike universal against strong drink, which, if kept up, will be the relief of the working-classes and the salvation of the nation. When you deplete a workman's physical energy, you deplete his capital. The stimulated workman gives out before the unstimulated workman. When an army goes out to the battle, the soldier who has water or coffee in his canteen marches easier and fights better than the soldier who has whisky in his canteen. God only knows what the drunkard suffers, in his body, in his home, and above all, in the loss of his soul. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *National improvidence* :—Objection may be urged against introducing social and political questions into Christian pulpits. Objection cannot, however, fairly be made against the pulpit treatment of that branch of social politics, national improvidence. Here, in Haggai's time, the means of life were abundant, and yet men were dissatisfied. The national improvidence of the Jews was a punishment of their neglect of God, while our national improvidence is a hindrance to our true approach to Him as a nation. See the enormous waste of means and comfort caused by our national self-indulgence, and the absolute want, and almost starvation, resulting thence to millions of our fellow-men ; or, when we think of the growing passion for destructive drink, must we not see a wonderful description of our present state in this other thing which God tells us to consider, "Ye eat, but ye have not enough ; ye drink, but are not satisfied with drink." It is a common but mistaken notion that Bible teaching generally is opposed to worldly notions of prudence. Men quote our Saviour's words, "Take no thought for the morrow," without our Saviour's context. His object was to prevent their letting care for providing earthly things cause them to neglect providing heavenly things. The possession of competence is not a crime. Our Saviour shows waste to be wicked, and wilful destitution a sin, not merely as being an offence and trouble to social politics, but as an iniquity against the honour of God, who, in ordaining that man should eat bread at the sweat of his brow, has laid on every man the duty of self-provision. The apostles point to the sin of improvidence in no measured terms. They never contemplate a state of things in which men shall expect fellow-men in every case of need to supply all their necessities. They teach, as our Saviour did, dependence on God, but not on man. Consider the prevalence of this sin of improvidence. National improvidence exists in England without a parallel in all creation. (*W. L. Blackley, M.A.*) *A bad investment* :—I. With respect to MUCH OF THE MONEY MEN GAIN we may say it is put into a bag with holes. Look at one man who is a type of those who put earnings into a bag with holes. He works hard. With the dawn he arises. He eats the bread of carefulness. He is ever on the watch for the "main chance," that is, for increasing the accumulations of No. 1. He does not trouble always as to the methods by which he gains. He cares only to see his balance increase. He is never known to be taken with a fit of generosity. He stints himself, and it may be his family, of all pleasures that he may increase his savings. Thus grubbing and grasping, puffing and lying, he makes the mickle into muckle. He finds the pennies become pounds, the tens grow to hundreds, and the hundreds to thousands. He gets respect, is favoured with applications for help. But he has been putting his gain into a bag with holes, if he has wrongly gained his wealth, and if he has bowed down to that, worshipping it alone. Remember that he cannot take it with him at death. It were useless if he could. There are many who, even without gaining much, make themselves slaves to their particular line of work. They give no thought to the higher concerns of life. But all their life they toil without content ; they have murmured and fretted, envied others, even misrepresented them. Into a "bag with holes" they have placed all they have so hardly gained. Then there are many who really could earn and do earn much, but they waste it. They know not where the money has gone, and if they knew where it has gone they would not confess it to themselves or to others. II. With respect to MANY OF THE PLEASURES men seek, the truth of the text is manifested. We say "many," because all pleasure is not sinful, and seeking it at times may be a strong duty. Alas ! some spoil lawful and sufficient recreation by taking unlawful pleasure. They are certainly putting their efforts into a "bag with holes." Thus also with stolen, secret pleasures. Souls yield to the desires of the heart, the lusts of the flesh, and because the thing is hidden up they rub their hands and say I have done no wrong. In no sinful indulgence can we find a gratification that shall be enduring. That deed, the memory of which causes the face to crimson, has no quality in it that can be really satisfactory. III. With respect to OUR UNAIDED EFFORTS AT REFORM OF LIFE, the truth of the

text applies. We find out that the devil is a bad master, that the wages of sin is death. We begin to see that this life has been wasted, that we have lived for self. We then begin to struggle, in our own strength, to improve character and conquer sins. Perhaps we do make some little progress for a time. Soon we discover that it has been only for a time, and that the root of sin is still in our soul. Then the fact begins to stare us in the face, that if we could avoid all sin in the future, if we could conquer all tendency to sin in our hearts, we have yet a great account of sin which is unforgiven. Law must not be violated and dishonoured. Hence He takes up, in the Person of Christ, our sins and bears them. "He magnifies the law." He then freely forgives us for Christ's sake. The whole past can be as though it had not been. All sin can be fully expunged. God in Christ has provided a way of dealing with sin such as we cannot understand, but which we can accept. Confucius said, "A blemish may be taken out of a diamond by carefully polishing it, but if your words have the least blemish there is no way to efface them." This is true of the sinful dispositions of the soul. Only Christ can efface them. Our self-righteousness, which is effort to atone in our own strength, is like wages put into a bag with holes. IV. With respect to ATTEMPTS OF MANY TO GAIN VARIOUS KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE we may assert the principle of the text. There are those who are incessantly inquiring, reading, and yet who know but very little. They go about, but although seeing much, they retain little. Many hear abundance of lectures, of sermons, but seem to know little more. They read their Bibles, but they increase little in knowledge of it. Now, just look back and see how much you have read and heard and known. What has been the effect on the character, the heart, the life? Has it not been put into a bag with holes? How often have you heard of the sacrifice of Christ and the infinite love of God. Has it had any effect? Has there been any effect on the life? Bitter was the wail of the mother who after ten years of care of an imbecile child said to me, "After all my love she never seems to notice me more readily than she would a stranger." Ah! that is just what Jesus has to say of us. His love has been thrown away upon us, it has been put in a "bag with holes." (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *The bag with holes*:—To apply this figure of the prophet's to our own times and circumstances, in a word to ourselves, let us see what is "the bag with the holes" into which honest earnings are too often put. I. EXTRAVAGANCE is such a bag. I mean the spending more on a thing than our income justifies. Bishop Patrick begins a chapter with a notable warning, "Consider thine own sufficiency." Weigh well what you are equal to, and this may as well apply to our income as anything else. If we allow ourselves in any instance an expenditure, no matter what be the subject of it, which is unsuitable to our circumstances and inconsistent with our means, there is no other name for this that I know of than extravagance; *i.e.* (to trace the word to its derivation) a wandering beyond the just limits within which our course should lie. There is a certain suitableness between our position and circumstances on the one hand, and our expenses on the other, which good taste will discern instinctively; any squandering in one direction must involve poverty in the other: I do not say a "bag with holes," but a bag with one hole will let out all the money, that which is for necessary wants, as well as that which is spent upon the luxury. Is not extravagance the fault of the age? Do not men of all classes live so near to their income that it is hardly possible to avoid going beyond it? There are but two ways of meeting that difficulty: we must earn more or spend less. II. There is another bag with holes—WASTE. This, though it resembles extravagance in some respects, is a different thing, for extravagance is in superfluities; waste may be of things necessary. I fear this is an increasing fault. I see it wherever I go: waste of fuel and of food, waste of money, waste of land, waste of its produce. Yet He who, by a miracle twice repeated, made bread enough and to spare for thousands in the wilderness, had an eye to what was over; and left us a memorable lesson: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." Young people hardly know how much can be done simply by wasting nothing. I have an honest shepherd near me who once offered me a loan of £200. I know another who has saved enough to buy him a little farm. What was their secret? They wasted nothing. They have had enough for livelihood, enough for health, for comfort, and this to spare when the day of feebleness and dearth shall come. Their bag was not one with holes. III. Akin to extravagance and waste is EXCESS. This does, indeed, partake of the character of the other two; but it has this element in addition, that it is extravagance and it is waste, both employed on self, and both to the detriment of self. If you will just call to mind some of the calculations which are now familiar to us all you will

see what a bag with holes this is for the earnings of the nation at large. More than 100 millions are spent in the kingdom every year on drink! This is *the* great bag with holes into which skilful earnings, hard earnings, costly earnings, are too apt to be put. That dreadful, that pitiable habit of intemperance is a solvent which will melt down a fortune however great, and a man however strong. No matter what is put into the bag, through that one hole it disappears, and leaves the owner of it like the tattered bag itself. (*A. C. Bishop, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.—*The call of God*.—I. THE PERSON WHO ISSUES THIS COMMAND. Note the Divine character of the speaker. The “Lord of hosts.” This name, containing in it every perfection, commands our regard and challenges our awe. Omnipotence, omniscience, and unlimited authority unite their beams in one blaze of glory in this truly august character, “The Lord of hosts.” II. THE COMMAND ITSELF. “Consider your ways.” Fix your thoughts upon them with diligence, earnestness, and heart application. Be honest with yourselves, serious and particular in the inquiry into your real character in the sight of God. The command implies that—1. God has given to us a revelation of His will as the rule of our duty, and the standard by which we are to examine our conduct. The Scriptures form the directory and rule by which we are to try our ways, and which God has in mercy given to us by His own revelation for this purpose. 2. God hath endowed us with the powers of recollection and reflection. By these we can bring the transactions of our whole lives into present view, and arrange the several actions of them in their proper order and colours. It is our wisdom to converse with our departed hours, that we may learn to redeem the time. 3. As God has given both the rule and capacity for the exercising of this duty, so the discharge of it is necessary and advantageous. (1) The frequent and impartial consideration of our ways has a tendency to humble us before the footstool of the all-glorious Jehovah, and to convince us of our weakness, unworthiness, meanness, and insignificance. (2) The diligent and frequent consideration of our ways will be accompanied with this further advantage, of leading us to a cordial, entire dependence upon God, both for direction and assistance in every duty. (3) Compliance with that required in our text will lead us to see and own that the salvation of a sinner is, and must be, all of grace and mercy. We shall then no longer boast of our good hearts, the integrity of our conduct, or our regular duties. We shall cry for mercy. If you would be humble Christians, dependent upon and sensible of your obligations to the free grace of God, be frequent and impartial in the consideration of your ways. III. APPEAL TO EVERY MAN’S CONSCIENCE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. 1. Address the careless unconcerned part of the hearers. 2. Those who have experienced only some slight convictions of sin, and but a transient concern about their salvation. 3. Those who are backsliders. Invite them to serious thought about their present state and danger. 4. Those who are real believers. How crooked even their ways will appear in the review! How slow their progress in the path of duty and obedience. On the whole, as the consideration of our ways is a great duty, so it requires our present and most serious attention. The present *now* is the season that demands dispatch. To-day we must hear God’s voice, before disease incapacitate, or death prevent us. (*J. King, B.A.*) *An address to servants*.—It should be the great concern of every one of us to “consider our ways”; to think over them; to search and try them. Applied to servants, we treat—I. THEIR DUTIES. 1. Your first duty is to God. You must turn unto Him as real penitents, seek forgiveness through the merits of Jesus Christ, wash in His precious blood, and believe the promises which He has given in His Gospel. 2. Earnest prayer is a duty which servants too often neglect. Weariness at night, and late rising in the morning, are the causes. 3. The diligent reading of the Scriptures. The busiest may find or make time for this spiritual improvement. 4. Attending constantly at the house of God. Whenever, that is, you can secure an opportunity. “Faith cometh by hearing.” 5. Consider your duty towards your employers. Such as the duty of fidelity or faithfulness; a strict regard for truth; obedience; keeping your temper. It is helpful and wise to make a friend, as we call it, of your master and mistress. 6. Consider your duty to your fellow-servants. You ought to show great care, tenderness, and affection for the welfare of each other. Endeavour to lead your fellow-servants into the paths of peace, by recommending, both by precept and example, religious habits. Aid them according to the ability which God giveth you, when they are in any distress. II. THEIR TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS. 1. Your early removal from

your friends. Service is not like home, however comfortably you may be located. Home is home, however homely. 2. If a Christian servant, the irreligious habits of the families with whom you dwell is another trial. 3. The worldliness of your fellow-servants. These trials bring temptations. And there are special moral temptations for female servants. III. THEIR PRIVILEGES. 1. Wants supplied without involving personal anxiety. 2. Opportunity for receiving the Lord's Supper. 3. Power to assist in the Lord's work. (*James R. Starey, M.A.*) *Whither art thou going?*—Every work, with every secret thing, shall reappear at the judgment-seat of Christ, whether good or whether evil. A journey ends somewhere; each step of it is somewhither. Whither, then, are we each going? Of some changes you must be aware, in some you have doubtless rejoiced. But what as to your souls? In what way have they changed? Are they fitter for their end, for that for which God created them? If you have not used God's grace in the last year, you are, humanly speaking, less in the way to use it this next. Would you prepare for anything, which you care about in this life, as you prepare for eternity? You would not so prepare for any race in this life. God has divided our lives into lesser portions. But each resting-place should give us pause, and force us into ourselves, and make us think, for a time at least, whether we have made ever so little progress in the way, or have sat down in the way, or have turned altogether aside out of the way. "Consider your ways." Consider what you have been doing, what you are doing, and whither those doings are tending. "Set your heart upon them," your heart, the seat of your affections. How, if you have not done it, are you to set about this considering your ways? How would you do if you suspected that you were out of your way on this earth? You would, if you could see it, look back to your starting-point, and see how, little by little, you had swerved from the right path. Then look back to earliest days, see by what lesser or greater steps thou first departedst from the narrow way; look how evil habits strengthen by repetition. "Sift thyself through and through," says the prophet, "and so sift on." Then shalt thou make progress, not if thou findest not what to blame, but if thou blame what thou findest. When thou didst not set thy heart upon thy ways, thou didst incur daily, well-nigh countless sin, in thought, word, desire, deed, yea, and in omission of duty. Then judge thyself, that thou be not judged of the Lord. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **Bring wood, and build the house.**—*The building rising.*—I. AN IMPORTANT OPERATION ENGAGED IN. "Building the house." 1. Its actual nature. The building of the temple of God on Mount Zion. Solomon's temple had been dismantled and razed to the ground. The first act of the restored captives was to rebuild the temple, so that they might once more perform Divine worship. The spiritual import of it was the formation and the gradual perfecting through successive generations of time, of the spiritual Church of God, under the dispensation of the Gospel of His Son, which in Scripture is known by the similitude of a house or a temple. 2. Its attendant difficulties. External adversaries around them. Powerful obstacles arose from the Jews themselves. Their numbers were scanty, and their resources were feeble; some were depressed and fearful, and some were indifferent and apathetic. Subtle objections against undertaking the work just then were started. Difficulties which common agency and common exertion might well despair of removing. These facts suggest the circumstances attendant on the erection of the spiritual temple of Divine grace, under the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The work has to progress amidst immense difficulty and opposition. External enmity has abounded, arising from the radical depravity and alienation of the human heart against God, and employing against His truth all the weapons of tact and force: heathen imposture, antichristian superstition, Mohammedan fanaticism, infidel impiety, worldly contempt and neglect. And the professed friends of the Gospel have themselves interposed serious difficulties in the path of progress and success. What injuries have come through the corruptions of the Church; by the divisions of the Church; and by the indolence of the Church. The inertness of some among us has been a most serious injury to the progress of truth and righteousness. It has contracted the resources of the Church; it has given to the Church a false aspect, and a false reputation in the eyes of the world. It has damped the zeal and paralysed the energies of pious, active, and devoted men; and it has prevented the announcement of saving principles to multitudes, who thus have lived in ignorance, have died in darkness, and have gone down in

despair. II. AN AGENCY IN CONNECTION WITH WHICH THIS OPERATION IS TO BE CONDUCTED. 1. It is instrumental and secondary. The personal exertions of the Jews themselves were demanded, and were enlisted under the guidance of certain men who had been specially appointed by God for that purpose. The instrumental and secondary agency, appointed for the purpose of promoting the designs of Divine mercy, under the Gospel of our Redeemer, consists in the devoted labours of men who have been themselves redeemed. When the Saviour had completed His own personal mission among the sons of men, He consigned the instrumentality we have noticed, mainly to those whom He had constituted His ministers: some amongst them to labour in temporary offices, and others again to be raised up in long succession, and in such succession to labour until the end of time. 2. It is an agency efficient and supreme. The Divine agency, connected with the instrumentality of men, was to direct them in their counsels, and to give efficiency and success to their movements. It is the agency of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the agency of the Holy Spirit. Zechariah presents Christ as the foundation-stone of the building, and as the architect of the building. The Spirit is presented under the figure of the "seven eyes." Obstacles would remain undiminished, the "great mountain" would always frown upon us in equal and unmitigated power, were it not for the agency asserted and vindicated here. The best instrumentality devised and employed by man, and operating with whatever of industry and skill, would not advance one solitary step, were it not for the agency asserted and vindicated here. III. A RESULT, IN WHICH THIS OPERATION, SO CONDUCTED, SHALL TERMINATE. The operation shall be triumphantly completed. The head-stone of the temple was brought on. And we can securely anticipate the certain and appointed consummation of the efforts, which in the cause of God we are now, although inadequately, assisting to promote. There is to be the completion of the structure of Divine grace. Nothing can injure the progress and the advancement of our religion. And being triumphantly completed, it will eminently redound to the Divine glory. And the final triumph will be hailed with ecstasy and rapture by all holy created beings. Application—1. What encouragement to those already engaged and labouring for God! 2. What rebuke to those, professing the religion of Jesus, who are yet indolent and inactive! 3. What warning to those who are avowedly hostile to God and to His truth! (*James Parsons.*) *The sanctuary built*:—It is vain to contend that there exists an exact correspondence between the Jewish and the Christian Church. Yet, as they were constituted and ruled by the same authority, and for the same great ends, the history of the former cannot be otherwise than pregnant with instructions suited to the condition and wants of the latter. The principles of truth and righteousness are immutable. These remarks are applicable to the present portion of Jewish history. The returned captives let the house of God lie waste until they had made ample provision for themselves and their families. With this course God was displeased, and He punished them in a manner exactly corresponding with the offence. They wanted to accumulate more of the world for themselves and families. But God rendered abortive every labour of their hands. By drought and famine He dried up the sources of their gains, and withered their hopes. There is nothing to render this case inapplicable to the Christian Church. The great law of God's providence, in this respect, is maintained even down to the present day. 1. God has, from the beginning, been worshipped in temples made with hands. While the Jews were passing through the wilderness, they built a portable tabernacle for God's worship. When their migrations were ended, they built a costly and magnificent temple to the honour of Jehovah. Thus it has been in all time where Jehovah has been known. Even heathen nations have everywhere had public edifices devoted to the rites of their idolatrous worship. There never was a community that did not consecrate to the object of its worship some structure. 2. As respects the true religion, these edifices have been built by command of God. See injunctions given to Moses and to Solomon. History records not one instance of the pervading and sanctifying power of religion in any community where the regular and stated convocations of the people for the worship of God had been abolished. 3. A house of worship, where the people may convene to make a public recognition of God, and offer to Him their homage, is indispensably necessary to a diffusion of the blessings of religion, and a perpetuation of its institutions. The advantages resulting from a convocation of the people at stated periods for religious instruction are perfectly obvious. Let the house of God go to decay, let the sanctuary be demolished, and the strongest bonds of the social state will be

dissolved, and all combinations of effort or sympathy to sustain the ordinances, or propagate the doctrines of religion, come to an end. Religion could, under these circumstances, have no organised existence. The solemn convocations of the Church of Christ constitute the heart, whose pulsations send the vital fluid through all the ramifications of the system. Let its Sabbath assemblies be given up, and its existence would speedily come to an end. 4. The ministrations of the house of God have a powerful influence upon the intelligence and good order of the community. There are susceptibilities to religious influence which belong to man's nature. They must either be developed and trained under scriptural instruction, or they must take on a character from some superstitious and inadequate culture. The objects presented before the mind in the sanctuary, by an able and scriptural ministry, are of the most exalted and commanding character. How is it possible that the constant exhibition of themes like these should fail of producing an elevation and expansion of intellect through all the grades of society that no other agency is capable of producing? How great must be the moral power of the pulpit. The principles of the Gospel are all holy. Whence come the perpetrators of crimes? I have no recollection of even one individual who was an habitual worshipper in the sanctuary being convicted of a States' prison offence. There are still higher interests to be secured by this agency—the interests of the soul. In the house of prayer there are peculiar manifestations of the Divine glory. Here souls are trained for heaven. 5. The building destined to this high purpose should, in some sense, correspond to the great design of its erection. (1) It should be a true exponent of the estimation in which the people hold the institutions of religion. (2) It ought to be rendered as attractive, by its architectural beauty without, and by its well-appointed arrangements within, as is consistent with the sacred and holy purposes which it is designed to subserve. (3) When it becomes necessary to erect a house for the worship of God, the people should well consider the character of the Being to whom it is to be consecrated, and take care that the structure be such a one as they will not be ashamed to present to Him as an expression of their gratitude and love. Closing remarks—1. We owe primarily to the sanctuary the intelligence, refinement, good order which prevail in Christian communities, and the security of life and property which we enjoy. 2. We do not recommend extravagant expenditures in building a house for the worship of our God. We would have everything simple and chaste, but, if the ability of the people permitted, rich and commodious. 3. To accomplish a work of such magnitude, the utmost harmony is demanded; a perfect union of views and efforts. Divided counsels always tend to weakness and ruin. 4. Nothing but the spirit of an enlightened and enlarged liberality will be equal to the demands of such an emergency, as the erection of a house to be consecrated to the worship of Jehovah. 5. The condescension of God, in recording His name in temples made with hands, and in permitting Himself there to be sought and worshipped by His sinful creatures, ought to excite our highest wonder, and gratitude, and love for ever. (*J. W. Adams, D.D.*) *The encouragement to build the Lord's house*:—In the Word of God warnings and threats are always accompanied with exhortations and promises. Were it not so, the threats would profit us little. It is true that only in the Gospel is the love of God made manifest in its fulness. Only in the Gospel do the promises prevail mightily over the threatenings. As God bids the Jews go up to the mountain and fetch the wood to build His house, so does He command us likewise to go up to the mountain for the same purpose. To what mountain? To the mountain of faith; to the mountain of duty. Faith is a hard mountain to climb for all, above all for those who have been living in unbelief. Duty too is a hard mountain to climb for all, above all for those who have been living in self-indulgence. This is the reward He promises us, if we will climb the steep mountain of faith and duty to seek the graces with which we are to build God's house. He assures us He will take pleasure in that house, and will be glorified in it. What a mighty motive is this! It ought to have great sway over every one of us. If God takes pleasure in our work, that work must be blessed upon ourselves also. God is infinitely more merciful and bountiful than man can believe or conceive. He sees the very first stirrings of an obedient spirit in the heart; and when He sees them, He blesses them, and strengthens them, and helps them forward. No sooner had Zerubbabel and the remnant of the people begun to obey the voice of the Lord, than the prophet Haggai was sent to say, "I am with you, saith the Lord." He had been with them long before. He had shown forth His wonderful loving-kindness in a number of ways.

Yet He sent them this comforting assurance. Nor is He less kind, less gracious, less bountiful, less merciful to us who have become His children in Christ Jesus. He comes to us from the very first by His Spirit. He has been with us, as our Guide, Teacher, and Director, during the whole of our journey through the wilderness of the world, from our childhood upward. It is through Him that we have been brought, whenever we have been brought, into the assembly of His people upon His holy hill of Zion. He has ever and anon sent His prophets to us. Yet when we do begin to turn our hearts towards Him, as soon as we earnestly desire to obey Him, and serve Him, He comes to us more plainly, more openly, more manifestly, and sends us a message to cheer us with the assurance that He is and will be with us. This blessed assurance is vouchsafed to all who sincerely desire and strive to obey God. They feel that they have a wisdom above their own to guide them, that they have a strength beyond their own to support them. May we all be brought to that state in which God will take pleasure and be glorified in us! (*Julius C. Hare, M.A.*) *God glorified in the building of Churches.*—What are the walls which we raise, unless God take pleasure in them? Just what a body is without a soul, hopeless, spiritless, unprofitable. Will God indeed be glorified of men? There is one thing more strange, it is that God should be so little glorified of men. It would be profane and impious to speak of those as glorifying God, who live with no “fear of God before their eyes.” When is God glorified? 1. When any are converted to Him who, heretofore, either in accordance with bad principles, or in contradiction to better principles, have been alienated from Him, or transgressing against Him. 2. When men accept the way of salvation which He has prepared. When the Gospel offer is accepted, and men thank God for His unspeakable gift, God is glorified. 3. When they who have repented do “works meet for repentance,” live “righteously, soberly, and godly,” and wait for His heavenly kingdom. God is dishonoured when any who profess to take His yoke upon them walk unworthily “of the vocation wherewith they are called”; when any, who pretend to be His friends, are really enemies of the Cross of Christ. 4. When men are saved. This is the crown of all; and truly is it the glory of God. Whoever is made meet for the heavenly inheritance, will ascribe it to God alone. “He that glorieth will glory in the Lord”; will acknowledge that His Spirit influenced him, His wisdom guided him, His goodness converted him, His power defended him, and that with anything less than that all-sufficient hand, he must have sunk under the dangers with which he was assailed. (*T. B. Sumner, D.D.*) *The duty of building the spiritual house of God.*—God’s material temple at Jerusalem was typical of the spiritual temple to be erected in the hearts of the people. The words of text are applicable—I. TO THE SPIRITUAL HOUSE TO BE RAISED IN EVERY INDIVIDUAL’S HEART. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, “Ye are the temple of God; and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.” Yet what minister can look over his congregation and not see manifest proof that in the case of too many this temple is altogether in ruins. Even where there is good reason to believe that the rubbish of sinful habits has been cleared away, the foundation been rightly laid, and the building is making progress, will not most allow that the lets and hindrances perpetually occurring, render the exhortations of the prophets both salutary and expedient? Some may say, What can we do in this matter? Is not the building of this spiritual house the work of God? Yes, it is. But because God’s material temple was to be raised, not by human power, but by God’s Spirit, therefore the people were urged to persevere and fear no obstacle: and it is because God worketh in us both to will and do, therefore we are exhorted to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Man can do nothing in spiritual things without God, and God seldom acts without being pleased to use the co-operation of man. We are to be active in the carrying on of this spiritual building, that the Lord may take pleasure in it, and that He may be glorified thereby. II. TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN OUR OWN LAND. But there are many living in our land without Christian ordinances, and in a state of heathenism. Then there is a call to “build this house.” III. TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. Our charity should indeed begin at home, but it should not stay there. Missionary exertion has a reflex effect. If ever there was a Church, or nation, to which God, by His providential dispensations, might be supposed in an especial manner to say, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel,” that Church and that nation is our own. (*T. Grantham, B.D.*)

Ver. 10. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.—*Nature penalties*.—With respect to the withholding of dew and of produce, we know that the prophets took from the law what served to teach the people, and accommodated it to their own purposes. The curses of the law are general (Deut. xi. 17). It is therefore the same thing as though the prophet had said that what God had threatened by Moses was really fulfilled. It ought not to have been to them a new thing, that whenever heaven denied its dew and rain, it was a sign of God's wrath. But as, at this day, during wars, or famine, or pestilence, men do not regard this general truth, it is necessary to make the application: and godly teachers ought wisely to attend to this point, that is, to remind men, according to what the state of things and circumstances may require, that God proves by facts what He has testified in His Word. God intimates that the heavens have no care to provide for us, and to distil dew so that the earth may bring forth fruit, and that the earth also, though called the mother of men, does not of itself open its bowels, but that the heavens as well as the earth bear a sure testimony to His paternal love, and also to the care which He exercises over us. God then shows, both by the heavens and the earth, that He provides for us; for when the heavens and the earth administer and supply us with the blessings of God, they thus declare His love towards us. So also, when the heaven is, as it were, iron, and when the earth with closed bowels refuses us food, we ought to know that they are commissioned to execute on us the vengeance of God. For they are not only the instruments of His bounty, but, when it is necessary, God employs them for the purpose of punishing us. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 12. Obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.—*The voice of the Lord*.—1. The Word of God in the mouth of His servants will not take effect till His authority be seen and acknowledged in it, and His servants looked on as coming in His name. They look on this message as "the voice of the Lord, and the words of Haggai." 2. It will be a notable means to make the Word effectual, when beside the absolute authority of God, speaking in His Word, His interest in His people is considered and believed by them, and that He who speaks, reproveth, and directs, is their confederate God, whom they should be loth to offend or disobey, so much the rather as His relation stands, notwithstanding their faults; for thus is the Lord named here, "The Lord their God." 3. When God is seen speaking in His Word as a party to the sinner, and when His love is believed for all that, even in His reproveth it will make the guilty and smitten sinner to stand in much awe, will both break and melt him, and will make him look on his former ways, wherein he hath lain secure, with much affrightment and horror; for the fruit of the former is, "And the people feared before the Lord." 4. When the awe of God, speaking in His Word, in His majesty and goodness, hath had place in the heart, it will put men to give obedience in some measure to what is commanded; for the people, in this temper, "obeyed the voice of the Lord." 5. It is a sweet and blessed like case, when men in power are patterns and encouragements unto others, in submitting to the Word of the Lord in the mouth of His servants, and when a people's affliction doth not hinder their respect to the commandments, as is here marked. 6. It may encourage the servants of God to go on with their work, when they consider what a great blessing God can, and sometimes doth give to their endeavours beyond all probability; for here, by one sermon, all the people are set about a long-neglected work, in the midst of many difficulties. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Duty followed*.—I. Duty followed its OBEEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE VOICE. "The people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God," &c. God has a voice to men. 1. His voice is revealed. He speaks to them in nature, history, the Bible; in these last days, specially, by His Son. The Divine voice is ascertainable. It can be distinguished from all other voices that fall on the ear of the human soul. 2. His voice is authoritative. Obedience to this voice is right, wise, urgent. II. Duty followed SECURES THE DIVINE FAVOUR. "Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord." This promise means more than presence. He is with all; He fills the universe; He is with the evil and the good. It means to bless, to enlighten, guide, support, dignify, and make happy. God is always on the side of the dutiful. III. Duty followed IMPLIES DIVINE ASSISTANCE. What prompted these men who had so long neglected duty to set now in earnest about it? "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerub-

babel," &c. Men will never give themselves to duty unless the Lord stirs them up. This He is constantly doing. By—1. The admonitions of providence. 2. The dictates of conscience. 3. The preaching of the Gospel. 4. The strivings of the Spirit. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 13. Then spake Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message unto the people.—*The message of Jehovah.*—This means in his official capacity as a messenger or ambassador of Jehovah, with the authority of Him in whose name he spake. There is something very beautiful in the sudden change of tone manifest in the message of God. The people had not yet begun to work, but as soon as they showed a disposition to do so, the stern and reproving tone of God is changed for one of the most exquisite tenderness. It is as if He hastened to forget their former unfaithfulness, and to assure them that, in spite of all, He was not only willing to be with them, but actually was with them as soon as their hearts turned towards Him. This presence of God is regarded rightly as being the highest blessing that could be bestowed on them, and the surest guarantee of success. They had the same jealous enemies yet round them that had arrested the work before, but God assures them that now He was with them, and nothing should be allowed again to hinder the work. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The Lord's messenger proclaiming union.*—I. JEHOVAH'S MESSENGER. Ministers are messengers. It is not every man that gets into a pulpit that is a messenger. God only can appoint messengers. II. THE LORD'S MESSAGE. Their message is one of mercy, of everlasting life. It is the Gospel. Salvation as the gift of God. Not of works. All boasting is excluded. III. THE MESSAGE IS TO THE PEOPLE. Jehovah's elect are a peculiar people, a purchased people, a special people, elect and redeemed. We cannot tell you the elect are. IV. THE SPECIAL MESSAGE IN THE TEXT. "I am with you." Jehovah is always with His people, and has been, and will be so everlastingly. (*J. J. West, M.A.*)

Ver. 14. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel.—*Stirring up the Spirit.*—It is not right to restrict the influence of the Spirit to one thing only, as some do, who imagine that the Israelites were confirmed in their good resolution, as they say, having before spontaneously obeyed the Word of God. These separate, without reason, what ought to be read in the prophet as connected together. For God roused the spirit of Zerubbabel and of the whole people; and hence it was that they received the message of the prophet and were attentive to his words. Foolishly, then, do they imagine that the Israelites were led by their own free will to obey the Word of God, and then that some aid of the Holy Spirit followed, to make them firmly persevere in their course. But the prophet declared, in the first place, that his message was respectfully received by the people; and now he explains how it was, even because God had touched the hearts of the whole people. We ought to notice the expression, when it is said that the *spirit* of Zerubbabel and of all the people was *stirred up*. For much sloth, we know, prevailed, especially among the multitude. But as to Zerubbabel and Joshua, they were already willing, but delayed until the coldness under which they laboured was reprov'd. But the prophet here simply means that they became thus obedient through the hidden impulse of God, and also that they were made firm in their purpose. God does not form new souls in us, when He draws us to His service, but changes what is wrong in us; for we should never be attentive to His Word, if He did not open our ears; and there would be no inclination to obey, were He not to turn our hearts; in a word, both will and effort would immediately fail in us, were He not to add His gift of perseverance. (*John Calvin.*) *The duty of rulers, ministers, and the community, to promote and increase the means of grace.*—However vast may be the indifference to the cause of Christ, and, therein, to the well-being of the human race, it is a source of encouragement to feel that there is not only pervading our land "a holy seed, which is the substance" of the Church, from whence its fruit-bearing branches spring; but that the number is increasing—slowly, perhaps, but certainly—of those who, professing to believe the Gospel, feel the obligation of applying its truths and its responsibilities to the guidance of their conscience, and the regulation of their practice. 1. Consider the necessity of enlarged means of grace for our countrymen. This necessity arises from the incalculable increase of our population. Of these people, the immense majority are congregated in masses in the metropolis, and in the trading and manufacturing districts. But what are

the moral circumstances under which they have arisen, and are hourly arising? Is it with an expansion of the national Church, commensurate with the wants of the nation? Unhappily not. Where then is the basis on which social duty is to stand? How can we indulge such wild fanaticism as to expect the fruits of honesty, sobriety, and affection, respect for property or office, authority, regard to decorum, peace, and virtue, among multitudes who are growing up utterly unacquainted with the only tie by which moral obligation binds the conscience; ignorant of the only fountain from whence relative and social affection flow, and unhabituated to that softening influence which familiarity with the means of grace, and the kind sympathy of pastoral intercourse engender and maintain? Moreover, every agency of mischief is set on foot to corrupt men more and more, to enlist their innate passions, and to array their imagined happiness and interest in opposition to all that is holy, venerable, and good. Few of us, perhaps, are acquainted with the extent of that agency of Satan—an evil press—working amongst us. The necessity being admitted, upon whom does the duty of meeting it devolve? Upon all, upon every one, according to the ability which God has given. 1. The voice of heaven appeals to the civil ruler. On him devolves the obligation of providing for the moral well-being of those who are entrusted to his charge, since by this alone can the ends of government, peace, order, and security be attained. 2. The obligation especially devolves upon the ministers of religion. The Church of Christ is to be a witness for God, bearing testimony to man of the things of eternity; to be a light of truth, dispersing the dark and troubled desolation of falsehood, superstition, and impiety. 3. The duty devolves upon “all the remnant of the people,” the whole community of professing Christians. He who speaks of the “Church” as embracing the clergy alone, and not the “whole congregation of faithful men,” speaks unscripturally, untruly, and unwisely. If there is any class of persons upon whom this duty devolves with more responsibility than others, it is upon the land-owners, merchants, and manufacturers, who derive their wealth and their enjoyment by congregating multitudes to dwell upon their lands, or to labour for them. (*John Garbett, M.A.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1, 2. Came the Word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai.—Encouraging the people:—The recovery of the Jews from the disasters attending the Babylonian Captivity was necessarily slow and painful. The handful of patriots who returned with Zerubbabel were poor, weak, and despaired. They found Jerusalem and the temple heaps of ruins, covered with weeds and rubbish. The first two years witnessed the rebuilding of the altar, the re-establishment of the burnt sacrifices, and the laying of the foundation of the second temple amid the liveliest conflict of emotions. Just at this point a second oracle, full of Divine encouragement, came to Haggai. Weak hands were strengthened, timid hearts were cheered, religious faith and patriotic zeal were kindled into a glow of enthusiasm that never failed until the work was done. We note four considerations by which the prophet wrought this happy change in the temper of his people. I. **JEHOVAH'S ABIDING PRESENCE.** Regarded from a merely human point of view there were many and cogent reasons either for an abandonment of the work, or for its postponement until a more auspicious time. The hostility of the neighbouring peoples showed itself in persistent plots to harass the returned exiles, in fomenting discords among them, and in discrediting them at the Persian court. In comparison with the number, wealth and influence of their adversaries, were not the Jews themselves weak and contemptible? Only a few years had passed since their return to a ruined city and a desolate land. In their poverty and distress would it not be audacious folly to undertake the rebuilding of a structure that had taxed the resources of the kingdom in its meridian glory and power? Had not this generation borne burdens enough without being crushed under another? Why not relinquish this enormous load to a better equipped posterity? Moreover, since they returned from Babylon, had not the Lord withheld the legitimate increase of the fields and vineyards? In these straitened circumstances did not the care of their families demand all their time and substance? It might be a pardonable,

but was it not a rash enthusiasm in the prophet that had incited them to waste a month of labour on this hopeless task? Religious leaders are always unreasonable! These discouraged Jews could have invented a hundred excuses for abandoning the work. Self-justification is easy when one is eager to recede from an unwelcome task or duty. All human objections, however, are as chaff before an explicit Divine command. The voice of prophecy, re-awakened after long silence, had spoken the authoritative word. However sore the discipline to which their sins had subjected them, they were His people still, a "holy seed," a "very small remnant" indeed, but one over whose preservation He had watched with jealous care. With loving reiteration Jehovah exhorts them to forget their own weakness in joyful recognition of His omnipotence; to assure themselves that "the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, is not as a sojourner in the land, nor as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night." As He covenanted with them when they came out of Egypt, so "His Spirit abideth among them." "Be strong and work, saith the Lord of hosts; for I am with you, and fear ye not." There is no better ground for victorious confidence than that. His presence is infinitely more desirable than unlimited worldly wealth and power. We, likewise, face the depressing problems of our own day, grappling with them as we can, only to be overwhelmed by the consciousness of our inability. Through repeated failures we learn that without Divine help we can do nothing. We are overmatched in the battle. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." II. JEHOVAH'S INEXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCES. What if Jehovah's people are poor, insignificant, despised? He who is in the midst of them is the rightful owner of the world's treasures. The silver and the gold are His. He will "shake all the nations, and the costliest things of all the nations shall come" into His sanctuary. Now, see, when the people really trusted the Lord and went to work (Ezra vi. 3-9), how wonderfully the prophet's word was fulfilled; how the expense of rearing the massive walls, and the cost of the wood-work were defrayed from the treasury of the Persian Empire; how the priceless vessels of silver and gold, that Nebuchadnezzar had carried to Babylon for his own glory, as he thought, but really for safe keeping during the exile, were all restored again; how the adversaries of the Jews, who had plotted against them, were compelled by the royal decree to furnish them day by day with young bullocks, rams and lambs for sacrifices, and with wheat, salt, wine, and oil as the priests had need. Not only this, but from the very day (Hag. ii. 19, 20) when the rebuilding of the temple began, Jehovah would bless their land with affluence, instead of smiting it with blasting, with mildew, and with hail. God's work never stops for lack of means when men are willing to obey Him, and to launch out confidently on His promises. The silver and the gold are forthcoming, not by miracle, but through natural channels, as surprising sometimes as actual miracles. Is the time ripe for carrying the Gospel into the heathen world? See how the millions are poured every year into the Lord's treasury. If men will not give spontaneously, as did Darius, to the furtherance of God's purposes, He compels them to bring the best of their substance, as the Samaritans were forced to do. God scatters His resources neither extravagantly nor in conformity to the whims of men. The law of parsimony withholds Him from giving so freely as to make unnecessary the discipline of anxiety and struggle. Even when social and moral reformations are greatly needed He does not purchase transient success by lavish expenditures. Moral results are not permanently secured by material agencies. God could have supplied the early Church with means enough to have freed every slave in the Roman Empire. Instead, He projects into humanity two lofty ideals, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, confident that these ideals will ultimately and for ever accomplish what neither gold nor force can do. Nor does He waste His resources in perpetuating institutions that have survived their usefulness. Local churches, as well as individual saints, are but temporary factors. "Holy relics" He suffers with absolute indifference to moulder into common dust. III. JEHOVAH'S GRACIOUS PURPOSES. Haggai prophesied in a transition period. The older men who heard him had witnessed the wreck of the Jewish monarchy. The return of the captives to Jerusalem was the glimmering dawn after a dark and stormy night. The glory of the past was a memory; that of the future a dream. Transition periods are always charged with doubts and fears, with peril and pain. The sorest trials are alleviated by an assurance that they lead to higher and richer experiences.

And yet men would often forego these if they could thereby escape the trial. They cling to long-cherished errors because they dread the effort and pain of adjusting themselves to new truths. Hoary abuses linger in the community, in the State, in the Church, because men shrink from the sharp but transient evils attending a crisis. Modern science, philosophy, criticism,—the forces that are continually precipitating these crises—are not enemies but friends. God's purposes do not move backward. A new and better world always emerges from the chaos of the old. So long as God's hand directs the development every transition will be, not toward darkness and anarchy, but toward truth and order. Haggai encouraged his people with the assurance that their sufferings were not meaningless. Painful as their national discipline had been, it was but an unavoidable step in the evolution of a sublime purpose. Not only did he assure them that Jehovah, their covenant-keeping God, was still in the midst of His people; not only were His resources inexhaustible, and ready to be poured out in their behalf; but He had also a purpose of grace concerning them and the whole world, immeasurably exceeding the brightest memories of the past. Despicable as this new house might appear to those who had seen the splendours of Solomon's temple, the new would nevertheless outshine the old. "Greater shall be the latter glory of this house than the former, saith the Lord of hosts." Observe that it is the "latter glory" (R.V.) and not the "latter house" (A.V.); for whatever be its material condition, Jehovah knows of but one abiding dwelling on His holy hill of Zion. That messianic day, moreover, will be characterised by universal peace. For "in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." Peace, first of all, between man and God, that which every true heart yearns for supremely, but which is not found in the world. Peace also between man and man. International rivalries, the ambition of conquerors, royal greed of power will no longer hurl nation against nation in bloody strife. Peace, finally, between man and the wild beasts of the field (Isa. xi. 6-9). The distrust between them will cease. As nature has shared in man's curse, so it will share in the benefits of man's redemption. IV. JEHOVAH'S "LITTLE WHILE." Some of the despondent ones might have retorted, "Such glowing pictures were painted by the older prophets, but they are as far from realisation as ever." "No," says Haggai; "it is only one period more, a very brief one, and then Jehovah will work signs and wonders among the nations to arouse them from indifference, to turn them unto Himself, and thus prepare for the golden age." In a measure His utterance was fulfilled at once, but in its larger signification it still awaits complete fulfilment. The centuries after the Exile were really a brief preface to the messianic period which began with the coming of Christ into His temple, and which still continues. Men are impatient at the moderate pace of events in the kingdom of God. They wonder why He does not force men into swift obedience by stupendous displays of power. Because love and obedience are not wrought by force. Love conquers the kingdom of hatred only inch by inch. Viewing these things by and by from the side of eternity, men will see that earth's longest periods are only Jehovah's "little whiles." The world is ripening faster than we think. Who knows but that the full glory of the messianic time may be close at hand? Whether near or far, every man's supreme duty to God and to his fellow-man is so to live, by the Holy Spirit's help, as to make the world better, and thus to hasten the advent of that golden age. (P. A. Nordell, D.D.) *God's message to His people by Haggai*:—1. The Divine message often comes from one man to many. It now came by Haggai. 2. All temples but the temple of nature are to be built by man himself. God could have studded the world with temples; but He has honoured human nature by leaving it to men. 3. Any postponement of duty is opposed to the will of God. All duty requires the utmost promptitude. The Jews were now dallying with duty. The subject of these verses is—God requires human labour purely for religious objects. True labour in every form should be religious. I. THIS LABOUR SHOULD BE STIMULATED BY THE VIEW OF RELIGIOUS DECADENCE. The temple, once the glory of the country, was now in ruins, &c. Into what a low state has genuine religion sunk in our country! It is cold, formal, worldly, conventional. II. That this labour should be PERFORMED BY THE MOST VIGOROUS EXERTION. "Be strong, O Zerubbabel, be strong, O Joshua, be strong, all ye people of the land." Why? 1. Because it is right, and therefore you may throw your conscience into it. 2. Because it is *worthy* of all your faculties. Call out and honour all the faculties of your nature. 3. Because it is *urgent*. The highest interests of your countrymen and your race depend upon it. III. This

labour SHOULD ENLIST THE CO-OPERATION OF ALL. It concerns all—young and old, rich and poor. IV. THIS LABOUR HAS A GUARANTEE OF DIVINE ASSISTANCE. “For I am with you, says the Lord of hosts.” (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 3. Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?—*The contrast between the two houses*:—A despondency, such as the Israelites must needs have felt, is very apt to come over those who have begun to engage in a good work, after the first flash of their zeal has faded away. When we are labouring for ourselves, indeed, our carnal heart urges us forward; but when we are doing anything for the good of our brethren, or in the service of God, our carnal heart lies like a heavy drag upon the will. This is especially the case at first. It is long before we grow humble enough to labour diligently, although the fruits of our labour are not to be seen even by our own eyes. For example, when our hearts have been moved to undertake any work for the strengthening or spreading of Christ's Church on earth, and when we have been thus led to look round and consider what she is, must not our hearts faint within us as we think how she is nothing in comparison with her first glory, in the time of the Holy Apostles? How do we see the Church of Christ now? Is she not almost as nothing in comparison of her primitive glory? The same question may be asked with regard to man in his natural state. At first made in the image of God, and unsullied by sin, how do we see him now? When we compare these two pictures together in thought, fallen man, in his best and most flourishing estate, may seem to us as nothing by the side of his first glory. Let us cast our eyes on our own selves. They who watch the growth of the young must often have seen a time in their history which was like the teeming and blossoming of spring. And they will also have seen how the blossoms have fallen off, without leaving any fruit, even if they have not been wholly blighted. The prophet says, “And now be strong.” How were they to find strength? Not in the thought which had just been so forcibly put before them, that their work was as nothing in comparison with the first temple. Such a thought will never strengthen a man, will never make him work. Nor will it strengthen us, and make us work, to call to mind how far the Church of Christ has fallen back from the zeal and holiness of the primitive ages, or how far human nature has fallen from what it was in the Garden of Eden. Where are we to look for strength? Not to ourselves. Not to friends. The prophet gives this assurance from God, “For I am with you.” This same assurance is granted to all who earnestly desire to build up the house of the Lord, either in the world around them or in their own hearts. If they will work, they shall be strong; for the Lord of hosts is with them. We have God's covenanted word that He will be with us. God does not give His Spirit like a gleam of sunshine bursting for a moment through the clouds. His Spirit remaineth with those to whom it is given. He has remained with the Church from the day when the Father and the Son sent Him down from heaven; and He will remain with it unto the end of the world. The first lesson we are to draw from this assurance is, that we are to be strong and work. Many foolishly think that if the Spirit is with them, irresistible impulse will stir them to work without and against their will. It is through the power of the Spirit they who work continually in His strength do truly become strong. The second lesson is drawn from the words, “Fear ye not.” They who work and are strong in the strength of God's Spirit abiding with them may boldly say, “The Lord is my Helper: I will not fear what man can do unto me.” They may even say, “I will not fear myself, what I can do to myself, having this Helper against myself.” Even the fear of God, if we felt that His Spirit remains with us, would by degrees lose all that is painful and oppressive and repelling in fear, and would be transfigured, by a constant living communion with Him, into reverent, dutiful love. (*Julius C. Hare, M.A.*) *Glory of the new temple*:—Just as in the second year of the return from Babylon, when the foundation for the temple, which was about to be rebuilt, was laid in the reign of Cyrus, many old men, who had seen the temple of Solomon, burst out into loud weeping when they saw the new foundation; a similar feeling of mourning and despair appears to have taken possession of the people and their rulers immediately after the work had been resumed under Darius, and doubts arose whether the new building was really well-pleasing to the Lord, and ought to be carried on. The occasion for this despondency is not to be sought in the fact that objections were made to the continuance of the building, and that the opinion prevailed in consequence

that the works ought to be stopped till the arrival of the king's authority. This view not only has no support whatever in our prophecy, but is also at variance with the account in the Book of Ezra, according to which the governor and his companions, who had made inquiries concerning the command to build, did not stop the building while they sent word of the affair to the king (Ezra v. 5). Moreover, the conjecture that the people had been seized with a feeling of sadness, when the work had so far advanced that they were able to institute a comparison between the new temple and the earlier one, does not suffice to explain the rapid alteration which took place in the feelings of the people. The building could not have been so far advanced in three weeks and a half as that the contrast between the new temple and the former one could be clearly seen, if it had not been noticed from the very first; a fact, however, to which Ezra iii. 12 distinctly refers. But although it had been seen from the very beginning that the new building would not come up to the glory of the former temple, the people could not from the very outset give up the hope of erecting a building which, if not quite equal to the former one in glory, would at all events come somewhat near to it. Under these circumstances their confidence in the work might begin to vanish as soon as the first enthusiasm flagged, and a time arrived which was more favourable for the quiet contemplation of the general condition of affairs. This explanation is suggested by the time at which the second word of God was delivered to the congregation through the prophet. It was the feast of tabernacles, the great festival of rejoicing. The return of this festal celebration, especially after a harvest which had turned out very miserably and showed no sign of the blessing of God, could not fail to call up vividly before the mind the difference between the former times, when Israel was able to assemble in the courts of the Lord's house, and so to rejoice in the blessings of His grace in the midst of abundant sacrificial meals, and the present time, when the altar of burnt sacrifice might indeed be restored again and the building of the temple resumed, but in which there was no prospect of erecting a building that would in any degree answer to the glory of the former temple; and when the prophecies of an Isaiah or an Ezekiel were remembered, according to which the new temple was to surpass the former one in glory, it would be almost sure to produce gloomy thoughts, and supply food for doubt whether the time had really come for rebuilding the temple, when after all it would be only a miserable hut. In this gloomy state of mind consolation was very necessary, if the hardly awakened zeal for the building of the house of God was not to cool down and vanish entirely away. To bring this consolation to those who were in despair was the object of the second word of God, which Haggai was to publish to the congregation. (*C. F. Keil, D.D.*) *The sorrow of the old men* :—How was it that the people became negligent after they had begun their work? Even because it grieved the old men to see the glory of the second so far inferior to the first temple. For though the people animated themselves by the sound of trumpets, yet the old among them drowned the sound by their lamentations. As this temple was in no way equal to the ancient one, they thought that God was not as yet reconciled to them. Had they said, that so great an expense was not necessary, that God did not require much money to be laid out, their impiety should have been openly manifested; but when they especially wished that the splendour of the temple would be such as might surely prove that the restoration of the Church was come, such as had been promised by all the prophets, we doubtless perceive their pious feeling. We are thus reminded that we ought always to beware of the intrigues of Satan, when they appear under the cover of truth. When our minds are disposed to piety, Satan is ever to be feared, lest he should stealthily suggest to us what may turn us aside from our duty; for we see that some leave the Church because they require in it the highest perfection. They are indignant at vices which they deem intolerable when they cannot be corrected; and thus, under the pretext of zeal, they separate themselves, and seek to form for themselves a new world, in which there is to be a perfect Church; and they lay hold on those passages in which the Holy Spirit recommends purity to the Church, as when Paul says, that it was purchased by Christ, that it might be without spot or wrinkle. In all this there is some appearance of piety. How so? Because they would have God to be revered so that they would have the whole world to be filled with the fear of His majesty; or they would have much wealth to be gathered, so that sumptuous offerings might be made. But Satan cunningly insinuates himself; and hence we ought to fear his intrigues, lest, under plausible

pretences, he should dazzle our eyes. The best way of caution is to regard what God commands, and so to rely on His promises as to proceed steadily in our course, though the accomplishment of the promises does not immediately correspond with our desires; for God designedly keeps us in suspense in order to try our faith. Though then He may not as yet fulfil what He has promised, let it yet be our course to attempt nothing rashly, while we are obeying His command. It will then be our chief wisdom, by which we may escape all the crafts of Satan, simply to obey God's word, and to exercise our hope so as patiently to wait the seasonable times when He will fulfil what He now promises. (*John Calvin.*) *Thoughts of the past* :—The glorious past is never disdained. There ought not to be any past in the sense of exhaustion or annihilation. The past should be the most vivid and graphic influence in the present. Because we have seen greatness we shall see glory, should be the tone of every man who undertakes to teach the mysteries of the Divine Kingdom, and lead the enterprises of the elect and consecrated Church. The house, indeed, had gone down; in that sense it was nothing in comparison with the house in its first glory. There is a past that humbles the present, that makes the present insignificant and worthless; but the Lord never regards that past as the end of His own opportunity; it is rather the occasion of the beginning of new revelations of His omnipotence. The Lord never stops His kingdom in its darkest hour and says, this is all. The Lord never interrupts a prayer at the point of confession; He listens until the prayer glows with thankfulness, until it becomes violent in sacred ambition, until it would seize the treasures of the kingdom, and appropriate them all with a grateful heart. It is thus that God leads us and educates us. He takes us at our best point, not at our worst. The Lord promised that the house should assume a glory to which the first glory was as nothing. Here is a principle in the Divine economy; it is a principle of development, of progress, of gradual and assured consummation. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord;—for I am with you.—*The Church of the future* :—These prophecies of Haggai are all concerned with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The first of them is a prophecy of rebuke, in which God censures the people for devoting all their care and interest to the rebuilding of their own houses, and neglecting the temple, the site of which lay desolate and bare. But the second prophecy, “Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts,” is of a different character. It is spoken for the encouragement of the people who had begun to be despondent as they compared the old temple, or their memories of the old temple, with the promise of the new that was at present before their eyes. No doubt it is a kind of misfortune to be born in a little age, to be born when there are none but little men, and when no great things seem to be in process of achievement either for God or for the world. Sometimes people speak as if the age in which we ourselves live were open to that kind of reproach. We have no men now in the service of the State like Chatham or like Peel. There are no names in our literature just now like the names of Scott and Thackeray, or Wordsworth and Tennyson. We have no preachers in our pulpits now like Chalmers. Even science itself seems to have fallen in many departments on little times, and there are not the discoveries made that thrill the imagination and give man's mind a new sense of its own possibilities. Now, it is against that kind of spirit that this prophecy is directed. It is not only a misfortune to be born in a time like that, but there is such a thing as temptation to give way to a spirit like that, and think the age in which we live is destitute of opportunities when it is not, and that there is nothing for us to do because we are not disposed to set our minds to the work that awaits us. That kind of mood assumes nothing, and it forgets a great deal. It forgets that man has always great duties, and that man is always accompanied in his life through this world by a great Presence, and that if he has faith in his duties and faith in the presence of God which goes along with him, his life may be as great as human life has ever been. That kind of despondency and disparagement of our own time and of the work that God has given us to do is a thing that tends to fulfil its own lugubrious prophecies. Where there is no faith even Christ cannot do any mighty work, and we ought to remember these two things,—that God's work is always waiting to be done, that God always needs us, and surely also that if it is little

we can do, it is all the more urgent that we should do that little and leave nothing of it undone. Now look at the encouragement that God in this prophecy gives to Israel and to us when we think of the work to which He calls us. First of all, there is the great encouragement contained in the fact that God has made a covenant with His people. "I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts; According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt." That word carried back the minds of the Israelites to the crossing of the Red Sea and to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. The covenant which God makes with men is a kind of relation into which God enters with men by which His faithfulness and love are pledged to them. Now, when we in the Christian time think of the work to which God calls us, think of our own powers, think of our duties, and especially when we are tempted to despondency, the thing we have to remember, the thing to which we have to go back, is the Cross of Christ. The blood of Christ is the blood of an everlasting covenant; the death of Christ is the pledge that God has given us of a love from which He can never retreat; and the Cross has in our religion just the same kind of historical significance that the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt had for these Jews. It is something in which God has committed Himself to us in a way from which He can never withdraw. And surely, when we think of it, we can understand how much it must mean, and how securely we can lean upon it. Does anybody think, can anybody think, that God made that awful demonstration of His love for nothing, or that He made it for some little cause, or that He can lightly, or at all, back out of it? And let appearances in the Christian Church be never so mean, let the things that we see with our eyes at any particular time be as discouraging as we please; suppose the Church is a small handful in an unfriendly world; suppose the Church had to worship in no church instead of in a fine building; suppose it had to take ungifted men for leaders, men like Haggai instead of men like Isaiah; that does not alter the fact that the Church is built upon the Cross of Jesus Christ, that it has the people that God has made His own people by the blood of the everlasting covenant, that it has the greatest future before it of any society in the world, that it has God with it and infinite possibilities of service put within its reach. But, then, God gives special promises. Besides recalling to Israel the memory of His covenant, besides recalling to us the Cross of Christ and the infinite faithful promise and hope that there is in that, He gives special promises, and tells them that the great days to which they look back will be renewed, and far more than renewed. In that old time when God called His people out of Egypt there were physical convolutions—Mount Sinai shook before the Lord—but now God says the time is coming that I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and more than that, the thrill will pass out of the natural into the moral world, I will shake the nations, and the nations will come trembling and bring all their wealth to lay it at the service of God and His house. "The Desire of all nations shall come." The word translated "desire" is a collective word, and it means "the desirable things" of all the nations shall come. God will stir the nations and they will come to His house, and they will bring along with them everything on which they set store, and though the house looks a bare, poor, unfurnished, desolate house at present, it will be adorned with the wealth of all peoples. Everything on which human hearts set store will be lavished upon the house of God. And what does it mean now when God says to us, "The desire of all nations shall come"? It means that everything on which human beings set value will be bestowed, and ought to be bestowed, on the enrichment and service of the Church. If we think what the history of the Church has been it will help us to see the meaning of that promise. Bishop Westcott has pointed out that there have been three great epochs in the history of the Christian Church. First, there was the time when the great creeds of the Church were constructed, the time when the Church devoted itself to the intellectual understanding and interpretation of the Christian religion, when it built up the Christian doctrine of God, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian doctrine of the Person of Christ, such as we find them in the great creeds accepted by all Christians. What did that mean? That meant the consecration of the Greek genius to the enrichment and service of the Church. Then we come to a different period. The great society of the ancient world crumbled into pieces, and as that old social order was dissolved the Christian society consolidated itself in its place, and a Catholic Church arose, covering all the civilised world of the time—a Catholic Church—a Church with one uniform government, a Church with one

visible head, a Church that gathered into itself all that had been characteristic of the old Roman world. And what did that mean? That meant the consecration of the Roman genius to the Christian Church. And then, since the Reformation we have had another epoch in the history of the Church. The Orthodox and the Catholic have been succeeded by the Evangelic Church, and the Evangelic Church has found its place and career among the free, expansive, aggressive peoples of Northern Europe and America. And what is it these nations value most? What they value most is individual liberty. And in that way, age after age, as the Gospel has invaded and conquered one branch of the human race after another, the dearest spiritual possession of that race—its intellect, or its sense for government, or its apprehension of liberty and responsibility—has been baptized into Christ, has been taken into the Church and made part of its strength and of its beauty. And that process has not finished the prophecy, “The desire of all nations shall come.” The things that all the peoples prize will yet contribute to the strength and beauty of God’s sanctuary. Now, when we see that we see not only the promise of God—“Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God”—we see not only the promise of God, but surely we see also a suggestion of our own duty. Whose fault is it that the Church is a poor affair? Whose fault is it that the Church is imperfect and bare and unadorned and unattractive? It is in great part our fault, the fault of those who are in the Church and come about it. God expects our best for it; not the things we do not care for. He expects our youth. God does not want us to give Him the dregs of a misspent life after we have bestowed the freshness of our youth in following our own passions and desires. God expects our best men, the most gifted in head and heart, in mind and affection, to offer themselves for His work in the world. There are two things God says He will do, in particular in connection with the Church, that we must remember. He says, “I will fill this house with glory.” It looked a bare and unpromising place, but God assures His people it will have a splendour answering to its purpose. It will be a glorious house when the nations bring their gifts into it. And our Church will be a glorious place also when we bring into it everything that is dear to us, and when we consecrate all that to our God. The Church is full of glory when it is full of people who belong to God in the bonds of the new covenant, and who keep back nothing from Him; when it is full of people who are matured in their Christian experience, and who are clear in their Christian convictions and ardent in all their Christian duties. When God fills the Church with that kind of life, with the presence and the tokens of His Spirit in that shape, then it is full of that which we can understand as glory, full of all the splendour that God can set on our weak human nature. Again, He says, “In this place will I give peace.” Now, peace may not seem a very great thing to mention after the things that we have been speaking about already. It may seem a little gift after glory, but God knows best, and I fancy there are few things that do more to bring people into the house of God, even at the present time, than just the hope of peace. These poor Jews were harassed with their enemies, and it would be a comforting thought to them when they were in the house of God that they were in sanctuary and in a safe place. Peace is a gift of God. It can only be obtained when it is obtained from God. It can only be obtained when we come face to face with God. (*J. Denney, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.—*An incentive to work*:—When Darius Hystaspes began to reign, Haggai and Zechariah urged that the work of rebuilding the temple should be renewed. The ever-recurring plan which they urged on the people was that they should work because the Lord of hosts was with them. Since then times have altered. Religion has become a more personal matter. Its sphere has been shifted from temples made with hands to what Milton calls “the upright heart and pure.” Religion has been shifted from the outward to the inward realm. “The kingdom of God is within you.” That is the true shrine, from which influence may reach out to wider realms. And since the sphere has changed, the work of rearing the temple has also changed. Then the work was hard, but it only tired the hand. Now the heart, rather than the hand, needs to be engaged. The tax is on the spirit rather than on the limbs. To labour in the invisible is far more trying than in the visible realm. The highest things cannot be weighed in scales and set down in columns. What is true of the work within is also true of the spiritual work we attempt in the world. It is invisible—wrought in the hidden chambers of the heart. It

is true that the fruit sometimes becomes visible in the life. But the spiritual temple we are seeking to rear may be growing in strength and beauty, and we see it not, or only catch momentary glimpses of the growing building. Now and then we are permitted to see that our work is not in vain in the Lord. The higher the realm, the less visible or tangible are the results. Manual work is more visible than intellectual. Intellectual work is more visible than spiritual. But the thinker accomplishes more than the artisan; and the spiritual more than the intellectual teacher. This is the true incentive to work—"the Lord is on our side." The conviction that God is with us will make us work. (*W. Garrett Horder.*)

Encouraging the people.—The people had grown indifferent and neglectful of God, as is the case with all who are not earnestly engaged in religious activities, giving their attention to fitting up and adorning their own dwellings, while the house of the Lord was left unbuilt. Haggai was sent to reprove them for their neglect, to call their attention to the blighting curse upon them because of this neglect, and encourage them to resume the work on the temple of God. The new temple was to be of the same dimensions as the old. But it was not to be overlaid with gold, or to have such imposing accessories for worship. It seems that the ark had been lost, and the tables, and the mercy-seat. There was no visible glory, and no Urim and Thummim. Hence the lamentations of the ancient men, who could make contrasts. We have narrated here sadness and rejoicing over the same thing. But such is life all round the world. Age made unfavourable comparisons, while youth, whatever the comparisons, delighted in the new and promiseful. The aged naturally, and almost inevitably, live in things behind them; the young in things around them, and before them. The danger is, that echoes of the past will mar the music of the present, and that the music of the present will mar the echoes of the past. Haggai's encouraging reference to God as with their fathers, and pledge of the same God as with them, was to the people a revelation and inspiration. It, however, seemed to this people that the times had changed. The prophet, therefore, is sent to encourage them with assurances that God is with them in their work, as truly as He was with their fathers. They may miss something of the grandeur and glory of the former temple; but what of this if God is still their God? The Divine presence would be in the new temple more manifestly than in the old. Therefore they should resume their work in confidence and rest in peace. We fall into the same false ways of judging. When present possessions and conditions seem to compare unfavourably with past possessions and conditions, we grieve and murmur and lose heart. Human lives do not always run in the same channels. Change after change is the lot of universal man. Where is rest? Where is inspiration? In the assurance that God is with us as He was with our fathers, and as He was with us in former times. At that very moment when the Jews were refining God had in mind a temple whose glory should far outshine the old, and He had all power to bring in this glory. He was to accomplish convulsions in the earth, and bring in the "Desire of all nations." Five stages in human history were then passed, from Adam to Noah; thence to Abraham; thence to Moses; thence to Solomon's temple, and thence to the Captivity. Only one stage remained—thence to the kingdom of the Messiah. These halting, hesitating Jews saw not that kingdom, and hence they were heavy-hearted. We are often blind, hence heavy-hearted. What we need to remember is that we have a present personal God, whatever the age of the world, or whatever the wants of our lives. Memories of blessing should make us glad instead of sad, even though present conditions may seem less favourable than former ones. Everything in heaven and earth is under the control of God for the perfection of human character, and for the world-wide end of righteousness and peace. Christian workers ought never to be discouraged. Whatever the present seeming, this world is not going from bad to worse, but from better to better; and best of all, the best things await every true child of God. We set you in the midst of memories, and let you enlarge upon them. 1. Think of self. 2. Think of associated lives and labours. God never failed those loved ones who are now at rest and out of sight. Beacon fires have blazed on all the mountain-tops. They shall burn on until far lands have been lighted up, and the new temple of peace and truth shall have completion; when He who was the glory of Israel's temple shall come again for crowning. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*)

Encouraging the people.—A ruined church is oftentimes a sad comment on religion; an unfinished church is a sadder one. What had arrested the work that began so auspiciously? 1. The enthusiasm of the people was but a transient

fervour. Steadfastness is a cardinal virtue. The reward is to him that overcometh. 2. Then they began to question and calculate. Might it not be that the project was premature? The altar was restored, why could not the temple wait? Some said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." 3. Meanwhile there was the natural concern as to temporal affairs. One by one the workmen left the temple walls, and turned their energy to affairs of more personal moment. Perhaps if they had continued to devote themselves to God's sanctuary, He might have devised some plan for providing for their wants. 4. There were other things that conspired to arrest the work. The adjacent tribes had set themselves against it. . . . Not until Darius came to the throne did the Jews pluck up courage to resume the work. Haggai's prophecies are brief and fragmentary, consisting of three addresses all delivered within a period of three months. In the first he admonished them that self-seeking at the expense of the Lord's work is a losing venture. Their own prosperity had suffered. It may seem that Haggai appealed to a low motive, but the Jews were always sensitive at this point. They had ever an eye to the main chance, and they have to this day. The Lord knew how to move their sluggish natures. When Darius issued an order endorsing the original permission to build, Haggai delivered his second address. The resources seemed inadequate to a great enterprise, and it seemed hardly worth while to build what must be an inferior house. Haggai is to assure them that God was with them, and the glory of the latter house should surpass that of the earlier one. How could that be? (1) God would here manifest Himself in the outpouring of His power. Sublime messages of truth, announcements of Divine faithfulness in the fulfilment of old-time shadows, flaming prophecies of ultimate glory were to be heard amid these rising walls. (2) But, better still, Messiah Himself was to worship at the altar, and walk among these porches. If the light of the golden candlesticks was quenched, what mattered it? The Light of the World was here to shine forth. (3) If God were so minded He might adorn the second temple with wealth incomputable. "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine." (4) Still further, the latter house was to be beautified with salvation. "For in this place will I give peace." With such considerations as these did the prophet encourage the builders. Then came Haggai's third message. He began by admonishing them that sin disqualifies for holy service. Then he touches upon their sordidness and want of faith. Let them turn and trust God. Still it holds true that godliness, obedience, simple trust, is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come (1 Tim. iv. 8). On the same day when this address was made to the people a special word of encouragement was sent through the prophet to Zerubbabel. Haggai's work was soon ended. His work was to encourage the builders, and he did it. What more could be asked of any man? God has a commission for every one. To heed and endeavour is to make an assured success of life. This is the very best that can be written of any mortal man, that he had something to do, and did it for God. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*)

Encouraging the people:—For sixteen years, just because of a little opposition, the Jews had left God's house to lie waste. In the first chapter of this prophecy Haggai rebukes them for this neglect in vigorous language. He accuses them of putting off their duty by the plea, "The time is not come, the time for the Lord's house to be built"; and points with sarcasm to the ceiled houses which they had been building for themselves in Jerusalem and its suburbs. Stirred by his words, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the remnant of the people set to work, while the prophet encouraged them by the message, "I am with you, saith the Lord." After a month had been thus occupied, and when the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles had arrived, Haggai was sent to his countrymen with another message. It is contained in the first nine verses of the second chapter of his prophecy. There is no rebuke in it, nothing but mercy and encouragement; for rebuke had accomplished its purpose, the people had willingly offered themselves for the work, and it was courage and hope that they needed in order that they might conduct it to a successful issue. God deals with us according to our attitude toward Him, and according to our need. If we climb the steep path of obedience He sends us smiles, helps, benefactions, so that the steepness is forgotten, and the hearts that resolved in fear and weakness are made to sing with joy. There were three promises given by the prophet in God's name for the encouragement of the people. I. THE PROMISE OF GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE. "Be strong, for I am with you." Their history had taught them by many illustrious

interpositions and widespread calamities that in God was their hope. When they continued in His ordinances with willing hearts He crowned them with mercies. Blessings of the field and blessings of the flock were theirs, because He ordered all things for them, and protected them from their enemies round about. But when they forsook the Lord, and turned aside to idolatry, He visited them with His judgments. The mildew and cankerworm, hail and earthquake, devastated their land, while their foes rejoiced on every side. The exile from which they had just returned had fixed deep in their souls the truth that if God withheld His favour they were helpless and exposed to oppression and disaster. So that this promise, "I am with you," was better fitted than any other to make them strong and brave. And the prophet supports the promise by an appeal to God's past faithfulness, and to His covenant which could not be broken. "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt." II. THE PROMISE OF MIRACULOUS INTERPOSITION. "I will shake the heavens." "I will shake all nations." The Jews had already encountered opposition, and they were likely to meet with more. But God, who possessed all resources, who had displayed His energies at Sinai, would again rise and put forth His power on their behalf. God would not leave them to the operation of ordinary forces and the vicissitudes of hurrying events. He would Himself be the chief Actor, as in the days of old, when He brought them out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm. III. THE PROMISE THAT, NOTWITHSTANDING APPEARANCES TO THE CONTRARY, THE LATTER GLORY OF THE TEMPLE SHOULD BE GREATER THAN THE FORMER. The old men had wept when the foundations of the temple were laid, because of its inferiority to the temple of their memory. They were deceived partly by the illusion of fancy which surrounds what is past with a halo, which it never had at the time, and partly by that disposition, common enough to man, which sees nothing in that which is passing, and which is before their eyes. But God's message to them and to us is one of hope. The golden age, which pagan and heathen nations put in the far-off past, God puts into the future. "God goes forward and not back, and is never so baffled as to be compelled to suspend progress. Let us not despise our own work nor our own generation. It also has a place in the history of God's work in the world." (*T. Vincent Tymms.*) *Inspiring anticipations*:—1. Men are always prone to be deluded by externals, and to suppose that the absence of outward splendour is indicative of the absence of God's blessing, forgetting that God often chooses the weak things of the earth to confound the mighty, that no flesh may glory in His presence (ver. 3). 2. The presence of God with His people is sufficient ground for encouragement to work in His service, whatever be the external difficulties, and sufficient comfort in distress how great soever be the calamity (ver. 4). 3. The covenant of God, and the Spirit of God, are the great grounds of hope to His people, in engaging in His service, and the promises made to the fathers may be pleaded by the children (ver. 5). 4. The kingdoms of the world are but the scaffolding for God's spiritual temple, to be thrown down when their purpose is accomplished (ver. 6). 5. The uncertainty and transitoriness of all that is earthly should lead men to seek repose in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (ver. 7). 6. The various changes of life in both individuals and nations are designed to lead them to bring their choicest offerings, and dedicate them to God. 7. The New Testament in all its outward lowliness has a glory in its possession of a completed salvation, through the atoning work of a crucified Saviour, far above all the outward magnificence of the Mosaic dispensation (ver. 9). 8. The kingdom of Christ makes peace between God and man, and in its ultimate results will make peace between man and man, and destroy all that produces discord and confusion, war and bloodshed on the earth (ver. 9). (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. *My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not.*—*The patience of the Spirit*:—Some, more especially the older men of the nation, remembering the magnificence of the temple of Solomon, and contrasting with it the meanness of the present temple, were continually discouraging the builders; so the Lord sent His prophets again the second time to say,—“My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not.” So we are often tempted to give up in despair, because our efforts seem so puny and so weak; but God's message comes to us to-day with this encouragement, “My Spirit remaineth among you.” 1. There are those who are continually putting off. They are busily engaged in their own pursuits, but are putting off the demands and claims of Almighty God. The

text ought to speak to such some heart-searching and heart-breaking appeals. Is not the patience of the Spirit wonderful? To think that the Holy Spirit of God should still keep on waiting while we were saying to God, "When I have a convenient season I will call for Thee." 2. There are men who profess to be Christian men. But they seem satisfied with being sure that they have escaped the damnation of hell. They are like the returned exiles who were satisfied with having an altar, and were not anxious about getting a temple. Yet God's Spirit is still waiting. Do not trust in any fancied security. 3. There are those who feel that unless they are found working for Christ they cannot reasonably hope that they have been saved by Christ. If God's Spirit is with us He reveals to us that we are in this world to do some good to our fellow-men. If we are despondent as we think how little we have done, the assurance of the text is encouraging, "My Spirit remaineth with you." Trusting in the patient, abiding, indwelling Spirit, may we be more and more inspired, in spite of every temptation to despondency, to rise and build the temple of our God. (*E. A. Stuart, M.A.*)

The presence of God's Spirit in the Church :—The conduct of God towards His Church in ancient time is an ennobling and a comforting study: ennobling because it brings His character before our view in a light in which we cannot see it in the fields of nature and in the works of creation; comforting because it brings to our view God in all those glorious relations which nature has no knowledge of. The ancient Jewish Church was set apart by God for the purpose of illustrating those deeper and, if I might dare so to speak, final aspects of the Divine nature. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit's presence and power in the Church is not less vital to her interests than the doctrine of salvation by the finished work of Christ. I. THE PROMISE ITSELF. "So My Spirit remaineth among you." 1. The indispensability of the blessing here spoken of. "The Spirit of God." The doctrine of spiritual influence was not so prominently taught, nor was it so clearly understood, under the old economy as we know it, and as it is taught to us. There was so much that was external, formal, and typical that the great truth of the absolute necessity of spiritual influence was apt to be laid aside and forgotten. That doctrine was not, however, altogether kept out of sight. It is not a doctrine exclusively confined to the Christian economy, as some have supposed. We have a more full and copious display of the Spirit's power in the Church of Christ now than there was in those olden times. There is no single believer who is not himself the possessor of the Holy Spirit's influence. We have the Holy Spirit not only as a Teacher, but as a Comforter. We all know the difference between the reading of the Word of God without Divine illumination, and with it. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and brings them home to us. He deadens us to the things of the world, and quickens us to all Divine realities. Without the Spirit of God within us there can be no real holiness. There may be external consistency. The Spirit is the only agent that can dive deeply down into the secret recesses of the human heart, that can command the energies and feelings of the soul one by one, and bring them all into a loving subjection to the obedience of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Revealer also to us of the glories of our future inheritance. The things which the eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not heard, and the heart of man hath not conceived of, are made known to us by the Spirit of God. 2. The Divine mercy as displayed in the giving of the promise. On what ground could that Spirit have been given to the children of Israel except on this? 3. The adaptation of the blessing to all times and all circumstances. The gift which the text promises I should desire most for the welfare of this, or any other church. As Jehovah Himself lives ever, so His Spirit shall follow us ever through all the changing scenes of time. 4. The certainty of the blessing. We are told that this promise of the Spirit was covenanted. The covenant assures us a new heart and a right spirit. II. THE GREAT TRUTH WHICH THIS PROMISE FORCES UPON OUR ATTENTION. "Fear not." "There is nothing for you to fear now I have given you this promise," says Jehovah. 1. Fear no local change. 2. Fear not personal apostasies in the history of the Church. 3. Fear not, for the existence of God's Church among you is of some importance to the surrounding locality. (*W. Barker.*)

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church an antidote to her fears :—The Lord showed great favour to His Church during the Old Testament Dispensation, in the frequency with which He revealed to her His mind and will, and in His special appearances for her preservation and deliverance. At the return of the Jews to their own land at the termination of the seventy years' captivity the Lord was very

gracious to His Church, against which He had had indignation so long. At that time the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices were all filled by eminent men. The prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Barachiah. The governor was Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and the high priest was Joshua, the son of Josedech. By the instrumentality of the two prophets who have been mentioned the Jews were encouraged to begin to rebuild the house of God, and to persevere in the work till it was accomplished. Although the people began the work with ardour, so soon as they had laid the foundation they began to be discouraged. There were various reasons for this, such as the vexatious opposition which their enemies carried on against them, and the mean appearance of their work in comparison with the grandeur of the former temple built by Solomon. In order to encourage them to persevere the Lord sent the prophet with a new message, which we have in this chapter from verse 2 to 9. The words which precede the text contain a supplement by the translators which give a good sense. But they may be read more forcibly in connection with the preceding verses without the supplement, thus, "For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts, I, the Word that covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." These words may be regarded as the language of God in the Person of the Son or of Christ. In them Christ assures His ancient people that He was now graciously present with them by His Spirit, and exhorts them not to be afraid. Most important is the presence of Christ by His Spirit in the Church. It is essential to the Church's vitality, increase, and general spiritual prosperity.

I. WE ARE TO MENTION SOME EVIDENCES OF THE SPIRIT'S REMAINING AMONG A PEOPLE, OR IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. One evidence of this is—1. Purity of doctrine and of worship enjoyed in the Church. God has been pleased to grant unto His Church a supernatural revelation of His will which we possess in the completed Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is the duty of the Church thus favoured so to receive that Word as to embrace the whole system of revealed truth. The Holy Spirit delights to dwell only where truth and purity reign. Purity of doctrine and worship is also spoken of by Christ as the effect of His Spirit's presence in the Church, when He says of Him, "He shall glorify Me for He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you," and "He shall testify of Me, and shall lead you into all truth." Men may be as zealous as they choose, and as fervid and fervent about their own devices and inventions in God's worship as they will; but, departing from the rule of the Divine Word, they are under the guidance only of their own spirits. Another evidence is—2. Unity in the maintenance of a scriptural profession and purity of Church fellowship. As the Church of Christ is a society separated from the rest of the world for the service and glory of God, it has an essential unity belonging to it; and this unity ought to be manifested by it, both in its profession of faith and in its holy practice, for it is the will of its Divine Head who hath founded and established it, that is the rule in respect of both. The presence of the Spirit in the Church causes the members of it to speak the same things and to walk by the same rule. We are aware that there are some who imagine that such unity in the truth, and purity of Church fellowship, is too chimerical an idea to be realised. "It is not possible," say they, "unless we are to conceive men to have only one mind, and to be divested of volition and of independence." But we reply that all the sacred writers disprove this, for they had volition and independence, and yet spoke the same thing. The state of the early Christian Church disproves it, when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." 3. Power accompanying God's Word and ordinances. 4. The exercise of grace, and the cultivation of a holy walk and conversation evidences the remaining of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit resides in every believer as the spirit of life, of light, of holiness, and of comfort. He not only carries on all those operations in the soul which recover it from ignorance, and enmity, and unhappiness, and bring it to the knowledge, love, and enjoyment of God, but He carries on the good work which He has begun, until it is perfected in complete conformity to the Divine image. 5. The abounding in prayer. **II. TO SHOW WHAT FEARS THE SPIRIT'S REMAINING AMONG A PEOPLE OR IN THE CHURCH IS CALCULATED TO REMOVE.** Generally, the Spirit's remaining in the Church may remove all fears about the maintenance and success of the Lord's work and cause. But, more particularly, the Spirit's presence in the Church is fitted to remove—1. The fear occasioned by open and secret enemies to the work and cause of God. The Jews were greatly discouraged in building the second temple by the number and power of their enemies, and by their open

hostility, secret plots, and contrivances to defeat them in the work in which they were engaged. So great, indeed, was their power, that they prevailed for a season to induce Artaxerxes, King of Persia, to put a stop to the work altogether. And so, when the Lord's people have His Spirit remaining among them, they have no reason to fear that the work and cause of God shall be overthrown, either by temporal or by spiritual enemies. Whatever may be their number, influence, or power, however great their malice and crafty their devices, the Spirit of God is able to defeat them, for He is almighty, omniscient, and omnipotent, and He is possessed of every infinite perfection. 2. The fears occasioned by the falling away of professed friends. When the Jews were engaged in building the temple and city they were tried by the desertion of some who once professed themselves to be friendly, and this was followed, as often happens in such cases, by open opposition. Among those who acted so basely the most conspicuous were Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite. In a similar way the people of God have been tried in all ages. 3. The fears occasioned by the removal of true friends of the work and cause of God. There are various ways in which the true and tried friends of the cause and work of God may be removed. In His providence they may be placed at a great distance from their brethren, so that they cannot be with them, as they were wont, nor so serviceable to them as they used to be. Sometimes affliction detains them for a long time from countenancing and encouraging by their presence those who delight in their company, and hold them in high esteem for their steadfast attachment to the truth and fidelity to the cause of Christ. The removal is sometimes, however, more permanent, and the separation more painful, for death takes them away from the world and from the Church below. But they are gone! And surely not without cause do we weep. We have not, we fear, improved our privileges aright, nor rendered unto the Lord according to the benefits we have received; and in judgment the Lord has recalled His gifts. Who, we well may ask, fill their places? But while we wish to lay to heart the Lord's dealings, and justly fear that His servants are taken away from the evil to come, we ought not to give way to desponding fears as to the Lord's cause and work. If the Lord's Spirit remain among us we have no cause to be afraid. He is able to give a double portion of His Spirit to those who remain, and to raise up Elishas upon whom the mantle of Elijah has fallen. We shall only add—4. The fear of sufferings and of trials which the people of God may meet with in their adherence to the cause and work of the Lord. In prosecuting the work and cause of God His people are often called by Him in His providence to make many sacrifices of their own ease and comfort, and of their worldly substance; they have also to bear much reproach and scorn for the truth's sake, not only from the world, but from those who bear the Christian name. These things are apt to discourage and fill them with fear. But the promise and evidence of the Spirit's remaining among them is an antidote to this fear. He will not allow any trial to befall them without making His grace sufficient for them. His promise is, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." In conclusion—1. This subject teaches us that the Holy Spirit is the very life of the Church and people of God. 2. This subject teaches us, further, that the Spirit's presence among His people is sufficient to remove their fears about the maintenance of the Lord's cause and the continuance of His work. So long as the Spirit remains among His people they may rest assured that He will continue His work and maintain His cause in spite of all opposition and hindrances. 3. Again, this subject teaches us that there are many sad evidences of a great departure of the Spirit and withdrawal of His gracious influences at the present day. The withdrawal of the influences of the Spirit, and His departure through being grieved, is an evil that the Church and people of God ought greatly to fear. (*J. Ritchie.*)

Vers. 6-7.—Yet once . . . and I will shake the heavens.—*Divine shakings*.—What are these shakings? They have generally been referred to the establishment of the New Testament dispensation, from the text in Hebrews. This interpretation we cannot receive, because—1. The designation of the interval before their commencement as "yet only a little while" leads us to look for a nearer future than five hundred years. 2. The force of the Hiphil participle here is properly to denote a continuance of shakings for an indefinite time. 3. The same phrase in vers. 22, 23 obviously refers to something outside of the Messianic kingdom, and not inside of it. 4. The usual meaning of this symbolical act is

that of a visitation of vengeance on the enemies of God, and not an unfolding of His dispensations of mercy. And—5. The future establishment of the Messiah's kingdom would not be as directly comforting to them as the nearer and more closely connected even to which the prophet alluded. This event was the speedy shaking of the social and political systems that were around and above them, before and beneath which they were in such dread as to hesitate about going forward in their work. That this fact would be an encouragement to them is obvious. They trembled before the consolidated power of Persia, and the craft of Samaria that might bring that power upon them again in restraint, if not in vengeance. The prophet assures them that they need not tremble, for in a little time this stupendous fabric would totter, and others be thrown up in its place. As these powers were soon to be prostrated, the people of God need not fear before their enemies, that were so soon to fall before them. This gives the key to all history. God will allow men to rear the loftiest fabrics, as individuals and as nations, but He will shake them down, that they may then seek for some immovable basis on which to rest. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The shaking of the nations* :—They who know that the Spirit of God remains with them, will not fear when God shakes the earth. What will a wise man fear? Nothing but that which would draw him away from God. Least of all would he fear that which is meant to bring him nearer to God. But this is the very purpose for which God shakes the earth, that He may burst the doors of our earthly prison, and the chains which bind us to the earth. This is the end for which God will overthrow a man's health, that he may learn how fleeting a possession bodily health is, and may seek that spiritual health which will abide with him for ever. It was by shaking the earth and the nations that God brought Israel out of Egypt, and established a people upon earth who were to be the shrine of His presence, the tabernacle of His law. It is by the shaking of our hearts and souls that the Son of God is made manifest to us. He shakes our earthly riches that we may be led to desire heavenly riches, which will never make themselves wings and flee away. This is the one great lesson which we may learn from our text, that they whom God shakes, if the Spirit of God remains with them, will not fear; because they know that, through this shaking, the desire of all nations will come to them, and fill their souls with His glory. (*Julius C. Hare, M.A.*) *The nations shaken, and the desire of all come* :—Three things are foretold in this remarkable prediction. 1. Great commotions and tribulations in the earth. 2. Wonderful and unexpected revolutions. 3. The glorious and happy issue of all these commotions, in the final triumph of Christ and His Gospel. He is properly called the "desire of all nations," because the whole creation groans for deliverance from guilt, for an interposing Mediator, who can make atonement for sin, satisfy Divine justice, and give peace to a wounded conscience. To Christ, therefore, and to His religion, this prophecy belongs. I. TEXT REFERS TO THE PERIOD WHEN JESUS WAS MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH. To prepare the way for this grand event, we may see the omnipotent Jehovah shaking the heavens, earth, and seas. II. VIEW TEXT AS RECEIVING ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT IN OUR OWN DAY. 1. He is shaking many kingdoms by awful judgments and unexpected revolutions. Concerning the shaking of the nations, note three things—(1) They are from God. (2) To the nations visited, the judgments of God are in wrath, and correctors of iniquity. (3) The effect of these visitations will be either unfeigned repentance and reformation, or utter ruin and destruction. 2. Though the shaking of the nations bring deserved calamity on guilty lands, yet the final issue of all will be the wide extent of our glorious Redeemer's kingdom, and the universal triumph of His Gospel. These predictions are now being fulfilled. All these present tumults and desolations are connected with events which shall bring peace, and righteousness, and joy to the whole earth. (*A. Bonar.*) *The nations shaken* :—We find here two things spoken of—1. The arrival of Him who is called "the desire of all nations": and 2. The introductory circumstances, "I will shake all nations." The one of these clauses was meant historically to be introductory and precursory of the other. We have, in this verse, a set of antecedent circumstances, and a given result and fulfilment. I. THOSE NATIONAL CONVULSIONS WHICH PRECEDED THE ADVENT OF MESSIAH. The expression, "the shaking of the nations," is put to signify other things besides mere national and mere political convulsions, but it clearly includes these. Sometimes it means those mental commotions that over-spread the minds of individuals. We all know what is meant by a person being "disturbed in thought." "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled,"

&c. Sometimes it means a removal of religious dispensations, as in Heb. xii. Apply to the five centuries which lay between the utterance of this prophecy by Haggai, and its fulfilment in the coming of our Master. What changes were there, both political, mental, and religious, precursive of the Christian dispensation. Give account of the Medo-Persian Empire, of Alexander's conquests, of the military power of Rome. Great thought-leaders arose in this period, and their opinions always bred convulsions. Philosophical schools were always at enmity with one another. Opinions held by some were utterly repudiated by others. As far as intellect was concerned, there was a desperate shaking of the nations. And as to religion, everything seemed to tell that Judaism was fast passing away. It was doubted by its own adherents. II. THE CONNECTION OF CHRIST'S ADVENT WITH THESE SHAKINGS. One great object of Christ in coming to the world was the establishment of peace. He was to be the Prince of Peace. He designed to establish a reign of peace. All His teachings go to the same point. How is it then, that though eighteen centuries have passed, the empire of peace has not come? The answer is that the world has not accepted the principles of Christianity. It is one thing to say that a step is taken towards the effectuation of an object, and another to say that the object has been effected, because there may be impediments put in the way of the effectuation which, while they hinder the fulfilment, by no means at all nullify the statement that the original intention was to produce that effect. A second object of our Master's coming was, the resolution of all those doubts and misgivings that keep the minds of men in perpetual agitation. If the Master came to resolve doubts, why do doubts still exist? Because men love darkness rather than light. Another object of our Saviour's coming was to do away with Judaism. This was to be accomplished by an act of supplantation. When instead of a Jewish priest there came a real priest; when instead of the typical sacrifice there came the real sacrifice; when instead of the prostration of body there came the sanctification of the spirit, the substance of Judaism was reached, and the type of Judaism might pass away. Learn—1. That though we are living in times of great disturbance, we may take this comfort, as convulsions introduced the first advent, so other convulsions may introduce the second. 2. There may be some whose hearts are disquieted, distressed, disturbed by many anxious spiritual cogitations; and we tell you to cease to be your own master, and let God's Bible teach you. Make it your comfort, stay, director, instructor. There is a time coming when mystery shall be dispelled, for it is written in the page of Scripture, "Then shall I know even as also I am known." (*Archibald Boyd, M.A.*) The desire of all nations shall come.—*Christ the desire of all nations*:—As the prophet's affirmation was not verified in a material sense, Christian commentators of all schools have generally agreed that it must refer to the actual presence of the Redeemer in the second temple. The title, "Desire of all nations," requires some explanation. It is reasonable to suppose that it has some respect to the design of the Father in sending Him into the world. The Jews could not believe that salvation was intended for any but themselves. But this fond conceit was at variance with their own Scriptures. While Christ has not, up to this time, been the actual desire of all of every nation, nor even of all of any one nation, yet very many of different nations have owned and adored Him as their Lord. A spectator of that scene at Pentecost could scarcely have repressed the feeling, "Surely, the desire of all nations has come." He is the only being that has appeared in the world of whom this could be affirmed. Every nation, pagan, Mohammedan, and Christian, has its heroes and sages. Within their respective countries they have received general homage—in some cases, indeed, a world-wide celebrity. But for none of them could it be claimed that he was the desire of all nations in the sense in which this title is challenged for Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is the one paramount desire of those who have scarcely anything else in common. Men who are the poles apart on other topics,—on questions of literature, of politics, of trade, of metaphysics, of Church government,—use the same language when they bow before the mercy-seat, sing the same psalms of praise to the Redeemer, and labour with the same zeal to make Him known to others. Where He is concerned, all their hopes and aspirations coalesce, like needles pointing to the same pole. This, however, seems to apply only to those who have a personal knowledge of Christ as their own Redeemer. Is He, in any wider sense than this, the desire of all nations? He cannot be the conscious desire of nations who have never heard of Him, but He may be, He is, their unconscious desire. He is their desire—1. Inasmuch as they long for a

competent and infallible Teacher. The love of truth is natural to man. There is a latent yearning that is not to be pacified until it finds the truth which God has appointed as its nutriment. Left to their blind guides the nations have lived and died, wandering sadly through the mazes of error. Worn and wearied with perpetual disappointments, humanity has longed for the advent of one who could resolve its doubts, allay its fears, and re-inspire its hopes, by unfolding to it immortal truth. 2. They long for a clearer manifestation of the Deity. Man must have a God. If he cannot have the true God, he will fashion gods for himself. Man has hoped, in some way, to behold God as a sharer of our humanity. This universal yearning is alone met in the mission of Jesus Christ. 3. Christ is the desire of all nations in His redeeming work. Universal is the sense of sin and danger: a feeling of exposure to penalty; the dread of an offended Deity. The needful expiation has been made, once for all. In the Cross of Christ is that which will satisfy even these yearnings—the deepest, the saddest, the most abiding, the most universal known to fallen humanity. Then—1. No nation can enjoy true and permanent prosperity except by receiving and honouring Him. 2. The cause of missions deserves our support as the great interest of earth. If Christ be the desire of all nations, what is He to *us* individually? (*Henry A. Boardman, D.D.*) *The desire of all nations*.—The ancient Jews regarded this prophecy as relating to the advent of the Messiah. It is remarkable that the prophet should describe the Messiah as the desire of *all nations*. He foresaw a salvation which should reach to the end of the earth. I. THE NEED ALL NATIONS HAD OF A REDEEMER. No one can look abroad into the state of the world, either as it is recorded in history, or reported by travellers of the present day, without seeing with grief and horror their general ignorance of God; their devotion to idolatry; their ignorance of a future state; and their vicious practices, particularly their impurity and cruelty. If we lead you to the morality of the heathen, how dreary, or how disgusting is our report! In these things, in which the nations of the world so greatly needed a Divine instructor, the religion of Jesus was peculiarly calculated to supply their wants; to remove their ignorance, to purify their hearts, to soften their ferocity. With the preaching of the Gospel a change was effected, like that which is wrought by the mightiest powers of the natural world. Both Jews and Gentiles had need of One who should reconcile them to God, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth. That One is found alone in Christ. II. THE EXPECTATION OF A REDEEMER WHICH SUSISTED PREVIOUS TO CHRIST'S APPEARING. We find everywhere prevailing an idea of the need of a mediator between God and man, either to reveal the will of the former, or to render the prayers and offerings of the latter acceptable. The wisest philosophers confess that the Deity must Himself reveal His will if it is to be known. This idea the Almighty suffered to be promulgated by means of oracles, auguries, divinations. Everywhere is the desire to propitiate the Deity by offerings and sacrifices. As proofs of an actual expectation of this Divine Person, take the testimonies of two Roman historians, Suetonius and Tacitus. Both say that "some One coming out of Judea should possess the empire." Some rays of Divine light illuminated even the thickest darkness; some remains of a former promise lived in the minds of the heathen; some Divine impressions showed them their wants, and their inability to supply them; some gracious communications instructed them whither to look for deliverance from ignorance and superstition. These faint gleams were lost in that glorious light which burst upon the earth when the Sun of Righteousness rose to bring wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption. But they served to guide many a wandering traveller through the thick night which enveloped the Gentile world, and to preserve the doctrine of a Divine providence. How gloriously did our blessed Lord relieve all doubts, and satisfy all expectations. But the great things which have been revealed kindle in our hearts a hope of future mercies. (*T. Boudler, A.M.*) *Christ the desire and glory of His Church*.—I. THE TIME WHEN OUR LORD WAS TO COME. "It is a little while." Yet it proved to be five hundred years. A short period compared with the time the Church had already been kept waiting for the Messiah. It was short in Jehovah's own sight. II. A SOLEMN CIRCUMSTANCE THAT IS TO ATTEND THE MESSIAH'S COMING. "I will shake," &c. What is this mighty shaking? The language has been interpreted as pointing out those political convulsions and changes which agitated the world between the uttering of this prophecy and our Lord's birth, one great empire giving way to another, and that in its turn yielding to a third. St. Paul applies it, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, to the uprooting and destruction of the

whole Mosaic dispensation. We may put another interpretation on this prediction. There may be a further reference in it to those moral and spiritual effects which have ever attended and followed the Gospel in its progress through the world. Wherever it has come, it has come with a shaking. It has startled the world, surprised it and changed it. Let the Gospel find its way into a sinner's heart, what a convulsion, what a complete uprooting and change does it often effect there! III. A DESCRIPTION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. "The desire of all nations." 1. In the sight of God He is desirable for all nations. 2. Some of all nations have desired Him. But we must look forward for a full explanation of this title. 3. All nations will desire this Saviour. Imagine these prophecies fulfilled, let this glorious scene be realised, bring before your minds a holy and rejoicing earth, and then cast your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, its holy and rejoicing King—what would you call Him? Just what the great God, the Lord of hosts, calls Him here, "The desire of all nations," the joy of the sons of men, the one great blessing, hope, and comfort of a regenerated world. IV. THE GLORIOUS CONSEQUENCE OF THE PROMISED REDEEMER'S ADVENT. "I will fill this house with glory." "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." The former house was Solomon's. How was this magnificent promise fulfilled? The promise seemed to have no fulfilment. At last an Infant enters that temple, brought thither from a stable and a manger, and borne in a peasant's arms. Here in this second temple God Himself was manifest in our mortal flesh. A twofold application—(1) It shows us wherein consists the chief glory of any Church. In the presence and manifestation within it of the Lord Jesus Christ. A real spiritual presence. (2) It tells us wherein consists the chief happiness of every really Christian heart. (C. Bradley, M.A.) *Christ the desire of all nations*.—The Church engages our thoughts both on the first and second advents of our Lord. For we, like them of old, are "waiting for the consolation of Israel." We exhibit Messiah as the desire of all nations with respect to both His advents. There are two kinds of predictions in the Holy Writings; the one anticipating a dispensation of grace and mercy, the other speaking of awful and tremendous judgments, seasons of tribulation such as the world had never before witnessed. Though our Lord was the Prince of Peace, yet through human perversity the result of His mission was a sword, the kindling of the fire of evil passions, the setting of the members of a household one against another. Whatever we expect hereafter, here we look not for the fulfilment of our hopes. Knowing the issue, the perpetual feud between the Church and the world, the weary persecutions by which the faithful have been harassed, how can the bringer-in of such a dispensation be the desire of all nations? Still less, seeing what must be the result of His future manifestation, how can He assume this character as the righteous Judge of an apostate world? The distinction may be thus made. The prophets do not say that when He appears, the desires of all nations shall be satisfied; but that He who is the desire of all nations shall come; He, that is, whom they desire by anticipation. With respect to His first coming, it is certain that, from the Fall downwards, the sons of men have ever looked for some mighty deliverer. However deeply men might err as to the object of faith,—however speculative their notions as to the nature of the Eternal Godhead and their own nature,—however depraved their ideas how they were to propitiate the Supreme Being,—they could not avoid the conviction that, if they were to be saved at all, it must be by the advent of a Son of God in human form, as the connecting link between the Creator offended, and the creature sinning. Such foreshadowings of the truth, originally impressed upon the human mind, the sacred oracles confirm. The streams of tradition and Scripture unite in one deep channel of expectation. But how did He, in whom these anticipations centred, fulfil them? Not in the way in which the sons of men imagined He would. If, dwelling on the train of miseries which the destroyer has brought upon the earth, and unable to reconcile what they saw around and felt within them with His righteous rule whose offspring they knew themselves to be, they yet had faith to see that He in whose hands their destinies lay, ever brings good out of evil, and that every affliction happens to man as part of a discipline of love, and will one day cease altogether—if such were their thoughts, then their fulfilment in God's good time was verily assured to them. The proof that Christ's kingdom has been set up, is seen in the rescue of men from the bondage of slavery and sin; in the daily, hourly, victories gained over the powers of darkness by those in whose weakness His "strength is made perfect." The same desires

which Messiah so graciously met, so far as our necessary trial admits, at His first advent, will receive their full and complete satisfaction only at His second coming. One point more. It is to the temple of the Lord that the desire of all nations shall come; it is there that He shall take up His abode. The words of Haggai and Malachi find their primary accomplishment in the presentation of the infant Jesus. But the true temple is our humanity. We know that He is with us, whether we assemble ourselves together to worship and adore Him, to pour out the plaints of our hearts in holy litanies, to praise Him "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," or whether we bend our knees in the silence and privacy of our closets. Let me ask you, then, have you such desires as the Lord at His next coming will be likely to satisfy? Ye have seen what they are. They are such as earth, and the things of earth, cannot fill. (*G. Huntington, M.A.*) *The desire of all nations*:—This is one of the most difficult, yet most interesting texts of the Old Testament. Many critics would rob the passage of its Messianic element, and degrade the glory of the temple into material gifts and privileges. They assert that the translation is not correct. 1. "The desire of all nations" should be "the desirable things of all nations," as the LXX τὰ ἐκλεκτὰ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν. The prophet describes, say they, not the coming of a person, but the contributions made to the rebuilding of the second temple (ver. 8; Isa. lx. 5), "the forces of the Gentiles (the wealth of the nations) will come to Thee," i.e., be brought to Jerusalem. The Hebrew word *Khēmādāth* (from *Khāmād*, to wish or desire) signifies wish or desire (2 Chron. xxi. 20), and as applied to persons means the best, the noblest, and most precious. "A man of desires," i.e., as the margin, one desired or desirable (Dan. ix. 23, x. 3, 11). "He is altogether lovely" (Song v. 16). In Heb. the same word as here is used, "all desires," or object of desires. But if the term refers to things, the glory of the second temple could not excel the glory of the first, for it wanted many treasures which the first contained (cf. Ezra iii. 12). 2. It is objected that a singular noun is followed by a plural verb "shall come"; hence the text should be altered and amended by ancient versions. But if we have any right at all to alter, have we not as much right to change the verb in number as the noun? The Vulgate agrees with the Eng. Ver., "desideratus cunctis gentibus." Why not take the word as a collective noun, and understand the Messiah as concentrating all excellences in His person, in whom the desires of all nations find their centre and satisfaction? This title seems to suit prophecy concerning Him (Gen. xlix. 10); and Christ was called by the Jews "the hope of Israel," "the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles" (1 Tim. i. 1; Tit. ii. 3; Acts xxviii. 20, xxvi. 7, 8; Gal. iii. 14). It is not likely that the gifts of proselytes and worshippers, contributions from heathen princes, and the devotion of surrounding countries, would be esteemed by Jews greater glory than the magnificence of Solomon's temple; and is it not unreasonable to think that the prophet would direct men to material treasures as constituting the "greater glory"? In what can this august prediction find its fulfilment if not in the Saviour of the world, who alone could give the "peace" mentioned in verse 9? If we carefully examine its words and catch its drift, the difficulties may not all be cleared away; but this sense seems to be furnished by collateral evidence, to agree with the context, and is in harmony with the spirit of the prophet, and with the exordium of his prophecy. "The desire of all nations" we believe to be the Saviour of the world, whom the Magi from the East and the Greeks from the West desired to see. Moral and physical changes prepared for His coming. The "greater glory" was exhibited in the presentation, teaching, and personal ministry of Jesus. The nearness of the time appears to oppose this view. "Yet once, it is a little while," or yet a little while, lit., "one little," only a brief space. But with the Lord a thousand years are as one day. The Divine mode of reckoning is not like our own. We are to look beyond the first to the second temple—from the present to the future—from the beginning to the end of these grand events. Sacrifices were abolished, the temple ritual was completed, and "peace" was given in the doctrine, and by the death of Christ. Hence, God's Spirit remains with His people (ver. 5). Wherever Jesus dwells, He imparts a glory surpassing the splendour of the Shekinah and the glory of Solomon's temple. He can transform the character and beautify the soul. We need Him. Shakings within must prepare for His reception. He has been once, and He will come a second time. Do we desire Him? Have we found Him? May Christ dwell in our hearts the hope of glory! (*Jas. Wolfendale.*) *The moral progress of the world*:—I. It requires great social REVOLUTIONS AMONGST

MANKIND. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land." Revolutions in society seem to me essential to the moral progress of the race. There must be revolutions in theories and practices in relation to governments, markets, temples, churches. How much there is to be shaken in the heaven and earth of Christendom before the cause of true moral progress can advance! May we not hope that all the revolutions that are constantly occurring in governments and nations are only the removal of obstructions in the moral march of humanity?

II. It INVOLVES THE SATISFACTION OF THE MORAL CRAVINGS OF MANKIND. "The desire of all nations shall come." The moral craving of humanity is satisfied in Christ, and in Christ only. 1. Man's deep desire is reconciliation to his Creator. 2. Man's deep desire is to have inner harmony of soul. Christ does this. 3. To have brotherly unity with the race. Moral socialism is what all nations crave for. Christ does this. He breaks down the middle wall of partition. He unites all men together by uniting all men to God. III. It ENSURES THE HIGHEST MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD TO MANKIND. "I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord." 1. God will be recognised as the universal proprietor. "Silver is Mine, and gold is Mine," &c. 2. God will be recognised as the universal peace giver. "I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." (*Homilist.*) *Christ the world's desire*.—The desire for a revelation of God is a desire of all nations. Men have never been able to rest satisfied with the bare knowledge or assurance that God is, they have ever yearned for some conception of what God is. What are all the gods of the heathen but human answers to the question, "What is God?" That question has, as yet, found no true answer. There is still a desire as deep as man's need, as universal as humanity itself, to know what God is, to see a revelation of the Deity. It is fulfilled in Christ. His mission is to satisfy the desire of all nations to see God. Let us take our place at the feet of the God-revealing Christ. The desire to be reconciled to God is a universal longing in the heart of man. In Christ is the fulfilment of this desire. In all its stages, here and in heaven, we see in Christ reconciliation between man and God, so that, as the way to the Father, He satisfies the desire of all nations. To all men, conscious of these restless longings and desires, Christ's invitation is, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." (*Alex. Marshall, M.A.*) *The desire of nations*.—How was this prophecy fulfilled? The second temple was never equal to the first in outward appearance. How, then, could the glory of the second temple exceed that of the first? God incarnate, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, stood in the second temple, and that made its glory greater. The text foretells the coming of Christ, and says that coming should be preceded by great commotions. How truly this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ those who know the history of the period before His coming will understand. It would seem as if neither civil nor religious benefits could ever be bestowed upon our world except as preceded by such commotions. Whether it is that men become so rooted down in old prejudices in favour of existing evils, that nothing short of bloodshed and revolution will tear them up, or whether God thus punishes old errors, and by His chastening produces a reformation, certain it is, that civil liberty and religious progress have usually dated their most important epochs from seasons of war and political disturbance. So let us regard the present crisis. Let our eye be directed upward to Him who rides upon the storm, and our prayer to Him be, that this, and every other which passes over our globe, may purify more and more, until earth shall have the very atmosphere of heaven. Scripture teaches that the millennial day is to be preceded by a great shaking of the nations. The text has an individual application to ourselves. Christ is, or ought to be, the desire of every heart. Just as God shakes the nations before the desire of nations comes, so does He arouse sinners before Christ can enter into their hearts. (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *The desire of all nations*.—The text foretold a strange phenomenon. It declared that the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity would be seen among sinful men. I. DESIRE, AS REFERRING TO THE EXPECTATION OF THE WHOLE HUMAN FAMILY. It is a fact deserving attention, that among the nations there has ever existed a widespread, if not universal expectation of a glorious Person, to be the renovator of mankind, and to impress a new character on the spirit, habits, and morals of the earth. The expectation was not confined to the Jews. II. DESIRE, AS REFERRING TO THE WANTS OF THE WHOLE HUMAN FAMILY. Wherever a human being is found, there will be found a conscience, a moral sense. Let men seek by repentance to atone for guilt, it is in vain. Everywhere the

imploping cry is heard for some medium, some mediator between God and man. To the want produced by guilt, add that created by the corruption which sin hath shed through our nature. III. DESIRE, AS REFERRING TO THE HAPPINESS OF THE WHOLE HUMAN FAMILY. Jesus alone can confer true happiness; because the mind of man can rejoice only in truth, and Christ is "the truth"; because the heart of man can only be satisfied with objects worthy of it; and because God is the life of the soul, and Christ alone reveals this Being, and reinstates us in His favour and love. (*R. Fuller, D.D.*) *Christ the desire of all nations*.—I. WHY CHRIST MAY JUSTLY BE CALLED THE "DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS." 1. Because of the general expectation that prevailed in the world previously to His coming. 2. Because all mankind required such a Saviour as He is, whether they knew Him or not. 3. Because the Lord Jesus is so attractive in Himself, that all would actually desire Him if they knew Him. 4. Because many, in all nations, have actually desired Him. 5. Because ultimately all the families of the earth shall be blessed in Him. II. HOW DID CHRIST'S PRESENCE RENDER THE SECOND TEMPLE MORE GLORIOUS THAN THE FIRST? In the second temple Jesus displayed the condescension, wisdom, power, and glory of the Deity, in such a manner as far more than made up for its want of external magnificence or internal memorials. The former temple had seen grand men, but now a sinless man. There is yet another temple which is honoured with the presence of Christ. Christians themselves are a building fitly framed together, and growing unto a holy temple in the Lord. There is yet another temple which is filled with the same glory,—the temple which is above, and in which believers serve God day and night. (*J. F. Osborne.*) *The desire of all nations*.—Here was a distinct prophecy of the Saviour's coming, and it can be appropriately referred to Him alone. That such a Divine personage was looked for by the Jews is seen in the uniform testimony of their prophets. He was the "desire of all nations," because He only could bestow those precious blessings which the world needed. Without Christ human nature was guilty, polluted, wretched, lost. He was to be the regenerator of that nature; the author of its deliverance, its happiness, and its eternal rest. The Lord Jesus was, emphatically, "The desire of all nations," because all nations shall one day be made happy in Him. His blessed reign is to be that of righteousness and peace, and the song of universal joy which shall swell forth at last in harmony with harps of gold, will be, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." For four thousand years the accomplishment of the prophecy had been looked for, and at last, in the fulness of time, the long-expected Messiah came. He appeared—1. At the very period marked out for His birth. 2. In the very manner which had been foretold. 3. He came for the performance of the very work which had been before marked out for Him. Certain remarkable events should distinguish the Messiah's coming. (1) All nations were to be shaken. (2) The Jewish temple should be filled with His glory. In several important particulars the second temple was far inferior to the first. It was not in riches, nor in outward splendour that the superiority of the second temple would consist, but in the personal presence of the Divine Redeemer. He was the infallible oracle, making known God's will: the perfect sacrifice for sin, faintly shadowed forth by the mercy-seat of the ark; the true fire, to rekindle the expiring flame in the perishing soul. In that second temple the Prince of Peace appeared, making peace between God and man, and proclaiming the Gospel of peace, whose provisions of mercy are freely offered to all. (*John N. Norton, D.D.*) *The advent of the Lord ushered in amidst the shaking of the nations*.—Though heaven be God's throne, and earth His footstool, and all space His temple, yet, in condescension to human weakness, He who fills immensity deigns to manifest Himself in a temple built by human hands. I. A GREAT PERSON, THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS, SHALL COME. There was no human probability that this part of the prophecy would be fulfilled. Who is the desired object? It can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christ may literally be said to be the desire of all nations, inasmuch as He was the object of their earnest expectation: because to all He was and is most desirable. That the promise of His coming to the temple was fulfilled, see the records of our Lord's visits to the temple, as given in the Gospels. II. THE PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING. "I will shake all nations." God bids us look for the precursors of His Son in the shakings of nations. This was prophetic, and has been exactly fulfilled. When God is about to introduce any great improvement into His Church, any era of light and enlargement, He generally precedes it by one of

trouble and commotion. This often removes serious obstacles to the establishment and welfare of the Redeemer's Church. III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMING OF THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS. "I will fill this house with glory." This is prophetic. Any one who had seen the temple of Solomon, would hesitate in believing that anything could surpass its glory. Christ now comes to His Church in remarkable dispensations of providence. As part of the Church visible, we have a great deal to do for Christ, in endeavouring, both at home and abroad, to prepare the temple for the advent of the Lord. (*J. G. Lorimer.*) *Christmas-day sermon*:—This text is a prophecy and prediction of our Saviour's incarnation. The Jews indeed pervert this text. We apprehend it as a prophetic prediction of that great benefit and mystery of our religion that the Christian Church doth this day celebrate. I. WHAT OCCASIONS THE PROPHET NOW TO MENTION OUR SAVIOUR, AND FORETELL HIS NATIVITY? The mentioning of Christ's incarnation comes in without any straining or impertinent digression. The prophet finds the people in a low condition, and the main consolation he ministers to them is this gracious assurance that the Messiah was ere long to be born, and to come among them. This promise of Christ had a threefold virtue in it that made it reasonable in the time of distress. It sweetened their sorrow in their present affliction. It revived their hope of a full restoration. It prevents and removes all doubts and suspicions that their fear may forecast against their deliverance. Shall their temple be built again out of so great ruins? There may be doubts whether such a restoration can be possible, and whether God can be so good as to accomplish it. II. WHAT IS THE NATURE, CONDITION, AND SUBSTANCE OF THIS PROMISE? Conceive the words as a lively description of our Saviour's coming. 1. Here is a solemn preparation for it. "I will shake all nations." The times before Christ were troublesome times; nation dashing against nation, and all subdued by the Roman Empire. 2. There was a stirring up of the nations to the expectation, and looking for, of the Messiah. 3. This shaking foretells a shaking of all things unto a great alteration. The coming of Christ wrought a great change. (1) In statu rerum. (2) In moribus dominum. (3) In modo rituum. 4. This shaking is a powerful drawing of men to a Christian conversion. The second subject to consider is the gracious performance of this blessed promise. "The desire of all nations shall come." Christ is the desire of all things in heaven and earth, and His incarnation that great work that all things looked for. 1. He was the delight and joy of His Father. 2. He was the desire of the angels. 3. He was the desire and longing of all creation. 4. The desire of the patriarchs. 5. The desire of the nations. Desire implies longing and wishing; attaining and possessing; enjoyment and fruition. This is not a single promise, but a promise pregnant. It includes and implies other promises with it. Here is a door set open for the Gentiles: it concerns us nearly; it is the tenure we hold by. All nations pitched upon one desire; all expect the same common salvation. Christ's Church shall be gathered out of all nations. Desire fulfilled and accomplished turns to joy, and that is the happy condition of the Christian Church. (*Geo. Stradling, S.T.P.*) *The presentation of Christ in the temple*:—Regard Christ as satisfying the craving of mankind for a perfect ideal of goodness. I. SUCH A YEARNING UNIVERSAL. Man made to look upward. Distinguished from lower animals by capacity for indefinite advance. 1. For this advance an ideal is necessary, up toward which men may struggle. "Intense admiration is necessary to our highest perfection." Nothing is so ennobling as looking up. 2. The absence of this upward tendency is a sure precursor of moral ruin. Too common now, especially among young men. Thought "fine" to crush down all admiration; to carp and sneer at goodness. This lie against man's instincts terribly revenges itself. II. THE POWER OF THIS INSTINCT PROVED. By the reverence felt by all nations for their legislators, philosophers, generals. 1. The abiding power over the human mind of Solon and Lycurgus, Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, shows the preparedness of the human heart to welcome One whose moral standard is higher than its own. The secret of this influence is that each manifested some features of the desire of all nations, some rays of the "light that lighteneth every man," some fragments of the truth that all are yearning after. 2. Show in the passionate devotion of soldiers for their generals. III. BUT ALL THESE COME SHORT OF THE TRUE DEVOTION TO THE ONE PERFECT IDEAL. 1. Napoleon's estimate of the superiority of the influence of Christ. 2. Secret of this universal power—the Incarnation. The "desire of all nations" must be at once man and God. Nothing short of perfection of sympathy and perfection

of holiness will satisfy man's demand. In Jesus Christ, "the second Adam; the Lord from heaven," &c., we see One whom we can love, adore, and imitate. The faultless pattern is set before us that we may copy it. In Christ, our brother-man, we see what God is, and by His Spirit's help we may strive to copy Him. (*Edmund Venables, M.A.*) *Christ the hope of the world* :—The words of the original do not refer at all to Messiah, but to the glory of the second temple, which was then being erected and into which it is foretold the riches of the Gentiles should be brought. The words may, however, be used as the motto of a sermon. Can the words, "the Desire of all nations," be justifiably employed in regard to our Lord? None of the names of Christ is more appropriate. The Messiah has always been the Desire of all nations. More or less vaguely a Christ was universally hoped for and expected. How noble a conception we obtain of the relation between an universal Saviour and universal need! **I. CHRIST IS THE WORLD'S GRAND IDEAL, FOR WHOM IT WAITED, AND IN WHOM IT HOPED.** It is a historical fact that all nations have desired to see such a person as our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice three ideas in which this desire to reconcile man to God became embodied. 1. There grew up the doctrine, or tradition, asserting the union of God and man in one person. The doctrine of the Incarnation is not peculiar to Christianity. 2. The belief that there would come a time of familiarity between God and man. 3. That there would come, or had come, a perfect God-man to better the condition of the human race in this world, and to teach them about the next. Whole races have believed that certain men were heaven-sent prophets, Divine teachers. Heathen records show that birth from a pure virgin has been attributed to several of these founders of religion. This is related both of Buddha and of Zoroaster. The story of Osiris is even more remarkable. He is represented as visiting the earth, suffering and dying, and rising again to become judge of quick and dead. **II. CHRIST IS FITLY SPOKEN OF AS THE "DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS," BECAUSE HIS WORK IS SUCH AS MEN HOPED TO SEE PERFORMED.** 1. The world hoped that One would come who should establish justice, peace, and truth in the earth. It was such a moral kingdom that Jesus came to found. 2. The world was craving deliverance from powers of evil to which they felt themselves to be in bondage. 3. Men longed for some means of securing pardon of sin. Consider a summary of the theory of sacrifice among the heathen, and see how it points, in company with the Mosaic system, to the Lamb of Calvary. (1) In this act they symbolically offered up themselves. (2) It was necessary that the life of the victim should be taken, and the blood must be shed, for "the blood is the life." Life for life is the first principle of the theory of sacrifice. (3) The victim must be faultless when brought to the altar. (4) More noteworthy still is the fact that sacrifice meant the giving up of that which was valued and beloved. These views with regard to sacrifice have prevailed almost universally. The faultless and treasured offering was to appease the wrath of heaven. It scarcely needs that I remind you how precisely our blessed Lord is the embodiment of this phase of the world's faith. 4. The world longed to see harmony and peace restored in place of the discords of human life, and in place of apparent incongruities in the natural world. Men saw so much around them that was problematical. Human life was so strange a puzzle. "There shall come," wrote a Persian prophet, a "righteous King, whose reign shall be universal. At His advent, poison and poisonous weeds and ravenous beasts shall be expelled from the earth. He shall make streams break forth in the desert, and there shall be no more a hot simoom. The bodies of men shall be unsubstantial, and shall cast no shadows. They shall need no food to sustain their life. That King shall cast out for ever poverty, sickness, old age, and death." What but the work of our King can fulfil such aspirations? Some argue against the triumph of Christianity. But Christ shall surely triumph; not one tittle of prophecy shall pass till all be fulfilled. But not as we expect may it come about. God's way of governing the world differs very widely from our very rational-looking theories of how it ought to be done. (*Edwin Dukes.*) *Christ suited to all nations* :—If you want to know what it is that makes the living centre of Christianity, go and ask a missionary what it is that he finds it best to tell people that gather round him. Is it not the one story—the universality of sin and the redeeming Christ? Wherefore we say with confidence, and I wish it were deeper in the hearts of all of us, that Christianity—not all the minutiae of reticulations of the net in which we carry it, but the treasure which we carry in the net—that our Christianity is the only religion on the face of the earth that has got stamped upon it universality.

Mohammedanism bears the stamp of Mahommed, and dissolves before Western civilisation. It is needless to ask whether Buddhism or Brahmanism can live beyond certain degrees of latitude and longitude, or outside certain stages of human thought and progress. They are all like the vegetation of the countries in which they had their origin. You cannot transplant palm trees and bamboos into our northern latitudes. But the seed which the great Sower came to scatter is like the bread-corn, an exotic nowhere, and yet an exotic everywhere, the bread of God that came down from heaven. All these other religions are like water that is strongly impregnated with the salts or the mineral matters which it has dissolved out of the strata through which it rises; but the river of the Water of Life that proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb has no taste of earthly elements in it, and in spite of all the presumptuous crowing of some whose wish is father to the thought, it will flow on till it covers the earth, and everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Christ expected* :—1. There was spread over the whole of creation a universal expectation of some One called in this place the “Desire of nations.” Three great wants were pressing upon the minds of men, and these wants became fulfilled in the advent of our Master. 1. A distinct knowledge of the true God. 2. Answer to the question, “How can man be just with God?” 3. Light on the mystery of the future world. Put these wants together—the true nature of God; the true nature of an expiation; and a true knowledge of immortality, and you see the void, or vacuum, in the human soul. 2. How far was this threefold want met by the Lord Jesus Christ in His advent? Outside of Jesus Christ no true and adequate knowledge of God can be possessed. When Jesus Christ came to the world as Mediator between God and man, He fulfilled all the required conditions of expiation. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus gives the satisfying light on the mystery of immortality. Christ thus met the world’s needs, and we may say, the “Desire of all nations” has come. (*Archibald Boyd, M.A.*) *And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.—The glory of the presence of Christ* :—The glory here spoken of was not any external splendour, pomp, and beauty, for in this respect the second temple fell vastly short of Solomon’s. It must therefore refer to the presence of Christ, His personal appearance again and again at the temple; which was a greater glory to it than any external ornaments could possibly be. It was not, however, the mere bodily presence of Christ, but the heavenly doctrine which He preached, and the miracles which He wrought there; the pains He took to rescue the Divine law from the corruptions of the Jewish teachers, and especially the spiritual blessings which He so freely offered to all who were willing to receive them. It was, in one word, the manifestation of the goodwill and mercy of God made by Him, and the influence of His Spirit, which accompanied His preaching and miracles, to turn men from darkness to light, and bring them to repentance, faith, and holy obedience. Infer, that the brightest ornament and truest glory of any place of worship is the spiritual presence of Christ in it; or, the influences of His Spirit, accompanying the means of grace, to make them effectual for the edification and comfort of the souls of men. The thing to be anxious about, as a Christian Church, is, that we may have the special and gracious presence of Christ with us, to fill His house with His glory. The evidences of this presence are—regular and careful attendance upon all the ordinances and institutions of Christ; serious and devout behaviour; worship of the Father in spirit and in truth; singing God’s praises with understanding and lively devotion; fixing the attention and engaging the affections with Divine truth. Particularly when, at the Lord’s table, the thoughts are fixed upon the sufferings and love of Christ, and grateful affections are excited towards Him; and when their souls are filled with love of the brethren. (*Job Orton.*) *Divine agency* :—1. Divine agency in the affairs of the world. “I.” 2. Divine order. “I will shake.” Disturbance precedes repose; war, peace; death, life. This law is seen in the operations of nature, in the government of nations, in individual life, and in the Church of God. The prophecy of the text was fulfilled. The wars of Alexander the Great, of his successors, and of Rome, shook the world. Political, social, and religious convulsions prepared the way for the Desire of all nations. 3. Christ’s advent. When He appeared the temple of Janus was closed. The world, weary and worn, was unconsciously longing for His presence. The cry of all religions was reconciliation with God. For this, temples were erected, altars built, priests maintained, sacrifices offered. Christ alone is the Reconciler, Mediator, Prince of Peace. 4. Christ the glory of the temple. The old men

wept at the inferiority of the second temple. But of it God said, "I will fill this house with glory." The Jews say five signs of Divine glory were in the first temple, which were wanting in the second,—Urim and Thummim. Ark of covenant. Fire upon the altar. The Shechinah. And the spirit of prophecy. But in Christ all these signs of the Divine glory were united and signally manifested. Thus by His coming to the second temple Haggai's prophecy was fulfilled. And He is still coming in like manner to hearts, to churches, and to nations; but He will come yet more gloriously. All changes, revolutions, and convulsions are preparing the way for His triumphal chariot. (*The Study.*) *The presence of the Messiah, the glory of the second temple*:—The modern Jews will by no means have this text to be understood of the Messiah. The ancient Jews did so understand it. The Messiah is He whom all nations had reason to desire, because of those great blessings and benefits which He was to bring to the world. Show how the several parts of this prediction agree to our blessed Saviour, and to no other. I. THERE SHOULD BE GREAT CHANGES AND COMMOTIONS IN THE WORLD BEFORE HIS COMING. This was fulfilled in a most remarkable manner between the time of this prophecy and the coming of our blessed Saviour. In those four hundred years happened greater commotions, and much more considerable revolutions, than in above two thousand years before, and in almost two thousand since. II. THE WORLD SHOULD BE IN A GENERAL EXPECTATION OF MESSIAS AT THE TIME OF HIS COMING. The Jews were in general expectation. Their tradition was, that Messias would appear at the end of the second two thousand years. Some Jewish doctors determined that the Messias would come within fifty years of their time. And Suetonius and Tacitus voice the heathen expectation. III. HE WHO IS FORETOLD, WAS TO COME DURING THE CONTINUANCE OF THE SECOND TEMPLE. Not long after Christ's death this second temple was destroyed to the ground. Then it could have been no other than Jesus who "filled this second temple with glory." IV. THE COMING OF MESSIAS WAS TO BE THE LAST DISPENSATION OF GOD FOR THE SALVATION OF MEN. "Once more" implies "once more only." The inference may be thus expressed, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh." What could God have done more for us than He hath done? (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *The glory of the second temple*:—I. WHEREIN THE GLORY OF THE FORMER HOUSE CONSISTED. Properly speaking, there were three temples in Jerusalem. From Joshua to Solomon there was no permanent edifice. The tabernacle was fitted to the needs of a wandering people. Nearly five hundred years passed before the project of building a permanent house for worship could be carried out. Solomon's temple is familiar. It was destroyed after an existence of over four hundred years. The second temple was founded by Ezra. The third was built by the munificence of Herod. It was strictly no new house, only a reparation of the old. Notice the magnificence of the first temple with regard to its materials. The whole world was laid under contribution, so to speak, for the erection of that magnificent edifice. Notice the contents of this temple. There were three of surpassing magnificence—the ark, the altar, and the light. Each of these was symbolical of a deeper and more recondite truth. Consider its dedication by the coming to it of the sign of God's presence—the cloud symbol. One other fact added to the magnificence of the temple. It was the spot where God chose to hold communion with man. II. WHEREIN DID THE GREATER GLORY OF THE LATTER HOUSE CONSIST? Here we find there is a passing from the material to the spiritual. Things symbolical and things material were in no respect to constitute the glory that belonged to the second temple. The peculiar glory of the second temple consisted in this—the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The material glory, the splendour of the former house, was all eclipsed in this consideration, that to the second temple came God manifest in the flesh. It was in the second temple that the world's peace was made. In the first temple the voice of prophecy was heard, but in the second it was altogether silent. At last the voice of prophecy came. The Master said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor." Jesus Christ, in uttering His prophecies in that temple, made that temple still more glorious by the character of those utterances. His word came with power. The subject teaches the manifest glory of the spiritual over the material. (*Archibald Boyd, M.A.*) *The glory of God's house*:—The glory of Israel consisted in God's visibly dwelling in their midst. The rabbis remind us that the second temple was inferior to the first in five essential particulars:—1. The original ark of the covenant, containing the two tables of

Sinai, and the Mercy-seat, were lost. 2. The Shechinah, or Divine presence, appeared no more. 3. The Urim and Thummim, connected with the miraculous breastplate of Aaron, had vanished. 4. The holy fire, which God Himself had kindled upon the altar, and which was ever kept burning, and from whence the sacrifices were to be ignited, was extinguished for ever. 5. The Holy Spirit of prophecy spake no longer as in times past; it was silent for four hundred years after Malachi's removal. These causes conspired to damp the fervour of the people in the work of restoration. Haggai was bidden to acknowledge the visible inferiority of the second temple; but he was to say that the deficiencies were only apparent. The true essentials of worship, the veritable consciousness of God's faithful guardianship, the unseen consolations of His Spirit, should more than compensate for the absence of the former tokens of His proximity. And to this, at present, unpretending shrine the Lord of hosts Himself would come: the Prince of peace should adorn it with His own life-giving presence. The dearest aspiration of all nations—for that is the meaning of the Hebrew word translated "the Desire of all nations"—should be realised in the person of Jesus the Messiah. Here, then, was true glory; here was substantial consolation! Here was consolation amply sufficient to counterbalance the absence, not only of material splendour, but also of the gorgeous symbolism, the departed externals of God dwelling in their midst. The consolation offered by Haggai consisted in the assurance that the temple which they were rebuilding should witness the arrival of the promised Saviour of the world, even of Him who should "gather together in one all the children of God that were scattered abroad." Salvation, and not the symbols and types thereof, is the one thing needful. (*Joseph B. McCaul.*)

Vers. 8, 9. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.—*The superiority of the latter house:*—The prophet's declaration that the silver is the Lord's and the gold is the Lord's is full of comfort to those who are disquieted about their own work, if they will receive it rightly. You who are poor, who have no gold and no silver to give, is it not a comfort that God does not need silver and gold from you? Rich as some may be in the eyes of the world, and in their own eyes, in God's eyes they are miserably poor, and only the poorer the richer they deem themselves. If our riches be our own, it is poverty; if our knowledge is our own, it is ignorance; neither can be true unless it be God's already. As the prophet's words are meant to cheer those who are troubled by a false humility, so do they cast down our pride, which always lies at the bottom of such false humility. What, then, are we to give to God? Only the things which are especially our own, our own hearts and souls. How could the glory of the latter house be greater than that of the former? It is declared that the Lord of hosts would "fill His house with glory." The manner in which this should be done is set forth thus—"The Desire of all nations shall come." Through the coming of the Desire of all nations what had waned and decayed may be restored and renewed, until the glory of its latter state is greater than that of its former. The condition of man after the Fall was as nothing in comparison with his first glory. In Christ human nature, regenerated by the power of His Spirit, is raised to a far higher state of glory than that from which man fell. So too it is with each individual man. Under the dominion of natural impulses and passions, he may look with shame on his early years; but they who have been truly and effectually regenerated by the Spirit of Christ know how, here again, the glory of the latter house is greater than that of the former. Such is the glory which we see in St. Paul's life after his conversion. (*Julius C. Hare, M.A.*) *The presence of Christ in the temple:*—From the earliest period of time particular places were set apart for the peculiar worship of God. The shady grove and the elevated mountain were at first chosen by most nations as places of devotion. David first formed the design of building the temple. Though in many respects inferior, there was to be in the second temple a brighter glory than was in the temple of Solomon. It is the presence of Christ in it which more than compensated for the want of other things. The great truth for us to consider is, that the presence of Christ constitutes the chief glory of any Church. How is His presence in a Church displayed, and the building rendered glorious by His presence? 1. By the faithful preaching and the cordial reception of His Gospel. 2. If the ordinances of religion are regularly administered and properly prized. 3. When the professors of religion are distinguished for holiness and spiritual

joy, and where sinners are converted. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *The glory of the second temple*:—The great and overpowering honour of the building which Solomon raised was this, that it was the only building on earth erected to the true God. By what peculiarity, then, was the second temple distinguished? The second temple was built by the children of the Captivity when they returned poor, dispirited, and feeble from the oppression of Babylon. It never approached in outward magnificence and real grandeur the original temple. And the emphatic glory of the first temple was wanting in the second. There was no visible symbol of the Divine presence; no awful cloud of brightness. There the Son of God was made manifest in the likeness of human flesh. We are to seek, in the appearance of the Son of God in our flesh, for the circumstances that were to constitute the superior honour of the latter temple. Give the occasions when our Lord visited the temple. And also, the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former, inasmuch as the manifestation of God in the flesh has brought down the character of God to the level of the understanding and the sympathies of men. The cloud of glory in the former temple did not immediately address itself either to the understandings or to the hearts of the people. But the nature of the Godhead has now been embodied in human flesh. We are now privileged to look upon God as He was seen in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We see the doings of the Eternal One when we see the actions of Christ Jesus. And the glory of the latter house is greater inasmuch as there the Son of God was manifested as the messenger of mercy and reconciliation to sinners. "In this house will I give peace." (*J. Bannerman, D.D.*) *A dedicatory sermon*:—Comparing the two structures, the prophet saw, in the vision of the future, what was far more glorious than the splendour of the former house. It is in allusion to the advent of Christ that God says, "I will fill this house with glory." This was the one transcendent event which made the second temple more glorious than the first. The tabernacle and the temple, as the dwelling place of God on earth, continue still to be the central symbols of all the higher forms of human organisation. The sanctuary stands to-day—the visible throne of the Deity among men, the house of Divine authority and Divine worship, the fountain of light and life, of health and blessing, to all generations. 1. How and in what respects does Christ become the glory of the sanctuary? (1) In due time Christ withdrew His bodily presence, that His spiritual presence might abound. (2) Christ, in the sanctuary, survives every change and outlives every foe. (3) Christ, in the sanctuary, draws after Him the whole range of human intelligence and culture. (4) He propagates Himself and His Spirit in the souls of all believers; and (5) He adds new dignity and grandeur to human souls in themselves, both for the present and the future life. 2. What is the demonstration of this manifested glory of Christ in the sanctuary? (1) Every house of Christian worship is a testimony that God exists, and that His promises continue. (2) Every Christian temple is a visible protest against all forms of infidelity, and opposition to the Gospel scheme of redemption. (3) It is a sign of that everlasting covenant of peace which God has made with His people. (4) It is a dwelling-place of a spiritual Christ on earth. (5) It is a witness of the faithfulness and constancy of God's providence over His people. (*B. Sunderland, D.D.*) *The glory of the latter house*:—The temple of Zerubbabel was inferior to the temple of Solomon in architectural beauty. Wherein, then, was its greater glory? The Kingdom of Christ rose out of the ruins of the old dispensation, and is become the eternal order of worship (see Heb. xii. 27, 28). I. THE GREATER GLORY OF THE GOSPEL APPEARS IN THE WIDER AREA IT COVERS. The tabernacle and temple were objects of national interest. Palestine was the only bright spot among all the countries of the world, and so great was the exclusiveness that the light did not travel beyond its boundaries, as if a wall had been built round it as high as heaven. It was the partition wall which Jesus came to break down. There was a breadth in the teachings of Jesus diametrically opposed to the prejudices of His countrymen. We, whose lives have fallen in the nineteenth century, can now survey the area of the latter temple better than they could. II. THE GREATER GLORY OF THE GOSPEL APPEARS IN THE GREATER STABILITY OF THE CHURCH. The temple of Solomon seemed a permanent building, but it was razed to the ground. The temple of Zerubbabel gave way to that of Herod. Three stages are visible in the development of the spiritual. God in creation was power and wisdom at some distance from us. God in the temple was nearer, and assumed the personal living form which communed with the people from the Mercy-seat. The Spirit

of God in us is the last stage, when all manifestations have given way to the real presence. III. THE GREATER GLORY OF THE GOSPEL WILL APPEAR IN THE GREATER RESULTS. Our lot is fallen in the "last days." We see the march of intellect and civilisation. We see kingdoms bowing to the authority of the Messiah. A succession of revolutions has brought us forward to the Gospel dispensation. We see another temple looming in the promise, the temple of God and the Lamb. (T. Davies, M.A.) *The greater glory of the latter house*.—1. The absolute dominion of the riches and splendour of the world belongs unto the Lord, who hath all these things in His power to dispose of as He pleases, and who is to be eyed, acknowledged, and submitted unto by every man in his portion or lot according as He dispenseth it. 2. It may satisfy the people of God in their wants to consider that God hath all they want at His command, and would not withhold it unless He saw such a dispensation tending to their good. 3. When the Lord withholds any glory or splendour from His people and work, it is for their advantage and flows from a purpose to give what is better, if they had eyes to see it; for when He withholds silver and gold, which they so much desired, He purposeth that "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." 4. The spiritual things of Christ's kingdom do far surpass all the legal administrations in glory, and do put more real splendour on any place where they are administered, than all the pomp of the world beside can do. 5. As peace and reconciliation with God is the allowance of Christ's subjects, which outshines all the splendour and glory of the world, so it is the great glory of the Gospel administrations that by them peace may be had through Jesus Christ, which was attainable by none of the works or ceremonies of the Law being rested on; therefore instead of their wonted splendour, and in opposition to former administrations, it is promised, that by Christ's coming His death and doctrine, "in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." (George Hutcheson.) *The glory of the second temple*.—Fifteen years after the commencement of the second temple Haggai uttered this prediction. Progress had been hindered by the indifference or the despair of those who were building it. Their hands became slack, and their hearts waxed faint in the work of the Lord. To furnish a stimulus and encouragement to them, Haggai was commissioned to utter this prediction. By the "former house" is to be understood the temple erected by Solomon. The great and overpowering honour of the building which the king of Israel raised was this, that it was the only building on earth erected to the true God. And God there vouchsafed to make visible to the very eyes of flesh a display of His uncreated majesty and glory. The prophet says that the "glory of the latter house" of the second temple was to be greater than the glory of the former. By what peculiar glory, then, was the second temple distinguished? In architecture or material there could be no comparison between the two. And the visible symbol of the Divine presence was never to be seen in the "latter house." 1. The glory was greater inasmuch as there the Son of God was made manifest in the likeness of human flesh. He was brought to this latter house as an infant for presentation. He visited it as a youth of twelve. He taught in its courts. He made public entry into Jerusalem, and exerted authority in purifying the temple. The simple fact of the Son of God assuming human nature is calculated to awaken a feeling of more profound admiration and awe than any such visible display of the Divine Majesty as that which dwelt of old above the mercy-seat. 2. As the manifestation of God in the flesh has brought down the character of God to the level of the understanding and the sympathies of men. 3. As there the Son of God was manifested as the messenger of mercy and reconciliation to sinners. (J. Bannerman, D.D.) *The future glory of the Church*.—The second temple was to be more glorious than the first. The temple spiritually is the Church. There being two temples among the Jews prefigured the fact that there would be two spiritual temples, two great churches among the Christians, the first and the second Christian Church. The first was given to the apostles, but has degenerated into mystery and superstition; the second is the Church meant by the New Jerusalem. The first would be destroyed by the spiritual Babylonians; the second would have greater glory than the former, but chiefly in this, that the Lord Himself would be more intimately present therein; there He would be Immanuel (God with us). Explain in what this greater glory consists. The glory of a Church is its wisdom. The glory of the New Church now forming by the Lord under the name of the New Jerusalem surpasses the glory of the former Church in the grand and beautiful character

of its disclosures on all subjects, but chiefly on the following—the Lord; His Word; the life which leads to heaven; death; the life after death. The chief glory, or the chief misfortune of man in the religion of thought, is his idea of God. He is infinite love and infinite wisdom in a Divine human form. The whole Divine trinity is in Him, as a human trinity is in a man. He is our Father. There is in all forms of nature a resemblance to humanity. All nature is human, and must have come from a Divine human Creator, a Divine Man in His infinite essence of love, wisdom, and power, from eternity, whom, therefore, it is not incredible to behold descending as a Divine Man in last principles as the Blessed Jesus. The Word of the Lord is glorious as seen in the light of the New Jerusalem. It is Divine wisdom clothed in human language. In all its sacred pages, whether they are history, prophecy, parable, or vision, there is a spiritual sense. The outside of the Scriptures is their least valuable part, the lowest step of the ladder. The Lord, the Church, the soul are everywhere the subjects. For want of a knowledge of the spiritual sense a large portion of the Bible is, to many readers, a dead record, and another large portion quite unintelligible. Then look at the life which leads to heaven. In many professors of religion the conduct of life has a very minute place. Much has been made of creeds, and but little of life. The great redeeming powers of religion have been held off by the prevalence of the dogma that good works do not contribute to salvation, but rather tend the other way. Religion, having been severed from the world, has made a sour, narrow religion, and a bad world. The spirit of love and the spirit of truth, like two guardian angels, should preside over every act of life, and sanctify the whole. Justice, in its widest sense, and religion, are the same (Micah vi. 8). Never will the world's work be rightly done until its labourers derive their motives from love to God and love to man. Now we come to death. What has the old dispensation to say about death? It speaks hesitatingly about the soul, as to whether it is in any shape or not. What becomes of it after death it cannot tell. The New Church teaches that the spirit is the man in perfect human form. It formed the body to itself, and whatever life the body had, it had from the spirit. Free from the body, the spirit will live more perfectly than before, because it will be no longer clogged by a body unequal to its wants. What about the life after death? The spiritual world is an inner sphere of being, filling the natural world as the soul does the body; visible to spiritual sight, and perceptible to all the spiritual senses, as the natural is to bodily sense. Into the realities of that world we come when we awake after death. (*J. Bailey, A.M.*) *The glory of the two houses*:—By the “glory” is here meant the Shechinah, or bright cloud, emblematic of God's presence and protection, which hovered over the Holy of Holies. I. THE TWO PERMANENT BUILDINGS WHICH THE JEWS ERECTED. David was grieved because, while he was accommodated in a palace of cedar, the Divine presence dwelt within curtains. He made preparations for a magnificent and durable temple. By the building of this structure, in the time of Solomon, an important promise was faithfully performed. At the consecration of it the personal Jehovah descended His radiant cloud, which filled the house as an emblem of His taking possession of it. In a night vision He assured Solomon that He had chosen this house as the home where His honour, His glory should dwell. Solomon's temple subsisted upwards of four hundred years, when it was utterly demolished by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. When the captives returned to Jerusalem they began to rebuild the temple, but were discouraged and delayed. To cheer them Haggai was sent, and he was to give this assurance, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.” II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH FULFILLED THIS PREDICTION. It is said to be clearly proved that Herod reared his temple on the yet standing foundations of the temple of Zerubbabel. The superior glory of the second temple could not have been any glory that Herod added to it; it must have rested on something spiritual. Haggai explains thus,—He who should be desired and expected by all nations, both Jews and Gentiles,—“shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” Four years after the superstructure of Herod was fully built upon the foundations of the temple of Zerubbabel, the infant Jesus was introduced into that temple. The presence of Christ is the grand circumstance which verified the prediction of Haggai. Another point in which the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former was the Court of the Gentiles. The temple of Solomon had only two courts—that of the priests and that of the Israelites. The Gentiles were considered as profane; and unless

converted, and wholly adopting the Jewish religion, disregarded and despised. This outer court in the second temple admitted all men to a certain consideration among the chosen people. This was a step toward the further admission of the nations into the entire covenant of peace. (*J. Grant.*) *Utility superior to beauty*:—There is an oriental proverb to the effect that the useful outlasts the beautiful, and I remember how an ingenious author illustrates this bit of practical philosophy by allusions to several famous works and names. The tomb of Moses, Israel's greatest chieftain, has never been known, but the traveller continues to quench his thirst at the Well of Jacob. Solomon's magnificent temple is gone, but the same king's reservoirs and conduits are still available. The ancient buildings of the Holy City are not to be found, but the Pool of Bethesda is clear and limpid and refreshing to-day. The columns of Persepolis, Persia's royal capital, are crumbling into decay, but its cisterns and aqueducts remain intact. The golden house of Nero at Rome is in ruins, but the Aqua Claudia pours into the city of the seven hills its bright and healthful stream. Many other triumphs of grandeur and beauty, that in their time commanded the admiration of the world, have disappeared, while humbler works of utility of the same period survive them. Certain it is that in the service of Christ usefulness alone is immortal. Many a brilliant discourse has been admired and forgotten, many a thrilling solo from a sacred oratorio has obtained a few days' enthusiastic praise, while a humble preacher's blunt appeal, or an uncultured singer's simple hymn, has had enduring results. The former were efforts of human genius, like the grand edifices adorning once famous cities; the latter were the lowly channels through which God's "living water" reached thirsty human souls. (*J. Grant.*)

Ver. 9. In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.—*The nature, source, and means of spiritual peace*:—Inquire—I. INTO THE NATURE OF THE PEACE HERE SPOKEN OF. It includes peace with God, *i. e.*, forgiveness, acceptance, reconciliation with Him. When this is witnessed to the soul by the Spirit of God the enmity is removed, or the will is subdued, and the affections are brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Peace of conscience, arising from pardon of past sin, and power over sin. A peaceful, serene, tranquil frame of mind; and peace with all men. II. THE AUTHOR OF THIS PEACE, AND THE WAY IN WHICH HE WILL GIVE IT. It is not ourselves. Our own works cannot purchase it, nor reconcile us to God. It is not others; not their absolutions, prayers, or advices. It is the gift of God. He is its Author, and it comes from Him as a free gift. III. WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS OF IT, OR THE PERSONS TO WHOM HE WILL GIVE IT? It is purchased by Christ for all, and offered to all. But it cannot be possessed by the wicked. It cannot be the portion of the unbeliever. Repentance and faith are both the gifts of God, and must be sought in the use of prescribed means, such as hearing the Word of God and prayer. IV. THE PLACE WHERE HE WILL GIVE IT, AND THE TIME WHEN. All times and places may be considered holy under the Gospel. Nevertheless, when and where the Gospel is preached, and prayer offered to God, repentance and faith are usually given, and Christ in His Word and Spirit is peculiarly present. (*J. Benson.*) *God's gift of peace*:—The Jews were taught to entertain new and more spiritual ideas of what it was in which the true glory of God's house consisted,—that it was not in the grandeur of its elevation, nor the beauty of its decorations, nor the costliness of its furniture, though wrought in gold of Ophir, but in the presence of God there, and in the communication of peace to the contrite and humble spirit. I. WHAT IS THE PEACE HERE SPOKEN OF? It is a sense of reconciliation with God. When paradise was the abode of holiness, it was also the abode of peace; when once sin had entered, there was no peace to our first parents, so long as the taint of their disobedience remained unwashed away. The peace for which we are seeking is far removed from servile fear and bondage, and has in it the very spirit of a child. There is peace for us when we are enabled to look up to God as our heavenly Father, who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope through Christ. II. WHAT IS OUR WARRANT FOR EXPECTING THIS PEACE? WHENCE IS IT TO BE OBTAINED? AND HOW ARE WE TO KNOW THAT IT IS OURS? The Gospel is specially the dispensation of peace; Christ is our peace. He is "the repairer of the breach," the way, the truth, the life, the door which leadeth unto the Father. There are systems full of error which, nevertheless, hold out fair promises of peace, and pretend that they alone can secure its possession. The infidel boasts that he can

give peace. Our peace depends on what Christ has done for us, and has promised to do in us, and not on what we can do in and for ourselves; and our possession of peace depends on the confidence with which we believe His word and rely upon His power. This is the teaching which gives peace to the troubled conscience, and we confidently assert that it is the teaching of our Church. (*Bishop Shirley.*) *Spiritual rest in political strife*:—It is Christ who really speaks to us, both out of the Old Testament and out of the New, this blessed message of the Lord, "In this place will I give peace." It is His Spirit which revealed it to the prophet; it is His Word which is uttered in the Gospel; it is He Himself who gives it to us now and for evermore. "He is our peace" (Eph. ii. 14). This was the glorious prospect lifted up before those who, coming back from the captivity of Zion, set to work on the restoration of that temple which they had never forgotten in a strange land. There was much, it is true, to sadden them. The place looked not like the ancient and beautiful house from which they had been driven seventy years before. And yet God told them to be strong and work, for He was with them. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place I will give peace." Five centuries passed away, and all the nations were in expectation; and all the nations happened by Divine appointment to be at peace. This was but an outward thing, however blessed, compared with that holy rest prepared for the people of God, and brought into the world by that eternal Son of God, in whom righteousness and peace kissed each other. That Son of God was made a human babe, and the angels sang, "On earth peace." He grew to manhood, and always, though with warnings mingled, He spake of peace. He sailed upon the stormy waves, and said to them, "Peace be still." And so throughout His life. It is His promise concerning His sanctuary. "In this place will I give peace." I. HE HIMSELF IS IN THE MIDST OF US. There is a holy presence here, and this should quiet our hearts with reverence and godly fear, and yet fill us with peace and joy. We draw nigh to Him, and He draws nigh to us. We lift up our hearts to Him in supplication, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. II. HE GIVES US HERE HIS "GOSPEL OF PEACE." Even if the clergyman's heart is heavy, the lips of the evangelist utter the blessed tidings, and the word in season helps the soul of the weary. But the Gospel is only a pleasant song to us, until we act upon it in penitence and faith; but then obedience is the path to peace. III. HE KEEPS US SECRETLY IN HIS TABERNACLE FROM THE STRIFE OF TONGUES. Though His presence, realised even in common life, keeps us peaceful in the midst of strife, yet there is a special calm about His house which gives us pause and refreshment after we have striven, and before we go again into conflict—a calm which bids us, on the Lord's day and in the Lord's house, set aside all thoughts of party, all the bitterness of controversy, and, instead, pray for one another, that thus, as far as lieth in us, we may live peaceably with all men. Then, let all the occasions of your life, all the changes which you experience, be sanctified in the place where He, according to His promise, is sure to be found. Christ is here, so here is liberty and light, here is strength and comfort. Christ is here, and so when we come before Him with an "humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart," He meets us with that priceless blessing, "Peace be unto you." (*G. E. Jelf, M.A.*)

Vers. 11-14. Ask now the priests concerning the law.—*Human duty*:—I. That the question of human DUTY IS TO BE DECIDED BY AN APPEAL TO DIVINE AUTHORITY. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Ask now the priests concerning the law." The question, of course, implies two things. 1. That there is a Divine written law for the regulation of human conduct. Though the law here refers to ceremonial institutes which were contained in the Levitical code, there is also a Divinely written law of a far higher significance—that moral law which rises out of man's relations, and is binding upon man as man, here and everywhere, now and for ever. It implies—2. That there are Divinely appointed interpreters of this law. "Ask now the priests." Under the old economy there were men appointed and qualified by God to expound the law to the people; and in every age there are men endowed with that high moral genius which gives them an insight into the eternal principles of moral obligation. The will of God is the standard of moral obligation. II. That the DISCHARGE OF DUTY REQUIRES THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. It was the duty of the Jews now to rebuild the temple; but that duty they discharged not by merely bringing the stones and timbers

together and placing them in architectural order. It required the spirit of consecration. The prophet sought to impress this upon the mind of his fellow-countrymen engaged in this work by propounding two questions referring to points in the ceremonial law. The first had reference to the communication of the holiness of holy objects to other objects brought into contact with them. "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy?" In other words, whether, if a person carry holy flesh in a lappet of his garment, and touched any food in the lappet, it should become holy in consequence? The priests said, No! and rightly. Mere ceremonial holiness cannot impart virtue to our actions in daily life; cannot render our efforts in the service of God acceptable to Him. The second question was this: "If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?" The priests answered and said: "It shall be unclean." "The sum," says an old writer, "of these two rules, is, that pollution is more easily communicated than sanctification; that is, there are many ways of vice, but only one of virtue, and a difficult one. Good implies perfection; evil commences with the slightest defect. Let not men think that living among good people will recommend them to God, if they are not good themselves. Conclusion. Mark—1. The transcendent importance of the spirit of obedience. 2. That man can more easily communicate evil to another than good. (*Homilist.*) If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?—*The contagion of evil.*—The warning of the text is not addressed solely to those whose hearts have always been estranged from God, but also to those who have felt the power of God, and whose hearts have been lifted up by Him, and who have been enabled to work for a time in His strength. For even the latter are very apt to fall back into the notion that they have a spring of strength in themselves. The warning is taken from the ordinances of the Levitical law. The uncleanness and holiness spoken of are those pronounced to be such by that law. But the ordinances of the ceremonial law were designed to be types and witnesses of moral and spiritual truths. Indeed, the prophet himself in the latter part of the text declares this. Thus far we can readily go along with the text. You all know that if a man's hand is covered with dirt, it will defile everything it touches, even that which before may have been clean. In like manner a soul that is covered with any sort of filth or pollution must defile that which it touches. As a jaundiced eye sees the reflection of its own jaundice in the things around it, so does a jaundiced heart. If a soul is full of impurity, though you pour in clean water, it immediately becomes foul. There is a taint of sin in your hearts which runs through all your thoughts and feelings, through all your words and deeds. The first truth we have seen is, that they whose souls are defiled by some great moral impurity, must carry that impurity along with them into everything they may take in hand. Sin is itself death, spiritual death; and the uncleanness from this contact also spreads on everything around. The second truth is, that we are utterly unable to bring forth anything, whether in thought or deed, that shall be perfect in the sight of God. Hereby we betray a secret corruption of our nature, the taint of which spreads through our whole lives. We have seen that, when a man is unclean, he makes everything he touches unclean. But alas! the converse does not hold. Though he were clean, he would not make what he touches clean. We have the power of defiling; but we have not the power of purifying. In every part of the land it may be seen how catching vices are: the plague itself is scarcely more so. Sins will produce sins, rapidly and abundantly, even as the foulest vermin breed the most rapidly and numerously. There are habitual vices to which each age and class are prone—this is a proof how catching uncleanness is. What must the state of the world have been in the eyes of Him who beholds the secrets of the heart, and to whom every impurity is an abomination? As God abhors all manner of impurity, He willed to purge it away from the earth. He willed to speak to the world, "Be thou clean." He sent His Son to speak that word to the world, that word which God alone can speak effectively, either to the world at large, or to any individual soul. It is by the body and blood of Christ that our souls must be purified and washed from our sins. By the offering up of that holy body and blood on the Cross a change was wrought in the whole order of the world. The prince of this world was judged. These truths are full of practical consequences with regard to the whole regulation of our lives. We shall fly at once to the Purifier when the sense of our impurity oppresses us; and we shall be very careful in our choice

of companions. Moral disease being no less catching than bodily, you should be no less careful in shunning vicious companions. It is indeed the duty of every Christian to go to those who are unclean, with the purpose of making them clean, through the power of God, and the Word of God. At the same time, let us pray continually that He, who alone can purify our hearts, and keep them pure, will vouchsafe to do so, until the time arrives when all the world shall enjoy the blessed vision promised to the pure in heart—when all mankind, being cleansed from every idolatry of the flesh and spirit, shall see God. (*J. C. Hare, M.A.*)

Pollution:—1. Ritualism is the natural religion of the unsanctified heart, and the same tendencies to it that have created popery in the New Testament ages, existed also in the Old (vers. 11–13). 2. Pollution is much more readily given and taken than purity. One drop of filth will defile a vase of water, many drops of water will not purify a vase of filth. “Evil communications corrupt good manners” (vers. 11–13). 3. No tithings of mint, anise, and cummin, will compensate for neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Obedience is better than sacrifice. A pure hand is necessary to a pure offering (ver. 14). 4. Men are prone to assign any other cause for their sufferings than their sins, yet this is usually the true cause (ver. 15). 5. Disappointment of our hopes on earth should make us lift our eyes to heaven to learn the reason (ver. 16). 6. Affliction will harden the heart if it is not referred to God as the author (ver. 17). 7. Pondering the past is often the best way of providing for the future (ver. 18). 8. We may and ought to trust God’s promise to bless us, even though we may see no visible appearance of its fulfilment. “The vision will surely come and not tarry” (ver. 19). (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. So is every work of their hands, and that which they offer there is unclean.—*Works and pure hearts*:—They who have imbibed the true fear of God, do rightly serve Him though they may bring only a crumb of incense, and that others only profane the worship of God, though they bring many oxen; as a heathen poet says, “An impious right hand does not rightly worship the celestials.” The philosophers ever hold this principle—that no sacrifice is rightly offered to God except the mind be right and pure. But yet the philosophers, as well as the poets, adopted this false notion, by which Satan beguiled all men, that God is pacified by ceremonies: hence have proceeded so many expiations, in which foolish men trusted, and by which they thought that God would be propitious to them, though they obstinately continued daily to procure for themselves new punishments, and, as it were, avowedly to carry on war with God Himself. The prophet says that men not only lose all their labour, but also contract new pollution, when they seek to pacify God by their sacrifices, unaccompanied by inward purity. Works, however splendid they may appear before our eyes, are of no value or importance before God, except they flow from a pure heart. The fountain of works I consider to be integrity of heart, and the design and end is, when the object of men is to obey God, and to consecrate their life to Him. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 15. Consider . . . from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord.—*The house of God*:—1. These places of worship are strongholds of the religious principle of the community. The only thing in the form of religious sentiment which can do any good to the soul is that which recognises God, not as a mere existence, or mere abstraction, but as the author of life and blessing to all that live. This religious sentiment may become a religious principle. The religious sentiment, then, embracing the idea of obligation, is that which the service of this house is meant to inspire and cherish. What sort of an obligation must it be? If there is a God, He is a living person, standing in a certain relation to us, and having certain claims which must be answered. It is an obligation to lead respectable and decent lives. But is that high enough to reach up to God? The religious sentiment cannot be rightly felt except in the Christian way—by looking up to God as our Father with childlike confidence, united with awful veneration. When a man feels bound to form himself for holiness and heaven, then the religious spirit is intimately connected with the sweet influences of the house of God. 2. The object of the service of this house is to keep before the eyes of men a standard of character higher than they meet with in common business and care. Every one who cares to cherish the religious sentiment in himself loves the service of the house of God. Our great care should be that our “house for God” answers the purpose for which it is set apart,—that of awakening

and confirming religious principle in those who worship within its walls. Without this, the building will cumber the ground; with it, it will become in very deed the house of God, and the gate of heaven. (*W. B. O. Peabody, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labours of your hands.—*Blasting and mildew*:—Very useful and important are the fungi in the world's busy household. They are working at "chemical problems which have puzzled a Liebig and a Lavoisier," converting the noxious products of corruption into comely forms and nutritious substances, absorbing into living tissues effete matters which are fast hastening downwards to join the dark night of chaos and death. Parasites, most of them, upon dead plants, they economise the gases which would otherwise escape into the atmosphere and pollute it; and conserve, for the use of nobler forms, the subtle forces of life which would otherwise pass unprofitable into the mineral kingdom. It is one of the strangest things in the world, when we seriously think of it, to see a vigorous life-full cluster of fungi springing, phoenix-like, from a dead tree, exhausted of all its juices, bleached by the sun and rain of many summers, and ready to crumble into dust at the slightest touch. Death is here a new birth, and the grave a cradle. It is one of nature's many analogies of the human resurrection. But the resemblance is superficial and incomplete. Wisely have the fungi been provided, in the rapidity of their growth, the simplicity of their structure, the variety of their forms, and their amazing numbers, for their appointed task in the economy of nature. Not a leaf that falls from the bough, not a blade that withers on the lea, but is seized by the tiny fangs of some special fungus ordained to prey upon it; not a spot of earth can we examine, where vegetable life is capable of growing, but we shall find a vegetable as well as an insect parasite, keeping its growth in check, hastening its decay, and preserving its remains from being wasted. And out of the eater, too, cometh forth meat. In carrying out the wise and gracious purposes for which they have been designed, the fungi not unfrequently overstep the limits of usefulness, and commit wholesale destruction. They purify man's atmosphere, but they also destroy man's food. If their ravages could be confined to useless plants; if they were employed solely in reducing weeds to decay, they would be welcomed by man as among his greatest helps and blessings. But nature knows no straight, arbitrary line of demarcation, such as we draw, between what is useless and what is useful. To every natural good there is a recoil of evil. The fungi are indiscriminate in their attacks. They seize upon the corn which strengthens man's heart, as readily as upon the thorns and briars which cause him to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. In this our fallen condition, we must always count upon the blasting and the mildew; upon the years to be eaten by the locust, the canker-worm, the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, as surely as upon the covenant faithfulness of Him who promised that seed-time and harvest would never cease. Nature with reference to nature completely accomplishes her purposes; but nature with reference to man is not a perfect means to an end. Blasting and mildew were very frequent in Bible times and lands. So terrible were the ravages committed by these scourges, so sudden their appearance, so rapid their progress, so mysterious their origin and cause, that they were universally regarded not merely as a visitation of God, but as a special product of God's creative power. The cause and the effect were confounded. Fear prevented the Israelites from investigating the nature of the phenomenon. Modern science has given the true interpretation of the riddle. Blasting and mildew are conclusively ascertained to be produced by plants,—to be the diseases occasioned by the growth of minute fungi. Ever since plants have existed, these vegetable parasites have preyed upon them. They appear in greater or less abundance every year. They are fostered into excessive growth by certain favourable conditions of soil and climate, and checked in their development by certain unfavourable conditions. They are the commonplace everyday product of nature's laws. They are not special creations of God, but the ordinary growths of the vegetable kingdom. The miraculous element, in connection with God's judgments, was their extraordinary development and sudden appearance in immediate connection with Divine threatenings. As science advances superstition retires, and the phenomena attributed to supernatural causes are found to have been produced by the operation of physical law. But the miracles of the Bible are untouched by this principle. Science may teach us the economy of miracles, but it cannot persuade us of their unreality

and impossibility. A brief glance at the nature of the fungi concerned in the production of blasting and mildew may be interesting and instructive. It will teach us that nothing is so weak and small that the strength and wisdom of God cannot accomplish great ends by its instrumentality. There are four diseases in corn produced by fungi—smut, bunt, rust, and mildew. The black heads, covered with a soot-like dust, noticeable in the cornfields, are caused by a parasitic plant—a true fungus, capable of reproducing and extending itself indefinitely. The seed-vessels of this plant are exceedingly minute. One square inch of surface contains no less than eight millions; and if the seed-vessels be so small, what must the seeds themselves be? Bunt is even more destructive. It has an intolerable odour, like that of putrid fish. It is one of the common diseases to which wheat is subject. It confines its ravages entirely to the grain. It is rare to find any wheat-field altogether free from rust, or Red Robin. It is sometimes so abundant that a person passing among the stalks is completely painted with its rusty powder. It is found upon the wheat-plant at all stages of growth. The term mildew is vague and unsatisfactory. Properly it should be applied to a disease produced by a fungus known to botanists as *Puccinia graminis*. It is derived from the Saxon words, *Mehl-than*, meaning "meal-dew." It makes its first appearance in the cornfields in May or June, and first takes possession of the lower green leaves, which become sickly. When the corn is nearly or fully ripe, the straw and the culm are profusely streaked with blackish spots, ranging in length from a minute dot to an inch. These evils are found all over the world, wherever corn is grown. All these blights and mildews on the corn-crops and the green crops may well be called by God, "My great army." Individually minute and insignificant, by the sheer force of untold numbers they are mightier for harm than storms and earthquakes. It is indeed a fortunate circumstance that they refuse to grow generally except in stagnant ill-drained places, and under peculiar conditions of warmth and moisture; for, otherwise if, quick with life as they are, they were to germinate wherever they alighted, the fig-tree would not blossom, and there would be no fruit in the vines, the labour of the olives would fail, and the fields would yield no meat. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*)

Insensibility under material evil:—This insensibility, which prevents people from turning to the Lord, is a moral evil, and ought to be charged on the guilty.

1. Instances and examples of this insensibility (Isa. v. 24, 25, ix. 17, 20, 21; Amos iv. 6-11; Jer. v. 3; Rev. ix. 20, 21). Human nature continues always the same. Some vices have a local and temporary prevalence. Insensibility is the palsy of the soul; a stupor that with respect to spiritual things seizeth all its faculties. Hence in its nature it is both immoral and penal; as a judicial stroke on the minds and consciences of men from a righteous and provoked God; immoral, as a course of opposition to His Word and providence, comprehending what Scripture means by stopping the ear, shutting the eyes, hardening the neck, pulling away the shoulder, walking contrary to the Lord, and in the way of our own heart. This insensibility is a reigning principle in natural men. Redemption by Christ from the curse of the law secures His people against its dominion, and yet it frequently prevails and hurts the spiritual life.
2. Investigate its cause. That is atheism, which may be either gross or refined. Though seldom avowed, gross atheism has a secretly malignant influence on manners in the middle and lower ranks of society. There is a refined atheism among persons who profess to know God, and in works deny Him. The truths they hold are not operative and holy principles.
3. Charge this insensibility upon the guilty as a moral evil, which prevents them from turning to the Lord when He smites them with material evil. (1) Those charged with it are the Lord's people. (2) The charge is made by a man invested with the authority of a prophet. (3) The charge is made in the name of the Lord. (4) He in whose name the charge is made knew it to be just. (5) The charge was delivered publicly, in the hearing and presence of the guilty. (6) The charge was designed to bring former misconduct to remembrance, and to encourage them to present duty.

Application—1. Sinners are destroyers of their own comfort. 2. The course of nature fulfilleth the purpose and performeth the Word of the Lord. 3. The Lord hath kind intentions in smiting His people. 4. Sensible and material things are uncertain property. (*A. Shanks.*)

Material evil the scourge of moral evil:—There are no dispensations prosperous or adverse, with which we are favoured or chastised, but in the Word of God everything may be found that is necessary to assist our exercise and regulate our behaviour under them.

When people refuse to hear, they are sometimes smitten on a tender part, and constrained to feel. 1. Deal with material evil: such as blasting, mildew, and hail. 2. Deal with moral evil. This must be sin. Such as—(1) Love to the world. (2) Neglect of temple-building. (3) A notion that material powers act of themselves, independent of God. This is a branch of atheism, and a virtual denial of the Divine overruling providence. 3. Show the efficiency of God in scourging with the one for the other. (1) The Lord hath determined to smite and afflict with these evils. (2) The Lord createth this evil, and giveth its commission. Till He have occasion for its service, it doth not exist. (3) The Lord hath appointed and always observeth the seasons of smiting. The scourge is neither taken up nor laid down at random. (4) Places where the evil is collected and inflicted are marked out by the justice of God. (5) A portion of evil is measured out and allotted for each body of the executioners. Consider—1. Moral evils among us have a striking resemblance to those which prevailed among the Israelites in the days of Haggai. 2. The Lord would be just were He to smite us, as He smote them. We have given Him provocation. Our light is clearer, our privileges are richer, and our iniquities exceed theirs in number and aggravation. Material evil is still at the Lord's call, and ready to fulfil His Word. (*Ibid.*) *Temporal chastisements*.—The scope of the second part of this sermon is to show that however God will put difference betwixt workers, and knoweth who are sincere and who are not, yet to encourage them to be diligent in it, as being a work which He approves in itself, and which He will reward with temporal blessing, and a change of His former dispensations. 1. Though the Lord's dispensations be visible and felt by all, yet the right considering and understanding of them is a work of much difficulty, and to which men need serious stirring up, especially to take up the right cause of them. 2. Famine and scarcity is one of the public scourges whereby the Lord chastises the sinful contempt and negligence of His people in His work and service; and He will be conspicuous in inflicting of it. 3. As it is the usual plague accompanying common judgments that they do not work upon the hearts of men, to draw them nearer God, but rather harden them; so such an impenitent disposition when God strikes, is a ground of further controversy; therefore He marks by the way their stupidity. "Yet ye turned not to Me, saith the Lord." 4. However temporal things are not to be looked on as the chief reward of serving God, nor as absolutely promised, nor yet are they to be so much looked to under the Gospel, as the Church of the Jews might under their pedagogy; yet in this the promise, even concerning these things, holds good, that following God hath the promise of this life, in so far as it is for the followers' good; that God's changing adversity into prosperity when a people set about His work, should be a confirmation to their faith, and strengthen their hands; that whatever adversity come on the Church, it is not to be fathered on God's work, as if it had been the cause of her woe; that as neglecters of God's work are real losers in their own affairs, and will prove so in the end, so followers of His work have a real advantage in it; and, in a word, that God's work is never followed without a blessing evidenced some way or other to the godly's satisfaction. 5. It is a profitable study to remark the advantages of following God, and to study encouragement in that duty. So much are we taught by the Lord's exciting them to consider the change of His dealing, as trysting with the very day of their amending their fault. 6. God is so sovereign and absolute a Lord of all things, and hath times and seasons, blessings and cursings so in His hands, as He may undertake to do things, whereof there is no visible probability or certainty in the second causes, and can certainly perform them: therefore doth He undertake to bless them, when second causes and the season could speak no such thing. 7. It is the prerogative of God only to know future contingent events, which depend on times and seasons, and uncertain second causes, and their influences, but only by immediate revelation; this is held forth as God's prerogative, by His extraordinary prophet, to foretell in the midst of winter, what the succeeding harvest should produce. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 19. **From this day will I bless you.**—*The birthday of blessing*.—The cause of much ill success in life is often to be found in the want of zeal for God's house. The temple was a type of that Church of which every individual believer is a living stone. From the day when the foundation of that temple is laid, the promise of the text is ours. When is the foundation day from which the blessing

dates? In one sense it is from everlasting, for God's people are, in purpose, part of the building from before all time. But the day of conversion is the day on which is laid—as far as our experience is concerned—the foundation of our salvation. I. A SPECIFIED DAY. This blessed day goes by different names in Scripture. A day of espousals: the day in which Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, wins the heart of His bride. A day of power. It is a mighty act to convert a sinner, infinitely beyond the power of man, and glorifying even to the omnipotence of God. The "day of salvation." This name describes itself. 1. This day often has a cloudy dawning. The day of grace begins before there is actual light. Just before the light breaks in, the power of darkness makes its most desperate resistance. 2. The day has often a secret dawning. There are those who cannot say exactly when or how they were converted. Foolishly they fear they can never have been converted at all, as they are unable to say it was then, and it was there. 3. Sometimes this day has an early, and sometimes a long-delayed dawn. God has no fixed age at which to convert. 4. This day, like all others, has a silent dawn. It is seen, but not heard. 5. The dawning of this day, like the dawning of all other days, is irresistible. If it is the work of God, it must stand. 6. The dawn is but the commencement of the day. The morning is the noon in childhood; the noon is but the dawn fully developed. II. A DECLARED BLESSING. It includes all spiritual blessings; pardon, peace, &c. It rests on all our temporal affairs. It extends to all future things. (*Archibald G. Brown.*) *Promises to bless encouragements to work*:—1. Concerning the great Promiser, the following considerations are interesting. (1) He is Jehovah. (2) The Promiser is the God of the people to whom the promises are made. (3) The Promiser is strong and faithful round about. (4) The Promiser is Lord of elements and seasons. 2. Concerning the good things which the Lord our God promises. Comprehended in the term, "bless." Includes—(1) The removal of material evils. (2) Means of fertility and plenty. (3) A blessing with the means. (4) A blessing upon the possession and use of those good things which the Lord produces by the means. 3. The people whom the Lord promiseth to bless. (1) They were His own people. (2) A people for whom the Promiser had lately done great things. (3) A people who had been negligent and slothful in the work which the authority of the Promiser required, and gratitude to their Redeemer bound them to perform. (4) A people whose negligence had been chastised. (5) A people who were now learning to do well. 4. The day on which the Lord promiseth to bless His people. (1) A specified day. (2) The day on which they turned to the Lord, and began to build. (3) The day on which the promise began to be performed. Learn—1. For the good things of this life the people of God have His covenant and promises. 2. Operations of material power are operations of God. 3. The zeal of the Lord of hosts hath done great things for the house of His name. 4. Building the house of the Lord is connected with blessing. (*A. Shanks.*) *The benediction of Haggai*:—These are the words of Haggai, whom the Lord raised up in his old age for the purpose of calling His people from the sin of religious indifference to the earnest performance of duty. As God's prophet, it was his duty to expostulate, to trace the connection between sinful neglect and its effects, to picture in dark but true colours the woes of the people, but also to pronounce the promise of benediction and peace. I. THE PROMISE ASSERTS THAT IN GOD AND FROM GOD IS THE BLESSEDNESS OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. There is nothing we can satisfactorily substitute for the blessing of God. 2. If we have it we need fear no evil from any other source. II. THE PROMISE DIRECTLY REFERS TO TEMPORAL BLESSING, BUT INCLUDES SPIRITUAL. The picture presented is descriptive of the people's estate. We ought to connect the goodness and love of God with all the material blessedness of life, as well as with the higher spiritual side of it. There is no department of life from which God need be shut out. But the promise certainly includes the higher blessings belonging to spiritual life and development. III. THE PROMISE IS GIVEN AS THE RESULT OF OBEDIENCE, THE SINCERITY OF WHICH PRACTICAL PROOF HAS BEEN SUPPLIED. We must not try to drive a bargain with God. The service our Lord wants is the service of faith and love. Let that be rendered and the blessing may tarry, but come it will, and just because it has tarried it may be all the richer and better. IV. THE PROMISE IS FIXED AND CONTINUOUS. "From this day." That is definite enough. The benediction had been stored up—now it was to fall like the refreshing rain over all the land. And the blessing is to be continuous. To-day, and every succeeding day, I will bless you. The promise is most reliable. From the words

of the promise we look to Him who made it. He is able to fulfil it. (*Adam Scott.*) *The day of dedication to God is the day of blessing*:—I. THE PROMISE—blessing. This blessing of the Lord conveys a promise that He would not only withdraw the evils under which they suffered, and send fertility and plenty, but also pour down on them the Spirit of His grace. Esau was blessed with outward prosperity. Jacob had the full blessing, spiritual and temporal. He whom God blesses is blessed here and hereafter, in body and in soul. II. THE TIME OF IT—"from this day"; that is, from the day the foundation of the temple was laid. On this the prophet lays great stress. Who has not noticed a turn of providence in favour of those who have returned into the way of duty; and that, from that very day, God has blessed them? Indeed, this is an unchangeable law in God's government of the world. III. THE REASON OF THIS PROMISE OF THE LORD. It seems that the people busied themselves with their own temporal affairs, purposing to build the temple when they could better afford it. God frustrated their selfish policy, by sending blasting and mildew in their fields, and causing their money to waste away insensibly, as though it had been put into a bag with holes. But when they reversed their mode of proceeding, from that very day God blessed them. God ordinarily proceeds to deal with men as they deal with Him. They who freely offer to Him their goods to carry on His work are blessed by Him with increase. IV. THIS TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM WAS TYPICAL OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, OF WHICH HE IS THE FOUNDATION AND THE SUPERSTRUCTURE. In this spiritual house we are all more immediately interested than in the building of the material temple. As Christians, we are all members of this spiritual building. Are we building on Christ, the only foundation? (*Alfred Jones, T.A.*)

Vers. 20-23. *And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms.—The blessing of calamities*:—These are the concluding words of the prophecies of Haggai. The Old Testament is one continual declaration and showing forth of this truth, that sin, when it has conceived, brings forth death, and all the family of death. On the contrary, the godly, who give themselves up to doing the Lord's will, still find that God blesses them,—with peace; with all manner of spiritual graces; with the light of His countenance; and, may be, with worldly prosperity. Whenever God executes judgment it must be against evil. Nothing but evil can move the wrath of God. Nor does God ever shake, or overthrow, or destroy anything, except by reason of evil. The natural man imagines a God who cares not about the life or death of His creatures, who merely creates them to show forth His power and His skill. This image is altogether different from the true God, as He has revealed Himself to mankind in His Word, and by the incarnation of His only-begotten Son. The true God has no pleasure in the ebb and flow of life and death. He wills life, not death. The only thing God wills to destroy is sin—not the sinner, but the sin. When He destroys the sinner, it is solely for the sake of the sin. The works of destruction spoken of in the text are a part of that warfare which God is continually waging against sin and all manner of evil, and accordingly agree in their spirit and purpose with the barrenness and blasting and mildew sent upon the Israelites, because they had neglected their appointed work of building the house of the Lord. When God takes in hand a work of destruction, it is never purely and entirely a work of destruction. Whenever God executes judgment, mercy is always going along with judgment. Were not this God's purpose, He would be giving up the victory to the spirit of evil, and death would triumph over life. This then is the end and purpose of Haggai's prophecy. It speaks of terrible and awful things; but it ends with words of comfort and peace. It says that, while the nations around Judea were to be shaken and disturbed by wars and divers disasters, and while many were to perish, Zerubbabel would establish the remnant of God's people in the land of their fathers; and so, we know, he did. The coming of Zerubbabel, which is spoken of as the coming of the desire of all nations, whereby the house of the Lord was to be filled with glory, was a type of a threefold fulfilment, one of which has already taken place once for all; one of which has been continually taking place ever since, and is continually taking place at this day; and one of which will take place hereafter: and all these fulfilments are accompanied by signs more or less like those foretold in the text, as ordained to attend the coming of Zerubbabel. Thus the coming of Zerubbabel was a type of Christ's coming in the flesh. Zerubbabel was not really the Desire of all nations, but Christ was. Zerubbabel could not fill God's house with glory, but Christ did fill it with an infinite,

undying, heavenly glory. . . . Whenever God has purposed to raise His Church to a higher stage of power and glory, the world has been shaken by the new life which has entered and taken possession of it. The heart of the Christian will not fail when he sees the shaking of the nations, or of the powers of heaven. He will not be troubled or disquieted by fears, as though evil were about to gain victory over good. Our Lord's promise is, that, from amid the clouds and the storm, the sign of the Son of Man shall come forth with power and great glory. (*J. C. Hare, M.A.*) *Terrible revolutions*:—These verses remind us—I. THAT THE REVOLUTIONS AMONGST MANKIND ARE SOMETIMES VERY TERRIBLE. Here we read of the "shaking of the heavens and the earth," the "crash of thrones," the "destruction of kingdoms," the "overthrow of chariots," &c. What the particular revolutions referred to here are, cannot be determined. Such revolutions imply the existence and prevalence of two antagonistic moral principles in the world—good and evil. These are the Titanic chieftains in all the battles, the elemental forces in all the convulsions of the world. It is truth against error, right against wrong, liberty against thralldom, virtue against vice. II. THAT GOD HAS TO DO EVEN WITH THE MOST TERRIBLE OF THESE REVOLUTIONS. "I will shake the heavens, I will overthrow the throne," &c. "I will destroy the strength," &c. Inasmuch (1) As God is eternally against the false and the wrong and the tyrannic, He may be said to be Author of these revolutions. Inasmuch (2) As He can prevent them, He may be said to be the Author of these revolutions. He does not originate them, but He permits them. He could annihilate all wicked doers by a volition, He allows them to fight themselves often to death in battling against the right and the true. "The Lord sitteth upon the flood." He sits in serene majesty, controlling all the fury of the battling forces. He "holds the winds in His fist." III. THAT THE GOOD MAN IS SAFE IN THE MOST TREMENDOUS REVOLUTIONS OF TIME. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts." What is here said of Zerubbabel suggests three thoughts. (1) That good men sustain the highest office. Zerubbabel was not only a servant, but a "chosen servant." He was selected for the work of rebuilding the temple. It suggests (2) That good men will receive the highest distinction. "I will make thee as a signet." A signet indicates, (a) Worth. It was a ring with a seal on it, worn on the finger, as an ornament of great value. Good men are elsewhere represented as God's jewels. A signet indicates, (b) Authority. The signet of an Eastern monarch was a sign of delegated authority. A good man is invested with the highest authority—the authority to fight against wrong and to promote right, at all times and in every place. It suggests (3) That good men will always be safely kept. Jehovah says this to Zerubbabel. Amidst all evil, "God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (*Homilist.*) *The safety of God's people amidst the coming commotions*:—1. Great political convulsions may be expected in the future, as well as in the past, because the same reason exists for them; the ungodly nature of existing political forms (ver. 21). 2. Wars, revolutions, and tumults of nations are all working out God's designs of mercy to the world, by means of His Church (ver. 22). 3. Amidst all the convulsions of human history, the people of God are safe, the gates of hell can never prevail against the Church. The past in this respect is prophet of the future (ver. 23). 4. The best protection for any nation, the surest guarantee for its political existence, is a living, working Church in its midst, for as long as the stream of national life carries the vessel in which Christ is carried, that stream shall flow on in safety. Sodom shall stand as long as a righteous Lot is found in it (ver. 23). The general drift of this prophecy by Haggai may now be perceived. His specific work was to urge the rebuilding of the temple. This work was important, because the temple was the seat of the theocracy, and the theocracy was the existing form of the great work of redemption. To erect that, and thus prepare for the re-inauguration of the temple-worship, was the great work of the restoration. To urge them to this work, the prophet tears away their subterfuges and excuses; shows them how they had already suffered by its neglect; develops to them the real greatness of the work, in spite of its outward littleness, as a necessary link in the great purposes of redemption; and guarantees the safety of the theocratic people amidst all the convulsions that were to come on the earth. All these predictions have been fulfilled to the letter, proving that Haggai was what he claimed to be, a true prophet of Jehovah. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

Ver. 23. Will make thee a signet: for I have chosen thee.—*God's acceptance of Zerubbabel.*—This text acquaints us with God's gracious purpose to magnify Zerubbabel, and to put honour upon him. Consider it in a three-fold notion. I. AS A PROPHECY. Directed to Zerubbabel, acquainting him with the future events in the world, and what shall betide him, and his people under him. It is the privilege of His Church, and chosen ones; they have those *arcana imperii* made known unto them. It is His care for them to settle, and support them against future events. II. AS A PROMISE. It betokens good to him. It is a reward assured to Zerubbabel for what he had done. He had been zealous for his God, for His temple and worship; a promise of his future advancement. In a mystical sense the text is understood of Christ. The text is a Royal Charter made to Zerubbabel. Here is the time set; "in that day." The person to be advanced; "Zerubbabel, My servant." The author of the advancement; that is God. The advancement itself; "I will make thee a signet." The ground and reason; "for I have chosen thee." The ratification of this promise; it is sealed with the seal of the living God. Apply this text to ourselves. 1. It is our comfort that we may do so, that we stand in such terms with God, that the promises to His ancient people may, with good warrant, be applied and transferred to us. 2. Is it not a blessing and comfort that we have a Zerubbabel to be prince and captain of this people of God? (By Zerubbabel the preacher here refers to Charles I.) (*Geo. Stradling, S.T.P.*)

INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH.

WE must think of the prophet Zechariah as living and preaching among surroundings the same as those with which Haggai, his companion in responsibility and tribulation and honour, was familiar. The captivity in Babylon had come to an end. The mighty empire, which for seventy years had enslaved God's people, had fallen before Cyrus. The king had authorised and invited the Hebrew exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord. But yet the sanctuary was unbuilt; no place of habitation had been found for the God of Jacob. An unworthy timidity, and a sad failure of trustfulness, and an overweening regard for self combined to promote this lamentable result. It was, then, fully fifteen years after the band of exiles had arrived in Jerusalem that Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to kindle within their countrymen a worthier spirit. Side by side these two servants of the King stood, strengthening each other's hands in God; side by side, until the slumberous eyes had been opened, and the forgetful hearts led back to the path of duty, and the Temple raised out of its ruins. Then Haggai laid down the burden of the prophet, and was gathered to his fathers; and Zechariah bore witness for God alone. I. What we know of ZECHARIAH HIMSELF may be rapidly told. He was priest as well as prophet. His grandfather's name and his own are mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah (Neh. xii. 16), in the catalogue given there of the members of the priestly class. He was the head of one of the families that ministered about God's altar, no less than a preacher of the Lord. He united the two offices just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had done in former days. The patriotic zeal of the prophet for the honour of his country and the glory of God was linked in Zechariah with that tender affection which every true priest must have felt for the shrine in which it was his blessedness to be a servant. Sprung from ancestors who for centuries had gone in and out of the sacred courts, he would have been strangely unmindful of the best traditions of his family if he had not been very jealous for the worship of the Lord God of Israel. God had called him to a task which a pious priest could not but welcome, and to which he could only surrender himself with enthusiasm. He was quite a young man when he stood up first to deliver the Divine message. He tells us that he was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of Iddo. The Book of Ezra, in its account of the matter, makes no mention of the father, and speaks, indeed, as if the prophet were sprung immediately from Iddo (Ezra v. 1, vi. 14). Probably Berechiah died at an early age, before he had time to make for himself a name with strangers like Ezra, though his memory could not but be cherished and perpetuated by his own son. It was in the care of his grandfather that Zechariah returned to Jerusalem from his alien home by the banks of the Euphrates. He could not be more than a mere child when the great deliverance took place. For, years after, when he became God's ambassador, he was still too young to exercise the priestly functions. Nehemiah informs us that he did not rank among "the chief of the fathers" during all the days of the high-priest Joshua; not, indeed, until Joiakim, Joshua's son and successor, was put in charge of the worship of

Jehovah; then only Zechariah was enrolled among those who made sacrifice and intercession for the people. He was a prophet before he was a priest. If Haggai were an old man before his ministry commenced, Zechariah's was begun in the days of his youth; God has room and work in His kingdom alike for the veteran and for the child. And nothing is pleasanter than to see, as in this instance, the old and the young taking part together in duties that are holy and heavenly. And sometimes the young are inclined to disparage the work of their elders; they are too self-confident; they imagine that there are no thoughts so large as their own, and no arms so strong, and no hearts so fervent. It is better when the two join hands frankly, as Haggai and Zechariah did, and Peter and Mark, and Paul and Timothy; and recognise cordially and ungrudgingly that each has his own place. Probably many years lay between Zechariah's first exercise of the prophetic office and his last. The chapters that close his book are very different both in manner and in matter from those with which it opens—so different that many have concluded that they could not have been penned by him at all. But it may make the difference easier of comprehension if we suppose these later chapters to belong to Zechariah's age while the others are the utterance of his youth. A man speaks in his maturity in phrases and tones which he did not employ when he was younger; he has passed into another atmosphere. Such was Zechariah, who testified for God in a time of declension and darkness. It was a difficult work. But I can well believe that, when the prophet's heart grew weary and doubtful, he would encourage himself by the strong consolations proclaimed in the very name he bore—a name which many a Hebrew father gave to his child. It spoke of the loving-kindness of the Lord. Zechariah means, "he whom Jehovah remembers." II. Passing to look at THE CONTENTS OF HIS MESSAGE, we find that the prophecy divides itself into three parts, the first inclusive of the six opening chapters, the second of the seventh and eighth, the third embracing the remainder of the Book. After a short introduction, in which the author calls upon his countrymen to repent of their indolence, and selfishness and sin, the first section of the prophecy is commenced. It is a striking and beautiful section. It describes the history of one very remarkable night, that which lay between the 23rd and 24th days of the month Sebat, a month corresponding with our February. The year was the same as that in which Haggai began and ended his brief but fruitful ministry—the second year of Darius Hystaspis. During this night, while Zechariah slept, God presented to his gaze one strange heaven-drawn picture after another. Vision succeeded vision, clear and vivid, till there were eight of them in all. And when the last had gone the prophet awoke, comforted in his own heart, and having learned much regarding the destiny of the nation that was dear to him; it had been the most blessed night he had ever known. The second part of Zechariah's prophecy—that which occupies the seventh and eighth chapters—was not uttered until two summers and winters had passed away. During this interval the Jews had set themselves zealously and devotedly to the restoring of God's neglected house; and they had not lacked tokens of His favour and grace. But a question had sometimes been discussed among them which they were anxious to have settled. And to whom could they go with more propriety or with greater likelihood of success, some of them thought, than to the prophet in whom the Spirit of the Lord was, and who had already been inspired to address to them such good and comfortable words? So, in December of the year 518 B.C., a deputation came to Zechariah from Bethel, one of the cities to which the captives had returned, to propound to him their difficulty. It concerned the national fast-days, which they had kept four times a-year during their exile in Babylon—days on which they had wept when they remembered Zion, captured and shamed and down-trodden. Should they still observe them now that the restoration had taken place? Perhaps God did not mean them to mourn any longer, and would be displeased if they did not manifest gladness because of the great things He had done for them. But, on the other hand, it might still be His desire that they should humble themselves and sit in dust and ashes, for their Church and nation were feeble and of small account. Zechariah answered his questioners in words which carry us back to some of the noblest sentences of Isaiah (Isa. lviii.), and forward to some of the searching and spiritual utterances of Christ (Matt. vi. 16-18). He told them that God preferred obedience to fasting, faith and holiness to sackcloth and a sad countenance. He reminded them that it was their failure to fulfil the weightier precepts of His law which had lain at the root of all their miseries. He bade them pay most heed to judgment and righteousness and truth. And, to

nerve them for duties so high and broad and deep, he drew aside the veil from the future. God, he said, would make them glad according to the days wherein they had seen evil. He would bless Jerusalem as He had done in former times. Old men and women would move quietly along its streets, or would sit out in the sunshine, talking of the many strange events which had happened since they were young, and none would alarm or disturb them; while troops of happy children, playing together fearlessly the games they loved so well, would make the thoroughfares resound with their irrepressible mirth and gaiety. And where would be the necessity for days of mourning then? Their fasts would be changed into feasts; their "winter of discontent" made glorious summer. That was the reply; and would not Sherezer and Regem-melech and the rest go back to Bethel with hearts lightened and glad? We come to the closing section of the Book. It may have been uttered, as I have hinted, many years later, when the active work of Zechariah's life was almost over, and when at length it was ringing to evensong. No detailed analysis of these six chapters can be given here. Let it be said, however, that they have a distinctly Messianic character. They speak of a King who was to come to Zion in future days, a meek and lowly King, but One invested with singular majesty too, for He would set free the captives of Israel, and would overthrow the enemies of His people. Then the image changes, and it is a Shepherd to whom the citizens of Jerusalem are pointed forward. But they who ought to be the sheep of His pasture deliberately reject Him, and heap contumely upon Him, and go after a foolish shepherd who cannot profit them. It is a sad picture; and the prophet's voice grows tremulous and indignant as he paints it. But, before he ends his message his accents are happier again. He sees Jerusalem lifted proudly on high as the capital of the land. He sees Jehovah Himself dwelling in her as her Ruler and Prince. He sees everywhere a noble purity in the ascendant. There is to be no distinction of secular and sacred, of clean and unclean; for all things, the commonest objects of life, are consecrated to the Lord. When the priest puts the collar on his horse, and goes to his day's work or his day's recreation, he will be as truly at one with God as when he enters the Holy of Holies with the censer in his hand and the fair mitre on his head and the jewels of the breastplate glittering in the sun. Is it not a splendid ideal? Would that it were nearer its realisation even now, after all these centuries of the Gospel! III. I have said that THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK have been made the subject of keen discussion. Many opinions have been expressed regarding their authorship; many doubts have been thrown on the belief that Zechariah spoke and penned them. It has been urged that they are altogether different in tone and contents from the chapters which precede them. There we were called to look on one significant vision after another; here there are no visions, only direct predictions, warnings of judgment, promises of succour and salvation. There the unbuilt Temple was always present to our thoughts; here the Temple has vanished altogether from view. There everything was of the profoundest interest and importance to the Jews of the prophet's day; here it is difficult to believe that these Jews could be moved and stirred by much to which they are bidden listen—it seems to deal with events remote from their time, with hostile nations and powers that had been formidable to their fathers, but had ceased to vex and trouble them.¹ The Book of Job and the Epistle to the Hebrews are not less divinely precious to our souls because we cannot be sure what human hand it was that penned them. But in this case there is no sufficient cause why we should alter our old beliefs. We may still regard the prophecy of Zechariah as a unity. Criticism itself, after discovering many stumbling-blocks and throwing out many conjectures, is coming back to that conviction.² If the preacher were far advanced in life before he published the truths contained in this division of the Book, there would be no need for him to refer to the rebuilding of the Temple; the work had long been accomplished; the headstone had been laid years ago, with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." And as for the references to nations, which were not then annoying the chosen people, or able to annoy them, these

¹ With Assyria, for example, and with Egypt.

² "The manifest acquaintance on the part of the writer of Zech. ix.-xiv. with so many of the later prophets seemed so convincing to De Wette that, after having in the first three editions of his *Introduction* declared for two authors, he found himself compelled to change his mind, and to admit that the later chapters must belong to the age of Zechariah."—Dr. Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*.

too can be explained in an intelligible and satisfactory way.¹ Then it must not be forgotten that there are strong arguments which tend to show that this section could scarcely have an earlier date. It is filled with allusions to the later writings of the Old Testament. It appears to have come from a man who was familiar not only with the more ancient of those who had preceded him as God's heralds and ministers, but with one like Ezekiel, who had been a contemporary of the Exile. Altogether, while "it is not easy to say which way the weight of evidence preponderates," we may lawfully continue to think of Zechariah as the author from beginning to end of the prophecy which has been called by his name.

IV. Only a few words can be added about THE LESSONS OF THE BOOK for ourselves; indeed, these lessons are so many and so weighty that it is hard to select among them. 1. Let the first part, that in which those wonderful visions are recorded, speak to us of the blessedness of being in alliance and friendship with God, the wretchedness of being opposed to Him. It was intended to comfort the feeble Jews, and to tell them that greater was He who was for them than all who were against them. Their adversaries were both crafty and powerful; but they must never dream that the way of the ungodly could prosper, or envy the success of the wicked. That success was destined to be shortlived. 2. The second part of the prophecy, that in which Zechariah answered the question about days of fasting, should remind us of the nature of true religion. Seasons of solemn humiliation and of solemn festival are good if they give outward expression to the penitence and the joy of the heart; they are bad whenever they degenerate into observances of routine and custom, and whenever they are severed from a living and practical piety. Above all things God desires us to be in earnest; beyond all things He abhors hypocrisy—the show and semblance of religion sundered from its reality. 3. Finally, let us fix thought and affection on the Messiah presented to our view in the closing division of the Book. Let us mourn because our sins have pierced God's good Shepherd—mourn and be in bitterness, as one mourneth for his only son, and as one is in bitterness for his first-born. Let us ever be thankful for the "fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins," which has been opened to wash away our uncleanness. And let us see that the King, who rides forth in lowly majesty, is King of our hearts and lives. Behold, He stands at the door and knocks; let us hear His voice and open to Him; then He will come in, and sup with us, and we with Him. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

THE PROPHET AND HIS MISSION.—Zechariah was a common name among the Jews. Of the personal history of this Zechariah we know nothing. There is no evidence to connect him with the man mentioned in Matt. xxiii. 35. His family seems to have returned from Babylon with the first expedition in the reign of Cyrus. He was very young at the time of his return. He had seen the arresting of the erection of the Temple by the successful machinations of the Samaritans in the Persian Court, and the depressed tone of the national character during the time that followed this arrest. He had witnessed the growth of that selfish greed for their own individual interests, and their neglect of the interests of religion, that was so mournful a characteristic of this period. He had also seen the creeping feebleness with which the work of rebuilding the Temple was undertaken and prosecuted, when the edict of permission was again issued by Darius Hystaspis. Now, as the Temple was to them the grand symbol of revealed religion, indifference to it was an undoubted symptom of backsliding and spiritual declension. It was therefore necessary that they should be stirred up to the discharge of their duty as to the Temple, and awakened to a proper estimate of that great plan of mercy to the world, of which the Temple and the theocracy were but symbols, in order that their zeal might have at once a right motive and a right direction. Hence Haggai was first raised up to rouse them to activity in building the Temple, and two months later Zechariah followed, to take up the same theme, and unfold it yet more richly to the minds of the people, by connecting

¹ "Although Assyria was now merely a part of the Persian Empire, it was yet that part of it which had the most important connection with Judah. And as regards Egypt, not only had captive Jews been deported into Egypt, but the relation of Egypt as an unwilling vassal to Persia made the position of Judah precarious in the extreme during the lifetime of Zechariah."—Dr. Marcus Dods, *The Post-Exilian Prophets.*

the poor and passing present, with the magnificent and enduring future. The scope of the prophecy, then, is to produce a genuine revival of religion among the people, and thus encourage them in the right way to engage in the rebuilding of the Temple. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—1. The Word of God which introduces the prophetic labours of Zechariah (chap. 1. vers. 1-6). 2. A series of seven visions which Zechariah saw in the night, on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, in the second year of Darius (chap. 1, ver. 7, to chap. vi., ver. 8). 3. A symbolical transaction which brought the visions to a close (chap. vi. vers. 9-15). 4. The communication to the people of the answer of the Lord to a question addressed by certain Judæans to the priests and prophets, as to the necessity of keeping certain fast days (chaps. vii., viii.). 5. A prophecy of threatening import concerning the land of Hadrach, the seat of the ungodly world-power (chaps. ix.-xi.). 6. A burden concerning Israel (chaps. xii.-xiv.). All the parts of the Book hang closely together; and the differences which exist between the first two prophecies and the last two, and which have led some writers to ascribe them to two different prophets, are not worthy of notice. It is clear that though the prophecies of this Book have their foundation in the building of the second Temple, it is impossible that they refer solely to that event, or to those times. They point onward to the close of the present dispensation. They fit only into events, and into times, not even yet reached. Only as we bear this in mind throughout the entire Book shall we be able clearly to understand it, and be preserved from a labyrinth of perplexity. And we must guard against the mistake into which so many have fallen, of applying the revelations of the future glories of the Kingdom of God to the Church of Christ. The prophecies of this Book relate to the Jewish nation and their Messiah; and to the Kingdom of God to be set up among them at His second coming in glory, and which is to rule the world. (*Frederick Whitfield, M.A.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

ZECHARIAH.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 2. **The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers.**—*A call to repentance*.—The prophet being to carry comfortable tidings to this people, begins with the doctrine of repentance, inviting them not to obstruct their own mercy by impenitency; and to make way for this doctrine, he points out to them the greatness of God's displeasure against their fathers for their sin, as might be seen in the horrible calamities that did come upon them, which might teach their children not to expect exemption if they followed their way. Doctrine—1. A people are prepared and fitted for favourable manifestations of God by repentance, and mercies are sweetest and most comfortable unto penitents, therefore the Lord permits this doctrine to the following visions, as the only way to fit people for them, and make them truly comfortable to them. 2. No privilege bestowed on any people will exempt them from sharp corrections when they sin; for albeit the Jews were the only people of God at that time, yet "the Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers," which is also a warning to them. 3. Though the Lord do not chastise any of His chosen and regenerate people in pure wrath or beyond the bounds of moderation, yet His fatherly displeasure may be very hot and sad in its effects, and His displeasure against a visible Church, which hath abused mercy, very grievous, and therefore ought to be seriously laid to heart; therefore He calls them to consider how "the Lord hath been sore displeased, or had displeasure on displeasure." 4. Albeit examples of God's anger, especially when they are near, ought to be effectual documents to others, exciting to tremble and repent, yet such is the stupidity of men, that notwithstanding any such warnings, they will be ready to adventure on the same sins, which God hath so remarkably punished; therefore they need stirring up to see and make use of God's anger against their fathers, the effects whereof were very visible to them. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The prophet's exordium*.—Its object is to show the unchanging permanence of God's Word, by contrasting it with the transitory nature of their fathers and the prophets, and it may thus be set forth more fully. Let the fate of your fathers be a warning to you that you avoid the disobedience to the word of Jehovah, which brought upon them evils so desolating. For where are they now? Once they ruled and worshipped here as you do. But where are they now? Some lie in slaughtered heaps, when the banner of Judah was trampled in the dust, and her bravest sons cut down like grass before the mower's scythe, by the fierce cohorts of the Assyrian. Some lie buried in the ruins of the holy city, which they sought to defend from the spoiler. Some are sleeping by the flashing waters of the Euphrates, after weeping out a weary life beneath the willows that bend in the land of the stranger. Whilst some, in the feebleness of tottering age, have returned to lay their bones in the soil that is hallowed by the memories and hopes of Israel. And why has this been their mournful history? Because they refused to listen to the warnings of the prophets. Hence even the prophets themselves were taken away. They warned, and wept, and prayed, but met only with stoning, reviling, and hate. They toiled on to stay the coming judgments, but when their efforts were disregarded by the people, God in mercy took them away from the evil to come. Then the last barrier was removed,

and the torrent of wrath came dire and pitiless in its rush of fury and swept them away in its flood. Now as your fathers and the prophets alike have passed away according to My word; as neither the wickedness of the one, nor the piety of the other, could arrest My threatened judgments, beware lest a like evil come upon you, that your prophets, being disregarded, be also withdrawn, and the judgments you are daring come upon you for your disobedience. This appropriate introduction was probably followed with exhortations to build the temple, and restore the worship of God, that are not recorded, as their interest was local and temporary. Inferences—1. Whilst God is love, and whilst the preachers of the Gospel must preach this glorious truth, they must not conceal the fact that God is a consuming fire, and angry with the wicked every day. It is a sign of sickly piety when men are willing to hear nothing of the wrath of God against sin (vers. 1, 2). 2. If men expect God to return to them in prosperity, they must return to Him in penitence. The flower averted from the sun must turn toward it, to catch its genial smile (ver. 3). 3. What we have to do for God in life should be done quickly, for life is rapidly passing; to evil and good alike come the swift shadows of the sunset (ver. 5). 4. What a man sows, he shall also reap, and the seedlings of life on earth shall be harvested in heaven or in hell (ver. 6). (T. V. Moore, D.D.)

Vers. 3, 4. Turn ye unto Me . . . and I will turn unto you.—*The Divine order of all true progress*:—The first step is at all times to turn to the Lord; the second follows, “turn you now from your evil ways, and from your evil doing.” The motive and the power to forsake evil must be found in himself. Once know Jesus and His love, experimentally, and you possess a motive for holiness, greater far than either heaven or earth can furnish. It is the expulsive power of a new affection. And yet, as in all advance, there is reciprocal action. The first step must ever be to Jesus. When the man is in Christ he possesses the power. But in turning away from evil, new light and life are thrown back upon the starting-point. We see truth more clearly, and embrace it more earnestly. Thus there is growth in grace. To every step of faithfulness on our part the Lord adds new light; and this light is reflected in the face of Jesus Christ. He becomes more known, more loved; and this produces its effect in more likeness to Him. (T. Whitfield, M.A.) *The importance of repentance*:—Urged from—I. THE DIVINE DISPLEASURE TOWARDS THE IMPENITENT MEN OF THE PAST. “The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers.” “They had shown a mournfully strong and inveterate propensity to depart from God and from His ways. They had needed incessant repetitions of Divine admonitions, entreaties, promises, and threatenings; and many a time all had proved unavailing. Jehovah bound them to Himself with ‘cords of love.’ But ‘they brake the bands asunder, and cast away the cords from them.’ They chose their own ways. They thus provoked Him to anger. Their fathers had by their sins brought that heavy seventy years’ judgment upon themselves.” Now the displeasure of God to sinners of the past is here referred to in order to induce the Jews to repent of the selfish negligence which they had evinced concerning the building of the temple (Hag. iv. 5-7). II. FROM GOD’S ASSURANCE OF A WELCOME TO ALL THAT TRULY REPENT. Proved—1. By His invitation to the impenitent. “Come now let us reason together, saith the Lord,” &c. &c. 2. By the experience of mankind. Manasseh, David, Saul, Bunyan, and millions more returned to Him, and He not only received them, but rejoiced over them. III. FROM THE TRANSITORINESS OF HUMAN LIFE. By the “fathers” are meant those with whom God was displeased. An argument—1. For the wicked to repent. 2. For faithfulness, and for persevering zeal. For we shall all soon have finished our mission. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 5. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?—*The mortality of God’s instruments*:—1. The mortality of the instruments which God employs for carrying on His cause in the world. At the time these words were spoken, the patriarchs of antiquity, the seers of after times, the evangelical Isaiah, the plaintive Jeremiah, the vehement Ezekiel, all had been gathered to the tomb. There is no exemption from the stroke of mortality for the most valuable instruments of God’s service. Their death subserves the Divine purposes, and the interests of men, as well as their lives. The removal of ministers makes way for a greater variety of gifts and graces to be exercised in the ministry itself; and thus that irrepressible love of novelty which seems to be one of the

instincts of our nature is provided for. How glorious does our Lord Jesus Christ appear, in carrying on His cause, not only in spite of, but in the very midst of, and even by, the ravages of death. It is a bright manifestation of His power, to work by such feeble, fallible, mortal creatures as we are; it is a still brighter display of His wisdom and power to make even their death subserve His cause. There is much in this view of our subject at once to encourage the timid and to repress the vain. Christ can do much with the weakest instrument; and He can do altogether without the strongest.

2. What there is, and how much, which, when these instruments are removed, survives the wreck of mortality, and perpetuates itself through the time to come. It was the proud boast of Horace, "I shall not all die, much of me will escape death"; and it has proved true. What remains of these men? (1) Not only their graves, but their own immortal selves, their deathless spirits. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. We are already come to the spirits of just men made perfect. They are assembled in the presence of their Lord, rejoicing with ineffable delight in their mutual recognition, in their sublime intercourse, in their joint adoration. (2) Their names, their character, and their examples still survive. Eminent piety, combined with eminent usefulness, retains, like the rose, its beauty and its fragrance after death. In their characters and examples we have the best part of themselves. The remembrance of departed piety is sometimes more serviceable than even the contemplation of it was while it was yet living. (3) The principles on which these worthies acted survives. These they derived from the Bible, and not from any human theories of civilisation, philosophy, or philanthropy. Your fathers when they died left you an unutilated Bible. Not a single promise lies interred in their graves. But, in some cases, the Bible is professed, while its truths are denied; it is, in a certain way, held in gross, while it is rejected in detail. Our fathers dealt not in vague generalities, philosophical speculations, or in evasive reserves. (4) Though the founders of the Society (London Missionary) have long since departed, the cause itself survives.

3. The means to be employed to carry on the work begun by our forefathers. Some fear the cause of missions will not live. Others think public attention will be diverted from the cause by the surpassingly great, various, and absorbing events of the times in which we live. It is a most remarkable, instructive, and impressive feature of the times that there is a conspicuous parallelism between political convulsion and social disorganisation on the one hand, and moral action and reformation on the other, between the destructive and the constructive forces, between the shaking and crumbling of the things that were ready to vanish away and the rising up of those things which cannot be shaken and are intended to remain. Shall we suffer this passing age to draw off our attention from the cause of Christian missions? That would be to lose our interest in the cause, when all things seem preparing the world for its full and final triumph.

4. We must unite appropriate and adequate means to our confidence of final success. (1) A more intelligent apprehension, a deeper conviction, and a more solemn sense, on the part of the whole Church, of the design of God in its erection and continuance in this world, as His witness and instrument for the conversion of the nations. In so far as the Church is a missionary Church, she is a true Church. What is the duty of the whole Church is the duty of every section and part of it. But the Church has not yet done, and is not even now doing, her duty. (2) If our zeal be the offspring of our piety, there is necessary for the continuance and extension of the missionary enterprise, an increase of spiritual religion. We want intelligence warmed with holy enthusiasm: a religion of life, of power, of love, and of a sound mind; a religion combining something of the enthusiasm of prophets, the zeal of apostles, the self-denial of pilgrims, and the constancy of martyrs. Eminent piety is essential to eminent usefulness. (*J. Angel James.*)

Lessons from the death of our fathers:—The death of our fathers reminds us—

1. Of our own mortality.
2. Of our own obligations.
3. Of our fathers' principles.
4. Of our prospects of reunion with them.
5. Of the grandeur of immortality. (*G. Brooks.*)

Prophetical succession:—I. THE LAW OF HUMAN MORTALITY AND SUCCESSION IS FULL OF SUGGESTION. Death is the law of all life, vegetable and animal, as well as human. Had man not sinned, the mortality of his human body would probably have been the same. The death to which sin doomed man was spiritual, not fleshly death. He could scarcely have remained permanently in a world subject to the conditions of this. The death of the body is sorrowful enough, because of our human affections and sensibilities. The

prophets die. Even their high vocation does not exempt them from the law of death. It may be that God would teach us that He can do His work without the best and greatest. Instead of Stephen God raises up Paul. A prophet's work may seem indispensable to an age, yet he dies. II. IS THERE NOT HIGH BENEFIT IN THE PROPHETICAL SUCCESSION? If the wise and experienced die, they give place to the young and ardent, who, with fresh impulse and newer lights, enter into their wealth of wisdom. Else might the prophet become a stereotype. The wisest may outlive their wisdom, and the most useful their usefulness. Sometimes the greatest are the greatest hindrance. Every generation rises to higher and broader spiritual conception than its predecessor. Whether is the greater evil, the mistakes of impetuous youth, or the paralysis of incapable age; the zeal without knowledge of experience, or the knowledge without zeal of over-caution; the Radical revolutionist, who would make all things new, or the Conservative revolutionist, who stands still in the stream of advancing thought and spirituality—the one too fast for his age, and the other too slow? Have we not a great law of compensation in the succession of God's prophets, especially as the generations overlap each other, and the Church possesses both at the same time? (*Henry Allon, D.D.*) *On the instructions to be derived from recalling the memory of our fathers*:—It is a tribute which we owe to the memory of our earthly parents, to recall them occasionally to our thoughts. The hope of this was a source of consolation to them amidst the cares of life. 1. By meditating on the fate of our fathers, we are reminded that we too must die. It is a fortunate circumstance in the nature of man, that, though his Maker hath formed him a mortal being, the idea of his dissolution doth not continually haunt his mind. 2. We learn what are the objects that are most worthy of pursuit. The good which our fathers have done remains for ever. It remains to embalm their memory, and to exalt their name. 3. We learn to imitate our fathers. The grave of a good man is a scene of much instruction and improvement. 4. We become reconciled to our own departure. The region beyond the grave is not a solitary land. There your fathers are, and thither every other friend shall follow you in due season. Therefore let your hearts be glad, let your glory rejoice, let your bodies also rest in hope. God will show you the path of life. (*W. Moodie, D.D.*) "*Your fathers, where are they?*"—Primarily, these words were intended to carry along with them a warning import to those to whom they were originally addressed, as to the folly of following on in the footsteps of those of their ancestors who had been taken away from all connection with time in the midst of careless inconsideration. The prophet does not pronounce as to where the fathers were. He knew that their bodies were consigned to death's dark domain, and reduced to inanimate matter. But where are their immortal spirits? The prophet leaves it as an open question, "Where are they?" We may have forebodings, but we are not the arbiters by whom any case may be decided. It must be left in the hand of Him to whom alone the right belongs to pronounce, and who will "judge righteous judgment." Think now of those of our fathers who lived and died in the faith of the Gospel. 1. They are not where they once were. 2. They are not where we are. 3. They are where they desired to be. 4. They are in the place for which they made preparation. 5. They are where they never would have been, but for the finished work of Christ, as their Representative and Substitute. 6. They are where they will be for ever. 7. They are where they will be very glad to see us. It may be added, and we shall be very glad to see them. (*T. Adam.*) *Our fathers*:—I. THE PEOPLE ADDRESSED. The visible Church, who lived in the typical land of promise, and under the Old Testament dispensation. It was declared or delivered, by the prophet from God, toward the close of the Babylonish captivity and exile. The "fathers" are represented as including those with whom the Lord had been sore displeased, and the people addressed are their descendants in the flesh, who inherited from their births their evil nature, were encompassed with their high privileges, and laden with their proportionate responsibilities. The "prophets" appear to signify those really sent of God, who spake His true Word, and no vision out of their own hearts. II. THE INTENTION OR OBJECT OF THE QUESTIONS PROPOSED. The inquiry is not after the existence of the absent "fathers." It doth not touch the truth of the immortality of the souls of the prophets. It regards the mortal existence of both the fathers and the prophets on earth. The inquiry calls a fact to the recollection of the people addressed, which relates to their immediate or remote ancestors. "Where are they?" Not with you now, to influence you. The Church is suffering the

loss of the benefit of their labours. The questions are put for the health and profit of the souls of the hearers, or for their greater condemnation, if they will not receive warning. III. THE PERMANENT USE OF THE RECORD, AS GOD SPEAKS BY IT TO US, AND IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES. We have been a highly favoured people, and we have long possessed manifold means and privileges, of a religious and spiritual nature; and in many cases, it is trusted, have, through distinguishing and sovereign grace, derived from the use of them profit unto eternal salvation. Let us make these inquiries matter of admonition for comfort and profit. (*William Borrow, M.A.*) *The invisible world*.—The difficulty of giving a sort of general reply to the question contained in the text, is much diminished by this particular fact, that the Scripture itself has assigned a fixed and determinate place in the world of spirits to the soul of every human being. Consider—I. THE CASE OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED WITHOUT PENITENCE AND FAITH. 1. Those who have died without repentance are gone to a state in which the wicked are no longer the prosperous. In this world guilt is often successful, at least for a season. 2. The impenitent and unbelieving are gone to a state in which they have no longer any hopes of escape, or means of approach to God. 3. Our impenitent fathers are gone into a state in which God is known only as the God of vengeance. II. THE CASE OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED PENITENT AND BELIEVING. 1. They are no longer in a state of trial and affliction. 2. They are gone into a world where temptation never enters. 3. Where doubt and despondency never come. 4. Where their infirmities and corruptions cannot follow them. Application—(1) If such are the glories of the one state we have been contemplating, and such the miseries of the other, what thanks are due to that Redeemer who has, of His own unmerited mercy, and by the sacrifice of His own life, rescued us from the anguish of perdition, and thrown open to us the gates of the mansion of God? (2) Remember that, very shortly, the question we are to-day putting about others will be put about ourselves. Another generation shall soon arise who will ask, with regard to you and me, “Your fathers, where are they?” (*J. W. Cunningham, A.M.*) *Improvement of death*.—I. SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS. 1. No distinction which men wear in society can possibly exempt them from the stroke of death. 2. Although our ancestors have departed this life, we are not altogether to entomb them in oblivion. Many reasons may be assigned why we should preserve them in recollection. To many of them we were bound by the ties of natural affection. To others we are allied by official connection. We have entered into their labours. The monuments of their industry lessen our toil. 3. Though these distinguished deceased have left this world, they are still in some state of conscious existence. Probably the souls of the departed enter at once either into bliss or woe. II. THE BEST IMPROVEMENT WE CAN MAKE OF PROMINENT PERSONS’ DEATHS. 1. By a serious remembrance. Not merely of their persons, but of their characters, and the labours in which they were engaged during their mortal sojourn. 2. Diligent inquiry, as to whether we have reaped any solid advantage from the ministrations in which they were engaged; and as to the manner in which we treated the servants of God while they were fulfilling their course. 3. Imitation of their holy example. There is always a limitation we must put when speaking of human example: “so far as he followed Christ.” 4. Earnest prayer in connection with bereavements. 5. By preparation to follow the devoted servants of God to the place where they now dwell. 6. Cherishing a devout expectation of reunion with the departed servants of God, in a world of future glory and perfection. (*J. Clayton.*) *The death of the old*.—1. The first thing that the words suggest is obviously the great law, under which we receive and possess existence—that we must die; the law of mortality, under which we were born. We will not enter into the curious question, whether man would have died if he had not sinned. It is better to look at death in its moral and spiritual aspect. It is thus continually represented to us in Scripture. It is not a part of God’s plan; it is a thing engrafted upon His original constitution. Death is the shadow of sin. This great, black, dark substance, that we call sin, comes in between man and the bright light of God’s countenance, and casts its shadow over man. That shadow is death. Death is but the symptom of a spiritual disease; it is not so much the grand disease of our nature, as it is the symptom of a deeper-seated disease. And God applies His remedy to the core of the disorder. He redeems from sin. 2. Apply remarks specially to the death of a very aged person. Note the amazing power of the principle of life in man. It is so wonderful to think that a human body, with its nice and delicate organisation, should go on sleeping and waking, toiling

and working, without intercession and without rest, for ninety or a hundred years. What a thing it would be if any man constructed a piece of mechanism that should go on in that way! But the individual man, though he is a wonderful, complex machine, considered in himself, is only one little wheel in a greater and a larger structure, that is, the whole species; and the species—such is the wonderful power of life—death cannot touch. However we may talk about death, the power of vitality is greater; even in man, and in the present world, life is stronger than death. Another thought is, that though there be this wonderful power of vitality, old age in general is not in itself very desirable. In general, very great age is only an additional affliction put to the ordinary ills of life. Nature does a great deal, independent of religion, to bring men to be willing to die. But where there is religion, and a “good hope through grace,” and a trust in the Divine mercy, the language and feeling of a man often is, “I would not live away.” The very aged man stands alone. He outlives his friends; and what is worse, he outlives the capacity of forming new attachments. The fact is, that second childhood is very much like the first. The child is interesting but to a few. The aged cannot very well sympathise with new hearts and new persons, new modes of thought and feeling. How different it is with God! Generation after generation cometh, and He has His fresh and young affection for every generation as it comes. And every generation may come to Him, and look up to Him, with the same cordiality and the same confidence as the first. The last thought is, that we are struck by the death of a very aged person being uncommon. We speak of it as extraordinary. It throws us back upon the general law, that men do not all die at one particular time. There is no day, no fixed date, up to which all men are to live, and beyond which none can survive. If a fixed date for each individual had been assigned, the punishment of sin would have been made unendurable. It is a most beneficent dispensation that there is no fixed date. But the price to pay is that we must be prepared to see death occur at all ages. 2. There are limits to human probation and the Divine forbearance. You will see this by referring to the context. Your fathers and the prophets are dead; their probation terminated. The agents and the objects of the Divine mercy equally die. There is something very affecting in this. Zechariah says, “Remember, you are living under the same law. Probation has limits; forbearance has limits.” 3. The power and perpetuity of God’s truth, in contrast with the mortality of man. This is seen by connecting the words that follow. The prophet lives in his utterances. A true thought is a Divine and immortal thing. What has come from the breast and bosom and mind of God, and has been uttered, lives, and there is power in it. Men change, their feelings change, their minds alter, their sensibilities and sympathies pass away; but the Gospel is fresh to every generation. The Word of God, in its substantial essence, continues, and is the life and food of the Church. (*Thomas Binney.*)

An inquiry after dead relations:—By “fathers” is meant fathers of our flesh, the active instruments in the hand of God of our being, the secondary causes of our being. “Where are they?” Are they here? No. Are they anywhere? Yes. We know where their bodies are. Their souls are somewhere. “The prophets, do they live for ever?” No. (1) They may not, if they would. They come within the compass of the universal decree. They are made up of the same ingredients, they have the same demeritorious cause of death as others, namely, sin. And their Lord and Master will do without them, as He does without others. (2) They would not, if they might. Two things put the saints in general, and ministers in particular, upon a desire to be gone; the happiness they shall then be instated in, and the troubles and miseries they shall then be freed from. Do the prophets live for ever? Yes. Though not in their persons, they do in their successors. Though not in this world, yet in a better. If prophets and righteous men did not in the other world live for ever, the joys and glories of that world could not be said to be perfect. In the other world they must needs live for ever, for otherwise the virtue and efficacy of Christ’s blood and righteousness would be very much lessened. They must needs live for ever, for the Church of Christ in the other world will still retain the same names and honourable titles of Christ’s body, spouse, and subjects as they have here. He cannot be a Father without children; a King without subjects; a Bridegroom without a bride; a Ruler without a correlate. What can put an end to their living in those upper regions of glory? Sin cannot. Death cannot. Devils cannot. And to be sure, God will not. (*Benjamin Hands.*)

Our mortal character:—Not a year passes away, hardly a week or a day, without some striking monition of our uncertain tenure

of earthly existence. 1. These inquiries of the text seem to furnish a strong intimation of the mortal character of our present existence. The prophet bade the Jews look back, and consider what had become of their fathers. The great and the good, the noble and the mighty, the teacher and the taught, the prophet and the people, have "gone the way of all the earth." There is no exception of age or station, of occupation or condition, to this appointment of the Most High, in consequence of the transgressions of men. There is something painfully affecting in the ravages of death. The fact is painful and humbling, more especially as it is the undeniable proof of the fallen character of our race—of that native corruption which has descended from Adam, who, though created "in the likeness of God," "begat a son in his own likeness," and that a sinful and degraded one. 2. But is the contemplation of death only painful and humiliating? Is there not a light to irradiate the tomb? May we not regard the inquiries of the text as the language of faith and hope? Surely the dark valley will open into the brightness of eternal home. We "sorrow not" as those "who have no hope." A glorious prospect is opened beyond the tomb. Those who have departed in the Lord are in His safe keeping. Our fathers are not taken away for ever. They are only removed before us, and anticipate us in the enjoyment of the Lord's presence. The hope of immortality has cheered many a believing soul amid the pains of life and the sufferings of death. 3. Looking back upon the Christian life of our fathers, we should follow their faith, and act up to their teaching, and pray that a double portion of their spirit may rest upon us. We are responsible for the teaching of Divine truth with which we have been blessed. (*John S. Broad, M.A.*)

Ver. 6. *But My words.*—*The dying men and the undying Word*:—The text comes from the first of Zechariah's prophecies. In it he lays the foundation for all that he has subsequently to say. He points to the past, and summons up the august figures of the great pre-exilic prophets, and reminds his contemporaries that the words which they spoke had been verified in the experience of past generations. He declares that, though the hearers and the speakers of that prophetic Word had glided away into the vast unknown, the Word remained, lived still, and on his lips demanded the same obedience as it had vainly demanded from the generation that was past. I. THE MORTAL HEARERS AND SPEAKERS OF THE ABIDING WORD. A familiar theme. Look at it from the special angle, to bring into connection the eternal Word, and the transient vehicles and hearers of it. All the past hearers and speakers of the Word had that Word verified in their lives. Not one of them who, for the brief period of their earthly lives, came in contact with that Divine message, but realised, more or less consciously, the solemn truth of its promises and threatenings. Wherever they are now, their earthly relation to that Word is a determining factor in their condition. "Wherefore we should give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard." II. THE ABIDING WORD WHICH THESE HEARERS AND SPEAKERS HAVE HAD TO DO WITH. Just as reason requires some unalterable substratum below all the fleeting phenomena of the changeful creation,—a God who is the rock-basis of all,—the staple to which all the links hang—so here we are driven back and back, by the very fact of the transiency of the transient, to grasp for a refuge and a stay, the permanency of the permanent. It is blessed for us when the lesson that the fleeting of all that can flee away, reads to us, is that, beneath it all, there is the Unchanging. Zechariah meant by the "Word of God" simply the prophetic utterances about the destiny and the punishment of the nation. We ought to mean by "the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever," not merely the written embodiment of it in this book, or that primarily, but the personal Word, the Incarnate Word, the everlasting Son of the Father. It is His perpetual existence rather than the continuous power of the truth which is the declaration of Himself, that is mighty for our strength and consolation when we think of the transient generations. Christ lives. Therefore we can front change and decay in all around calmly and triumphantly. Since we have this abiding Word, let us not dread changes, however startling and revolutionary. Jesus Christ does not change. There is a human element in the Church's conception of Jesus Christ, and still more in their working out of the principles of the Gospel in institutions and forms, which partakes of the transiency of the men from whom they come. III. THE PRESENT GENERATION AND ITS RELATION TO THE ABIDING WORD. Zechariah did not hesitate to put himself in line with the mighty forms of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. He, too, was a prophet. Some simple exhorta-

tions. I. See to it that you accept that Word. Open not only your minds but your hearts to it. Hold it fast. In this time of unrest make sure of your grasp of the eternal central core of Christianity, Jesus Christ Himself, the Divine-human Saviour of the world. Accept Him, hold Him fast, trust to His guidance in present day questions. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The fleeting hearers and speakers and the undying Word*.—I. THE PASSING AWAY OF HEARERS AND SPEAKERS ALIKE. An ingenious exposition of the words of text suggests that they are a brief dialogue, a kind of duel between the prophet and his hearers, in which the first question is his sword-thrust at them, and the second is their return to him. In it they parry and return the prophet's thrust. I prefer to regard the questions as continuous; the remonstrance of the prophet based upon the fact that hearers and speakers alike drift away into the unseen land, and are no more heard of. It is a very familiar and commonplace thought. Try to individualise the thought that is here. Reflect how surely, stealthily, constantly hearers and speakers of the immortal Word are drifting, drifting into the dark. Did you ever stand in some old cathedral, or ruined church, where for centuries the Word of God had been preached? And did there never come over you, with a strange rush of feeling, the thought, "Where are all the men and women that bowed their knees here, beneath the vanished roof of this place?" II. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE FLEETING HEARERS AND SPEAKERS AND THE ABIDING WORD. There is nothing so transient as the words that are spoken by Christian teachers. Even where the Word takes root in men's hearts, how swiftly the speaker of it passes and is forgotten. No workers so soon have their work covered with oblivion as preachers. In another way, too, the prophets fade and perish; inasmuch as new circumstances arise about which they know nothing; new phases of thought which antiquate their teachings; new difficulties in which their words have no counsel; new conflicts in which they can strike no blow. Yet, in all this mingled and fleeting human utterance, does there not lie an immortal and imperishable centre, even the Word of the living God? Much ingenuity is expended nowadays in trying to discriminate between the permanent and transient in Christian teaching. The enduring Word is that story of Christ's incarnation, death for our sins, resurrection and ascension, which by the Gospel is preached unto you. Therefore we have to look beyond the dearest of human teachers, and those to whom we owe most. "They truly were not suffered to continue by reason of death," but this Man (Christ) continueth ever our Friend, our Prophet, Priest, and King. III. THE WITNESS OF PAST GENERATIONS TO THE IMMORTAL WORD. They that heard and he that spake have passed into the silent land; but they passed not thither until they had found, in some measure, that both the warnings and the promises that had been uttered were God's truth, and not man's dreams. God's Word has leaden feet, but steady, and slow, and certain, it overtakes the wrong-doer. Do you take care. The generations that are gone found that the Word of the Lord was true; and if you reject His Word, you too may, before you die, find out, what you will certainly find out when you are dead, that He speaks no vain things. IV. THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THESE SOLEMN THOUGHTS. I want to urge upon my brethren in the ministry that they should, in all their utterances, try to realise that they are prophets, dying, with a message to dying men. There is a great deal of modern preaching clever, eloquent, cultured, ingenious, which seems to have utterly forgotten that it has got a message of forgiveness and of cleansing by the blood of Christ to proclaim to men. And how these thoughts should influence hearers! How you would listen if you knew that this was your last sermon! (*Ibid.*) *The eternity of God's Word contrasted with the mutability of man*.—When Zechariah wrote, the Jews had just returned from the Babylonish captivity, and already, in spite of that severe warning, they were going back into their old habits, and bringing upon themselves fresh displays of the wrath of God. Both judgments and mercies either leave us better or worse. They lead us to repentant watchfulness, or else harden our hearts into utter carelessness and wilful sin. We might naturally have expected that the lessons of a long captivity would have cured the Jewish people of their old disease, but sin is of too deep and treacherous a character for external circumstances to uproot it. The sin of idolatry had, indeed, been cast out, but the sins of luxury and pride, self-righteousness and dogmatism, worldliness and unbelief, had taken its place, and the forecast of their future possession of the Jewish mind appears as soon as the Jews returned from captivity. Haggai and Zechariah were commissioned by God to reprove the selfish and worldly spirit of the people. Here the prophet enforces his exhortation by two considerations. 1. The

mutable nature of man, passive in the hands of God, and thoroughly dependent on God. It is the height of folly for man to oppose God, who has all power to punish sin. All men must die. The Word they bring is eternal as God is eternal, but they themselves must perish. Zechariah would say, "If such be the destiny of man, it is yours. Soon you must fade and fall. Turn ye from your fruitless and evil ways, and think not that ye can resist God." 2. The warning is enforced by considerations drawn from the unchangeable nature of the Divine Word. The prophets had died, but the certainty and stability of their prophecies had been vindicated by an express fulfilment. For the Word of God is eternal and unchangeable. Are you then profiting by it as you ought? (*Joseph Maskell.*)

Vers. 7-11. I saw by night. — *The night vision*: — The anointed One of God and His kingdom are the centre and axis about which the fiery wheel of all Zechariah's revelations and imagery turns. The vision in our text is both beautiful and consoling. Consider—**I. THE TIME WHEN IT WAS SEEN.** 1. The time. "By night." Primarily he meant natural night, while men slept. At that season the Lord came to him, opening the prophet's spiritual eyes, and causing to pass before him, like a pictured scene in bright and glowing colours, a sublime and cheering vision. The words "by night" may remind us of the circumstances of the time at which the vision was given. Apply the words, by way of accommodation, to the spiritual night of Christendom. For night in a spiritual sense is only dreadful when we are deprived of spiritual vision, when the eyes of the understanding are darkened. It is night, when with sufferings upon us, we do not recognise the hand that inflicts them. There is another kind of spiritual night more fearful still. David feared it when he said, "Hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit." Yet even here there may be vision in the darkness, and this is a favour indeed. **II. WHAT DID THE PROPHET BEHOLD?** It was a precious vision. Afterwards he hears the explanation of it. The vision was fraught with consolation and promise. Zechariah beholds a man; that man is Christ, the Angel of the Covenant. The times of Zechariah needed a helper in the character of a man, and a "man of war"; for it was a season of war and tumults. Zechariah beholds Him upon a red horse. And Christ, like a man riding upon a horse, stands ready to fly with speed to the help and defence of His people. The prophet speaks of the myrtle-trees. True believers are trees which Christ Himself has planted; trees of righteousness, fast rooted in the ground of His merits, and thriving by the grace of His Holy Spirit. Such are all the children of God here on earth. The man among the myrtle-trees "stood"; the Lord abides among His people. (*F. W. Krummacher, D.D.*) Behind Him were there red horses, speckled, and white.—**Zechariah's vision of the horses**:—**I. THE NAME OF THIS PARABOLIC VISION.** "The Word of the Lord." Thought is invisible, and must be clothed in some form of words. God's greatest thought about men was revealed to us by His Son in human flesh. **II. THE TIME WHEN THE PROPHET RECEIVED THIS "WORD OF THE LORD."** "In the night." God has often chosen the night-season to reveal His mind to His servants. At night men are more free from impressions from the outside world. The darkness and stillness of night throw the mind in upon itself. **III. THE MEANING OF THE SYMBOLIC WORD.** 1. The "red horses" symbolise coming war. 2. White horses symbolise victory. 3. Speckled horses set forth the variety of the Divine dealings, of that mingling of mercy and judgment which had been intended to lift them up to a high level among the nations of the world. Lessons—(1) The Church triumphant is intended to minister to the comfort of the Church militant. (2) The child of light walking in darkness is under the guidance of the angels of light. (3) God's silence at sin is not God's forgiveness of sin. (*A London Minister.*) *The vision of horses*:—I understand that all these horses had riders. There were, then, a troop of horsemen; but the prophet says that one appeared as the chief leader, who was accompanied by others. These horsemen had returned from an expedition; for they had been sent to review the whole world and its different parts. He therefore says that they had returned from their journey, and also that the whole earth was quiet, that men enjoyed peace and tranquillity everywhere. It seemed a very unbecoming and strange thing that the faithful alone should be oppressed with adversities, while others lived in peace and enjoyed their pleasures. There follows at length an answer from God. I regard this as the object—that horsemen were presented to the prophet that he might know that God does not remain

shut up in heaven, and neglect the affairs of men, but that He has, as it were, swift horses, so that He knows what things are everywhere carried on. The prophet here ascribes to God the character of a chief sovereign, who inquires respecting all the affairs of men. It is, indeed, certain that all things were fully known to Him before He created angels, but God assumes the character of man in order that He may more familiarly instruct us. . . . As God did not intend to exhibit in full light what He afterwards in due time taught, the vision appeared in the night. And to the same purpose is what he says respecting the angels, that they were in a dark or deep place, and that they were among the myrtles. Some think that their being in a deep place and thick shade designates the state of the people, being that of sorrow and of joy; for though quietness in part was restored to the people, yet much darkness and much perplexity remained in their affairs. There was one angel more eminent than the rest, and in this there is nothing unusual, for when God sends forth a company of angels, He gives the lead to some one. If we regard this angel as Christ, the idea is consistent with the common usage of Scripture, for Christ, we know, is the head of the angels. With regard to the different colours, the prophet, no doubt, understood that they designated the offices allotted to angels, as some convey God's benefits, and others come armed with scourges and swords. The design of the vision is not doubtful; it is, that the Jews might be assured that the distresses which they at present endured would not be perpetual, that there was a hope of the temple and the city being rebuilt, because God had returned into favour with the people. The prophet teaches at the same time that the building of the temple was not to be expected, but as an instance of God's gratuitous favour, and this doctrine ought also to be extended to the state of the Church at all times, for whence comes it that the Church remains safe in the world except that God indulges us according to His infinite goodness? (*John Calvin.*)

The rider in the myrtle grove:—By the myrtle grove is signified the covenant people, the nation of Israel, and by its being in a low place is indicated their then depressed and sad condition. In the Hebrew mind the idea of modest beauty and freshness was associated with the myrtle; and hence we find this introduced as symbolical of the Church under the reign of the Messiah, when "instead of the brier,"—the symbol of the world under the curse—"shall come up the myrtle-tree." The Jewish nation, though at that time in a state of depression and affliction, was fair in the sight of God, was destined to endure and flourish, and was ere long to be visited by Him in mercy and restored to prosperity. This is specially indicated here by the standing among the myrtle-trees of the mounted rider. He is described as the Angel of Jehovah; no other than God manifest in human form; the same Being who, in the fulness of time, came to our world as the Angel of the Covenant. For the consolation and encouragement of the people, the prophet had to tell them that, depressed as was their condition, the Angel of the Lord, the Leader, the Protector, the Redeemer of Israel, was still in the midst of them. He was ready to ride forth in their defence, and to send judgment on their adversaries. This was indicated in the vision by His being mounted on a red horse, the symbol of war and bloodshed. The Angel of the Lord is with them also as their Intercessor with God. Hence He appears in this vision as making intercession for them, beseeching God to have pity on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; and now that the time of chastisement was at an end, that He would be gracious to them, and grant them full restoration and establishment in their own land. And through Him also came the comforting answer to the people. In this vision the Angel of Jehovah speaks directly and immediately to the invisible God; but to the prophet He speaks through the angel interpreter. God declares His zeal for His people, His indignation against their enemies, and His determination to do good unto His people, and enrich them with His bounty. He is not an indifferent spectator of what happens to them. He watches over them with a constant jealousy, solicitous for their well-being, and ready to resent all attempts to injure them. His own He will never forsake. When the deepest abyss of calamity seems to be reached by them, when the darkest hour of their sorrow throws its shadows over them, the Angel of the Lord, He who ever encamps round them that fear Him, will suddenly appear on their side, and will deliver them from all their enemies. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*)

The man among the myrtles:—As the Jewish people are usually regarded by the prophet in their theocratic character, as the form in which the Church then existed, the general doctrines of these visions are applicable to the

Church in every form in which she exists. Some of the doctrines as set forth in this vision are—1. The Church is externally an humble and lowly thing, neglected, often despised by the gay and wicked world, a grove of myrtles, rather than the cedars of Lebanon (ver. 8). 2. She has, however, an unseen glory that the world knows not of; for Christ dwells in her midst, full of love, invested with all power, sending His angel-messengers to do His work, and preparing everything for her final triumph (vers. 8, 9). 3. The hour of darkest desolation to the Church, and of hughtiest triumph to her enemies, is often the very hour when God begins His work of judgment on the one and returning mercy on the other (ver. 11). 4. Christ intercedes for His people when they need it most, and His intercession is always prevalent (vers. 12, 13). 5. God will have all our hearts, for He is jealous of sharing His glory with another (ver. 14). 6. God often uses instruments to chastise His people, which, when He has done with them, He breaks and casts into the fire (ver. 15). 7. The Church of God shall yet triumph over every obstacle and vanquish every foe (ver. 16). 8. The promises and threatenings of God, though slow, are sure. They have eternity for the range of their fulfilment (ver. 17). 9. The head of the Church is at once human and Divine. He is called here “a man” (ver. 8), and the “Angel of Jehovah” (ver. 12). But the Angel of Jehovah is a Divine Person—even Gesenius admits this, and the Babylonish Talmud declares that “this man is no other than the Holy One.” But if Divine and human, He must be God and man in one person. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The second vision*.—The next vision was full of comfort. As the little group of returned exiles looked nervously out on the mighty world-empires, which surrounded and threatened them, they were filled with alarm. How could they cope with them? There were Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, of the nations whom Nebuchadnezzar had settled in Samaria; Rehun the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, so ready in their use of the pen to exert influence on the great kings beyond the river, to make the work of temple-building cease; and the reactionary influences at work in the far-distant court, always adverse to the resuscitation of a subdued nation, like the Jews, which had given such proofs of inveterate independence. Beneath the irresistible pressure of these hostile forces the work of temple-building had already ceased for fifteen years, and there was every fear that the new resolve to arise and build would meet with similar opposition and a similar fate. There was singular appropriateness, therefore, in the prophet’s vision. “Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, four horns.” In the language of a pastoral people like the Jews, the horn naturally represents the pride and power of the ravager and oppressor of the flock. The number “four” reminds us of the cardinal points of the compass, and indicates that, wherever the people turned, there were foes, which were sworn to resist their attempt to renew their national life. On the north, Chaldea, Assyria, and Samaria; on the south, Egypt and Arabia; on the west, Philistia; and on the east, Ammon and Moab. And it is probable that the Spirit of God looked beyond these to the four great Gentile monarchies, which have occupied, and still occupy, the “Times of the Gentiles,” and which were represented in the four metals of Daniel’s vision, or in the four great beasts, which one after another emerged from the sea. As yet Babylon and Medo-Persia alone had arisen; Greece and Rome, the latter including the kingdoms of modern Europe, were to come. We must not forget that God Himself gave these world-powers their authority. He says, in Isaiah, “I was wroth with My people; I profaned Mine inheritance, and gave them into thine hand” (Isa. xlvii. 6, 7). And in Daniel He lifts the veil and shows that the world-rulers represent not flesh and blood merely, but malign and mighty spirits that actuate and inspire them (Dan. x. 13-20). As long as God’s people are perfect in their loyalty and obedience towards Him, they need fear the power of no adversary whatsoever; but when there is a break in the holy connection which binds Him and them in an inviolable safety, it seems as though all the forces of evil are set free to bear down on and ravage them, until their chastisement is completed, and they return to their first love. If we were asked to name the four horns which are ravaging the Church in the present day, we should not hesitate to say that they are priestcraft, worldliness, Christian science, and spiritualism. In every life there are similar experiences. Sometimes, when we lift up our eyes, we find ourselves begirt with opposition and threatened by hostile powers. Think of the martyr-host who have witnessed for God in every age, and who could reiterate the words of the greatest

Sufferer of all. "Many bulls have compassed Me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset Me round about; they gape upon Me with their mouth as a ravening and a roaring lion." Ignatius, who complains that his custodians were like "ten leopards, who only wax worse when they are kindly treated"; Blandina, the girl slave; Germanicus, the noble youth; the Waldenses, whose wrongs roused Cromwell's wrath and Milton's muse; the Netherlands, in their long conflict with Philip, when the leaders saw their homes covered again by the ocean from which their ancestors had redeemed them; Madame Guyon, beset by husband, mother-in-law, servants, and priests; Samuel Rutherford, and hundreds of his time, harried by the fiercest and most insatiable hate; William Tyndale, the celebrated translator of the English Bible; John G. Paton, beset with savages—these are specimens of a multitude, which no man can number, of every nation, and kindred, and people, who have seen the vision of the four horns. But there is something beyond; and surely it is not without significance that the prophet says, "The Lord showed me four carpenters" (or smiths, R.V.). We have no difficulty in desecrating the sources of alarm for ourselves; but we need a Divine hand to reveal our assured deliverance. "And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray Thee open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." For Babylon, the "carpenter" was Cyrus; for Persia, Alexander; for Greece, the Roman; for Rome, the Gaul. Very different from each other, very ruthless and unsparing; but very well adapted for their work. Commenting on this passage, the late C. H. Spurgeon said: "He who wants to open an oyster must not use a razor; for some works there needs less of daintiness and more of force; providence does not find clerks, or architects, or gentlemen, to cut off horns, but carpenters. The work needs a man who, when he has work to do, puts his whole strength into it, and beats away with his hammer, or cuts through the wood that lies before him with might and main. Let us not fear for the cause of God; when the horns become too troublesome, the carpenters will be forthcoming to fray them." Remember how in every age He has found His appropriate messenger. Athanasius frayed Arianism, and Augustine Manichæism; Luther frayed the power of the pope in Germany, and rough Hugh Latimer in England; Wesley and Whitefield frayed the religious indifference of the last century. When Haldane went to Geneva, he frayed the scepticism which was destroying the Helvetian and Gallic Churches. The Lord knows where to find His servants, and when the predestined hour strikes, there will stand the workman ready. Oh, child of God! there have been many horns engaged in scattering thee. Year after year they have wrought sad havoc in thy plans, and cost thee bitter tears. But thine Almighty Friend is greatly displeased that they have hurt thee more than His purposes of chastisement required, and He has resolved that they shall be frayed. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God's government of the world*:—Amongst the various manners in which God revealed Himself to men of old, visions were perhaps the most frequent and impressive. He appears to the prophet in six distinct visions. The visions were marked by these four characteristics. They were (1) Mental. Unlike all other creatures on the earth, man has an inner visual organ; he can see with his mind. This is seen in poets, such as Milton, Spenser, &c. Allegorists, such as Bunyan, &c. They were (2) Symbolic. Strange and grotesque objects were seen. These objects were all symbolic; they had a spiritual significance. They were (3) Divine. All men, unless they are utterly destitute of the poetic sentiment, have visions sometimes, not only sleeping but waking visions. But seldom, perhaps, are these visions Divine. They were (4) Prophetic. They point here to the future of God's moral kingdom upon the earth. Men of lofty, sanctified genius, often in their visions have a glance of "things that are to come." This vision seems to give us a glance into God's moral government of the world. It takes us behind the veil of phenomena, and shows us principles and agencies that move, fashion, and control all. I. It is carried on in connection WITH MYSTERIOUS AGENCIES. What did the prophet see? "I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and He stood among the myrtle-trees that were in the bottom: and behind Him were there red horses, speckled, and white." Who are these? Unfallen angels and sainted men. These by millions stand near His throne, prompt to obey His behests. In relation to these agents two thoughts are suggested—1. That they are under the command of a transcendent mind. Most expositors regard the man on the red

horse, and who stood among the myrtle-trees, as no less a personage than the Angel of the Covenant, the Great Messiah. This same man appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, to Jacob before his meeting with Esau, to Moses at the burning bush, to Joshua at Jericho, with the sword drawn in His hand. Here He is on the "red horse," emblem of war. He is a great moral chieftain. Another thought suggested is—(1) That there are varied orders. "Behind Him were there red horses, speckled, and white." This is the troop that followed the man. When the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, he beheld a "mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Horses are emblems of force and fleetness. In Christ's army there are hosts, mighty in power and swift in motion. "Are they not all ministering spirits?" How infinitely varied are God's ministers—varied in kind and measure of faculty, in experience, attainment, and aspect too—thrones, principalities, powers, and dominions. In relation to these agents it is suggested—2. That the whole world is their sphere of action. "These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth." (1) They "go to and fro" through the earth. They are ever journeying; some are swift as lightning in their speed; some of them are "full of eyes," and see all things. (2) They know the state of the world. "We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest." "At rest," not in the rest of righteousness, not in the repose of goodness, but in carnal security and sin. Another fact suggested in relation to God's government in the world is—II. THAT IT HAS NOT ONLY DIFFICULTIES, BUT AN INTERPRETER ALSO. "Then said I, O my lord, what are these?" 1. The difficulties of God's government. What are these? The prophet understood not these strange appearances; and in amazement he exclaims, What are these? What thoughtful man has not asked such a question as this concerning the Divine government over and over again? "What are these? What are these elements, forces, laws, existences, events? What are they? Are they messengers of mercy or justice? O my lord, what are these?" We are all moving in mystery. 2. The interpreter of God's government. Who answered the question? "The man that stood among the myrtle-trees answered and said, These are they." Some other creature, the angel that talked with them, was asked first; but the answer came not from him, but from the man, Christ Jesus. In Rev. v. 2, "a strong angel" is represented as crying with a loud voice concerning the mysteries of God's government, inquiring who was able to "loose the seals"; but no one was found in heaven, in earth, or under the earth worthy to "open and read the book." There was only One found. "It was the Lamb in the midst of the throne." Christ is the only interpreter of God. He is the Logos. III. THAT IT IS ESPECIALLY CONCERNED IN THE INTERESTS OF HIS PEOPLE. His people are supposed to be here represented by the "myrtle-trees." The Jewish Church at this time was not like a forest of stately cedars, but a grove of myrtles, fragile and obscure. 1. These seem to be the centre of Divine operations on the earth. Now, in the myrtle-trees is the "man riding upon a red horse." And in the myrtle-trees were the "red horses, speckled, and white," the whole troop was there. The "myrtle-trees" seemed to be the centre of all the agents. From it they started on their mission, and to it they returned. The true Church is the temple, the residence of God Himself. 2. The object of special intercession. "Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" The duration of their captivity in Babylon. Who is the angel that makes this appeal? It was He that "ever liveth to make intercession for us." "If any man sin, he hath an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 3. The subjects of the Divine communication. "The Lord answered the angel that talked with me, with good words and comfortable words." The prophet is here commissioned to proclaim—(1) God's zeal on behalf of Jerusalem. "Cry thou saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts." (2) His displeasure for the enemies of Jerusalem. "I am sore displeased with the heathen." His merciful purpose was to bestow blessings on Jerusalem. "Therefore thus saith the Lord," &c. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 14-17. I am jealous for Jerusalem.—*Mercy mingled with chastisement* :—"Jealousy is that particular uneasiness which arises in our minds from the fear that some rival may rob us of the affection of one whom we greatly love, or from suspicion that he has already done it." God's jealousy, or zeal, denotes

His distrust of His creatures, His eminent care of His people, and His readiness to punish such as injure them. He is peculiarly jealous for everything whereby He maketh Himself known. Comparatively speaking, God may be said to be but a little displeased with His people, whatever be the manner of His dealing with them in this world. Their afflictions are only temporary and of short duration. They are also designed for their profit, and overruled for promoting their best interests. And though the troubles that afflict the just be great and many in number, the Lord will deliver him out of them all. Let us take the comfort which the good words spoken to Israel are designed to yield, amid all the trials and afflictive dispensations of providence with which we may be visited in this life. You may be in darkness and in doubts, perplexed on every side, and encompassed with difficulties, but still you need not despair. The Lord is jealous for you with a great jealousy. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (*Matthew Fraser.*)

Ver. 16. **I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies.**—*Returning mercies*:—Jerusalem and Zion are laid waste, it is true, but not in anger, so much as in chastising love. God still loves them, and is jealous of any estrangement of their affections from Him, and when estranged He chastises them to bring them back. This was His object in using the heathen as instruments of chastisement, but the spirit in which they executed this office provoked His wrath. He designed only to inflict a slight chastisement, but they rioted in the sufferings of His people with wanton cruelty. They mocked their sorrows and taunted them with their abandonment. Hence God will punish these heathen, and will bestow mercy on His people, cause the temple to be built, the city to be enlarged, and prosperity to return to the land. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The Divine absence and return*:—1. God seems to absent Himself sometimes from those for whom He hath great blessings in store. By absenting Himself is meant only the withdrawing His countenance, or sunshine of His favour, when the clouds of adversity or trouble, either spiritual or temporal, sit uneasy on His chosen servants. At such times He seems to “hide His face from them.” Afflictions in this life are like eclipses of celestial bodies, the noblest planet never suffers any, for when we say the sun is eclipsed, it is we are more properly so, we want his cheerful light and influences, whilst he himself is not diminished one ray. The moon is sometimes really eclipsed, and labours under the want of a borrowed light. Thus Divinest constitutions never suffer. The lunar populace are more really affected by that obscurity which can never hurt a being, placed so near Divinity. But if such an one hath been obscured, then this proposition must be granted, that God Almighty doth sometimes seem to absent Himself from those whom He best loves. Joseph, David, and even the Son of God Himself, had more than an ordinary share of this world’s frowns. The reason for such experiences may respect—(1) God Himself. He may permit this for His own Divine sake, that He may be glorified by all that happens to the children of men; that the wise man may see that he hath no reason to glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man in his strength, but that all things by God’s providence come alike sometimes to all. (2) In respect of those whom He loves, God may sometimes afflict them either by way of admonition or trial. God is that wise and tender physician who never administers any uneasy medicine but when He sees there is an occasion for it. All the dispensations of His providence are the results of Divine wisdom and unchangeable love; therefore they ought most to suspect themselves who have the least share of severe favours. God may design to make trial of the patience, virtue, faith, hope, or charity of any one of His servants. (3) The like reason not only regards the sufferer, but all others who are witnesses and spectators of their sufferings. That they may see the advantages of religion above all other supports and consolations, how useful and effectual it is. 2. Such absenting of Himself is but for a while, as seems best to His goodness and wisdom “I am returned” denotes the speediness and certainty of God’s returning with mercies. The fountain of honour can never be impoverished or impaired by making the first overtures of tenderness and reconciliation. He is in great haste for an accommodation; He condescends much to our infirmities. It is His nature and property to have mercy and forgive. 3. When He doth return it is with all the tenders of love and compassion. Not with forgiveness only, or any one species, but with all the instances of mercy. Nor doth it at all interfere with His constancy and justice, because it always supposes conditions performed; at least in His foreknowledge, that His mercy

will move us to repentance. Upon which account His mercy is sometimes termed His justice. His mercy never obstructs His justice, but all His attributes are one simple essence, and proceed in an eternal and unchangeable method. Learn that if the mercies of God toward us are so great, we ought to be tender and compassionate one towards another. (*Samuel Prat, D.D.*)

Vers. 17. My cities through prosperity.—Zion's prosperity.—Jehovah's tender care of His living Church seems to be a prominent topic with the prophet Zechariah. Amid all the visitations Zion has experienced from her God in consequence of her departures, His heart has been set upon her eternal interests, and He never can change His mind concerning her. I. THE CLAIM WHICH JEHOVAH LAYS TO HIS CHURCHES, "MY CITIES." They are associated, or organised bodies, not promiscuous multitudes. Distinguished they may be from each other by a variety of names, and a variety of circumstances; but God says to them all, "Ye are My cities." They are all chartered cities. Their charter is unchanging, covenant love. It is written, signed, sealed, and preserved by their covenant God. What is the wording of the charter? "I will be their God, they shall be My people." God's Churches are classified. Separated from one another, not only in their peculiar localities, and their peculiar features of discipline, but in minor points of order and regulation. Each one should know and keep his proper position. And they are all consecrated cities, from the highest to the lowest. Cities are generally noted for their liberties and privileges. And so "if the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed." Our privileges are most valuable and innumerable. These cities were all designed and also founded by Jehovah, and He rules over them all. II. THEIR PROSPERITY—WHICH MUST COME FROM HIMSELF. "Shall yet be spread abroad." The prosperity of a city is seen in its population, its commerce, and the healthiness of its air. A sign of prosperity in a Church is found in the number of spiritual births. III. THEIR COMFORT. "The Lord shall yet comfort Zion." Her tranquillity is preserved in spite of all that sin and Satan can do; and her honourable associations are kept up and maintained. That will be comfort for Zion. IV. THE GRAND FIRST CAUSE OF ALL, ELECTING LOVE. The Lord "shall yet choose Jerusalem." (*Joseph Irons.*)

Vers. 18-21. Behold four horns.—*The mission of the Church's enemies.*—Three things there are which this age of ours hath brought forth: malignant enemies, special instruments of their ruin, and great endeavours for reformation. Accordingly here are three visions: a vision of four horns (vers. 18, 19); a vision of four carpenters (vers. 20, 21); a vision of a man with a measuring line in his hand (chap. ii. ver. 1). The description of the Church's enemies under the vision of four horns. 1. Their number or multitude; they are four horns according to four parts of the world. 2. Their power and strength. The horn in Scripture denotes strength. 3. Their mischievous and malignant practice; "They scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." In the second vision is the description of those special instruments that are raised up for their destruction, under the similitude of four carpenters or smiths. Their work is to scatter the horns, and to cast out the Gentiles. The third vision presents the endeavours for reformation, under the similitude of "a man with a measuring line in his hand"; which is described in two ways: from the instrument thereof, a man, an excellent man, possibly alluding to Zerubbabel the governor; and from the exactness thereof,—he doth work by line. Attend to three doctrines. 1. When God intendeth any good and salvation to His Churches, He doth first suffer many potent, malicious enemies to rise against them. Was it not so with Israel when God intended to bring them out of Egypt? Then their taskmasters arose and doubled their work. This is God's way still. But what reason is there that God should suffer His people to be thus handled, oppressed, scattered, by cruel enemies? Good reason. So many enemies, so many schoolmasters. Our enemies are our observers, and their observation is our preservation. Hereby they are occasioned to honour God; they are weaned from the world; they are more useful in their places, and even beneficial to their enemies; they carry the truths of God into other parts; they receive a fuller and clearer testimony of their own graces; their enemies themselves are the more convinced; the saints are kept from, and cured of, divisions among themselves; hereby the servants of God may see and know by experience, that it is better to serve God than man; and the servants of God learn the right use of the rod, both in Church and State. Then let no man be

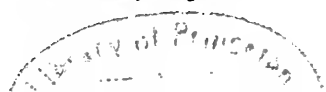
stumbled or offended at God's present proceedings in the world, as if they were very mysterious. 2. Though God suffers the enemies of His Church to be many and great, He will raise up proportionate strength against them. Three enemies there are by whom you are most molested, the flesh, the devil, the world. The flesh brings forth three great evils. Ignorance in the understanding; in opposition to that Jesus Christ is called our Prophet. Rebellion in the will; in opposition to that Jesus Christ is called our King. Guiltiness that arises from ignorance and rebellion; in opposition to that Jesus Christ is called our Priest. The devil, our second enemy, is armed with all weapons of hostility against us. Whatever terms or titles of strength and power there is in Satan, there is somewhat in Jesus Christ that answereth, yea, that over-answereth all. The third enemy, the world, is described in Rev. xiii. 1. Our text speaks but of four horns, here are ten. So that, whatever your enemies are, there is strength enough in Jesus Christ to subdue their strength. Why is Christ thus furnished, but for His Church and people? He is the Lord-keeper of all our comforts; the Lord-treasurer of all our graces; and the great magazine of all our ammunition. The application of this doctrine looks two ways: to the saints by way of consolation and encouragement; to the carpenters, God's workmen, by way of direction and exhortation. (*W. Bridge, M.A.*)

Horns and workmen:—This second vision may be regarded as supplementary of the first. There the restoration of Judah was indicated generally; here some of the means by which that was to be effected are presented. Though enemies from all quarters, and on every side, might assail the people of God, the Lord, their protector, would raise up for them adequate defence, would bring into action powers sufficient to discomfit and cast down all their oppressors, however many or strong. What was thus showed for the comfort of the people of God in the old time is no less for the comfort and encouragement of the Church in all ages and places. "The sum of the whole is, though the Church may not be exempt from many troubles, yet the Lord has in His hand resources by which He can restrain all assaults of the wicked, however impetuously and violently they may be impelled against the Church." The Angel of the Lord, the Divine Redeemer, abides for ever with that Church which He has purchased with His own blood. And exalted as He is to the throne of His glory, and having all power in heaven and on earth, He can send forth at any time agencies by which the power of the Church's enemies shall be broken, and all their forces routed. It behoves the Church, then, to have faith in her exalted head, and patiently to wait for Him. In due time He will interpose on her behalf when she is afflicted; He will scatter and discomfit all her adversaries, and will "cause her righteousness to go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth." (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*)

The vision of the four horns:—Some consider the four horns represent the four kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Others look on them as types of the whole of the enemies of Israel coming from the four quarters of the earth. The same general truths are taught in either case. 1. That while the world-powers continue, and the Church of God lives in their midst, the latter will be subjected to opposition and persecution. 2. That whatever number of foes the Church may have, God will take care to provide her with an equal number of friends. 3. That though there will ever be conflict between God's Church and her enemies, there will never be defeat but on one side. The strongest force must ultimately gain the day. We can account for the existence of the Church only from the fact that "God is in the midst of her." (*A London Minister.*)

The purpose of this vision:—I. For INSTRUCTION. The progress of the wicked in their enmity against the Church, is but the prologue to the Church's deliverance. First, the horns arise and play their part; and this brings on the hammermen to act their part. II. For ADMONITION: that God's people be not offended, or dismayed, when they see things go contrary to their deliverance. At such times let us calm ourselves—1. With a consideration of the just aggravation of our own sins, our disunion and security that opened the door to let in the misery. 2. With the consideration of the character of the horns. It is the nature of a beast to do as they do, to push and scatter. A brute will be a brute. A devil will be a devil. But beasts are not made to rule over men. And the devil is the gaoler of the wicked, not our ruler. 3. As the constitution, so the complexion of the last times is indeed the worst; so no better is to be expected for a time, but, though the several hammers make at first but a confused noise, and the pieces of the building lie in the dust, yet, ere long, the new building is reared, and the Great Master of the house comes in and dwells among us in it. III. For EXHORTATION. 1. Let us not judge by sense,

but by faith. 2. Judge not by present action, but by their productive tendency. 3. Judge not by the meanness of means, but by the might of the hand that useth them. (*N. Homes.*) *Destroyers and builders* :—The enemy came upon the land, came upon the hills of Judah and of Israel, laid waste the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, scattered the people, broke up their happy homes, and carried them into captivity. These are the horns of which the text speaks. Wise men were raised up, skilful workers, men willing and able to rebuild Jerusalem, restore the temple, and re-establish the worship of Jehovah there. These be the carpenters spoken of in the text. The first class is characterised by the fury of the *beast*, and the second by the wisdom and skill of the *man*. I. **THERE ARE THE DESTROYERS**—THERE IS THE POWER OF THE DESTROYER. The power opposed to God and His purpose is in Scripture often described under the symbol of a beast. The prophet Daniel saw four beasts coming forth in succession to do their destructive work. This symbol teaches us that the power opposed to God is from below, from the abyss. The persecutions that raged against the Church in other ages were eruptions from the bottomless pit, real boiling volcanic floods sent forth from the mouth of "that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." Such is infidelity, and the criticism which merely destroys, and the philosophy which ignores God. The power opposed to God and goodness is coarse, rude, vulgar—the power of a beast. What will a beast do if turned into a flower garden? So the power of evil is rude and coarse. Whenever men begin to sneer at religion, at faith, at holiness, at Christianity, that moment they become coarse. The deepest and subtlest wisdom, the wisdom that can create, the wisdom that can construct and build up, is not necessary for the destroyer's work. The rude, clumsy power of the reasonless beast will answer for that purpose. The power of the destroyer is out of harmony with the nature of things. The beasts of Bible symbol are all monsters. Not one of them is harmonious or proportionate. Here is one—he has the body of a leopard to begin with, the feet of a bear, the hungry mouth of a lion; he has seven heads and ten horns, and on each of the heads in flaming letters is inscribed the name of blasphemy. What a dreadful apparition that must have been to St. John! The power of evil being out of harmony with the laws of nature, we can never fall into the order of God's universe while we are moved by the power of evil. II. **THE SKILFUL WORKERS**. These men have a Divine vocation, and are inspired of God—endued of Him for their work. There are very many Divine vocations in this world. There is the preacher, the student of nature, the statesman, the teacher, private Christians. These belong to the class of true workers. And God's purpose shall at last be realised; the work of the skilful ones shall prosper. Refer to the building of the first temple at Jerusalem. It was an idea early started, again and again lost sight of, but at last fully realised. There is an old saying, that in this world every man has believed in his best moments that there is a golden age which belongs to humanity. Man never believes in his present degradation; he believes that it was never intended the world should remain as it is. And I am glad there are so many brave Christian people in this great city who are determined by God's grace to do all that they can to realise this ancient idea. The prophets saw it, and it kindled their souls into rapture. (*Thomas Jones.*) *Four horns and four carpenters* :—This vision presents to us the cause of right in the earth. I. That the cause of right on the earth HAS STRONG ANTAGONISTS. Here are four horns, four mighty powers, all of which are in dead hostility to the covenant people. They are represented as those who have "scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head." The enemies of the true scatter and crush. Though Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome have long since passed away, the horns, or the mighty powers of evil, are still here, and are at work. What are they? Reigning materialism is a horn; practical atheism is a horn; intolerant superstition is a horn; and dominant selfishness is a horn. II. That the cause of truth upon the earth has DIVINE DEFENDERS. Here are four carpenters, or smiths, who appear to "fray them, and to cast out the horns of the Gentiles." Mark, the defenders were—(1) Men, not angels. God saves man by man. Who were the first apostles? (2) Working men. Toilers, labourers. It is man as man, not philosopher, poet, king, millionaire, that has to battle for the right. The greatest moral victories have been won by men in the lower walks of life. (3) They were skilled men. These men had a trade; they were craftsmen; they had been trained to the work they undertook. There is a skill required in order to strike effectively at the errors and wrongs of life. Stupid men, however good their intentions, accomplish but little, if anything, in the



noble cause. A man to convert souls must have as much aptitude for the work as the carpenter has to shape the wood to his purpose, or the smith to work the metals. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 20. And the Lord shewed me four carpenters.—*The counterbalancing of agencies* :—Evil agencies are counterbalanced by good—for there is a Divine providence always at work in this world. The prophet saw “four horns,” representing the powers by which Judah had been scattered; but at the same time he saw “four carpenters,” the instruments raised up by God to accomplish a Divine work. I. THE WORLD IS MADE FOR THE CHURCH. Men read the history of nations without the slightest reference to the Church of the living God. They look at passing events and circumstances without believing that they are the development of a Divine providence at work in the world. It may be thought that the world was made for unfallen man. Was it not rather made to be the scene of man’s trial and probation? It is a fact that the world was mapped out with a peculiar reference to the locality and home of the Church. The world was made for Christ, and therefore for the Church. The world was made to be the school for unfallen intelligences. It was made to be the tabernacle of God. II. THE WORK GOING ON IN THE WORLD IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DIVINE PLAN. There is a charm in history, since it not only annihilates the distances of time and space, but transports us to other scenes and periods. If you are a devout student of history you will see a Divine hand prescribing the limits of conquest and the extent of a nation’s duration. There is, then, eternal order underlying the world’s disorder, and a Divine will subordinating all human wills. The great chapters of the world’s history have all been written beforehand. We have only seen parts of the plan, some of the first chapters—strange and startling. III. THE WORK OF GOD IN THIS WORLD IS UNDER DIVINE SUPERVISION AND ANGELIC INSPECTION. From some brief hints, it would appear as if the government of the world’s provinces had been, in some measure, intrusted to the management of angels in former times. IV. EVIL AGENCIES ARE COUNTERBALANCED BY GOOD. In the natural world there are opposite forces, and laws that seem antagonistic, but these agencies are counterbalanced. We have darkness and light—we have night and day. All the forces in this world are adjusted by Divine wisdom, and thus the balance of the universe is preserved. There are opposite powers in the world. There is Satan, and there is Christ. “For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” There is sin; and yet sin is counteracted by grace. There is flesh, and there is spirit. The one seems to be the adversary of the other. Is the law in our members always to bring us into captivity to sin? No. Flesh itself is to be transfigured, to be consecrated and hallowed. There is death in the world. All men die, though Christ has died; all men shall rise, because Christ has risen. Thus evil agencies are counterbalanced by good. If there are powers hostile to the Church and to us, there are powers that are directly opposed to them, and that are at work for us, for said the prophet, “The Lord shewed me four carpenters.” (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Four carpenters* :—I. THE TRUTH EXHIBITED IN THIS VISION. 1. The champions of the Church are as numerous as its assailants. 2. They are more powerful than its assailants. 3. They are seasonably provided. II. THE GROUND ON WHICH THIS TRUTH RESTS. On the love, power, promises, and dispensations of God. (*G. Brooks.*) *Zechariah’s vision* :—“When God makes the prophet, He does not unmake the man.” Each sacred writer preserves his individuality. Character and circumstance leave their impress on the inspired productions. Zechariah was moulded by the peculiarities of the age in which he lived. He was raised up to incite the Jews’ zeal in building the temple. His mind overflowed with it. He could think of nothing else. Hence we cannot marvel that, when he prophesied, he used architectural figures. At one time he sees a “man with a measuring line,” and anon he says, “The Lord shewed me four carpenters.” 1. God’s works are often unobserved. “The Lord shewed me.” The seer did not behold them at first. Only when Divine help was afforded did he become aware of them. Are there not thousands who resemble him? As regards nature it is so. “Eyes have they, and they see not.” What is true of creation is true with double emphasis and touching revelation. The Bible is dull and uninteresting to some. Others delight in it. Why the difference? The last have Divine teaching. 2. God’s works are creative. “Carpenters.” These are constructive agents. Building, not demolishing, is their proper work. In seeking our own

spiritual and moral welfare, we cannot too often remember this important principle—the true method of destroying is by creating. Get good into your heart, and it will cast out evil. 3. God's works are compensative. "Four." Observe the number. It corresponds with the number of Israel's foes. There is more of equality in men's conditions than is often supposed. A grand law of compensation is in operation. "God hath set one thing over against the other." As regards riches and poverty, adversity and prosperity, there is compensation. Everywhere evil is counterbalanced by good. Our mercies outweigh our miseries. (*T. R. Stevenson.*) *The four carpenters*:—The Hebrew word means workman in iron, brass, and stone, as well as wood. They are here the workmen of God. The horn is the instrument of power. The four horns are the symbols of persecutors, of violence and oppression, of the destroyers of the people and State. How were they to be crushed, put to fear, destroyed? That the prophet could never have found out for himself. The Lord showed him four carpenters. They were to fray (frighten) the horns. It would be heart-breaking if there were nothing for us but to realise the evils we have brought on ourselves; if we were left only to all that we could see of our troubles. But there is a revelation for us, and an interpretation of the revelation too. The four horns were met by four carpenters. It was a declaration to Zechariah that there existed—ready to act out of the unseen world, whether by energising human means, or not—a system of counterpoises, and counter-influences, and means of salvation, with Divine intentions concerning them, all of which were there, though man saw them not. God revealed the workers of the spirit-world. Zechariah saw four horns; it was the human apprehending the terrible; and the terrible is not ignored by God; it is emphasised, it is explained. God puts their evil work against His people side by side with the work that He will do in their behalf. There was a matching of four against four. All evil meets its match in every part when God comes forth to work. If there be bad influences against you and yours, God can bring counter-influences against them, and He can break the spell of evil already done. Why need you ever despair of restoration, of help, of salvation, be your cause never so low? The "Son of God has come that He might destroy the works of the devil." (*P. B. Power, M.A.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-4. A man with a measuring line in his hand.—*The man with a measure*:—The prophet asks where the man is going, and the answer given is—"to measure"; and then he shows what would be the measure of Jerusalem, that it would hereafter extend beyond the walls, as that compass would not contain the vast number of the people. "God will extend," he says, "far and wide the holy city; it will no longer be confined as before to its own walls, but will be inhabited through all its villages." There is then no doubt but that God intended here to bear witness respecting the propagation of His Church, which was to follow a long time afterwards, even after the coming of Christ. For though Jerusalem became wealthy and also large in its compass, and, as it is well known, a triple city, and heathen writers say that it was among the first of the cities of the East when Babylon was still existing, yet this prophecy was not verified in the state of Jerusalem, for it was not inhabited without its walls, nor did it spread through the whole of Judæa. We hence conclude that the spiritual Jerusalem is here described which differs from all earthly cities. Here is described the heavenly Jerusalem, which is surrounded by no walls, but is open to the whole world, and which depends not on its own strength, but dwells safely though exposed on all sides to enemies; for the prophet says, not without reason, "through the villages shall Jerusalem be inhabited"; that is, it shall everywhere be inhabited, so that it will have no need of defence to restrain or hinder enemies to come near; for a safe rest shall be given to it, when every one shall quietly occupy his own place. Though few returned from exile, God was yet able to increase the Church, and to make it a vast multitude, and this was certain and decreed, for it was shown by the vision that however unequal they were to their enemies, God was still sufficiently strong and powerful to defend

them; and that however destitute they were of all blessings, God was still rich enough to enrich them, provided they relied on the blessing which He had promised. (*John Calvin.*) *The optimism of faith*.—Zechariah was the most uniformly hopeful of all the prophets. He was a young man. His little book is the work of a youthful imaginative mind, richly endowed with poetic gifts, as well as steeped in the diviner fount of inspiration. He saw all things bathed in the glory of the morning. The time in which he wrote was near the end of the Babylonian captivity. The prophet draws one picture after another of the glorious things which were nigh. Here the prophet sees a young man going with a measuring line in his hand, and asks "Whither?" "To measure Jerusalem," is the answer, and straightway he marches on. Then the angels appear, and one says to the other, "Go after that young man, and tell him that his measuring line is too short. Jerusalem will expand beyond all boundaries and all measurements, because of the number of people in it. Tell him that he is going to measure the immeasurable." This allegory contains these two Gospel truths. 1. Faith realises that which does not exist. 2. These Divine things which faith realises are so great that even faith cannot measure them. I. FAITH REALISES THAT WHICH IS TO BE. This young man was going to do an apparent absurdity. He was going to measure a city which had not yet been built. All the practical, materialistic, matter-of-fact people of the world would call that the very climax of folly. The Gospel of common sense says, Let us have no illusions. Give us facts, for anything which is not built upon facts is foolishness. Our religion indulges throughout in this foolishness, if foolishness it may be called. Faith realises the city that is not yet built, grasps coming events as though they were already present. All the best and greatest men and women that have ever been upon this earth have lived and moved and had their being in what was called a world of dreams, a world, that is, of fair, sweet hopes, of treasures and of glories that had not yet been created. Illustrated by Abraham, David, &c. It is the source and secret of all our strength and confidence, that where other eyes see only imperfections, we see a city of God which He will most assuredly build. II. THESE DIVINE THINGS WHICH FAITH REALISES BEFORE THEY COME INTO EXISTENCE ARE SO GREAT THAT EVEN FAITH CANNOT MEASURE THEM. The angel speaks to the young man, to rebuke him for the presumption of thinking that he can measure the city—it is immeasurable. We cannot measure anything that God builds. You cannot gauge moral influences or tabulate spiritual forces. There is no plummet that can sound the depths of love Divine. You could have measured Giant Goliath, but you could not have measured the faith and the courage of the young man who came up to meet him in the name of the Lord. Illustrated from the company carried by the *Mayflower*; or by comparing the French Revolution with the beginning of missionary enterprise. You cannot measure the Church, the Church of Christ. It is infinitely broader, larger, stronger, than the most flattering statistics show. (*J. G. Greenough, M.A.*) *The man with the measuring line*.—It was natural enough. We dream of what occupies our waking thoughts; and probably Jerusalem was full of surveyors, engaged in mapping out the new streets and walls. 1. The pessimist comes with his measuring line, and draws the plan of the city within the narrowest possible boundaries. He justifies his forecast by quoting such a text as "Fear not, little flock"; or "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Sometimes he fears that he will not enter, at other times he doubts all others but himself. 2. The bigot comes with his measuring line and insists that the city walls must coincide with his shibboleth, and follow the tracings of his creed. 3. The experimentalist is apt to refuse to consider as Christians those who have not experienced exactly the same doubts, fears, ecstasies, deliverances, and cleansings which he himself has felt. 4. The universalist goes to the other extreme, and practically builds his walls around the entire race of man, including within their circumference every member of the human family. It is not for us to fix the boundaries, or insist on our conceptions. These are secret things which belong to the Lord our God. So shall it be with the saved. We have no right to include in their ranks any who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, who have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. But apart from these, there will be a multitude which no man can number, out of every nation and of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues; as stars in the midnight sky, or the sand-grains on the seashore. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *An interesting future of the world*.—I. THE FUTURE

INCREASE OF GOOD MEN ON THE EARTH. Two remarks are suggested concerning the extent of genuine religion. It is—1. Measurable only by the Divine. Who had the “measuring line”? Not a mere man, not any created intelligence, but the God-man, the Messiah. Men cannot measure the growth of piety in the world. They attempt it, but make fearful mistakes. They deal in statistics, they count the number of churches in the world and the number of professed worshippers. But piety cannot be measured in this way. Have you scales by which to weigh genuine love? Any numbers by which to count holy thoughts, aspirations, and volitions? Any rules by which to gauge spiritual intelligence? Have you any plummet by which to fathom even the depths of a mother’s affections? No one but God can weigh and measure the holy experiences of holy souls.

II. THE FUTURE SECURITY OF GOOD MEN ON THE EARTH. Who shall penetrate a massive wall of fire? But that wall is God Himself, omnipotent in strength. Omnipotence is the Guardian of the good.

III. THE FUTURE GLORY OF THE GOOD MEN ON THE EARTH. Good men are the recipients and the reflectors of the Divine glory. They are the temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in, and they reveal more of Him than the whole material universe. Holiest souls are His highest manifestations. (*Homilist.*) *The true glory of the Church:*—

1. Although Zion has not yet lengthened her cords and widened her stakes to her appointed limits, yet the measuring line has gone forth that gives her bounds to be the habitable earth. Hence, if this future extension was a motive to the Jew, in his work of rearing the temple of wood and stone, much more is it to us in our work of erecting the great spiritual temple on the foundation, Jesus Christ (vers. 1-4).

2. We learn here the true glory of the Church. It is not in any external pomp or power, of any kind; not in frowning battlements, either of temporal or spiritual pretensions; not in rites and ceremonies, however moss-grown and venerable; not in splendid cathedrals and gorgeous vestments, and the swell of music, and the glitter of eloquence, but in the indwelling glory of the invisible God. Her outward rites and ceremonies, therefore, should only be like what the earth’s atmosphere is to the rays of the sun, a pure, transparent medium of transmission (ver. 5).

3. The punishment of the wicked as truly declares the glory of God as the salvation of the righteous (ver. 8).

4. The wicked shall ultimately be the slaves of their own lusts; those appetites and passions which were designed to be merely their obedient servants, shall become their tormenting and inexorable tyrants (ver. 9).

5. The incarnation of Christ and His indwelling in the Church are grounds of the highest joy (ver. 10).

6. Christ is a Divine Saviour. In vers. 10, 11, we have one Jehovah sending another, and the Jehovah sent is identified with the angel of the covenant, who was to come and dwell in the Church, whom we know to be Christ. Hence, unless there are two distinct Jehovahs, one Divine and the other not, Christ, the Jehovah-angel of this passage, is Divine.

7. The Church of God shall cover the earth, and become in fact, what it is in right, the mightiest agency in human history. Though now feeble and despised, she shall one day include many nations, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (ver. 11).

8. Delay of punishment is no proof of impunity. God often seems to be asleep, but He is only awaiting the appointed time; in the end, when all seems as it was from the foundation of the world, the herald cry shall go forth, Be silent, O earth, for Jehovah is aroused to His terrible work, and the day of His wrath is come. Let men kiss the Son whilst He is yet in the way, before His anger is kindled but a little, and they perish before Him like stubble before the whirlwind of flames. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

The man with the measuring line:—In this vision God presented to the prophet, and through him to the nation at large, the prospect and the assurance of the restoration of Jerusalem, and the re-establishment of the Jewish state as it had been before the captivity. The city should not only be rebuilt, but greatly extended: the temple should be restored, and the worship of Jehovah resumed; His presence should be with His people, and they should enjoy His protection; and whilst they were thus blessed, judgment should come upon those nations that had oppressed them, and they should have supremacy over those by whom they had been enslaved. All this was literally fulfilled. But even in these promises there seems to be a reference to things of still higher import, and of spiritual significance. . . . Who can such a speaker be but that Being who in the fullness of time appeared in our world, uniting in His one person the human and the Divine natures? May we not say, then, that there is here a promise of blessing

to the Church through the advent of the Redeemer? Then certainly was glory brought to the temple of the Lord. The Church of God, under the latter dispensation, may take to herself as her own the comfort and encouragement which those promises, given to the Church in the old times, were intended to convey. Security, protection, glory, grace, blessing, extension, and final triumph are all assured to her by the promise of Him whose word cannot fail. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Run, speak to this young man.—*Young men* :—The Lord said to me, “Run, speak to this young man,” and I asked—I. “LORD, WHICH ONE?” First, this one. He is the son of godly parents, he was nursed in the lap of piety, and cradled in prayer. He is in the general acceptance of the word a good fellow. The home is all the brighter when he is in it. The parents all the happier for his presence. “Is he, Lord, the only one?” No, “speak to this young man.” Ah, I see him now. His experience has been a very different one from the last. No prayers ever arose on his behalf; no holy influences ever surrounded him; his earliest remembrances are oaths. “Are there any more, Lord, I have to speak to?” “Yes, this one.” He is a young man of considerable mental ability, who is fast making his way in the world. A bright future seems to be opening up before him. Sitting at his right hand I see another I have to address. He is of a very different stamp of character. I thought I heard him say just now, “Well, thank goodness, I’m no money-grub. I don’t care so much about getting on in life as seeing life.” His motto is, “begone dull care”; aye, by any means so long as it goes. II. WHY SHOULD I SPEAK TO HIM? To this question three answers at once came. 1. Speak to him because danger awaits him. The very least we can do for a man in peril is to arouse him to a sense of danger if he be ignorant of it. Humanity itself will dictate this. Never mind frightening the crew, better do that than all be lost, through want of warning. 2. I am bound to speak to you, because one wrong step will lead to many. 3. Speak, for if you do not there are many that will. No one knows the temptations that surround young men, but a young man. If there are but few to lead him right, there are plenty to lead him astray. Godless companions will. Then, too, he has the attractive preacher called the world, who like some fair siren seated on a rock by the deadly pool, smiles but to deceive. “Speak to him,” still my Lord says, “for if you do not Satan will.” III. WHY SHOULD I RUN? 1. Because he is running. Sinners never creep to ruin. Slow as the tortoise are we on the road to heaven; swift as the bounding stag to hell. The road to perdition is downhill all the way. The natural heart which is so heavy a load heavenward, lends a tremendous impetus to our downward course. 2. Because time is running. Time is a ship that never casts anchor—an eagle that is ever on the wing—a shuttle that always flies—an ocean that never ebbs. 3. Run, because opportunities are running. 4. Run, because death is running. The grim despot is after every one of us, nothing can turn his course, he laughs all bribes to scorn, and every moment he gains upon us; his scythe swings with the speed of the lightning flash, and never grows blunt in its work. 5. Run, because hell is running. We read in the Book of Revelation that death rode forth on a white horse and hell followed after, to every impenitent sinner the two go together. IV. AND WHEN I CATCH HIM UP, LORD, WHAT SHALL I SAY TO HIM? Son of pious parents, with many a noble, amiable quality, let me say this word to you, “Your morality will not save you.” Unless you are “born again,” you will be as much lost as if you never possessed any. Young man, you who have had nought but evil example from infancy, to you let me speak. Do not think that frees you from responsibility. Your parents’ sins will not exonerate you from yours. If they led, you have willingly followed. Remember, too, you can no longer plead ignorance as to the way of salvation, for you have just heard it, if never before. Young man, so occupied in getting on in this world, I will just ask you one question, and leave you to give the answer. It is this, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (*A. G. Brown.*) *What to say to a young man* :—1. Tell him he has a wicked heart. 2. He ought to become a Christian. 3. He should improve the season of youth. 4. He should beware of evil company. 5. He should attend to Bible reading and to prayer. (*G. Brooks.*) *The young man’s mission* :—Zechariah is, of all the prophets, most remarkable for the simple, practical purpose with which he employs the grandest prophetic symbols. The text is the speech of one angel to another angel in regard of a young man who, in symbolic action significant of Israel’s redemption and enlargement, was going forth with a measuring line to take

the length and breadth of Jerusalem. Using the text simply as an accommodation, it may have a twofold direction. I. TO MYSELF, AS PREACHING TO YOUNG MEN. It is an earnest exhortation unto the Christian minister to labour especially with young men. The conversion of young men is so important—1. Because, in most cases, if not converted while they are young, they will never be converted. Divine grace, in its very sovereignty, operates according to the laws of our moral and intellectual nature. Youth is the most favourable period for religious impressions. 2. Because of the peculiar power of young men to accomplish great things for God and their generation. Young men are hopeful; young men are brave; young men are fertile in invention: and thus young men are strong in all qualities that secure earthly success. The foundations of all true greatness must be laid in early life. The energy of youth is the world's mightiest influence; and that influence is especially needful in the Church. II. TO YOU, AS YOUNG MEN AND CHRISTIANS. The words set forth the means, objects, and manner of a great Christian duty.

1. The means. "Speak." Use that grand power of articulate utterance; it is almost man's finest gift. Language is reason, walking forth with tremendous energy amid the vital interests of the race. Consider the wonderful title of the Divine Son—the Word. 2. The objects of your labour. Consider some distinct classes of young men with whom you are called earnestly to labour. (1) Strangers who have just come into your sphere. (2) The young man beginning to associate with evil companions. The pitiful idler. The fashionable young man. The spendthrift. The dishonest employer. The openly profane and impure man. Corruptors of youth, &c. (3) The sceptical young man. (4) The young men whose lives are already practically immoral. The profane man. The Sabbath-breaker. The dishonest. The impure. 3. The manner of their labour. "Run." The extent of your influence over others will depend not so much upon your talents as your discretion. Be earnest, thoroughly in earnest—(1) Because these young men are in imminent and deadly peril. (2) Because the work itself is all-important. (C. Wadsworth.)

Sympathy with young men.—At the annual meeting of the Central Y.M.C.A., at Exeter Hall, London, the recently consecrated Bishop of Sierra Leone said that he had been connected with the Y.M.C.A. for about twenty years, and gave the following reason for becoming a member and subsequently taking a great interest in young men: "When I was quite a young man I had some papers put into my hand dealing with infidelity. They troubled me considerably, and I did not know whom to go to for advice and sympathy. At last I went to a minister of the Word, thinking that surely he would sympathise with me. But instead of doing that and praying with me, he took the papers and threw them into the fire and sent me away. This discouraged me so much that I dared not tell my trouble to any one else, but at length I took my difficulties to God, and He gave me an answer, as He has always done when I have gone to Him with my troubles. That day I asked God to give me a heart of love and sympathy for young men. The Y.M.C.A. extends a mutual sympathy to young men which is most helpful and much appreciated."

Speaking to young men.—"Mr. Birch, who did much work in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, was on one occasion going from Cork to Dublin, and at a small wayside station near the Curragh Camp he saw a number of young officers *en route* for a ball in Dublin, who entered the carriage in which Mr. Birch was travelling. Soon the cigars were produced, and one of them, looking at Mr. Birch with a serio-comic face, said, 'I hope you do not object to smoking,' and, without waiting for permission, they lighted up. Mr. Birch took out his Bible, and said to the young man who had addressed him, 'Do you believe in Jesus Christ?' 'Shut up!' exclaimed the officer. 'Because,' continued Mr. Birch, 'if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be lost.' 'Do you hear that old stupid?' said another of the officers; 'what shall we do to him?' Quickly the preacher of the Gospel turned to the second speaker, and said, 'Do you believe in the Lord Jesus? for, if you do not, you will be lost.' 'Sit on him,' suggested one. 'Shove him out of the window,' proposed another. 'That would not alter the fact,' said the intrepid servant of God. Just then the train began to slow down, and there was a general cry of 'Oh, let us get out! Let us change carriages!' 'Your getting out will not alter the fact,' again said Mr. Birch. 'Well, good-bye, old fellow!' shouted the officers, as they jumped from the carriage. 'Good-bye,' was the response; 'but remember that does not alter the fact. If you do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be lost.' Four years had passed away, and the evangelist was travelling in England, when a tall, military-looking gentleman entered the carriage. As soon as he caught sight of

Mr. Birch, he leaned forward, and said, 'Excuse me, but I think we have met before. Do you remember, some years ago, a party of young men entering the compartment of a train in which you were travelling to Dublin? I was the young fellow who sat next you. We went to our ball that evening; but, despite all our gaiety, I was conscious of that awful sentence ringing in my ears, "If you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, you will be lost." I drank heavily that night, but the champagne did not revive me; and at an early hour I left the ball-room, and went to my hotel, where, in the solitude of my own room, I knelt down and cried to God for mercy. Since that night I have been a Christian, and have striven to bring those under my command to know and to love the Saviour.'" (*John Robertson.*)

Ver. 5. I will be unto her a wall of fire.—Zion's protection:—I. THE PEOPLE THAT SHALL BE THUS DEFENDED. It is Jerusalem that is to be defended; and that will include three things: the temple, the habitations of the people, and the people themselves. The people of God are spoken of as the temple of God. Do we belong to the temple of the Lord? If we belong to the temple of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ will be our only foundation. There are two things that make the Lord Jesus the foundation—1. As being the end of the law for righteousness. He brings in everlasting righteousness. 2. As being the end of sin. He is spiritually, legally, properly, and entirely the end of sin; His blood cleanseth from all sin. As is the foundation in character, so the building must accord in character with the foundation. The foundation is one of free grace. Therefore we are not only justified by grace, but saved by grace. The first feature given to this building is mercy. Then it is a free-grace building. The third feature is certainty. We may be upon the right foundation, and yet not rightly built. God's people are spoken of as a city; they have habitations which require to be defended. Take these habitations as the truths of the Gospel, wherein God's people dwell. Electing grace; predestination; Christ's righteousness; the atonement; God's promises may all be spoken of as habitations. **II. THE DEFENCE.** Notice the forms under which the Lord represents Himself as round about His people: all indicative of two things, destruction to the adversary, safety to the friend. The Lord is round His people as a hedge; and as mountains; and as a guard of fire, such as men use to protect from wild beasts. **III. THE GLORY IN THE MIDST.** He is in the midst, the living God, the life-giving God. He is the glory in the midst by being the temple in the midst. (*James Wells.*)

*Protected by God:—*In one of the great cities of the Continent the regalia are not kept behind iron bars as in the Tower of London, but lie upon an open table. It might appear that any ruthless hand could wrench any jewel or diamond from the glittering array; and yet no man dare put out his hand to take one, because that table is charged with a strong current of electricity. You cannot see the protection, but there it is. And so if a man will only live in daily and hourly communion with Christ, the devil can no more touch him than a thief can touch those jewels. (*F. B. Meyer.*)

*The wall and glory of Jerusalem:—*In this chapter is a vision of a man with a measuring line in his hand, to show that the Lord was now in readiness to build and restore the city and temple. Two great discouragements the people met with—danger and scorn. The Lord here, by a gracious promise, fortieth them against the fear of both. Against the fear of danger, by promising to be their protection; and against the fear of scorn, by promising to be their glory. The Lord is to His people whatever good they want. "I will be a wall." 1. A wall of partition, to separate the Church from the world. 2. A wall of conjunction, uniting the parts together in one common interest. 3. A wall of protection and defence. The Lord doth as a wall protect His Church—(1) In a way of promise. (2) In a way of power. (3) In a way of providence. (4) In a way of grace. His protection is like that of a wall. It is near, adequate, and impregnable. Consider the city walled, the subject of His defence. The Church is His property, His rest, His peculiar treasure. The Lord is the glory in the midst of His people—1. By His spiritual residence and gracious presence with them. 2. By His holy ordinances. 3. In glorious privileges and immunities belonging to every citizen of the New Jerusalem. What folly, then, and what wickedness, to oppose the Church of God, briars to contend with flames! We need not make use of carnal wisdom and sinful means for protection. Envy not the glory of the world. Above all, hold fast God and His presence. God will be with you while you are with Him. If God be thus your glory, let your glorying be in Him alone. (*T. Hannam.*)

The glory in the midst of her.—Inward glory and outward defence:—

Speak of the bearing of the text upon our individual lives. 1. If we choose, we may have the Divine glory in the deepest heart of us. The "glory" of the Old Testament was that material but supernatural symbol of the Divine presence which gleamed above the mercy-seat in the most holy place. That little house on the temple hill was nothing in sanctity in comparison with the temple of the Christian heart. The true habitation of God is man. Spirit dwells in spirit in a profounder sense than it does in space, or in the material creation. Have you got the glory in the centre of your being? We may all have the indwelling of the glory of God if we will. 2. If God be for glory within, He will be a fiery rampart round. He is not only a wall, but a wall of fire. His protection is not merely of the passive sort which shields from evil, but active and preserving. 3. If God is a wall of fire round about us, we do not want any other walls. God is everything that we need, and do not find anywhere else; and having Him, we do not want anything else. But the lives of most of us do not much look as if we believed that the only necessary thing was God, and that, having Him, we required nothing else. Let us cast all our self-confidences down, and rest ourselves on Him, and Him alone. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The city without walls*:—Zechariah was the prophet of the returning exiles, and his great work was to hearten them for their difficult task, with their small resources and their many foes, and to insist that the prime condition to success, on the part of that portion of the nation that had returned, was holiness. And that exuberant promise was spoken about the Jerusalem over which Christ wept when He foresaw its inevitable destruction. When the Romans had cast a torch into the Temple, and the streets of the city were running with blood, what had become of Zechariah's dream of a wall of fire round about her? Then, can the Divine fire be quenched? Yes. And who quenched it? Not the Romans, but the people that lived within that flaming rampart. "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." I. "I WILL BE A WALL OF FIRE ROUND ABOUT HER." I need not dwell on the vividness and beauty of that metaphor. These encircling flames will consume all antagonism, and defy all approach. But let me remind you that the conditional promise was intended for Judea and Jerusalem, and was fulfilled in literal fact. So long as the city obeyed and trusted God it was impregnable, though all the nations stood round about it like dogs round a sheep. The fulfilment of the promise has passed over, with all the rest that characterised Israel's position, to the Christian Church, and to-day, in the midst of all the agitations of opinion and all the vauntings of men about an effete Christianity and dead churches, it is as true as ever it was that the living Church of God is eternal. If it had not been that there was a God as a wall of fire round about the Church it would have been wiped off the face of the earth long ago. If nothing else had killed it, the faults of its members would have done so. The continuance of the Church is a perpetual miracle, when you take into account the weakness and the errors and the follies and the stupidities and the narrownesses and the sins of the people who in any given day represent it. It does not become any Christian ever to have the smallest scintillation of a fear that the ship that bears Jesus Christ can fail to come to land, or can sink in the midst of the waters. But do not let us forget that this great promise does not belong only to the Church as a whole, but that we have each to bring it down to our own individual lives, and to be quite sure of this, that in spite of all that sense says, in spite of all that quivering hearts and weeping eyes may seem to prove, there is a wall of fire round each of us, if we are keeping near Jesus Christ. Only, we have to interpret that promise by faith and not by sense, and we have to make it possible that it shall be fulfilled by keeping inside the wall, and trusting to it. As faith dwindles, the fiery wall burns dim, and evil can get across its embers, and can get at us.

II. A GLORY "IN THE MIDST" OF US. The one is external defence; the other inward illumination, with all that light symbolises—knowledge, joy, purity. There is even more than that meant by this great promise. For notice that emphatic little word "the"—the glory, not a glory—in the midst of her. Now, you all know what "the glory" was. It was that symbolic Light that spoke of the special Presence of God, and went with the children of Israel in their wanderings, and sat between the cherubim. There was no "shekinah"—as it is technically called—in that second Temple. But yet the prophet says, "the glory"—the actual presence of God—"shall be in the midst of her," and the meaning of that great promise is taught us by the very last vision in the New Testament, in which the seer of the Apocalypse says, "the glory of the Lord did lighten it" (evidently

quoting Zechariah), "and the Lamb is the light thereof." So the city is lit as by one central glow of radiance that flashes its beams into every corner, and therefore "there shall be no night there." Now, this promise, too, bears on churches and on individuals. On the Church as a whole it bears in this way—the only means by which a Christian community can fulfil its function, and be the light of the world, is by having the presence of God, in no metaphor, the actual presence of the illuminating Spirit in its midst. The same thing is true about individuals. For each of us the secret of joy, of purity, of knowledge is that we be holding close communion with God. III. "JERUSALEM SHALL BE WITHOUT WALLS." It is to be like the defenceless villages scattered up and down over Israel. There is no need for bulwarks of stone. The wall of fire is round about. The more a Christian community is independent of external material supports and defences the better. Luther tells us somewhere, in his parabolic way, of people that wept because there were no visible pillars to hold up the heavens, and were afraid that the sky would fall upon their heads. No, no, there is no fear of that happening, for an unseen hand holds them up. A Church that hides behind the fortifications of its grandfathers' erection has no room for expansion; and if it has no room for expansion it will not long continue as large as it is. It must either grow greater or grow, and deserve to grow, less. The same thing is true about ourselves individually. Zechariah's prophecy was never meant to prevent what he himself helped to further, the building of the actual walls of the actual city. And our dependence upon God is not to be so construed as that we are to waive our own common sense and our own effort. We have to build ourselves round, in this world, with other things than the "wall of fire," but in all our building we have to say, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchers watch in vain." But yet neither Jerusalem nor the Church nor the earthly state of that believer who lives most fully the life of faith exhausts this promise. It waits for the day when the city shall descend, "like a bride adorned for her husband, having no need of the sun nor of the moon, for the glory . . . lightens it." (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 6-9. I have spread you abroad, &c.—*Soul-exile*.—This is a call of Jehovah to the Jews in Babylonian captivity to return to their own land. These words may illustrate the moral exile of humanity. The point suggested is, the reluctance of the exile to return. This reluctance is seen—I. IN THE EARNESTNESS OF THE DIVINE APPEAL. "Return," is the word. "Flee from the land of the north." It is the land of corruption and tyranny. II. IN THE POTENCY OF THE DIVINE REASONS. Reasons for return are—1. The greatness of their separation. 2. The tender interest of God in them. 3. The opposition of the Almighty to their enemies. Conclusion—Why should sinners be so reluctant to return to God? What made the Jews so reluctant to break away from Babylon? Was it indolence? Was it love of the world? Was it old association? Do not all these act now, to prevent sinners from coming out of moral Babylon? (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon.—*Separation from the world, the duty and privilege of a Christian*.—Zechariah prophesied at Jerusalem after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon; and one great object of his ministry was to stir them up to a more lively sense of the peculiar duties and privileges which their deliverance brought with it. In the text he is addressing that part of the nation which were still remaining in the land of Chaldea. As their dispersion had been the effect of God's righteous displeasure, so the way now opened for their return was no less clearly an evidence of His returning mercy and favour. But many were unwilling to return; the real cause of their so deciding was their indifference to religion, their distrust of God's Word, and their backwardness to obey Him and to show themselves His servants. To them came the admonition of the text. Can we make application of this passage to present times, and point out its spiritual sense? The world is now, to Christians, what Babylon was then to the Jews. By the world, is meant this world, in respect to its moral state; to its habits, maxims, and practices; to its principles, fashions, and ways: the world as it is now corrupted through the depravity of man. By Christians is meant all who are so called; all who, by name and profession, are Christians. They are born and grow up in the midst of the world's sin and iniquity. From their earliest infancy they are surrounded by its examples, exposed to its allure-

ments, and made familiar with its practices. What they are taught to admire and covet most, are the things of the world. But they belong, not to the world, but to Christ. They are professedly the subjects of that spiritual kingdom which Christ has established in the world. They cannot possess and enjoy their privileges while living in the world. The Jews must return home to Judea before they could rejoice as Jews. And what must Christians do, if they would rejoice as Christians? They must arise, and turning their backs on the world, must comply with the proclamation of the Gospel. "Come out and be separate." It is one part of the salvation of the Gospel, that it "delivers us from this present evil world." If persons would sincerely come to Christ for deliverance, He would surely set them free. The persons with whom we would plead are those who, under the garb of a Christian profession, manifestly retain a worldly spirit, and by their conformity to the fashions and follies of the world, betray its influence over their hearts. Consider—1. The inconsistency of such a state with your profession of Christianity. 2. The shamefulness of it. 3. The danger of your present state. If you walk not as a Christian now, you will never be owned as a Christian at last. 4. The happiness which will result from complying with the admonition in the text. (*E. Cooper.*)

Ver. 8. He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye.—*The Divine interest in His people*.—1. While we disown the reference of the former portion of the vision to Gospel times, and to the spiritual or New Testament Jerusalem, we are very far from disowning the applicability to the latter of what is said in the former. Whatever sayings are here respecting the extension, the security, and the glory of the literal Jerusalem are equally true of the spiritual and heavenly. 2. The people of God may now, as well as of old, and even more emphatically, appropriate the Divine assurance, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of His eye." He identifies Himself with His people, and His own interests with theirs. What a spring of consolation to believers in every hour of darkness! 3. We ought to be earnest in persuading God's people to "come forth," and "flee" from the mystical Babylon. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) *A figure of speech with a gracious meaning*.—It is expressive of—1. Intimate union. 2. High appreciation. 3. Earnest attention. 4. Intense sympathy. 5. Watchful care. (*G. Brooks.*) *The Church and unjust criticism*.—In a religious paper there appeared a symposium on "The Church and the Kingdom of God." In it we are told that "one of the most dangerous of current heresies is the identification of the kingdom of God with the Church." "The kingdom of God can never embody itself in an institution." "I am reluctantly coming to believe that Christianity, as it is organised, is the most serious obstacle in the way of the realisation of the Christianity of Christ." Similar criticisms fill the air everywhere. These strictures must be met. 1. The first thing to be said in reply is, that although the kingdom of God is spiritual, nevertheless it and the external organisation which we call the Church are practically identical. There is very little of the real spirit of the kingdom outside of that institution. When men become imbued with the spirit of God's kingdom they are generally ready to go into the Church. The reason they stay outside is because they have not caught that spirit. Where are the much-talked-of philanthropies, charities, establishments, colleges, seminaries, asylums, homes, refuges, founded by men or societies outside of the Church of God? When sceptics and other devotees of the world give a thousandth part as much for the advancement of morality, and the elevation of mankind, as members of the Church give, then it will be time enough to lampoon the Church. 2. Spirit in this world needs body through which to work. Man is a spirit, but he can do nothing here without a body. It is so with God's kingdom; it is a spiritual kingdom, but it must be embodied in an institution for its propagation. When one becomes so spiritual that he wants soul to work without body, and God's kingdom to advance in the world without a temporal organisation, he is altogether too ethereal for this mundane sphere. He ought to take on his wings and go. What if Jesus does use the word "church" only twice? He founded the Church, and evidently instructed His disciples to rear it with scrupulous care. And if Churches are "in a struggle to keep themselves going," what of it? Would that prove they were utterly useless? That sort of talk will not help on God's kingdom. The work is slow, it is true; that is partly, at least, because it is a prodigious undertaking. To cleanse this planet from sin. What audacity for finite beings to attempt such an infinite enterprise! But the Church is accomplishing much when it merely exists

in this world. But it really looks as if the Church was doing something more than simply existing. Who can measure the influence of the Church upon society, business, legislation? If politics is so bad with Christianity, what would it be without it? Who can measure the abysmal depths to which all Christian governments and peoples would plunge without the upholding and preserving influence of the Church? (*F. B. Perry.*)

Vers. 10-13. **I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee.**—*The restorer of Israel and Judah.*—Note that the name of “the Lord,” or “Jehovah,” is applied to two distinct persons; to Him who sends, and to Him who is sent. Note also that in this prophecy the future restoration of the Jews is spoken of, as well as their settlement at Jerusalem after the Babylonish captivity. The words of the text evidently relate to the future restoration. A period is yet to come, of glory to God, and of prosperity to the people of Israel and Judah; and that the Son of God, the Messiah, will dwell among them, acknowledged and honoured as the Lord of hosts. Note some of the circumstances which will mark that season of the fulfilment of God’s promises to His people. 1. The conversion of the people of Israel and Judah. 2. The restoration of all the tribes to their own land. 3. The people of God will be restored to their native land in the midst of wars and tumults. Their return will be preceded by violent convulsions, and by a season of disaster and tribulation, such as the world has never yet witnessed. 4. The first and most remarkable circumstance in the condition of God’s people after their settlement in their own land, is His immediate presence among them. 5. God will make a new covenant with them. It will involve a much higher degree of religious knowledge. 6. The pardon of sin is mentioned as one of the promises under the new covenant. 7. The consequence of this abundant pardon and superior knowledge is the greater practice of virtue. This superior degree of purity and holiness in the people of God, is the gift of God Himself, the effect of that abundant effusion of the Spirit which will adorn the Church under His own immediate care. 8. The advantages will not be confined to Israel, but will flow out to other peoples. 9. Jews and Gentiles being united as one body of faithful worshippers, a pure and holy service will be paid to God in Jerusalem. The people will enjoy all worldly and spiritual blessedness. Let us seek to attain a share of these coming blessings. (*T. Bowdler, A.M.*) *The joy of the Divine presence.*—1. No difficulty or strait can take away from the Church the true cause of her joy, nor excuse her for not rejoicing in it, for when the Jews are now a contemptible handful, deserted by their brethren, vexed by their enemies, and some of themselves conspiring against them, yet she is called to this duty, “Sing, and rejoice.” 2. The Lord’s own presence in and with His people, is His choice and matchless gift, which He is willing to give before any other thing, and which, as He will not disdain to bestow in His people’s lowest condition, so it is a gift that should occasion much joy and refreshment to them. 3. As the Lord’s presence with His own chosen people is perpetual, and will bring intimate familiarity and love; so Himself will be at all the pains to make up this union, He will not, by sin putting Him, as it were, away for a time, be provoked to stay away, and will have this communion still upon the growing hand till they come to full fruition, for He will dwell constantly and familiarly “in the midst of thee.” 4. It is the great ground of the Church’s encouragement, and the fountain of all other manifestations of God, that the Son of God became man, that her Redeemer is God, that He came and dwelt in our nature, and was like us in all things without sin; and that we may trust with God in the man Christ, and know our tender-hearted Surety to be also God over all blessed for ever, and able to save to the uttermost. This incarnation of Christ is it which this promise ultimately points at as the ground of their joy. “Sing, for I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith Jehovah.” (*George Hutcheson.*) *The joy of the millennial Church.*—The words point to the bright periods when Messiah’s kingdom shall so extend as to embrace “many nations.” Three remarks are suggested concerning this joy. I. It is **RIGHTEOUS.** It is not only Divinely authorised, but commanded. “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion.” Often we are informed by religious teachers that joy is a privilege, but seldom told that joy is a duty. It is as truly a sin against heaven to be spiritually gloomy and sad, as to be socially false and dishonest. “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion.” Similar commands are found elsewhere on the pages of Holy Writ. “Break forth into joy, sing together” (Isa. lii. 9). “Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion” (Isa. xii. 6). Gratitude is joy; and ought not gratitude to fill every soul? Admiration is joy; and ought not

every soul to be filled with admiration of the Divine excellence? Love is joy; and ought we not to love all creatures with the love of benevolence, and the Creator with the love of adoration? II. It is REASONABLE. But here are reasons suggested for this joy. What are they? 1. The presence of God. "Lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord." The highest happiness of an intelligent creature, is the presence of the object it supremely loves. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy." 2. The increase of the good. "Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day." Is not this a good reason for joy—to see the clouds of error in the human sky breaking, dissolving, vanishing, and the Sun of Truth rising, spreading, and penetrating the whole earth with its life-giving beams? Is not this a sublime reason for life-giving joy—"Many nations shall be joined to the Lord," as the branches are joined to the roots of the tree, as the members of the body are joined to the head? 3. The restoration of the Jews. "For the Lord shall inherit Judah His portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again." III. It is REVERENTIAL. "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for He is raised up out of His holy habitation." "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." The profoundest emotions of the soul are always mute. Superficial feelings are noisy and chattering. The shallow stream rattles amongst the hills. The deep river rolls by unheard. Deep joy is silent as the stars. It is so with the godly soul. In the presence of the supremely beautiful, it is filled with a joy that cannot speak. If we are loyal subjects of the great spiritual empire, we might well be happy. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 12. **The Holy Land.**—*Those holy fields*:—There is no place on the face of the globe so attractive as Palestine. There is no abatement of the interest which the peoples of the world have always taken in it. I. WHAT MAKES IT ATTRACTIVE? How comes it that this land has such a hold upon the hearts of men of varying religions and different races? Is it because of the excellence of its government? Is it because of the might and power of its arms? Is it because of its size, its colossal proportions? II. ITS CONNECTION WITH JESUS CHRIST. The Holy Land is endeared to the hearts of men because the Son of God walked its streets, and made it for ever sacred by His holy life and sacrificial death. There the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made known to perishing man the love of God for a lost world. III. THE HOLY LAND IS STRIKING AND INTERESTING IN MANY OF ITS ASPECTS. Its climate is the most remarkable in the world. Its position is not less striking. In ancient days it was believed to be the very centre of the earth. And so it is in a higher and better sense. It was there the great mystery of the Incarnation was enacted. Mount Calvary is the central point of the world's religious life and thought. If ever that universal brotherhood of man, for which the world longs, is to be realised, it will come in proportion as men climb Mount Calvary, and meet in love at the Cross of Christ. (*Charles Leech, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. **Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for He is raised up out of His holy habitation.**—*Flesh silenced by God's arising*:—1. The vision itself. The man with a line in his hand. 2. The interpretation of the vision. Jerusalem shall be built, and the city shall be inhabited. 3. A threefold apostrophe that the Lord infers from this—(1) Directed to the Jews that yet continued in Babylon. The Lord calls them. It is barrenness and lowness of spirit not to accept deliverance. "Deliver thyself." (2) The news is to the enemies that were their neighbours. (3) To both. Let the enemies silence their murmurings, silence their slanders. Let the saints silence their frettings, silence their doubtings. In the words of text are two things. I. A PROPOSITION. "The Lord is raised up out of His holy habitation." The expression "habitation of His holiness" is used two ways in Scripture. It is sometimes put for heaven; sometimes for the temple, the place of God's presence among His people, manifested in ordinances. How is God said to be "raised up"? It is such a rising as is after an awaking out of sleep. But how can God be said to sleep? The cessation of acts of providence is God's sleep. The putting of them forth is God's arising, awaking. The meaning of the sentence is this,—When the Lord doth appear for His people as a return of their prayers, when the Lord ariseth gloriously for them, for their deliverance, and their enemies overthrow, then it is said, "The Lord is raised up out of His holy habitation." Two observations—The great comfort of the saints in all their straits and difficulties lies in this, when they see God ariseth for them.

Experiments of God's rising in acts of providence are great grounds to His people to stay their faith, that God will go on, He will bring His work to perfection. Open this under three heads—1. There is a time when God seems to sleep. 2. The great labour of the saints in all their straits is to awaken God, that God may arise. We knock at heaven's gate; we environ God; beleaguer God by our prayers; we as it were wrest mercy out of His hands. 3. The consolations of the saints must needs be very great from the arisings of God for them in His providential dealings. When the Lord doth arise, whatsoever standeth in opposition must fall. When God ariseth, He overruleth the spirits of men, so as they shall effect and accomplish the end. When God ariseth, He hath abundance rise with Him. When, by our spiritual eyes, can we discern that God is raised up? 1. Prayer is God's way by which He is raised up. 2. When the Lord defeateth the counsels of the enemy, turns their plots upon their heads. 3. When the Lord takes away the heart of His enemies. 4. When the Lord aceteth the spirits of His people unto high and noble and invincible resolutions. 5. When the Lord goes on in ways of mercy, and draws out His loving-kindness. The experiments (experiences) which the saints have of the rising of God are a sure pledge to their faith that He will go on; He will not leave the work till He hath brought it to perfection. The inference is,—then "be silent all flesh before Him." Some men keep silence in policy, because they would not discover themselves till a convenient time. But all the people of God that would approve themselves, must keep silence in duty. There is a silence of shame, and a silence of fear and astonishment. The Lord says to these Jews, silence your doubtings, and silence your frettings. (*W. Strong.*) *God raised up out of His holy habitation.*—I. THE SENSE OF THE PHRASE. Expressions concerning the locality of the Divine presence arose out of the circumstances of His dwelling in the tabernacle of Moses; of His resting when the camp rested, and marching before them when they advanced. When God thus arose, He came forth from His holy habitation. When God is spoken of in human language, local and bodily ideas must enter into it. The conception of our minds, as to the operations of God, are aided by such phraseology. It may be applied generally to the dispensations of providence. When wickedness prevails, when error spreads, when the Church is wasted, then the Almighty is represented as shutting His eyes, turning away His face, withholding His hand, and resting in His holy place. But when He makes Himself manifest in judgment or mercy, when He has nations to punish or to bless, when His Church calls for protection and help, then He is "raised up out of His holy habitation," and "all flesh" is commanded to "keep silence" before Him.

II. THE OCCASIONS WHICH PROCURE THIS INTERPOSITION OF GOD. 1. He is raised up by the incorrigible vices of men. When wickedness abounds, for a time He appears to disregard it, or He interposes by gentle corrections; but there is a limit to His patience and forbearance. 2. Pride and oppression raise Him up out of His habitation. "Those kingdoms that walk in pride He will abase." Every power that is opposed to the laws of God must be overthrown; and the more proud and oppressive it is, the more certain, speedy, and marked is its downfall. 3. God is raised up for the manifestation of His truth. To every people God originally gave a saving system, and all nations might have preserved it. That they have not, is a proof of human depravity. Had it not been for special interpositions from God, the truth would have wholly perished; and with it all the hopes of the world must have ended for ever. Here is the mercy of God. 4. God is raised up by the prayers of His saints. Prayer moves Him that moves the universe. Everything encourages prayer. That which is our privilege is made our duty. You know the efficacy of prayer. It is prayer that calls down His visitations, interests Him in your cause, and secures to you grace to help in every time of need. Nor less essentially is it connected with every plan for the spread of His Gospel, and the prosperity of His Church. 5. The performance of His promise to Messiah raises God up from His holy habitation. He had said, "I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance." This decree is not yet fully accomplished. God has been raised up partly to accomplish it; but He will ere long put forth His power in a still more glorious manner. Even now is He raised up for this purpose.

III. THE IMPRESSION THESE EXTRAORDINARY DISPENSATIONS SHOULD MAKE. Silence is commanded; but silence in such a case is the result of powerful mental impression. 1. It is the effect of deep and intense interest. 2. Reproof produces silence. 3. Satisfaction produces silence. All flesh, as well as the Church, is commanded to keep silence before God. IV. BUT IS THE WHOLE

TO ISSUE IN EMOTION? Certainly not. God is raised up out of His place, to raise us up from ours. We are to be fellow-helpers to the truth. It is our encouragement that God is "raised up out of His holy habitation"; and this will render us inexcusable if we refuse to co-operate. If God is thus raised up, we have many encouragements to exertion. We have the Divine sanction. Prayer must be heard. We shall not want co-operation. We cannot want success. We shall be inexcusable, if we refuse to espouse His cause. (*R. Watson.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-7. And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing.—*Joshua the priest*:—We learn from the Book of Ezra (ii. 36-39) that among the exiles who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon, were Joshua or Jeshua, and 4289 priests. But they were in a sorry plight—their character is described by the prophet Malachi; and it was in sad contrast, as he suggests, to the original type of the priesthood represented in Phinehas. As a judgment on the priesthood, the whole body had fallen under great reproach (Mal. ii. 9). The sense of shame becomes more acute when we stand before the Angel of the Lord. "He shewed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the Angel of the Lord." In the world's twilight much may pass muster which, in the light of that sweet, pure face, must be utterly condemned. Garments which served us well enough in the short, dark winter days are laid aside when spring arrives; they will not bear the searching scrutiny of the light. In the ordinary life of our homes, we are less particular of our attire than when, on some special occasion, we have to undergo the inspection of stranger eyes. Thus we are prone to compare ourselves with ourselves, or with others, and to argue that the habit of our soul is not specially defiled. Alas! we reason thus in the dark. But when the white light of the throne of God breaks on us, we cry with Job: "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean, yet wilt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." The more we know of God, the more we loathe ourselves and repent. What is to be done under such circumstances? Renounce our priesthood? Disclaim its God-given functions? No: remain standing before the Angel. He knows all—we need not shrink from His searching eyes—but He loves infinitely. He has power to make our iniquity pass from us, and clothe us with change of raiment—that white linen which is the righteousness of saints. It is at such moments, however, that our great adversary puts forth his worst insinuations. "Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary." Since he was cast out of his first estate, he has been the antagonist of God, the hater of good, and the accuser of the brethren. He discovers the weak spots in character, and thrusts at them; the secret defects of the saints, and proclaims them upon the house-tops; the least symptom of disloyalty, inconstancy, and mixture of motive, and flaunts it before God's angels. He is keen as steel, and cruel as hell. Ah, it is awful to think with what implacability he rages against us! When we pray, he is quick to detect the wandering thought, the mechanical repetition of well-worn phrases, the flagging fervour. When we work for God, he is keen to notice our desire to dazzle our fellows, to secure name and fame, to use the Cross as a ladder for our own exaltation instead of our Master's. "Is this," he hisses, "the kind of service which Thy chosen servants offer Thee?" And when, like Job, we do bear trial patiently and nobly, the great adversary suggests that we do it from a selfish motive—"Doth Job serve God for nought?" Satan cannot reach the Son of God now, save through the members of His body; but he misses no opportunity of thrusting at Him, as he accuses them. Let us notice the intervention and answer of the Angel of the Covenant. 1. It is spontaneous and unsought. Before Joshua had time to say, "Shelter me," his faithful Friend and Advocate had cast around him the assurance of His protection, and had silenced the adversary. "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." As the Aaronic Priest, He died; but as the Melchizedek Priest, He ever lives to make intercession on our behalf; and as the torpedoes of the enemy are launched against us, He catches them in the net of His intercession, and makes them powerless to hurt. Before we call, He answers. 2. It is founded

on electing grace. For He says: "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Before ever He chose her, He must have foreseen all that she would become, her backslidings and rebellions, her filthy garments, her wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; but, notwithstanding all, He set His heart upon her. Satan could allege nothing which the Advocate had not weighed in the balances of His Divine prescience. He had realised the very worst before making His final choice. Yes, thou gr at adversary, thou canst not tell our Lord worse things about us than He knows; and notwithstanding all, He loves, and will love. 3. Moreover, it has already done too much to go back. The point of the metaphor which follows is very reassuring. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" You have been writing all the morning at your desk, answering letters, assorting papers and manuscripts, destroying much that there was no need to keep. After two or three hours of work, there is a heap of papers which you wish to destroy, and you place them in your stove or fireplace, the fire kindles on them, and they begin to blaze. Suddenly, to your dismay, you remember that there was a cheque or note amongst them, or a letter with an address, or a paper which has cost you hours of work. As quick as thought you rush to the kindling flames, and snatch away the paper, and attempt to stay the gnawing edge of flame. But what an appearance the paper suggests! It is yellow with smoke, charred and brittle round the edges, scorched and hot, here and there are gaps—it is a brand plucked out of the fire. Would you have snatched it out if you had not valued it? And, after you have taken such pains to rescue it, is it likely that you will thrust it back to destruction? And would Jehovah have snatched Israel out of Babylon, and expended so much time and care over her, if at the end He meant to destroy her? The fact of His having done so much, not only proved His love, but implied its continuance. What depths of consolation are here! As we look back on our lives, we become aware of the narrowness of our escape from dangers which overwhelmed others. We have been involved in companionships and practices which have ruined others irretrievably; but somehow, though we are charred and blackened, we have escaped the ultimate results. We have been plucked out of the burning. What can we infer from so gracious an interposition, except that we have been preserved for some high and useful purpose? (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Help and opposition:—I. THE POSITION OF THE HIGH PRIEST. 1. He stands before the Angel of the Lord. 2. He stands before the Angel of the Lord as an accused person. 3. He stands before the Angel of the Lord as an accused person, to pray.

II. THE OPPOSITION OF SATAN. 1. It was prompt. 2. It was directed against Joshua as the high priest. 3. It assumed the form of accusation against Joshua. 4. It was intended to interrupt or thwart Joshua in his prayer. (*G. Brooks.*)

Joshua and Satan:—Israel was then what Christendom is now; and the prophet in this chapter must be considered as instructing not the house of Jacob alone, but the whole family of God in Christ. The vision of Zechariah is a solemn picture of what is now going on. Taking the vision to refer to the Christian Church, inquire into the truths which it involves, and how it tallies with external events. Trace its reality in the dispensation of the Gospel. Illustrate from the manifestation of Christ to the Gentile world. The Church ever comes before us as a community enlarging its borders, absorbing into itself human belief, supplanting other modes of worship. But there is another side of the picture. The Christian history is full of the opposition and violence with which the onward march of the Cross has been uniformly encountered. The lives of Christian missionaries are ever lives of risk and pain. Such is the external history of the propagation of the Gospel. Where lies the cause that after eighteen hundred years Christianity has not conquered a majority of the human race? The cause of Christianity is the cause of Christ. The resistance of the devil has been partly open, but his resistance has been secret and stealthy: it has mainly sought to undermine rather than cast down; to weaken from within rather than assail from without. A chief cause of the slow progress of the Gospel among men has been, the want of unity. This is seen in sectarian separation, and in diversity of doctrine. The history of the world, of the Church, yea, of every individual soul, is but the outward result of the mystic vision of Joshua the high priest, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. (*J. R. Woodford, M.A.*)

Joshua the high priest before the Angel of Jehovah:—This vision is of less obvious interpretation than the preceding, perhaps for the reason that its truth lies nearer the deepest throbbings of the human heart. A sense of sin and a feeling of hopeless ill-desert are among the deepest emotions of a heart that has been touched by the Holy Spirit. This is the ever-recurring

state of the heart both individually and collectively, because it rests on the ever-during relations that connect man with God. A sense of sin fairly awakened produces despair if we are thrown back on the resources of reason. We cannot hope in God, for we tremble before His justice. Thus it was with the Jewish Church at this time. They felt that they had sinned, and hence had no ground in themselves to hope for God's favour. They knew that their priests had also been unfaithful, and hence they had no hope in them. Why, then, go forward with the temple, when both priest and people must defile rather than hallow its courts? These were the suggestions of Satan, to deter them from their work. God will not accept so vile and faithless a heart, so lame and mutilated a service as you render Him, says the tempter, therefore you had better abandon it all, and enjoy sin at least, if you cannot enjoy holiness. This brings us to the heart of the vision. It is designed to show the people of God that their personal demerit is no ground for distrusting the mercy of God, for He receives them not because of their own righteousness, but that of Another; and that at this particular period the unworthiness of the priesthood was no reason for their destruction and the overthrow of the temple, as they were typical, and the end of their instruction was not yet served. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *Christ the advocate of His Church and people:*—This part of the vision has respect to Joshua and his accuser. It exhibits Joshua—

I. WITH RESPECT TO HIS CONDITION. View him—1. In his office. High priest. One part of his duty was to consult the Divine will in matters of difficulty. Another part was to intercede on behalf of the nation. Possibly he was now before God, confessing the sins of the people, and pleading for that pardon which a God of mercy is ever ready to bestow. 2. In what place was Joshua executing his office? The temple was not built, and the particular place is not named. He was "standing before the Angel of the Lord." This was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Angel of the Covenant.

II. HIS ENEMY. Satan means adversary. Look at—1. The actings of the adversary. Satan stood at Joshua's right hand. But why? To resist him. But he might do this either by tempting Joshua or by accusing him. The right hand was the usual place for accusers in public. 2. What were his motives for accusing Joshua? His motives as a tempter we can well understand; but what were his motives for accusing Joshua of negligence in the work of God? Did Satan then wish that the work of God should go on vigorously? **III. HIS ADVOCATE.** Jehovah Himself. The Lord's defence of Joshua is grounded—1. In His love toward the Church. 2. On His past mercy to Joshua. The defence which the Lord Jesus makes for His people now is substantially the same as it was then. Past mercies are grounds of Christian confidence, and should be viewed as pledges of future blessings.

IV. THE APPAREL OF JOSHUA. "Filthy garments." Probably the garments worn in the time of captivity. 1. His dress was unsuitable. 2. Suitable apparel was provided for him. "I will clothe thee with change of raiment." The righteousness of Christ is to all, and upon all, them that believe. Ask—(1) Are we attending to our duties? (2) Are we sensible of our defects? (3) Are we confiding in an Almighty Advocate? (*J. G. Breay, B.A.*) *The great contention:*—

I. JOSHUA'S MINISTRY AND DEFENCE. 1. He stood to minister before the Lord. Whereby we learn—(1) That as ministers of the Lord have their mission from Him, so they ought to receive instruction from Him. (2) Having received instructions, they ought with all readiness to obey them. (3) That they are always in the eye of God, to counsel them in their duties, to search them in their performances, to hear them in their petitions, to protect them in their dangers. 2. He stood as a defendant, as one accused, to answer for himself and others. The sins of the age were then general, such as, neglect of building the temple, marrying strange wives, &c.

II. SATAN, AND HIS WORK AGAINST JOSHUA. 1. He withstands us as a tempter. If we do our duty, Satan is at our right hand to hinder us; if we do not our duty, he is there to accuse us. He stands at the working hand. Usually, the more work the more temptation, and the more public the work the more sharp and eager the temptation. 2. He opposes as an accuser. He resisted Joshua by stirring up the Samaritans to hinder the building of the temple. He resisted him in his ministry, by accusing him of his failings. What these were we may guess. (1) He ministered not in the priest's robes, but in filthy garments. (2) He delayed the building of the temple. (3) His sons were, some of them, defiled with strange wives.

III. THE ADVOCATE—THE LORD. Christ is the Church's Advocate. Satan is at our right hand; Christ is at God's right hand. Joshua does not plead his own cause; he answers by his Counsel, his Advocate pleads for him.

IV. THE DOUBLE FOUNDATION OF THIS VICTORY.

1. God's gracious election. "The Lord which hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee." The doctrine of adoption by free grace is the strongest weapon that we can wield against the malice of Satan. 2. Joshua's past deliverance. "Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" Past mercies are pledges of more. If God snatch out of the fire, He will bring unto His temple: if He lay a foundation, He will bring forth the head-stone. (*Bishop Reynolds.*) *The vision of Joshua*:—1. The representative characters of the high priest and of Satan. Joshua represents the Jewish nation, especially the godly people in it. His filthy garments were emblematic of the moral defilement of the nation, and of their low and poor condition. Satan is the representative of all evil forces. He represents the majority of this world, but the minority of the universe. 2. The motives which at this time brought them into God's presence. It is implied that the high priest was there to plead for his nation. Satan was there to oppose this restoration to God's favour,—to bring forward reasons why it should not be granted. 3. The reason why the promise and the symbol should have their perfect fulfilment. One life, or one act in a life, is sometimes of such a nature or character as to send down a blessing to future ages; it seems to gather within itself all the wisdom or all the goodness of the past, and to bring them all into a centre of blessing for the present and the future. The life of God's Son, and especially His death upon the Cross, gathered up all that had been shadowed forth in the prophets and priests of old. His perfect life and sinless death and intercession were sureties that the promise given to the Hebrew people, through Joshua, should certainly be fulfilled. The vision embodies the blessed results of Divine forgiveness through the life and death of Christ, which are so beautifully set forth by the greatest of Old Testament prophets, Isaiah (see chaps. xi. and xii.). Learn—(1) Evil spirits may plead with God against men, as the good plead for them. Many human beings send up desires against the prosperity and happiness of their fellow-men. 2. The man who would be a benefactor of his fellow-creatures must be an intercessor for them. 3. The elect of God are those who fulfil the conditions of fellowship with God. Divine forgiveness springs from Divine grace, but the proof that it has reached us must be found in the fact that we fulfil the only conditions upon which it is granted. (*Outlines by a London Minister.*) *God's method of salvation*:—1. Joshua, before the Angel of the Lord, represents a sinful people. (1) Sin is impurity. What dress is to the body, moral character is to the soul. Impure garments are the symbol of sin. Iniquity is described by the most loathsome objects in nature—an infant uncared for; the vomit of the dog; the wallow of swine; the exhalations of the sepulchre. A Greek philosopher said, "Evil destroys us like a wild beast." 2. God saves through instrumentality. There are two classes: the good, who stand by all beneficent influences; and Satan, all that hinders good, evil spirits, bad men, corrupt hearts. The day of Gospel grace is neither day nor night. It is a conflict of contending forces. We live between Ebal and Gerizim. Every one who undertakes anything good will find agencies obeying the command, the Angel of the Lord assisting. And He will find Satan standing at his right hand,—the place of power—to resist him. Reflections—1. We observe the same method of work in the natural world, and in civil society, as in the Church. All are the work of one God. 2. Why does God permit sin? He works by the balance of contending elements everywhere. 3. The position of an unsaved sinner is as when a chief falls wounded between two contending armies: both fight for him. For which does he fight? (*J. S. Fulton.*) *Joshua*:—The Church is a holy priesthood. Regard Joshua as representing the humble, penitent believer. I. JOSHUA IN HIS DIFFICULTIES. Standing before the Angel of the Covenant. No careless person, but a poor sinner seeking to stand before the Lord Christ. Satan is near him as his accuser. When the sinner awakened stands before the Angel Jehovah, how often does the devil, by doubts and insinuations, seek to turn him aside. So the Angel Jehovah becomes his helper. II. THE LORD'S ACCOUNT OF JOSHUA. Scorched, but delivered by power, the sinner saved by grace. The powerful hand of the Lord, by His Word, in His providence, by the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart, has arrested and plucked him from the burning. III. THE RELIEF AT HAND. The Angel of the Covenant answers Satan's accusations. Joshua had special holy garments provided for him. But even these were filthy and polluted. He must be stripped and re-clothed. IV. THE HAPPY RESULTS. The pure mitre conspicuously a part of the priest's dress. The angel, &c., stood by to help and comfort, to put Satan to flight, to counsel and to direct, to be his guide as well as his deliverer. We

now stand before the Angel Jehovah, the messenger of light and life and glory, when we come into His house of prayer; and we must stand before Him when He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him. (*E. Auriol, M.A.*) *Joshua the high priest*:—The visions of Zechariah were intended to encourage the rebuilding of the temple. The resumption and successful prosecution of the work upon the temple devolved not less upon the ecclesiastical than upon the civil power. Zerubbabel and Joshua must co-operate. The former was ready; the latter needed to be extricated from the Slough of Despond. 1. At the opening of the vision the prophet saw Joshua standing to be judged before the Angel of God. (1) And he was clothed in filthy garments. The best of human kind is not perfect. The contrition of Joshua was, therefore, becoming in him, and all the more because of his official position. Before the all-searching eyes his garments were mere shreds and tatters. And therein he was indeed a just representative of the people. (2) Satan stood at his right hand to resist (*i.e.*, accuse) him. There is no lack of accusers. God's people are always at the bar of judgment, and alas, they have little enough to say for themselves. Guilty is the plea. 2. Next in the vision the Lord Himself appeared to vindicate Joshua. He stands as the champion of His people; His ear is ever open to their cry. He is the champion of all the weak and humble. (1) In this instance He rebuked Satan; not because there was no truth in His charge that Joshua was unworthy to minister at God's altar, or have part in the rebuilding of the temple, but because of other considerations, which made his accusations null and void. (2) The Lord having rebuked Satan, said to His own attendant angels: "Take away from Joshua his filthy garments." Thus does He uncliothe His people of their filthy rags, and make them worthy to minister before Him. He is a great forgiver. Thus the Lord encouraged Joshua, and qualified him, despite his personal unworthiness, to offer sacrifices and join with Zerubbabel in the re-building of the temple. And thus does He stand at the heavenly tribunal as the vindicator of the least of His little ones. 3. Then, in the vision, the prophet saw Joshua arrayed in garments white and clean. "I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Nor was this enough. "Let them set a fair mitre upon his head." Thus was he encouraged to exercise anew and with increased diligence the functions of his priestly office. 4. The vision closes with the words of a solemn compact or covenant, for the sealing of Joshua's restoration to service. The promise of perpetual blessing is conditioned on patient continuance in well-doing. To him that hath shall be given. A covenant would scarcely be a covenant were there no stone of remembrance. Here the stone had seven eyes in it. "Branch" interprets it. Under this title the Messiah was frequently mentioned. Thus the name of Christ Himself is set as the seal of His covenant with Joshua and his people. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Joshua the high priest*:—Joshua appears to Zechariah in his dream,—Israel's representative, clothed not in the splendid priestly attire, with its immaculate purity and costly jewels, but in garments worn and soiled, symbolical of the nation's sins. Before the humiliated priest is the Angel of the Lord, and at His right hand is Satan. The question is, which shall conquer, the Angel or the adversary? But not long is the question unanswered. Joshua is as a brand plucked from the burning. Israel, despite her sins and her familiarity with the tempter, shall be saved and forgiven. Then, when reclothed, the faithful monitor urges upon Joshua the necessity of obedient, whole-souled service. And then comes the promise of the greater High Priest, the Branch of David, the Messiah Himself, and the stone of the new theocracy, with its seven eyes running to and fro throughout the world, and finally the millennial peace, when Israel shall sit in peaceful forgetfulness of all her tribulations, under her own vine and fig-tree. The dream yields important lessons. 1. The representative function of the priesthood. Joshua stood for Israel. The soiled clothes in which he appeared indicated that both the priesthood and the people were leading lives which were not altogether in accordance with the Divine will, and from other sources we know that the priests of that day were given over to worldliness and materialism. While the priest can hardly fail to take somewhat of the tone of his life and character from the people to whom he ministers, it is also true that, because of his high position as a moral teacher and guide, he is under peculiar obligations to give the tone to his people, and determine in a large measure by his own words and life the standard of their lives. 2. The truth of angelic influence and guardianship. Joshua between the Angel and the adversary. The human soul facing the right and the wrong. But the Angel prevails. The temptation may be a mighty one,

the guilt may be great, but Satan is never allowed to go unchallenged. No child of humanity is ever left alone under the power of evil. He may sometimes feel alone. He may get so low in the pit, may become so hardened in sin, that he loses all sense of God's presence, and feels that there is no help for him in this world or the next. But God cannot, even for an instant, leave one of His children wholly alone with the powers of evil. 3. Another lesson is, that man's extremity is God's opportunity. The occasion of this vision was doubtless the discouragement of some of the more thoughtful Israelites, on account of their national sins. The exciting experiences since the return had tended to hold their minds to material interests, and make them forget their spiritual obligations. Notwithstanding the tendency to formalism under an established order of things, it is probably true that religion reaches its highest spiritual ideals under conditions which are not liable to frequent changes. But God does not forsake His children. He is with them always in the form of a searching and rebuking conscience. When the nation or the individual begins to feel deep down in his heart that a great wrong has been done against God and conscience and truth, then, and not till then, is the way open for forgiveness and restoration. Note the last scene of the vision. Strange enough, we find coupled with this revelation of the Divine heart the prophecy of the Messiah, who Himself was that Divine heart made flesh, and clothed with the features of humanity. Under Him shall the iniquity of the land be removed and the millennium shall dawn. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *Joshua the high priest* :—

I. A GREAT ADVERSARY OF GOD'S PEOPLE BROUGHT BEFORE US. It is strange how every good work meets with resistance in this world. He who would effect reforms, especially in religion, has to stand alone, at least, at first, with none enlightened or brave enough to give their support. "I am sometimes," wrote Robertson, "tempted to doubt whether any one who tries to open people's eyes in religion is to be reckoned as a sublime martyr or an egregious fool. The cross, or the cap and bells? Certainly, had it not been for One, I should say the cap and bells." Paul was accounted a fool for Christ. Wickliffe, Luther, and all great reformers have borne the same antagonism, and many prophets have cried out, "Who hath believed our report?"

"Truths would you teach, or save a sinking land?
All fear, none aid you, and few understand."

Even in such a work as the rebuilding of the temple it was so. And the Bible lifts the veil and lets us see that behind the human actors there are malignant forces at work,—a truth which, though mysterious, is sustained by history and experience. II. OPPOSED TO THE ADVERSARY IS THE FAITHFUL AND UNCHANGING GOD. While there is such conflict before truth and godliness prevail, yet the victory is sure. God's servants have to wrestle with principalities and powers, but greater is He who is for them than all who can rise up against them. 1. God's interposition is a restraining of evil. "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." He wounds the head of the dragon; puts checks upon the forces which threaten the Church and cause of Christ; turns the weapons forged against her into instruments of retribution to her enemies. 2. God encourages and aids His servants. Joshua is forgiven, clothed in festal garments, crowned with a clean mitre, assured of success, and promised future freedom of approach. There is enough of encouragement for those who take the Lord's side, if only they will use it. III. THE PROMISE OF A DIVINE SAVIOUR AND KING. Every book of the Old Testament, either by word or type, predicts a coming Christ who is now arrayed in the attributes of God, and now represented as a suffering but conquering Servant. It was a promise which had many partial fulfillments in God's anointed servants before He was incarnated in Jesus. But Jesus was the Christ of whom others were only figures and signs. He was the Branch extolled by Isaiah, and predicted by Zechariah. The vision still points to a future in which all prophetic hopes will be fulfilled. (*T. Vincent Tymms.*) *The hinderer rebuked* :—I. SATAN THE ADVERSARY OF THE AWAKENED SOUL. 1. The person who is resisted. This is the exact picture of an awakened soul: he comes and stands before Christ, clothed with his filthy garments, conscious that in ' himself he is lost, but resting on the Saviour's power and willingness to save. Wherever we see a soul living in sin and departure from God, there we may see the work of Satan. But wherever we behold a soul forsaking sin, and seeking to live a holy and consistent life, there we behold the work of the Holy Ghost. Consequently, when Satan rises up to resist the sinner he

rises up to resist the Holy Ghost. 2. The manner of Satan's resistance. There is allusion to the customs of ancient courts of justice, in which the accuser always stood at the right hand of the accused. How does he resist him?—(1) Before God, bringing forward his sins, and demanding the awful sentence of violated law. (2) Before himself; troubling the sinner's conscience, and striving, by every wile, to keep him from Christ, and by suggesting the greatness of our sins. (3) Satan keeps the sinner from the Saviour, by suggesting to him his unworthiness, and the uselessness of expecting mercy. 4. Satan hinders by suggesting that Christ is unwilling to save, since you have so often spurned and rejected Him. 5. And by suggesting that repentance is too late. II. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS THE REBUKER OF THE ADVERSARY. He is the high priest within the veil, the sinner's Advocate. Notice the manner in which Satan is silenced. Two ways—1. God's sovereignty. "The Lord hath chosen Jerusalem." God's choice is without repentance. 2. The soul Satan desired to have was already beyond his reach. "Plucked out of the fire." (*A. W. Snape, M.A.*) *The good man an interceder.*—Regarding the vision as a symbolical revelation of Joshua, in his representative aspect as the high priest of the Jewish people then existing, we feel authorised to infer from it two or three ideas touching the intercessory functions of good men while on earth. I. That the good man, in HIS INTERCESSORY FUNCTIONS ON EARTH, HAS TO BEAR BEFORE GOD THE MORAL IMPERFECTIONS OF HIS RACE. Joshua had on "filthy garments." This was evidently intended to represent the corrupt state of the Jewish people. The seventy years' captivity had not purified them; for now, instead of setting themselves to the work of rebuilding the house of the Lord, they were taken up with their own personal concerns, and excusing themselves by saying, "The time is not come." Here, then, is a characteristic feature of a good man's intercession while on earth. He has to bear the imperfections of his fellow-creatures before God. And does not this benevolent feeling lie at the basis of all moral excellence? There is not a saint nor an angel in heaven, we suppose, who does not desire the progress of kindred spirits; and what is this but intercession? But that which distinguishes the intercession on earth is, that we have to remember the moral corruption of our race. In heaven there is no defilement. All there are either clad in the robes of pristine holiness, or in garments washed and made white by the cleansing influences of redemptive love. But here all are in "filthy garments,"—garments stained by sensuality, worldliness, idolatry, falsehood, and dishonesty. Here the pious parent has to appear before God for sinful children, the minister for sinful people, and the pious sovereign for a sinful nation. II. That the good man in his intercessory function on earth HAS TO CONTEND WITH A MIGHTY SPIRITUAL ANTAGONIST. The existence of some mighty spirit or spirits, who are determined foes of truth, virtue, and the happiness of man, is rendered more than probable by a number of considerations, independent of the testimony of the Bible. Such, for example, as the general belief of the race, the conflicting phenomena of the moral world, the unaccountable opposite impressions of which all are conscious. Now, this enemy stood up to resist Joshua in his intercessions. And who will say that he is not now specially active with the good man when he draws near to God? In how many ways may he hinder our prayers? Sometimes he may suggest to us, even in the very time of our prayers, doubts as to the existence of God; we may be tempted to ask, Are we sure that there is a God? May not the idea be a delusion, for who has ever seen or heard Him? Or, granting His existence, he may suggest whether He would condescend to attend to the affairs of an individual. Or granting that He does exist, and that He attends to the prayers of some, Satan may suggest that I am too worthless for His notice, that it is presumptuous for me to address His awful Majesty; I am too great a sinner ever to be attended to. This, again, is a peculiarity of our intercessory functions on earth. In heaven, we presume, no enemy will intrude on our devotions, no Satan will stand up to resist as we appear before God. No power there to darken our faith with cloudy doubts, nor to cool the ardour of our devotions! III. That the good man, in his intercessory functions on earth, HAS THE SPECIAL ASSISTANCE OF A DIVINE HELPER. Whilst Satan stood up against Joshua there was One who stood up for him; the Lord—called also, "the Angel of the Lord." The scene illustrates two thoughts concerning the help rendered. 1. It was rendered sympathetically. "Is not this a brand?" &c. Consider the suffering to which they have been subject. Christ is full of sympathy. 2. The help was rendered effectually. The old "filthy garments," the emblem of impurity and

guilt, were taken away, and he was clothed in other garments; that is, their guilt was removed, they were restored from their degradation. And the "mitre," the emblem of dignity, was put on their head. They were raised once more to the glory of an independent nation. See (1) That if you would effectually help your race you must appear before God as an intercessor. Other means are to be employed. Promote general knowledge, advance the arts, help on commerce, above all, diffuse the Gospel of Jesus; but, in connection with all, you must appear before God as Joshua did for Israel. It is in this way you will change the world's "filthy garments," and get for it the "raiment" of purity and the "mitre" of honour. (2) That if you would effectually appear before God you must have the help of Jesus Christ. Ever as we attempt to approach the everlasting Father in devout thought and worship, do we not find some opposing force like this Satan, or rather, this Satan himself, "standing" at our right hand to "resist" us? What is to be done? Are we to retire?—cease all endeavour to commune with the loving parent of our souls? God forbid! Our doom is sealed in midnight and anguish should this be so. There is no happiness for any finite spirit but that which flows from intercourse with the eternal Fountain of good. Our only hope is in getting HIM—the great Mediator,—with us, who shall repel our foe, drive him from our presence with the words, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." (*Homilist.*) *By nature and by grace* :—The Jewish Church is represented by its head, the high priest Joshua; various objections are brought against it, but the Lord overrules them all, declaring His will, that it shall be restored to His favour, notwithstanding its past guilt or present degradation. This transaction represents to us the way in which every true child of God becomes a partaker of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. I. THE CHRISTIAN'S WOEFUL CONDITION BY NATURE. 1. He is exposed to condemnation. It is the condition of us all. Conscience acknowledges this. The Christian, in himself, has no reply to the accusations of Satan. 2. He is an object of God's abhorrence. Indicated in Joshua's filthy garments, offensive in the Lord's sight. 3. He is on the very brink of destruction. A brand actually in the fire. II HIS HAPPY ESTATE BY GRACE. In spite of every hindrance, Joshua is accepted—the Christian is saved. 1. His conviction is quashed. It is not urged that there are no grounds for condemning him. The charges are tacitly allowed to be true. But at the critical moment there is an arrest of judgment. The accuser is forbidden to proceed,—“the Lord rebuke thee.” There is no ground for this exemption, save the Lord's free and unmerited choice. 2. He is clothed afresh, through the merits of the Saviour, and with the graces of the Spirit of God. The filthy raiment of guilt is what we cannot lay aside, but Christ took it away. And He brought in an everlasting righteousness. 3. He is effectually saved from ruin. Inquire whether this all-important change has taken place in you. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *The Lord, the Defender of His people* :—Here is represented unto the prophet Christ, who is the Lord, taking the defence of Joshua, and by His intercession (acting as the angel of the Lord) pleading that Satan may be rebuked, confounded, and restrained in his malicious and cruel design to destroy them whom God had chosen, and them who, having been almost consumed in trouble, were miraculously plucked out and preserved from total ruin. Doctrine 1. Christ, in His office of mediation and intercession, is the strong refuge of the Church against Satan, who is sufficient to oppose all his machinations, being Himself God equal with the Father, zealous for and affectionate to His people and their weal, and the Father being engaged to help Him and His by virtue of the covenant. 2. Albeit the ground of Satan's accusation of the Lord's people before God, and in their own consciences, may be true and just, yet his insatiable and cruel malice in prosecuting that controversy to their destruction, and casting out of God's favour, is so far from being Christ's allowance, that it is hateful unto Him, and will be effectually suppressed by Him. This is imported in His intercession—“The Lord rebuke thee,” or restrain thy malice, and make void thy intention. 3. The Lord's election of and free love toward His people is that whereby they are allowed to answer Satan's temptations, which otherwise might be heavy upon them. And where the Lord hath chosen and purposed to do good unto a people He will also have a care of their ministers for their sake. This we are taught from Christ's first reason of intercession—“The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee.” God having chosen them, Satan's bill (how true soever) could not be heard to destroy them, or to reject Joshua their minister. 4. Though the people of God may be cast into painful and hard

trouble, and may be kept in it till it come to some extremity that they may be purged, yet shall they certainly be rescued and brought out again; for so was it with Joshua, and this remnant, "a brand plucked out of the fire," a stick half burnt, and yet thought worth the pulling out. 5. As the former afflictions of the Lord's people do so endear them to Christ's heart that He will not hear Satan's accusations, so His eminent appearing for them in trouble is a pledge that He will not destroy them, but perfect His work notwithstanding Satan's machinations; or this is the force of the second reason of Christ's intercession, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" As if He had said,—Should My anger smoke yet against My people who are already almost consumed by it, and whereof they yet bear the marks? Should I not make an end of pleading with frail flesh? And shall I prove so foolish a builder as when I have appeared, in bringing them out of consuming trouble, giving them a remnant to escape, I should again forsake them, and let all My pains be in vain? (*George Hutcheson.*) *Joshua the high priest*:—Sin in act or in heart takes all the meaning and joy out of God's richest promises and gifts. So it prevented the Israelites from appropriating the former gracious words until its baleful influence was removed by the fourth vision of our lesson. It is a vision of free forgiveness for the nation. Joshua, the high priest, represents Jerusalem and the people. His filthy garments are symbols of their sins, and his clean raiment is a pledge of their pardon. I. THE ADVERSARY. Who was the great opponent of those afflicted Hebrews? Was it the nations around? Or was God Himself against them? The vision reveals their true enemy. It was neither of these, but the great adversary of souls; he who tempted Christ, the prince of darkness. The foe of man is Satan, not man; much less God, who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to save it. The very names of this enemy betray his character. The Hebrew word Satan means "adversary." And here, exemplifying his name, he is standing at Joshua's right hand "to be his adversary." When did he ever do a deed or suggest a thought really to help or bless a man? The assaults of Satan are well timed. It was when Joshua stood in foul raiment, symbol of the moral uncleanness of the people, and when the bright hopes of the returning exiles were fading away, that Satan seized the opportunity to accomplish their ruin. The days of sin, failure, despair find him at hand to do his fatal work. God's past dealings with us are a pledge of the future, an assurance of final victory. II. PARDON. How vivid and repugnant sin must have become under such a symbol. The garments were not coarse, or old, or worn and soiled with use, but filthy. By such striking symbolism God taught His chosen people to hate sin. This was no euphemistic language softening and covering the wrong-doing, but rather a proclamation of it. Sin masked under the forms of fashion or elegance is doubly dangerous. With garments so filthy, but one thing can be done. They cannot be covered up. The blackest spots cannot be sponged off—as men try to do with their guilt; for every thread of the clothing is defiled. Moreover, the wretched man seems powerless to remove the unclean garments. In fact, they are part of him, they are his life, his character, himself. God must work the deed which shall free him from the burden of his sins. "Take away the filthy garments and clothe him in fair raiment," "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." III. SUBSEQUENT LIFE. Pardon was never intended to be the end of effort or of progress. Accordingly, the Angel of Jehovah does not pardon Joshua and dismiss him; but rather pardons and then hastens to declare solemnly: "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge," then thou shalt have the honour of priesthood, with its authority and its free access into God's presence. After pardon comes obedience. The order cannot be reversed. Joshua's previous efforts to obey were vain. Only with the consciousness of forgiveness can there be full and unconstrained obedience. But after one is pardoned, walking in God's ways is the condition of further blessing. Not that God who has forgiven once is unwilling to forgive again. He is love, and His mercies are everlasting. But a man cannot wilfully and constantly transgress God's law, and continually and lightly seek forgiveness. Upon the high priest there was an especial obligation to careful obedience. He was in a sense God's representative. His office carried with it wide influence for good or evil. Before God, indeed, all are under the same supreme law of right. But towards their fellowmen, some are under heavier obligations than others. The obligation rests most heavily on the representative of God, the teacher or preacher whose influence is wider than that of one in a humbler sphere, and whose opportunity to help and guide is greater. Our opportunity to serve man is the

measure of our responsibility to man. A larger promise limited to no man or family is now introduced by the emphatic words, "Hear now, . . . for behold." It is an old promise renewed. From earliest ages the hopes of all godly Jews had centred about one dim future figure, ever expected, ever receding. Moses spoke of Him as a prophet, the highest ideal in his mind. David sang of Him as a righteous king, the loftiest conception of man in that age. The coming One was pictured as the servant of Jehovah, and as a sprout growing up out of dry ground from the stump of the fallen house of David. But still He was the hope of Israel. The lowly names by which He was known became transformed into titles of honour and glory. "Behold I will bring forth My servant, the Branch." That promise has been fulfilled to us. And when we, like Zechariah, would urge as a motive for action God's greatest gift, we must speak of that same Servant, of His life and death and resurrection. Wonderful power in human life! His name brought fresh zeal and courage into the feeble remnant under Joshua and Zerubbabel twenty-five hundred years ago. It has never lost its power. This great promise of the Branch, pledge of the continued care and favour of Jehovah, is naturally accompanied by more definite promises of immediate help. The seven eyes of Jehovah, which run to and fro through the whole earth and are the symbol of perfect watchfulness, shall be directed to each stone of the temple now building under great difficulties. More than that, He will "engrave the graving thereof." He will give the stone its beauty. He will both watch and work with His people. Man's work is ever incomplete. In spiritual matters, no less than in temporal, our work needs and certainly receives its vitalising and beautifying power from Him who transforms the elements into flower and fruit. Peace and prosperity complete the picture of the future of the forgiven people. Every one shall call his neighbour to come and sit under his fig-tree. Righteousness and peace with God were doubtless included in this favourite Hebrew thought, but temporal peace, with all its glorious blessings, was the chief element in the anticipated reign of the Messiah. Some of the loftiest conceptions of the Jewish religion are found in these verses. Each is a shadow of a vastly greater and more inspiring truth which is familiar to the Christian. (*G. R. Hovey, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?—*A firebrand*:—The fire meant here is the fire of sin. Sin is a fire which destroys the comfort of mankind here, and all the joy of mankind hereafter. Nothing can be more suitable to burn in a fire than a "brand." It is not a branch just taken from the tree, fresh and full of sap; it is a brand—dry, sere timber, fit for the burning. And what does this indicate but man's natural heart, which is so congenial to the fire of sin? As the firebrand fits with fire, so does the sinner fit in with sin. We read of a brand "in the fire." Not lying on a heap, but burning and blazing in the fire. Does not this portray our condition? We began very early. Disobedience to parents, angry tempers, petty falsehoods,—these were the first catchings on fire of the brand. We have blazed away merrily since then. What with the lusts of the flesh, or pride, or unbelief, or some other form of departing from the living God, how many are like the firebrand, blazing and flashing in the flame! There is, however, a fair side to the picture. We have here a "brand plucked out of the fire." Sinners these, who though they have still within them the propensity to sin, are no longer in the fire of sin. They have been taken away from it. They sin through infirmity, but wilful sin they do not commit. The fire that once burned within them has been quenched. They are rescued from that fire which once threatened their everlasting destruction. They are brands still; but brands no longer in the fire. The force of the passage seems to lie in the words, "plucked out of." The Christian does not escape by his own free will. He is plucked out of his peril. To be plucked out there needs a hand quick to rescue. Every believer in the Lord Jesus is a trophy of the strength as well as of the mercy of God. The question of the text will bear three renderings. I. THE SENSE OF WONDERMENT. "Is not this," &c. The words are spoken of Joshua, the high priest. There was such astonishment at his preservation that, with hands uplifted, the question was asked, "Is not this man just like a firebrand snatched from among the glowing coals?" This marvel is not confined to Joshua. Was there ever a man saved by grace who was not a wonder? Out of the state of our natural depravity we have been plucked, so that every man who is delivered from its sway may well say,— "Am not I a brand plucked out of the fire?" Each Christian knowing his own heart, and having a special acquaint-

ance with his own peculiar setting sin, feels as if the conquest of his own sin by the grace of God were a more illustrious trophy of that grace than the conquest of a thousand others. There are instances so uncommon that they excite surprise in the minds of all who hear. In the cases of extraordinary conversion, one of the first is the salvation of the extremely aged. Exceptional, too, is the conversion of people who have been accustomed to hear the Gospel from their youth up, who, though not perhaps absolutely aged, have nevertheless been receiving Gospel privileges without any result. Over in the Bankside, I am told, when a man is first put inside a boiler, while the rivets are being fastened, he cannot stop long, the noise is so dreadful, but after a time the boiler-maker gets so used to the horrible din that he can almost go to sleep inside. And so it really is under any ministry where the people get Gospel-hardened. There have been cases of gross sinners in which this marvel has been still more exciting. Can we pass over the case of some who have given themselves up to sin, to work it with greediness? There is a wonder which I do see, but not often. It is when a self-righteous religious man gets saved. II. TAKE THE TEXT BY WAY OF INQUIRY OR HOPE. When a sinner's eye is suffused with tears, and a sigh breaks forth, "Alas! woe is me!" you may say, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" for the tear of sorrow for sin is a blessed omen of mercy's dawning. The sigh of penitence and the prayer of the seeking are evidences of grace. When the poor soul at last, driven by necessity, throws itself flat at the foot of the Cross, and rests its hope wholly and alone on Jesus, then we may say of it, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" And when, in the midst of many a conflict and soul struggle, the heart still flings away its idols, and hopes to love Christ, and vows in His strength to be devoted to His service, we may say again with pleasure, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" I would invite you to think over the signs of grace, and if you see them in yourselves you may be able to answer this question with joy III. AND WHAT A QUESTION OF DEFIANCE THIS IS. Do you not catch the idea of the text? There stood Joshua, there stood the angel of the Lord, and here stood the adversary. The angel, in effect, replies to the adversary: "If God has plucked him out of the fire, you can never put him in again." It is a defiance full of majesty and grandeur. It reflects a gorgeous lustre on the past. If God has chosen him, dost thou think to undo the Divine decree? God hath snatched him from the fire, determined to save him. God has done that which is the earnest and the token of his perfect safety. Then, beloved in Christ, dread not all the temptations that may attack you. God will not leave His purpose half accomplished. He will not be disappointed. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The rescued brand*.—This is the Divine description of a justified and converted man. The words present at once to our view the sinner's worthless character by nature, his dangerous and dreadful condition while in this natural state, and the fulness of unmerited grace and love of which he has been made the subject. Joshua was here the representative of all the true people of God. Like him, they are all "brands plucked out of the fire." Against them all the same power of Satan is employed to resist them. In behalf of them all the same boundless grace is exercised on the part of the Lord God. The rescued brand forms the subject of our discourse. 1. How unprofitable and worthless in himself. A brand! Useless for any purposes of man; having no value annexed to it in his estimation. Is not every unrenewed sinner precisely this in the sight of God? As a fallen creature man cannot be profitable in the eye of God. No creature can ever render anything to the Creator which shall merit a continuance of blessings bestowed by Him. 2. How dangerous the condition in which this brand was found. The fire from which he was plucked refers to those everlasting burnings which are his heritage in a world of recompense. All earthly woes are temporary. These sorrows are unchangeable and eternal. Under this tremendous load the unconverted sinner now lies, condemned and perishing, as a brand burning in the fire. The wrath of God abideth on him. None can appreciate the dangers of an unconverted soul, but they who have been plucked from the fires in which it is still consuming. 3. How glorious and worthy of praise is that Divine power which can pluck this brand from the fire, and transform it into an eternal monument of love, and a vessel of everlasting holiness! In the midst of the ruin of the world, and the guilt of man, God proposes to the ungodly a reconciliation to Himself. 4. How infinite is the extent of that love, of which this brand is the object! The foundation of all our hope is, that God's love is infinite and free. His love can pardon the greatest and most multiplied

transgressions. 5. How precious is the Christian's ground of hope, the glorious union of Divine power and Divine love, in the work of his salvation! The same hand which plucked us from the fire will carry us to the temple. The man who has found peace with God has no enemy in the universe to fear. 6. How inestimable is this privilege of being the objects of God's unchangeable love! (*S. H. Tynng, D.D.*)

Danger and deliverance:—I. THE DANGER. The brand is—1. Fit for the fire. 2. Scorched by the fire. 3. Destined to the fire. 4. Unable to deliver itself from the fire. II. THE DELIVERANCE. 1. Its author. 2. Its completeness. 3. Its permanence. 4. Its benefits. III. THE EXCLAMATION. 1. With regard to the speaker, it expresses triumph. 2. With regard to the enemy of souls, it hurls defiance. 3. With regard to the spectators, it challenges admiration. 4. With regard to the person delivered from the danger, it demands gratitude. (*G. Brooks.*)

A suggestive question:—Under the form of an interrogation, the language of the text is capable of being differently understood. 1. It may be considered as conveying a seasonable reproof to an insulting enemy. It is as if God said, Amidst all his imperfections and failings, thou hast nothing to do with him. I claim a property in him, and will assert it. 2. As expressive of exultation and triumph. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" I rejoice in him as such. He is a pattern of My long-suffering, a monument of My grace. 3. The expression carries with it the force of an affirmation. It is a brand plucked out of the fire. I. TO WHOM MAY THIS LANGUAGE BE APPLIED? To all who are finally saved. There are some to whom it is more immediately applicable. 1. Such as great and heinous transgressions, when converted from the error of their way and turned effectually to God. 2. Old and accustomed sinners may be viewed in the same light, when they are brought to repentance and to believe in Jesus. 3. There are some whose cases were despaired of by their friends. 4. Pardoning mercy has in some instances followed upon an overwhelming sense of guilt and distressing apprehensions of Divine wrath. II. NOTICE THE PROPRIETY OF THE DESCRIPTION. 1. A brand plucked out of the fire was once a brand fit for the fire. 2. A brand plucked out of the fire was very near being consumed. 3. A brand plucked out of the fire retains some evidence of the dangerous situation. 4. The brand plucked out of the fire is no way instrumental to its own deliverance. There it must lie and burn if some kind hand do not snatch it thence. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

The sinner rescued from perdition:—Reverse this question, and ask, Is this a brand plucked out of the fire? The text was a sort of challenge to Satan to deny the riches of Divine grace in the salvation of the Israelitish Church, now rescued from the furnace of Babylon. It was a question put concerning them figuratively, for the whole Church of Jesus Christ, and for every individual member of it. Bring the question home, "Am I a brand plucked out of the burning?" Consider the importance of being able to come to a clear decision upon this point. I. YOUR DANGER AS SINNERS. A state of sin is a state of imminent danger. 1. Sin is destroying your bodies, and will at last destroy your souls. 2. Every sinner is in danger of the law of God. 3. The terrors of a guilty conscience are a fire. II. THE WONDROUS DELIVERANCE EFFECTED. 1. The sinner is delivered by Divine grace from that dreadful sentence, which is literally destruction begun in the heart. 2. The deliverance signifies to be rescued from the raging violence, the destructive power of sin in our heart. 3. This deliverance signifies to be rescued from the burning stings of inward guilt. III. THE ACT OF DELIVERANCE. "Plucked out." 1. Here is exhibited God's own sovereign will and purpose. 2. The act of rescue points to the direct personal interposition of the Saviour. 3. The deliverance is to be viewed in its individual application by the Holy Spirit. IV. THE DIFFERENT EMOTIONS THIS DIVINE AND MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE SHOULD EXCITE. 1. Exultation. Admire the grace of God in your salvation. 2. Confidence. Learn to trust both for yourselves and for others. What cannot Divine grace do! (*The Evangelist.*)

The brand plucked out of the fire:—It is a "brand,"—nothing better; dry, sapless, lifeless, profitless; and such is man. If a brand and lifeless, then powerless. Can a brand quicken itself to life? How can it live? It has lost the principle of life. All our efforts to restore ourselves to the dignity we have lost, and to the state from which we are fallen, are utterly abortive. How little men know their spiritual powerlessness, because they will not make trial of it. But the brand is also worthless; it is only fit to be cast into the fire; it has no utility. And such is man. It may seem a hard thing, but God says it, that the natural man is at best enmity against God. And if enmity against God, is not his moral nature loathsome? It is a brand "out of

the fire"; it is black and scorched. So is every sinful son of man. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. A "brand" is fitted for the flames. It is combustible; it is dried up, so as to be ready to ignite into flame. And so sin assimilates man to hell, makes him more susceptible of "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." The "brand" is already scorched in the fire. It has been in the fire; it has been "plucked out of the fire." What is hell? Sin unmitigated, unabated by the fear of God, and unassuaged by any kindlier feeling or appliance, sin consummated, sin left to itself. Leave a man to himself, and he needs no other hell. But there is hope for this brand. It is "plucked out of the fire." Was it not grace, sovereign grace that rescued it? What is there in a brand that God should expect anything from it in return? Yet it is taken out of the fire that it might be transformed into a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. What a blessed change passes on the sinner whom God delivers! (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*) *A rescued brand*:—Here Satan is presented to our view as the accuser of the brethren. He does his work in the court of conscience; at the bar of public opinion; and before the Divine Judge. Here Satan accused Joshua to one who was his Advocate as well as his Judge. Christ rebukes Satan; alleges God's election; and points to Joshua as a trophy of power, guided by sovereign mercy. I. A VIVID AND IMPRESSIVE DESCRIPTION OF JOSHUA'S ORIGINAL CHARACTER AS A SINNER. "A brand." A piece of wood which has been purposely prepared for burning. A sinner, as a brand, is one in every way fitted for destruction. The wicked have a suitability to the place and the experience assigned to them by God. There is an adaptation of desert, and of character. Their experience results from their character. They have in themselves the causes of misery—a deranged system. They war with everything, and therefore are warred against by everything.

II. AN ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION, UNDER LAW, AND IN ACTUAL EXPERIENCE, IN WHICH JOSHUA HAD BEEN. "In the fire." 1. The brand is one plucked out of the fire, then it must have been in it. 2. By fire, understand the destruction and misery which are the fruit of sin. 3. The sinner is already under condemnation; spiritually dead; he feels the elements of misery in his breast. He feels the oppressiveness of the thought of God. He draws pain from without. He already suffers as a sinner. III. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARACTER WHICH JOSHUA NOW SUSTAINED. "A brand plucked out of the fire." Such a brand has on it the marks of burning. The believer retains marks of his once lost condition. In his conscience, which still accuses. In his heart, where are the remains of spiritual derangement and death. In his body, which is mortally affected. In his moral character, which is disfigured. In his very righteousness, which is imputed. In his life, which is derived. Brands plucked from the burning shall be the eternal character of believers. IV. THE AGENCY THROUGH WHICH JOSHUA WAS DELIVERED. It was not by himself. The brand retains the burning flame. Salvation is wholly of God—of grace: in its origin; its purchaser; its application. Man takes offence at this, being self-righteous. The believer rejoices in this. God has thus the glory of salvation. V. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD RESCUED JOSHUA. He plucked him out of the fire. Indicative of haste—we thus rescue a precious manuscript, accidentally thrown into the fire. God is in haste, for man's guilt is increasing; his depravity is deepening; he is descending with time's flight; his fate is awful! (*James Stewart.*) *A brand plucked out of the fire*:—Satan is represented in the context as an accuser of his brethren. He brings serious charges against Joshua, the high priest. He never committed a greater folly. The Lord never fails to come to the defence of the redeemed. The Lord represents Joshua as a trophy of sovereign grace. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" I. IF THIS FIGURE MEANS ANYTHING, IT MEANS THAT UNSAVED SINNERS ARE IN THE FIRE. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" We are accustomed to think of hell as something in the future. There is a sense in which this is true, but it is not all the truth. It is not at death that bad men enter into hell; they are there already. II. IF THIS IMAGERY MEANS ANYTHING, IT MEANS THAT UNSAVED SINNERS HAVE A NATURAL AFFINITY FOR THE FLAME THAT CONSUMES THEM. A brand is a piece of wood that readily catches fire. The sinner is meet for destruction. See how eagerly men yield themselves to the sins which consume them. III. IF THIS IMAGERY MEANS ANYTHING, IT MEANS THAT RESCUE FROM THE DEVOURING ELEMENT IS ONLY POSSIBLE BY DIVINE INTERPOSITION—"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" A brand in the fire will remain there until it is utterly consumed unless it is taken out. Salvation is a Divine act.

“By grace are ye saved.” IV. IF THIS IMAGERY MEANS ANYTHING, IT MEANS THAT SAVED SINNERS RETAIN THE MARKS OF THE BURNING. Forgiven, saved, but scarred. Even in heaven there will be evidences of the flame. V. IF THIS IMAGERY MEANS ANYTHING, IT MEANS THAT DELAY IN THE MATTER OF RESCUE IS INFINITELY PERILOUS. Plucked out of the fire. There is no estimating the possibility of sin. There is enough latent fire in any unregenerate heart to effect its ruin. The flame which is smouldering in the concealed places of human life may be even more ominous than that which blazes forth under the open heavens. These facts should have a twofold influence. 1. They should serve to awaken alarm in the unsaved, and arouse the saved to the intensest solicitude and zeal for their rescue. The human brand is not a dead piece of wood. He has reason, judgment, sensibility, will. He needs to be made to realise his peril. 2. There is no time for dallying. The service is urgent. (*B. D. Thomas.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **Take away the filthy garments from him.**—*Removal of guilt*:—Zechariah was shown the state and condition of God’s Church in his day, and the change wrought upon that Church; a change that must be wrought on all that belong to the Lord God Almighty, and which is wrought by Divine power and grace alone. Here is a scenic representation of Gospel truth. “Joshua was clothed in filthy garments.” Why did he so appear, and in such a presence? That his condition, and yours, and mine, in the presence of a Holy God, may be likened to filthy, polluted, unclean, defiled garments. “Satan stood at his right hand to resist him.” This alludes to the prevailing custom of placing an accused person before a bar of justice, and bringing his accuser upon his right hand to prefer the charge against him. Satan is the “accuser of the brethren.” Having rebuked Satan, our Advocate addresses Himself to them that stood by. “Take away the filthy garments from him.” This is the Old Testament description of the removal of guilt, the manifestation of salvation by grace. We must in this manner go to God in our filthy garments. Wait not to try to change your heart, as you would your raiment. Prayer is necessary, but prayer is no qualification; repentance is necessary, but repentance does not qualify for God’s mercy. Come, poor self-condemned sinner, just as you are. The filthy garment is removed from every one whose heart is moved by God’s grace, though he know it not. What is represented by the change of raiment? The clothing with righteousness of our blessed Redeemer. The righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is a robe long enough to cover the sinner completely, it is as broad as the law of God; those that are enrobed in it need fear no stormy blast, either through their journey, or at their journey’s end. . . . There is nothing to be compared in importance, to us all, with the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the full, perfect, and complete Saviour of our souls. (*A. Hewlett, M.A.*) So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments.—*The mitre of priesthood*:—This book was written in the midst of a process of reconstruction. The people, or at least a handful of the people of Israel, had come back from Babylon to a ruined city, but by the guidance and leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, and those prophets of God, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the little handful or remnant of the people commenced to reconstruct their state, their city, and temple. It was of little use to build the temple while the priesthood was so degraded as Malachi tells us it was. The priests offered upon the altar of God contemptible sacrifices—they were content to bring to it the halt, the lame, the blind, such as they would not bring to their governor. They looked upon the whole service they rendered as hardly worth their care and energy, so ill were they repaid. You will notice at the end of the chapter we read that Joshua and his fellows were men for a sign, that is, they were types of the spiritual priesthood of the present time. We may not exercise our priestly office any more than we exercise our royal prerogative; yet in God’s sight we have a spiritual faculty of standing between God and man, speaking to God for man and to man for God. Is it not a fact that there are men and women here who are priests, but they need to be reconstructed, who are called to exercise this spiritual prerogative, but they have not a fair mitre upon their head? “Let them set a fair mitre upon his head.” I. We consider **THE PERSONS THUS ADORNED**, lest any here might suppose that they could not claim the fair mitre. You will see it is Joshua who receives the fair mitre, the person who at first stands before us clothed with filthy garments. Filthy garments always indicate some slur upon the character, some stain on the white robe of the dress of the soul. It may be that you are sensible

that your robe is soiled, and as you come to the searching light of God's angel—the angel of God's presence—you are more than ever conscious of the wrinkles in your white robe. When you first came to the Cross of Christ you washed your robes and made them white in His blood, but you have failed to keep them so. The father sits down at the family altar, takes the old Bible and turns over its leaves, but all the time that he essays to act as priest of the family he is conscious that during the past twenty-four hours he has soiled his garments by impure thoughts or wrong imaginations. It may be that some young man here, who, indeed, is a true child of God, has allowed the sin of foul impurity, of unclean desire, to stain his robes; some housewife here has yielded to that to-day which soils her garments. But even you, in your filthy garment, may yet by the grace of God receive the fillet, the mitre. You will notice not only was Joshua clothed with these filthy garments, but he was the object of Satan's accusation; Satan stood beside and indicated his disgrace. Do you not suppose the great accuser still does this? When just now you bowed in prayer and your thoughts were wandering to your pleasure or business, Satan saw it and said, "Christ, do you notice there is not one in all those people truly in prayer?" And when your minister speaks and his motives are vanity or pride, again the evil spirit stands to accuse us; he says to Christ, "Here is Thy chosen servant, but it would be better for me to cast him out of Thy hand and find another to do Thy work better." And so there is never a negligence, a sin, or a fault but what Satan catches it and casts it upon Christ, because he can wound Christ best by showing up our filth and sin. You will notice also that Joshua was like a charred brand: you know how a piece of wood put in the fire will soon blacken and be consumed; a precious letter, a bank-note, or cheque, by mistake has been taken by your servant to your waste-paper basket and put into the furnace, and when taken out it is so blackened, yellow, or charred, as to be almost undecipherable; and I suppose I am speaking to plenty of men here who have the marks of fire upon them. But though charred as you are, He will pluck you from the burning, and is prepared this very night to adorn your brow with this fillet, this mitre of His Holy Spirit which will equip you to exercise your power as a priest of God. II. I ought to mark THE PREPARATORY PROCESS, because one has often found, in talking to people about the blessed Holy Spirit, that there has not been any deep preparatory previous work, and it is quite impossible for you to receive the appointing of the Holy Ghost unless you have submitted yourself to the previous work of that same Spirit. Whilst the Holy Spirit of Pentecost is more especially the Spirit of power, He is also the Spirit of cleansing, purification, and sanctification. There is a previous process, but with God that process need not take long. This process is indicated in the vision thus: "He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." And we are told at the close of the chapter that God can put away the iniquity of man in a single day. Imagine all the sin rising over England, Scotland, and Wales to-day; this little island surrounded by our four seas; imagine and remember God says He can put away the sin of a land in one day, and that day was when Jesus died. If the Lord during His three hours' crucifixion was able to expiate and put away the sin of the world, how long will it take for Him to expiate the sin which is already expiated? Will you allow Him now, the great High Priest, to put away your filthy garments, to cause your guilt to leave you, and to give you instead the sense of God's forgiveness? That is not all. The "garment," if you compare it with the epistles especially, stands more for habit of life, and when Paul talks about garments he means divesting the life of certain evil habits which have too long clung to it. The word "habit" is used for an article of ladies' dress, and the habit is the dress of the soul that clings to it, and there must come a moment in a man's life when he stands before the angel of God, when certain habits which he once permitted are shown to be altogether unworthy of his Christian character, and he puts off the works of the flesh. You see things in a different light. I feel that the man who does not drop habit after habit, indulgence after indulgence, is not growing; just as a tree may tell us its age by the rings of wood, so we can mark the growth of a man by what he has dropped. I am not here to tell you what to give up, it is not my purpose to add commandments to the decalogue, but to say that a man's growth is determined by what he is prepared to renounce. He does not think it hard to renounce them, because he is receiving so much more; he drops the less to take the better. Just as when we come to the moment of death I do not suppose we shall think

about dying, because the radiant light of that world beyond will attract us, and reaching out our two hands towards it, before we know we have died, we shall have passed into heaven. So now we are attracted always by the heavenly vision. O Christ, cause these habits, associations, indulgences, which have been rotting our heart and holding us back, cause these things to pass. Then there is a change of raiment: you must put on the Lord Jesus; make no provision for the flesh, but put on the perfect character of Jesus Christ. This is the deep truth that we do not all remember, I think; we are more anxious for the negative than the positive; more taken up with what we give up than with what we take on. You see here is Joshua: when I began to speak, he stood there clothed with soiled garments, and Satan stands beside him; but the scene is altered now, the filthy garments have been dropped. He has been bathed in water, and he is clothed with fair and beautiful robes, the emblem of some soul here. Satan has vanished, there is no further record of his accusing Joshua, because Christ had rebuked him; and when Christ throws the agis of His protection round a soul, then Satan sneaks away. Christ has said, "I have chosen this man, plucked him as a brand from the fire, and am not likely to cast him back. Avaunt." And ashamed and disappointed he sneaks away. And so the soul that stood ashamed and downcast, knowing every sneer of the devil was true, now looks into the face of the blessed Angel—Christ—and says, "O Advocate, Priest of God, O most blessed lover of my soul, what can I render to Thee for Thine advocacy and intercession, by virtue of which the very tempter is vanquished?"

III. Still, though Satan is gone, Joshua wants the crown of the priesthood, the insignia, THE MITRE OF THE PRIESTHOOD. The mitre, you know, as worn by the bishop, is golden. It is an emblem of the ancient idea of the cloven tongues of fire, but is a faint rendering of the Greek, for on the day of Pentecost the fire came as a glow of light or fire into the room, and then there was distributed a flame upon each meekly bowed head. But still the mitre is the emblem of the ancient thought. The mitre, fillet, or turban, if you compare this with Leviticus and Numbers, and these again with the epistles, stands without doubt for the anointing of the Holy Spirit, not for the bishop alone, but for every one of us. You cannot do priestly work until you have got it; you cannot plead with God as intercessor, and cannot speak to men with power until you have got your fair mitre. You may have your clean robe, but if you have no mitre, you are unable to act as priest. The Lord Jesus for thirty years had a stainless robe of purity and beauty, and as He walked on the hills round Nazareth in intercourse with His Father, there was in Him neither spot nor blemish; yet I think I shall be within the confines of preaching the Word of God when I say that in a sense our Lord had not the fair mitre upon His head until He went down into the Jordan and was baptized, thus identifying Himself with man; then having fulfilled all righteousness, as He came up out of the water, beneath that blue sky, the Spirit of God, in the fitting emblem of a dove's wing, came upon Him, and the fair mitre abode upon His head. He went forth into Galilee and said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." So when He left the Church of God He blessed them and said in effect, "Peter, John, and the rest of you, tarry in Jerusalem until you get your fair mitre"; and though they have been cleansed with fellowship with Him, and by His most precious blood, they waited together in the upper room, until that mystic sign to which I have alluded—the fair mitre—was put upon the head of one hundred and twenty, and upon many since then. Many a soul I have had to do with has spent long years with white robes, but without the fair mitre. You must have the anointing power of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost if you are to do the Church's work in the world. It is noticeable that Zechariah said, "Let them set a fair mitre upon his head." Zechariah, you have no right to say that—an angel should do it; you are a prophet, and Joshua is a priest, and there used to be antagonism between the prophets and the priesthood; but Zechariah said, "Let them put a fair mitre upon his head," and they did. The prophet and priest are united by the Holy Ghost. How can you have it? Not by agonising, not by wrestling and struggling, but by first receiving, because Jesus Christ, the angel of Jehovah, waits to give it. There is nothing He wants more to give you than this. You ask me how you know when you have got it? I will tell you. You receive it by faith; you received forgiveness without emotion; you must not gauge your reception by emotion, or you will be disappointed: emotion must not be trusted. You receive it by faith; you may receive it now, at any moment. The indication you have

got it is not emotion : it is two things. First, a new sense of the sweetness of the presence of Jesus ; for the Holy Spirit never reveals Himself, but always reveals Christ. Secondly, a quiet power over other men. These are "men for a sign," and I close with one most precious promise : "Hear now, O Joshua, the high priest, if thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge"—I give this as a parting message,—"then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I will give thee places of access among these that stand by." This is not got by wrestling, but by trusting ; so will you be brought within the inner circle of Christ's presence. "Let them set a fair mitre upon his head." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 6, 7. The Angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua.—*A charge to young ministers* :—I. WHAT THE GREAT HEAD OF THE CHURCH REQUIRES OF YOU.

1. Personal piety. "Walk in My ways." This phrase denotes the whole of practical and experimental godliness. There can be no true piety without a previous scriptural conversion, a moral, universal, spiritual change ; a change of the principles, of the mind, of the affections, of the heart, of the conduct, and of the life, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and obtained by faith in Christ Jesus. Every unconverted minister is an intruder into the sacred office. The dignity of your office does not discharge you from all the obligations to personal holiness ; but it binds those obligations upon you with superadded weight and force. Then be men of integrity. Cultivate a devotional spirit. Be clothed with humility. Be grave and serious. Be cheerful, but take care that cheerfulness does not degenerate into levity. The piety of some ministers has serious blemishes, against which you will do well to guard yourselves. Such as envy, which is the vice of little minds. Or a disposition to retail slanders. In order to maintain your personal piety it will be necessary for you every day to renew your acts of dedication to God. 2. A faithful discharge of your ministerial and pastoral functions. Your office may be called "the charge of the Lord," because you received it from Him, and are accountable to Him for the discharge of its functions. In order to keep this charge, you should well understand its nature. It is Christian theology which you have to teach to mankind ; and you cannot teach it to others unless you well understand it yourselves. It is the well-informed, well-instructed divine who alone can adorn the sacred profession and edify the Church of Jesus Christ. Avoid a controversial style of preaching, for that is generally unprofitable, and unpopular too. You should be faithful, zealous, and laborious preachers, ever ready to declare "the whole counsel of God." 3. In this charge is implied the faithful performance of pastoral duties. The exercise of a pure discipline over the societies (Churches) entrusted to your care. A Church without discipline is like a garden without a fence. The due administration of pastoral advice and counsel is another of our duties. II. THE IMPORT OF THOSE PROMISES MADE TO YOU. Dignity and authority in the Church of God is here promised to faithful ministers. Continuance in office is another promise. And it is further promised that they shall at length be translated to nobler stations in the heavenly world, where they shall become companions of angels. Allow me to charge you then to give attention to all these things. I have not exhorted you to pursue unattainable objects ; they are all well within your reach. Redeem the time. And "be thou faithful unto death." (*Edward Grindrod.*) *God's promise to Joshua* :—The design of God's promises is to quicken us to diligence in the work which He hath given us to do. I. WHAT IS REQUIRED OF JOSHUA ; or how he was to behave. He was to "walk in God's ways, and keep His charge" ; which signifies a general care to be religious himself, and a faithful performance of the duties of his particular station. II. WHAT IS PROMISED TO JOSHUA IN CONSEQUENCE OF SO DOING. 1. That he should be continued in his office. 2. At length he should be preferred to a nobler station, in which he should be the companion of angels. It does not mean that angels should guard and preserve him in all his goings and undertakings. The most natural and easy sense of the words is, that they refer to a future state, and mean that Joshua should at length be joined to the angels in heaven. Most of the Jewish writers paraphrase thus, "I will raise thee from the dead, and place thee among the seraphims." This is a most delightful and instructive idea of the heavenly world—walking among the angels. Heaven is the stated abode of these glorious, wise, and happy spirits, who are superior to men ; therefore they are called "the angels of God in heaven." God intends that all His faithful servants on earth should at length dwell and walk with them. Reflect what an honour

and happiness this will be. Consider what excellent beings they are in themselves. And consider them as those who have been ministers of God to the world, the Church, and ourselves. Application—(1) Reflect, for our caution, on the counterpart of this, or the future state of those who forsake the ways of God. (2) Let us be excited to the duties required in the text, by the gracious promise contained in it. (*Job Orton.*) *Cleansing, obedience, service.*—Let the Christian notice well God's order in these verses. It is cleansing first, then obedience, next service. All through the Bible the cleansing is with a view to the other two; and if these two fail to be seen in the Christian's character he will lose the first, for all practical purposes. A cleansed soul will be a holy soul. A cleansed soul will be an obedient one, and will love to serve. Then, Christian, "work out your own salvation" by putting no hindrance in the way of "God working within you both to will and do." Live upon Christ, and let nothing come between your continued eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man. This is living upon Christ; and if your soul lacks it your obedience and your service will cease. The measure of blessing to another's soul will be the measure of Christ living in your own; and the measure of Christ living in you will be the measure of your love to Him, and your own personal assurance of His love to you. You must translate the generally acknowledged fact of His love into a living fact in your own experience. And remember that the measure in which you think about Christ, and in which your thoughts about Him have power over your personal character and your daily life, is the measure of your religion. This, and no more than this, is the extent to which you are a Christian. This, and no more than this, is the extent to which there will be any reality, any power, any real blessing in your service to others, or anything pleasing to God in your obedience. May God make you real—stamp Divine reality on everything within you, and in all your outward life! (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*) *A place of access.*—"I will give thee a place of access." We owe this beautiful promise to the Revised Version (Zech. iii. 7), for in the Authorised Version the text has quite a meaningless rendering. "I will give thee place to walk among these that stand by." The immediate reference of the promise is, of course, to Joshua, the high priest. It was his privilege and his duty, clothed in white linen, to enter the most holy place once a year, there to make atonement for the sins of the people. Instead, however, of this great office being fulfilled, the prophet sees Joshua clothed in filthy garments—the type of his own sins and of those people of his "standing,"—with Satan at his right hand to be his "adversary." It appeared impossible that such a high priest, or such a nation, should ever be permitted to draw near the living God. Then comes the symbolic action of the prophetic vision. The filthy garments are taken away by command of God, from Joshua, and are replaced by "rich apparel," the mitre of high priestly office is set on his head, and the promise is made—made both to him and to his people—"I will give thee a place of access." In spite of Israel's unworthiness and sin, God Himself would permit His people to draw near to Him. Such were the original scope and meaning of these words. "I will give thee a place of access." How little we realise the great privilege of this great promise! To say that we can draw near to God is only to utter one of the commonest of all truisms; but familiar as the truth may be to us, let us never forget that there was a time when it would have been regarded as the strangest and most incredible of all truths. A Jew was never permitted in his own person to come near to God; he had to approach the Most High from a distance, and even the high priest himself was only allowed the privilege of "a place of access" once in each year. Such were the awful holiness and the ineffable majesty of the Most High, and such the terrible sin and guilt of man, that no human soul dared to draw near the consuming fire. God was a God "far off" and not "nigh" to a Jew. There was no "place of access" opened for all the world. We do not wonder, therefore, at the exaltation and rapture with which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews dwells on what Christ had done, in opening a "new and living way" to God, even into the holy place, by His blood, and on the fact that His sacrifice for sin makes it now possible for the sinful and guilty with "boldness to enter into the Holiest." It was the fulfilment of the promise of the text, "I will give thee a place of access." And this is the astonishing privilege of every child of man to-day. Howsoever unworthy and sinful he may be, still through the blood of Jesus, he may freely draw near to God. He may stand in the presence of the Eternal. He may speak face to face with God, and hear God speak to him. "In Christ Jesus," to use St. Paul's words, "we that once were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (*G. W. Barrett.*)

Ver. 7. **I will give thee places to walk among those that stand by.**—*The right of entry*:—The prophet has just been describing a vision of judgment in which the high priest, as representative of the nation, stood before the angel of the Lord as an unclean person. He is cleansed, and clothed, and a fair priestly garment, with “Holiness to the Lord” written on the front of it, put upon him. And then follow a series of promises, of which the climax is the one that I have read. “I will give thee a place of access,” says the Revised Version, instead of “places to walk”; “I will give thee a place of access among those that stand by”; the attendant angels are dimly seen surrounding their Lord. And so the promise of my text is that of free approach to God, of a life that is like that of the angels that stand before His face. So, then, the words suggest to us—

I. WHAT A CHRISTIAN LIFE MAY BE. There are two images blended together in the great words of my text: the one is that of a king’s court, the other is that of a temple. With regard to the former, it is a privilege given to the highest nobles of a kingdom—or it was in old days—to have the right of *entrée*, at all moments and in all circumstances, to the monarch. With regard to the latter the prerogative of the high priest, who is the recipient of this promise as to access to the Temple, was a very restricted one. Once a year, with the blood that prevented his annihilation by the brightness of the Presence into which he ventured, he passed within the veil, and stood before that mysterious Light that coruscated in the darkness of the Holy of Holies. But this High Priest is promised an access on all days and at all times; and that He may stand there, beside and like the seraphim. This Priest passes within the veil when He will. Or, to put away the two metaphors, and to come to the reality far greater than either of them, we can, whensoever we please, pass into the Presence before which the splendours of an earthly monarch’s court shrink into vulgarity, and attain to a real reception of the light that irradiates the true Holy Place, before which that which shone in the earthly shrine dwindles and darkens into a shadow. Our lives may on the outside thus be largely amongst the things seen and temporal, and yet all the while penetrating through these, and laying hold with their true roots on the Eternal. Our Master is the great Example of this, of whom it is said, not only in reference to His mysterious and unique union of nature with the Father in His Divinity, but in reference to the humanity which He had in common with us all, yet without sin, that the Son of Man came down from heaven, and even in the act of coming, and when He had come was yet the Son of Man which is *in heaven*. Such a conversation in heaven, and such association with the bands of the blessed, is possible even for a life upon earth.

II. Let us consider this promise as a **PATTERN FOR US OF WHAT CHRISTIAN LIFE SHOULD BE**, and, alas! so seldom is. There is no greater sin than living beneath the possibilities of our lives, in any region, whether religious or other it matters not. Sin is not only going contrary to the known law of God, but also a falling beneath a Divine ideal which is capable of realisation. And in regard to our Christian life, if God has flung open His temple-gates and said to us, “Come in, My child, and dwell in the secret-place of the Most High, and abide there under the shadow of the Almighty, finding protection and communion and companionship in My worship,” there can be nothing more insulting to Him, and nothing more fatally indicative of the alienation of our hearts from Him, than that we should refuse to obey the merciful invitation. What should we say of a son or a daughter, living in the same city with their parents, who never crossed the threshold of the father’s house, but that they had lost the spirit of the child, and that if there was no desire to be near there could be no love! So, if we will ask ourselves: “How often do I use this possibility of communion with God, which might irradiate all my daily life?”

III. Again, my text suggests to us what **EVERY CHRISTIAN LIFE WILL HEREAFTER PERFECTLY BE.** Some commentators take the words of my text to refer only to the communion of saints from the earth, with the glorified angels, in and after the resurrection. That is a poor interpretation, for heaven is here to-day. All that here has been imperfect, fragmentary, occasional, interrupted, and marred in our communion with God, shall one day be complete. And then, oh! then, who can tell what undreamed of depths and sweetnesses of renewed communion and of intercourses begun, for the first time then, between “those that stand by,” and have stood there for ages, will then be realised?

IV. Lastly, notice, not from my text, but from its context, **HOW ANY LIFE MAY BECOME THUS PRIVILEGED.** The promise is preceded by a condition: “If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then . . . I will

give thee access among those that stand by." If we are keeping His commandments, then, and only then, shall we have access with free hearts into His presence. But to lay down that condition seems the same thing as slamming the door in every man's face. But let us remember what went before my text, the experience of the Priest to whom it was spoken in the vision. His filthy garments were stripped off him, and the pure white robes worn on the great Day of Atonement, the sacerdotal dress, was put upon him. It is the *cleansed man that has access among "those that stand by."* (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 8-10. **They are men wondered at.**—*Christians a wonder*:—Joshua and his fellow-worshippers were wondered at, both by the idolatrous Chaldeans and the unbelieving Jews, for their faith in the Divine predictions during the period of their captivity; that Jerusalem should be rebuilt, the temple-worship restored, and that they should return again to their own land. Good men are not less an object of wonder now than they were then. There is something in their principles and pursuits which men in general cannot easily understand, and they know not to what cause it should be ascribed. 1. Ministers of the Gospel are often a wonder both to themselves and others. It is wonderful that God should condescend to employ weak and sinful creatures in so sacred a work as publishing articles of peace between heaven and earth. Infinite wisdom saw fit to lodge this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us. Considering likewise the mean opinion which good men entertain of themselves, the treatment they are likely to meet with, the difficulties and trials to which they will necessarily be exposed, it is not a little remarkable that they should be induced to engage in the work of the ministry. Yet it is wonderful how such are carried through their work, and enabled to persevere, notwithstanding all the discouragements they meet with, from within and from without. The success that at any time attends the ministry may very properly be regarded as matter of astonishment. 2. The same sort of singularity attaches to all real Christians who walk in newness of life, and exemplify the genuine spirit of the Gospel. (1) They are a wonder unto angels. They are struck with amazement at the love of God, manifested to such sinful and unworthy creatures. (2) They are a wonder unto devils, who cannot but be surprised to see the spiritual temple, which is to endure throughout eternal ages, rising out of the ruins of the Fall. The fallen spirits wonder to see all their plots frustrated and their evil designs overruled for the Divine glory. (3) Real Christians are a wonder to themselves. What reason can be rendered for such distinguishing grace and love? The conversion and salvation of a sinner is a more surprising work than the creation of a world. (4) They are a wonder to one another. (5) They are a wonder to the world. Nor is it strange that it should be so, since they are followers of Him whose kingdom is not of this world. 3. There is something in the very nature of religion that is mysterious and strange. (1) The manner in which grace is implanted in the soul is so. The work of the Spirit upon the heart is one of the deep things of God. (2) The way in which grace operates is equally wonderful. The Christian's life is a hidden one. (3) The fruits which grace produces in the life of a true believer are not less remarkable. Those who walk by sight cannot understand how others walk by faith. How then can the Christian be ashamed of his high calling, even though it should make him a gazing stock to angels and to men? Thou art now a wonder to the world, believer, but what a wonder wilt thou be in that solemn and decisive day, when Christ will come "to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe." (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) **My servant the Branch.**—*The world's wants and God's provisions*:—I. The world wants a MORAL HELPER, and in the Gospel one is provided. Morally, man is enslaved, diseased, exiled, lost to the great uses and purposes of his being. God has provided a great Helper, here called His "servant the Branch." In Isaiah we have these words, "Behold My servant whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth." He is the "Branch," God is the Root, and all holy souls are branches, deriving their life, beauty, and fruitfulness from Him; but Christ is the "Branch," the oldest Branch, the largest Branch, the strongest Branch, the most fruitful Branch, &c. He is the Branch on which there hang clusters of perennial fruits for the "healing of the nations." II. The world wants DIVINE GUARDIANSHIP, and in the Gospel it is provided. "Behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes." What is here meant by the "stone"? Not the foundation-stone of the temple, which was now being rebuilt, for that had been laid long

before. "The stone," says Keil, "is the symbol of the kingdom of God, and is laid by Jehovah before Joshua, by God's transferring to him the regeneration of His house and the keeping of His courts (before lip-hire in a spiritual sense, as in 1 Kings ix. 6, for example). The seven eyes which watch with protecting care over this stone are not a figurative representation of the all-embracing providence of God; but, in harmony with the seven eyes of the Lamb which are the seven Spirits of God (Rev. v. 6), and with the seven eyes of Jehovah (Zech. iv. 10), they are the sevenfold radiation of the Spirit of Jehovah (after Isa. xi. 2), which show themselves in vigorous action upon this stone, to prepare it for its destination." Perhaps the meaning is, that upon the kingdom of Christ, here symbolised by the stone, God's eyes are fixed (engraven) with deep and settled interest. "The eye is the natural hieroglyphic for knowledge; and 'seven' as every reader of the Bible is aware, is the number used to denote completeness, perfection. Seven eyes denote the perfection of observant knowledge; and as the 'eyes of Jehovah' mean Jehovah's observation and knowledge, His 'seven eyes' express the perfection of both—omniscient observation." Two thoughts are suggested—1. God has a special interest in Christ and His followers. His eyes are on the "stone," there in all their completeness, seven. He has a general interest in the universe, but a special interest here. 2. God has a settled interest in Christ and His followers. The eyes are said to be engraven on the stone, not written in mere ink. III. The world wants MORAL PURIFICATION. In the Gospel it is provided. The iniquity of the land of the Jews was multiform, aggravated, immeasurable; but in one day provision should be made for its removal; the day on which Christ died upon the Cross. "Christ came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." IV. The world wants SPIRITUAL REPOSE. In the Gospel that is provided. Mr. Henry says, "When iniquity is taken away—1. We reap precious benefits and privileges from our justification; and 2. We repose in a sweet tranquillity, and are quiet from the fear of evil." (*Homilist.*) For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua.—*The stone before Joshua*.—That stone was Christ. Take the clauses of the verse in succession. 1. Behold the stone which I have laid before Joshua. "He that built all things is God." He built the temple of nature. More august and glorious far is the temple spoken of here. Its foundation-stone was laid by God Himself in Zion. He laid it when the great Antitype Himself came, and gave His life a ransom for many. He laid it anew, in the Zion above, when Christ was exalted on His mediatorial and priestly throne, a name given Him that is above every name. He shall finally consecrate and glorify it as the "head-stone of the corner," on the great day, in presence of the Church triumphant. 2. "Upon one stone shall be seven eyes." Observe, it is "one stone." One Mediator. "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." So that one stone laid by the Divine Builder! The sun needs no glittering taper to add to its light; the ocean needs no tiny drop to add to its volume. Let the giant deed of Christ's doing and dying stand forth in all its peerless, solitary grandeur. What mean the seven eyes? Seven was a sacred number with the Jews, probably from being first associated with the seven days of Creation. It would seem to denote—(1) Christ's fulness or perfection. How applicable to Him "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Out of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." (2) The "seven eyes" point to Christ's providential government of the Church and the world. What a blessed truth is this universal, constant sovereignty of Jesus! The roll in which are inscribed the world's destinies is in His hands. More comforting still is it to think of Christ's individual providence, the care He takes of each separate member of His Church. This stone, with its seven eyes, has an eye for each. But the words "seven eyes" may admit of the rendering "seven fountains." The "eye," among Orientals, is often the metaphor for the well-spring. The Arabs call the fountain to this day, the "eye of the desert." Render then, "Upon one stone shall be seven fountains." This one stone, the Rock of Ages, was smitten by the rod of justice, and lo! seven fountain-streams flow from its cleft side. Fountains of pardon, righteousness, peace, sanctification, comfort, grace here, life and glory hereafter. All the fountains from one source. 3. "I will engrave the engraving thereof." Carvings on stone were frequent in ancient times. In Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, it was the old method of inscribing a nation's annals. These "stone libraries" are dug up fresh as they were chiselled and entombed many thousand years ago. Once engraven on the heart of love, you are on His heart for ever. An alternative rendering of this metaphor is, "I will open the openings thereof." "I," says God, "will

unlock the fountains in that sealed stone, that the waters of salvation may gush forth." He opens the fountains every time His glorious Gospel is proclaimed. 4. "And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." This doubtless points onwards to the day of days. In the Mosaic and ceremonial dispensation of the Jews, iniquity was typically removed. But all was a shadow, till the true Antitypical Surety and Scapegoat Himself came to remove iniquity "in one day," by having the sins of His people laid on His guiltless head. It was a momentous "one day," the day waited for by all time. The stone was smitten, the fountain was unsealed. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Jesus Christ, the stone whereon are seven eyes*:—The text is highly figurative language. I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS "STONE." Joshua may be the representative of the whole priesthood, or of the Church at large. We take the latter idea. Therefore the stone is laid before Joshua,—or the Church of God. 1. The stone. By which I understand Christ. A precious stone. Precious to the Father, to angels, to the fully redeemed, and to us. A precious stone, because God has chosen it as the foundation of His Church. It is a corner-stone. He is a foundation-stone. He is a tried stone. 2. The situation of the stone. It is not a stone of human production. It was laid in God's everlasting love. In the Old Testament rites and types and shadows. In prophecy. It is to be laid before the Church even now. 3. The Builder. It is the "stone that I have laid." God in Trinity is the builder. The Father is the builder of the Church designedly. The Son is the builder of the Church really. The Spirit is the builder of the Church efficiently. II. THE EYES FIXED UPON THIS "STONE." "Seven eyes." Some refer this to the operations of the Spirit of God. Prefer to take it as the eyes of all, friend and foe, that are placed upon our Lord Jesus Christ. 1. The eye of the Father is upon this stone: in eternal council, when the everlasting stipulations for the salvation of the Church were entered into. 2. The eye of the Spirit was upon Him. The Spirit of God taketh the things of Christ and revealeth them unto the soul. 3. The eyes of angels are fixed on Christ. 4. The eyes of all the saints in heaven are fixed on Christ. 5. So are the eyes of the Church on earth. 6. And the eyes of the wicked, on earth and in hell. III. THE ENGRAVING OF THIS STONE. The names of the Lord's people are said to be written on stones, or in books. Our names are written on the palms of Christ's hands, denoting our security. Upon His shoulders, to denote the support that we receive from Him. On His heart, explanatory of His love. IV. THE REMOVAL OF THE CHURCH'S SIN. By God the Father, through the Mediator. God has imputed all our sins to Jesus Christ, and removed them in one day. (*T. Bagnall-Baker, M.A.*) *The corner-stone of the Church*:—Christ is promised as He who is represented by the temple, and who is the ground and corner-stone of His own Church, and the rock on which she is built, bearing all the burden of the fabric, concerning whom is promised that God's infinite providence shall be about Him and His Church, Himself endued with perfect wisdom to see to and care for all His members, and that by the effects and rays of the glory of God shining in Him, He shall draw all eyes to Him, and keep them on Him; as also that He shall be so polished and adorned by God, as shall be marvellous to the world. Doctrine—1. Christ the Mediator is not only a part of the spiritual building, making up one Christ mystical with all His members, and the eminent and most excellent part of it, but the very foundation of His Church's being, upon whom all the Church and every particular member thereof is and must be built, and without whom they cannot subsist; for, He is "the stone laid before Joshua." 2. As Christ in His office of mediation is a means of the Father's appointment, by Him to derive happiness to the Church, and establish her in it; so whoever despise and reject Him, yet the Father will have Him high and eminent in that building. 3. As Christ hath all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge employed for seeing to the condition, and finding out the way of happiness for His people, in every case and exigency, signified by seven eyes (which is a number of perfection) engraven on that one stone: and as the vigilant providence of God is always intent upon Christ as Mediator, and for His sake upon the welfare of His Church and kingdom as being His chief delight, signified also by seven (or many) eyes fixed over that one stone, so also is Christ, as Mediator, God-man, revealing the Father in Himself, and as the support and upholder of His Church, so glorious and excellent as may draw all to admire Him, and to fix their expectation on Him, as the only choice and refuge of lost sinners, and will do so to all the elect, which is also signified by seven eyes fixed on that one stone, admiring Him, and having all their expectation from Him. 4. The beauty, excellency, and furniture of Christ the Mediator, is Divine and rare, and He is the

ornament, glory and storehouse of all the spiritual building, being, as God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person (Heb. i. 3). His humanity also being adorned with the gifts of the Spirit without measure, and with all Divine perfections in so far as the human nature is capable; withal His sufferings for His people (as so many curious engravings) speak not a little His beauty to those who have interest therein. This is signified by our Lord's engraving the graving of this stone, polishing it as a precious jewel, and adorning it by His art. Two benefits are promised to flow from Christ the Priest to His people; the first whereof is, remission and purging away of sins by the sacrifice upon the Cross, once for all, which needs not to be repeated as the Jewish sacrifices were. This is promised to the whole elect and mystical body of Christ, figured by the Jews and their promised land, beside what peculiar relation it may have to them and their land, that their sins, being taken away by Christ, should not hinder Him to favour them, nor the land for their sake; but should be looked on in due time, not as polluted, nor possessed and overrun by enemies. (1) Remission and removal of sins is the choice mercy of Christ's people, and the rise of other mercies. "I will remove iniquity," is the fruit of Christ's coming to the world, and of His glory as Mediator. (2) Sin is pardoned and removed only by the virtue and merit of Christ's one sacrifice, only once offered, and not to be repeated on any pretext whatever; for, iniquity is removed "in one day." (3) Christ's own peculiar and given people of the Father, are they upon whom the privilege of pardon and sanctification is conferred, and on whose behalf Christ offered up Himself to procure these benefits, for it is the iniquity "of that land" (a type of the elect Church) that is removed. (*George Hutcheson.*) Behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts.—*No engraving without wound*:—That is, of the stone, upon which were to be seven eyes, and which intends the Messiah, the foundation laid in Zion. To engrave is to pierce and cut. When He became a Man of Sorrows, when He said, "Reproach hath broken My heart," then was this Scripture fulfilled. As there is no engraving without wounding, so to engrave is to embellish and beautify. And He was made perfect through suffering. The richest display of His graces; the acquirement of the dispensation of the Spirit; the dominion He exercises in our nature; the prerogative of judging the world in righteousness; and the praises He will inhabit through eternal ages—all these resulted from His sufferings. "Because He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, therefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name above every name." To a person unacquainted with the process, the pruning of the tree; the cleaving of the ground with the ploughshare; the operation of the chisel on the stone would look like an effort to injure or destroy. But look at the thing afterwards. Behold the vine adorned with purple clusters. Survey the field, yielding the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear. Examine the carved work, when the sculptor has achieved his design, and fixed it in its proper place! Christians are sometimes perplexed and discouraged because of their trials. They know not what God is doing with them. They fear He is angry, and going to crush and destroy. But they are His workmanship. He is preparing them for their destination in the temple of His grace. These trials are applied to qualify and advance them. They will all perfect that which concerneth them. Howard was taken by the enemy and confined in prison. There he learned the heart of a captive. "It is good for me," says David, "that I have been afflicted." (*William Jay.*)

Ver. 10. Under the vine and under the fig-tree.—*Messiah's times*:—Thus inspiration characterises the reign of the Messiah. It was to be distinguished by three things. 1. Enjoyment. The very image is delightful. Vines and fig-trees were much prized in the East. They afforded at once delightful fruit for the taste, and refreshing shade from the heat. Persons therefore regaled themselves under their branches and leaves,—and thus the expression in time came to signify happiness. And blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. Wherever the Gospel came it was received as good news, glad tidings, and it was said of the receivers, that they walked not only in the fear of the Lord, but in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. 2. Liberty. Slaves and captives did not sit under their vines and fig-trees. Nor did proprietors in time of war. They were liable to the surprises of the enemy. Then they disappeared from these loved, but no longer safe, retreats. In Messiah's days "Israel shall be saved, and Judah shall dwell securely." What have His subjects to fear? Their souls shall dwell at ease. They are free

indeed. They are kept by the power of God. 3. Benevolence. "Ye shall call every man his neighbour under the vine, and under the fig-tree." There is nothing like selfishness here. They are anxious that others should partake of their privileges. There is no envy here; there is no room for it. Here is enough for all. If we are Christians indeed, our happiness, instead of being impaired by the experience of others, will be increased by it. Let me invite all that come within my reach to that mercy which I have found. (*William Jay.*) *The times of Gospel peace*:—A second benefit is the taking away of all trouble, and the fear of trouble, which sin procures; and the giving of peace, represented by peoples walking abroad, and daring, in the open fields under shades, to invite and call one another to feasts and enjoyment of the fruits of peace; which promise is spiritually performed to all the elect when they are assured that God is at peace with them; and is sometimes outwardly performed to the Church, when it is for her good, beside what Israel may expect when they shall turn to Christ. Doctrine—1. True and sound peace comes only from Christ, and from the sense of the pardon of sin through His blood, which those who have fled to Christ ought to take as their allowance to rest confidently upon, whatever danger there be, and feed upon as the choicest of dainties and feasts. 2. As outward peace and tranquillity in the visible Church and nation, where it is a great mercy if it be well improved; so it shall not be wanting when it is for her good: for this promise is put in her charter for that also, and left in the hand of her wise and tender Guide, to dispense it as He sees may be for her profit, being the "Lord of Hosts," to make it forthcoming for her when He pleaseth. 3. As it is a token of a blessed and thorough peace, when with outward and foreign enemies God removes intestine dissensions; and as amity among the inhabitants of a nation, especially in the Church, is a blessing and favour in its own kind; so true, spiritual peace ought to be entertained and improved by mutual godly society, and communication of conditions and experiences for common edification. This is signified to us in that peace, whether inward or outward, is described by "calling every man his neighbour," living in amity, and inviting to mutual feasts and banquets. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The stone with seven eyes*:—The prophet Zechariah, for the length of his prophecy, has rather more than a usual number of allusions to Christ. Among these is the one contained in the passage before us. The language is metaphorical, and derived from the arts of architecture and engraving. I. THE STONE WITH SEVEN EYES. It is generally allowed that this refers directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some, however, understand it of Zerubbabel. But if it be allowed to refer to him primarily, yet only as a type of Christ; for it is the same person who is styled "the Branch" in the preceding verse, in chapter vi. 12, and in other places where Christ is undoubtedly intended. 1. There are numerous allusions to Christ under the metaphor of a stone (Exod. xvii. 6; 1 Cor. x. 4; Psa. cxviii. 22; Matt. xxi. 42; Eph. ii. 20). 2. Upon this stone were to be seven eyes. Seven appears to have been a sacred number among the Jews, and one denoting perfection. Hence we read of the "seven golden candlesticks"—"the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes"—the "seven Spirits of God"—the "book with seven seals"—the "seven lamps"—the "seven phials"—and here, of the "stone with seven eyes." Eyes are explained by commentators to signify intelligence and wisdom. Eyes of the Lord are to be understood of His omniscience. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings" (Prov. v. 21). "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (chap. xv. 3). "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Psa. xciv. 9). Now, as seven in the Scriptures denotes perfection, we are doubtless, by the expression in this place, to understand that the attributes or qualities signified by it are infinitely perfect, forasmuch as they are ascribed to God. It is then, at least, an exhibition of one of the attributes of the infinite Jehovah. Let this be borne in mind, for we shall soon see Jesus Christ possessing this attribute. 3. By these eyes "being upon this stone" some suppose that we are to understand the eyes of the Father beholding the Son. But may we not rather suppose that the seven eyes being upon the stone were designed to signify that the perfections represented by them should be imparted to and become identified with it? And may not this be what is intended by the expression, "I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts"? And may we not, then, suppose that this is an exhibition, by a most beautiful figure, of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ? The engraver was "the Lord of hosts." And says John, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace

and truth" (John i. 14). The things engraved on this stone were the infinite perfections of the Godhead. II. THE WORK TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." The whole stupendous work of human redemption centres in one single point;—it was effected by one single act, and that act the work of one single day. The one act which secures it is the sacrificial offering of Himself. The day on which it was effected was the day on which Christ suffered, "the just for the unjust." Whatever, therefore, was said by way of promise, whatever was revealed by prophecy, or whatever was exhibited by the rites of the Jewish economy, all pointed to and centred in the death of Christ. The whole scheme of human redemption was consummated by the one offering of Christ upon the Cross! O my soul, what a day of interest was that to the world! We have heard of a day on which a world was involved in the waters of a flood. We have heard of a day on which whole cities were reduced to heaps of smoking ruins. We have heard of a day on which one decisive battle determined the fate of empires; yea, and we have heard of a day on which the tyrannical yoke of foreign usurpation was broken, and the sweet sound of liberty heard throughout this vast republic. But what are all these in comparison of that day when all heaven, in breathless silence, paused and, with an interest commensurate with the importance of the work, beheld the achievement of "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel"? III. THE EFFECTS WHICH FOLLOW. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree." Here is, then—1. A spirit of general benevolence. This is a legitimate fruit, or one of the effects of the great atonement applied to the heart of man. The first step towards the restoration of society to proper principles of feeling and action is to remove that principle which first disorganised society, and which still promotes enmity and separation between man and man. As love is the ruling principle of the soul, all sordid views and selfish interests are excluded from the heart of the Christian, and he looks abroad upon all mankind with a heart flowing with benevolence. He rejoices in the prosperity of the prosperous, and tenderly sympathises with those who are in adversity. In a word, he has learned to call every man his neighbour. But wherever this principle is found in the heart it cannot remain inactive. Hence—2. A spirit of association. It is not enough for the true Christian that he has peace, order, and happiness within the sanctuary of his own breast, nor yet that he feels a spirit of general benevolence towards all mankind. The language of his heart is, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" The principle of which he is possessed, and by which he is actuated, ever prompts him to "every good word and work." Eating together was by the ancients considered a mark of peculiar respect. It was a ceremony used not only as a testimony of mutual friendship, but also for the confirmation of covenants, in the transaction of civil and religious affairs. The place chosen and sanctioned by custom for these purposes was the shade of the vine and of the fig-tree. The fruit of these was much depended upon both for nourishment and comfort. Beneath their shade, therefore, was an appropriate place for the interchange of friendships, and especially for the purpose of devotion. When, therefore, any one invited his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree, it was a testimony of his love, and the expression of a desire that his neighbour might with him partake of all the temporal and spiritual blessings of which he himself was a partaker. But viewing these expressions in their more immediate reference to the effects of the great atonement, they very clearly designate the spirit by which every true Christian is actuated towards mankind. It was this spirit, in all its infinite perfection and fulness, which moved the Father to "give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." It was the same love that moved the Son to "give Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity," and that He might "break down the middle wall of partition" which separated man from God, and man from man; "and in himself of twain to make one new man, so making peace." It is the existence and operation of this spirit, in the hearts of the ministers of Christ, which stimulates them to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature"—to invite and entreat sinners to be "reconciled to God." It is the existence and operation of this spirit which leads Christians to unite their efforts and put forth their energies in the cause of man. Improvement—1. That the Christian hath a strong foundation for his faith. In the first part of this subject we have seen that Jesus Christ, by both prophets and apostles, is laid in Zion for a "sure foundation." He therefore, who believes in Him with a

heart unto righteousness, shall not be confounded. 2. We learn from this subject the great privilege of the children of God. Whatever obstacles lay in the way of our salvation, on account of original sin, was "removed in one day" by the death of Christ. 3. Finally, we learn from this subject the duty of every Christian. Was it said that in the day when iniquity should be removed "every" (Christian) "man should call his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree" ? This prophecy, then, clearly points out the duty of every lover of Christ. Think not that this duty belongs exclusively to the ministers of the Gospel. (*Noah Levings.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1-14. Behold a candlestick all of gold.—*The candelabrum and olive-trees* :—That by the candelabrum was symbolised the Israelitish community, the people of the theocracy, may be regarded as generally conceded. But Israel was itself a symbol and type ; it was the visible manifestation of that invisible spiritual community, the Church of the living God, which embraces the faithful of all ages and places. But the light which the Church possesses is not from herself ; it is light communicated and sustained by influences from above. Hence in the vision the lamps were supplied with oil, not by human ministration, but through channels and pipes from the olive-trees which stood beside and were over the candelabrum. Oil is the proper symbol of the Holy Spirit's influence. This is the oil by which the Church is sustained, is made to shine, and is enabled to accomplish the work she has to do in the world. Apart from the Divine Spirit the Church is dark and cold and feeble ; but through the visitation of the Spirit she is animated and invigorated, becomes luminous and glorious, and is crowned with success as she labours to erect God's temple on earth. They were taught by this vision not to be discouraged, for it was not by human might or power that the work was to be done, but by the Spirit of the Lord. Through His grace the light should be sustained in them ; their hands should be strengthened for their work ; and ere long they should see the consummation of that which had been so auspiciously begun. God sustains His Church by His grace. But this grace comes to men through certain appointed media. This was symbolised in the vision by the fruit-bearing branches of the olive-trees, and by the conduits and pipes through which the oil was conveyed to the lamps. The branches represented the sacerdotal and civil authorities in Israel. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*)

Man as a student of the Divine revelation and a doer of Divine work :—I. AS A STUDENT OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS. "I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold," &c. The ideal Church is all this. The candlestick may, I think, fairly represent the Bible, or God's special revelation to man : that is golden, that is luminous, that is supernaturally supplied with the oil of inspiration. In fact, in the passage the interpreting angel designates this candlestick, not as the Church, but as the "word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel." I make two remarks concerning this revelation—1. It has in it sufficient to excite the inquiry of man as a student. "What are these, my lord ?" What wonderful things are in this Bible ! 2. It has an Interpreter that can satisfy man as a student. The angel to whom the prophet directed his inquiry promptly answered. The prophet here displays two of the leading attributes of a genuine student of the Divine—(1) Inquisitiveness. He inquires ; and because he inquires he receives an answer. The Bible is an unmeaning book to the great mass of mankind, because they do not inquire into its significance. Truth is only got by genuine inquiry. (2) Ingenuousness. The first reply of the interpreting angel to the prophet was, "Knowest thou not what these things mean ?" and he said, "No, my lord." At once he confesses his ignorance. The man who develops these two attributes in relation to God's Word has a Divine Interpreter at his side, namely, the Spirit of God, who will lead us into all knowledge. This passage sets man before us—II. AS A DOER OF THE DIVINE WILL. Man has not only to study, but to work ; not only to get Divine ideas, but to work them out. The work of the prophet was to convey a message from God to Zerubbabel, and the message he conveyed was a message to work. Man is to be a "Worker together" with God. I offer two remarks concerning man as a worker out of the Divine will. 1. That though his

difficulties may appear great, his resources are infinite. Zerubbabel, in rebuilding the temple, had enormous difficulties. Those difficulties hovered before him as mountains. But great as they were, he was assured that he had resources more than equal to the task. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." 2. That though his efforts may seem feeble, his success will be inevitable. (1) The feebleness of human efforts is here implied. (a) It is common to despise small things. (b) It is foolish to despise small things. All great things were small in their beginnings. (c) It is contemptible to despise small things. Truly great souls never do so. (2) The success of feeble efforts is here guaranteed. The temple should certainly be completed. So it will be with every true work to which a true man puts his hand in the name of God. It will be finished; there will be no failures, success is inevitable. (*Homilist.*) *The golden candlestick*.—1. The Church of God is composed of the most precious human material in the world. The man who walks day by day with the "King Eternal, Immortal and Invisible," is of far more value to the world, and is regarded by God as of more worth, than the man of the greatest intellectual attainments. 2. The Church is a light-giver, because its power to give light is sustained from a source outside itself. The life of the Church of God is not self-sustaining. God is the sustaining power by which the Church is kept alive, and only as she is supplied from Him with the holy oil of the Divine Spirit can she give out that light which is the life of men. The most perfect machinery without this life-sustaining force is useless to accomplish the Divine purpose of making the Church a blessing to the world. This mysterious living principle is due to a life at the back of all that is apprehended by the senses, a life which some call "the efficient cause," but which we think it more reasonable to call the "living God." 3. Because of this all-sufficient source of life we are assured that small beginnings in the kingdom of God will issue in great results. There is no such thing in nature as instantaneous result. The blade comes before the ear. The law of the spiritual kingdom is to begin with the small and end with the great. Connection with the source of life ensures growth unto perfection. (*Outlines by a London Minister.*) *The vision of the candlestick*.—1. The temple here represents the Church to be enlightened by Christ, she being in herself but dark, and void of light and comfort, till He come and appear in her, and for her, and make her light. 2. The ministry appointed of Christ for the direction, edification, and comfort of the Church are here represented by the candlestick, who should be pure, that they may be precious in His sight as gold, and who ought to shine by purity and holiness of life, and be instrumental in making the Church a shining light in a dark world. 3. The bowl upon the top of the candlestick which immediately receives the oil doth fitly represent Christ as Mediator, the head and storehouse of the Church, to whom is intrusted all fulness of gifts and graces for the Church's behoof. 4. The variety and sufficiency of gifts communicate by Christ, for the good and salvation of the Church is represented by seven lamps, all tending to one common end of burning and shining. 5. The way of deriving grace from Christ to His servants, by ordained and sanctified means, especially by His covenant; our dependence, and the bands of communion betwixt Him and His people, is represented by seven pipes going betwixt the bowl and the lamps. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The candlestick*.—In order to make God's meaning clearer the prophet was granted the vision of the candlestick (lampstand), the gist of which was that the wick, though necessary to the light, played a very inconsiderable part in its production. It had no illuminating power; it could only smoke, and char, and smoulder. At the best it could only be a medium between the oil in the cistern and the fire that burnt on its serried edge. Thus Zerubbabel might be weak and flexible as a wick, but none of his deficiencies could hinder him finishing the work to which he had been called, if only his spirit was kindled with the Divine fire, and fed continually by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. The candlestick was evidently fashioned on the model of that in the temple, the shape of which is still preserved to us on the Arch of Titus. According to the R.V., there were seven pipes to each lamp. Nor was this all. On either side of this massive candlestick stood an olive-tree, from the heart of which, by a golden pipe, the oil was continually being poured into the reservoir; so that, even though it might be limited in its containing power, there could be no failure in its ability to meet the incessant demands of the lamps. So far as the Jews were concerned, the meaning of the vision was obvious. They were represented in the candlestick, of which the many lamps and the precious metal of its composi-

tion set forth their perfection and preciousness in the thought of God. Their function was to shed the light of His knowledge on the world, as it lay under the power of darkness; whilst, to aid them in fulfilling this mission, Divine supplies would be forthcoming from a celestial and living source, and brought to them through the golden pipes, of which one represented Joshua the priest, and the other Zerubbabel the prince. These men, therefore, were but mediums for Divine communications. Their sufficiency was not of themselves, but of God. The mission of Israel would be realised, not by them, but by the Spirit of God through them. They might seem altogether helpless and inadequate; but a living fountain of oil was prepared to furnish them with inexhaustible supplies (F. B. Meyer, B.A.)

Ver. 6. **Not by might, nor by power.**—*The Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel.*—Dwell upon the very remarkable interpretation of the vision given by God Himself in the words of the text. I. **THE FALSE GROUNDS OF CONFIDENCE WHICH ARE TO BE REJECTED.** Summed up in the words "might and power," including all earthly means and human instrumentality. We must beware of substituting temporal means and mortal instruments for the work of the Spirit, or the glory of God. Nothing short of the almighty power of God can open the blind eyes or awaken the dead affections of the natural man to see and embrace the Gospel. If we may not trust to the strength of reason, or the force of truth, neither may we to the powers of oratory. The gifts of oratory or eloquence are lovely and excellent, but trusted in, or gloried in, they become snares and stumbling-blocks, drawing away the heart and affections from Christ, and converting our acts of worship into an idolatrous service. Every Christian, too, has a sphere of influence with which to serve and honour God, and to help and strengthen others. But this must not be rested in. Religion must be a personal concern, a deed of contract, a life of communion between the soul and God. And there are those who imagine that they love the truth because they love some of those who profess it. The power of affection on the minds of such persons is almost unbounded. But a religion based on such grounds is not to be trusted. When the Spirit of God is not the Author of the work it cannot stand trial, even in this world; it can never issue in the salvation of the soul. II. **THE ONLY SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY.** The work and efficiency of the Spirit of God. In three things this work is distinguished. 1. In transforming the character. 2. In overcoming the world. 3. In glorifying the grace of God. (J. M. Wilde, B.A.) *Force—spiritual and material.*—We have need to study the Christian dynamics. Good arrangements, good instructions, good intentions, are all well; but what can they avail without a sufficient, continuous force? Let us take a lesson from the angel who spoke to the prophet. Zechariah's object was to instruct the Jews on their return from captivity, and to cheer them on in the work of rebuilding the temple. They were not to be appalled by obstacles ever so formidable, for the work was of God, and God was able to remove mountains of difficulty out of the way. No adversary would be able to injure them. It is easy to pass from this to New Testament teaching. The foundation of the Church has been laid; it grows up slowly but surely, a Holy Temple in the Lord. The work proceeds slowly because it is arduous in its own nature, obstructed by many adversaries. Zerubbabel's temple was finished in about twenty years; but a building which is spiritual needs much more time than one which is constructed of wood and stone. The affections and dispositions of men cannot be shaped as material things may be; and just because the Church is a structure so noble, a habitation of God in the Spirit, its progress is difficult, and in comparison with the works of man it is slow. It has also been hindered by the mistakes and dissensions of the builders; but in the end the same Prince who laid its foundations will certainly finish it. He will say, "It is finished," and in His completed Church He will fill the whole earth with His glory. We speak of the propagation of the Gospel and the construction of the Church: the one movement is diffusive, the other formative; both agree in one, and both are of the Lord. The propagation of the Gospel is not only for, but also by, Christ. He publishes the testimony through all the earth, and saves sinners. The construction of the Church is also by Christ from first to last, and the builders, from Paul and Apollos downwards, are nothing without Him. And oh! with what patience and with what wisdom does He preside over His vast and complex work. Christ is always building His people together, healing, reconciling, moulding, blending, compacting them together as living stones that form the One Temple of the One Holy Ghost. We have said

that there is much opposition to this work. So it has always been, and especially at critical emergencies, mountains have threatened to fall upon and to destroy the work of God. Moses went down to Egypt to redeem Israel; then was the power of Pharaoh as a great mountain against him. And as the people escaped the mountain seemed to come nearer, the Egyptian army pursued and threatened to destroy them. Hezekiah revived religion in Judah; then came the power of Assyria, and as a great mountain impended over Jerusalem. The heathen army invested the city, and Hezekiah had no power of resistance, and he spread the matter before the Lord, and in one night the angel of death removed the mountain and laid the Assyrian host still and dead. The Messiah came, not to condemn but to save the world; then the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and His anointed. Herod, Caiaphas, Pilate, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, elders, and populace all joined in one desperate resistance. The acts of the Apostles were all performed, in spite of mountains of obstruction, by the power from on high that rested upon them. So they carried the Gospel to Europe, and planted it in Macedonia and Greece and Italy, and long afterwards missionaries of apostolic spirit bore it onward through the dense forests of Helvetia, Gaul, and Germany, and penetrated to the distant shores of Britain. The rage of the heathen threatened to devour them, but the Lord stood with them, and before His face the mountains melted away. We have great mountains against us still; huge masses of heathenism which resist our missions. The scepticism which becomes every day more pronounced. [There is something else to do than wring our hands and pour out lamentations on the ear. Let us have the faith that removes mountains, and, oppose and deride us who may, let us be of good courage and build. In order to this, mark well what the energy is which surmounts or removes obstacles. Not might, nor power of mortal man. It would have been as vain for the Jews of Zerubbabel to cope with the power of Darius, or for the Apostles and early Christians to grapple with the power of the Roman emperor, or for a few labourers to attack a mountain in the Alps with their spades and try to reduce it to a plain. And equally impossible it is for us to remove the more intellectual or spiritual obstructions in the way of the Gospel by merely human persuasion and argument. The removal of such mountains as we encounter is a thing possible only with God. It was not before Moses, Hezekiah, Peter or Paul, Columba or Boniface, Zwingli or Luther, that mountains became plain, but before Jesus Christ. Zechariah had a vision of the continuous supply of the Spirit as of holy oil flowing through golden pipes from two olive-trees or branches. By this we understand the kingly and priestly institutions which were represented at the time by Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the high priest. In Jesus Christ, our exalted Saviour, the kingship and priesthood are united. He is the Priest upon a throne, and from the Father through Jesus Christ proceeds to the Church a constant supply of the Spirit. This is the present truth for us; if we believe it, why do we give way to languor or discouragement? If we have strength, learning, money, let us consecrate it to the Lord. But, knowing that these cannot prevail, let us lift our eyes to the Lord Himself, and cast our care upon Him. Let me encourage all Christian teachers and preachers to persevere in this confidence, undaunted and unwearied. The holy Temple on the rock will be finished, and the headstone brought forth with shoutings. Indeed, no man can understand all the symmetry of our Lord's plan till it is completed; but then, it will be seen how He has overruled all the persecutions, martyrdoms, and controversies for higher ends, and has made even the rending of the outward frame of the Church of God a means of preserving and purifying its inward life. What bursts of admiration when all is finished! What shouts of praise, grace, grace! No shout of human names or party distinctions will be attempted in that bright day. All is due to the grace of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to whom be glory in the Church. (*D. Fraser, D.D.*) *The Spirit of the Lord*:—The message which this vision was intended to convey was an assurance of God's presence and readiness to help, and of utter dependence on Him. The prophet was greatly puzzled by this vision. The interpretation was given in such form as would be likely to make it most effective for the enterprise in hand. 1. Rulers and people must understand at the outset that as God's chosen they were utterly dependent on Him. It is true for every man in every age. Not with a strong right arm can we make our spiritual livelihood; not with a mighty intellect can we plan and execute the purposes of a holy life. The Spirit of the living God must quicken, energise,

inspire. 2. The vision was interpreted to mean that difficulties should not block the way. All hindrance shall disappear. God shall touch it with His almighty hand. Nothing is too hard for Him. 3. The vision gave assurance of the ultimate completion of the temple. The work had languished for years. But as to the final issue there was no shadow of doubt. A day of great things was coming, if the present did seem to be a day of small things. Remember that we live in the dispensation of the Spirit. The Church is the organism through which the Spirit is working towards the restitution of all things. The Church is the one great power in history. Its influence is inexplicable on any except supernatural grounds. At every point of Christian faith and life we are dependent on its influence. Our life begins with the operation of the Spirit in the new birth. Our sanctification is through the Spirit. A symmetrical character comes in no other way. Our success in Christian service is conditioned in the same way. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The need of God's Spirit*:—This scene has a natural application to the Divine working among men, and suggests the need of God's Spirit. The human spirit should be the temple of God. Its foundations are laid in the capacities of the soul made in His image. Sin opposes the work, worldliness hinders it. How shall it be completed? "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." **I. WE NEED GOD'S SPIRIT, BECAUSE THROUGH THE SPIRIT THE DEITY REVEALS HIMSELF MOST CLEARLY.** Our first necessity is to know God. 1. Some of the Divine attributes are revealed in nature. Wisdom, power, glory everywhere, but not the King eternal, immortal, invisible. Scripture declares that since the foundation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. Mark the reservation,—His attributes, not Himself. He is ever hidden within impenetrable isolation. Nature leaves us crying, "Show us the Father." 2. God was revealed in Christ. Because men could never by searching find out the Almighty, the Word which was with God, and was God, became flesh and dwelt amongst us, revealing Him even to our senses. The incarnation shows that, while the Deity is an Infinite Spirit pervading immensity, He is yet a person. He has feeling, and thought, and will, as we have. Taking to Himself a body like ours, He manifests every quality which makes earthly friends real. Very God was with men in human body and human soul. 3. God is revealed by His Spirit. When Jesus ascended, the dispensation of the Spirit began, a closer and fuller Divine manifestation. The incarnation was not an immediate revelation of God. By the Holy Ghost God enters directly into our spirits; we know Him, commune with Him, without any earthly faculty called in to interpret. Neither did the incarnation complete the revelation. The fullest manifestation of God to man began at Pentecost. The office of the Spirit is not to supersede the revelation through Christ, but to disclose its meaning and apply its power. Nature shows God above us; Christ is God with us; the Holy Spirit is God in us. **II. WE NEED GOD'S SPIRIT, BECAUSE THROUGH THE SPIRIT THE MOST POWERFUL DIVINE INFLUENCE IS EXERCISED UPON MEN.** God does not merely reveal Himself to the soul, He also acts upon it. 1. The influence of the Spirit was needed to write the Scriptures. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. He put before their intellect deep things which it was quickened to apprehend. Their affections were exalted to delight in the infinite grace unveiled to them. Their conscience was purified to behold and adore the Divine holiness. What they saw and felt they were moved to declare to the world. It is this supernatural influence upon the writers which has given the Bible its authority and power. By this influence the Scriptures are understood. Only He who illuminated the writer can enlighten the reader. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Critical acumen without spiritual insight cannot understand the book. 2. The influence of the Spirit is needed in regeneration and sanctification. The plainest truths of the character of God will not of themselves renew the soul. The intellect discerns them, the heart feels, the conscience trembles, the will may struggle to obey, but all this does not give life. There must be added a Divine, a creative touch, which shall send a new energy into every faculty, thrilling through the will itself, and quickening all to the sacred activities of a regenerated soul. This creative act separates the new life in its feeblest beginnings, at a world-wide distance from the most admirable exhibitions of the old life. Wonderful and awful is the entrance of God into the human soul. Under the Old Testament dispensation the Spirit was sent to exceptional individuals for exceptional purposes; it is the mission of the Comforter to abide permanently in every believer, bringing him into personal

union with God, and making him like God. The fruit of the Spirit is not dreams and visions, signs and wonders, but love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,"—healthy every-day virtues that make kind husbands, patient mothers, dutiful children, upright citizens, and pure officials. 3. The influence of the Spirit is needed in Christian work. The Almighty uses human agents. Heathen abroad and unbelievers at home are to be saved through the efforts of Christians. The most powerful Divine influence is given them to accomplish this. We do not always realise that the Almighty is working more efficiently in His present manifestation through the Spirit than He has ever wrought in any other method. He who gives grace to receive the truth also gives grace to speak it. The understanding mind, the earnest heart, the wise tongue, these are the gift of the Spirit. All the Christian power comes from this help. Through our study, our pleading, our prayer must breathe that holy presence which is the power of God unto salvation. This lesson has a special promise to feeble churches and discouraged Christians. It shows that all human opposition is of no account in the sight of God. He gives power to the weak, and grace to the faulty to do His work. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

The might of the Spirit:—What is the secret of the immense and amazing victory of Christianity? It lies in the out-poured Spirit of Pentecost. It was that which made the might of weakness irresistible; it was that which gave to the feeble seedling its imperishable vitality. Nor is it only that Christianity is still preached; it is still no dead doctrine, but a living force to those who truly receive it. Is there nothing for men who are filled with the Spirit of God to do now? Look at the universal worldliness around us; look at the passionate Mammon worship; at the reckless competition; at the desecration of Sundays in the mere voluptuous wantonness of pleasure. O God, give us saints; O God, pour out the Spirit of Thy might! (*Dean Farrar.*)

The world-conquering Spirit:—The work of the early Churches, and that of the Churches of this age, agree in principle and purpose. The difficulties and forms of opposition are substantially the same. They are more moral than intellectual. 1. The prevalent worldly spirit. 2. The careless spirit manifest in another direction. There is an intellectual indifference to Christianity. But the majority of those who are indifferent to Christianity do not lay claim to any such difficulties. They are simply and utterly careless. 3. The sceptical spirit that lifts its voice around us. Then wherein lies our power? Is it in intellectual subtleties of reasoning? No intellectual power can touch the root of man's alienation from God. It lies in supernatural power: a power which, springing from the Divine heart, lays hold of our hearts and permeates them with His own energy, infusing our intellectual powers with His own strength. With increased supernatural power—the power of the Spirit—we shall yet come against the world spirit, the careless spirit, the sceptical spirit, and cast them down, and the sea of everlasting love shall roll on until "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." (*R. F. Bracey.*)

The spiritual work of the Church:—1. It is with the spiritual nature of man the Church has to do. (1) Her purpose is not political. A great and important factor she certainly is in all true political progress; but she was not instituted to promote either Republicanism or Imperialism. (2) Her purpose is not to effect great social and moral reforms. These reforms are certain results of her progress. Wherever she becomes a power the character of the people is purified, the tone of life is raised. (3) Her purpose is not only to secure the world's belief in her creed. 2. In man's spiritual nature she has to effect the most radical changes—the greatest transformations. Conversion must be wrought. There must be a change in the spirit's condition, the spirit's relations, and the spirit's aspirations. The accomplishment of this work requires a special power, a spiritual power. 1. It cannot be done by the might and power of the sword. Or—2. By the power of law. "You cannot make men moral by acts of parliament." Or—3. By the might and power of reason. Your premises may be admitted, your arguments conclusive, and your pulpits distinguished for logical force, but men may remain as stones, and our churches as deserts. Or—4. By the might and power of sympathy. Sympathy can touch the heart as no other human force can. But sympathy fails to convert and renew. The essential power is in the Spirit of the Lord of hosts only. 1. This Spirit is greater than the forces in opposition. (1) Greater than the human spirit which has to be won. (2) Greater than the spirit of evil, united with the human spirit, that has to be conquered. 2. This Spirit infuses a new life. He creates. 3. This Spirit effects the change in perfect

harmony with man's freedom. The Church is in the greatest power when she is most filled with the Holy Spirit. Filled with the Spirit, she can be confident of success, although her members be few and the opposing forces strong. The Church's truest friends are those who are the most spiritual, and who most earnestly seek the Spirit's power in her. (*Rombeth.*) *The Spirit of the Lord*:—This message of God is addressed to Zerubbabel, as the former was addressed to Joshua. In this fact the difference in the nature of the vision is to be accounted for. Joshua represented the nation spiritually, and the nation had sinned. So the message to him is a message of mercy, and forgiveness, and promise. Zerubbabel was the civil ruler, and represented the nation's might and resources and means of defence. So he is bidden not to rely upon these, as he was prone to do, but to rely upon God. Two thoughts are prominent. I. THE COMPLETED TEMPLE WAS SYMBOLISED. Zechariah saw a golden candlestick. What did it mean? The candlestick which in old time had been made by Moses and set up in the tabernacle, and which afterwards was removed to the temple at Jerusalem, had been removed out of its place because of the infidelities and sins of the people. There was no tabernacle now where God dwelt, no temple with its mercy-seat and golden candlestick. But there it stood in its perfect and incomparable beauty before the eyes of the prophet as the symbol of a restored temple, with its lamp and altars of sacrifice and incense and songs of joyful worship. It was a picture of what was to be, a prediction of a future which in God's gracious purpose was near at hand. II. THE COMPLETE RESTORATION OF NATIONAL LIFE. Israel was meant to be the light of the world, as the Christian Church is in a more perfect manner. When the chosen nation fell into sin, and had to be punished by the desolation of temple, city, and land, the world was darkened, and the lamp which God had lighted before the nations was put out. Restored worship and a revived nation meant a rekindling of this lamp. To illustrate these ideas and apply them to daily dangers and duties. (*Matt. v. 14-16; Mark iv. 21, 22; Luke xii. 35; Phil. ii. 15; Rev. i. 20, ii. 5.*) III. THE MEANS OF RESTORATION WAS DECLARED. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." (1) Man is prone to rely upon the material. Never was this more manifest than to-day. Man believes in himself, in his resources, in his mastery over the world. He boasts of what his science has discovered, of what his hands have wrought. "Look," he says, "at the bridges which span mighty rivers, at the tunnels I have bored through the earth. See how I can control the electric spark, and make it light up great cities, and send my messages to the ends of the earth." But the power which really does all these things is God's. One object of the Bible is to correct the short-sightedness of man, which fails to see through modes of operation to the Divine Mover and Sustainer of the universe, and so to teach us not to trust in our own strength, or in the strength of human allies, or the forces of wealth, nor yet to be afraid of failure in God's work, because consciously weak and poor and girt about with dangers. The vision is equally fitted to humble us in the hour of triumph, and to inspire courage in the hour of apparent failure and in the day of small beginnings. (2) The material often fails. Success marks man's life, yes, but failure also. A frost undermines his bridges, and they are rolled into the torrent. The forces of nature often rise up to defy man. In the events of life unforeseen accidents frustrate his plans, and pour mockery on his devices. The Jews had broken down in their attempts to rebuild the temple. They began well, and laid the foundations thereof with rejoicing, but reverses followed, and they gave it up. We must not in our life rely upon self. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. (3) God works for us when we work for Him. "By My Spirit, saith the Lord." This truth was wondrously illustrated in the history of the Hebrew people. But that which happened to them was an ensample to us. He is with us if we are with Him, and we may boldly say, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." (4) God never fails. What He promises to do He does—does perfectly, and does at the right time. Let us look up. Let us trust in Him. (*T. Vincent Tyms.*) *The true source of power*:—We recognise the lesson which this vision furnishes, namely, that God is in His Church and in the world, and that His government in both is enforced and supported by the adoption of his own agencies. And furthermore, we learn that there is order and unanimity in the employ of such agencies. In the symbol there is unity, order, co-operation, and maintenance. Vegetable life is maintained through a system of organisation. The whole system of human life is carried on by the same principle. The great truth laid down in our subject

is that of co-operation. The golden pipes of the candlestick co-operate with the oil in giving light to the lamps. It is not the mere outward forms and institutions by which only the Church is to preserve her God-like character, and to diffuse her good and saving influence upon the world, but by the Divine Spirit acting through these, uniting them to Himself in one grand scheme of co-operation. The means are required, but they must be made subservient to the Divine will, and co-operate, in their dependency and trust, with the omnipotence and guidance of the Almighty. Consider, then, the true source—I. OF POWER. "Power belongeth unto God." To Him we ascribe all might. This is the one and only source of our power, personally or nationally. We have our instrumentalities, we have our Church and national appliances for building up and enlarging all that is right and beneficial; but we wait for the fire from heaven to kindle it. II. OF COURAGE. Courage lies not in dexterity, but in the heart, in the mind. It is shown by a cool obedience, by a steadiness of manly purpose. Courage that is true is the power of mind over matter. But in order to trace out its source we must look above mind to that Divine Spirit who acts upon the mind. III. OF CONQUEST. The noblest battle is against sin, and the noblest conquest is that of self. Hence as the foes of God, of ourselves, and of truth accumulate upon our life-path, may we meet them with a power, a courage, and a conquest embodied in the words,—“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” (*W. D. Horwood.*) *The agency of the Holy Spirit*:—The primary allusion of these words requires no explanation. The typical import is not less apparent than the primary reference. That by the law of types is not mere, not accidental resemblance, but similarity designed, as well as complete and unquestionable. Man was created to be the temple of God. That temple is now in ruins. The grand end of Christianity is to restore that temple, to clear away the rubbish that conceals its glory. From the contemplation of existing ruin, glance at the ideal of future restoration,—its amplitudes, its completeness, its perpetuity. How can the vision be realised? If, looking at the disproportion of the agency, there comes over the heart the painful impression of inadequacy, and the corresponding, the contingent apathy of despair, then listen to the spirit-stirring voice of the text, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” We are not to conclude that weakness is at all necessarily connected with this influence of the Spirit. The laws that determine the nature and regulate the action of this power of the mind. It must be cognate in kind to that on which it acts. Again, mind is responsible; and to be so must be free. Anything therefore that moves it must not interfere with its liberty of choice or its freedom of judgment. Again, mind is infinitely, constitutionally diversified. Its idiosyncrasies are endless, and, under the influence of a spiritual power, we have reason to expect full tolerance of such varieties, and that no attempt will be made to reduce all into dull uniformity. We are not to interpret the text as teaching that the Spirit is to act independently of, and unconnected with, human agency. The power of coercion, our Gospel leaves to error or secularised systems. The philosophy of the Cross, nevertheless, continually associates Divine power and human agency. In its moral canons and apparatus, the energy of God does not supersede the activity of man; nor is the activity of man efficient without the energy of God. These remarks lead to the proposition of the text, that no human, no created instrumentality, which acts independently and alone, is adequate to the restoration of the fallen temple; but that the Spirit of the Lord of hosts provides the sole efficient energy for the conversion of the world. I recognise the adaptation of truth, scriptural truth, to the nature and necessities of man. That adaptation is universal. Biblical truth is entirely accommodated to our condition and character. Let truth be admitted to the heart and it must conquer. Undoubtedly it must. But a prior question exists, how is it to obtain admission there? The avenues are blocked up by sin. 1. Now it is fair to reason for the truth of a principle from the necessary inconsistencies of its opposite, to urge anomalies irreconcilable, except on the supposition of the accuracy of the assertion before us. Consider then these anomalies. It will be generally granted that in similar circumstances uniformity of cause will be accompanied with uniformity of result. If, accordingly, in the evangelical plan no power beyond the human is at work, similar external energy will issue in similar results. Yet such is not our experience. If dependent on human power, the Gospel will be most successful when preached by the most eloquent men. The skill of an advocate often compensates for the hollowness of the cause. But if the measure of real

ministerial success be the conversion of souls to God, the most logical and eloquent preachers of the Gospel are not the most successful. Again, the Bible contains a system of pure ethics. We might expect the most cordial reception of this system from the purest moralists when and where it is ever propounded. All history attests the reverse. 2. Another train of illustration unfolds itself in analogy. The emblems of conversion are not more numerous and varied than they are one in, indirectly but really, tracing all the results of the Gospel to the power of the Spirit of God. What we want is a ministry thrilled into life by God's Spirit, and thrilling men into vigorous, healthy, sustained life, by the same Spirit, superinduced by faith and prayer. 3. Coincident with this conclusion is the experience of the Church, not only in its more ordinary and routine movements, but in its epochs that stand out in bold relief. Consider then the history of the modern revived Church. Consider the relative success of the preaching of our Lord and of His apostles. Conclude by appeal to scriptural assertion. The Spirit then is the power with which the Church is to be armed. (*Thomas Archer, D.D.*)

Independence of Christianity.—God's first and greatest object is His own glory. This is true in the general of the great acts of God, this is equally true in the minutiae of them. God is jealous of His own honour; He will not suffer even His Church to be delivered in such a way as to honour men more than God; He will take to Himself the throne without a rival. **I. NOT BY MIGHT.** "Might" properly signifies, the power of a number of men combined together. "Power" signifies the prowess of a single individual. Treat might as meaning might collectedly. 1. Collected might in human armies. The Church can neither be preserved, nor can its interests be promoted by human armies. The progress of the arms of a Christian nation is not the progress of Christianity. 2. Might may signify great corporations or denominations of men. There never ought to have been any denominations at all. They may do some good, but they do a world of mischief. Whenever a denomination begins to get too great, God will cut away its horns, and take away its glory, till the world shall say, "It is not by might nor by power." **II. NOR BY POWER,** that is, individual strength. The greatest works that have been done have been done by the ones. Take any church, there are multitudes in it, but it is some two or three that do the work. Individual effort is, after all, the grand thing. Learning is useful, so is eloquence; but God does not work by these His great works. **III. BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.** What a magnificent change would come over the face of Christendom if God were on a sudden to pour out His Spirit as He did on the day of Pentecost. The grand thing the Church wants at this time is God's Holy Spirit. Whatever faults there may be in our organisation, they can never materially impede the progress of Christianity, when once the Spirit of the Lord is in our midst. Be in earnest in praying for this. All we want is the Spirit of God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

A work beyond human ability.—**I. AS IMPLYING SOME IMPORTANT PROPOSITIONS.** 1. That many things which it is our duty to attempt evidently lie beyond human powers. 2. We have reason to expect that God will grant the necessary aid while we use the means which are in our power. 3. God communicates spiritual aid in a manner concealed from human observation. 4. These invisible operations of the Holy Spirit do not supersede human agency, nor alter, in general, the connection between cause and effect. 5. God uses men and means in such a way as to leave no doubt to whom the accomplishment is owing. **II. AS SUGGESTING SOME USEFUL ADMONITIONS.** 1. The words convey instruction. They throw great light on events which have occurred, for which historians have not been able to assign an adequate reason. 2. A lesson of reproof. Some lay great stress on human means and do not look for the influences of the Spirit. 3. A lesson of encouragement. We are too apt to despise "the day of small things." God acts by degrees. The kingdom of God is as a mustard-seed, but that can grow into a great tree. (*C. Jerram, M.A.*)

The triumph of the Divine kingdom.—So much is in the hands of providence that, in general, we can only conjecture what may be the result. In proportion as events are dependent on the will of God, they are uncertain to us. **I. THE MOST HIGH HAS CLEARLY PROMISED IN HIS WORD, THAT THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST SHALL ULTIMATELY PREVAIL OVER THE EARTH.** The religious history of the world presents a threefold aspect. 1. We may regard man in the state into which he was plunged by the first transgression; obnoxious to the wrath of the Most High, and distant from Him. Men divide into two classes:—those who forget God altogether, and the Jews to whom were committed the oracles of God. 2. To

the head of the Jewish people it was promised, "In Thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." 3. These promises formed part of the joy set before the Redeemer, by which He was stimulated in His work of self-denial. II. GOD HAS ENJOINED IT AS A DUTY ON HIS CHURCH TO ENDEAVOUR TO PROMOTE THIS END. The inspired writers derived this notion from two sources. 1. Express commands. 2. The principle on which those commands went. The appointment of a Christian ministry implies this duty. III. THE MOST HIGH HAS COMMUNICATED TO THE CHURCH ADEQUATE MEANS FOR ACCOMPLISHING THIS END. We do not now need the aid of miracles. Our power lies in the presence and impulse of the Spirit of truth. IV. WE MAY ANTICIPATE THE PERIOD WHEN THE KINGDOM SHALL BE FULLY ESTABLISHED. Some hopeful signs are—1. An increasing respect for the Word of God. 2. A more general appeal to the great converting principle of the Word of God. 3. A universal endeavour to pay the debt of obligation to the diffusion of the Word of God. 4. Much success has already attended the labours of Christians, and this shows how God smiles on the rising energies of His Church. 5. The hopeful state of the Church as the administrator of truth in the present day. If the Spirit of the Christian religion live in our minds, we shall want no exhortation to advance a cause like this. (*W. Wilson, A.M.*) *The necessity of the Holy Spirit's aid* :—The sentiment here recorded refers to the building of the second temple. When the prophet contemplated the difficulties that lay in the way of the accomplishment of this great design, the magnitude of the work, the obstacles to be overcome, and the insignificance of man's best energies, he was ready to despair. But the assurance came to him that the work should certainly be accomplished, but not by man's might, only in the power of the Spirit of God. I. A NEGATIVE PROPOSITION. "Not by might," can any design be brought to a successful issue. Illustrate by recalling some of the great occurrences which have taken place in the history of the world, and which declare this incontrovertible truth. History of Tyre, Babylon, Assyrian attack on Israel, degradation of Rome, story of Spanish Armada, French Revolution, &c. II. AN AFFIRMATIVE PROPOSITION. Illustrate some instances of the success which attends spiritual exertions sustained amid prayers, and blessed by the presence of the Spirit of God. Noah, the only righteous man in the world at that period of prevailing sin. Success of Joshua when Moses' hands were held up. Success of the Apostles. Reformation of Luther. Triumphs of missionaries. This principle of dependence on the Spirit applies to our reading the Word of God, and to the mode of a sinner's acceptance before God. (*John Cumming, D.D.*) *The work of the Holy Spirit* :—The primary application of these words was to the Jews who were engaged upon the great work of rebuilding their temple. Because they could not depend upon themselves, the Lord, in these words addressed to Zerubbabel, opened a better resource. It was not "by might nor by power" that they were to succeed, but "by His Spirit." Now the Spirit, whereby God helped the Jews in their necessity, was the very same Spirit which, from the commencement, has been concerned in all that regards the well-being of man, and the government of this lower world. He "moved upon the face of the waters." Upon the world thus created through the eternal Spirit, the work of redemption was to be carried out and accomplished. We do not marvel that the Lord Jesus, on entering upon the great work of His ministry, received a visible communication of that same Spirit; and through that same Spirit He offered Himself a sacrifice unto God. The Holy Spirit does not now descend for miraculous operations in the Church. But the promise of the Holy Spirit is a perpetual promise. And it is necessary for the whole Christian community. I. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT IN BRINGING ABOUT THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOSPEL. The Apostles and first missionaries had to encounter difficulties of every shape and character. Where did they get the wisdom which their adversaries were not able to gainsay or confute? How were they enabled to speak those gracious words which never failed? It was through the Spirit of God. We do not confine these marvellous interpositions of the Spirit to apostolical times. The Spirit has always accompanied the Word with power. II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CARRYING FORWARD THE WORK OF SANCTIFYING AND LIKENESS UNTO GOD. After our conversion we must count upon many a long and weary day of trial and temptation, and spiritual conflict, and heart-distress. If we would take a deeper insight into the things of God, we must ask the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Jesus and show them unto us. Our enemies may be overcome, because greater is He who is with us than all who can be against us. It is promised that

we shall be "strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man." And the consolation of a Christian man's heart comes direct from the influence of the Holy Spirit. And what is true concerning the individual is true concerning the great Christian body. When the Church is despised and persecuted and everywhere spoken against, God puts forth His interposing arm, delivers His people, and comforts them, confirming the truth of His ancient word, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." (*E. Robins, M.A.*) *The might and power of God's Spirit demonstrated*:—Our subject is, the Spirit's influence on the human mind.

I. THE NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE. Considering the varied moral effects of the fall, we may ask, can any less powerful agent than the Spirit of God re-organise our faculties, and adduce harmony, loveliness, and order, out of the confusion that prevails within us? No one can savingly know the truth and be really holy, but as taught of God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

II. THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE. We are not called upon to explain the mode or manner of the Spirit's operation on the human mind. The fact is sufficient for our purpose. The value of the agency will correspond with the nature of the agent. Agreeable to His high and essential excellence will be the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit's work should not be thought of as miraculous. Influence only of an ordinary and necessary kind do we contend for, and that only in an ordinary way, and the use of ordinary means. It is—

1. Quickening in its nature, "The Spirit that quickeneth."
2. It is enlightening.
3. It is renewing.
4. It is sanctifying.
5. It is consoling.
6. It is assuring.

III. THE EVIDENCE OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE. The tree is known by its fruits, so also is the Holy Ghost. His fruits are "love, joy, peace," &c. An immediate effect of supernatural agency will be, a deep and humbling conviction of sin. Another will be,—a ceaseless restlessness till mercy and forgiveness be obtained. A third will be,—a supreme valuation of Jesus Christ. A fourth will be,—a prevailing desire to be holy. (*W. Mudge.*) *A law of Divine operations among men*:—A rule upon which the eternal God acts in the affairs of His people. The law is this,—that not human energy nor resources but the Spirit produces good; that not man but God gives success. Recall some illustrations of this law.

1. In the circumstances in which it was given. The builders of the second temple were disheartened and hindered. Their power was gone; they were taught to look to the Divine power which would work through them.
2. In the operations of the third Person in the Trinity upon the Church. Its progress has always been due, not to human might and power, but to the Holy Ghost.
3. The effect of the truth upon the heart of man is not of man, it is of God.
4. The advancement of Divine life in the soul is in accordance with the same rule. It becomes then the duty of believers to depend on the Holy Spirit at all times for success. Reliance on the Holy Spirit for producing spiritual effects is the rule for Christians. To lose sight of this rule brings a blight upon efforts however earnest. This reliance will act in a twofold way; it will hinder any resting or boasting in lawful human resources; and it will give encouragement where there is little human resource. Faith in the power of the Holy Ghost will inspirit men, will shed new light upon their humble path, will put new vigour into their exertions, and will make them bold for God according to their measure, their capacity, and their means. And a pressing necessity arises for continual prayer that the Spirit may be given. While you seek more of the Spirit for yourself, pray earnestly that the gift may be bestowed on others. (*Forster G. Simpson, B.A.*) *The Word of the Lord to Zerubbabel*:—The vision seen by the prophet Zechariah in this chapter is evidently descriptive of the spiritual character and strength of the Church of God, shining with a communicated light, and sustained by a communicated strength perpetually supplied. We dwell on the interpretation of it. We are told—

1. The false grounds of confidence which are to be rejected. "Might and power" include all earthly means and human instrumentality. The powers of reasoning, the exhibition of truth, or the force of argument, are not to be despised or neglected. It is the trusting to them, the resting in them, or the boasting of them, that is to be, and must be, utterly rejected if we would look for the favour and blessing of Almighty God. If we may not trust to the strength of reason, or the force of truth, neither may we to the powers of oratory. The gifts of oratory or eloquence are lovely and excellent, but trusted in, or gloried in, they become snares and stumbling-blocks, drawing away the heart and affections from Christ, and converting our acts of worship into an idolatrous service. Every Christian has his own peculiar sphere of influence

with which to serve and honour God. But all brought under such influence must beware lest they rest in it and go no farther. Religion must be a personal concern. Then there are those who imagine that they love the truth, because they love those who profess it. A religion based on such grounds is not to be trusted. When the Spirit of God is not the author of the work, it cannot stand trial, even in this world. 2. The only source of spiritual prosperity. There are three particulars in which the work of the Spirit may be distinguished. In transforming the character. In overcoming the world. In glorifying the grace of God. 3. The certainty of these effects of the Spirit's work issuing in the glory of the grace of God. That which God only can effect, to God only can be attributed. To bring man back again to His own likeness is God's own work, for the manifestation of His almighty power, the revelation of His infinite love, and the perfection of His eternal praise; when, the holy temple completed, the top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings of, "Grace, grace unto it." (*J. M. Wilde, B.A.*)

Opposition to the Gospel in every age.—The opposition made to the building of the temple in that age may be considered as emblematical of the opposition made to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the hearts of men and in the world. By the "Spirit of the Lord" we may understand Divine power generally, or the Holy Ghost. The proposition to illustrate is, that the existence and prevalence of religion in the heart and in the world are not owing to human power but wholly to the Holy Ghost. If it were the result of human power, then—

1. Men of great learning and talents would be the first to embrace the Gospel. Their talents and learning seem to qualify them in a peculiar manner for investigating the evidences of the truth of religion. We reasonably expect that they will be the first to receive with meekness, humility, and gratitude, every doctrine which the Bible reveals. How different the actual facts are! The majority of men of talents and learning have either rejected the Bible or treated it with scorn. And the comparatively ignorant and unlearned have become "wise unto salvation." How shall we account for this difference? Never, without taking into account the work of the Holy Ghost.
2. If religion in the heart were by might and by power, then those who are decent and moral would be the first to embrace the Gospel. To all the duties of the second table they pay strictest attention. To such it might be supposed that the Gospel would be exceedingly acceptable. Then there are persons who seem utterly careless and dead; to all appearance they are the children of perdition. And yet, contrary to all expectation, we see the decent formalist passing smoothly to perdition; while the wicked and profane are often "plucked as brands from the burning."
3. If religion were by might and power, then those who hear the ablest preachers would always be the best Christians. But facts do not correspond with expectations. Some of the ablest preachers have laboured with little success; while others, greatly their inferiors, have been "wise in winning souls." As the existence and prevalence of religion in the heart is wholly the work of the Spirit of God; so the existence and prevalence of religion in the world must be the fruit of the same agency. The arguments which illustrate the one also illustrate the other. The progress of religion in the world is just the progress of religion in a multitude of hearts. Look at the state of the world when the Apostles of Christ were first sent forth to preach "the Gospel of the blessed God." The men who were sent to preach were few in number, without learning, without wealth, without influence, without eloquence. What rendered their work so successful? Only the power of the "Spirit of the Lord." In process of time superstition almost extinguished the light of the Gospel. Corruption spread so rapidly, and diffused itself so widely, that in a little time nothing remained of Christianity but the name. Would the reformation have been such a power and blessing to the world without the presence of the Spirit of the Lord? The success of modern missions is not due to instrumentality, but to the power of the Spirit in the instrumentality. Then let us pray for the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord upon ourselves and upon our missionaries. This is a matter of unspeakable importance. And let us feel a deeper interest in the salvation of our own souls and the souls of others. Let us be more generally, more fervently, more perseveringly, employed in prayer for the Spirit of the Lord. (*W. S. Smart.*)

God's work in man.—In the work of God in the heart, and for the work of God in our lives, we require the operation of God's Holy Spirit. Man is continually seeking and claiming for Himself independence. But they are happy, and they alone are happy, who can commit all their ways unto the Lord their God. Whether we are converted or unconverted, we must be inhabited

by some spirit. I. THE NECESSITY FOR A SPIRITUAL AGENCY. This arises—

1. From man's wants on earth. He needs life. By nature he is dead, "dead in trespasses and sins." How is spiritual life to be obtained? It must be the effect of God's sovereign mercy, by the operation of His Holy Spirit. But man wants light as well as life. He is dark by nature. By the fall his understanding became darkened, and he requires to have that understanding renewed, before he can in any wise comprehend the plain and simple truth which concerns his everlasting peace. Men continue walking in that same darkness in which they were originally created. None but the Holy Spirit of God enlightens man. But if man wants light and life, so also does he require love, because by nature he is at enmity with God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Again, man requires health, for he is spiritually sick. This also comes by the Spirit. Man requires confidence in God, for by nature he distrusts God.
2. We require the Holy Spirit for our admission into heaven. (1) There must be a title to heaven. How is this obtained? We are regenerated by the Spirit. We are adopted into God's family by the application of the blood of Christ to the conscience by that same Spirit. (2) There must be meetness for heaven. This does not depend on our outward circumstances, but upon the inward working of the Holy Ghost. It is the same Spirit that supplies our daily want of grace.

II. THE RESULTS WHICH FOLLOW FROM THIS SPIRITUAL AGENCY. There is security for us amid all the trials and temptations of this life. The subject suggests to us the greatest encouragement in the midst of our many difficulties. The road to everlasting life is beset with difficulties. Who shall be able to overcome these "many adversaries"? None but they who have the Spirit of God working with them. Address those who are disheartened in the endeavour to live the Christian life. Do not attempt to serve God with a half-hearted service; the failure will be as complete in itself as it will be miserable and wretched to you. Be decided, if you are really seeking to be God's children. Are any of you trying to hinder the work of God in others? Remember, there is One above who sees all the malice, perceives all the enmity, and considers that any opposition offered to His children is offered to Himself. (*H. M. Villiers, M.A.*) *God's modes of working*:—When Zerubbabel was ready to bend before the interruption of his work, his heart was greatly encouraged to persevere in the arduous undertaking by the assurance that through God's special interposition and grace the work should be carried forward to a happy and honourable termination, till at last he should bring forth "the headstone thereof with shouting, Grace, grace unto it." The expression "Not by might," &c., intimates that God will carry on and complete His work, as He had begun their deliverance from Babylon, not by external force, but by the internal influence of His Spirit upon the minds of men.

I. OBSERVATIONS FOR ILLUSTRATING THE TEXT. 1. It is usual for God to bring most important and stupendous results out of causes apparently trivial and unimportant. 2. The words of text imply God's accomplishment—of the most gracious designs by the weakest and most insignificant instruments. 3. That it is our duty to attempt many things which evidently lie beyond human power. 4. God will grant the necessary aid while we employ the means that are in our power.

II. PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THE SUBJECT. 1. That ministers should preach the Gospel with an humble and confidential dependence on the co-operation of the Spirit to crown their labours with success. 2. This subject administers reproof to those who pervert it into an argument for carnal sloth and security. 3. Learn not to despise the day of small things. As in the natural, so in the moral world, the progress of God's power is often hid from our view; but still, is it making no advancement? The Spirit of God is again moving on the face of the deep, preparatory to a new creation. (*James Hay, D.D.*) *The only power that can set the world right*:—An infidel, who was also a well-known socialist marked down by the police, entered a meeting of the Salvation Army in Switzerland to make satirical remarks for a Constantinople paper, but during the meeting he was moved by the power of God, and at the close, with tears running down his cheeks, he said, "Ah, I believed in dynamite to set the world right, but now I see there's another power, and the only one." *The Spirit of the Lord*:—It was the mission of Zechariah to stimulate the courage of God's people, to kindle again the enthusiasm for the temple and the theocracy with which they had set out from Babylon. Opposition from their foes, the enormity of the task of restoring the temple, and the necessity of providing homes for themselves, had broken their courage, and diverted them from contemplation of their great spiritual

destiny. They must be brought again to the deep theocratic feeling cherished among their fathers of old. The Lord's message to Israel through Zechariah was communicated to the prophet in a series of eight visions. It was a hard lesson for these returned exiles, this lesson of implicit trust in God. The nation was just awaking out of a long night, in which God seemed to have abandoned them. They were little practised in seeing the invisible. Like Elisha's servant, they needed to have their eyes opened to perceive the mountains of Jerusalem "full of horses and chariots of fire" round about the Lord's chosen. The tendency of our times is away from all special reliance on the Spirit of God. Relatively, we have too great faith in secondary causes. To build a temple, you need only a competent architect, a good contractor, and a good force of masons. If opposition is threatened, simply provide yourself with a sufficient police force. Such is men's creed now. We glorify organisation. We deify law. We apotheosise the practical. We are witnessing a revival of the heretical belief in salvation by works. If it was necessary for James to say, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone," it is necessary for us to say, Work, if it hath not faith, is dead, being alone. We give up our inspiration for institutions. We lose the Spirit of God in elaborately designed methods for His operation. The intellectual, the practical, the spiritual; this is the order of importance according to the judgment of many contemporaries. Few things, therefore, could be of more importance to the religious life of to-day than this message of Zechariah to the returned exiles. However truly and clearly seers and prophets may still apprehend God, the life of thousands goes on nowadays in practical atheism. And the infection has spread to the churches. Witness the almost frantic efforts of some among them to keep themselves alive. Having insensibly withdrawn from the sources of vital piety their only recourse is the process of artificial respiration. We need schooling in the science of spiritual dynamics and economics. That this thought may assume greater definiteness, let me specify some of the lessons which the vision of Zechariah has for us. I mention, out of many, three—

I. THE PROPER RELATION OF GOD'S SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH IS A VITAL ONE. Philosophically considered, the main conceptions of God which have been current in the religious progress of the race are two: God as transcendent above the world, and God as immanent in the world. The one erects a throne for the Ruler of the universe somewhere above the sky, and worships Him from afar. It reached its extreme form among the Deists of the last century, who denied all interference on the part of God in the affairs of the world. It was the dominant, though not the only conception of God among the Jews before the coming of Christ, which helps to account for the formality and barrenness of their religion. Nothing so robs religion of its transforming and sustaining power as the drawing of its sanctions from some distant sphere, and the deferring of its rewards to some future age. The other conception—that God is immanent in the world—finds its best exposition in the literature of Pantheism, and has had expression and adherents ever since the time of the Vedic hymns. It reaches its extreme form in the view, still current, which denies to God personality, and identifies Him with the forces which upbear and impel the world. Both these conceptions are found—though not in their extreme forms—in the Bible. The New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit may be regarded as the evangelical counterpart of the philosophical doctrine of immanence. The New Testament teaching here is summarised for us in the fulfilment, in Acts ii. 17, of the prophecy of Joel. God would no longer be confined above the sky, or by the walls of a single building, or by the lines which separate the nations. He would come out into the open, so to speak, and be seen everywhere. He would make every place sacred by His presence. The universe, and no longer a booth of skins or a house of cedar, would be His dwelling-place. This dispensation of the Spirit began on the day of Pentecost. In it the Gospel assumes its universal character and function. But the New Testament does not say that the Holy Spirit abides in the world and world forces in such a sense as to become one with them. In the ministry of the Holy Spirit God is still a person different from us and from His world, but He is no longer remote. With Paul we are thrilled with the awe of a great, tender reverence when we reflect that "He is not far away from any one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." I know of no more blighting heresy than the practical denial among us of this New Testament and Old Testament teaching concerning the presence of God's Spirit in His world, in His Church, as a vital blessed and mighty equipment for life's battles and duties. II. GOD'S SPIRIT

IS THE CHURCH'S ONLY PROPER EQUIPMENT FOR SERVICE. The presence of God's Spirit for defence and for aggression was the burden of Zechariah's message to Zerubbabel. God is our defence. It is said that William Penn was the only colonist in America who left his settlement wholly unprotected by fence or arms, and that his was the only one which was unassailed by the Indian tribes. The first Christians depended in a peculiar manner upon the Holy Spirit for protection and leadership, and with the result that they were delivered from the hands of persecutors. History affords no more striking enforcement of Zechariah's message: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." III. GOD'S SPIRIT, APPROPRIATED BY PRAYER, IS NOW INTENDED TO OPERATE THROUGH ALL BELIEVERS. In the time of Zechariah, God's Spirit wrought His will by means of special representatives. The olive-trees supplied the oil to the candelabrum. Only the anointed ones were in full measure supplied with the Spirit. But when Joel's prophecy was fulfilled the Lord poured out His Spirit upon all flesh. It was a new epoch in the spiritual progress of mankind. God will now to operate directly, without mediation, upon the hearts and minds of all believers. What matters it, however, if while we are within reach of strength we elect to continue in all our old weakness? The nearness of God does not ensure that we shall, in spite of ourselves, personally feel the thrill and joy of His strength. Prayer is a condition to this. Through prayer the very air about us may be charged with God, so as to bear us up like eagles in electric clouds. Closer than our breath is God with His Almighty Spirit and grace. Before Franklin's experiment for harnessing the lightning the air was as full of electricity as it is to-day, but men did not know how to appropriate it. A battery may be charged with electric fire, but you must make your connections to get the power. We need to gear our personal lives and our church work on the Power which moves the world. Then shall we see a revolution in spiritual commerce and economics which will speedily bring in the completed kingdom that was the hope of Zechariah and the inspiration of His message to Zerubbabel. We make this connection by prayer. Pray in faith, and there shall quiver along every fibre of your being a thrill of the life, light, and might of God. (*E. M. Poter.*)

Vers. 7-9. Who art thou, O great mountain.—*The temple of God built amidst difficulties* :—I. THE SEEMING DIFFICULTIES IN OUR LORD'S WAY. Solomon raised his goodly structure in quiet. Joshua and Zerubbabel had difficulty after difficulty to overcome. Turn to the Lord Jesus. What difficulties were there in His way when He first undertook to build God's temple in heaven! He had—1. To introduce sinners into heaven; to bring those near to God, who were among the farthest from Him. 2. He had to prepare sinners for heaven. The Lord the Redeemer has to work to the very last against the bias of nature, and the power of nature's lusts. Consider how many of such men He has to work on and change before His task can be completed. He has to bring "many sons unto glory." Remember where this work is to be done. In a world where there is everything to obstruct, and really nothing to aid it. It is to be accomplished too against all the powers of darkness. It cannot be done in an hour, or a day, or a year. II. THE EASE AND COMPLETENESS WITH WHICH THE REDEEMER OVERCOMES THE DIFFICULTIES BEFORE HIM. This is more strongly expressed in the abrupt language of the original, than in our translation "Who art thou?" There is no surprise or ignorance implied in this question. There is something like derision and contempt in it. The question expresses at once His own dignity, and the insignificance in His sight of the obstacles opposed to Him; His own almighty power and their utter impotence. Here lies one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in practical Christianity—to see the difficulties of salvation, and not be discouraged by them; to see the hills before us and around us, and yet to feel sure that the Lord will carry us over them. III. THE MEANS WHEREBY THE LORD JESUS CARRIES ON HIS GREAT WORK. Christianity has been established in the world without the world's aid, by means which have seemed most unlikely to establish it. Its very existence in the world at this moment is one of the greatest moral wonders the world ever saw. The Lord Jesus fits us for heaven by means of His Spirit. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Observe then here how jealous God is for the honour of the Holy Ghost. In looking to the Lord Jesus as our sanctifier, we must not overlook the Holy Spirit. He sanctifies us by this Spirit. IV. THE EFFECT WHICH WILL BE PRODUCED BY THE COMPLETION OF CHRIST'S WORK. God's present dealings with our world will not go on for ever. There is a day

coming when all His purposes of mercy towards it will be accomplished. The completion as spoken of under the figure of bringing forth and putting on the top or headstone of a building. This, in Eastern countries, was generally done with much ceremony, and in the presence of many beholders. With such a prospect before us, well may we ask with this prophet, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" As for the Church of Christ, let us learn to be ashamed of our fears concerning it. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Salvation secure*:—Treat the text as designed to encourage the believer in the assurance of his final salvation, in strong confidence of continuing and upholding power, to be vouchsafed to him. **I. THE HONOUR OF GOD IS CONCERNED IN A PERSUASION OF OUR FINAL SAFETY.** 1. In all spiritual temples the command to build, and the means to build, and the laying the foundation for the building, originate solely with God Himself. How unlikely then that God should forsake the work of His own hands. God is the author of that spiritual temple which is to be raised from the ruins of our degraded humanity. Man is as powerless to work a change in his own spiritual affections as he is to fix a new sun in the heavens, or to divert the course of the trackless deep. 2. The honour of God is concerned in the accomplishment of this work, by the multiplied succours which He has provided for carrying it on. We discover a constant regard to a law of progression. Whether God be ripening a blade of grass, or forming a world from the shapeless void, there is to be a beginning, a continuance, and an end. The building up of the soul into a holy temple in the Lord is no exception to this law. God will take His own time, and work in His own way. **II. THE BUILDING OF THIS TEMPLE WILL REDOUND TO THE GLORY OF CHRIST.** Zerubbabel is a type of Christ. 1. There is a promise on the part of Christ to His people, that He will work in them all needful grace to keep them faithful unto the end. 2. Christ is concerned in our final victory, because the believer's triumphs form an integral part of His own. Conclusion—(1) Be as confident with regard to the completion of the work as if it were altogether of God. (2) Be as diligent in working out that accomplishment as if it were altogether your own. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *The building of the spiritual temple*:—Zerubbabel is a type of a far greater builder than himself, and the temple of Zerubbabel is a shadow of a far nobler temple. Zerubbabel is a type of Him "whom God hath exalted from among the people," to build His spiritual temple; and the temple of Zerubbabel is a type of that Church, which is "built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone"; of which every true Christian is a lively, that is, a living stone; and in which all are built together, for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Each converted Christian is a temple of God by the Spirit, and like the temple of Zerubbabel, is honoured by the indwelling God as His abode. Christians are spoken of in Scripture as living stones of one great spiritual temple (as well as each being a separate temple). The manner in which the separate stones of Solomon's temple were prepared was striking and remarkable. While that temple was in building, no sound of axe or hammer was heard. Of the glorious temple to the Lord—a temple built of ransomed and purified souls, of deathless and sinless bodies—our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief builder. And He "will not fail nor be discouraged," until He has erected His spiritual building on God's eternal hill of Zion. But He uses instruments. He has His fellow-labourers. He directs their work. The whole plan is in His mind. To His ministers he gives "diversities of operations" by the same Spirit. It is the conviction that our great Master is with His servants, even unto the end of the world, that supports and cheers them under difficulties that would otherwise overwhelm them. (*W. Weldon Champneys, M.A.*) **His hands shall also finish it.**—*The founder and finisher of the temple*:—Zerubbabel is very little more than a grotesque name to most Bible readers. He was a prince of the blood royal of Israel, and the civil leader of the first detachment of returning exiles. The words of the text are, in their plain original meaning, the prophetic assurance that the man, grown an old man by this time, who had been honoured to take the first spadeful of soil out of the earth, should be the man "to bring forth the headstone with shoutings of grace, grace unto it!" I take them to be a Messianic prophecy. This Zerubbabel was a prophetic person. What was true about him primarily is thereby shown to have a bearing upon the greater Son of David who was to come thereafter, and who was to build the Temple of the Lord. **I. THERE IS HERE, A LARGE TRUTH AS TO CHRIST, THE TRUE TEMPLE-BUILDER.** "I am Alpha and Omega," &c. All the letters are from Him, and He underlies everything. That is true about Creation, in the broadest and in the most

absolute sense. "He is the beginning, and in Him all things consist." He is the Beginner and the Finisher of the work of redemption, which is His only, from its inception to its accomplishment. Jesus makes a new beginning; He presents a perfectly fresh thing in the history of human nature. Just as His coming was the introduction into the heart of humanity of a new type, the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, so the work that He does is all His own. He does it all Himself. The text declares that all through the ages His hand is at work. "Shall also finish it"—then he is labouring at it now. We have to think of a Christ who is working on and on, steadily and persistently. A work begun, continued, and ended by the same immortal hand is the work on which the redemption of the world depends.

II. WE HAVE HERE THE ASSURANCE OF THE TRIUMPH OF THE GOSPEL. There were many who were ready to throw cold water on the works of Zerubbabel. The text is the cure for all hopeless calculations by us Christian people, and by other than Christian people. When we begin to count up resources, and to measure these against the work to be done, there is little wonder that good men and bad men sometimes concur in thinking that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has very little chance of conquering the world. That is perfectly true, unless you take Him into the calculation, and then the probabilities are altogether different. He renews and purifies the corrupted Church, and He lives for ever. When Brennus conquered Rome, and the gold for the city's ransom was being weighed, he clashed his sword into the scale to outweigh the gold. Christ's sword is in the scale, and it weighs more than the antagonism of the world and the active hostility of hell.

III. HERE IS ENCOURAGEMENT FOR DESPONDENT AND TIMID CHRISTIANS. Jesus Christ is not going to leave you halfway across the bog. That is not His manner of guiding us. He began and He will finish. If the seed of the kingdom is in our hearts, He will watch over it, and He will bless the springing thereof. Be of good cheer, only keep near the Master, and let Him do what He desires to do for us all.

IV. HERE IS A STRIKING CONTRAST TO THE FATE WHICH ATTENDS ALL HUMAN WORKERS. Few of us are happy enough to begin and finish any task, beyond the small ones of our daily life. Authors die with half finished books. No man starts an entirely fresh line of action; he inherits much from the past. No man completes a great work that he undertakes. Coming generations, if it is one of the great historical works of the world, work out its consequences for good or evil. We have to be contented to do our little bit of work that will fit in along with that of a great many others. How many hands does it take to make a pin? We have to be content to be parts of a mighty whole. Multiplication of joy comes from division of labour. So let us do our little bit of work, and remember that whilst we do it, He is doing it in us for whom we are doing it, and let us rejoice to know that at the last we shall share in the "joy of our Lord," when He sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Reasons against pessimism.—Those Hebrew prophets were thorough optimists. No matter how great the desolation which was around them, no matter how deep the degradation into which the people had fallen, no matter how dark the prospect, they told of a glory to follow. Their words are charged with hope. They summoned languid, desponding souls to courageous action. They never hung their harp upon the willows. In the presence of error, evil, idolatry there is no quailing, no craven cry of fear, but a tone of almost contemptuous defiance. Can the force of contempt go further? "Moab is my washpot,"—I will wash my hands in Moab. "Over Edom I will fling my old shoe." It is so here. This young Zechariah is perhaps the most hopeful of all the prophets. He calls upon the daughter of Zion to sing and rejoice. The holy city, which has been despoiled, shall become so vast that no angel can measure it, and God shall be a wall of fire round about it, and the glory in the midst of it. In this chapter he seeks to encourage Zerubbabel in the great work of rebuilding the temple. A mighty mountain of hindrance bars his way. But by this most suggestive vision the prophet assures him that he shall be aided in his work by the mysterious energy of God. Perhaps there never was an age when the servants of Christ were more exposed to dejection, or when it was more incumbent upon them to maintain an undaunted and confident spirit. Pessimism is in the air. It fills our literature with a wailing cry. As Goethe said: "Men write as if they were all ill, and the whole world a lazaretto." There is a deep undertone of sadness in the life of our times. The culture of the age is mournful. One may well ask, Is this "merrie England"? The number of suicides in this country during the past thirty years has risen from 65 per million to 79.

In London it is 85, in Paris 422. Now, pessimism is the legitimate outcome of unbelief. If man is a bubble, soon to be pricked by death, how can he be glad? Men are congratulating the world that faith is dying; but they will find, if it dies, that some other things, which they would fain keep, have disappeared too. But if pessimism is proper to unbelief, it ought to have no place in the minds of Christian men. What are the reasons against pessimism? What reasons have we for declaring that it will be laid low? I. First of all, IT IS ALIEN TO HUMAN NATURE. The fundamental principle of pessimism is that evil is an essential element of human nature. It is original and permanent. The world is corrupt in its nature. The teaching of the Word of God is that sin is an intrusion. We are often told that the Scripture view of man is too dark. It is the only bright view of the subject. That which regards sin as natural is horrible, and forbids hope. Sin is neither the "essence of the creature nor the act of the Creator." So terrible is it when it culminates, that it would be fearful to regard it as the mere outcome of the natural working of the human heart. What a vivid picture is that which our Lord gives of the state of man! The human heart is a house, and living in it, ordering it, is "a strong man armed." Yes, sin is a mighty tyrant, but it is only a lodger. It occupies the city of Mansoul, but it has crept in and it can be cast out. Is not this evident from a survey of the effects of evil? It is manifestly foreign to human nature, for it runs right athwart the interests, and cuts deep into the powers of that nature, sapping its strength, and draining its very life-blood. It is a wrong inflicted upon the soul, not the intended outcome and expression of the soul. It is a great hurt, a violation of law, a break in the harmony of life, a discord in its music, a derangement of its order. The effects of sin are eloquent of its nature. It spoils, rends, tears, maims, perverts. It is off "the course of nature." Human nature has fallen among thieves, which have robbed, wounded it and left it half dead. Sin is not the essence of man; it is an alien thing, it is a foreign power. Men feel it has to be accounted for, that it is not according to the constitution of things. A belief in a fall runs through the religions of the world. Archdeacon Wilson has well said: "The problem about evil which has attracted the mind of man has always been enunciated as the origin of evil. Did any one ever write an essay or vex his mind over the origin of good? It is in the constitution of our minds to ask for a reason for anything that is rare, exceptional, or anomalous. Why does an eclipse of the sun take place? What is the cause of thunderstorms? But we do not often ask why the sun gives light. Can it be that evil is so rare a phenomenon? No; the pessimist will not admit, and the optimist will not assert, that evil is so rare an interference that we are driven to account for it because of its rarity. It is not because it is rare, but because we instinctively feel it is an intruder, however common it may be. We ask for the cause of sickness, common as it is. Health is the normal state; disease the abnormal. Sin is an interference, a fall." II. ANOTHER REASON AGAINST PESSIMISM, AND A GROUND FOR HOPE, IS TO BE FOUND IN THE WILES AND DECEPTIONS THAT EVIL MUST PRACTISE BEFORE IT CAN SUCCEED. It pretends to be what it is not. It palms itself off as something else. Sin only keeps its place by deception. It is "transformed into an angel of light." It wears the garb of goodness, and declines to be unclothed. Nor does it wholly possess the human soul. The noblest, most authoritative power of the soul may be cowed and silenced, but it never consents heartily to the sway of evil. Conscience is often like a discrowned king, whose commands are slighted, but it does not run with the multitude of the passions to do evil. It stands solitary, apart, issuing, however vainly, its protests. Hence sin and fear go together. The mountain shakes and trembles, as Sinai at the voice of God. "Conscience doth make cowards of us all." Nor are the forces of evil so compact, so massive, so welded together as they seem. It is well to follow the counsel which the angel gave to the fearful Gideon—"But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host, and thou shalt hear what they say, and afterwards shall thine hands be strengthened to go down to the host." An undefined fear pervades the ranks of evil. There are vague presages of approaching disaster. III. But let us hasten on to CONSIDER THE CHIEF REASON AGAINST PESSIMISM, THE HIGHEST GROUND FOR CHERISHING THE SPIRIT OF THE TEXT. The vision recorded in this chapter is most beautiful and suggestive. The prophet sees a golden candelabrum, like that which had been in the old temple, but much grander. It has a bowl on the top of it, and beneath are seven lamps and seven

pipes to the lamps, and on each side of the bowl stands an olive-tree. THE PROPHET IS TAUGHT THAT HIS HELP IS IN GOD. As the lamp was supplied, not by human agency, but direct from the living trees, so he is to learn that evil will be overthrown and righteousness exalted, "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." The advent of Jesus Christ into this world was the coming of one stronger than the strong man armed. It was the introduction of a new spiritual energy, a life-giving, restoring force. His whole work, and the consequent descent of His Spirit, show that God is on the side of man, and that the evils which have enslaved, defiled, degraded him shall be overcome. Truth, purity, love are on the throne of the universe. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad." And further, we are reminded that, as we seek to overcome the mountains of evil which are in this world, we can only be qualified for our work as we receive the power of the Holy Ghost. To trust in our own strength, to place our dependence in men or means, to rely on ecclesiastical organisations and auxiliaries, will entail inevitable weakness and defeat. I read the other day of an Italian miser, who died near San Remo worth £120,000, who for years went without stockings because he grudged paying for the washing of them. Some Christian workers are guilty of a similar penuriousness with regard to the spiritual treasures, the "unsearchable riches," which are at their disposal. Let us not be straitened in ourselves, for we are not straitened in God. Let us be of good cheer, and cultivate a bold, buoyant optimism. And let us be clear as to what is implied in the hope of the overthrow of evil and the establishment of righteousness. It is not implied that the millennium will be here in a fortnight, or that the progress of goodness is steady and uniform. Dalliance with the world may enfeeble the churches, and they may be shorn of their strength. Everything depends on the extent to which the Spirit of Christ prevails among men. The great mountain of evil is a crumbling mountain. Some of us have quailed before that mountain. Sin seems so fixed and strong. The characteristic evils of our nature seem so inveterate. (J. Lewis.)

Ver. 10. Who hath despised the day of small things?—*Great results from small beginnings*:—This has ever been a watchword among Christians; small beginnings are not to be despised. Apply—I. TO THE INSTITUTIONS OF RELIGION. Four reasons why we should not despise the day of small things. 1. Because often the mightiest effects are produced from them, as in the world of nature; in the world of literature; in the world of politics. So in grace. What is it and what will it be? Yet what was its origin? 2. Because God's power can make the feeblest mighty for the accomplishment of His work. 3. We never know what God intends to do by our understanding. Prescience is not ours. Not having it, we cannot see what God will do. 4. In matters of religion, what is comparatively little is abstractedly great. Then if you want to do much for God, do not generalise so much. Do not be discouraged by seeing how many are unsaved, look at the one saved. II. TO PERSONAL AND PRIVATE RELIGION. Religion is often small in its commencement—sometimes rapid, sudden conviction, but ordinarily more slow. This day of small things may be despised by scorn; by opposition; by neglect. First impressions are sacred; treat them as such. The day of small things is not despised by those who best know its value; the Father of Mercies; the Son; Angels; or Satan. It is the pledge of greater days that are coming. Apply to ministers; parents; Sabbath-school teachers; the lately awakened. (J. Summerfield, A.M.) *Small beginnings*:—Despondency paralyses exertion, but hope stimulates and supports it. Despondency is never so likely to be felt as at the commencement of an undertaking, when there are few to support it and many to oppose it; when the beginning is so small as to excite the apprehensions of its friends and the derision of its enemies. The Jews who returned from the Babylonish captivity felt this when they applied themselves to the rebuilding of the temple. "Small beginnings are not to be despised." Consider this sentiment—I. IN APPLICATION TO PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS. The age in which we live is happily and honourably distinguished by a spirit of religious zeal. So many are the associations throughout our country, for humane and pious purposes of every form, that charity, where it has but a solitary offering, is almost bewildered in its choice. Those only who have known by experience what it is to originate a new institution, especially if it be out of the ordinary routine of Christian effort, can form an adequate idea of the labour, patience, and heroism which are requisite to carry it to maturity, amidst the

doubts of the sceptical, the mistakes of the ignorant, the misrepresentations of the slanderous, and the cold and selfish calculations of the lukewarm. But still, small beginnings are not to be despised. 1. The most wonderful effects have resulted from causes apparently very small. Illustrate from the natural, intellectual, and political world, and in the world of grace. Trace the cause of Protestantism to its commencement. Contemplate the progress of Methodism. Or note the beginnings of great missionary societies, or the Bible Society. 2. We should not despise the day of small things, because the power of God can still render the feeblest instruments productive of the greatest results. The feeblest preacher may be the honoured instrument of conversion, when the most eloquent has preached in vain. 3. However discouraging appearances may be, we never know what God really intends us to do, or to do by us. We can never look to the result of our actions in their influence upon others. No man who devotes himself to the cause of religious benevolence can say what use God intends to make of him, but it is often far greater than he is aware. Illustrate by Robert Raikes, or Wesley. 4. In religion, what may seem little by comparison, is, when viewed positively and absolutely, immensely great. We may offend against the injunction of the text by inattention. We do not advocate an indiscriminate precipitate zeal. Or by scorn. If the object of a scheme be good, if the means appear adapted to the end, let it not be contemned because it is at present in the infancy of its age, and of its strength. All that is sublime in Christianity was once confined to a little circle of poor men and women. Neglect is another way of sinning against the letter and spirit of the text. Especially let those who are the principal agents in schemes of benevolence beware of despising the day of small things. Let them not too soon sink into a state of depression. If they have fears, they should conceal them, and exhibit only their hopes. II. APPLY THE SENTIMENT OF THE TEXT TO PERSONAL RELIGION. 1. Religion is often small in its commencement. This is not always the case. Sometimes a transformation of character takes place, as complete as it is rapid. But the usual process of this great change is much more slow. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. There are many ways in which the small beginning of personal religion may be despised. It may be ridiculed as the fanaticism of a weak mind, or the enthusiasm of a heated imagination, or the whim of a capricious taste. Ridicule is not unfrequently coupled with direct opposition. Men who find laughter avails nothing are very likely to exchange it for wrath. Neglect, however, is that which comes more immediately within the spirit of this part of the subject. The first appearances of religion in the soul do not always receive from others the prompt, affectionate, and skilful attention which they demand and deserve. First impressions, unless carefully watched, like the young buds of fruit-trees in the spring, will soon fall off from the mind and come to nothing. 2. Reasons why the day of small things ought not to be despised. It is not despised by those who best know its importance. It is not neglected or contemned by the Eternal Father. Angels do not despise it. The beginnings of religion lead on to great and glorious attainments. Our subject has its special admonition to ministers, and to parents, and to Sunday-school teachers, and to Christians generally. (*John Angel James.*) *The day of small things* :—I. SOMETHING ABOUT GOD. These words show us that humility is, if I may say so, a portion of the Divine character. He does not despise “the day of small things.” It is impossible to find lowliness in the Divine nature in its essence, because there is nothing upon which to base it. The life of God is a necessary life. There is room for this virtue in the Divine actions, though not in the Divine essence. Note the absence of ostentation in all God’s works of nature or of grace. Note the condescension of Divine providence. Not only in its prime, in its perfection, in its maturity, in its grand completeness, does God take delight in the soul, but in the nascent form of undeveloped life, the very foundation of the spiritual structure. He does not despise first beginnings; it is even true that in the “day of small things” God especially acts. II. SOMETHING ABOUT SMALL THINGS. We despise little things, and think them beneath us. Our thoughts and measurements are so different from God’s thoughts and measurements. And this results from pride, which makes us think so many things beneath us, not worthy of care and of finish. It arises also from a certain ignorance of the value of little things. The text implies that they are important. 1. Because our life is made up of little things. 2. In their effect upon our spiritual life, because they require so much effort. III. SOMETHING ABOUT OURSELVES. 1. It teaches us hope. God does

not despise, because He sees in His eternal mind the results. 2. We learn patience from it. 3. It must fill us with emulation. This will make us persevere and long to make progress. (*W. H. Hutchings, M.A.*) *The regard of God for small beginnings, physical and spiritual*:—It was but a small and feeble remnant that returned from the captivity in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Their spirits broken by slavery, their cohesion imperfect, their resources limited, their well-wishers few; the adversaries arrogant and numerous, the difficulties manifold and dispiriting. It was as if a fraction of a swarm of bees were striving to rebuild their hive under the ceaseless attacks of a cloud of malignant wasps or hornets. Their souls were exceedingly filled with contempt by the scorn of Sanballat, who cried aloud, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they revive the stones of the temple out of the heaps of burned rubbish? If a fox shall go up even he shall break down their stone wall." Now this contempt of Sanballat well represents the scorn with which the great world regards all religious beginnings both in individual lives and in society. The notion which prevails so widely as to the hopes of Christians might be expressed thus: "These aspirations of yours after union with the Infinite and Everlasting Cause, after an indestructible life in God, are too absurd. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and consider their magnificence, look upon the illimitable vastness of that celestial machinery, the number of those worlds on worlds, which shine through the eternal darkness; and then look down on yourselves, and at mankind, a cloud of ephemeral insects passing away. Who can believe that such 'minims of nature' have any permanent relation with the universe, much less with its Maker? Face the inevitable, and do not shrink from the nothingness which is your doom." The one all-sufficing answer to these degrading counsels is to be found in the words of the prophet of the restoration. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" The law of the Divine action is evolution from small beginnings, the development of all organic growths from germs, and the gradual transformation of lower into higher forms of being. Suppose the seeds of all the flora of the world in all its latitudes could be offered to our view in one panoramic vision. Who could suppose, apart from experience, that out of such a collection of black or grey or yellow dots, or tiny cones, or coloured berries, could spring the cloud-piercing forests of the tropics, or of the American Andes, and all the radiant glories of the flowers, shrubs, and trees of the temperate zones? Who could believe that such a marvellous universe of lovely form and lovelier colour lay hid under the appearance of such insignificant beginnings? Extend the thought to the world of birds, to the development of their airy figures and varied plumages, and places of abode, and modes of living, all springing from invisible vital germs concealed in eggs throughout all their uncountable millions of millions; and finally enlarge the conception by taking in the whole animal world similarly developed. Who after such a review could rationally despise the day of small things? It is a world unceasingly renewed from invisible points of life—points of life developed under a Divine pervading power into the universe of wonders that we see around us. The visible and material is a type of the unseen. "First the seed, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. So is the kingdom of God." And this leads us directly to the Divine lessons inculcated by the prophet in the name of the living God: "Who hath despised the day of small things?"—the lessons learned from God Himself, and His own loving procedure—(1) Of respect for all early growths in the days of their feebleness; (2) Of toleration for all the defects of their early stages; and (3) Of patience with undeveloped natures. 1. The old Latin proverb teaches us that "great reverence is due to the young." Oftentimes there is very little of this shown to them. Many of the most unpleasant qualities of children are frequently the direct result of the infamous treatment which they receive from their elders. Try to be a sun to your planets, not raining down on them only the cold light of instruction and reproof, but the warmer rays of a beneficent friendship. Wise words cannot take the place of loving deeds. Flowers must have sunshine. Souls must have tenderness. If you "despise the day of small things" here, you despise the foundations of the future structures of the temple of the Lord. 2. In the same manner respect the beginnings of early religion. Many adult Christians appear to have no faith in the reality and value of early piety. Let us never despise the day of small things, but understanding our Lord's regard for elementary faith and love, never be detected in breaking, as unworthy of reliance, the bruised reed of childhood, or quenching the tiny spark on its smoking flax. 3. In the same manner we have to learn, if ourselves established

Christians, to understand and sympathise with the imperfect development of character in the earlier stages of adhesion to the Son of God. It would be delightful if all Christians were suddenly struck into perfection, as a disc of gold is struck with some heroic image on one side, and with St. George's victory over the dragon on the other. But it is not so. The plant of righteousness is a growth. The temple slowly rises. The formation of the Divine likeness is both a creative and an imitative process. Children are childish in both worlds. But who hath despised the immature stages of development? It is as if you enter a sculptor's studio. You see here an almost shapeless lump of clay; there a mass beginning to put on the human form; there a bust beginning to speak with the lines of nobleness or beauty; there a piece of marble undergoing the first rougher process of assimilation; there an artist at work with hammer and chisel, striking frequent blows with passionate ardour, as said Michael Angelo, as if he would "set free the imprisoned angel"; there the master-hand at work on his final touches, which are to breathe soul into the stone, and beauty and life into the dead material, and to impress on it, perhaps, a likeness which shall transmit to future ages the countenance which overawed or delighted contemporary generations. Even so in the Church you see souls in all stages of progress under the Supreme Artist's touch. Learn, then, to tolerate the defects of incipient development. We know not what we shall be, and we see not what others will be. Simon, the passionate fisherman of Bethsaida, became the steadfast and devoted Rock, or Petra, on which Christ has built His Church. The Son of thunder became the Apostle of love. The ferocious and murderous Saul became the gentle and all-embracing father of the Gentile Churches. God only knows what He will bring out of anything. Man can bring light out of the blackest coal, and the colours of the rainbow in the aniline dyes are extracted from gas-tar. And so God can convert carbon into the diamond, and souls swarming with many devils, into the "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." How hopeful as well as tolerant should such a retrospect make us in relation to the unfinished individualities around us. We must see the "end of the Lord" before we judge of His work. There is but one Eye that sees the end from the beginning, and that is the eye of the Eternal. That which is last to our thought is first to Him. The evolutionary prospect is ever before Him, and in looking at each creature He sees what that creature shall become in all the stages of its future eternity. We know not what we shall be; but we know that to despise small things now is to contradict the processes of Divine thought, and to flout the methods of Divine procedure. Each soul is the subject of a work which will never end, under the hand of the Omnipotent Designer. And that which will satisfy us, when we awake in His likeness, and will satisfy Him when He rests with delight, and sees His work to be "very good," in the endless Sabbath, will also satiate the desires of His under-workmen. Oh, what will be the heaven of such a man as St. Paul? It is this vision, in its different degrees of glory, which the Omniscient Mind sees beforehand for all God's servants in the eternal future; and it is because He sees it, that He warns us never to "despise the day of small things"; because each soul is what God sees it to be, not only now, but in its future development. (*Edward White.*) *God's blessing on the day of small things*:—1. God's great mind, so infinitely above our level, does not perceive all the distinctions we are wont to make between what we denominate great and small. To a person greatly elevated, all below—people and buildings—appears equally small, even so Jehovah is too high to perceive the various grades of greatness and littleness into which we are accustomed to divide the affairs of life. 2. It has ever been God's plan to work from apparently small beginnings; had He chosen He could have commanded great things at once into existence, but He has said, "A little one shall become a thousand," &c. (Isa. lx. 22). The great Saviour came into the world as a weak babe: His great kingdom commenced with twelve men, most of whom were unlearned. Mark the insignificant beginnings of modern missions, of Sunday Schools, or of our Christian Endeavour Movement! Truly, "God chose the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the things that are strong," &c. (1. Cor. i. 27). 3. Those who despise the day of small things will never accomplish great works. It is dangerous and disastrous to make light of the small beginnings of evil, sin, or bad habits. The modern scientific theory of germs may be used as an apt illustration, showing how the neglect of even infinitesimal atoms is the cause of so much fatal disease. 4. The tenderness of God comes out in His

regard for the small and weak. "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt. xii. 20). Our Lord often referred to the small beginnings of His kingdom, comparing them to "seeds," "a grain of mustard seed," "a little leaven" (Matt. xi.). The day of small things is the day of precious things, but we are not to be satisfied until it becomes the day of great things. 5. Small things marked the beginning of the work in the hand of Zerubbabel, so small was the foundation in the eyes of those who had seen the glory of the former temple, that "they wept with a loud voice" (Ezra iii. 12) at the comparison; but God assured them that, in the latter end, its glory should be greater, inasmuch as the Messiah Himself would stand within its walls, and His Gospel be proclaimed therein (Acts v. 42).

6. There is great comfort here, for all depressed builders of the spiritual temple. The work progresses so slowly that we are often discouraged. But let the work of grace be ever so small in its beginnings, the plummet is in good hands. The great Master-Builder will surely accomplish that which He begins. Jesus Christ is the finisher as well as the author of our faith (Heb. xii. 2). 7. "God's blessing on it" is the secret of all success. Work, great or small, without this is utter failure. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zech. iv. 6). (E. J. B.) *Folly of despising small things*.—Value of little things may be seen in—I. GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL DEALINGS WITH HIS CHURCH. Give illustrations from both Old Testament and New, from the Reformation, and from modern missionary societies. II. IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INNER LIFE. 1. In the training of children. 2. In the formation of habits; both good and bad. Conclusion—(1) God is with the Church still. Then there is hope in our small beginnings. (2) Patiently work, biding God's time. (3) Find encouragement in temptation in this, that "He will not break the bruised reed," and if faith be weak, remember that a child may as really (though not as firmly) hold a staff as a strong man. (J. G. Pilkington, M.A.) *The day of small things*.—No doubt many of the Jews had looked with a sort of contempt on the apparently insignificant beginning which had been made towards restoring the religion of their fathers, and had discouraged one another by insinuating that what commenced with so much feebleness was never likely to reach a successful termination. They might have known better. Just because there seemed to be but little proportion between the agency and the end, they decided at once that success was hardly to be looked for, and that it was useless to persevere in an endeavour so palpably hopeless. These Jews have been imitated by men of every age. Much of the evil that exists in the world may be traced to the despising "the day of small things." I. THE REASONS WHICH LIE AGAINST SUCH DESPISING. God is wont to work through instruments or means, which in human calculation are disproportioned to the ends which He designs to accomplish. He does not always take what appears to us a mighty agency, when a mighty result is to be achieved. There is in us all a tendency to ascribe to second causes what ought to be ascribed directly to the First. It is by the day of small things that God ordinarily interposes those great revolutions and deliverances which alter the whole state, whether of nations or of individuals. God ordinarily commences with what appears inconsiderable. II. CERTAIN CASES IN WHICH THE "DAY OF SMALL THINGS" IS DESPISED, WITH THE CONSEQUENCES THAT ARE THENCE LIKELY TO ENSUE. We are likely to make light of small things. Take the case of the slave of bad habits. Few plunge immediately into evil. Most men begin by deviating from the right in some one small particular. And it is this small beginning which it is perilous to despise. Observe the ordinary course followed by God in His spiritual operations on unconverted men. They are not for the most part to be distinguished from the operations of their own minds. There is a small beginning of influence which it is perilous to despise. (Henry Melvill, B.D.) *Small things*.—I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE "DAY OF SMALL THINGS"? It is the course of God that the beginning shall be small to lead to great effects. We see this in creation, in providence, and in grace. In many a young and tender heart there has been just a thought, then a misgiving, then a desire, then a prayer. And that was just the day of small things: it was the first dawning of a bright day. When God begins the work, He carries it on in His own way, therefore perseverance is the great mark of effectual calling. Think of those who, though not young in years, are the weak in faith. They are always wavering between hopes and fears. Wherever we look we may see a "day of small things." II. WHO HATH DESPISED IT? God does not. Jesus will not despise them. Take care lest you

should be found despising it. Apply to ministers, parents, teachers. The gradual work in souls is little discernible, but, when duly reflected on, it is as clearly to be traced out as any other. (*J. H. Evans.*) *The significance of apparent trifles*.—I. ILLUSTRATIONS FROM NATURE. 1. The seed. 2. The mountain rivulet. 3. The spark. 4. The child. II. ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PROVIDENCE. 1. Scriptural, as Joseph, Moses, David, Esther. 2. General, as Cromwell, Napoleon. III. ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH. 1. Introduction of the Gospel. 2. Reformation. 3. The religious denominations. 4. Benevolent and religious institutions. (*G. Brooks.*) *The day of small things*.—It is a “day of small things” with you as regards your—I. CONVICTION OF SIN. How easy it is to know ourselves to be sinners, how hard to feel ourselves to be such. We distress ourselves because it seems to us as if we could not repent. But beware of imagining that a certain number of tears, a certain standard of repentance is to qualify you for the blessings of Christ’s salvation. Try yourself thus, “How do I feel with regard to sin? Have I any desire to be rid of it in its power, as well as in its consequences? Do I feel any real degree of hatred towards it? Do I desire to hate it?” If you can answer in the affirmative, this is a sure proof that God’s Spirit has not forsaken you. The Spirit’s office is to convince of sin. II. FAITH. Your cry is, “Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.” You have no doubts as to the power of Christ’s work; but you can scarcely believe there is salvation for you. Many are in darkness and disquietude through lack of faith. It may be a “day of small things” as regards your faith in God’s providence. III. CHRISTIAN GRACES AND THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE LIFE. This again is a source of deep humiliation and much disquietude to you. Be not discouraged. The work of grace is gradual; you cannot sow the seed and have blossom and fruit in a day. IV. SPIRITUAL PEACE AND JOY. It cannot be presumption to claim what God bestows, what Christ has purchased. V. RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE. You find many difficulties in the Bible. As yet you seem to understand only “first principles of the doctrine of Christ.” How then are you to go on to perfection? The Spirit, to teach and enlighten, as well as to sanctify and comfort you, is covenanted to you. You shall grow in knowledge as in grace. (*John C. Miller.*) *The day of small things not to be despised*.—In this message God reproved those who had regarded the new temple with contempt, and those also who thought that they were unable to finish it. He informed them that the work was His, that it was to be effected not by human might nor power, but by His Spirit. Zerubbabel should finish it, and those who had despised the feeble commencement of the work should witness its completion. I. IN ALL GOD’S WORKS THERE IS USUALLY A “DAY OF SMALL THINGS.” There is a season in which His work makes but a very small and unpromising appearance. Illustrate from the beginnings of the Christian Church, and from the work of grace in the hearts of individuals. II. MANY PERSONS DESPISE “THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.” God’s enemies did so in Zechariah’s time. The friends of God do. They think too little of it; they undervalue it, and they are by no means sufficiently thankful for it, and therefore may be said, comparatively speaking, to despise it. Illustrate, times of religious revival generally begin with persons of no social standing, and so revivals are often despised. Even Christians too lightly esteem the work of God in their own hearts. III. REASONS WHY IT OUGHT NOT TO BE DESPISED. 1. Such conduct tends to prevent its becoming a day of great things. 2. Because the inhabitants of heaven, whose judgment is according to truth, do not despise it. 3. Because our Saviour does not despise it. “The smoking flax He will not quench.” 4. Our Heavenly Father does not despise it. 5. Because it is the commencement of a day of great things. Apply—(1) By asking every individual present, is it with you, in a religious sense, even so much as a “day of small things”? Beware how you deny or underestimate what God has done for you. (2) There is an opposite error. Instead of despising the day, some professors make too much of it, and are too satisfied with it. They conclude too hastily that the work of grace is begun in their hearts, and flatter themselves that it will go on, without their attention. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Weak grace encouraged*.—It is not easy to determine what is small. Things, at first apparently trivial and uninteresting, often become very great and momentous. It is so in nature, in science, in political affairs, in moral concerns. What inference should we derive hence? A philosopher will not despise the day of small things; a statesman will not; a moralist will not—and should a Christian? Apply the question entirely to the subject

of religion. 1. The work of grace in the soul is frequently small in its commencement. The Christian is a soldier, and the beginning of his career is naturally the day of small things. The Christian is a scholar; and when he enters the school, it is, of course, a "day of small things"; he begins with the rudiments. 2. Three reasons why the day of small things is not to be despised. (1) Our Saviour does not despise it. He received and blessed the weak. (2) Because such a day is precious. Real grace is infinitely valuable. It is the work of God; the image of God; the glory of God; the delight of God. A little grace is too precious to be despised. (3) Because it will be a day of great things. The child will become a man, contemn not his infancy. Divine grace shall assuredly increase. What is sown in weakness shall be raised in power. Conclude with a question—Is it even a day of small things with you? With an admonition. Do not overlook or undervalue imperfect religion, whether in yourselves or others. If you are upright in heart you will be in most danger of despising it in yourselves. You are in some danger with regard to others. You may think too little of a real work of grace. You may suppose God has done nothing, where He has been doing much. With a caution. Let not the subject cause remissness in duty. Those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," will cry "evermore give us this bread." More is attainable. More is desirable. There are two reasons why you should seek growth in grace; one is taken from usefulness, and the other from comfort. (*William Jay.*) *The day of small things*:—Contempt for small beginnings is one of the most ordinary displays of the human disposition, in all departments of affairs, but especially in things connected with sacred interests. Divers of the great powers and influential systems, good or evil, that have had a mighty effect, have in their apparently insignificant origin been despised. Individuals appointed to be of the greatest importance in the world have often experienced contempt in the beginning of their career. This is true of David, and it is in a sense true of the Son of Man. The vain world has always been peculiarly disposed to an unhesitating contempt of the small beginnings of Divine operations,—to attribute meanness to what had a relation to infinite greatness. The Christian cause itself, in its early stage, was an object of extreme scorn; every ignominious epithet was connected with the name of a Christian. So fared the great Reformation. We comment on the tendency in men to indulge contempt for good things, in the littleness and weakness of their beginnings and early operations. The case with our world is, that man, having lost his original goodness, was to be under an economy of discipline, for his correction and practical restoration; but that the operation for this was not to be sudden, but by various processes, commencing in an apparent littleness of agency, power, and scope, so as to appear, in human judgment, incompetent to a great purpose. Why has the Sovereign Wisdom appointed it so? It is a higher discipline for the servants of God, as agents in a good cause, as it brings their principle of obedience under a more plain, unequivocal proof. It tends to keep them under a direct, pressing conviction that all the power is of God. They will also have a stronger sense of the value of the good that is so hardly and so slowly accomplished. Can we expose the error and injustice of this disposition to despise small beginnings? It comes from not duly apprehending the preciousness of what is good, in any, even the smallest portion of it. Any essential good, in the highest sense, is a thing of inexpressible value: especially so in an evil world, where it is scattered among baser elements. Again, in the indulgence of this disposition, it is left out of sight, how much, in many cases, was requisite to be previously done, to bring the small beginning into existence at all: it did not start into existence of itself. Though *small*, it may have been the result of a large combination. Another thing is that we are apt to set far too high a price on our own efforts and services. Far enough from small, truly, have been our labours, expenditures, sacrifices, self-denials, inconveniences, pleadings, perhaps prayers. Our self-importance cannot endure that so much of our agency, ours, should be consumed for so small a result. A tenth part of the pains should have done as much. It is not an equivalent; and it is a hard doom to work on such terms. Again, we overmeasure our brief span of mortal existence. We want all that is done for the world to be done in our time. We want to contract the Almighty's plan to our own limits of time, and to precipitate the movement, that we may clearly see the end of it. In all this there is the impiety of not duly recognising the supremacy of God. The grand essential of religion—faith—is wanting; faith in the unerring wisdom of the Divine scheme and determinations: faith in the *goodness* of God. With such *faith* let

us look on the "day of small things," and remonstrate against the tendency to despise it; whether it be in good men, from impatience, and a very censurable self-importance; or in worldly men, from irreligion. Look into the natural world, as having an analogy emblematical of a higher order of things. In nature we see many instances of present actual littleness containing a powerful principle of enlargement: such as the seed of a plant, the germ of a flower, the acorn of the oak. In fire there is a mysterious principle of tremendous power. Does the parent despise the day of small things in his infant? Turn to the kingdom of God on earth, the promotion of which is the cause of God. There the small things are to be estimated according to what they are to become. But what things, as yet comparatively small, come under this description? We answer; all things, judiciously and in good faith, attempted to promote the best cause, that is, to diminish the awful sum of human depravity and misery. Efforts to diminish ignorance. The topic includes the progress of genuine Christianity. Looking abroad, we can but think it a "day of small things" for Christianity. But what is it, that, on this account, shall be despised? Is it Christianity itself, or is it God who sent it? We may be confident that when God makes or causes a beginning of a good work, it is intended for progress and expansion. Now to remonstrate and warn against "despising." To a decidedly irreligious contemner, we might say, "Beware what you do; for if the thing be of God you are daring Him by your contempt." There is also admonition to those who are too apt to fall into something like what the text describes,—not from hostility to religion and general improvement, but from want of faith,—from indolence, cowardice, or mere worldly calculation,—reckoning on things without reckoning on God. To undervalue is in a certain sense to "despise." Shall there not be an admonition to examine whether pride, or sluggishness, or covetousness have not something to do with it? In some cases, it partly proceeds from the less blamable cause of a gloomy, apprehensive, disconsolate constitution of mind,—looking on the dark side,—dismayed by difficulties,—prone to fear the most and hope the least, dwelling on remembered and recorded failures more than on successes. But there may be the interference of pride. A man shall have such a notion of himself, and of a good cause, as to deem it unbefitting his dignity to connect or concern himself with it. It is not of an order, or in a state, to reflect any honour on a man of his high sentiments, refined habits, or consideration in society. With some men a good work or design is of "small" account, when it has not the quality for rousing the sluggish temperament, nothing to excite gaze and wonder. Covetousness is one of the most decided practical "despisings." Most truly does a man treat the good things as contemptibly small, when he deems them not worth his money, that is, money which he could afford. We would rather refer to such as were not positively enemies, whose "despising," in a mitigated sense of the word, was from little faith, self-sparing, false prudence, worldly calculation. They have lived to see that the good cause can do without them, and that there were more generous, liberal, magnanimous spirits to be found in the community. Well, at all events, the good cause of God, of Christ, of human improvement, is certain, is destined to advance and triumph. It may at last be seen that the whole course of the world, from the beginning to the end, was "a day of small things," as compared with the sequel—only as a brief introduction to an immense and endless economy. (*John Foster.*) *Christian appreciation of little things*:—Zerubbabel was taught of the Lord to hold in due esteem even the imperfect commencement already made, and to regard with a degree of assurance and satisfaction the feeble results his hands had already wrought. This is but one of the uncounted instances, both in Scripture and in nature, of the affectionate interest with which God regards "little things." It is not quite easy and natural for us to think of God as putting all the skill of His thought and interest of His heart in the small matters of His providence and His workmanship. In all our attempts to figure and localise Him, we resort instantly and spontaneously to words that represent immensity of height, and breadth, and circuit. It is not the drop, but the ocean—not the pebble, but the mountain that seems to us redolent of Divine suggestion, and freighted with Divine presence. This tendency prompts us to see God in the flashing of the lightning, and to hear Him in the pealing of the thunder, but makes us deaf to Him in the pattering of the rain, the sighing of the wind, and the twittering of the sparrow. Happy is the man and the prophet that has the ear to detect the Divineness that lodges in the little quiet voices of God's works and providences. It is only when we pass into

the New Testament that we get the best assurances of God's distributed regard, and of His detailed interest and affection. It is the genius of the Gospel to try and convince men of God's fatherly concern for us. But fatherly concern always particularises and individualises: and so in the Gospel there is not much about the sky, but a great deal about the ground: not much about masses of men, but about individual men. God feeds the bird, paints the lily, clothes the grass. "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Christ's history, from the Baptism to the Ascension, is mostly made up of little words, little deeds, little prayers, little sympathies, adding themselves together in unwearied succession. One reason why we have no more continuous and solid comfort in our Christian life is, that we are looking and feeling after great joys, and neglecting and failing to economise the multitude of little blessings that are within reach, and that, if husbanded and cultivated, would go, in most cases, to compose a life quite substantially delightful and quite solidly comfortable. It is not well to pray for great joys. There is something disturbing and unsettling in them. It is a great deal better to pray that we may have our hearts let into an appreciation of our everyday joys, and into an appreciation of the goodness of God in that these everyday joys come to a very quiet but very steady expression. We want a Christian genius for infusing sublimity into trifles. Some one has said, "It is better that joy should be spread over all the day, in the form of strength, than that it should be concentrated into ecstasies, full of danger, and followed by reactions." Our lives would be more fruitful if we let our hearts feel the incessant droppings of heavenly mercy. The constant dropping of God's little goodnesses seems designed, not so much for their own sakes, but, like the constant dropping of the rain, that they may be to us a kind of heavenly fertility, soaking in at the soul's pores, and sinking down around the roots of our manly Christian purposes, nourishing those purposes, becoming absorbed into them, and so quickening them, building them up, and pushing them on to fructification. What capacity even the most commonplace living has for affording us discipline. A good angel really hides in every provocation and petty exasperation. The little tests that are given to our temper, our faith, our affection, our consecration, are more efficacious than the larger and more imposing ones. They take us when we are off our guard. There is something in great occasions that nerves us to powers of endurance not properly our own. We ought to show great respect for little opportunities of service and patient continuance in small well-doings. (Charles H. Parkhurst, D.D.)

Duty in relation to the little:—I. IT IS SELDOM WISE TO DESPISE "THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS." This is shown by history and observation. Look at nature. Into the hand of an infant may be put an acorn which shall be the parent of many forests. The Wye and the Severn may be turned whithersoever you please at their source, and a child may step over them. At their outlet they are indebted to the very smallest possible rill, and even to the tears of rushes. Look at men. Rembrandt painted in a smithy; Pascal traced his Euclid with chalk; Wilkie drew his first rough sketch on the white-washed walls of his father's rooms with a burnt stick; and it was with a burnt stick on his father's barn door that one of Wales's most celebrated preachers learned to write. Luther was but the son of a miner, Carey a shoemaker, and Morrison a last maker! And who can help going back to the humble company of the Galilean fisherman who afterwards turned the world upside down. Sydney Smith made sport of the Baptist Missionary Society, because the first collection on its behalf was only £13, 2s. 6d.; and to come to a recent Lancashire political movement, who can forget the Anti-con law league's "day of small things" and subsequent grand success? II. IT IS GENERALLY WRONG TO DESPISE "THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS."

1. There is a heartlessness in it. It is during "the day of small things" that men need sympathy and help. Johnson in composing his dictionary, and many others in all fields of labour. "To him that hath shall be given." At one point in a man's history, a kind word, a sympathising look, and a cordial grasp of the hand will be felt to be of more service than any amount of money at a subsequent stage in his career.
2. There is a cowardice in it. The cowardice of sneering at honest, well-meant efforts on a small scale.
3. There is an injustice in it. The injustice of withholding encouragement and praise from men who so act as to deserve success, whether they succeed or not. Blessed is the man who still believes that "wisdom is better than folly, though it fail to bring him bread during the reign of fools." The right—the Christian thing should take precedence of all calculations as to the scale of operations. The right must be weighed in its

own scales—tested by its own standard. The extreme importance of not “despising the day of small things” in regard to—1. The formation of bad and irreligious habits. 2. The formation of religious habits, and the cherishing of religious impressions and convictions. 3. The present attainments and spiritual stature of professing and real Christians. 4. The final prevalence of Christianity throughout the world. (*Homilist.*) *Day of small things—A talk with children*:—We are all inclined to underestimate the importance of little things whenever we see them. We should not despise them—1. Because small things are often too powerful to be despised. Our enemies are microbes, not lions. The discoveries of science are chiefly in the direction of showing the terror of small things. 2. Because of the exceeding beauty of small things. Illustrate by the revelations of the microscope. Their beauty teaches us that God has taken care to make, not only big things, but even the smallest things exquisitely beautiful. He is such a perfect worker that He would not do anything imperfectly. And with us, careful attention to little things will help to form a noble character for life. If you become negligent and slovenly in school you will, by and by, be slovenly in life. There is no knowing what little things may become as time unfolds. You little children, learn of Jesus Christ and His love, and you may turn out a great reformer, or such an one as Luther, Knox, Wesley, Spurgeon, or Florence Nightingale. Then never treat small opportunities with indifference, but consider that every great thing has come from a little beginning, and that a great life, as a rule, consists of many little things well done. (*David Davies.*) *Small things (to children)*:—You, my children, are living in the day of small things, the day of little sorrows and little joys and little sins and little thoughts and words, but do not despise the day of small things. The greatest results, both of good and evil, come from small beginnings. There is an old fable that the trees of the forest once held a meeting, to complain of the injuries which the woodman’s axe had done them. All the trees determined that none of them would give any wood to make a handle for their enemy the axe. The axe went travelling up and down the forest, begging the oak and the elm, the cedar and the ash, to give him wood enough for a handle, but they all refused. At last the axe begged for just enough wood, only a little bit, to enable him to cut down the brambles, which were choking the roots of the trees. Well, they agreed to this, and gave him a little wood, but no sooner had the axe got a handle than the cedar and the oak, the ash and the elm, and all the trees were cut down. So is it with sins and bad habits. They begin with a very small beginning; the tempter whispers, “Is it not a little one?” and then, if you yield to them, they cut you down and destroy you. Remember that one single worm can kill a whole tree. Never think sin is a trifle; it may seem small to you, but it is none the less dangerous. A scorpion is a very small reptile, but it can sting a lion to death. There are plenty of ruined men and women, who began as children by being too idle to get up betimes in the morning, and to do their work. If you want to get rid of the weeds in your garden, pull them up when they are young; don’t give them time to grow strong and run to seed. If you want to grow up to be good men and women, try to get the better of bad habits whilst you are young. One of the labours of Hercules was to kill the hydra, a horrible monster with one hundred heads. As fast as one head was cut off two more grew in its place unless the wound was stopped with fire. We have all got some kind of a monster like the hydra to fight with. Perhaps your monster is bad temper, or laziness, or untruthfulness. You must fight against your monster, and cut off its head. And you must get the wound burnt with fire, that the heads may not grow again. I mean, that you must pray to God to help you, and to send the fire of the Holy Spirit to your assistance. Little sins seem like trifles to us. Well, a grain of sand seems a very little thing too, yet millions of grains of sand form a desert, and bury the traveller beneath them. When we do wrong for the sake of pleasing ourselves we think it a small matter, and look forward to having our own way. But we find in time that what we get by our sin crushes us at last. In the early days of Rome the governor of the citadel, the strongest part of the town, had a daughter called Tarpeia. When the Sabines, a neighbouring tribe, came to attack Rome, Tarpeia promised to open the gates to the enemies of her people. As a reward she asked for what the Sabines carried on their left hands, meaning their golden bracelets. When the treacherous woman had let them in the king of the Sabines not only threw his bracelet upon Tarpeia, but also his heavy shield, which was carried on the left hand. His followers did the same, and Tarpeia was crushed beneath the

shields and bracelets. So it is with sin. "The wages of sin is death." Again little words seem trifles, but they are very important. Such words as "I shan't," "I won't," "I don't care," have made many a parent's heart sad, and spoilt many a promising life. (*H. Wilmot Buxton, M.A.*) *Small, but enough*:—In Sir Henry M. Stanley's account of his African experiences he tells of his first encounter with a pigmy tribe that used poisoned arrows. With contemptuous smiles the young men drew out the tiny darts, flung them away, and continued answering the savages with rifle-shots. When the day's fight was over the wounds, which were mere punctures, were syringed with warm water and bandaged, but soon the poison began to be felt, and all who were wounded either died after terrible suffering, or had their constitutions wrecked or were incapacitated for a long time. So the smallest sin does its work in the heart and life, sooner or later. *Small, but growing*:—When the father of William the Conqueror was departing to the Holy Land he called together the peers of Normandy, and required them to swear allegiance to his young son, who was a mere infant. When the barons smiled at the feeble babe the king promptly replied to their smile: "He may be little now, but he will grow." And he did grow. That same baby hand ere long ruled the nation with a rod of iron. The same may be said of evil in its tiniest form: "It is little, but it will grow." Once let the smallest sin gain the upper hand, and it will destroy the whole life. *No influence is small*:—The great tendency in many Christians of circumscribed lives is to believe that their influence is small. Tell them that they have a large influence over the people among whom they live, and they will at once dispute it and perhaps blush at the thought of their having any perceptible degree of influence. And this is true of many Christians of acknowledged piety, ability, and clean records. And it is because of this feeling that not a few of these good people do not put forth that effort to reach and help others which they easily might. They are afflicted with a modesty which underrates the real measure of their power and possible ministry. Better realise, Christian brother, that, however weak and narrow your ability may seem to you to be, your influence is never small, but always large. You cannot make it otherwise if you would. An eminent preacher says: "Do not fear that your influence be small; no influence is small: but even if it were, the aggregate of small influences is far more irresistible than the most vigorous and heroic of isolated efforts." Did you ever think of the influence which the odour of a little bed of flowers has? Everything around that bed is influenced by it; every one coming near it is consciously affected by it. Do not excuse yourself from duty of any sort on the plea of having no influence. (*G. H. Wetherbe.*) *A little woman and a big war*:—When Mrs. Stowe, who wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin," visited the White House, President Lincoln bent over her, saying: "And this is the little woman who made this big war?" The freeing of the serfs in Russia was the result of thoughts aroused by the reading of the novelist's story, so the Czar told Turgeneff. *The resolution of a moment*:—At Toulon, Napoleon, looking out of the batteries, drew back a step to let some one take his place. The next moment the new-arrived was killed. That step brought the French Empire, and made possible the bloody role of its victories and defeats. The rout at Waterloo turned on a shower of rain hindering Grouchy's advance. The resolution of a moment with some men has been the turning-point of infinite issues to a world. (*J. C. Geikie.*) *Great results from small beginnings*:—A little babe is born in a poor miner's home at Eiselben, Saxony, November 1483. Few notice his birth, but in 1519 Martin Luther shakes the foundation of the papal throne, and saves Europe from gross ignorance and superstition. August 25th, 1759, William Wilberforce was born at Hull. Who imagined that this small babe would one day become the saviour of the slaves, and that on August 15th, 1838, 800,000 African bondsmen would rend the air with cries of "Freedom's come"? *Nothing should be despised*:—Down at Greenock there, on an ordinary working man's hob, there is a kettle boiling. Kettles have boiled in Scotland millions of times before. Listen to the lid. "Rat-a-tat!" Listen! Don't judge it! The ears of a genius are suddenly fixed on the sound of the lid that is raised by the bubbling of the boiling water. What have you there? You have the birth of the giant steam forces that are abroad on the world to-day. Don't be hasty either about men or method—about workers or work; you never know what it is to grow to, if God be in it. Over in an American State there is a kite flying as the thunder-cloud is coming across the sky, and there is a man holding the string like a silly schoolboy. "Oh, what an undignified thing," you say. **And**

he has a key in his hand. He is tapping away at the bottom there, when suddenly a spark is seen. What are you going to say about it? A small thing, yet perhaps one of the mightiest events that ever took place in this world. It is the birth of electricity—the birth of the electric forces that bind the Antipodes to our shores. Ah, be careful! When God is in it you do not know what is to come out of it. But these men, though chosen by God, have got no extra intellect. They have no extra learning, and would have been passed by even for a Socialistic propaganda. It was not likely that these men should carry the banner of the Cross as they did. "Only a little chit of a boy," the elder said at a Scottish communion; "only one chit of a boy joined us this communion"; and he thought the minister was wasting his time, night after night, with that little chit of a boy. But in that Scottish parish there was never such a communion, never such a joining of the Church; for that little boy was Robert Moffat, Africa's missionary. Never despise anything, for you never know to what it will grow. (*John Robertson.*) *The day of small things*:—This very sweet and evangelical minor prophet bore his burden of prophecy after the return from the Babylonish Captivity. The second temple, erected in his time, was of no esteem in the sight of the people, few and poor as they were, whose fathers had boasted to them of the glory of the first temple. But the prophet cheers them as his fellow-prophet Haggai did, who said, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former!" In this despised temple the people would know that the Lord of hosts had sent His servant to them. Man is never so apt to err as in coming to hasty conclusion with regard to God's dealing with him. I. OURS IS A DAY OF SMALL THINGS. 1. We live in a small world. Many worlds that surround us in space greatly exceed ours in size. We stand, as it were, upon an atom of God's material creation. 2. Our bodies are small portions of this world. Over these alone we have immediate control, and that in a very partial degree. 3. Our faculties are few. We have but five senses of the body and five of the mind. These are at our command in a limited and imperfect manner. 4. Our knowledge of matter is small. Nature is ever sparing in her revelations. 5. Our knowledge of the Divine Mind is small. II. THIS DAY SHOULD NOT BE DESPISED. Why should it? It is ours. No one despises his own. Despise—1. Not small opportunities of obtaining religious knowledge. This is the chief knowledge. Its smallest morsels are more precious than pearl-dust. Religious knowledge is useful for two lives—a guide for both worlds. 2. Not small opportunities of doing good for Christ. We have not all abundance of wealth to enrich God's sanctuary. Few have ten talents to occupy until He comes. 3. Not small sins in their earliest stage. However small, they are deviations from the right path; the lines containing a small angle, if produced far, become far asunder. As large rivers spring from small sources, so small sins soon grow to be large. Sinning is strengthened by habit, and increases in its onward course. 4. Not small chastisements for sin. 5. Not small religious impressions. You may never get stronger ones to start with. By being timely cherished they will grow in strength. Why we should not. Because our present day is but the infancy of our being. Our brief time will give birth to an eternity; a dwarf will be the parent of a giant. We shall have to give an account of how we spend it. Why should we differ from others with regard to the day of small things? God despises not small things; if He did, He would not have created so many of them. Nor does the Church; it receives the weakest in the faith, and performs the smallest duties. Nor does the Evil One, with his malicious craftiness. (*J. Bowen Jones, B.A.*)

Vers. 11-14. What are these two olive trees.—*The candlestick and the olive trees*:—In the parable of Zechariah we have the picture of a lamp supplied not by a limited quantity of oil contained in metal or earthenware vessels, but by an unlimited unending quantity from a living source. It was not part of the produce of an olive harvest that kept the candlestick burning brightly; for that supply would in course of time have been exhausted: even the whole crop of olives of one year would in course of time have failed. And what a beautiful symbol of the bountifulness and enduringness of grace this is! We do not get a limited, carefully measured supply from Christ, but an unlimited, ever-flowing fullness. He will supply all our need; not according to our own sense of need, but according to His riches in glory. Christ came not that we might have a bare life, snatched from the condemnation of the law, but that we might have more abundant life than man originally possessed in his unfallen state. It is

not pardon and acquittal only that He gives us, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Where our sin abounds His grace doth much more abound. God carefully measures His afflictive dispensations, and sends trials and sorrows in small doses, as it were; just as the apothecary measures out in a carefully graduated medicine-glass the bitter or poisonous medicines that are necessary to cure our sicknesses. But God pours His joys and blessings into our souls in such lavish bountifulness that there is not room in them to contain them. He wishes not only that His joy may be in us, but that our joy may be full. The two olive trees that feed the visionary candlestick, one on each side, may be said to represent the twofold character of Christ's personality,—His Divine and human natures. Another idea implied in the symbol of the text besides this of exhaustless abundance is spontaneity—freeness. The olive trees pour their oil into the lamps freely as well as fully. The oil that feeds the candlestick has not to be first gathered in the berries, extracted in the oil-press, manufactured by the art of man, sold by the merchant, bought and earned by the sweat of the face. Not in this roundabout, laborious, artificial way, but directly, by a spontaneous, natural process, do the olive trees contribute of their fulness to the supply of the lamps; and thus it is that the grace of God is freely given to us. Not by laborious mechanical arts and efforts, but by a living faith, a simple trust, do we obtain the supplies of our spiritual need from Christ. We have not to work for them, but only to freely receive them as they are freely offered to us. How striking is the contrast between the way in which we get the fruits of sin and the tree of life! We stretch out our hand to pluck the forbidden fruit. We take it ourselves, in defiance of God's command—by force, by deceit, by trouble, by methods that cost us toil and pain. But God gives to us to eat of the tree of life. We have not to stretch forth the hand to pluck it; it is given into our hand, into our mouth. God's unspeakable gift is freely bestowed. The olive trees that feed the lamp of your faith and love are planted in no earthly soil, and are dependent upon no earthly means of culture. They grow without your toil or care in heavenly light and air. Their harvests are regulated by the unchanging laws of God's covenant of grace. Your Father is the husbandman. Your Saviour has finished the whole work of grace, and you do not require to add to it. The less you interfere with its working the better. The Kingdom of Heaven is indeed as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself—first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. He who is the author of your faith will be the finisher of it; and having begun the good work of grace in you, He will carry it on and complete it; and therefore the more poor in spirit you are, the more empty and destitute, the more will the Kingdom of Heaven be yours, the more room and freedom will it have to work out in you the good pleasure of God's goodness as the work of faith. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D., LL.D.*)

The consecration of the people :—The picture that the prophet saw is set before us with distinctness, and the meaning of the symbol is not obscure. The significance of the central figure—the candlestick or candelabrum, all of gold,—the prophet knows perfectly. Concerning that he asks no questions. Is the meaning equally clear to all of us? The golden lampstand always symbolises the Church. The Church is represented, not as the light of the world, but as the receptacle or support of the light. The light is Divine. The candelabrum all of gold was to the prophet the symbol of the Church of God in its latter-day glory. To him the Jewish Church and the Jewish nation were not twain, but one. That sharp discrimination which we make between things sacred and things secular, the devout Jew did not make at all. Between politics and religion he drew no line. It must be admitted that this old Hebrew conception is a little nobler and finer than the theory of life that generally prevails among us. We have come to make a broad distinction between that part of life which is sacred, and that part which is secular. The complete divorce between the Church and the State which exists among us is the result of sectarian divisions. That a practical unity is one day to be realised I have no doubt. It can never be realised until the different sects all learn to exalt that which is essential above that which is secondary. The things that are essential are the values of character, righteousness, purity, and love; the things that are secondary are rites and forms and dogmas. When the Church of God shall be one it will be possible to bring it into the closest relations with the State. The prophet did need to inquire concerning the two olive

trees growing on either side of the candelabrum, connected with it by golden pipes and pouring a perennial supply of golden oil, pure and precious, into the golden bowl—what did they symbolise? The oil thus provided must be taken to represent the Divine inspiration, which is the power that moves and the life that energises the Kingdom of God in the world. It is the immanent and perennial grace of Him “whose light is truth, whose warmth is love.” The two olive trees are the “two anointed ones,” Zerubbabel and Joshua—the two men in whom the Spirit of the Lord was dwelling; the men who were working together to rebuild the temple, and fully restore the worship. They were the living sources of inspiration and help to the restored and glorified kingdom. We have no kings or priests. All who believe, says Peter, are a royal priesthood. The grace that was specialised in the old time is generalised in the new. The right of standing before the Lord, receiving His messages, and transmitting His truth and love and power, is not restricted to a few; it belongs to all faithful and loyal souls. (*W. Gladden.*)

Model religious teachers :—This is not another vision, but an explanation of the one recorded in the preceding verses. Take the “two anointed ones” as types of model religious teachers. I. THEY HAVE A HIGH ORDER OF LIFE IN THEM. They are represented by the olive branches. Few productions of the vegetable kingdom are of such a high order as those of the olive. Its fatness was proverbial (Jud. vii. 9); it is an evergreen, and most enduring. In short, it is marked by great beauty, perpetual freshness, and immense utility. It was one of the sources of wealth in Judea, and its failure was the cause of famine. The emblems of a true teacher are not dead timber or some frail vegetable life, but an olive tree. Religious teachers should not only have life, but life of the highest order. They should be full of animal spirits, full of creative genius, full of fertile thought, full of Divine inspiration. II. They COMMUNICATE THE MOST PRECIOUS ELEMENTS OF KNOWLEDGE. They “empty the golden oil out of themselves.” It has been observed by modern travellers that the natives of olive countries manifest more attachment to olive oil than to any other article of food, and find nothing adequate to supply its place. Genuine religious teachers feed the lamp of universal knowledge with the most golden elements of truth. They not only give the true theory of morals and worship, but the true theory of moral restoration. What are the true genuine religious teachers doing? They are pouring into the lamps of the world’s knowledge the choicest elements of truth. III. THEY LIVE NEAR TO THE GOD OF ALL TRUTH. “Then said he, These are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” They “stand”; a position of dignity, “stand,” a position of waiting—waiting to receive infallible instructions, ready to execute the Divine behests. All true religious teachers live consciously near to God. (*Homilist.*)

The two olive trees :—Consider—1. That by the two olive trees it is not clear to understand only the graces of God poured out on His Church. That is indeed signified by oil in such Scripture as Psa. xlv. 7. Here the resolution is concerning the trees that furnished the oil. Nor yet are we to understand them of a fountain of bounty in God; for there can be no reason given why that should be compared to two trees, and be said to “stand before the Lord.” But by them we are to understand Christ anointed in His priestly (which includes His prophetic) and kingly office, who was chief in this work, and in furnishing all instruments; who furnishes His Church, and serves His Father in the work of redemption, and is cared for by Him. 2. That the angel, answering both the prophet’s questions in one, leads us to understand the one by the others so far as is needful; and therefore we may conceive that either that of the branches is not touched as needless, or pointing out only the fit ways of communicating Himself to His people’s capacity, the pipes not being able to receive the oil of the whole tree at once, or that branches only now furnishing, imported Christ’s communicating Himself in a small measure in this typical work of building the temple in respect of what He had and was to communicate in the building of His Church under the Gospel; or if we will stretch it further, it may take in Joshua and Zerubbabel, the one anointed priest, the other a successor of their anointed kings, who, however, as instruments in the work, they were resembled by the burning lamps, getting furniture from the bowl, yet in respect of their office among that people, and their influence upon all instruments of building the temple, they were types of Christ, and so might be represented by two little branches, resembling Him, the great olive tree . . . “standing before the God of the earth,” as being instrumental to keep in life in the Church when all power shall be opposite to her. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The two anointed ones* :—Who

are these? They refer to some standing channel of blessing from God, and are alluded to again in Rev. xi. 3, 4, in terms that cannot be mistaken. Without entering at length into the reasons for this opinion, we simply affirm that they refer to a duality of gracious manifestation from God, corresponding to a duality of necessity in the nature of man. There are two grand evils to be overcome, guilt and pollution, and they demand two standing sources of blessing, the one to remove the guilt by atonement, the other to remove the power of sin by giving a higher power of holiness. These two sources are embodied in two official forms, the only two that were connected with the theocracy as permanent elements, the sacerdotal and regal orders. This duality marked all the manifestations of God, for it rested on a deep necessity of human nature, and it was then embodied in the persons of Joshua and Zerubbabel. Since, then, they were so essential to the theocracy, the people need not suppose that God would allow them to perish, but would continue them in existence until He should come who was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Learn—1. That the Church is the same under both dispensations, for the promises made to her then are only fulfilling now, showing that then and now she was the same Church. The candlestick is the same, though the tubes may be changed; and the Church is the same, though her official channels be totally altered. 2. God has provided an unfailing source of strength for His people. Their supply comes not from a dead reservoir of oil, but a living olive tree, that is ever drawing from the rich earth its generous furnishings, and then distilling them by seven pipes, a perfect number, to those who are to be burning and shining lights. 3. The whole work of religion in the heart of the individual, and throughout the world, is of grace. Christ is at once the corner-stone and the cope-stone of the Church; and as He was greeted with "shoutings of grace" when He came the first time, much more shall He when He comes the second time, without sin unto salvation. 4. We are prone to judge of God's work by man's standard; and because we see but a narrow stream from the fountain, doubt or deny the river. 5. It is not only unwise, it is wicked, to be disheartened because of the external feebleness of the Church, compared with the work she has to do and the enemies she has to encounter. God is her strength, her glory, and her hope, and to despair of her is to deny God. 6. The doctrine and discipline of the Church, the truth and power that God has lodged in her organisation and in her ordinances, are still the standing channels through which the Spirit pours the oil of grace and strength, and hence should both be kept pure and unclogged. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *Do not arrest the inflow of spiritual influences*:—Beware, also, that nothing chokes the golden pipes of obedience to His kingship, and trust in His priesthood; else the entrance of the golden oil will be arrested. They may soon become stopped by neglect, inattention, or disuse. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Two olive trees*:—The prophet manifests great concern to understand what is meant by these two olive trees. I. THE UNIVERSAL DOMINION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. "The Lord of the whole earth." Not to be understood in an abstract, but in a relative sense. The Lord Jesus is the last Adam, and He came and acquired universal dominion on behalf of His people. He obtained universal dominion by prevailing with God. This He did by His obedient life. Whatever perfection—whether of love, or holiness, or wisdom, or integrity—you may name, the Saviour possessed them all. And "the Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake." This righteousness, this obedient life of the Lord Jesus, hath prevailed with God's law, hath prevailed with justice. This is one step towards the Saviour's universal dominion, God's unexceptional approbation of His righteousness, God's deep and eternal interest in His righteousness. When the Saviour came to die, was there in the whole universal Church one sin that He did not conquer? Was there one demand of justice that He did not meet? See some of the symptoms of this dominion while the Saviour was in the world. He cast out devils,—there is power over hell. Need I remind you of sin? Why, He pardoned one and another. Then diseases,—what disease was ever too hard for Him? Then the sea,—He walks on it. Whatever dominion He possesses, He will give to you. II. THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES. The two anointed ones. In the Book of Revelation called the "two witnesses." These represent the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church. In this passage, then, is given Christ's entire dominion; the river of the Gospel; the Old and New Testament Churches sweetly united in the same theme; a clear note of time when these wonders were to be mediatorially accomplished; and the faithfulness of the Old and of the New Testament Churches. (*James Wells.*)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-4. **And I turned . . . and looked, and behold a flying roll.**—*The flying roll* :—The object of this discourse is to present to you the Scriptures as a phenomenon of the world around us. Consider them as an appearance in the circle of our observation, a fact in the history of our race, and ask, what account is to be given of it? The attention of our age is taken up much and wisely with the study of phenomena. We may interpret the Scriptures in one way or another; we may study or neglect, revere or despise them; we may consider them to be the dictates of observation, or below the level of human intelligence; we may call them a word of delusion, or the Word of God; but in the extremest varieties of opinion no one can escape from this,—that they are a leading phenomenon in the history of civilisation and religious thought, in the aspect of the moral world as it now stands and moves before us. In the text an angel speaks in vision to one of the last of the prophets, and asks, as if in the very spirit of modern research, “What seest thou?” The prophet raises his eyes and sees a winged book, “a flying roll.” It is of gigantic dimensions. It is of restless speed. It “goeth forth over the face of the whole earth.” It was the roll of the Lord’s judgments—a consuming fire. In this respect the Bible corresponds with it only in one of its parts, but in that part perfectly: in its testimony against unrighteousness, its sentence upon those who love and practise dishonour, its “fiery law.” Dealing with the “flying roll” more generally, what are the points that we discover in it? 1. The extraordinary dimensions of the book, “its length twenty cubits, and its breadth ten.” What a space does the Bible fill in the gaze of mankind, though it can be carried about in the hand of the feeblest wayfarer! Do we not speak truly of its wonderful dimensions when it holds on its ample pages such a widely scattered wisdom, and is discerned from so far? 2. Its preservation and continuance through so long a sweep of time. This is remarkable even at a first glance. Since faithful Abraham came out from Chaldæa vast tribes and strong nations have risen to renew and passed away into silence. Founders of states have not so much as secured the name of what they founded. Dispensers of religion have left neither a priest for their successor nor a shrine for their monument. Oracles of wisdom have grown forgotten as well as dumb. Genius and learning have gone down into the dust, and there is not a finger-track of an inscription upon it for their posterity to read. Whole literatures have disappeared, their tongues having ceased, and their characters become illegible or blotted entirely out. But here is writing, from many hands, and in a long series of instructions, dating as far back as the school lessons of human improvement. It has defied time. It has repelled decay. The linen, or the parchment, or whatever frail material it was confided to, held fast its trust, while brazen trophies were melted down and marble columns were pulverised. The temple of the Lord protected its archives; though its huge stones were unable to hold themselves together, and its sacred vessels served at last but for the ornaments of a heathen triumph. 3. Its spread. It is, indeed, a “flying roll.” The Scriptures move rapidly. They are not only preserved, but incredibly multiplied. They were addressed for the most part to one people, and they now speak to all people. They were written in their own peculiar tongues, and now they call all tongues their own. Have they not “gone forth over the face of the whole earth”? They are among the studies of learned men, who find there a wisdom higher than all else they know; while the ignorant and the simple, reading as they run, are made wise to life everlasting. 4. The honour with which they have been received as they have flown along. They are recognised in the public worship of most of the civilised tribes now under heaven. They are enshrined in cathedrals. They are revered, at least with all outward forms of homage, in the courts of the proudest empires. They are sworn upon when the most solemn vows by which we can be bound are to be attested. The patient fingers of holy recluses could for centuries find no better task than to copy them; and countless presses are now perpetually busy, that they may be distributed over the globe. The rarest genius and the profoundest learning are employed upon the illustration of them. It may be objected that we have said nothing of the disrespect and derision with which the Scriptures are regarded by multitudes, and have always been. We may admit this, but press the consideration, that they have withstood even this trial. Familiarity and levity have not subjected them to contempt. Nothing could better show how deeply they are seated in the

veneration of mankind. 5. Their influence, their surprising power. There may be a high repute without any true efficiency. But that roll of the Divine covenants has always been of a Divine force. It has acted upon communities, wherever it has been introduced, so as to accomplish the most astonishing consequences. Are you inquiring what overthrew many of the massy oppressions, the enormous abuses, of the elder times? It was its paper edges that smote upon all that dark strength, and before those thin leaves buttress and battlement went down. How much has it done for individual minds. 6. Their immeasurable superiority, as mere traditions, above everything that has been handed down to us from the ancient world. There is in their contents a deep spring of instruction, such as the old generations nowhere furnish, and the coming ones are not likely soon to exhaust. Your own minds will surely leap to the inference: the finger of God was here. You may be perplexed with many passages in your Bible. You may slight some things as unimportant, and repel others as uncongenial. You may think you discern great blemishes and errors here and there. But what of that? It should throw no mistrust over the spontaneous conclusion: the finger of God was here. Yes, the Divine providence ordained and protected this charter of man's truest liberty and highest good. Let us look thoughtfully at it, then, as it flies on its holy errand. (*N. L. Frothingham.*) *The flying roll*:—The import of this vision is threatening, to show that the object of the prophet was to produce genuine repentance. The parts are significant. A roll, probably of parchment, is seen, 30 by 15 feet, the exact dimensions of the temple porch; where the law was usually read, showing that it was authoritative in its utterance, and connected with the theocracy. Being a written thing, it showed that its contents were solemnly determined beyond all escape or repeal. It was flying, to show that its threats were ready to do their work, and descend on every transgressor. It was unrolled, or its dimensions could not have been seen, to show that its warnings were openly proclaimed to all, that none might have an excuse. It was written on both sides, to connect it with the tables of the law, and show its comprehensive character. One side denounced perjury, a sin of the first table, the other stealing, a sin of the second; and both united in every case where a thief took the oath of expurgation to acquit himself of the charge of theft. This hovering curse would descend in every such case into the house of the offender, and consume even its most enduring parts, until it had thoroughly done its work of destruction. The immediate application of this vision was to those who were neglecting the erection of God's house to build their own, and thus robbing God and forswearing their obligations to Him. On such the prophet declares a curse shall descend that will make this selfish withholding of their efforts in vain, for the houses they would build should be consumed by God's wrath. The teaching of this vision is that of the law. It blazes with the fire, and echoes with the thunder of Sinai, and tells us that our God is a consuming fire. We learn thus a lesson of instruction to those who have succeeded the prophets of the Old Testament, as the authorised expounders of God's will under the New. It is needful to tell the love of God, to unfold His precious promises, and to utter words of cheer and encouragement. But it is also needful to declare the other aspect of God's character. There is a constant tendency in the human heart to abuse the goodness of God to an encouragement of sin. Hence ministers of the Gospel must declare this portion of God's counsel as well as the other. They must declare to men who are living in neglect of duty, that withholding what is due to God, either in heart or life, is combined robbery and perjury. For those who thus sin, God has prepared a ministry of vengeance. There is something most vivid and appalling in this image of the hovering curse. It flies viewless and resistless, poisoning like a falcon over her prey, breathing a ruin the most dire and desolating, and when the blind and hardened offender opens his door to his ill-gotten gains, this mystic roll, with its fire-tracery of wrath, enters into his habitation, and, fastening upon his cherished idols, begins its dread work of retribution, and ceases not until the fabric of his guilty life has been totally and irremediably consumed. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The flying roll*:—I. THE MAN WHO IS MARKED AS A SPECIAL TRANSGRESSOR IS MARKED ALSO FOR SPECIAL JUDGMENT. The curse went "forth over the face of the whole earth," but it was to cut off the thief and the false swearer. In the Hebrew nation there were many sinners, but there, as everywhere else, there were sinners who had not yet filled up the measure of their iniquity, and there were others who had passed all bounds, whose transgressions were so great as to make them marks upon which the lightnings of God's displeasure must fall. II. ESCAPE

FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNREPENTED SIN IS IMPOSSIBLE. It is not necessary that the sin should reveal itself in action to ensure the entail of the certain penalty. If it never passes the boundary of the inner man there will be a reaction upon the man's spirit as certainly as night follows day, and more so because, though God has suspended the laws of nature, we have no reason to suppose He has ever interposed to prevent the consequences of sin, unless the sinner has come under the power of another law,—the law of forgiveness by confession and repentance. However hidden the transgression, the curse will find out its most secret hiding-place.

III. THEFT AND PERJURY INCLUDE ALL OTHER SINS. The son who forges his father's name includes in that one act every other crime that he can commit against him except that of taking his life. He only needs occasion to reveal his readiness for any other act of dishonour toward his parent. The man who deliberately appeals to God to uphold him in his false statements forges the name of the Eternal Himself, and seeks to turn the God of truth into the Father of lies.

IV. THE SPECIAL SINS OF SOME BRING SUFFERING UPON MANY. The curse went forth "over the whole earth," or land. It is a truth proclaimed by God and verified by experience, that many may suffer by the sin of the few to whom they are in no way related. See this principle, and its bright reverse, illustrated by St. Paul in Rom. v. 18. (*Outlines by London Minister.*) *The flying roll* :—The threatenings here are directed against the defects and transgressions of the Jewish people at that time.

God gives them to understand by this vision that whilst it was His purpose to make His promise good, in the establishment of His Church, He would by no means connive at their sins and corruptions, but would visit them with present punishment, and with future extirpation, if they persisted in their unbelief and rebellion.

I. THE SINS MORE ESPECIALLY CONDEMNED. 1. Theft and sacrilege. 2. Perjury and false swearing. II. THE PUNISHMENT THREATENED. Partly personal and partly domestic. 1. A personal judgment is denounced. Every one shall receive his reward and punishment according to his sins, and according to the sentence of the roll. 2. It was to extend to his relative and domestic interests. "It shall enter into the house of the thief." "It shall remain in the midst of his house." "And shall consume it with the timbers thereof, and the stones thereof."

This subject may well teach heads of families a lesson of religious caution, lest by an undue anxiety for their own worldly success, or that of their children, they frustrate their most cherished purposes, and entail a curse rather than a blessing. We shall do well to remember that no external evil which may befall a particular class of mankind, in consequence of the faults of their progenitors, renders any individual of that class less acceptable to God, if he turn from his wickedness and repent. But the very curse may become a blessing, if it operate to warn an individual against the sin by which it was brought down upon him. On the other hand, let no children of religious parents suppose that the piety of a long line of ancestors will avail in their behalf, unless they are themselves the possessors of religious principle. And since all are exposed to an infinite danger on account of sin, how deep should be our gratitude to that Divine Redeemer, who bore the curse for us, that we might escape the impending penalty, and inherit the unspeakable blessings of His salvation. (*S. Thodey.*) *The flying roll—Divine retribution* :—

I. AS FOLLOWING SIN. 1. The particular sins which retribution pursues. (1) Theft and sacrilege. (2) Perjury and false swearing. The sins here mentioned are not mere specimens, but root or fountain sins. The "flying roll" of Divine retribution followed sin with its curses. There is a curse to every sin, and this is not vengeance, but benevolence. It is the arrangement of love. 2. The way in which just retribution pursues them. (1) Openly. The roll is spread open, and is written in characters that are legible to all. Divine retribution is no secret to man. It is not some intangible, hidden, occult thing. It is open to all eyes. Every man must see the "flying roll," not only in the history of nations and communities, but in his own domestic and individual life. The "flying roll" hovers over every sin. (2) Rapidly. Retribution is swift. It is a "flying roll." Retribution follows sins swifter than the sound of the swiftest thunder-peal follows the lightning-flash. (3) Penetratingly. "I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by My name." Wherever the sinner is, it will find him out. No mountain so high, no cavern so deep, no forest so intricate and shadowy as to protect him from His visitation. It serves to illustrate retribution. II. AS ABIDING WITH SIN. "It shall remain in the midst of his house." Not only does it rule the house of the sinner, "it remains in the midst of it" like a leprosy, infecting, wasting,

consuming, destroying. It abides in the house to curse everything, even the timber and the stones. Guilt, not only, like a ravenous beast, crouches at the door of the sinner, but rather, like a blasting mildew, spreads its baneful influence over the whole dwelling. The sin of one member of a family brings its curse on the others. The sins of the parents bring a curse upon the children. (*Homilist.*)

Judgment with consolation:—The angel shows, in this chapter, that whatever evils the Jews had suffered, proceeded from the righteous judgment of God; and then he adds a consolation—that the Lord would at length alleviate or put an end to their evils, when He had removed afar off their iniquity. Interpreters have touched neither heaven nor earth in their explanation of this prophecy, for they have not regarded the designs of the Holy Spirit. Some think that by the volume are to be understood false and perverted glosses, by which the purity of doctrine had been vitiated; but this view can by no means be received. There is no doubt but that God intended to show to Zechariah that the Jews were justly punished, because the whole land was full of thefts and perjuries. As their religion had been despised, as well as equity and justice, he shows that it was no wonder a curse had prevailed through the whole land, the Jews having by their impiety and sins extremely provoked the wrath of God. This is the import of the first part. And then, as this vision was terrible, there is added some alleviation by representing iniquity in a measure, and the mouth of the measure closed, and afterwards carried to the land of Shinar, that is, into Chaldea, that it might not remain in Judea. Thus, in the former part the prophet's design was to humble the Jews, and to encourage them to repent, so that they might own God to have been justly angry; and then he gives them reason to entertain hope, and fully to expect an end to their evils, for the Lord would remove to a distance, and transfer their iniquity to Chaldea, so that Judea might be pure and free from every wickedness, both from thefts and acts of injustice, by which it had been previously polluted. (*John Calvin.*)

This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth.—*The Lord's curse*:—This type is expounded to signify the Lord's curse going forth to do execution in all the land of Judah, and to cut off sinners against the first and second tables of the Law. Doctrine—1. Whatever be the particular punishment inflicted by God for sin, yet this is seriously to be laid to heart, that every such punishment hath in its bosom a curse, till the sinner, awakened thereby, flee to Christ, who became a curse, that His own may inherit a blessing. 2. The Lord is an impartial avenger of sin, when it is persevered in without repentance; and when other means are ineffectual, He will not spare to cut off the desperate sinner; for the curse goes forth “over the face of the whole earth,” or land; and “every one shall be cut off,” without exception, who are guilty. 3. The Lord will not spare but indifferently punish sin, whether against the first or second tables, in avoiding of both which the Lord's people are to testify their sincerity. This is signified by “cutting off every one that stealeth, and every one that sweareth.” 4. When a people are delivered out of sore troubles, and yet their lusts are not modified, they ordinarily prove covetous, false, and oppressing, as labouring by all means to make up these things that trouble hath stript them of; therefore is there a particular threat against every one that *stealeth*, it being a rife sin at their return from captivity, for they went every man to his own house (Hag. i. 9), were cruel oppressors (Neh. v. 1-3), yea, and robbed God of tithes and offerings (Mal. iii. 8). 5. Covetous and false men, in their bargains with men, will make no bones of impiety and perjury, if that may help to gain their point; for with the former is joined “everyone that sweareth,” which is expounded, ver. 4, to be “swearing falsely by God's name.” (*George Hutcheson.*)

It shall remain in the midst of his house.—*A curse in the family*:—As certain as the ordinances of nature, is the law that ill-gotten gain will bring a curse. The following is a startling illustration of the truth, gathered from the history of a rural town:—“In 1786, a youth, then residing in Maine, owned a jack-knife, which he, being of a somewhat trading disposition, sold for a gallon of West India rum. This he retailed, and with the proceeds purchased two gallons, and eventually a barrel, which was followed in due time with a large stock. In a word, he got rich, and became the squire of the district, through the possession and sale of the jack-knife, and an indomitable trading industry. He died, leaving property, in real estate and money value, worth eighty thousand dollars. This was divided by testament among four children, three boys and a girl. Luck, which seemed the guardian angel of the father, deserted the children; for every folly and extravagance they could engage in seemed to occupy their exclusive attention and cultivation. The

daughter married unfortunately, and her patrimony was soon thrown away by her spendthrift of a husband. The sons were no more fortunate, and two died in dissipation and in poverty. The daughter also died. The last of the family, for many years past, has lived on the kindness of those who knew him in the days of prosperity, as pride would not allow him to go to the poor-farm. A few days ago he died, suddenly and unattended, in a barn, where he had laid himself down to take a drunken sleep. On his pockets being examined, all that was found in them was a small piece of string *and a jack-knife!* So the fortune that began with the implement of that kind left its simple duplicate. We leave the moral to be drawn in whatever fashion it may suggest itself to the reader; simply stating that the story is a true one, and all the facts well known to many whom this relation will doubtless reach." (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*) *A plague in the house*:—How terribly those words have been fulfilled in the case of people and families we have known! It has seemed as though there were a plague in the house. The fortune which had been accumulated with such toil has crumbled; the children turned out sources of heartrending grief; the reputation of the father has become irretrievably tarnished. "There is a plague spread in the house; it is a fretting leprosy, it is unclean." No man can stand against that curse. It confronts him everywhere. It touches his most substantial effects, and they pulverise, as furniture eaten through by white ants. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 5-11. *And this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah.*—*The woman in the ephah*:—This vision, like the preceding, is of a warning character, and somewhat more obscure in its symbolical apparatus. A dim outline rises to the eye of the prophet, to which the angel calls his attention, but which he cannot at first distinctly make out. The angel tells him that it is an ephah, a very common dry measure, containing about three pecks. He then sees a mass of lead, containing about a hundredweight, lifted up above the measure, and on looking more closely he sees a woman in the measure. This woman is then violently thrust down into the measure, and the mass of lead laid upon its mouth, after which two winged women carry it away into the land of Shinar, where it was to be permanently deposited in a house prepared for it there. The general meaning of this is to show that when the measure of the people's wickedness became full, then their punishment should come, and they should again be carried into the land of their enemies in exile, not for seventy years, but for a long time. As the flying roll symbolised the certainty and completeness of their punishment, so this vision indicated its swiftness and mode. The ephah is selected simply as a common dry measure, to symbolise the thought that there is a certain measure of sin beyond which the people cannot go with impunity. The woman sitting in it represents the Jewish people, by a common figure. The phrase, "this is their appearance (Heb. *eye*) in all the land" (ver. 6), simply means, this represents that to which the people are looking, or tending, namely, to fill up the measure of their sin, and when they have done that, God will lay upon them their punishment. When the prophet perceives the woman in the measure, he is told that this is (represents) wickedness, even that of the Jewish people. Henderson thinks that the wickedness here represented was idolatry, and that the vision predicted the removal of idolatry from Palestine to Babylon. But there is no reason at all to limit it thus, but rather the contrary. Idolatry had not been a sin of the Jews for a century, and would hardly be represented as an existing thing, as this vision does. It did not exist in the land, and so could not be removed out of it. Moreover, it was not removed to Babylon, in any sense, literally or figuratively, and did not remain there as the vision declares (ver. 11), for the Mohammedan occupants of that region were not idolaters. Hence the explanation that refers it to the entire wickedness of the Jewish people of all kinds, is more consistent with the preceding vision, and gives a better sense. The mass of lead symbolises the heavy judgments that God was holding over them, and which at the fulness of time He would allow to fall. Accordingly, the wicked woman is thrust down into the small measure, crushed and doubled together, and the heavy weight laid upon her to keep her thus prostrate. Then there appear two winged messengers, with outstretched pinions, as if the wind was raising them up, and their wings were strong for flight like those of the stork. There were two, because it required two persons to lift such a measure. They symbolised the messengers of God's wrath that should desolate Judea, and banish the people. They were to carry it into Shinar, which is here the symbol for an

enemy's country, and not the exact country to which they were to be exiled. There it was to be put in a house, shut up, and this house to be built strongly and securely for a permanent habitation, to show that this exile would not be, like the first, a brief sojourn, but a long, weary, and enduring banishment from the land of their fathers; when their resting should not be on God, or on the rock Christ Jesus, but "on their own base"; they should be left to themselves, weighed down like lead with judicial blindness, stupidity, darkness, and hardness of heart. The vision predicted what happened four hundred years afterwards, when the measure of their iniquity being full by the rejection and murder of the Messiah, their hearts being gross, and their care heavy, the hour of vengeance came. Then appeared the Roman eagles, and after the most desperate struggle, the Jewish nation was crushed, and scattered to the four winds, wandering in enemies' countries, not resting on the promise of God, but weighed down with leaden obstinacy, and resting on their own works and righteousness. Learn—1. Every individual, and every nation, has a measure of sin; and until that measure is filled up, God's longsuffering will wait for repentance and reformation. 2. There hangs above every sinner a crushing weight of wrath, poised and ready to descend with overwhelming destruction. 3. If the measure is filled up, the weight shall fall, and crush the sinner with its ponderous mass of punishment. 4. The finally impenitent shall be driven from God into gloomy exile, and left to himself, "to rest on his own base," to be subject to the thrall of his own lawless lusts that he has so long pampered into strength, and to reap as he has sowed, through a long and limitless banishment. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *Vision of the ephah*:—There are some portions of Old Testament prophecy which, at first, appear unmeaning. But upon closer examination they are found to contain important lessons, profitable for all times. Such a prophecy is Zechariah's vision of the ephah. Look—1. At the symbol as seen by the prophet. The ephah was a well-known Jewish measure, represented by our word "bushel." The prophet saw such a measure moving forth as if it were a thing of life, and in the midst of it sat a woman with a talent of lead lifted up before her. The whole picture was a composite symbol, in which were prominent the measure, the woman, and the talent of lead. 2. The meaning of the symbol. In ver. 8 the Hebrew emphatically declares—"This is the wickedness." The most obvious suggestion is, that form of wickedness most likely to ensnare and ruin the people to whom Zechariah prophesied. The symbols point most naturally to the sin of unrighteous traffic, the root and essence of which is covetousness (1 Tim. vi. 10; Col. iii. 5). Why a woman rather than a man appears in the symbol is somewhat difficult to say, but probably because of her power as a temptress. The ensnaring images which have been most prominent in the great systems of idolatry have borne the female form. This woman's throne was an empty measure, and her sign an uplifted talent of lead, thus aptly representing the sin of those who would "swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail" (Amos viii. 4-6). This iniquity of unrighteous traffic appears to have ever been a besetting sin of the Jewish people. The preceding oracle of this prophet (vers. 1-4) was directed against thieves, and those who swore falsely by Jehovah's name; and the obscure expression in ver. 16 (lit., "this is their eye in all the land") is perhaps best explained as alluding to the fact that in all the land the eyes of thieves, extortioners, and false swearers, turned longingly towards this tempting goddess of covetousness. 3. The removal of this ephah to the land of Shinar indicates some kind of retribution which will visit this form of wickedness. The woman was cast down into the empty measure, and the leaden weight was cast upon her mouth (or on the mouth of the ephah), and ephah, woman, and talent were lifted up, and carried off into a foreign land; and the removal was effected by two women, who had wings like the stork, and who were helped by the force of the wind. This part of the vision sets forth God's penal judgment upon this sin and its devotees. Among the various elements of this judgment we note the following—(1) Such wickedness as this composite symbol represented cannot abide in the holy land of Israel, or inherit the kingdom of God. There must be, and there will be, a renewal. (2) The instruments of this woman's sin are made to contribute to her punishment. Her being cast into the ephah, with the leaden stone upon her mouth, suggests the image of a covetous soul, cramped and crushed into the narrow world of self, with nothing else to know or talk about than weights and measures. Thus sold to covetousness one makes his own place, and goes to it; his heaven is made his hell. He is made to live inside his own little half-

bushel, and talk of nothing else than talents, stocks, bonds, corner lots, &c. (3) By an irreversible law such natures are taken out of the fellowship of the pure and good, and removed far from them, by others of their own kind. The world will love his own, and when selfish interests are at stake, men and women of an adulterous and sinful generation aim to help those who have helped them. So this one woman was taken up and carried away by her like—aiders and abettors in unrighteous traffic. When the angel had cast her into the ephah and put the stone upon her mouth, these other women came to her rescue, and, for a season at least, remove her to a more congenial place. The stork is mentioned probably for no other reason than for being a well-known bird of passage, having notably large wings, and abounding in the land of Shinar, in the Euphrates valley. The money-lovers of this world move rapidly in each other's selfish interest, as if borne upon the wings of the wind. 4. The land of Shinar is to be understood as the opposite of the land of Israel, which in chapter ii. 12 is called "the holy land." It was the Babylonian plain, where the descendants of Noah settled after the flood, and builded the city and tower, which was the occasion of their being confused and scattered by the curse of Jehovah (Gen. xi. 2). It was a land of idolatry, whither the Jewish people had, according to Zechariah ii. 6, been scattered as by the four winds of heaven. So this vision symbolised the penal scattering abroad into an unclean land of all whose eye admired the goddess of weights and measures more than Jehovah. The great moral lesson of the vision is therefore a warning against covetousness and unrighteous traffic. Where the love of money is so strong as to employ "balances of deceit," and make "the ephah small and the shekel great," there will come curse and exile. The covetous man will suffer in ways he little dreams of, and the very instruments of his sin may be turned into modes of punishment. He who will serve Mammon must leave the house and land of the Lord, and so all those Jews who loved the wages of unrighteousness might expect sooner or later to be again scattered as by the winds of heaven. Their aiders and abettors might come to their help, and even build for them a house in the foreign land; but, like the tower of Babel, built by selfish ambition in the plain of Shinar, even that house will be likely to prove a curse. This process of separating and removing the lovers of this world from truth and holiness is ever going on in the development of the kingdom of God. Judas loved silver, and was cut off and went to his own place. Demas forsook the Apostle Paul from love of the world. John, the apostle, speaks of those who went out from the godly because they were not of them (1 John ii. 19), and Jude significantly mentions the sensual, having not the Spirit, as they who separate themselves, or make separations. So, by the necessary antagonism of opposite natures, the covetous must remove from the holy; for the narrow-minded, self-centred worldling cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (*Milton S. Terry, D.D.*)

The woman in the ephah.—The question of the angel, and the answer of the prophet, suggest—1. That the medium of Divine thought may be obscure to human understanding. 2. That which we are to communicate to others must be seen clearly by ourselves. 3. That what is difficult to one servant of God may be clear to another. The vision probably refers to the general sin of the nation, which reached its height in the rejection of Messiah, after which the nation was entirely removed from the land. It suggests—**I. THAT TIME IS NEEDED FOR A NATION TO COMPLETE ITS DESTRUCTION, AS WELL AS FOR ITS CONSTRUCTION.** The ephah is a measure of considerable size; the idea conveyed is that, when it is full, it is lifted up and carried away. The filling takes time, and the nation to which the vision pointed did not all at once fill up the measure of its iniquity. Wickedness is allowed to go on unchecked for a certain period, but only to give space for repentance. **II. SIN FIRST IMPRISONS THE SINNER, AND THEN SEPARATES HIM FROM THE DIVINE PRESENCE.** A talent of lead shuts the woman into the ephah, which is then borne into the land of Shinar. This foretells the constant dwelling of the Jews among the Gentile nations. The man who finds himself in a condemned cell is really shut in and banished from his own choice. So it was with the Jewish nation, and so it is with every man who rejects God's plan of regenerating him. He is self-imprisoned and self-banished. **III. THOSE WHO REJECT GOD'S PLAN OF RESTORATION WILL BE LEFT TO THEIR OWN.** God offered to the Jewish nation a sure foundation upon which to rebuild their national greatness (see Isa. xxviii. 16). This they would not accept. Therefore they were banished from their land, and, in the words of this prophecy, "set there upon their own base." They were left to be their own national architects and defenders,

and the history of their bitter sufferings for many centuries, and their present inability to gather themselves into a national whole, shows how ill they succeed who prefer their own way to that which God offers to them. This truth applies equally to every man who rejects the only foundation upon which his character can be rebuilt into its original greatness. (*Outlines by London Minister.*) *A materialistic community*:—Utter mercenariness is an abhorrent object to an angel's eye. The prophet still looks, and what does he see? The meaning of the new scene may be easily discovered. The ephah, with the woman in it, is carried away between earth and heaven, i.e. through the air. Women carry it because there is a woman inside; and two women, because two persons are required to carry so large and heavy a measure, that they lay hold of it on both sides. These women have wings, because it passes through the air; and a stork's wings, because these birds have broad pinions, and not because the stork is a bird of passage or an unclean bird. "The wings are filled with wind, that they may be able to carry their burden with greater velocity through the air. The women denote the instruments or powers employed by God to carry away the sinners out of His congregation, without any special allusion to this or the other historical nation. This is all that we have to seek in these features, which only serve to give distinctness to the picture."—Thiel and Delitzsch. I. Such a community is ENCASED BY THE MATERIAL. This woman, the emblem of the worldly Jews, was not only "in the midst of the ephah," but was closely confined there. "He cast the weight of the lead upon the mouth thereof." To an utterly worldly man matter is everything. He is utterly shut out from the spiritual; there is no glimpse of it, no interest in it. Like the woman in the ephah, he is encompassed by that which shuts him in. The bright heavens and the green fields of the spiritual world are over and around him, but they are nothing to him. He is in the ephah. (1) Your secular scientist is in the ephah. He sees nothing but matter, believes in nothing but matter. (2) Your sensuous religionist is in this ephah. He judges after the flesh. (3) Your man of the world is in this ephah. All his ideas of wealth, dignity, pleasure are material. II. Such a community is being DISINHERITED BY THE MATERIAL. This woman in the ephah, emblem of the worldly Hebrew, is borne away from Palestine, her own land, into a foreign region. Materialism disinherits man. His true inheritance as a spiritual existent is "incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away." But materialism carries him away from it, away to the distant and the gross. (1) The process was rapid. No bird so fleet with wing and foot as the stork, and with this fleetness this woman in the ephah was borne. How rapidly do animalism and worldliness bear away the spirit of man from the realm of spiritual realities, from a love of the true and the beautiful! (2) The process was final. "And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established and set there upon her own base." "To be carnally minded is death. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." What ruined Simon Magus? The world. What ruined Demas? The world. And, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 8. **And he said, This is wickedness.**—*Worldliness*:—This is the ruin of thousands and tens of thousands. It is not at all necessary to insure a man's perdition that he either "steal" or "swear falsely." A man may be a thorough worldling, without the practice of these or any gross iniquities. Whatever shuts God out from His place in the heart as the object of fear and love, and from His place in the conscience as the authoritative regulator of the life, that, be it what it may, is the ruin of the man. In the parable of the marriage feast, the men who declined the invitation, and went away to their farms and to their merchandise, are not charged with any selfish and fraudulent dealings in the management of their farms or the prosecution of their merchandise. What was their sin? Worldliness. They preferred the world to God. They declined the blessings of the Gospel for something more to their taste. They chose the world and the things of the world—no matter in how innocent a form—even the sweets of domestic life itself—to God and the things of God. And in the enjoyment of these, as their chosen portion, they "had their reward." Thus it was of old; thus it is still. Let no man deceive himself by fancying it necessary to his forfeiture of the blessings of God's salvation, that he give himself up to the practice of dishonesty and of open vice. If his heart is in the world, with the world he must have his portion. Let Christians be on their guard against

“the love of this present world.” It is an insinuating and perilous principle. In proportion as it gains upon the heart, it tends to enfeeble the energies, and deaden the sensibilities, of the Divine life in the soul. God will not have a divided heart. “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1-8. Behold there came four chariots out from between two mountains.—*The four chariots*:—The general meaning of this vision is very clear. The enemies of the Church shall be punished, is the motto of the picture, and the purport of the vision. The immediate application of the truth was to the existing circumstances of the Jewish Church, but it contains a general proposition or law of the Divine procedure that is now in fulfilment, and will so continue until the restitution of all things spoken of by the holy prophets since the world began. Following the preceding vision, which denounced wrath on the Jews, it declares that after the Jews have been punished, God will destroy their enemies, who will also be the enemies of the Church. Now, as the threatened punishment of the Jews is not yet completed, so this punishment which was to follow that completion is also incomplete, and the main fulfilment yet to come. We have therefore in this vision an instance of what has been called the continuous fulfilment of prophecy. This takes place when the prophecy is not so much a simple prediction of facts, as the annunciation of a great principle of Divine procedure, in the garb of existing and well-known facts, but yet equally applicable to other facts all along the history of God’s dealings with man. Thus the most abstract and formulated statement of the essence of this vision is, the enemies of the Church shall be punished. Its immediate application was to Babylon and Egypt, the existing representatives of the ancient enmity of the serpent’s seed, but this application is of course a single one, that does not exclude the future examples of this principle of the Divine government that may and must arise. This is wholly different from the old double sense of prophecy, and is a most obvious and reasonable canon of interpretation. How striking the fulfilment of this threatening, when we remember the circumstances under which it was made. Could the haughty nobles of Babylon, in the gorgeousness of its magnificence and the pride of its power, have heard the threatening of this obscure Jew, amidst the ruins of Jerusalem, with what derision and contempt would they have treated the threat! The anathema that was so feebly uttered against the mightiest and richest city in the world, to the eye of sense seemed like the ravings of lunacy. Yet that feeble whisper was the uttered voice of Jehovah, and the elements of ruin in their remotest lurking-place heard the summons, and began to come forth. Slowly and silently did they come up to this dread work, and yet surely and resistlessly, until the glory of these high palaces was dimmed, and the magnificence of these gardens and temples was covered, and now the winds whistle through the reeds of the Euphrates, where Babylon then sat in her pride; and loneliness, desolation, and death are stationed there the sentinel witnesses of the truth that His word returns not to Him void, that His Spirit is quieted in the land of the north. The same is true of Egypt, and later on of Greece and Rome. So it will be with guilty and godless Europe. Learn—1. That the history of the world is all arranged and conducted in reference to the destinies of the Church, and the agencies that control that history go forth from the seat of the Church’s great head, the unseen temple. 2. God has in operation every species of agency, human and angelic, animate and inanimate, needful for the accomplishment of His purposes, and will send these forth at the proper time. Political changes and revolutions are only the moving of the shadow on the earthly dial-plate that marks the mightier motions going forward in the heavens. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The supremacy of God*:—The entire vision was designed to teach a great general lesson—the lesson of the universal supremacy and superintendence of the “God of Israel” over all the agencies of nature, and all the varying movements of progress or retrogression, of prosperity and adversity, of peace and war, amongst the nations; and to teach it with a special application to themselves, as His chosen people, and to those adjoining or more distant countries by which their condition

had been, or might hereafter be, beneficially or injuriously affected. It called upon them to put their trust in the wisdom, power, and love of their own Jehovah,—the governor among the nations;—in one word, to “have faith in God.” Let us learn the lesson. Amidst all the convulsions and revolutions that are agitating Europe, let us not only acknowledge but rejoice in the supremacy of the infinitely wise, and good, and mighty. All “the winds” are His. He “holds them in His fist.” The zephyr and the hurricane are alike His agents. All influences—in every department of creation, and in the hearts and wills and words and actions of men of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, are under His absolute control. “None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” Let us trust in Him, own Him, pray to Him,—deprecating, on behalf of our country, and of our guilty world, merited wrath,—and imploring, especially, that all events may result in glory to His name. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) *God’s government of the world*:—This is the last in the series of visions, which amount in all to seven, during that one night. This is not more easy of interpretation than the preceding ones. The objects which were now revealed to the prophet’s vision are various and strange. (1) He sees four chariots. It does not say whether they were chariots of war bearing the warrior out to battle, or home in triumph, or whether they were chariots used for private or public conveyances. (2) He saw these four chariots proceeding from two mountains. These were not mountains of earth or stone, but mountains of brass; mountains, therefore, having peculiar solidity and strength. (3) He saw these chariots drawn by horses of different colour. I take the vision to illustrate God’s government of the world, and it illustrates four facts concerning that government. I. VARIETY. This is suggested by the colour of the steeds that bear on the chariots of His plans. The “red horses,” emblem of war and bloodshed. The “black,” emblem of calamity, distress, and mourning. The “white,” emblem of gladness and prosperity. The “grised” and “bay,” or piebald, a mixture of events, prosperity and adversity, friendship and bereavement, sorrow and joy, &c. Has not this variety characterised the providence that is over man from the beginning until this hour? It is not only seen in every page of the history of nations and Churches and families, but in the history of individuals. The experience of every man is more changeable than the weather. There is a constant alternation,—the red, the black, the white, the mixed. These changes are useful. 1. They break the monotony of life. They tend to keep the heart of humanity on the alert. There is but little opportunity for moral sleep. 2. They create a desire for a state of certainty. They prompt a search for a “city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This is not our rest. II. IMMUTABILITY. These chariots move between two “mountains of brass.” Though they are borne by a variety of steeds, and move rapidly towards every point of the compass, and bear a variety of events wherever they go, they are overshadowed and hedged in by the immutable in mountains of brass. God’s immutable counsels of decrees keep all the motions and commotions, all the convulsions and revolutions of the world in their place. As the ocean amidst all its ebbings and flowings, rage and fury, is bound to obey the moon, which remains serenely settled in her orbit, so all the agitations of the earth are bound to obey the immutable decrees of Heaven. Thank God! that in this changing world of ours there are mountains of brass, things that cannot be shaken. “All flesh is grass, but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” III. UNIVERSALITY. These chariots, borne by these varied coloured steeds, rolled towards every point of the globe, some to the north and some to the south. They walked “to and fro through the earth.” Not a spot unvisited or ignored. God’s providence embraces all, matter and mind, great and small, good and evil. Hence we should bow with resignation under all our sorrows, and shout with gratitude in all our enjoyments. IV. SUPREMACY. “These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.” He is at the head of all. No evil spirit moves without His permission and control; no good spirit without His inspiration and guidance. He is the Lord of all the earth. How great must He be who manages all things! (*Homilist.*) These are the four spirits of the heavens.—*Four spirits of the heavens*:—Eminent interpreters translate the words “celestial spirits,” and thus present us at once, in our own customary theology, with angels. There is difficulty here, however. In the first place, “spirits of the heavens” is a very unwonted designation for angels in Scripture. I know not that it has a parallel. And secondly, if angels are intended, how come we to have four? Their

number is "ten thousand times ten thousand"; and unless they are mentioned in connection with something else that leads and limits to the number four, it is difficult, by any analogy, to account for it. Let me illustrate the remark from another passage—"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree" (Rev. vii. 1). Here we have "four angels." But we at once see *why* they are four. They are, in the vision, employed in "holding the four winds of the earth." Now the four winds, from the four cardinal points—understood as representing and embracing all the intermediate points, and thus signifying the winds in general—was a style of expression familiar to the ancients as ourselves. The word rendered "spirits," as most if not all of you are aware, signifies also winds. The question then is, whether what are called "the four winds of the earth," in the Book of Revelation, be not the same as what are here called the "four spirits," or winds, "of the heavens." I am strongly tempted to think that we have, in this vision, one symbol, or emblem, explained by another. "The four winds" are an emblem—a most natural and appropriate one—of all the powers and agencies by which the earth can be affected; especially agencies of judgment—of wars and desolations, arising from the contending elements of human passions and Satanic malignity. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Vers. 9-15. And set them upon the head of Joshua.—*The matchless man in history*.—The crowning, the work, and the position of Joshua spoken of in these verses, are obviously employed to symbolise some coming man who would be matchless in all history. Concerning this matchless man, we are taught—I. THAT HE IS ONE WHOM HEAVEN COMMANDS THE PEOPLE TO HONOUR. The prophet is commanded to go to certain men of the more distinguished who had returned from Babylon, representative men it may be. He was to take these men, whose names are here given, to the house of another distinguished man, here called Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. From that house silver and gold were to be taken, with which crowns were to be made, and placed upon the head of Joshua, the son of the high priest. By general consent of expositors, this was a mere symbolical transaction—a transaction pointing to some great man whom heaven will require all men to crown with the highest dignity. Here is a character symbolised by the name of Joshua, to whom the people are called upon by God Himself to render honour. Who is this man? The man Christ Jesus! "When He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world He saith, Let all the angels of God worship Him." II. THAT HIS PEDIGREE WAS STRIKINGLY SINGULAR. "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord." He came down from heaven and tabernacled on this earth, which was not His place. A great soul, dominated by a supreme sympathy with the Supremely Good, can grow anywhere, in its place or out of it. It can subordinate the most hostile external elements and forces for its own will and interests. III. THAT HE IS ONE WHOSE MISSION IS SUBLIMELY GLORIOUS. "He shall build the temple of the Lord," &c. Zerubbabel was now engaged in the work of rearing the material temple at Jerusalem; and a more glorious work than this is not given to man, viz. to promote the public worship of God. IV. THAT HE IS ONE WHOSE POSITION AND FUNCTIONS ARE TRANSCENDENTLY EXALTED. He is on a throne. 1. As a priestly King. 2. As a glorious Reconciler. The Mediator between God and man. The reconciliation, the atonement. V. THAT HE IS ONE WHOSE POWER TO ATTRACT OTHERS TO HIS ENTERPRISE IS IMMENSELY GREAT. The Gentiles were to be themselves stones in the building, and agents in the rearing of it. (*Homilist.*) The man whose name is the Branch.—*On Christ's name, the Branch*.—The text and context are a remarkable prophecy of the coming of the promised Messiah in the flesh, who is described by His natures, His offices of Priest and King, and His work in building the spiritual temple of the Lord. 1. Some observations upon the occasion and reason of this name, the Branch, given to the promised Messiah, before His coming in the flesh. (1) The original word, "tsemach," does not signify "the East," as some have imagined, but always, "the Branch." There are also other Hebrew words expressing Jesus Christ by this His name, the Branch. (2) A man's offspring are, by a very just metaphor, called his branches, because they proceed from him, as branches or sprouts from a root. Jesus Christ is said, in Isa. xi. 1, to be a "Branch out of the root of Jesse."

(3) Jesus Christ is metaphorically called a Branch, respecting some family He was to spring from in His human nature, and this was the family of David, the son of Jesse. (4) When the kings of David's family, and their kingdom, which was then the Church of God, were greatly declined, sore oppressed and much weakened, this promise to David, that Christ was to come as a Branch from him, was presented to their faith, that they might expect the greatest blessings to themselves, and to the Church of God, by the means of this Branch of David's family. (5) After the return from captivity, the encouragement and hope of the Church were founded upon the coming of this Branch of David. 2. Scriptures of the New Testament where He is designed the Branch (Luke i. 78). For "day-spring" the margin has sun-rising or branch (Matt. ii. 23). Nazareth had its name from a branch, which, though not the same word as in our text, yet is of the same signification. 3. The Scripture account of Jesus Christ, under the name and designation of the Branch. (1) He was to be the true and eternal God. "The Lord our Righteousness." (2) The Branch of the Lord (Isa. iv. 2). Son of God the Father, by an eternal, incomprehensible, and incommunicable generation. (3) Really and truly man, and of the lineage and posterity of David. (4) Both God and man, without any change of one nature into another, or confusion of the one with the other, and all this in one person. (5) He was to be Jehovah's servant for the redemption of lost sinners. "He took upon Him the form of a servant." He came, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." (6) This Branch was, in a peculiar manner, of God's bringing forth and raising up. God the Father found Him out, and called Him to the work of saving sinners. (7) He was for a time to be very low and contemptible, to be cut down, and to grow up to the greatest height. This was to be specially true of His birth. (8) The Branch was to sustain and execute offices for the building of the temple of the Lord, both as Prince and Saviour. (9) It was to be a righteous Branch, a Branch of righteousness. Application—1. Learn the advantage of studying the Old Testament. 2. Be restless in your endeavours, until this Branch, this man, be excellent, desirably glorious and precious to you, and in your esteem. 3. Behold the man whose name is the Branch. Behold Him in His person, in His natures. 4. Come and take up your dwelling under the shadow of this man whose name is the Branch. (*James Robe, M.A.*) *The Branch*.—The words are addressed to Joshua the priest, but they represent the Divine Saviour. I. THE BEAUTY OF THIS "BRANCH." What is it that most especially constitutes the beauty of the Divine character? Not justice by itself; not mercy by itself; but the marvellous union of both, the harmony between these Divine attributes, by which God can be "a just God and a Saviour." That union has been discovered perfect and complete in the person of the Lord Jesus, the God-man-mediator, so in Him is the very perfection of beauty. It is indeed said of Him, "There is no beauty that we should desire Him"; but these expressions refer to the meanness of His birth, and to the prejudices of His nation. II. THE SHADINESS OF THIS BRANCH. The term brings to our minds the exposed state of the sinner, in the "weary land" of this world. He stands exposed to the wrath of God. He wants "shade"—something that will interpose between him and the intense heat from above, and afford him a protection from it. By whatever emblem the precious blood and perfect righteousness of Christ are represented to us in Scripture, the idea always conveyed is that of security against the effects of Divine wrath, consequent on human transgression. The shade of the "righteous Branch" is the interposing mediation of our exalted Redeemer. The shade of this Branch is extending itself every day. III. THE FRUITFULNESS OF THIS BRANCH. The two figures are united in Canticles. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." In Revelation is described the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruit, and whose leaves were not for shade only, but also for healing. IV. THE STRENGTH OF THIS BRANCH. "He shall bear the glory." He shall bear the weight of all the cares and concerns of His whole Church, both small and great, even of every individual, however important or insignificant; and He shall be found both able and willing to support them all. And He "bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (*F. Elwin.*) *The man whose name is the Branch*.—There is a difference between the manner in which the prophets, before and after the captivity, spoke of the Messiah. To the prophets after the captivity, the invasion of the Babylonian armies, the destruction of their city and temple, and the very return of the Jews were all past events. The fulfilling hand of the faithful Inspirer of foregoing predictions had swept them all aside; and nothing remained to turn their attention

from that near approach of the Messiah of which they all speak in terms so remarkably explicit. Among other types and figures of heavenly things which the Jewish prophets used, are personal types, of which the text is an example. Here Joshua is expressly made the type of Him who was both King and Priest. This could not apply to Joshua himself, seeing that he was only a priest. I. THE EMPHATIC APPELLATION GIVEN TO THE MESSIAH,—THE BRANCH. The verb whence the word is derived signifies "to grow," "to sprout." It is specially applied to trees, some of which in part decayed, and that to the very roots, will often send forth new shoots, which shall surpass, in greatness and fruitfulness, the original stock. This expression, as applied to Christ, is—1. Eminently prophetic (Isa. xi. 1). The stem of Jesse was decayed. At the time of its lowest depression, the Branch, the Messiah, shot forth. 2. As descriptive of His personal progress to glory and dominion. Of the progress of His religion in the world. And of the work of Christ in the heart. 3. As indicating the secret and mysterious mode of His operations. The metaphor is taken from vegetation, the process of invisible influence which out of rude elements frames the stately tree, and from a bud develops the goodly branch. There is an unseen principle at work, and that principle is the working of God Himself. We see this in the progress of our Saviour from sufferings to glory. And in the progress of His religion in our world. II. THE GREAT WORK TO WHICH THE MESSIAH WAS APPOINTED. "He shall build the temple of the Lord." A parallel may be presented between the material temple and the spiritual house. In conclusion notice—the union of the kingly and priestly offices in Christ. (*R. Watson.*) *The man whose name is the Branch*:—I. THE PERSON HERE SPOKEN OF. Who is this wondrous, mysterious man? Not certainly Joshua, the high priest, on whose head the crowns were to be placed. For the message is addressed to Joshua, as concerning some one else. Joshua, the crowned high priest, is the type of another, greater than himself, to whom he and all others are to look for blessing. These words seem to point to one already known, to one whose name is familiar. And so it is. Isaiah had borne testimony regarding Him (Isa. xi. 2-9, xxiii. 5, 6, xxxiii. 15, 16). Is not this the substance of the Lord's message to every generation of the sons of men? Is not this the great central message of the Book of God, and of every faithful messenger of His? Must not this be the keynote of our preaching? The Branch is none other than the Messiah, our blessed Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells of one who has taken our nature. Our Redeemer is man. But not man alone. He is the God-man. Son of God and Son of Man, a Divine, and therefore an all-sufficient Saviour. II. HIS WORK. "He shall build up the temple of the Lord. This work was entrusted to Zerubbabel, but he was only a type of the true temple-builder. For the true temple is the spiritual temple, the temple into which all believers are built, and of which Jesus Christ is the foundation-stone. And this Builder is also the Owner, the Ruler, a Priest, a Royal Priest. The headship of Christ is a personal matter; the great question for each one is, Am I a loyal subject of the Church's Head and King? Is He the ruler of my life? It is also said, "He shall be a Priest upon His throne." What you and I need is a priest to remove guilt, to make atonement for sin, to satisfy Divine justice, and reconcile us to God. "Him hath God exalted, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (*William Findley, M.A.*)

Ver. 13. He shall build the temple of the Lord, and He shall bear the glory.—*Christ glorified as the Builder of the Church*:—Heaven singeth evermore. And this world is singing too. The tune to which heaven and earth are set is the same. And mark how the music of the Church is set to the same tune as that of heaven and earth, "Great God, Thou art to be magnified." Is not this the unanimous song of all the redeemed below? In the text the Lord Jesus Christ is alluded to. The context runs, "Behold the man whose name is the Branch"—a title ever applied to Messiah. I. THE TEMPLE. It is the Church of God. All Christians constitute the Church. I mean all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, for these make up the one universal Church. This Church is called the "temple" of God, and Christ is said to be its builder. The temple was the place where God specially dwelt. It is true that God is everywhere, but in a special manner He dwelt in the temple. If you would find God, He is everywhere in creation. If you would know what is the secret place of the Most High, you must go where you find the Church of true believers, for it is here He makes His continual residence known. The temple was the place of clearest

manifestation. He who would see God the best of all, must see Him in His temple. The Church is like the temple in that it is a place of worship. As there was only one temple, so there is only one Church. II. CHRIST IS THE CHURCH'S ONLY BUILDER. Make a parallel between Christ's building the Church, and Solomon's building the first temple. In this Solomon fails to be a type of Christ. Christ builds the temple Himself. And Jesus Christ excels Solomon, for He provides all the materials. III. GLORIFY CHRIST. The glory which He shall have will be a weighty glory, an undivided glory. He shall have *all* the glory. Practical application—Are we built up upon Christ? Then let us evermore honour Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Builder of the spiritual temple:*—This passage relates to the dispensation of the Gospel, when it would be proved that Jesus Christ by His person and work did actually rebuild the spiritual temple, which fell into ruins by the disobedience of our first parents. I. THE BUILDING. 1. The ruinous state of the temple. 2. Whose temple it is. "The Lord's." 3. The builder of this temple is Christ. 4. The agent employed is the Holy Ghost. II. THE GLORY OF OUR SALVATION BELONGS UNTO THE LORD. In redeeming us from sin; in justifying our souls; and in preserving us for glory. III. THE NATURE OF HIS GOVERNMENT. He rules in heaven, having accomplished His work. He rules over the world generally. He rules over the Church collectively. And over each believer in particular. He rules in the Word, in the Gospel, and in every Christian duty. IV. HIS PRIESTLY OFFICE. He lives as a priest to make intercession. By appearing in the presence of God for us. By presenting His sacrifice and righteousness. By declaring His will of our final glory. V. THE NATURE OF THE COUNSEL THERE SPOKEN OF. Some explain it as between the Father and the Son; or between the altar and the throne; or between Christ and His Church; or between Jew and Gentile; or between the soul and God. (*T. B. Baker.*) *The temple:*—I. THE TEMPLE. 1. Because the Church is consecrated to the service of God. 2. Is hallowed by His residence. 3. Is honoured by His self-manifestation. II. THE BUILDER. Because He—1. Prepares the materials. 2. Employs the workmen. 3. Superintends the workmanship. III. THE GLORY. 1. From the unlikelihood of the materials. 2. From the magnitude of the obstacles. 3. From the diversity of the workmen. 4. From the perfection of the work. (*G. Brooks.*) *Christ, the Builder and Ruler of the temple:*—Of the *man* here spoken of it is affirmed that "His name is the Branch, and that He shall grow up out of His place." The Branch that was to grow out of the root of Jesse was to be more than man; for who could bear that wondrous name, "The Lord our Righteousness," but the Lord Himself? The text refers to One who should combine in His own person the fulness of Divinity with all that is essential to the constitution of our nature. I. THE WORK HERE ASCRIBED TO CHRIST. "He shall build the temple of the Lord." The prophet was commanded to make two crowns, and set them on the head of Joshua. Under the Levitical economy the high priest wore a crown, and in ancient times the crown was the badge of royalty. Joshua was thus a striking type of Him who is at once the High Priest and the King of Zion. As the person of Joshua typified that of Christ, so the work to which Joshua was called was typical of that which Christ was to accomplish. The temple Christ was to build is the Church universal, consisting of all who in every age and nation are washed and justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Why the Church is called a temple is not difficult to perceive. It is so called in allusion to the sacred edifice which, by Divine command, was erected in Jerusalem. That edifice was dedicated to the service of God, and so are all who believe in Jesus. In the Jewish temple the Lord was pleased to reveal His glory; and so He does in the Church, but more spiritually and more fully. He manifests Himself to all that love and serve Him. The Jewish temple was regarded as God's residence, for the visible emblem of His glory dwelt between the cherubims. And is not His life-giving presence with His Church on earth? Has He not promised to be always with His people? In the one temple were observed the rites which He was pleased to institute; in the other, He is worshipped in spirit and truth. Of this temple Jesus is the builder. Before a structure can be reared the foundation must be laid; and Christ has laid the foundation of His Church, virtually, in the counsels of eternity, when He undertook to accomplish the work of our redemption; actually, in the fulness of time, when He obeyed and suffered in our stead. He is Himself the rock on which His Church is built. On Himself as foundation God rears the spiritual temple. This He does by the instrumentality of His Word, and by

the agency of His Spirit. The soul, when united to the Saviour, undergoes a thorough change of character as well as of condition. Christ imparts His virtues to the soul that rests on Him as the foundation of its hope. Christ sanctifies it by His Word and Spirit, and thus it becomes a living stone, reflecting the glory of Christ Himself. Such is the way in which Christ carries on the work that is here ascribed to Him. As one sinner after another is converted, one living stone after another is added to the temple which He is building. Amid all the uproar and turmoil of this ungodly world, this work is silently but surely going on. How glorious shall the temple be, when the last living stone shall complete the harmony of its vast proportions! Then, purified from every soil, and resplendent with the beauties of righteousness and holiness, it shall stand out before the universe the noblest monument of the Divine perfections. What a signal honour to be fellow-workers with Christ in speeding on this blessed consummation!

II. CHRIST BEARS THE GLORY AS THE RULER IN THE TEMPLE. It is to His glory in this respect that the text more especially refers. There is a very obvious and important distinction between His government of the universe, and His headship over the Church. The Church is a society of a special nature, requiring special laws and institutions for its government and guidance. It is a kingdom not of this world, though in this world. The glory which Christ bears as ruler in the temple is represented in Scripture as the fruit of His sufferings. This honour was secured to Him in the covenant of redemption, as the stipulated reward of obedience unto death. Application.—1. Relating to the duty of individuals. To yield submission to Christ's authority. 2. Relating to the duty of a Church—or any particular society of professing Christians. Is it not a Church's duty to have respect in all things to Christ's authority—to regulate its procedure by the principles and the precepts of His Holy Word? (*David Couper.*) *Christ, the Builder of the Church* :—

I. THE PERSON SPOKEN OF. Observe the circumstances of the prophecy, and see how undeniably they all point to Christ, the High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle. **II. THE WORK ASSIGNED HIM.** "To build the temple of the Lord." The true and spiritual Church of God, which is spread over all ages and all nations, which consists of all believers, all faithful men and sanctified persons throughout the world, gathered out of the vast multitudes of mankind, and brought into one mystical body. It is the glory of the Son of God to be the builder of this temple. The Redeemer builds the temple of the Lord by the virtue going forth continually from His kingly and priestly offices. **III. AN APPROPRIATE REWARD.** Two particulars are mentioned, possessing each a deep interest in connection with the missionary work; the one holding forth our encouragement, and the other our duty. He whom we serve is invested with the government; and He shall bear the glory. Then let us—1. Beware of building without Christ. 2. Give all the glory to Christ. 3. Contribute with a self-denying liberality of our labour and our substance for the work of building the temple of the Lord. (*J. Scholefield, M.A.*) *Christ the Branch, and the Builder of the spiritual temple* :—Our text is a prophecy set forth and highly adorned with metaphor. The text—1. Announces the Saviour by a singular yet significant title. "Behold the man whose name is the Branch." 2. It predicts—the allotment to Him, and the accomplishment by Him of a most important and magnificent work. "He shall build the temple of the Lord." 3. It recognises—the great Builder's right to have all the praise, whilst it assigns to Him a well-deserved reward. "He shall bear the glory." Two inferences—(1) The cause of real religion is in the hands of Jesus Christ. (2) All success in the prosecution of any important part of the glorious work of building up the temple of the Lord must be looked for and derived from the great Master-Builder. (*Josiah Redford.*) *The spiritual temple of Jehovah* :—

I. EVERY TRUE BELIEVER IS A TEMPLE OF GOD. 1. A temple is the residence of Jehovah; and in this view every true believer is a temple of the living God. It is the prominent design of the Gospel to enthrone Jehovah in the affections, dispositions, and habits of men. 2. A temple is consecrated to the service, the worship, and the glory of God. In this sense every true believer is a spiritual temple of the Lord. Christian believers are represented in Scripture as renewed in the spirit of their minds, as built up spiritual houses, as consecrated in every part to the service and glory of God. 3. A temple is the scene of Divine manifestation; and in this sense also every true believer is a spiritual temple of the Lord. Every true believer exhibits in his own person, in his principles, in his habits, in his privileges, and in his bright hopes, a manifestation of God, a practical exemplification of the Saviour's

work, a public and accredited testimony of the truth of the doctrines of Scripture, as imprinted on his mind, as brought to bear with powerful effect on his life.

II. THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN BUILDING, BEAUTIFYING, AND COMPLETING THIS TEMPLE.

1. Christ, by His mediatorial interposition, has paved the way for the erection of the temple of God. 2. The glory of building the temples by His Holy Spirit belongs also to Him. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, begins, carries forward, and completes the building of the spiritual edifice. It is the glory of the Gospel dispensation that it is complete in all its parts. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the process of sanctification is carried forward. 3. The glory belongs to Christ because He has provided those *means* by which, under the ministry of grace, the temple is built. 4. The glory belongs to Christ, inasmuch as He constantly superintends the Churches, takes a tender interest in all their concerns, sympathises with them in all their vicissitudes, and completes the purposes of God ultimately in regard to them. This subject displays (1) In a very interesting and pleasing manner the glory of our great Redeemer. (2) It tends also to elevate our conceptions of the Christian character. There is something in the very idea of a temple that is associated with holy and sacred pursuits, with holy and hallowed enjoyments. (*Robert Burns, D.D.*) *The living temple*:—To understand this Scripture we must consider when the prediction was uttered, and to what it primarily refers. To relieve the anxious mind of Joshua, the high priest, and to animate his soul with the prospect of happier days, the prophet Zechariah is sent with a special message from the Lord, to assure Joshua that the temple should be built; that his fears were without foundation; that his prayers should be answered, and his utmost wishes accomplished. An outward sign was given. Two crowns were placed on the head of Joshua, as emblems of priesthood and royalty; and were then to be deposited in the temple, as memorials of what God had determined to accomplish in future times. Thus the Jews were led to contemplate a more durable and glorious temple than that which they were then building. In the language and symbols of prophecy, they were told that the Messiah, whose name is the Branch, would be much more to this spiritual building, than Joshua was to their external temple. He would be Priest and King, Redeemer and Lawgiver, Prince and Saviour. When He humbled Himself to appear in the nature of man, He seemed to be no more than a feeble stem from the root of Jesse. Yet this tender plant sprung up and spread forth its branches, and became a sheltering to the weary, and still flourishes with undecayed vigour; the leaves whereof are for the healing of the nations; and the fruit thereof sweet to the taste. In various passages of the New Testament, believers in Jesus are declared to be the temples of God; temples of the Holy Ghost; living temples, built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Christ.

I. CONSIDER EVERY REAL CHRISTIAN AS THE LIVING TEMPLE OF THE LORD. Observe this dignified and distinguished character here ascribed to the righteous: each one of them is a temple of the Lord. A soul, the temple of the Lord, suggests the sublime ideas of solemn consecration to His honour of worship and sacrifice, of the Divine residence, and of peculiar manifestations; such manifestations as discover a present Deity, and render His glory in us evident to our souls.

1. Believers in Jesus are temples of the Lord, because they are separated from idolatry and impurity, are consecrated to sacred purposes, and are dedicated to the honour of Him whom they worship. 2. Believers in Christ are the temples of God, because they offer up to Him dutiful worship and acceptable sacrifice. Not sacrifices of propitiation or atonement, but sacrifices of daily thankoffering for the mercies of God, and the blessings of His great salvation. Every faculty and affection of the Christian soul may be considered as engaged in the service of this living temple. 3. Believers in Christ are the temples of the Lord, because in them He resides to manifest His glory; and them He blesses with all the satisfying consolations of His presence. In every renewed person much of the image of God is displayed; the power of God in forming, from such unlikely materials, a new creature, or a new creation—the holiness of God, in stamping upon every child of the family some lineaments of their Father's image; and the sovereign mercy of God, in rescuing from deepest ruin, and imparting the noblest hopes and happiness, to the praise of the glory of His grace. In all saints, so far as they are sanctified, we may trace some resemblance of God. God is said to dwell in His people as His temple, when He manifests His glory to them, and admits them to delightful intercourse with Himself. This honour have all the saints; but it is enjoyed by them in very different degrees, according to the measure of

their faith. **II. THIS TEMPLE IS, IN ALL RESPECTS, THE WORKMANSHIP OF THE ADORABLE REDEEMER.** He who is the Branch, builds the temple—1. In His mediation between God and man. 2. He lays the foundation of that living temple by bestowing that living faith which unites us to Himself, and interests us in all the blessings of His mediation. 3. He not only lays the foundation of the spiritual temple, but He rears the superstructure by His grace and Spirit. Every grace and duty of religion is a living stone in that temple which every believer is rearing unto God on earth. All these graces and duties are intimately connected, and by their union the spiritual building is rendered fair and useful. 4. The Almighty Builder carries on to perfection the good work which He has begun. By His dispensations He carries forward the perfections of His people. He carries on to perfection by the ordinances of His grace. By the powerful energy and gracious influences of His Holy Spirit, working in them to will and do of His good pleasure. **III. THE CHEERING AND ANIMATING PROMISE, "HE SHALL BEAR THE GLORY."** This is now fulfilling on earth, and shall be fulfilled for ever in heaven. Amidst meditations on God's gracious ways with them, at every new survey, saints feel their hearts warmed with gratitude, and they say, "Not unto us, not unto us." "He hath built the temple, and He shall bear the glory." (*A. Bonar.*) *The Church the temple of God*:—This is a prophecy of the Messiah. The prophet puts two crowns on the head of Joshua the high priest, and then speaks to him, not only as the raiser up of the desolated temple, but as a type of an enthroned Saviour, the builder of a spiritual and far more glorious structure. "Behold the man whose name is the Branch," &c. **I. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S TEMPLE.** By the Church is meant all that the word imports in its highest and its widest sense—all God's real servants, all His believing and pardoned and sanctified people of all ages and places. When God builds, His habitation shall have a name and character of its own—it is a temple. View the Church simply as God's house, then we look on it as something which God dwells in, and rests in, and delights in. View it as God's temple, then a sacredness comes over it. The house becomes—1. A consecrated place, a place appropriated and set apart for holy purposes. 2. The idea of worship and devotion is connected with this term. It implies not only that God designs His people to show forth His praise in heaven, but that they do show it forth there; they answer there the end for which they are taken there: God is served, and worshipped, and magnified by them. **II. THE LORD JESUS IS THE BUILDER OF THIS TEMPLE.** Elsewhere spoken of as the foundation or chief corner-stone, He is here described as the great Builder. No one figure can suffice to set forth His importance. Therefore they apply figure after figure to Him. They do not heed what we deem incongruities and contradictions. Three things the builder of a temple has to do. 1. To form the plan of it. He has to settle in his mind what its form and size shall be, and of what materials it shall consist. 2. A builder has to prepare his materials. At least the builder of a temple has. He does not find them prepared for him by nature, the wrought stone in the quarry, and the carved beam in the forest. Nor can they prepare themselves. And we, brethren, are not naturally fit for heaven, nor can we make ourselves or one another fit for it. 3. A builder has to join his materials together, to put each one of them into the place for which it is prepared. And this also is the work of Christ. **III. THE TEXT BEARS US OUT IN ASSERTING THAT IT REALLY IS A VERY GLORIOUS BUILDING.** It does not expressly say this, but it implies it. There is to be a glory result to Christ from it, and this glory is doubtless to proceed in part from something excellent and magnificent in the building itself. What a subject opens itself to us here! Does beauty make a building glorious, a noble plan and excellent workmanship? Oh, what so beautiful as the Church of the first-born? Bear in mind two facts in reference to the glory of this temple. 1. It is such that it satisfies Christ Himself. 2. This temple has occupied the Mighty Jehovah far longer than any of His works. From this fact also we infer its gloriousness. **IV. THE LORD JESUS WILL HAVE ALL THE GLORY OF THIS TEMPLE.** Two reasons why Christ is so little honoured on earth as the author of His people's salvation. The greatness of the salvation is not known, and we do not see how entirely the work is His. God's design in this building was His own honour. Is Christ the Builder of God's temple? Then this text calls on all of us really to regard Him as such. And if the Church is the temple of the Lord, then we should cherish in our minds a high reverence and love for it. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*)

Ver. 13. **A Priest upon His throne.**—*The Priest of the world and King of men*:—It is in accordance with the law of prophetic development from the beginning that the external circumstances of the nation at the moment should supply the mould into which the promise is run. Here, the kingless band of exiles are heartened for their task by the thought of the Priest-King of the nation, the Builder of an imperishable dwelling-place for God. **I. THE TRUE HOPE OF THE WORLD IS A PRIEST.** The idea of priesthood is universal. It has been distorted and abused; it has been made the foundation of spiritual tyranny. The priest has not been the teacher nor the elevator of the people. Yet there the office stands, and wherever men go, by some strange perversity they take with them this idea, and choose from among themselves some who shall discharge for their brethren the double office of representing them before God, and of representing God to them. That is what the world means, with absolute and entire unanimity, by a priest—one who shall be sacrificer, intercessor, representative; bearer of man's worship, channel of God's blessing. This is the result of the universal consciousness of sin. Men feel that there is a gulf between them and God. The Jewish people, who have at all events taught the world the purest theism, and led men up to the most spiritual religion, had this same institution of a priesthood for the very centre of its worship. What is the priest whom men crave? The first requisite is oneness with those whom he represents. We have a Priest "in all things made like unto His brethren." The next requisite is that the priests should possess, at all events, a symbolic purity—expression of the conviction that a priest must be cleaner and closer than his fellows. And we have a Priest who is "holy, harmless, undefiled." And again, as in nature and character, so in function, Christ corresponds to the widely expressed wants of men, as shown in their priesthoods. They sought for one who should offer gifts and sacrifices on their behalf. They sought for one who should pass into the awful Presence, and plead for them while they stood without. They sought for a man who should be the medium of Divine blessings bestowed upon the worshippers, and we know who hath gone within the veil for us. "We have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." **II. THE PRIEST OF THE WORLD IS THE KING OF MEN.** "He shall be a Priest upon His throne." In Israel these two offices were jealously kept apart. The history of the world is full of instances in which the struggles of the temporal and spiritual power have caused calamities only less intolerable than those which flowed from that alliance of priests and kings which has so often made monarchy a grinding tyranny, and religion a mere instrument of statecraft. Our Priest does rule. The "kingdom of Christ" is no unreal fanciful phrase. The foundation of His rule is His sacrifice. Men will do anything for him who does *that* for them. His rule is welded in gentleness. Priestly dominion has ever been fierce, suspicious, tyrannous. The sway of this merciful and faithful High Priest is full of tenderness. The end of His rule is, that His subjects may be made free in obedience. **III. THE PRIEST-KING OF MEN BUILDS AMONG MEN THE TEMPLE OF GOD.** Christ is Himself the true temple of God. Christ builds the temple. Christ builds this temple because He is the temple. By His incarnation and work He makes our communion with God and God's dwelling in us possible. Christ builds the temple, and uses us as His servants in the work. Christ builds on through all the ages, and the prophecy of the text is yet unfulfilled. Its fulfilment is the meaning and end of all history. In one of the mosques of Damascus, which has been a Christian Church, and before that was a heathen temple, the portal bears, deep cut in Greek characters, the inscription, "Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." Those words are graven over the temple which Christ rears. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **Christ—Priest and King**:—**I. NOTICE THIS SIGNIFICANT DESIGNATION OF THE LORD JESUS—"The Branch."** The family of David was like a decayed tree, the stump of which alone remains; but from so lowly and unlikely an origin, a shoot or scion would emanate, which would again become a noble forest tree, and perpetuate the memory and influence of the royal line. Certainly David's race had reached a low ebb when Joseph went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, because they were of the house and lineage of David. Through a branch the fulness of the root is carried to the fruit, which swells in ruddy beauty on its extremity, and presently falls into the hand of the wayfarer: so Jesus is the blessed channel of communication between the fulness

of God and the thirsty wastes of human need. II. THE COMBINATION IN CHRIST OF THE PRIESTLY AND KINGLY OFFICES. "He shall be a Priest upon His throne." Man's nature demands a priest. Conscious of sin and defilement, he rears an altar wherever he pitches his tent; and, selecting one of his fellows, he separates him from the ordinary duties of life, and bids him stand as mediator and priest between God and himself. It was thus that Micah addressed the young man, the Levite of Bethlehem-Judah, when he said, "Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and priest; and I will give thee ten pieces of silver by the year, and thine apparel, and thy victuals." If an argument were needed to prove the unity of the human family, it surely would be suggested by the universal distribution of temples and altars over the world, as though men were everywhere alike in this—that they know themselves to be sinful, and desire to find some way of propitiating and approaching the Almighty. In the Levitical system, and, above all, in Jesus Christ, God has met this universal craving of the human heart. Man also requires a king. God had designed to meet this need by Himself being Israel's King, that they should not be "like other nations," but a peculiar people unto Him. How remarkable it is that the Kingship of Jesus should have been so accentuated in His trial! It was the centre around which the storm raged. Pilate challenged His claims: "Art Thou a king, then?" and Jesus asseverated them: "Thou sayest that I am—a king." The faded purple robe flung over His shoulders, the reed in His hand, the mocking bending of the knee, the crown of thorns on His brow, were but the grotesque and heartless mockery of His claims. And since He has passed into the glory, He is still the Priest-King. Not Aaron, but Melchizedek, is the true type of our Saviour now. As Aaron, He made atonement and propitiation for sin; but as Melchizedek, He has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. "This Melchizedek was king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God." As priest, Jesus pleads the merit of His blood; as king, He exerts power on our behalf. As priest, He pacifies the guilty conscience; as king, He sends thrills of His own victorious life into our spirits. As priest, He brings us nigh to God; as king, He treads our enemies under His feet. It is of great importance to us all to think of our Saviour in this dual aspect. On the one hand, we get all the benefit of His cross and passion; on the other, all the benefit of His resurrection and session at the right hand of God. May it not be that the weakness of thy Christian life is due to the fact that thou hast viewed Him only in the light of Calvary, and hast not, with Stephen, seen Him seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High—a prince as well as a Saviour—a Saviour because a prince? He accounts Himself absolutely responsible to achieve the uttermost salvation of those who trust in Him. If there is some sin which defies *thee*, at least it shall not be too strong for *Him*. And if the outflow of His delivering power towards thee seems restrained and ineffective, be sure that, in some one particular, which He will be quick to show thee, if only thou art willing to be informed, there has been a failure to yield Him the obedience which is due to Him as thy king. III. AS THE PRIEST-KING, CHRIST BUILDS THE TEMPLE OF GOD. Twice over this is affirmed; but what untold comfort the assurance must have brought when first addressed to that little band of exiles! Their temple site was strewn with ruins: it seemed almost hopeless to contend with those heaps of rubbish, impossible to rear a fabric worthy of the past and adequate for the future; but these words must have greatly heartened them. As the hand of inspiration drew aside the veil, they beheld another and greater than either Joshua or Zerubbabel, working with them and for them, and bearing the chief responsibility in all the toils and labours of their new erection—*He*; not they. They would work with new energy and courage, knowing, as they did, that they were fellow-workers with God. What difficulty could daunt, what enemies thwart or frustrate, the work of His right hand? If these words should be read by any who are losing heart because of the difficulties presented by their parish, their church, or the souls of their charge, let them be reassured, as they behold the trowel in the hands of the Priest-King; and let them be sure that He will succeed. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *A Priest upon His throne*:—As the enthroned king, Jesus reigns over His church as the vicegerent of God. He as king reigns over the intellects, the hearts, the wills, the bodies of all who yield allegiance to Him. He distributes to all His people the gifts of God according to His will. At His hand every good and perfect gift must be sought, and from His hand received. He giveth gifts to men through the power of His delegated authority received from the triune God. He is the true Joseph reigning

over the kingdom of the true Pharaoh. As Pharaoh raised Joseph from his prison, and made him ruler over all the land of Egypt, so the eternal Father has raised Jesus from His cross and tomb to enthrone Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies. As Pharaoh's commission to Joseph was "Thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled," so Christ is revealed to us as being over God's house as its delegated king. As Pharaoh's gifts were distributed by Joseph to the needy Egyptians, so God's good gifts of grace come to us through the kingly ministry of Jesus. It is from Jesus seated on the throne of grace as the priest upon His throne that we are bidden to seek pardoning mercy and aiding grace in every time of need. This revelation of Jesus as being the giver of grace as Heaven's enthroned king, is one that does not receive the recognition it demands. This is of course a necessity in all those theological systems in which the continuous priestly ministry of our ascended Lord is denied or ignored. But even where His ministry of priestly intercession is recognised He is not seen to be the priest sitting on His throne. That all the blessings of the kingdom of the incarnation come to us through His intercession is confessed. But men fail to see that these blessings are given to us by Him as the bountiful king of that kingdom. Nay, not unfrequently men shrink in dread from the statement that every good and perfect gift coming from the Father of Light is given to us not only by the hand, but according to the will, of the ascended Lord. Yet unless this truth be grasped Jesus' mediatorial ministry is not fully confessed. That He is the mediator of the new covenant is a matter of faith. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Now His mediation means that through Him, "the Word made flesh," we draw nigh to God in worship and God's gifts of grace come to us. This truth does not involve the idea that God has ceased personally to reign and to give gifts. The recognition of Jesus' delegated sovereignty does not involve the denial of God's essential sovereignty as an ever-living fact. When by Pharaoh's authority Joseph ruled Egypt this was not the virtual abdication of his power by Pharaoh; nay, it was the strengthening of his dynasty and the perfecting of his rule. Between him and Joseph there was perfect oneness of conviction as to the policy to be adopted in that crisis of his nation's life. In raising Joseph to his high position, and giving him liberty of action, he was but carrying out in the most effective way the policy his own wisdom approved. So the enthronement of Jesus as man, as king of the Church, is not the dethronement of God. For the sovereignty of the Son of Man is a delegated sovereignty, and its glory must exalt the throne of Him whose delegate He is. The wisdom and the love of the only Potentate is revealed in the king He has enthroned. And still more is this seen to be true when we remember the absolute union of thought and action that there is between them. What our King hears He speaks. "What the Father doeth that doeth the Son likewise." In an union so close there is no place for conflict of action or variance of will. Not by constraint but by union Jesus in His delegated sovereignty rules according to the will of God. He is a throned king, and gives His gifts according to His own free will. But even in His free rule He is the minister of the Father's pleasure because of His absolute conformity with the will of God. With full assent of mind then grasp the truth of Jesus' delegated sovereignty. See Him throned by God in the Church as the giver of His supernatural gifts. See in the revelation of Jesus as enthroned in Heaven, and hence ruling over His Church in Paradise and on earth, the fulfilment of Zechariah's glorious vision. Gazing by faith on Jesus at God's right hand, in Him, "Behold the Man whose name is the Branch," who has "built the temple of the Lord," and who in it "bears the glory," and "as a priest upon His throne" sits and rules. (*G. Body, M.A.*)

Of Christ's offices in general:—There are three. 1. The office of a prophet. He builds the Church by the Word of the Gospel, which it is His work to promulgate as a prophet. 2. The office of a priest. To expiate the sins of His people, to purchase peace for them, and to manage their cause with God. 3. That of a king: for He has a throne, which denotes His kingly office. He is "a priest upon His throne," denoting the reward of His sufferings. In Him the glory of all these offices is to meet. The text affords foundation for the following doctrine—Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of prophet, priest, and king, both in His estate of humiliation and exaltation.

I. THE VERITY OR REALITY OF THESE OFFICES IN CHRIST. 1. From plain scripture testimony. (1) To His having or being possessed of these offices. (2) To His executing these offices. 2. From

His name Christ, or Messiah, the anointed one. The unction signified—(1) His being set apart to the mediatory work. (2) His being fully furnished with gifts and qualifications suitable to these offices, in respect of His human nature, to which the Spirit was given, not by measure, but in fulness. II. THE NECESSITY OF HIS EXERCISING THESE OFFICES. This will be clear if we—1. Consider our misery by sin, ignorance, guilt, and bondage. We were ignorant of the way of returning to God again; and therefore Christ as our prophet must teach us; our priest must make atonement for us; our king must bring us back again, leading captivity captive. 2. Consider the salvation which the elect were to be made partakers of. 3. Consider Christ as mediator of the covenant, who behoved to deal with both parties, in order to bring them together. 4. Consider the work of conversion; what the soul needs. 5. Consider our daily necessities. 6. Consider the promises, which are the stay and staff of the Christian's life, without which they could never bear up. III. WHEN DID CHRIST EXECUTE THESE OFFICES? As He was the Redeemer of the Church in all ages so did He execute these offices in all ages of the Church. But more especially after His incarnation, and that in His twofold state of humiliation and exaltation. These three offices are not to be divided, especially when they are executed in a way that is effectual for the salvation of the subjects thereof. Wherever He executes one of these offices in a saving way, He executes them all. Inferences—1. How great and glorious is our Lord Jesus Christ, who was meet to bear all these offices at once, and exercise them at once, so as one does not mar or clash with another! 2. Let this commend Christ to you as a full and a suitable Saviour. 3. You cannot take Christ as a Redeemer, if you take Him not in all His offices. 4. Employ this mighty Redeemer in all the offices wherewith He is invested, and which, as mediator, He exercises for the benefit of the ruined race of mankind. (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VERS. 1-3. When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer, and Regemleah, and their men to pray before the Lord.—*The left ones in captivity* :—It must be observed that though all had not so much courage as to return to their own country as soon as leave was given them, they were not yet gross despisers of God, and wholly destitute of all religion. It was indeed no light fault to remain torpid among the Babylonians when a free return was allowed them; for it was an invaluable kindness on the part of God to stretch forth His hand to the wretched exiles, who had wholly despaired of a return. Since then God was prepared to bring them home, such a favour could not have been neglected without great ingratitude. But it was yet the Lord's will that some sparks of grace should continue in the hearts of some, though their zeal was not so fervid as it ought to have been. All then are not to be condemned as unfaithful, who are slothful and want vigour; but they are to be stimulated. For they who indulge their torpor act very foolishly, but at the same time they ought to be pitied, when there is not in them that desirable alacrity in devoting themselves to God which they ought to have. These men remained in exile, but did not wholly renounce the worship of God; for they sent sacred offerings, by which they professed their faith; and they also inquired what they were to do, and showed deference to the priests and prophets then at Jerusalem. It hence appears, that they were not satisfied with themselves, though they did not immediately amend what was wrong. There are many now, who, in order to exculpate themselves, or rather to wipe away (as they think) all disgrace, despise God's word, and treat us with derision. (*John Calvin.*) *Religious beliefs and religious services* :—**I. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS THAT ARE RIGHT.** There are three beliefs implied in this commission entrusted to Sherezer. 1. The efficacy of prayer. They were sent to pray before the Lord, or, as in the margin, "to intreat the face of the Lord." That men can obtain by prayer to the Supreme Being what they could not obtain without it, is one of the fundamental and distinctive faiths of humanity. 2. In the intercession of saints. These men were sent to pray before the Lord, not merely for themselves but for others. 3. The special ability of some men to solve the religious questions of others. This Sherezer and Regemleah appealed

unto the "priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?" They wanted a certain religious question answered, and they appealed to a certain class of religious men who they believed had the power to do so. II. RELIGIOUS SERVICES THAT ARE WRONG. The Jews had performed religious services; they had "fasted," they had "mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years." This was right enough so far as the form is concerned; but in spirit the service was wrong, hence here is the reproof. 1. Their services were selfish. Mark the reproof. "Did ye at all fast unto Me?" Was it not from selfish motives that ye did all this? Was it not with a view of obtaining My release, and securing My favour? 2. Selfish motives the Almighty had always denounced. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 4-9. Did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me?—*Rebuke of mere ceremonies*:—God had, through successive ages, exhorted the Jews to true repentance, and condemned their dissimulation, that they might not think that true religion was made up of fasting and of similar things. Fastings being of themselves of no moment, a beginning ought to be made with true religion and spiritual worship. When this question about the fast was raised by the captives, much disputing prevailed among the people. The Jews ever reverted to their old ways, being blindly attached to their frigid ceremonies, and thinking in this manner to propitiate God, so the prophet derides their preposterous labour and toil. "See," he says, "the only question now is, whether there should be fasting, as though this were the principal thing before God; in the meantime, godliness is neglected, and real calling on God; the whole of spiritual worship is also esteemed by you as nothing, and no integrity of life prevails: for ye bite one another, plunder one another, wrong one another, and are guilty of lying; ye heedlessly close your eyes to such vices as these; and at the same time, when fasting is neglected, ye think that the whole of religion falls to the ground. These are your old ways, and such were commonly the thoughts and doings of your fathers; and it appears evident that ye trifle with God, and that ye are full of deceits, and that there is not in you a particle of true religion. For God formerly spoke loudly in your ears, and His words were not obscure when He exhorted you by His prophets; He showed to you what true repentance was, but effected nothing. Is it not then quite evident that ye are now acting deceitfully, when ye so carefully inquire about fasting?" This reproof was needful, in order more sharply to stimulate them; it was wholly necessary to discover their hypocrisy, that they might not be too much pleased with external performances. (*John Calvin.*) *Fasting*:—A question about the propriety of continuing the stated fasts under the altered circumstances of the people brings a delegation to the prophet to solve this doubt. The date of this transaction was two years after the symbolic visions of the preceding portion. But the Jewish people needed something more than information in regard to the continuance of this fast. The whole doctrine of fasting had become overlaid with an incrustation of formalism and superstition that needed to be broken up. Fasting had become not a means but an end, a mere form, as it is in Mohammedan and papal countries at this day, and had attached to it an *opus operatum* that wholly destroyed its real value. They thought that God must bless them, indeed was bound to bless them, if they rigidly observed these outward rites, whatever was their inward character. Thus formalism acted in the time of the restoration, precisely as it acted in every subsequent period of the Church; and before a mere question of ritual observance could be settled, it was important that their minds should be set right on the deeper questions of their spiritual relations with God. The prophet, instead of answering the question about the fast of the fifth month, proceeds to rebuke them for their selfish and stupid will-worship, and their ignorance in regard to the whole subject of fasting, not only as to this, but as to all the stated fasts that they had been observing. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The self-centredness of fasting*:—It is not enough to fast. That may be a trick; there may be a way of doing it which robs it of all its virtue and of all its significance. God takes our ceremonies to pieces and says aloud, What is the meaning of all this—your church-going and hymn-singing, and apparently decent observance of religious ordinances? Is it in reality unto Me, or it is unto yourselves? Fasting is not postponed fasting. Yet this is what it has been turned into many times. Fasting has become a process by which we have got ready for eating. We have kept as it were on

one side all the things we have abstained from, and then, when the fasting day was over, we transferred the whole of them to the table and gorged ourselves with the very things we had fasted from. That is not fasting. When you fast from your bread, you must give your bread away—"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?" Fasting is not to lock the cupboard where the bread is, and to say, We shall not want you to-day, but to-morrow about this time we shall be prepared for the feast. No, the loaf must be given away, and there must not be left one crust in the house. When we feast the poor, we truly fast ourselves. God will not have any other fasting. As for church-going, what is the meaning of it? Is it to relieve the tedium of a dull night? Is it to hear something that will titillate the senses or momentarily please the fancy? Is it to get rid of something at home? Or does it express the spirit of adoration, the necessity of the soul's immortality? Is it a coming to God because He is God? Is it worship, or a form of entertainment? The Lord thus searches into our ceremonies and says, What do they mean? So also with our feasting: the criticism of God is not partial: the judgment of heaven attends our banquetting and asks questions whilst the foaming goblet is in our hands. "And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" (vii. 6). But, O Thou loving God, Thou art also our Creator, and are we not so made that we cannot get away from ourselves? The Lord answers, Yes, you are so made: but you forget there is a second creation, a miracle called incarnation, and following upon that a sacrament called Pentecost, the Whittide of the Spirit's descent, so that a man shall be himself, yet no longer himself, yea another self; God will give him another heart. If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is not his old self one whit, but a new creature, with new aspirations, new necessities, new desires, with the restlessness which leads to contentment, with the ambition that despises the constellations because they are too small for its religious capacity. You are right when you say, you cannot get away from yourselves, your prayers are selfish unless you take great heed to them; but if you be rooted in Christ, living branches in the living Vine, why then you shall perform this miracle of being yourself and yet not yourself; of the earth, yet of the heaven; standing upon the earth, yet having a celestial citizenship and franchise. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *How to keep a truly religious fast*:—The inquiry of the text concerns the fast of the fifth month, which was observed as a sad remembrance of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem. The exiles had three other fasts. Did they really serve any religious end and purpose? Did not the people content themselves with a mere external show and performance, without any inward affliction and humiliation of their souls, in order to a real repentance? Did they not still go on in their sins, nay, and add to them on these occasions, fasting for strife and debate and oppression? Were they not worse rather than better for them? And therefore God had no regard to them. Notwithstanding the outward solemnities of fasting and prayer, there was nothing of a religious fast; "Did ye at all fast unto Me, even unto Me?" The prophet Isaiah calls a true fast, the fast which God hath chosen, and an acceptable day to the Lord. I. IN GENERAL, WHAT IS IT TO FAST UNTO GOD? 1. A truly religious fast consists in the afflicting of our bodies by a strict abstinence. 2. In the humble confession of our sins to God, with shame and confusion of face. 3. In an earnest deprecation of God's displeasure, and humble supplications to Him that He would avert His judgments, and turn away His anger from us. 4. In intercession with God for such spiritual and temporal blessings upon ourselves and others as are needful and convenient. 5. In alms and charity to the poor, that our humiliation and prayers may find acceptance with God. II. IN PARTICULAR WHAT IS THE DUTY OF A DAY OF SOLEMN NATIONAL REPENTANCE AND HUMILIATION? Apply the above five essentials of a true fast to the particular circumstances of the day. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *True and mistaken fasting*:—The prophet expostulates with the people concerning their monthly fasts, whether they did indeed deserve that name, and were not rather a mere show and pretence of a religious fast. It is necessary to consider the original and occasion of these monthly fasts. When carried into captivity, the Jews appointed four annual fasts. (*Zech. viii. 19.*) The question is,—Did these fasts truly serve to any religious end and purpose? Were not the people rather worse than better for them? They were sensible of the judgments of God which were broken in upon them, but they did not turn from their sins, but persisted still in their obstinacy and disobedience. These fasts could not therefore be acceptable to God.

I. WHAT IS IT TO KEEP A TRULY RELIGIOUS FAST ? 1. A truly religious fast consists in the afflicting of our bodies by a strict abstinence that so they may be fit and proper instruments to promote and help forward the grief and trouble of our minds. 2. In the humble confession of our sins to God with shame and confusion of face, and with a hearty contrition and sorrow for them. 3. In an earnest deprecation of God's displeasure, and humble supplications to Him that He would avert His judgments and turn away His anger from us. 4. In intercession with God for such spiritual and temporal blessings upon ourselves and others as are needful and convenient. 5. In alms and charity to the poor, that our humiliation and prayers may find acceptance with God. **II. WHAT IS OUR DUTY ON A DAY APPOINTED FOR SOLEMN HUMILIATION AND REPENTANCE THROUGHOUT THE NATION ?** 1. We should humble ourselves before God every one for his own personal sins and miscarriages, whereby he hath provoked God, and increased the public guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgments and vengeance of God upon the nation. There cannot be a general reformation without the reformation of particular persons which do constitute and make up the generality. 2. We should heartily lament and bewail the sins of others, especially the great and crying sins of the nation. This hath been the temper and practice of good men in all ages. Illustrate by Jeremiah, Lot, David, Daniel, Ezra, &c. We should lament and bewail the general prevalence of impiety and vice which has diffused itself through all ranks and degrees of men, magistrates, ministers, and people. 3. We should earnestly deprecate God's displeasure, and make our humble supplications to Him, that He would be graciously pleased to avert those terrible judgments which hang over us, and which we have just cause to fear may fall on us; and that He would be entreated by us at last to be appeased towards us, and to turn from the fierceness of His anger. 4. We should pour out our most earnest supplications for the preservation of their majesties' sacred persons. 5. Our fasting and humiliation should be accompanied with our alms and charity to the poor and needy. 6. We should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives. This is the proper fruit and effect of all our humiliation and good resolutions. Without this, all our fasting will signify nothing. (*Archbishop Sharp.*)

Ver. 7. Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets.—*God's Word by former prophets*:—*Doctrine*—1. External performances of external duties of religion are nothing in God's sight, where there is not study of obedience to all His revealed will, nor will howling under misery avail, while wickedness is kept under their tongue. 2. The Lord in all ages is uniform and like Himself in approving and enjoining of duty, and in disliking of sin, yesterday and to-day, the same for ever: for the Lord here requires the same He required of their fathers. 3. The longer the Lord by His Word hath been pressing duty upon His people, they ought to heed it the more, lest judgment prove the sadder; for, He presseth a doctrine that had been long since cried, to be so much the rather heard. 4. The Lord's chastising a people for sin and disobedience, doth not warrant them to look on their deliverance from chastisement, as a full assurance of their being reconciled, as if their strokes had made up all; but being delivered they are to make conscience of obedience, otherwise the controversy still stands, whatever deliverance they get, and they may expect to smart again. Therefore, after all their captivity, they must hear and obey. 5. It may help us to take heed to what God says in a sad time, when we consider that if it had been hearkened unto, it might have prevented much misery; for so is this doctrine commended, it was cried "when Jerusalem was inhabited, and in prosperity," &c.; that so the thoughts of their former prosperity, which had ended in sad desolation, might let them see the ill of former neglect, and stir them up to be more serious. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 12. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant-stone.—*The disease and cure of the hard heart*:—A man does not become profligate or altogether wicked at once. One vice makes way for another. The people in Zechariah's time had arrived at such a prodigious height of vice, that it is said, "Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant-stone." Adamant is the hardest of all stones: it is found by the best chemists to be indissoluble. The similitude is proper to exhibit the real state of the human heart; which cannot be melted, or reduced to the genuine image of Jesus, by human art or power.

I. THE DISEASE OF THE HARD HEART. 1. Of the symptoms or nature of it. It discovers itself in a wayward temper, a pride and stoutness of heart against God, particularly the calls of His providence, and the admonitions of His holy Word. This is the genuine character of wicked men. God is not in all their thoughts. They extinguish the remains of natural conscience. In an inflexibility against the word of truth, and the ordinances of religion. The inflexible adamant heart defeateth the gracious designs of the Gospel. It is inflexible to the motions of God's Holy Spirit. And this is the crowning sin. He knocks by the motions of His Holy Spirit, yet the hard heart refuseth to give Him admittance. 2. The different kinds of this disease. (1) There is a natural hardness: a part of that natural corruption, that original guilt and inbred poison of our nature. (2) There is an acquired hardness of heart. There are those who voluntarily strengthen themselves in their natural disobedience, and reject the counsel of God against themselves. How careful we should be to form our hearts for the Redeemer; to open those gates that the truths of the Gospel may be admitted. (3) There is a penal hardness of heart. There is a degree above voluntary hardness, as voluntary hardness implieth something above natural. In Scripture God is said to harden men's hearts in two ways—by leaving them in their natural state; and by giving up to a reprobate mind. (4) This hardness is either in part or in whole. Some complain of hardness and insensibility, as the present frame and temper of the soul. What contributes so much to hardness of heart in believers is, their giving too great scope to carnal delights. These may be tasted, but a large draught intoxicates. (5) This hardness of heart is severely felt by the genuine disciples of Jesus. It is neither felt nor complained of by carnal and wicked men. But to be past feeling is a sure symptom of death, as well spiritual as natural. There is no life without feeling. Learn—(1) From this view of the human heart, the character of the real Christian. (2) That nothing short of the teachings of the Holy Spirit have ever proved sufficient to affect the heart with a practical sense of the vileness of sin and its own hardness. (3) Learn what that sacrifice is which is most acceptable and pleasing to God. 3. The causes of this spiritual malady. (1) Ignorance. The blind mind, the obstinate will, and hard heart, inseparably accompany each other. (2) Unbelief. The most powerful arguments and most engaging motives of our holy religion are brought from things unseen. Unless we feel the powers of the world to come, neither the joys of heaven nor the terrors of utter darkness will properly work on our fears or encourage our hopes. (3) Custom in sinning hardens the heart. (4) Hypocrisy. This dangerous character appears to consist of two branches: dissimulation, by which we deceive others; and formality, by which we deceive ourselves. (5) Pride. As in the case of Pharaoh. Pride is at the bottom of every vice. (6) The deceitfulness of sin. Sin deceiveth by general invectives. By delays. By coming plumed in the feathers of profit, or pleasure, or honours, or preferments. By presenting herself in a coat of many colours, especially in making her address in all the charms of sensual pleasures. She attacks the soul in Jacob's voice, and in an angel's form. Sin, by continuance, increases upon the soul. In hardened sinners, vice prompts men to presume upon impunity. II. THE CURE OF THIS SPIRITUAL MALADY. 1. Serious and frequent meditations on the perfections of the Divine nature, especially His glory and power. 2. Faith in the great doctrines of the Gospel is a sovereign remedy for the most inveterate disorders of the soul. 3. Faith in Gospel ordinances is another sovereign remedy. 4. Faith in the great atonement made by our exalted High Priest is another absolutely necessary ingredient in the cure of the adamant heart. The dignity and infinite excellence of this sacrifice will appear from its Divine appointment; from the nature of the sacrifice itself; from its noble and infinitely precious fruits; from those vast multitudes who have been saved by this sacrifice. 5. Another ingredient towards the cure of the hard heart is a proper knowledge of the guilt and demerit of transgression. The smallest deviation from the Divine law is entailed with the curse. (*J. Johnston.*) *The guilt of hardness of heart*:—There are periods in the life of every person who hears the Gospel in which his attention is called, in an especial manner, to the subject of religion; and one of the most common discoveries made at these times is this—that the heart is insensible,—that there is in it no corresponding emotions to the magnitude, or to the admitted importance of the great truths which have now become the subject of special attention. Insensibility upon the subject of religion is inexcusable. Notice that you are not destitute of sensibility and susceptibility. You are not incapable of feeling. Religion

does not indeed consist in emotion. It consists, first, in a right belief, then right feeling, then right purpose, then right action. You are not destitute of those susceptibilities to which the truths of the Gospel make their appeal. Nothing is so adapted to excite these constitutional susceptibilities as the great truths of religion. Consider the subjects of immortality, the being and character of God. God is love. Then why do you not love Him whom you should love supremely? We are capable of reverence, and God is the most venerable being in the universe. There is in Him independence, eternal existence, majesty, power, dominion, sovereignty, the terribleness of wrath, greatness of mercy, all of which qualities are capable of inspiring the soul of man with the profoundest feeling of reverence. "Fearful," said Moses of God, "fearful in praises." Consider the great work of redemption. God from His holy throne looking down upon a lost race. God meeting the demands of His own justice, and in order to sustain the principles of His moral government, condescending to be Himself the victim of the law, and a sacrifice to its penal demands. Will you tell me, you who confess to this charge of religious insensibility, will you tell me why you have never sympathised with the Divine compassion? You have looked upon that scene of the Father giving up His only begotten Son to save a lost race, and you never felt that, you never admired, never loved, never thanked, never praised Him for it! It is not that God has made you so, not that religion is not calculated to enlist your feelings on its behalf, there must be some other cause. Your hardness of heart is the result of apostasy. It is the issue, the fatal issue of a process, directly and completely adapted to the end, and incessantly practised up to the present moment. Who is it that is now complaining of moral insensibilities? Is it that person who has cherished the teachings of maternal kindness, and the sentiments inspired from time to time by the solemn admonitions of providence, and the more solemn warnings of life? Oh, no! I apprehend a fair review of your life will take away your surprise at any present hardness of heart. You have the power of commanding your thoughts, of fixing your attention on any subject. You can then command your thoughts, control the current of your thoughts, and the attention of your mind, keep your mental eye fixed upon all that is pure, lovely, noble, vast, glorious, upon God, the human soul, immortality, redemption, the great, the vast interests of the human race. Keep your thoughts up, and your soul will go up; keep your thoughts high, and your character will be elevated; keep your thoughts high, and your hopes will be pure, elevating, high. I am not speaking of this life only, I go beyond that. You will notice, in regard to your own mind, that some subjects approve themselves to you, by the operation of the passions. The passions have their own objects, and when they are at work in the soul, they bring into the imagination those thoughts and visions which are apt to feed themselves. Bodily appetites have their passions, and they control the trains of thought. What I wish to observe is, that the passions, the appetites, the senses, the general conversation of life, the character of the literature of the day, all tend to make you worldly and sinful and not religious. They do not suggest the great truths of religion, nor tend to keep them before the mind. Spiritual subjects must be kept before you by an effort of your will; your thoughts must be raised by meditating upon the Divine will. The hardness of heart which you may be feeling to-night, runs back through the history of your life, and could be traced to a period quite remote from the present. The text is true, "You have made your heart as an adamant-stone." What a comparison this is to make! Like an adamant-stone all moral culture is lost upon it. (*E. N. Kirk.*) *Gospel hardened*:—I was on a visit lately at a country village. The first morning I was there, I was awakened very early by the sound of a horn blowing, which continued for about a quarter of an hour. It disturbed me every morning, at the same hour, and on speaking of it to my friends, they assured me that I would soon get accustomed to it, and it would then cease to disturb me. And so it proved. I could soon sleep on undisturbed, though the horn blew as usual. In a spiritual sense I think this is the most dangerous state into which a man can fall. When they hear the Gospel preached to them at first, they seem to waken out of a sleep, and get disturbed and uncomfortable; but if they do not take advantage of what they hear, they get accustomed to it, and by and by can listen to any Gospel sermon without being moved by it. Such a man's state is worse than at the first, for God's Spirit has ceased to strive with him. (*Christian Herald.*)

Ver. 13. I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts.—*God refusing to hear*

prayer.—I. THE NEGLIGENCE OF MEN. 1. They do not hear the dispensations of God in His providence. 2. They do not hear the invitations of God by His servants. 3. They do not hear the commands of God in His Word. II. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. 1. He will not hear the cry of the lost, as expressive of regret. 2. He will not hear the cry of the lost, as expressive of disappointment. 3. He will not hear the cry of the lost, as expressive of fear. 4. He will not hear the cry of the lost, as expressive of despair. (*G. Brooks.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1-6. I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.—*The blessed community of men yet to appear on the earth*.—I. Here is a community SPECIALLY INTERESTING TO THE GREAT GOD. "Again the Word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury." The rendering of Dr. Henderson is worth citation: "And the word of Jehovah was communicated to me, saying: Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I have been jealous for Zion with great zeal, yea, with great indignation have I been jealous for her." Jerusalem was a city on which God had chosen "to put His name"; there was His temple, the ark, the mercy-seat, and the memorials of His power and goodness in the history of Israel. This city had been destroyed by the Babylonian invaders. Instead of losing interest in His persecuted people, His feelings were intense concerning them. The Eternal is interested in all the works of His hand, interested in men even in their state of infidelity and rebellion; but specially interested in those whom He regards as His people. "Unto that man will I look who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and who trembleth at My Word." II. Here is a community IN WHICH THE ALMIGHTY SPECIALLY RESIDES. "Thus saith the Lord, I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." Jerusalem was in a very particular sense the dwelling-place of God (Exod. xxix. 45; Lev. xxii. 12). There are two senses in which the Almighty dwells with good men. 1. By His sympathy. The loving mother dwells with her loved child; yes, though separated by continents and seas. Jehovah's sympathies are with His children. 2. By His presence. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." III. Here is a community DISTINGUISHED BY REALITY AND ELEVATION. 1. Reality. "And Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth." What is moral reality? A practical correspondence of the sympathies and life with eternal facts. All whose thoughts, affections, and conduct are not in accord with the immutable moral laws of God, live in fiction, "walk in a vain show"; and in this state, most if not all communities are found. Alas! "The city of truth" is not yet established, it is in a distant future. It is distinguished by—2. Elevation. "And the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain." Where are the communities of men now found in a moral sense? Down in the hazy, boggy, impure valleys of carnalities and falsehoods. But this community is up on the holy mountain, it is in a place of high moral exaltation. IV. Here is a community IN WHICH THE VERY AGED AND THE YOUNG LIVE IN SOCIAL ENJOYMENT. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age." Beautiful city this! The children not filthy, half-starved, diseased Arabs in crowded alleys, but bright creations gambolling in the sunny streets. V. Here is a community WHOSE ESTABLISHMENT, THOUGH INCREDIBLE TO MAN, IS CERTAIN TO GOD. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of the people in these days, should it also be marvellous in Mine eyes?" As if the Almighty had said, The creation of such a social state amongst you may appear an impossibility; but it is not so to Me. (*Homilist.*) Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth.—*The Church the city of truth*.—This declaration originally referred to the re-building of Jerusalem, and the re-establishment of true religion among the Jews after the Babylonish captivity. It had, however, a more particular and ultimate reference to the final conversion and restoration of Israel and Judah, when the glory of the latter days should arrive. I. THE CHARACTERISTICS BY WHICH THE CHURCH OF

CHRIST, OR HIS GENUINE DISCIPLES, ARE DISTINGUISHED, AS HERE DENOMINATED, THE CITY OF TRUTH. 1. It may be called this, because it is founded on Christ, who is Himself the truth (Eph. ii. 19, 20). 2. Because in it, and by them, the truth is believed. Faith, in opposition to unbelief, is that which chiefly distinguishes the spiritual citizens of Zion, from the children of the world and sin. The children of Zion dwell in the city of truth. Truth is the object of their faith—the truth revealed by God for the salvation of sinners. 3. Because the truth is obeyed in it. Were true Christians distinguished from other men merely by their speculative opinions, it would be of little importance, comparatively, whether they believed the truth as it is in Jesus, or not. But Christians are characterised by the obedience of faith. Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, their hearts and consciences are made to bend to the authority of the Divine law, which is “holy and just and good.” They are gradually purified more and more through obeying the truth. II. THE QUALITIES OF ITS WORSHIP, AS ENTITLING IT TO THE APPELLATION OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, OR THE MOUNTAIN OF HOLINESS. It was on Mount Moriah that the temple stood, so this mountain of the Lord may figuratively signify the worship of God as established there. With the most emphatic propriety, the worship of the Christian Church may be designated the mountain of the Lord of hosts, and the Holy Mountain, on account—1. Of its exalted nature. In this respect it rises above every other kind of service, as the lofty mountain above the lowly plain. For, in worshipping God as the God of salvation, all the most elevated and noble faculties of the soul are brought into action, and made to bear on the sublimest and most perfect objects. 2. On account of its holy character. It is the service of God, and therefore must partake of qualities which correspond to His nature, which is the perfection of holiness. Likeness to God’s image, to a certain extent, is indeed essential to the enjoyment of fellowship with Him. 3. On account of its purifying influence. Assimilation of character is one of the commonest and most natural effects of friendship. What a purifying effect, therefore, should not the exercise of Christian worship have on the character of the citizens of Zion. Christian devotion is the pure bulwark of Christian virtue. III. THE CHARACTERS OF CHRISTIANS AS THE CITY OF TRUTH, AND OF THEIR WORSHIP AS THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, MUST BE ASCRIBED TO THE EFFECT OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN THE MIDST OF THEM. While Israel was captive the city of Jerusalem was inhabited by the profane and idolatrous. The people returned with a better spirit, and the service of the temple was restored when its walls were rebuilt. The heart of man had become the seat of profaneness and sin. The spiritual descent of the God of grace and of mercy into the hearts of sinners has changed this scene, has emancipated the slaves of sin from their galling thralldom. The character of true Christians is the glorious work of Jehovah, the effect of His return to their hearts. Nor is it less true that the holiness of their worship is owing to His presence. It is the realised presence of His majesty that makes it solemn, and the actual manifestation and experience of His grace that renders it pure. (*D. Dickson, D.D.*) *A city of truth.*—No other city bears that name: the lie would be too great even for modern speculators. There must always surely be some lie that men cannot tell. By the “City of Truth” understand the home of truth, the address of truth; every citizen has an address, that is, a place where his friends may find him, where his letters may reach him. Jerusalem is to be called the City of Truth: every man is a truth-speaker, because every man is a truth-lover. A lie could not live in this Jerusalem which the prophet has painted; the lie would be no use. Put a very bad man into the company of very good men, and the man is unhappy; he does not understand the language, he feels that he is a long way from home; he would be glad if the door would open and he could find a way of escape; he says, This is not my native air; I do not understand these people; what are they talking about? I have no interest in their subjects; they do not speak my language; they do not discuss the topic I like best: I would God I were out of their society! It is just the same if we personify falsehood, and send the impudent audacious visitor into the city of truth. Every man would look on with amazement; sensitive spirits would shrink back in fear and horror and shame; no hospitality would be offered to the trespasser. The liar has only to look upon a flower, and the flower is blighted. A false hand has only to touch a little child, and the little child shrinks into old age by reason of inexpressible horror and fear. The liar, therefore, would not find a residence in Jerusalem. No owner of houses would have him. The time will come when the liar will be uneasy, simply because he is false; the stars will fight

against him, the earth will try to vomit him into some lower realm of creation, and all pure things will not hate him in the sense of inflicting upon him all the penalties of animosity, but will turn away from him with unutterable disgust. There is no city of truth now. When we read the prophecies of the ancient bards and seers of Israel, we are to understand that they are looking on through centuries, and are gathering flowers from the gardens that are to be, and singing songs that will be sung in the far-away but assured time. What city now could live if it were true? What society could exist three days if it were frank? Who would insure human friendship beyond a very limited number of months if man were to speak to man exactly what he thinks of him? An official robe may be a lie; a civic banquet may be an aggregation of falsehoods; what is called business may be a baptised way of swindling one another. Is there any likelihood of a city now becoming a city of truth? Not until it is burned down, and rebuilt, and built upon the foundation-stone of righteousness; not until Jesus Christ Himself is the chief corner-stone; not until everything gives way before the presence and persuasiveness of the infinite Gospel of Christ. Herein every city must be its own judge. When we speak of the city, what do we mean? Some outline of stone and brick and thoroughfare? Not at all. The city is only bad because the citizens are not good. When the individual citizens are honest men the total city will be a city of truth. Imagine a beautiful picture; a pilgrim, with a staff in his hand, and with sandals on his feet, has set out upon what he is told will be a long journey, and after he has travelled many days he says to some fellow-traveller or wayside friend, Where is the City of Truth? Perhaps the inquiry will awaken amusement in the man who hears it; perhaps it will awaken real pleasure, and the man will answer with a beaming face and an eloquent tongue, There is the home of reality, sincerity, uprightness, genuineness; see, over here, towering like a church, the whole outline beautiful with the sky that bends over it like a benediction. How is it that when men form themselves into cities they live upon compromises, concessions, mutual understanding, and elaborate legal documents which nobody can understand? If we could understand our legal documents we could not live together three months. Yet men speak of the difficulty of understanding the Bible! The lawyers must not speak of this, for they are the very creators of mystery; doctors must not speak of this, for they live in Latin, and without Latin nobody would believe them capable of treating the simplest disease; if they called water "water" some other doctor would be sent for; and even merchantmen must not be too severe against the mysteries of the Bible, for they have their terminology, their significant alphabetic signs, and their masonic tokens, which they can be exchanging with one another whilst the customer is looking at them, and the customer may be innocently "commissioned"—if there is such a word as that; if there is not, let us now make it; the customer becomes the subject of a remunerative "commission," and yet knows nothing about it, because all the signs are pre-arranged, and the whole calculation proceeds without the client's consent. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The holy mountain city*:—What is its characteristic?—it shall be called . . . "the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain." Mountains make towns; mountains support hotels. Did not some simpleton say, What a curious thing it is that rivers always come near towns? Some men do speak upside down; they are not wholly to be blamed, every man has not every gift: but the fact is just the contrary, it is the town that goes near the river. The Thames never came near London, but London built itself on the banks of the Thames. And why did the Thames become so very important? Because it is so very clean? I will leave that to the popular judgment. But because the Thames is a fine high-road to the sea, and the sea beats upon the farthest shores, offers a still broader highway for the transit of the commerce of the world. As with rivers, so with mountains. Men get as near some mountains as they can. They have not yet built upon the top of the Matterhorn, but they would if they could. I am not aware that there is a hostelry upon the summit of Mont Blanc, but I have no doubt there are men who would put a hostelry there to-morrow if they had the ability to do so. From some mountains you must build at a certain distance. They do not permit familiarities. Sometimes we have to calculate the quality and read the history of a mountain before we build near it. Vesuvius must be calculated with, must be consulted; because Vesuvius is a mountain of proverbially fitful temper, and when Vesuvius does speak we do not want to be present. But there are mountains in the Bible that men would live upon; they are green to the very top, their summits are paradises, if not in the

poor, narrow, horticultural sense, yet in some ideal sense of uplifting, as if they would bring us nearer heaven than any other mountains ever brought us. What shall be said of Lebanon and Tabor and Hermon? What shall be said of hills shaggy with forests, strong with rocks, rich with honey, garnished and carpeted with choicest flowers? When the pilgrim asks his way to the city of truth, the guide will point him to the mountain and say, The city nestles under yonder hill, and that hill is a benediction, a defence, and a stairway to loftier elevations still. There are some men who do not see mountains, who do not care for mountains, who cannot interpret mountains, and who consequently prefer what they call tablelands; they like to see a great stretch of sky. Other men could not live without high hills, they say the air gets purified somehow by circulating round these great elevations; besides, they love to climb. Man is surely a climber by nature. What is that singular instinct in him which leads him to look up? When did the ox look up? When did the beasts of the field count the stars of twilight as they leaped within the vision of man? Surely it belongs to man, singularly, to look up, in the fullest sense of the term, significantly, devoutly, wonderingly, and hopefully. Sometimes it comes into us that we must have wings, faculties we have not yet discovered, and if we could but discover them we should flee away to some pre-natal clime, to some other birthplace, to some long ago and forsaken home. There are other men who cannot be satisfied until they have put down in memorandum books the names of the mountains they have seen. Who gave the mountains these names? The mountains do not know them; the mountains are not dogs to be called by names. Others want to see the mountains as they stood before man was made. Thus we have a variety of nature to deal with—the prosaic, the poetical, the hermitage-loving spirit that yearns for solitude and boundlessness and the eloquence of silence; and the other nature that pines for the city, the gaslighted thoroughfare, the rattle and the tumult of public life. When the spirit of the living God comes into us we shall all love mountains, we shall say with the poet, “God made the country, and man made the town,” and in that time of spiritual uplifting, when all our faculties are aglow with Divine fire, mountains will be ways to heaven, and all things growing upon their verdurous sides shall be hints and tokens of the eternal paradise. Religion always works this mystery in a man’s nature; it elevates his taste, it dignifies his imagination, it gives nerve and pith to every faculty he has. No man can be a Christian in reality and remain a little narrow-minded creature. No small mind, in the sense of a mind that loves smallness, can ever love Christ. Every Christian is a great man. We may of course have to redefine the term “great,” and have to make many who are first last, and many who are last first, but if elevation of thought, purity of desire, radiance of hope, dawning immortality, and all the moral inspiration belonging to it—if these enter into greatness, then no man ever called Jesus “Lord” without entering into the possession and the enjoyment of that blessed inheritance. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 4, 5. *Old men and old women, . . . boys and girls.*—*Inhabitants of the holy city:*—What a lovely civic picture, what a charming representation! Dear old travellers, sweet old mothers, each with a staff in hand and leaning upon it for very age, and these making their way through groups of romping boys and girls full of laughter and glee and young joy. We cannot part with this word “playing.” Whoever thought the word “playing” was in the Bible? Always have great suspicion of any boy or girl who cannot play. See the picture, let it pass like a panorama before your eyes: old men, old women, little boys, little girls, children of every age, crowding the glad city, which is the city of truth, and which is dignified by the presence of the holy mountain. If all were old the city would be depressed, if all were children the city would be defenceless, but having old and young we have also the middle line, the average line, the active business energetic element, and there you have a complete city. It would have been a poor picture if the Lord in distributing His gifts had given to one man five talents, and to another one; the whole pith of the story would have been lost. Who does not see that but for the middle man in that parable there would have been no parable at all? The leap from one to five is too much; contrasts may be too startling; they may be so startling as to be tragical, and so tragical as to be discouraging; but the king gave to one man five talents, to another two, and to another one: preachers are eloquent upon the first and the last, and forget in too many instances that it is the average man that represents society. “Boys and girls playing in the streets.” Many parents are too dainty to allow their children to play in the

streets; there propriety draws a line. Poor propriety, it is always drawing lines: that is about the only thing it can do. Whoever saw a boy or a girl who would not play whenever an opportunity occurred? Children must be made to feel that playing is religious. All children should just be as merry as possible. Both boys and girls should be really glad, frolicsome, playful, and therefore simply natural and human. Any young thing that does not play is a paradox. Why do not men relax their strenuous business life sometimes, and be boys again? Especially why do not fathers of families be boys among their own sons and daughters? How commonsense is the Bible! How graphic in its pictorial delineations, how rational in its conceptions of human necessities, and therefore how likely to become the right book when it comes to speak of inner mysteries, and upper possibilities, and further issues, and ultimate destiny. Is it possible for boys and girls to be Christians? Certainly; and almost impossible for anybody else to be Christians. The Church has been fruitful of mistakes, but probably hardly any mistake has been greater than the discouragement of the young in this matter of giving themselves to Jesus Christ. There have been men who have said to children affectionately, You cannot understand these things yet, you must wait a while. I undertake to pronounce that instruction to be unsound and untrue. We are not saved because we understand. If so, then salvation is of works, for understanding is an intellectual work, and men are saved by cleverness, by ability, by mental penetration, because they see certain things through and through. I will not be saved so: let me be saved because Jesus wants to save me, loves me, and tells me that when we get together by and by in the long days of eternity He will tell me all about it. The church should be full of boys and girls. At present there are signs that boys and girls are being made more and more welcome to the Church. These signs should be gratefully hailed, for they are the signs of a deepening and widening Christian life. We cannot characterise all boys and girls as good, but surely there is a time when all boys and girls want to be good. This is the time to claim them for Christ. Jesus Himself took children very early; they were children that could not walk, they were "brought"—mark that word, for it indicates a good deal that is not expressed—to Him, and He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Boys and girls, there is one difficulty: people are extremely fond of us when we are babies; they would die for us then, or nearly so; they would sit up all night, they would expend their tenderest affection upon us, but when we are seven years of age, and from that to fourteen, we are looked upon somewhat coldly; then we shoot up into young men, and seem to recover part of the attention lavished upon us when we were babies. There is a zone of young life where young life has very much to take care of itself under the guidance of the schoolmaster—that sweet friend, that dear, dear soul that would do anything for us! Then be it ours to see that the young, when very young, are made to feel that there is something that cannot be seen, something better than fatherhood and motherhood as known upon the earth. Never burden a child with religious teaching. Never let a child know that there is such a thing as a Catechism. Never make the Bible a task-book, saying, You must commit to memory such and such verses, or suffer my displeasure. Never associate penalty or suffering of any kind with the Bible, with the Sabbath Day, or with church-going. In due time the Catechism will have its place, and Bible-learning will have its place, and church-going will have its place, but do not turn these early into burdens or penalties or associate with them the darkness of a shadow. Let the Sabbath Day be a day of jubilee, wedding day, resurrection day; a time when the joy bells ring their merry peals to call all men to the Father's house, where there is bread enough and to spare. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Children in the streets*:—The image here presented is one of great force and beauty. The city rises before us as the glow of sunset begins to steal over Olivet, and the lengthening shadows begin to warn the labourer home. The streets are not silent or deserted, as they have hitherto been, but there sits the old man gazing on the scenes of peaceful beauty before him, while the aged companion of his earlier years sits by his side, to enjoy with him the freshening breeze that comes cool and sweet from the distant sea, while before them and around them are the merry shout, the joyous glee, and glad gambols of happy childhood, whose ringing echoes mingle sweetly with the tinkle of the bells and the lowing and bleating of the flocks that come softly from the hills as they hie them homeward to the nightly fold. There is an exquisite beauty in this picture that would strike a Jewish mind with peculiar force, to which the promise of old age

and posterity was one of the richest that could be made. Indeed, the presence of the two extremes of life is one of the usual signs of prosperity. When war, famine, pestilence, or anarchy, have been raging, there are but few of either class, for their feebleness makes them the earliest victims. Hence, in the streets of Jerusalem, there were but few of either in her desolation, for even those who did remain abstained from coming forth their houses through fear. But the time was coming when security would be so general, that old and young would meet in the peaceful streets without fear of molestation or injury. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

The human society in the city of God.—The dear old capital, the centre of their reverential affections, and seat of their worship, beautiful for situation and holy for its history, will put on its thriving look again, and be the same blessed home to them that it was before. Observe that this Jerusalem was the city of God—a city that He has fashioned and filled after His own design, just as He wished it to be. This future Jerusalem was no mere mortal metropolis, built by human ambition, or populated by some sordid colony. It was to be modelled after a heavenly pattern. It was to embody the Divine ideal of a perfect, pure, and happy state. There is no mistake, then, in the city's composition, and no accident in its arrangements. If the Lord does not mean to have old men and old women in it, they will not be seen there; if boys and girls are found playing in the streets of it, we may be sure they did not stray in as vagrants, or get dropped there as foundlings; they are there by the express appointment of the Father of all the families of the earth. We may take these sentences, therefore, as a graphic outline of what God would have a Christian state of society to be, not in heaven, but in this world. In the scriptural imagery of symbolism, Jerusalem is a type of the Christian Church. Where the Gospel of Christ has done its perfect work, where Christianity has realised itself in social institution, and has penetrated all our private and public life with its practical regulation, there the whole of our being will come under its control; all its periods, from childhood to old age, will take the stamp and bear the fruit of this holy and gracious power in the heart; every capacity will be invigorated to its best exercise by Christian faith; our common work will be better and safer and happier work for being done in the name of Christ and for the sake of Christ; done by a Christian will, with a Christian purpose, in a Christian spirit, with Christian hands and brain and feet. Our faith is really the bread of our life. The Church is meant to open straight into your homes. The man and the children in the street, as the text says, should be the constant signs and witnesses of the kingdom of God within them—men about their business, children at their play, so toiling and trafficking, or so playing, as to make it plain that the stamp of the regeneration is upon them, the image of Christ within them. There is nothing in our domestic habits too small to bear this stamp and seal of the law of Christ, nothing too commonplace to be a test of sanctification. . . . In these villages and cities there are many men who treat the whole system of positive Christianity, both doctrine and ordinance, with indifference. They live by the side of Christian institutions very much as they would live by neighbours speaking another language, and following different pursuits. What can break up this strange and heathenish unconcern? It is due largely to the impression men have that religion lies aside of life, and apart from its vital interests. Religion is regarded as a class-concern, or a periodical and occasional concern, at anyrate a partial and narrow concern. It lays hold on a peculiar and exceptional faculty in the mind. It comes to some, and not to others, and those others must be excused. There is much of this sentiment abroad, and it kills, in not a few, all effort to be Christians. Nothing will be more convincing, in exploding this error, than a daily demonstration, in our own persons and conduct, of the opposite truth. Turn and look into the face of Christ as He walks the world in the majesty and beauty of His holiness. Is there anything that looks like a class-piety there? Do you gather from anything He says, that His followers are to have two divided lives, serving mammon a part of their time and God a part, the world with their busy energies, and God only with some sentimental states brought out at special seasons? Analyse the very essence and marrow of the Christian life. What are the parts of it? Faith, hope, charity. Is any one of them a class-possession? Christianity intends that every man and woman and boy and girl shall be the better for it, and every corner and instant in the character and life of each shall be the better. It would make strong men more manly, pure women more pure, light-hearted children lighter-hearted, because the love of Christ casts all fear out. We must expand our ideas, and give them life, by convictions of the "way

of coming" to Christ, and being made one with Him in this world. It is a very simple road. Theology becomes only a blind guide when it complicates and mystifies it, and puzzles the unsophisticated mind with metaphysical cross-examination. Do you want to be a Christian? Then you have already begun to be one—but you have only begun. The greatest part of salvation on our part is in the being willing to be saved. (*Bishop Huntinglon.*) **The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.**—*Children for evermore*:—The prophet is speaking of the restoration of the temporal Jerusalem, of the return of her inhabitants when the long night of their captivity by Babylon's streams is over. His words may be taken as prophetic of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the golden city there will be children—children for evermore!

"Oh, there's nothing on earth half so holy
As the innocent heart of a child."

It would seem to us as if there could be no heaven without the children: and as if we could not wish those that are in heaven to grow up. Shall there be no sweet childlike voices bearing their part in the "Song of Moses and the Lamb"? The children of the heavenly city are described as "playing." Children are children all the world over. And when we come to speak of the eternal world, we meet with children there—real children, happy children, "the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." (*C. L. Balfour.*) *Children in the city of God.*—I. BOYS AND GIRLS MAY BE IN THE CITY OF GOD. They may know about Christ. They may be justified in Christ. They may be converted by the Holy Spirit. They may love Christ. They may imitate Christ—who spent a great part of His time in performing children's duties. II. THOSE BOYS AND GIRLS WHO ARE IN THE CITY OF GOD ARE VERY HAPPY. They are when they look back; when they look forward; when they look down; when they look up. They are happy now. They shall be happy hereafter. III. BOYS AND GIRLS WHO ARE GOD'S CHILDREN ARE VERY SAFE. They are in the streets of a city, walled and eternal. Neither God, the devil, wicked men, poverty, diseases, nor death, will harm them there. IV. BOYS AND GIRLS, WHO ARE GOD'S CHILDREN, MUST NOT GO OUT OF THE CITY OF GOD TO SEEK AMUSEMENT. To be very fond of amusement is not good. Duties in variety may often afford amusement. (*James Stewart.*) *Recreations, false and true*:—The man who imagines that his instincts for healthy recreation must be either ignored or destroyed if he is to live a Christian life is deluded by a dangerous untruth. I prefer the word "recreation" to the word "amusement." The latter may be no more than idle rest, the former is definite in its promise of renewal. There appear to be two somewhat different sets of considerations which claim our notice according as one or the other immediate purpose in Christian life presses with emphasis. If self-protection is our main idea, some things do not show themselves within range of vision, which are not only visibly present, but well up toward the front, if our main thought is aggression, conquest, possession of the whole world of human life for Christ. That cannot be a "recreation" which results in mental and moral and spiritual languor. Dissipation is the true name for that. The thing is poison to him, whatever it may be to others, and he must refuse it. Take the case of the children of our Church and homes, still retaining for the present the idea of protection, safety. We know that the circle of social relation, and that of Church relation, are not bounded by the same line. Even if Christian parents were more wisely careful in the matter of their children's choice of friends than they sometimes show themselves to be, it is not as far possible to-day as it was thirty years ago to exclude the "currencies" of the world: and it is almost impossible to guard against the penetrative power of current literature, let our will and our watch be ever so resolute. By what attitude, with regard to amusements, can our young people be sent forth most safely into the multitude of men and the tumult of life? My strong conviction is that we should, in full frankness, teach them to distinguish between things that differ. They will understand that evil is evil, and that good is good. We need, then, set up no jealous bar against this or that recreation, or any amusement which is really such, and for all their life they will be capable of judging the wrong and right of things, also of the expediency of this or that, in a way which the most complete quasi-papal *Index* would never afford. Take dancing. Late hours so spent afford no recreation. Indiscriminate companionships, indelicacy of dress, wastefulness in dress, never under any circumstances

can be right. Brand the wrong as evil, claim your children's verdict, and it will be given without hesitation, and then see, if you like, whether those things need intrude. They seem ridiculously non-essential. There are games which have been and are largely abused for purposes of gambling, and which have been eschewed or regarded as objectionable on that account. Gamblers are ready to turn every occasion into an opportunity for the exercise of their vice. To say that chess, or whist, or billiards is wrong, because betting and gambling have been connected by some men with the game, is scarcely a sensible conclusion. The theatre is often unquestionably poisonous and corrupting. But is it true beyond all doubt that evil is essential to the theatre? Has the theatre, distinguishing it from the drama, ever had a fair chance? The very presence of this power to-day, to say nothing of former generations and other lands, shows surely that there is not only an instinct to act, but a desire to see dramatic portrayal, such portrayal being an aid to the understanding and realising of a conception admittedly the fruit of a genius which is a worthily-used Divine gift. Must this necessarily injure the man or woman who attempts the task, and the society, in the midst of which such means are organised? Is the case of musical performance essentially different? Mendelssohn's *Elijah* is, in the music of it as well as in the libretto, a magnificent drama. Is an organised dramatic portrayal necessarily an evil? I cannot think it. But the principle of cautious self-protection and avoidance is not the whole, or the highest part, of Christian life and duty. The attitude of aggression is a true and necessary one, and aggressive Christianity has a voice and a work in this sphere of amusements and recreations. In the matter before us isolation is not security, and victory is the only safety. Watch as we may, warn as we may, if we do not rescue such amusements from evil surroundings, the temptation they present will again and again overwhelm. Forms of recreation are not the outcome of chance, they are a response to something which is part of us. If the people who organise the standing institutions receive no support from good people in any attempts to respond in worthy ways to the demand for amusement, they will be tempted to degrade their provision to a lower level. We must offer recreative substitutes for that which we condemn. We have to win and conquer and possess the world for Christ, and not be content to say a thing is wrong without, at all events, an attempt to set it right. It is neither Christian nor heroic to hand down difficulties to our children without an endeavour to grapple with them. . . . To many devout Christians the very necessity for considering such subjects as have occupied us, is almost a pain. They have never felt unrest. They can scarcely understand the besetment by which others say they are assailed. The fact is that, a generation ago, the majority of people did not occupy their minds with matters which we could not evade if we would. I think even conflict is healthier than stagnation. Work and play are as necessary parts of our life as worship. The greatness of the Gospel, the glory of God in Jesus Christ, is its power of salvation to the uttermost. (*D. Jones Hamer.*)

Boys and girls playing in the streets of the city:—God has a city still. In it live all who love Him and serve Him. They are walled about with God's love and care. They have the temple of His presence. Like Jerusalem, it is a city of peace; it is pleasant for situation, the joy of the whole earth. The Heavenly Father would have His city full of boys and girls, playing in the streets. **I. WHY GOD WOULD HAVE THEM IN HIS CITY.** 1. Because He loves them so much. The Heavenly Father will never have the children shut out from anything that He has provided for the people. He does not forget any little one. He does not think that you are too young, or too ignorant, or too weak. His city will not be right unless you are there. And He wants you now. 2. Because it is dangerous outside the city. There were in the old days wild beasts prowling about,—jackals and hyenas; and perhaps a fierce old lion came down from the hills to see what he could find. And outside the city to-day there is the old lion that goes about "seeking whom he may devour." And there are many robber bands that strip people of everything, and make slaves of them to hard masters, and even kill them. Sins like drunkenness, and vice, and dishonesty, I mean. **II. HOW MAY WE GET INTO THIS CITY?** Its gates are shut to keep out all enemies, and the watchmen with spears keep guard above the battlements. A long way off from the city there stands a man looking and longing to enter it. Why does he not come in? He has been an enemy of the King, a rebel against His laws. He could never get in there, at the gate of the law. Then I see that they are making a new gate. Over it they have written the words, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise

cast out." No watchmen or archers guard it. But there is One with such tender love and compassion that none could ever shrink from Him. It is the King's Son. Forth from this gate come messengers, offering free pardon for all. The King's Son has borne their punishment,—suffered in their stead,—that He might bring them all into the city of God. And now, whoever will, may come. III. WHAT ARE THE BOYS AND GIRLS DOING IN GOD'S CITY? They are playing; they are very happy. The moment children get unhappy they leave off playing. 1. They are happy because their sins are forgiven, and they know that God loves them. 2. They are happy because of the wall that is about them, the wall of God's love and care. Have you ever heard of the old woman who always used to pray, "O God, be a wall about us"? It was in the dreadful days of Napoleon Buonaparte. He was driven back from Russia, and fierce Russian soldiers were following him. Everybody was greatly frightened, thinking that the soldiers would come upon them and take all that they had, and perhaps kill them. But when this old woman heard of it, she said, "O God, be a wall about us!" Her neighbours laughed, and even her little grandson said, "What does grandmother mean by talking about God being a wall about us?" "Ah," said the old woman, "you will see, you will see; He can take care of us and be a wall about us." The soldiers had to march close by her house, but in the evening she prayed to God, and went to bed as usual. In the night the soldiers passed; but they did not see her dwelling. There came a very heavy fall of snow, and it drifted against the hedge of the cottage garden so high that the soldiers could not see it, and all passed along without knowing that there was a house there. Thus God really built a wall about her. He sent down the light snow from heaven and piled it up for her defence. 3. They are happy because they can play in the city. If God had not told Zechariah to say this, I am afraid some people would have thought of something very different. They would have said, the children must be very quiet; they must be seen more than heard; they must always be going up to the temple, and always praying, and singing hymns. But when God brought the boys and girls back to His city, the streets were to be full of them, "playing in the streets thereof." Because they were in the Holy City, they were not to try to be men and women; they were to be boys and girls still, full of fun and fond of playing, and loving to run and shout. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *The children of the king*:—Zechariah's heart is plainly in the sight he describes. Gladness grows in him as he watches in vision the children at play, and hears their ringing laughter. And his spirit is the spirit of the Bible, which everywhere shows the warmest interest in the joys of children. Who of the world's teachers but Christ took children in their arms, laid hands on them, and blessed them? He thinks His praise imperfect when there are no little voices in the choir. The religion of Christ has quite changed the thoughts and feelings of men about children. How do children fare where the Bible is not known? You owe your childhood, all its kindness and happiness, to Jesus Christ, the lover of children. Jerusalem was the city of God on earth, and the picture of the city of God in heaven. In heaven there shall be a mighty multitude of happy children. Illustrations may be borrowed from the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation, which is the book of God's city. I. THE GLORY OF THE CITY. 1. There is perfect safety in it. 2. It contains everything needed for life and joy. 3. The King is the centre of the city. Near the Rhine stands the city of Carlsruhe, or Charles' Rest, so called after its founder. It has the shape of an outspread fan, and all the streets branch out from the palace, in front of which stands the bronze statue of the grand duke. II. THE CITIZENS OF THE CITY. A city derives its glory more from the people than from the places in it. III. THE GATE OF THE CITY. You do well to ask, "Shall I get into the city?" Penitence is necessary. Those only who have loved holiness on earth can enter into the city of holiness. Thank God that the day of mercy is not past, and that the gate of mercy still stands open; and enter in by hearty faith in the Saviour of sinners. (*James Wells.*) *The new humanity*:—This charming word picture is a representation at once vivid and sublime of the new human race. It sets before us a city in the time of prosperity and peace. In time of peace children crowd in the open spaces, and engage in gleeful play. The spiritual idea is—men and women of the Gospel age—their characteristics as represented by the city street scene. Old photographs of new people. I. THE NEW HUMANITY IS CHARACTERISED BY YOUTHFULNESS. Childhood is peculiar to Christianity. God's religion is the only one that makes a speciality of children. Jesus made children a type of believers. "Of such is the

kingdom of heaven." Childlikeness is characteristic of Christians in a state of grace and in a state of glory. 1. In a state of grace. Children are humble, obedient, forgiving, contented, hopeful, loving. So are Christians. 2. In a state of glory. Christianity reveals a future state, where the good are ever young. Heaven is the land of the living. Religion a life of eternal juvenility transfigured with eternal glory. I. THE NEW HUMANITY IS CHARACTERISED BY ENJOYMENT. "Playing." All young life is playful—the colt, kitten, lamb, child. The Gospel is a system to make men glad. Joy is a duty. God is our best friend—our Father. Christians possess the secret of happiness—relation to Him. Externally, all may be forbidding, but there are hidden springs within. The Christian, though poor, is rich. III. THE NEW HUMANITY IS CHARACTERISED BY SAFETY. "In the streets." 1. God's affection for them proves this. He has loved man best of all. His affection is means to an end. All the attributes of God work for His love. 2. God's sacrifice for them proves this. God willingly sent forth His Son. 3. God's work in them proves this. His resources are boundless, and His purposes unalterable. To commence is to consummate. He who is Alpha is also Omega. 4. His promises to them prove this. "We severally and jointly promise to pay,"—so reads the promissory note. The Trinity are personally and collectively pledged to save the believer. We can trust them. The bridge of God's promises grips the Rock of Ages. IV. THE NEW HUMANITY IS CHARACTERISED BY MULTITUDE. "Full." Jesus will save a multitude untold. 1. The plan in operation proves this. "Power of God." "Mighty through God." 2. Divine promises to Christ prove this. "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance." 3. The expectations of Christ prove this. "Many shall come," &c. Apply—(1) Seek the new nature. (2) Live the new life. (3) Then will come the new song in the new Jerusalem. (B. D. Johns.)

Ver. 6. Should it also be marvellous in Mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts.—*The limits of the marvellous*.—Here is a prophetic picture of a time of peace and prosperity. To the man of his time the prophet's picture seemed wholly incredible. They were not prepared for such an optimistic view of things. The scene, however desirable, seemed utterly incredible. Then to their despairing mood comes this soul-inspiring message from God: "If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, shall it also be marvellous in My eyes?" There is no room for marvelling when God is taken into account. Many things that are marvels to men are but the orderly and ordinary carrying out of God's purposes and plans. The miracles of Jesus were not miracles to Him. They were the spontaneous exercise of His ordinary healing and restorative powers. Finite minds have a tendency to be crushed by consternation in the presence of the marvellous, except they have learned to see God in all events. The only steadying and strengthening principle of human life is God, and faith in His wisdom and power. These disheartened captives were in a despairing mood. Hope had deserted them. They had given up their work in despair. When the prophet assured them that the work would be completed, that Jerusalem would be restored, and that peace and security would yet be enjoyed within its walls, they shook their heads incredibly. They said: "It is too good to be true." They failed to take God into account, and hence were crushed and disheartened. God comes to them and says: "It may seem incredible to you, but it is not incredible to Me." And God comes to us all in the same way, and tells us that we are not to limit His power or to doubt His love. He is behind all events, making them work out His own gracious purpose. The true solution of the marvellous is found in the recognition of God. Illustrate by two men who are bent on making the world brighter and better. One yields to despair because he has been limited to means and agencies. The other clings to the belief that a remedy may be found for the ills of society, because he sees God overhead, and recognises His power to regenerate society. The same is true of our own personal experience, especially of the higher experiences of the Christian life. The timid heart often shrinks from claiming the perfect peace that God promises to them that love and trust Him. The true answer to our marvelling mood is that God will do it. He will lift the worried, fretting soul up out of its own feebleness. The same principle holds good in those strange and bewildering experiences that so often surprise and perplex the believer. But the hand of God may be recognised in the times of doubt and darkness. No matter what form the trial may take, the way out of it is the same. And in the matter of service

there are many things that surprise and perplex us. We are often sadly perplexed at our failures, and sometimes we are greatly surprised at our successes. Such a view of God, as an ever-present factor in all human experiences, cannot fail to enlarge our lives, and to lift us up above the countless petty perplexities and annoyances that tend to fret and worry the life. We thus learn to look at life as a whole, taking in its entire plan and scope, as seen and known by God. We need this view of God also to steady us and strengthen our faith as we look abroad upon the spiritual life of Christendom. We look for fruit, and behold there is barrenness. What marvellously slow progress the Church is making! But God is the same God still, and therefore we are not to yield to despair, and cease to labour and to pray. The Churches may be dead, but God still lives. We may strengthen our faith and encourage our drooping hearts by remembering God's gracious dealings with ourselves in early life. He came to our desolate hearts, and filled us with His own fulness, and made us sing for joy. God, who wrought such wonders in us, can do the same in His Church. (*Samuel Macnaughton, M.A.*)

Things marvellous to men not marvellous to God:—This is a wonderful age, not merely in the number of strange and unprecedented things happening in it, and in the strange and unprecedented character that belongs to it as a whole, but also in the prominence of wonder as an element in the view which it takes of itself. It is wonderful, because it is an age full of wonder. It does not seem as if there ever could be a time which so stood off, as it were, and looked at itself, in which so many men lived under a continual sense of the strangeness of their own circumstances. You will see how important such an element must be in the character of an age which possesses it, if you remember what it is to an individual. A child who thinks himself singular and different from other children grows up under the power of that thought more than any other which is in his mind about himself. Whatever kind of effect is produced by it, this is an element in the life and growth of every man—this wonder at the age he lives in, at the world, at men, at himself—this wonder that everywhere pervades our wonderful, our wondering age.

I. WONDERFULNESS OF LIFE. What is the reason that this sense of the wonderfulness of life, this sense of the strangeness and mystery everywhere, has such a different effect upon different men that it brings one man peace and another man tumult, that it brings to one man hope and despair to another? No doubt the reason lies deep in the essential differences there are between our natures, and cannot be wholly stated. One cause of the difference, and not the least one, lies here: in the difference of our ideas as to whether there is any Being who knows what we are reminded every hour we do *not* know; whether there is any Being in whose eyes this age, so strange to us, is not strange and bewildering, but perfectly natural and orderly and clear. We are too ready to think that God is surprised with this endless surprising strangeness that comes into our human life. Our only hope lies in knowing that there is One whom nothing disappoints and nothing amazes. Wonder is so much a part of ourselves, and such a constant experience, that we can hardly leave out wonder from the thought of any high nature. In the strong remonstrance with which Zechariah met the incredulity of the people there is the substance of what I have been saying. "It is all strange to you," God by His prophet seems to say; "but does that prove it will be strange to Me? You must not limit My knowledge by your wonder." Where we are ignorant, God is wise; where we are standing blindly in the dark, He is in the light; where we wonder, He calmly knows. God knows: this should bring us comfort, in a sense of safety and of enlargement.

II. THE SENSE OF DANGER. Where does so much of the sense of danger and the sense of unsafety in life come from? It is from the half-seen things that hover upon the borders of reality and unreality; from things which evidently are something, but of which we cannot perfectly make out just what they are. It is not clear, sound, well-proved truths which frighten men for the stability of their faith; it is the ghostly speculations, the vaguely outlined, faint suggestions that hover in the misty light of dim hypothesis, that make the dim uneasy sense of danger that besets the minds of so many believers. Behind all my conceptions, and all other men's conceptions, of what things are, and how things came to be, there always must be the first fact about things, about what they are, and how they came to be; and that fact must correspond exactly with the knowledge which is in the supreme intelligence of Him who knows all things accurately and completely. If my conception of that fact, however it was reached, differs to-day from *His* knowledge of the fact, danger must be in the persistence of that difference,

and safety in its being set right. Ignorance is always dangerous; knowledge is never dangerous. He who believes truth only as the way to God, he who regards opinions as valueless except as they agree with the infallible judgments of God, and so bring him who holds them into sympathy with God and keep him there, he is the man for whom all life is safe, and whose faith faces the changing thoughts and destinies of the world, however astounding they may seem, without a thought of fear. III. THE SENSE OF FREEDOM. Such a man is also free. The safety of life and the enlargement or freedom of life must go together. No man is safe who is not free; no man is free who is not safe. Our effort, our action, our whole life in the thought and will is limited by that which we account possible. The conception of what is possible enlarges and widens as the quality of any being's life becomes higher; and so the loftier being is able freely to attempt things which the lower being is shut out from if he lives only in the contemplation of his own powers and never looks beyond himself. Freedom to attempt belongs to the larger vision. If He who sits at the centre of everything, and sees the visions of the universe with the perfect clearness of its Maker—if God can really speak so that we can hear Him, and say, "It is impossible to you, but it is not impossible to Me; it is marvellous in your eyes, but it is not in Mine"; if He can say that of any task that is overwhelming men with its immensity, that word of His must snap our fetters, must set free the little strength of all of us to strike our little blows, must enlarge our lives, and send them out to bolder ventures with earnestness and hope. IV. THE ESSENCE OF FAITH. It seems to me as if, through all these ages of Christendom, God had been trying to teach the Christian world to enlarge its notions of the possibility of faith by the perpetual revelations of His own. God must be teaching us all that faith is the essential relation of the human soul to His soul-faith, the deep rest of the child's life upon the Father's love-faith, the reception by man of the word of God, which comes to him in voices as manifold as the nature of God Himself,—that faith, a thing so deep, essential, and eternal, is not to be conditioned on the permanence of any one of the temporary forms in which it may be clothed. The fearful believer says, "I do not see how it can be, it is so strange"; but God answers him out of all the richness of Christian history, "If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it also be marvellous in Mine?" Apply this truth to the personal life; for there, most of all, a man needs the enlargement that comes of always feeling the infinite knowledge that God is about him, encompassing his ignorance with Himself. How easily, with our self-distrust and spiritual laziness, we shut down iron curtains about ourselves, and limit our own higher possibilities! This is truest in religious things. (*Phillips Brooks, D.D.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **I will save My people from the East country, and from the West country.**—*A twofold Divine restoration*:—I. A-DIVINE TEMPORAL RESTORATION. The reference here is to those Jews who had been scattered abroad over various countries through the Babylonian Captivity and other disastrous causes. The point is, that the restoration here promised is a temporal restoration to their own land and country. God is constantly restoring His people to those temporal blessings they have lost. He restores often—1. To lost health; 2. To lost property; 3. To lost social status. In all His people's distresses He bids them look to Him. II. A DIVINE SPIRITUAL RESTORATION. This may mean, I will become their God in good faith or in reality, both on their side and on Mine. This is incomparably the most important restoration. 1. Man may lose his God, and be "without God in the world." 2. The loss of God is the greatest loss. A man separated from God is like a branch separated from the root, a river from the fountain, a planet from the sun. 3. Restoration to God is the transcendent good. He who can say, "The Lord is my portion," possesseth all things. This restoration the Almighty is effecting now in the world. "He is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." (*Homilist.*) **And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.**—*The future of the Jews*:—The terms of this prediction carry us beyond any facts at that time existing, and refer to events then future. It predicts a return of the Jews from the West as well as the East, whilst at this time the only dispersion existing was toward the East in Babylon. Hence an universal dispersion is implied in this universal restoration, the terms, from East to West, being inclusive of the entire earth. This general dispersion did not occur until the final fall of Jerusalem, since which there has been no general restoration of the Jews, either in a literal or a figurative sense. Hence the main

facts predicted are yet future. That they include a literal restoration of the Jews to their own land is probable, but that this is the main purport of the prophecy is just as improbable. There is something more than a mere political restoration required by the general drift of the prophecy, which is spiritual, not temporal, and which therefore demands a spiritual reunion to the spiritual theocracy, or the blood-bought and blood-washed Church of God. And this is particularly demanded by the covenant formula of ver. 8, "They shall be My people, and I will be their God," which is always the exponent of spiritual blessings, and the fact is put beyond all question by the explanatory addendum, "in truth and righteousness," which expressly affirms that this restoration and union are not to be outward, visible, and temporal, but inward, invisible, and spiritual. They will be a sincere and justified people, as He will be a true and pardoning God. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

Vers. 9, 10. For before these days there was no hire for man.—Society before the temple was built:—A neglected temple always means a ruined society. These words are not to be applied locally or parochially; they express an eternal and unchangeable principle: a neglected God is a frowning heaven, a frowning heaven is a desolated earth. We must more and more insist upon the importance of the religious spirit in its relation to policy and commerce and agriculture, and the whole mechanism and build and meaning of society. Unless we cultivate our own spirituality to a high degree we may soon be tempted to forego this argument, or allow ourselves to be victimised into the belief that it is not an argument but a sentiment. The first thing which the Christian man has to do is to keep up his spirituality to the very highest point. By keeping up spirituality I mean the cultivation of that insight which sees more than surface, more than so-called phenomena; that penetrating insight that sees behind all these things a Spirit, a Providence, ruling, moulding, and directing all things. We walk by faith, not by sight: Lord, increase our faith! We see nothing as it really is; the reality is beyond the appearance. Why be satisfied with the door? smite it that it may fly open, and let the opening door be an invitation to enter and partake of the hospitality of God. Always in Biblical history, when men turned from God, God turned away from them: "Therefore it has come to pass: therefore I scattered them with a whirlwind among all nations: he that honoureth Me I will honour, he that despiseth Me I will lightly esteem." This is not arbitrary, this is not the changeable rule of a changeable court; this is simply the utterance of an eternal necessity. The sun says, He that will not have me shall have darkness and death. Is the sun cruel? Nay, the sun is clement and pitiful by announcing that fact; the sun offers its dower of light and warmth and comfort. So when we speak in Gospel words about the wicked being driven away in his wickedness, and about man neglecting to build the temple, and therefore having no harvest to reap, we are not delivering the arbitrary decrees of some fancy-created Jove; we are announcing the law of the universe, whoever made it. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) **A Divine call to a Divine work:—**The call is urged on two considerations—**I. THE WRETCHEDNESS CONSEQUENT ON THE NEGLECT OF DUTY.** They were then destitute of three elements essential to the well-being of any people. **1. Industry.** "There was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast." The people were purposeless, lazy, and in a state of general lethargy and collapse. No great project inspired their interest, engrossed their attention, enlisted and marshalled their powers. The lack of industry is a curse to any people; it is an injury to health, as well as an obstruction to material and social progress. Another element of well-being of which they were destitute was—**2. Peace.** "Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction." The lack of earnest occupation naturally led to intestine broils and contentions. Nothing is more natural and more common than for people without employment to wrangle and dispute with one another. Men who are full of business have no time to quarrel. **3. Social unity.** "For I set all men every one against his neighbour." **II. THE IMPROVEMENT WHICH ENSUES ON THE RESUMPTION OF DUTY.** "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous," &c. This means, but now, as you have resumed the work and rebuilt the temple, I will bless you. There are three blessings here promised. **1. Temporal prosperity.** "For the seed shall be prosperous," &c. Material nature is in the hands of God, and He can at any moment make it a curse or a blessing to men. Here He promises

to make it a blessing. 2. Social usefulness. On the resumption of the great duty which Heaven had enjoined on these returned captives they should be a blessing. 3. Divine favour. Where there was Divine displeasure there would be Divine favour. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 11, 12. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days.—*The danger of resistance to the Divine messages*:—It is a decisive evidence of sound wisdom to profit by the faults, the errors, and the calamities of other men. Two sources from whence we ordinarily obtain knowledge and caution. The first is, our own experience, by which we too frequently buy knowledge at a very high cost. The second is, the experience of those who have lived before us; and this knowledge is as good in its quality, and obtained at a much easier rate than the former. In Scripture we have many histories of individuals and histories of communities. I. A MESSAGE FROM GOD TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN. 1. The immediate agent by whom the communication is made—the Spirit of God. It is this Holy Spirit who is the author, the immediate author, of all communications from God to man. It should give a great solemnity to all that is addressed to us, to recollect that it comes to us by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost. 2. There are instruments appointed for the communication of this message. “By the prophets.” The ministrations of fellow-men—ancient prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. 3. The nature of the communication thus made. It is a message of instruction, conviction, consolation, and warning. II. THE RESISTANCE AND OPPOSITION WHICH IN EVERY AGE HAS BEEN MADE TO THE MESSAGE. Mark the varied forms in which this opposition is here described. When is it that resistance may be said to be made to the Spirit, in the Word? 1. When men estrange themselves from the means of grace and salvation, and place themselves beyond the reach of those means, it may be justly feared that they are in the state of those who refuse to hearken. How many do place themselves in such situations! 2. When men perversely act in direct contradiction to the light they have received. All sin is heinous in the sight of God. But that is especially heinous which is committed in direct opposition to the light we have received, whether that light have been communicated by the instructions of an earlier age, by the ministrations of the prophets, or by means of any of the various institutions which have been set on foot in our day. 3. Where there is a determination to persevere in a course of sin, against the remonstrance of conscience and the Word of God. This is surely pulling away the shoulder, and stopping the ears, and hardening the heart. 4. When to the impiety of unbelief is added the iniquity of scorn and contempt, and when ridicule is poured by men of determined minds on things sacred. III. THE TREMENDOUS CONSEQUENCES TO WHICH SUCH CONDUCT INEVITABLY EXPOSES. To the wrath of God; the Divine displeasure. Here presented as “great wrath”; and “great wrath from the God of armies, the Lord of hosts.” Lessons—1. Admire and adore the condescension, patience, and grace of God the Holy Spirit. Condescension in that He visits our world with the messages of mercy, and brings home to our ears and to our hearts the sounds of reconciliation and salvation. Patience, in that He still visits us and waits to be gracious; still strives in the hearts of the unregenerate—still visits His people with the dews of the heavenly grace. 2. This subject affords a clear demonstration of the depravity of human nature. If I could find no other proof of human depravity, I should find it in this enmity of man to all that is good and gracious. 3. Learn the debt of gratitude you owe to the Son of God. For you would still have gone on in the way of enmity if He had not visited you. It was the sovereignty of God’s distinguishing grace which gave you eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to feel. 4. We tremble for some of you. Because you have heard these things again and again; you have seen the Cross of Christ reared in your midst—and some of you are still stopping your ears and hardening your hearts; instead of yielding up to the convictions of your minds, you are struggling against them. (*George Clayton.*) I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.—*A goodly heritage*:—Wherever there is the teaching of the Holy Spirit it is sure to convince men personally, in their own consciences, souls, and experiences, of their need of God’s Christ. I. THE POSSESSIONS. The people will be distinguished by that which they are to possess. 1. The city of freedom, the new Jerusalem. There is no sense in which in this possession freedom is not implied. The Jerusalem that is above all is free for us all. The first feature is freedom from sin. 2. This Jerusalem shall be a city of truth. This truth, that

from first to last we are saved entirely by the grace of God. This grace is entirely by the Lord Jesus Christ. The second thing to be careful upon is that regeneration is one part of the work of grace. 3. This city is called "the mountain of the Lord." So called because the Lord is there. II. HOW THE PEOPLE ARE BROUGHT TO POSSESS THESE THINGS. The Jews in their return from captivity, and coming back to their land, and the Lord making the land fruitful, are the things indicated here. It was on Christ's account,—that was the deep foundation reason why they came back from captivity at all. And how is it you return to Zion? It is because God chose you in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. By virtue of the secret relationship existing between you and Jesus Christ you are brought to possess these things. (*James Wells.*)

Ver. 13. So I will save you.—*Man's need and God's provision*:—I. MAN IN HIS NATURAL AND FALLEN STATE. "As ye were a curse among the heathen." Sinners are under the curse of God. Mankind in general, as transgressors, all whose sins are unpardoned, are under the curse of God. Those who are in their natural and carnal state are a curse to themselves. The dispositions which they cherish, the practices which they adopt, injure their health, blast their reputation, often ruin their circumstances, and lead to sorrow and wretchedness and death. And sinners are a curse to others. They diffuse evil, they propagate mischief, they are corruptors. II. THE GRACIOUS PURPOSE OF GOD IN REFERENCE TO MAN, AS MADE KNOWN IN THE GOSPEL. "So will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing." This salvation has been procured for man by the atonement and intercession of Christ. This salvation is free to all, without any exception, without any limitation. This salvation can only be experienced by those who exercise "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." III. THE GRACIOUS AND DELIGHTFUL RESULT OF THIS DESIGN IN CONNECTION WITH THE CHILDREN OF MEN. "Ye shall be a blessing." Those who are saved inherit the blessing of God. Those who are saved are a blessing to themselves. (*J. H. Bumby.*)

Vers. 16, 17. Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour.—*Truth*:—Concisely stated, the doctrine of the text is, think truth, love truth, speak truth, and do truth—live in its atmosphere, make it your ruling principle. Let the clear light which it sheds out throw a radiance on your course, so that your life be transparent as a summer-day. The charm of truth is the charm of simplicity. He who knows the value of truth, and strives to exhibit it, bears the mark of God: he cannot be far from the kingdom of God. The text contains two affirmative and two negative precepts—speak the truth, execute judgment, and do not imagine evil in your hearts, do not love a false oath. I. PRESUMEDLY INNOCENT INROADS UPON THE DOMAINS OF TRUTH. 1. There is innuendo and insinuation. The wise look which says so much, and commits itself to little. 2. Common prattle and gossip, meddling, as it generally does, with the more intimate concerns of third persons, seldom respects the limits of truth. Nowhere is caution more needful than in ordinary conversation. 3. Promises are lightly and readily given, and often as lightly and readily broken. 4. Lack of firmness necessitates sacrifice of truth. One does not like to be singular, one does not like to be disagreeable. 5. In speaking of one's self or friends, the temptation, not always resisted, is to throw them out in the best light and make great persons of them, that it may be seen how grand, how clever we are, and how choice is the circle of our acquaintance. 6. The species of falsehood commonly called "fibs," "white lies," or in the slang diction of the college, "crams." 7. The unconscientious workman's dallying with his work is a sin against truthfulness. II. FLAGRANT BREACHES OF THE LAW OF TRUTH. Open and deliberate lies, intentional and heartless deception. In opposition to all falsehood, whether of the lighter or heavier sort, whether respectable or vulgar, whether in deed, word, or gesture, whether by omission or addition, the Word of God says, "Speak every man truth to his neighbour." III. HOW DOES SCRIPTURE ENFORCE THIS? By what revelations; by what further precepts? 1. The wrongfulness and fate of untruth are clearly explained. 2. What more would you have to recommend truth than that it is assimilation to the Divine character? He is a "God of truth, and without iniquity." "Just and right." If our thoughts, words, and deeds were regulated by the standard of truth this would be heaven upon earth. Be satisfied of a man's integrity, sure that he ever means to do the right, and would scorn to act meanly, and you may make that man your friend. To work the world

out into a society of friends, to transform it into a brotherhood, is, in brief, the aim of Christ. That ideal is the reality of heaven. (*A. Hawkins Jones.*) *An universal revival of religion*:—I. THE ESSENTIAL PRE-REQUISITES. Four pre-requisites or preparatories for an universal revival of genuine religion. 1. There must be truthfulness in speech. "These are the things which ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour." Truthful speech is somewhat rare in all social circles, and in all departments of life. Fallacious statements abound in markets, senates, courts, and even families. Truthful speaking involves two things—(1) Sincerity. To speak a true thing insincerely is not to speak truthfully. A man must conscientiously believe that what he speaks is true, before he can be credited with veracity. Truthful speaking involves—(2) Accuracy. A man may speak with sincerity, and yet from ignorance or mistake may not speak according to fact; and unless he speaks according to fact he can scarcely be said to speak truthfully. His speech unintentionally conveys falsehood. Hence truthful speaking requires a strong sense of right, and an adequate acquaintance with the subjects of the speech. 2. There must be rectitude in conduct. "Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." In the East the courts of justice were held at the gates of the city; and perhaps the primary reference here is to the pronouncing of judgment on cases that were righteous and tended to peace. But rectitude of life is even more important and urgent than rectitude in judgment. 3. There must be benevolence in feeling. "Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour." We must not only keep our hands from evil, but we must watch over our hearts, that they imagine not any evil against our neighbour. 4. There must be abhorrence of falsehood. "Love no false oath." II. The SIGNAL MANIFESTATIONS. It is suggested that where these pre-requisites are found, *i.e.* where a revival takes place, three things are manifest. 1. An increased pleasure in religious ordinances. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; the fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts." "The fast of the fourth month was on account of the taking of Jerusalem (*Jer. xxxix. 2, lii. 5-7*); that of the tenth was in commemoration of the commencement of the siege (*Jer. lli. 4*). The Jews are distinctly informed that these fasts should be turned into festivals of joy."—Henderson. The first sign of a true revival of religion in an individual or a community is a new and happy interest in the ordinances of religion. Another sign is—2. A deep practical concern for the spiritual interests of the race. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; It shall yet come to pass that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also." There will be a mutual excitation amongst the people to seek the one true and living God. "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord." "Speedily," there is no time to be lost; religion is for all, and for all an urgent duty. Another sign is—3. An universal desire to be identified with the people of God. "In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men—a definite number for an indefinite multitude, indicating many rather than a few—shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a JEW." Conclusion—When will this universal revival of religion take place? The signs are scarcely visible anywhere. We can only hasten it by attending to the pre-requisites. (*Homilist.*) *Lying and false oaths*:—Honesty and policy cannot live in the same heart. Who can make anything of the liar? He is the worst of all men. He has lost the higher qualities of manhood, yet the base deceiver can shudder when he sees a poor drunken man who may be a saint compared with himself. The liar cannot be converted, unless it be by the whole force of the Deity. He is hollow, he has killed his conscience, he has sold his honour. Never allow a liar to come into your house. The liar is a composite sinner; he sins all round, or would sin in any direction and every direction if it would serve his purpose so to do. Have faith in every man that loves truth. Though he fall seven times a day he shall stand at eventide. Any sins that lie along the line of passion are nothing as compared with sins of deliberation, plan, scheme, thoroughly wrought out, purposed. I have known many a soul overborne by gusts from the bottomless pit, not wanting moral beauty and fine quality, but I have never known a liar that was worth being touched by the point of the longest instrument ever fashioned by human hands. Lying is so subtle, too. It is not vulgar deception in all cases. There is a falsehood that is calculation,

a very fine process of putting things together and totalling them up into certain results and considering whether those results are worth realising. Lying may be speechless. It is a mistake to say that lies are always "told": lies are acted, lies are suggested, lies are inferential. Christ came to give us the spirit of truth. Truth is a spirit. It is not a mere way of stating facts. A man may contradict himself in his statement of facts and be true at the soul. Verbal discrepancies are nothing: the meaning of the heart is everything. When an honest soul corrects itself there is nobility in the very act of self-correction; you see the candour, you appreciate the withdrawal or the addition or the modification of former statements, as the case may be. A truthful man never thinks of his own consistency; a truthful man cannot be inconsistent. So-called inconsistency in his case is accidental, superficial, transient, explicable. The man's consistency is in his soul: what he means to be, that he is. Of all liars perhaps the young liar is the worst. It ought not so to be. The boy, the young man, should not lie. He should be so heroic and fearless as even to blurt out the truth when he does not tell it in sequential order. It should not occur to his young soul to falsify. Yet if one were to write the history of young hearts in any family and in any city, society could not live; we would fly away from one another as men fly from suddenly disclosed serpents. "Love no false oath," saith the text. "False oath"—what ironies there are in expression! "False balance"—what an affront to geometry! "False oath"—what an offence to righteousness! "False prophet"—what a shock to the spirit of the sanctuary! "False brethren"—who can live? The Bible grows upon our conscience and our whole moral nature by the sublimity of its criticisms and the loftiness of its spiritual appeals. The Bible will have truth everywhere, because it will first have truth in the soul. Do not treat the symptoms of your case: get at the radical disease. It is poor curing that is done by mere plasters. Only the cure that starts from the centre and works out towards the circumference brings with it summer redness to the cheek, summer brightness to the eyes. God condemns sin and all evil things in detail because they are ruinous to the man. They are spoiling the work of God's hands, they are overturning the purpose of God's heart. The sinner is a suicide. "He that sinneth against Me," saith the Scripture, "wrongeth his own soul." Think of a man committing plunder upon his own nature, stealing from himself every element that makes him a man! I have known liars that succeeded for a few months; I have before my mind at this moment three liars, all under five-and-twenty years of age, who lied and robbed and did evil with both hands, and to-night they are refuse; they are avoided by all who know the rottenness and pestilence of their character. Thus sin takes a man down line by line, faculty by faculty. Sin sucks the Divine juice out of a man. You cannot allow one evil thought to pass through your sensitive brain without leaving that brain weaker and poorer. The temptation came and left ruin behind. The temptation itself is not sin unless it is yielded to, but if the temptation have hospitality one moment in the brain it takes off some fine film, some subtle veil through which the brain saw somewhat of God. The poet can drink himself into idiocy; the genius, the master magician of words, can so treat his body that his soul will not think for him. It will give up and abandon the altar where once it burned. God sees therefore that sin ruins the man. The sinner himself goes down. The things are not only hateful to God, they are ruinous to the people who practise them. You cannot over-eat yourself, and pray; you cannot soak your body in evil liquids, and then sing, you can sound the notes, but the subtle, spiritual, Divine music is gone. When fire has left the altar what is the altar? (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. Therefore love the truth and peace.—*The love of the truth*:—This solemn admonition may seem to derive additional weight from the consideration that it is almost the concluding message which the prophet Zechariah delivered to his countrymen. (Probably only the first eight chapters were written by Zechariah.) The admonition was well suited to the particular condition of the Jews at that time. The warning is even more applicable to us, baptized Christians. As Christians it is expected of us that we should "love the truth and peace." Attend especially to the love for religious "truth." Many take for granted that it signifies little whether they embrace the truth or not. Religion is not a matter which comes much into their thoughts. It is a common sentiment, that if a person is but sincere in his religion, it signifies little what that religion is, true or false; if he is but sincere and in earnest, he is, they think,

equally acceptable in the sight of God. Others cannot be said to "love the truth," in that they do not put their hearts and minds to it, but satisfy themselves with shallow and imperfect views on the greatest and most concerning of all subjects.

1. Those who have no care for religious truth. It is a dictate not merely of religion, but even of natural piety and common sense, that we should make such inquiry as we can into the truth of our spiritual condition. 2. Those who think sincerity sufficient. Persons who think one belief is as good as another, strike at the very foundations of all religious truth. 3. Those who do not put their minds and hearts to the truth. Their religion, though good so far as it goes, is yet of a very shallow and imperfect character. Let not serious and thoughtful minds be frightened at the name of bigotry, or any other term of reproach, but steadily cherish in themselves a substantial love of God's holy truth, always remembering that the truth will stand, and nothing else will. There is a good kind of bigotry, when we resolve to stand firm on faith and obedience, in faith relying on God's Word, and in obedience on His will, however made known to us. (*Sermons by Contrib. "Tracts for the Times."*)

Love to the truth and peace.—Unperverted love is one of the noblest, most useful, and comprehensive affections of the heart. Essential to the moral nature of man, it is, as refined by the energies of the Spirit, and suitably exercised, the fulfilling of the law, the sum of religion, and our assimilation to the God of love. No arguments can be necessary to prove that truth is better than error, and peace than contention. In order that the returned captives might at once express their gratitude for the past, and insure continued and increasing prosperity, the prophet delivers the injunction in the text, "Therefore love the truth and peace." It is not restrictively the truth of judgment, nor the speaking of truth between man and man, but religious truth in general, or the mind and will of God made known to them in the law and by the prophets, which the house of Jacob are here required to love: and therefore, agreeably to the economy under which she is placed, the truth to be loved by the Christian Church is the entire system of evangelical doctrine, or "the truth as it is in Jesus." The peace which is to be loved in conjunction with the truth, is that good understanding and spirit of conciliation, which ought to characterise the embodied friends of religion.

I. TRUTH AND PEACE ARE SUBJECTS OF HIGH IMPORTANCE IN THEMSELVES AND TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. That evangelical truth is highly important, and ought to be dearly valued, will be conceded by all, the moment we think of it as God's revealed will to men for salvation. With the true knowledge of it, eternal life is closely, inseparably connected. In a general view, it is the only appointed and approved means of the world's moral transformation. To the individual believing sinner, it is the blessed instrument of his illumination and progressive sanctity. An accurate comparison of it with truth of every other kind would only serve to establish its glorious superiority. We learn the unspeakable value of the truth from the wonderful concern that the God of truth Himself has had and uniformly manifested about it. The supereminent importance of evangelical truth might be demonstrated from the evil nature, the ruinous consequences of error. But, in connection with truth, peace also is of high importance in itself and in the Church. Peace of any kind, and particularly peace in the household of faith, if built upon right principles, will be dearly valued by every wise and good mind. In proportion as the friends of religion live peaceably among themselves, they are just what it becomes them to be. Peace of the right kind has a most benign influence on the spiritual interests of the Church.

II. IT MAY BE THE ATTAINMENT OF THE CHURCH TO HAVE THE POSSESSION OF THE TRUTH AND PEACE AT THE SAME TIME. Absolutely, or without any exception, this has rarely or ever been. Still in some happy degree it may be the attainment of the Church in her aggregate state. Christendom, it must be confessed, furnishes at present no very favourable specimen of the point in hand. But this neither disproves our position, nor forbids the hope that it shall yet be realised.

III. THOUGH BOTH ARE VERY PRECIOUS, TRUTH IS YET ENTITLED TO THE FIRST AND PRE-EMINENT CONSIDERATION OF THE CHURCH. Rightly do we associate truth with the very idea of the Church. We cannot think of what the Church owes to the truth, and not insist that, next to its Divine Author, it merits her first consideration. To it she owes her very existence. In forming, however, a comparative estimate between truth and peace, it would not be right to exalt truth at the expense of peace. Everything bland in language, and courteous in demeanour—everything comprised in the meekness of wisdom and the gentleness of Christ—every attainable degree of patience and candour in research—these and a thousand other

things are to be offered, and willingly offered, at the shrine of holy concord. It is possible to give away too much, even for precious peace. Such a case would occur if amity were purchased by the surrender of any saving truth. For the sake of internal tranquillity, the Church may and ought to give away much of her own; but she has no right to barter the truth of God for peace with man. On the other hand, however, so inestimably precious is truth, that more than its worth cannot be given for it. Such views are, indeed, in letter and spirit at variance with a given species of modern liberality.

IV. THE BEST AND SUREST PEACE IN THE CHURCH IS THAT WHICH HAS TRUTH FOR ITS FOUNDATION. The precedence of truth is not a mere arbitrary, but, if we would enjoy true peace, a necessary distinction. Truth is as essential to the being of peace as the cause to the effect, and must precede it, as the foundation must be laid before the superstructure.

V. THE GREAT THINGS WHICH THE LORD HATH DONE FOR THE CHURCH, OR ENGAGES TO DO, LAY HER UNDER SACRED OBLIGATIONS TO LOVE THE TRUTH AND PEACE. Obviously the text assumes the form of deduction. Learn from this subject—1. The moral nature of the true glory of the Church. 2. That genuine love to the truth and peace would be a presage of good to the Church. 3. That the ministers of religion have a most honourable and delightful employ. In a ministerial sense, peace-makers between God and man, and so also between man and man. Our vocation gives scope to all our powers and our unwearied exertions. 4. This subject gives us right to insist that the members of our association should be, without exception, the sincere and ardent lovers of truth and peace. (*Robert Muter, D.D.*)

On reading works of fiction :—When the use and love of fiction is so general, it would be of little avail to speak against it. God has made the imagination part of our nature for wise purposes, no doubt; and so long as those purposes are ascertained and kept in view, there cannot be much danger. The mind cannot be always on the stretch. If fiction is occasionally used to refresh weary powers, to lift up into the world of fancy for a time, one who is tired of walking on the dusty road of existence, such an indulgence is not to be blamed; nor is it inconsistent with that love of truth which is essential to the mind of a man as well as the character of a Christian. But there is danger of excess in this indulgence; these luxuries cannot be the daily bread of the mind. The effect of these fictions on the mind exactly resembles the effect of rich and stimulating food on the body. That caution is necessary may be seen from the tendency of this taste for fiction to become excessive and engrossing. And fact proves it to be an unhealthy taste, and one which cannot be indulged without injury to the mind. There is no danger that the taste for reading true history will ever become excessive :—it is healthy in itself, and indicates right action in the mind. The taste for fiction dislodges and removes better tastes from the mind. Let your taste for fiction be so much indulged that you can no longer relish reading for improvement, and the injury is done; the mind is no longer healthy. There is another danger, arising from the fact, that the mind is passive, perfectly passive, in this kind of reading. In reading for improvement the mind is active. In reading for amusement the mind is not in action. It originates no trains of thought; it gains no new strength, nor power of action; but, on the contrary, subsides into a luxurious, dreamy state, very much resembling that produced by narcotics, and which, fascinating though it is, destroys all moral and intellectual energy, and makes self-indulgence the ruling principle within. There is little force in the common saying, that good moral instruction can be given in a fictitious form. Nobody doubts this; but there is another question, Can such instruction be taken in a fictitious form? Emotions which do not lead to action grow less and less every time they are repeated. Tears are shed, as usual, for they cost nothing, but the heart grows cold. Fictions only produce a fictitious benevolence. A reader of fiction becomes the sure victim of the immoral and unprincipled author whom he reads. His moral and religious sensibility will be impaired. Of course all writers of fiction are not immoral. If there are not many writers of this description, if the majority are of a higher order, still the very best of them will do injury, because they will create a taste for fiction which can only be fed by fiction. When the works of the best writers are exhausted, the reader will resort to others less worthy; he will not perceive the degenerating change that goes on within him; he will not be conscious that his moral sense is dead and all his soul in ruins. This unconsciousness of danger is one of the most fearful things in all diseases of the mind and heart. If any one would know the signs of danger, I say, that if he has lost the taste, or never formed

the taste for reading for improvement, there is injury already done. If he finds that it gives him no pleasure to exert his powers, that improvement alone has no attractions, that he turns to his fiction like the intemperate man to his glass, then the charge, "Love the truth," should be a serious sound to him. It reminds him of a perverted taste, of a neglected duty; and of a change, too, which must be made before the purposes of life can be fulfilled. (*W. B. O. Peabody, D.D.*)

Vers. 20-22. **Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord.**—*Nations meeting for prayer* :—A scene like this has never yet been witnessed upon the earth. The prophecy was partially fulfilled when, from the time of the rebuilding of the temple to the coming of the Saviour, a more than usual number of Gentile proselytes from the nations around sought admission into the Jewish Church, and attended the annual festivals. **I. THE OBJECT OF THIS GATHERING OF THE NATIONS.** "To pray." The time is coming when the nations will crowd to the feast of devotion. The result of the awakening of the nations will be a universal movement for concentrated prayer. **II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THIS GATHERING OF THE NATIONS FOR PRAYER.** They are described as many cities, strong nations, and all languages. Isaiah, wrapt in the vision of the future, beholds all the tribes of mankind, instigated by one common and irresistible impulse, flocking along the road to Zion, panting to be within its holy walls, and to pour out their prayers in her courts. **III. THE PROMPTITUDE OF THEIR DECISION.** This heaven-originated movement for universal prayer will be felt to be a matter demanding immediate attention. "Let us go speedily." When the Spirit is poured out from on high, all the speed and promptitude with which men pursue inferior ends will be consecrated to religion. Universal man will feel it his first duty to serve God. **IV. THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF THIS MOVEMENT.** No mighty movement takes place among masses of mankind until individuals have been moved. The world is but the aggregate of single individuals. Every individual must act his part. If men smother the enkindled fires of ardent devotion in their own breasts, till they see the zeal of others manifested, that day of prayer for all nations will never dawn. Every man is to invite to prayer, and at the same time resolve for himself. Then seek to be distinguished as a devotional Christian—a man of prayer. Then you will seek the society of men like-minded with yourself, and thus the holy flame will be borne onward, till every soul is enkindled, the Church revived, and the world saved. (*Evangelical Preacher.*) *God everywhere for those who seek Him* :—1. We are here reminded of our high and distinguishing privileges, as subjects of the Christian economy, in relation to the outward institutions of religion, and all that is commanded in the worship and service of God. When we would offer our devotions in His presence, we need no longer travel from one city to another, ascending to the house of the Lord. Wherever we seek Him, He is equally near, and equally accessible. Great and important purposes were once attained by the selection of a definite abode, wherein to place the sensible demonstrations of His majesty. It was in accordance with the infantile condition of the human mind on the great subject of religion. It repressed the tendency to mingle with the idol-worship of the surrounding nations. It secured the permanency of the ordinances of the true God, till the coming of Messiah. By the final cessation of such services, soon after the death of Jesus, it marked that the Messiah had appeared, that the fullness of the times had been accomplished. 2. We are led to reflect upon that singular and elevated relation we now personally sustain to Him who was once known and worshipped only under the appellation of the God of Abraham. We have come to the family and household of the saints. This incorporation of the idolatrous heathen with the seed of the promise—this accession of the Gentiles to the Church—while it presents a subject of gratitude and wonder, is fitted also to expand our sentiments and to confirm our faith; and it leads us to anticipate a day when the Gospel shall universally prevail. 3. An interesting and attractive picture of a period of spiritual prosperity. (1) The period thus described is marked by the diffusion of the spirit of prayer. (2) Under the aspect of unity and mutual co-operation. (3) Signalled by the prevalence of activity, energy, and zeal. "Let us go speedily. Let us go to seek the Lord of hosts." (4) The last characteristic of the period so depicted is the inseparable and intimate connection of all its other features with the decisiveness of individual piety. "I will go also." 4. Apply these reflections to purposes of immediate and practical utility. (*R. S. M'Al, LL.D.*) *Spiritual prosperity described* :—The text is part of the answer given to the question asked in chap. vii. 2, 3. 1. There are many false notions abroad

respecting religious prosperity—crowded Churches—forms in the aisles—full exchequer; such things are taken by some as a sure sign of a Church's vitality. Flying here and there—doing this, that, and the other in three minutes, and making a great noise, are looked upon by some as signs of saintship, and indications of true religious prosperity. And they may be, but not necessarily so; because outward manifestation is not always a sign of true strength. But we have true signs, unmistakable signs, described in the text. I. DELIGHT IN PRAYER. "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord." 1. Thus there is a gathering together. It is a regular prayer-meeting, and it is in answer to united prayer that blessings come. Illustrations: Day of Pentecost. Liberation of Peter. And it is only when Churches feel the importance of this that a true revival comes. 2. Not only must we pray, but we must seek the Lord as well—give God no rest until He answers prayer. II. HARMONY AND CO-OPERATION. "And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying," &c. When will the different Churches of the different denominations learn the importance of united prayer? When shall we have done with our little differences and distinctions, and kneel as one family round the throne? God speed the day. III. A SPIRIT OF ZEAL. "Let us go speedily." 1. There will be no lagging behind. It is not, Let us have a prayer-meeting to-morrow; let us turn unto the Lord soon; but, Let us do it now. IV. PERSONAL DEDICATION. "I will go also." 1. It is no uncommon thing for people to ask others to do what they don't like to engage in themselves. How inspiring it is to hear the exhortation, "Do this, and I will do it too." "You go and pray before the Lord; I will accompany you." When this spirit is actuating the members of a Church, the result will be surely seen—in the earnestness and goodwill which exist—sinners saved—church-roll increasing—joy in heaven—comment of the world. "Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (*Christian World Pulpit.*) Revival:—Suggesting the benefits of a spiritual revival. 1. That the possession of religious life awakens interest in others. "And the inhabitants, &c., shall go," &c. 2. That a revived religious life sets value on prayer. "Let us go to pray before the Lord." 3. This revived life realises the importance and value of time. "Let us go speedily." 4. Revived life constrains us to seek companionship. "Let us go." Christians are gregarious. 5. Revived spiritual life ensures a powerful influence over our companions. They said, "We will go with you." (*J. H. Snell.*)

Ver. 23. **We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.**—*A wise and good resolution*:—The kingdom of God was to be no longer confined to one nation or people; but multitudes in different climates, and the most distant parts of the earth, should submit to Christ as their ruler, and trust Him as their Saviour. The term "Jew" in this connection is descriptive of character rather than of person, and is to be understood of any one who is an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile; any humble and sincere believer, who adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. In the days here predicted such characters shall be highly esteemed. I. THE RESOLUTION—"WE WILL GO WITH YOU." This language implies—1. Approbation and affectionate regard. When grace opens the eyes of a sinner, and takes possession of his heart, those persons and things are contemplated with delight, which before were the objects of aversion and scorn. 2. Earnest desire and a holy determination, if permitted, to associate with the people of God. The same disposition of mind which causes us to cleave to the Lord makes us of one heart with His people. 3. It implies an union of interests as well as of affection. True religion teaches us to renounce all other interests and attachments, to forsake our own people and our father's house, and cast in our lot with the people of God. 4. A holy ambition to learn of the people of God and to imitate their example. Congeniality of sentiment and feeling is the foundation of religious union, and where that union subsists there will be a desire after a nearer assimilation. 5. Fellowship and communion in Gospel worship and discipline are also included. To those who properly consult their own interest and the glory of God, fellowship with the saints will not only be an article of faith, but an object of fervent desire. One of the ancient fathers thought it a greater honour to be the member of a Christian Church than head of the Roman Empire. This will not only contribute to our safety, by providing a defence against apostasy, but also to our comfort and usefulness; for communion with the saints is oftentimes a step towards communion with God. II. THE GROUND OF THE RESOLUTION. "For we have heard that God

is with you." We have heard from the Divine Word, wherein this blessing is promised and declared. We have heard it from yourselves. You have acknowledged His protection and the consolation arising from the Divine presence. We have heard it from others, who observed how your faces shone when you came down from the mount. God is naturally and necessarily present with all His creatures; but He is in a gracious and special manner present with His own people. He draws near and manifests Himself unto them as He does not unto the world. They experience the care of His providence, and enjoy the smiles of His countenance. He walks with them through the wilderness, He communes with them by the way, He puts His everlasting arms underneath them, and they doubt not of their interest in His favour. Then they can glory in tribulation, bid defiance to the powers of darkness, and look death in the face without fear. We may hence learn—1. That seclusion from all society is neither the Christian's duty nor his privilege. 2. As the presence of God with His people is the principal inducement for others to join themselves to their society, how solicitous should they be to improve this sacred privilege, by seeking much communion with God. The ways of Zion would not so often mourn, if Zion's God were more frequently in the midst of her. When primitive believers were edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the Churches were greatly multiplied (Acts ix. 31). 3. Young converts will learn from hence that it is their duty to unite in Christian society, when the Word and ordinances are faithfully administered. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Christian attraction*:—I. THE ATTRACTORS. They are called Jews. Generally a very despised people. Were all the countries to come to learn of them? Yes, to learn of them the knowledge of "Him whom to know is life eternal." Jesus Christ, His disciples, the writers of the New Testament, &c., were all Jews. The word Jew is not used here so as to distinguish Israelites from Gentiles, so much as saints from sinners; the Church of God, whose members may be derived from any nation, as they may live in any period. II. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS ATTRACTION. "Ten men," &c. This marks the number and also the variety of the proselytes or converts. It means simply a large and not a definite number. Among the Jews ten was the number of perfection. When they would render a number countless, they did it by attaching the word ten. By the ignorance of some, and the sneers of others, and the bigotry of still more, the people of God are now often improperly diminished. If there be a sense in which they may be considered a few, there is a sense also in which they are many, very many. A time is coming when a "nation shall be born in a day." Whatever croakers may think or do, there are better days for the world before us, than the world has ever yet seen. Variety is indicated as well as number. "Out of the languages of the nations." The Jewish religion, though of Divine origin, never could, in the nature of things, have become a general or universal religion. There is nothing in Christianity that is local, nothing that is restrictive. It regards man, not so much circumstantially considered, as essentially. It regards man in his grand wants. The Gospel provides for the whole of these wants. III. THE GROUNDS OF THE ATTRACTION. The Divine presence. As to His essential presence God is with *all* His creatures. God's presence in the way of promise or privilege means something distinguishable from the perfection of His nature. God is surely with such persons as He was not once; surely He is with such persons as these, as He is not now with others. IV. THE MEDIUM OF THIS ATTRACTION. It is the knowledge of their state and privilege. Nothing can affect us unless it be known. Though others may make known their religion, they must principally make it known themselves; and for this purpose they must not only be religious, but they must appear religious. Never be ashamed of your religion. If you have any religion, it will not be easy to conceal it; it will break out some way or other. Repentance will get into the eye, and be seen in tears. Meekness will sit in a man's face, and smile like a fine morning in May. It is not easy to restrain powerful emotion. Practically make known your religion to others: actions speak louder than words. Let your tempers tell; let your humility under applause tell; let your liberality with growing wealth tell; let your patience under affliction tell; let your readiness to forgive injuries tell. Let all these tell whose you are, what you are, whence you are born, and whither you are bound. V. THE EFFECT OF THE ATTRACTION. Knowledge is necessary to influence, but all knowledge is not influential. Uninfluential knowledge is worse than none. The knowledge of these people was effective: it constrained them to "lay hold," &c. This is a simple and striking expression. It

reminds of the little child pulling at his mother's clothes. Man is a social creature as soon as he comes under the power of religion: the social principle will be sanctified as well as other things; and the man will now be able easily enough (though you could not pull him away before) to give up the scenes of vice and vanity. Conclusion—1. See what it is that makes people valuable, and which should render them interesting and inviting to us. 2. Think of those who, instead of feeling the Divine presence an attraction, feel it to be a repulsion. 3. If such advantages are derivable from connection with the pious, be you concerned to obtain union with them. 4. Let your religion be not only impressive but attractive. Some professors have so much of the repulsive about them that it is not likely any person will ever "take hold of their skirts, saying, We will go with you." Whitfield says, "God lives with some that I should not live with, and that I could not live with." (*William Jay*.)

Our obligations to the Jews.—So far from joining in the illiberal scorn, too generally poured by men, called Christians, on the dispersed Jews, I feel for them as I should for a father, who had, indeed, disgraced himself, and whose conduct could not even be palliated; but who, after all, was still a father. I. EXPLAIN AND ILLUSTRATE THIS WONDERFUL PROPHECY. The God of the Jews, long unknown, except to that obscure and oppressed people, is now the professed object of worship throughout the mightiest and most distinguished nations in the world! This is a fact which cannot be denied or doubted. Such an extraordinary revolution has taken place; and the prophecy of our text was suited to excite the expectation of it. But in what way, and by what means and instruments was it effected? Unless these also accord with the prediction, the fulfilment must be allowed to be imperfect and dubious. From the text we see that whatever means should be employed by the Jews, compulsion was not one of them; the conduct of the persons concerned was perfectly voluntary and the effect of conviction. Even the persuasion and fascination of oratory, as separated from the conviction of the understanding and conscience, producing the outward profession, would not be an unequivocal completion of the prophecy. The instances of Gentiles converted to Judaism, before the coming of Christ, can by no means be considered as fulfilling this prophecy. But reflect on the events which followed the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of our Divine Redeemer, the "Light of the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel." Not only did the apostles, and especially the great apostle of the Gentiles, attract the attention of immense multitudes among the heathen, by faithful preaching; by stupendous miracles, as benevolent as powerful; by a holy example; by patient sufferings, "not counting their lives dear unto themselves"; and by indefatigable labours, without any other recompense from man than additional sufferings; not only did evangelists and subordinate ministers prosper, but Jews, converted to Christianity, though not ministers, though obscure in station and of slender abilities, by an union of universal conscientiousness, cheerfulness in poverty, patience under persecution and in the most distressing circumstances, and meekness, with persevering benevolence, amidst all manner of provocations and injuries, won over multitudes of the idolaters to "go with them." At what other time, or in what other way, has this prophecy been actually fulfilled? II. THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROPHECY HAS LAID US UNDER OBLIGATIONS TO THE JEWS WHICH EXCEED ALL CALCULATION. We "owe even our own selves" to the Jews; in addition to the common debt of goodwill, and compassion, and liberal, active love, which we owe to men in general. Shall we then make only feeble and heartless exertions, where the salvation of the Jewish people is concerned? III. A STILL MORE SIGNAL FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY IN THE TEXT WILL MOST CERTAINLY TAKE PLACE, AND AT NO VERY REMOTE PERIOD. In the final event the nation of Israel shall be restored from their dispersions, placed under the government of their promised Messiah, and (as far as I can judge) reinstated in their own land. (*Thomas Scott*.)

Purpose of God regarding the Jews.—Curious inquiry into the future, and confident prediction as to times and seasons, are both to be eschewed. The former is unprofitable; the latter is most presumptuous. But we must not run from one extreme to another. It is as much our duty now to "discern this time," as it was the duty in our Lord's day to discern that time. We ought to look behind us, around us, before us, and anticipate the next act of the world's mighty drama. The dispensation of Gentile mercy has now lasted for nearly 2000 years. But it is not designed to be eternal. We have plainly laid down for us in Holy Scripture the signs which shall mark its closing in, when God shall turn Himself to the Jew again. And we are as much bound to look at

these signs now as the Jew was in his day. These signs are four in number. Two given by our Lord Himself, and two by the prophet Daniel. 1. "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. xxiv. 14). Our Lord's second sign is a painful one. "Iniquity shall abound" (Matt. xxiv. 12). Daniel's first sign is, "Many shall run to and fro." His second is like unto it. "Knowledge shall be increased." Let us look around us, behind us, before us; do we see anything like the fulfilment of these predicted signs? He must be blind indeed who does not see the first sign advancing rapidly to its fulfilment, in the Gospel of the kingdom published to all nations. There are now afloat in the world about two hundred million copies of a translated Bible. This enormous circulation is seconded by corresponding preaching. But the world is not yet converted? No, for Christ's sign is not its conversion, but His Gospel preached as a witness. The Christian Church is now gathering the first-fruits of the earth. Everyone has the fulfilment before him of Daniel's sign, "Many shall run to and fro." In this the prophet gives us exactly the characteristic of the present age. Daniel's second sign is equally manifest in our time. It is the amazing progress of science which has enabled us to avail ourselves of the powers of nature. With all this running to and fro, and all this advance of knowledge, is the world to go on improving in its spiritual and moral character? Our Lord's last sign, "iniquity shall abound," affirms the contrary. And His apostle explains in detail the meaning of His Master's words (2 Tim. ii. 1-4). There are too many signs that these perilous times are already upon us. Never in the experience of civilised Christendom has crime been so audacious as now. As the times of the Gentiles seem closing in, the Jew is coming again into prominence. May we then expect that the Jew will come up once more as a nation, to act his part in the world's great drama? Distinguished expositors tell us that the prophecies respecting the Jews have all been fulfilled in the past, and no prophecy whatever respects the Jews in the future. When were the solemn words of the text fulfilled? Judah returned from Babylon, indeed, but it was to remain in the midst of the nations, a humbled and despised people. But they shall be fulfilled when, in the words of St. Paul, the Jews shall be as life from the dead to the nations of the earth, and a world's love and gratitude and devotion shall be their spontaneous and most abundant recompense. (*William Tai, D.D.*)

Uniting with God's people.—The passage seems primarily to refer to the general conversion of Gentile nations. We consider the text as it may apply to those who, having been awakened to a sense of their ruined condition, resolve to consecrate themselves to God and His people. I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GOD BEING WITH HIS PEOPLE? 1. God's essential presence is everywhere. 2. God's glorious presence is in heaven. 3. His terrible presence is felt in the abodes of the lost. 4. His providential presence is seen in the government and regulation of the world. 5. His presence referred to in the text is His gracious presence. He is with His Church in the exercise of His love and favour. As their Head, Friend, Prophet, Mediator, and King. II. THE EVIDENCES OF GOD'S PRESENCE. External splendour, great wealth, a multitude of members, are not evidence. 1. Scriptural doctrine is an evidence. 2. So is purity of ordinances. 3. So is brotherly love. 4. When Divine changes are produced in the power of the Gospel. 5. When the reproach of the Cross is endured. III. THE INFLUENCE THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE CHURCH SHALL PRODUCE ON THOSE WHO ARE WITHOUT. "We will go with you," &c. This resolution implies—1. Dissatisfaction with their present condition. 2. Earnest desire to be united with God's people. (*J. Burns.*)

The supernatural in religion.—By supernatural is meant that which is above nature, above and beyond what natural causes, coupled with human agency, might produce. The reason why effort is made to take the supernatural out of religion is that already God is taken out of the universe. Having already taken an intelligent, reasoning, personal God out of the universe, as a matter of course everything supernatural must come out of the Bible, and out of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ; and there is nothing anywhere above nature, and above the power of human agency. This is the philosophy—this is the religion that modern rationalism proposes to give to mankind. But in taking all that is supernatural out of religion, it takes away religion itself. The supernatural may be predicated of religion in two distinct senses. 1. Historical. Every system of religion that has claimed the assent of the human mind, and the acceptance of the human heart, has claimed a supernatural origin. This claim arises out of a law of mind. The effect must be in harmony with the cause. The supernatural of the Christian religion is evinced

in the two great branches of evidence—miracles and prophecy. 2. Another depart in religion is more important. Its intrinsic character as it now is. All that is supernatural in religion, whether it be considered historically or intrinsically, arises out of the being or presence of God in it, or with it. If there is a God He may surely do that which is above nature itself; for if He created all things, that act of creation was something above nature. God is the author of nature, the author of its laws, and of its being. The great underlying cause of the supernatural, historically and intrinsically in religion, is, God present with His people. The idea of the Divine coming down to mankind and communing with men runs through every form of religion. If there be a God, He is somewhere, in some relationship; He is with or without the power of fellowship. If He be without it, He is below the lowest living creatures He has made. If He be with it, He is above all. He can speak to an archangel; He can speak to my heart. There is only one possible reason why God should withdraw Himself from men, and that reason is sin. God's presence among His people will be manifested, will assert itself. There are several ways in which the presence of God among His people indicates itself. 1. In the superior knowledge of God that prevails among His people. How come we to have a more accurate knowledge of God than the pagan nations? 2. There is an indication of God's presence among His people in their superior, intellectual, moral, and religious condition. Compare Christian and pagan nations in this regard. 3. There is a manifestation of God's presence with His people in the direct impression that is made upon the consciousness of men. In the olden time, God revealed Himself under visible forms. God has been educating the race away from its dependence on the senses. Our Lord Jesus Christ formed a point of transition. Now, there is a manifestation of God to the human consciousness, so that when God comes into my soul I can recognise Him, and know that it is God who is coming in. 4. God's presence among His people is manifested in the works of power accomplished. "No man can do these miracles which Thou doest, except God be with Him." 5. God manifests His presence and power in the singular experience that He gives to human souls. Take as a practical lesson from this subject, that our greatest need is God, God in Jesus Christ, God by the Holy Ghost dwelling within us, shining out of the eye and out of the life, and God living in us, so that we form part of the Divine life, so that it shall shine out of us. O for the presence of God to be more and more distinctly apprehended among His people. (*Dr. Kynett.*) *Admission of the Gentiles*.—The form of this prophecy is highly dramatic. The scope of it is to predict the introduction of the Gentiles into the theocracy, and the consequent enlargement of the Church. This is described by a bold and beautiful personification. To seize the hem of the garment is a gesture of earnestness, importunity, and perseverance, which is emphatic were it done by only a single person, but when done by ten persons, it becomes significant of an intensity of anxiety, and a depth of conviction, of the very highest grade. When this prediction was uttered nothing seemed more hopelessly improbable than its fulfilment. The Jews were a poor, despised, obscure tribe in the heart of Syria, whose existence was only known to the mighty world by their furnishing a trophy to the victorious arms of Babylon. Greece was just rising in the firmament of human history, and as she ascended to her brilliant zenith, her track was marked by the sweeping of the phalanxes of Alexander, and the legions of Antiochus, over the hills and valleys of Judæa. And yet this prophecy remained unfulfilled. At length the time arrived, and there came to Jerusalem "men out of every nation under heaven"; see Acts ii. Learn, that all true piety is instinct with the missionary spirit, desire for the salvation of others. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 1-8. The burden of the Word of the Lord.—*The dark and bright side of God's revelation to mankind*.—I. The DARK side of the Divine Word. Notice two things—1. In this aspect it is here called a "burden." The word "burden" is almost invariably used to represent a calamity. Thus we read of the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, the burden

of Tyre, the burden of Egypt, &c. 2. In this aspect it bears upon wicked men. The doomed peoples are here mentioned. They are in "the land of Hadrach." Whether Hadrach here means the land of Syria or the common names of the kings of Syria, it scarcely matters; the people of the place of which Damascus was the capital were the doomed ones. Besides these, there are the men of "Hamath," a country lying to the north of Damascus and joining the districts of Zobah and Rehob. And still more, there are "Tyrus" and "Zidon," places about which we often read in the Bible, and with whose history most students of the Bible are acquainted. "Ashkelon," "Gaza," and "Ekron," are also mentioned. These were the chief cities of the Philistines, and the capitals of different districts. All these peoples were not only enemies of the chosen tribe, but enemies of the one true and living God. History tells us how, through the bloody conquests of Alexander and his successors, this "burden of the Word of the Lord" fell with all its weight upon these people. Observe—(1) That the Bible is heavy with black threatenings to the wicked. (2) That these black threatenings will inevitably be fulfilled. All the threatenings here against the land of Hadrach, Hamath, Tyrus, Zidon, Gaza, Ekron, Ashkelon, and the Philistines were fulfilled. II. THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE DIVINE WORD. There is a beam of promise here (vers. 7, 8). The following is Dr. Keil's translation of these verses: "And I shall take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth, and he will also remain to our God and will be as a tribe prince in Judah, and Ekron like the Jebusite. I pitch a tent for My house against military power, against those who go to and fro, and no oppressor will pass over them any more, for now have I seen with My eyes." The promise in these words seems to be twofold—1. The deprivation of the power of the enemy to injure. The Bible promises to the good man the subjection of all his foes. 2. Divine protection from all their enemies. The Bible promises eternal protection to the good. (*Homilist.*) *Prophetic fulfilments*:—1. Every fulfilled prophecy is a distinct proof of the truth of the Bible—of its having been "given by inspiration of God." Prophecy is a miracle. We generally apply the word miracle to supernatural manifestations of power; but it is equally applicable to supernatural manifestations of knowledge. Knowledge of futurity belongs only to God. Jehovah frequently appeals to such foreknowledge of the future as one of His distinctive attributes. The accomplishment of Divine predictions stands out, incontestably, in the records of ancient history. 2. The true value of the evidences of revelation arises from the value of what is revealed. Were it of trivial importance, that would be itself a strong presumptive proof—almost, indeed, a conclusive one—that what professed to be a revelation had no real title to be so regarded. That which revelation does make known has in it to us a value beyond the powers of man or angel to estimate. It "shows unto us the way of salvation." This is its great discovery. It is no mere republication of the lessons of nature. It is not a mere volume of precepts. It does confirm all that nature teaches. It does set before us a perfect code of morals. But it does more: it addresses us not as creatures merely, but as sinners. It makes provision for us in this capacity—for our deliverance from the guilt, condemnation, and punishment of sin, and our restoration to the favour, the image, the enjoyment of God; and that for the eternity of our being. It is this that stamps every proof of the divinity of the Bible with such importance,—every species of evidence, and every variety of each species. The investigation of the evidence is what every man in his sane mind should feel to be the most momentous inquiry in which he can possibly be engaged. 3. The past fulfilment of prophecy should establish our "faith in God," regarding all that is yet future; and especially our "faith in God" as still in all His providential administration, having His eye upon the Church. His entire, extensive, and complicated administration is ever working out the development of the plan of salvation. 4. The enemies of God and of His people have cause to tremble. He will not leave either Himself or His people unavenged. He that "toucheth them toucheth the apple of His eye." It may at times be difficult to see on which side lies His favour; in seasons when "the ungodly prosper in the world," while "waters of a full cup are wrung out" to the faithful. In such seasons, love seems to be hidden, and even as inverting the order of its manifestations, and tempting the Christian to say—"How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" But when the whole comes to be set by God, and seen by men in the light of the final judgment, all will be clear. The distinction, then, between His people and His enemies, will

be fully, finally, and irreversibly marked; an everlasting separation made, and the "great gulf fixed between them." (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) *National judgments* :—1. The condition of all men is laid open to the eye of God, and He will appoint judgment or mercy according to that condition (ver. 1). 2. Worldly-wisdom is at last greatly inferior to that wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord (ver. 2). 3. However secure nations or men may think themselves in sin, their sin will be sure to find them out. Never has sin more proudly entrenched herself than in godless, but magnificent Tyre. Never has every element of earthly prosperity seemed more completely under control than in her case. And yet they were all swept like chaff before the whirlwind of the wrath of God, when the time for the fulfilment of His threatenings had come. Hence though nations now trample on law and right, and seem long to flourish in their sin, let not the child of God be impatient. Let him remember that two hundred years passed away after the utterance of these threatenings against Tyre, and she seemed stronger than ever, and yet when the day of doom had dawned, the galleys that left her on their stated voyages the peerless queen of the seas, when they returned found her but a bare and blackened rock, a lonely monument of the truth, that our God is a consuming fire. If then, God thus executes His threats, even on a mighty commonwealth, in spite of His delay, let not the fact that judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily cause the hearts of the sons of men to be fully set in them to do evil. Let men remember that it is a falsehood to violate a threatening as much as to violate a promise, and that God will not make Himself a liar to save man in his sins (vers. 3-7). 4. Amidst all the tumults of nations, the true people of God are safe, being guarded by the arm of Almightyness (ver. 8). (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

Vers. 9, 10. *Thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation.*—*Palm Sunday* :—This prophecy was generally recognised by the Jews as referring to the Messiah. First of all, prophecy spoke only of Messiah's glory. It was not until the era of the Captivity that we find Christ spoken of as the Man afflicted and stricken, the Hind pursued by the buffaloes and dogs, the King lowly, and riding upon an ass. When the prophet declared that Messiah should come riding upon an ass, it was taken as an indication that He should be a prophet-King. In the Talmud it is said for this reason that to dream of an ass is to dream of the coming of salvation. To the Gentiles this, like other features of our Lord's work, was a constant subject of mockery. The Persian King, Sapor, promised the rabbis that when their Messiah came who should ride upon an ass, he would send Him a horse. It was a common scoff among the Mohammedans that whereas Mohammed was "the rider upon a camel," Christ was "that rider upon an ass." Christ only entered Jerusalem riding on an ass, to bring before us a necessary illustration of His character and office. 1. Though He was King of kings, yet He is the Lowly One. The Hebrew word expresses the condition of a man who has been brought low by affliction and sorrow, possessing in himself the fruit of this sorrow in lowliness and submission of mind. In this sense the word is used of Moses, the "meekest of men." Messiah is "stricken and afflicted." Our Lord applies this character to Himself, "I am meek and lowly in heart." And this trait must especially distinguish all who follow Him into His kingdom. 2. Lowliness not only expressed the character of the King, but the character also of the kingship. The victory of Messiah is to be over the very things which are esteemed mighty in the world. As in nature, the brute force of the beast is conquered by the skill of man, and the forces of matter overcome by the power of mind, so in the kingdom of Christ all powers of body and mind are subdued to the power of the Spirit which is made perfect in human weakness. All through the history of Israel, God's hand had thus been made manifest in the casting down of strongholds. When, therefore, Jerusalem rejected the Messiah, she became like the fallen powers which were before her, a power of this world, aiming at success by the world's methods, looking forward to the world's splendour, and receiving the world's downfall for her reward. She knew not the day of her visitation. Let us not indulge only in pity for the fallen city which opposed itself so madly to the kingdom of Christ. The world—even the Christian world—is very far from this subjection to the kingdom of Christ. When we see how faintly Christian principles as yet influence the policies of nations, our impatient spirit is filled with dismay. We are ready to believe that Christianity has gained extension at the cost of intension, that men have been made Christians at the cost of Christianity, and that it had been better

if the conversion of Europe had been slower rather than speedier. If it be so, what remedy is there so effective and so apposite as the intension of Christian claims upon ourselves, individually and now, the realisation now of the severe claim which Christianity makes upon the will and the life of each of us? A country is conquered by the capitulation of one castle after another; even so Christ's kingdom comes by the yielding up of individual hearts. What a glorious triumph we can make for Christ in our hearts to-day! With hearts bowed down in lowliest sense of sin, emptied of all self-trust, filled with the sense of God's love and passion for the world, we shall be ready then to receive the lowly King, and to be made partakers of the kingly spirit. (*H. H. Gower.*) *The ideal monarch of the world:*

—I. Here is a monarch, the ADVENT OF WHOM IS A MATTER FOR RAPTUREOUS JOY. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem." Christ's advent to the world was announced by the gladsome music of angelic choirs. "Glory to God in the highest," &c. Why rejoice at His advent? Because He will

—1. Promote all the rights of mankind. 2. Remove all the calamities of mankind.

II. Here is a monarch the DIGNITY OF WHOM IS UNAPPROACHED. "Thy King cometh unto thee." "Thy King." Thou hast never yet had a true king, and there is no other true king for thee: this is "thy" King. 1. The King who alone has the absolute right to rule thee. Thou art His, His property. All thy force, vitality, faculty, belong to Him. 2. The King who alone can remove thy evils and promote thy rights.

III. Here is a monarch the CHARACTER OF WHOM IS UNEXCEPTIONABLY GOOD. 1. He is righteous. "He is just." The little word "just" comprehends all virtues. He who is just to himself, just to his Maker, just to the universe, is the perfection of excellence, is all that Heaven requires. 2. He is humble. "Lowly, and riding upon an ass." Where there is not genuine humility there is no true greatness; it is essential to true majesty. Pride is the offspring of littleness, it is the contemptible production of a contemptible mind.

IV. Here is a monarch the MISSION OF WHOM IS TRANSCENDENTLY BENEFICENT. 1. It is remedial. "Having salvation." Salvation! What a comprehensive word, deliverance from all evil, restoration to all good. Any one can destroy; God alone can restore. 2. It is specific. "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim," &c. He will put an end to the "chariot," the "horse," the "battle-bow," of war, and "speak peace" to the nations. Peace! This is what the nations have always wanted. War has been and still is the great curse of the nations. V. Here is a monarch the REIGN OF WHOM IS TO BE UNIVERSAL. The language here employed was universally understood by the Jews as embracing the whole world. He claims universal dominion, He deserves it, and will one day have it. Learn—1. The infinite goodness of God in offering the world such a King. 2. The amazing folly and wickedness of man in not accepting this Divine offer. (*Homilist.*) *The personal and official character of Messiah:*—I. ROYAL DIGNITY. "Thy king cometh unto thee." The designation is emphatic. "Thy king," as if they had never had another. That royalty was to pertain to the coming Messiah might be shown from many predictions. He was to "sit" on the throne of David for ever. His being a king was anything but an objection to the Jews. But the kind of royalty was not at all to their minds. His kingdom was not to be "of this world." Its throne was not to be in this world. He was born of royal lineage—born a King; though, strictly speaking, His mediatorial reign did not commence till, having finished His work on earth, the Father said to Him, "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool." II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF HIS CHARACTER AND ADMINISTRATION. "He is just." The designation is to be understood as at once personal and official: for, indeed, were there not the former, there could be little reason to count upon the latter. This attribute is frequently ascribed to Him, as characterising Himself and His government. Jehovah calls Him "My righteous servant." His throne is founded in the very charter of righteousness. And His whole administration is conducted on the principles of the purest and most unbending righteousness. III. HIS SAVING GRACE AND POWER. "Having salvation." Salvation was the very object of His coming. "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." The very design of His atonement was to render salvation consistent with the claims of righteousness: so that Jehovah might be "a just God and a Saviour." When He had completed His work, He was to "have salvation," not only as being Himself delivered from death, but as possessing for bestowal on mankind all the blessings of "salvation"—beginning in pardon and ending in "life eternal." IV. THE HUMILITY AND MEEKNESS OF HIS CHARACTER. "Lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

This attribute of character distinguished His entire course; all His intercourse with men—with His friends, and with His enemies. Even His triumphs were lowly—"riding upon an ass"; and not one that had been trained for the use of royalty, but, as would appear, a rough unbroken colt. Although the ass was not the very mean and despised animal there that it is with us, yet comparatively it was so. The horse was the animal used in war; and consequently, in the triumphal processions of kings and conquerors; and on such occasions, arrayed in costly and elegant caparisons. V. THE MODE AND MEANS OF THE EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM CORRESPOND WITH ITS SPIRITUAL NATURE. "I will cut off," &c. This, at the coming of the Messiah, was literally true respecting the civil and military power of the Jewish people. At the very time when they were looking for a Messiah who was to break the yoke from off their neck, establish their temporal freedom and power, and lead them on to universal conquest, their power was finally overthrown and destroyed, their temple and city laid in ashes, and themselves scattered abroad among all nations. Yet the kingdom of the Messiah grew and prospered. This itself showed its true nature. It was not, as the Jews anticipated, to be a Jewish kingdom. It was to have subjects among all peoples. And these subjects were not to be gained for Him with the sword of steel, but by the "Sword of the Spirit," which is the Word of God. His kingdom consisted of all, wherever His truth spread, whom that truth made free—spiritually free. All thus made free come under willing and happy subjection to His gracious sceptre. Force never made one subject of the King of Zion. VI. ANOTHER CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS REIGN—"PEACE." "And He shall speak peace to the heathen." This is a feature of His reign frequently celebrated. By His gospel He speaks peace to sinners of mankind. There is no exception. VII. THE EXTENT OF HIS REIGN. The language employed here was universally understood by the Jews as embracing the whole world. In due time, "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ." (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The Saviour King* :—To us who read this prophecy in the light of its fulfilment in the advent and work and glory of Christ, all is plain and clear. Not so much by our Lord's particular act in riding into Jerusalem on the occasion, and in the manner described by the evangelists, as by that which, by this act, was symbolised and indicated, namely, His advent to empire, His coming to get for Himself a kingdom, His appearing as the Saviour and King of His Church, and His gathering to Himself a people from among the nations, has this prediction been fulfilled. He came in poverty and humiliation to lay the foundation of His kingdom in obedience and sacrifice. It was from the field of sorrow and of suffering that He ascended to the throne. The crown came after the Cross; the humiliation preceded the glory. All things have been put under His feet, all power and authority have been given Him in heaven and on earth, in the universe He reigns supreme. But it is because He was "obedient unto death" that He has been thus "highly exalted." His kingdom rests on His propitiatory work; and it is in view of this, though then perhaps but dimly seen, that the prophet here calls upon Zion to behold and hail her King. And now that He hath ascended to the throne of His glory, the "glad tidings of the kingdom" are to be proclaimed to all nations, and men of every tongue and clime are to be invited to behold their King, and submit to His righteous and benignant sway. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*) *The lowly King Messiah* :—The theocracy, or Church, is called to rejoice because of the coming of her King. The kingly office of the Messiah, which was conferred upon Him for the accomplishment of the work of redemption, is often alluded to as ground for rejoicing. Here is given the character of the King, and the extent of His kingdom. 1. He is "just." The righteousness referred to is not His priestly, but His kingly righteousness, that rigorous justice of His reign in virtue of which no good should be unrewarded, and no evil unpunished. In the unequal allotments of the present, when the good so often suffer, and the bad so often escape, it is surely ground for rejoicing that the King, under whose rule this dispensation is placed, is just, and will render to every man according to his work. 2. He is "endowed with salvation." The word employed is a difficult one. It is usually taken in a secondary sense, as expressing not simply the reception of a salvation, but its possession as a gift that was capable of being bestowed upon others. The meaning then would be, that God was with Him, in spite of all His lowliness, sustaining Him in the mighty work He had undertaken, and that this protection was bestowed upon Him not as an individual, but as a King, a representative of His people, so that He would not only enjoy it Himself,

but possess the power of bestowing it upon others. Hence, while His inflexible justice might make us tremble in our sin, the fact that He was also endowed with a free salvation, and a salvation which He could bestow as a kingly right, would remove these fears, and enable us to rejoice in this coming King. 3. He was to be "lowly." If the usual sense of the Word be given, the Church would be summoned to rejoice because of the humiliation of her King. And, however incongruous such a ground of rejoicing may seem to be to men generally, the heart that is crushed with penitence or grief will comprehend the reason of this summons. Had this august King been as sorrowless as He was sinless, had He been a robed seraph, or a crowned monarch, the poor and suffering could never have approached Him with confidence, for He could not have sympathised with them in their sorrows. But when He comes to us as One who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, we welcome Him with joy, and understand why we are called to rejoice, because He comes to us as the lowly King. Surely a suffering child of God can understand how blessed a thing it is to have a Saviour King who has known Himself what it is to suffer. 4. He was to be externally in poverty, "riding upon an ass, and upon a foal, the son of the asses." This is a prediction of poverty, for although in earlier times kings rode on asses, after the time of Solomon they were never so used, horses having taken their place. The employment of the horse in war also made the use of the ass an indication of peace as well as of poverty. The exact fulfilment of this prophecy in the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, was merely a specific illustration of the general prediction, not the entire object of the prediction itself. Its range was much broader than this single event, and, indeed, would have been substantially fulfilled had this event never occurred. The specific fulfilment, however, rivets the prophecy more absolutely to Christ. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *How comes the King?*—The Cæsars of the world have come upon strong palfreys, prancing, snorting; from their nostrils there has come fire, and their bits have been wet with foam; how comes the King?—"lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." The more King for that! Some men need their own furniture to set them off; some persons would be nothing but for their *entourage*: the things that are round about them seem to be so admirable that surely they must be admirable themselves:—such the loose but most generous reasoning of some men in some cases. "Lowly"—"I am meek and lowly in heart." Why this colt, the foal of an ass? To rebuke the horses of heathenism:—"The Lord will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem": they are signs of pomp, self-sufficiency, conscious dignity, as who should say, we made ourselves, and we are the builders of the great Babylons of the earth. The Lord will not have it so with His Son, with His Church, with His kingdom. Only meekness has an eternal province. It is so always and everywhere, if you would but learn it. It is so at school. The boy who is going to do everything with a wave of his hand will do nothing; the boy who does not care anything about the examination until the night before it comes off and then gathers himself together in tremendous impotence, comes back the next night a sadder but a wiser boy. It is so in business, it is so in the pulpit, it is so along the whole line of human action: pretence means failure. But there must not be mere meekness of manner; the tiger is sometimes asleep. There is a spurious meekness; there are persons that have no voices at all, and when they speak they are supposed to be so gentle and so modest and so unassuming. Not they! It is for want of hoof, not want of will; they would crush you if they could. This meekness is a quality of the soul, this is the very bloom of greatness, this is the finest expression of power. Meekness is not littleness, insignificance, incompetency; meekness is the rest that expresses the highest degree of velocity. "Riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." All the rabbis have allegorised this ass with painful tediousness. They in very deed have tried to read meanings into the words, but they were so obviously incongruous that they never got into the words. Take it as a type of your King's meekness, take it as an assurance that His kingdom is not of this world. This world hates all meekness. Mammon never listened to a prayer; Mammon hates even read prayers; Mammon has a distaste for theological conception; Mammon never sung a hymn or a psalm; Mammon never bowed his knees in tender, holy adoration. The eyes of Mammon are greed, the hands of Mammon are felons, the desire of Mammon is possession, though it may be purchased with blood. This world, therefore, will not have true meekness, gentleness, pitifulness; the world will have pomp and show and magnificence and royalty,—one day its

heart will sicken at the sight of its own idols. These are the lines that have sudden endings. Truth encircles the universe: all lies, however glibly told, suddenly disappear in the pit. Jesus Christ then comes to set up a kingdom that is moral, subjective, spiritual; a kingdom that is clement, redeeming, sympathetic; a kingdom that rests upon unseen but immovable bases. Whatever He touches He elevates. Take the principle, and do not vex the mind or distract the piety with worthless detail: the principle is this, that when Jesus Christ comes into the world He comes as no other king ever came, that He may do a work which no other king ever dreamed. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The coming of the King of Zion*:—I. CONTEMPLATE MESSIAH IN HIS TITLE, AS A KING. There are many senses in which we may contemplate Christ as a King. 1. He has all the ancestral honours, titles, and high-born qualifications of a king. He was descended of a stock of heavenly royalty; He was the first-born of every creature. 2. Christ gave out laws and principles of government as a King. His sermon on the Mount is a beautiful unfolding of the principles of spiritual rule, the righteous awards which would characterise His future administration. Christ then is a King. He defines the terms of our obedience; He lays down the maxims of the spiritual realm; He declares what worship He will accept, and in what way alone His presence can be approached. 3. Christ protects, defends, and counsels His subjects as a King. In the primitive condition of society monarchs were for the most part chosen on account of their possessing, in the estimation of their subjects, some special kingly qualities. He who was the first to go forth with their armies, He who would redeem them from the power of the oppressor, He who was valiant in fight, prompt in action, prudent in counsel, apt to rule, He by one consent would be allowed to be advanced to the throne; and in this sense, Christ ever vindicated His claim to be the King, and "Head over all things to His Church." And He is King over all His spiritual subjects to-day. For all the purposes of guidance, help, comfort, and protection, He still reigns. 4. And Christ bestows honours, and gifts, and recompenses, as a King. Christ gives as a King—pardons full and free, grace rich and abounding, crowns bright and glorious. II. CONTEMPLATE MESSIAH IN HIS CHARACTER—HE IS JUST. The word is to be taken in its largest and highest sense, as comprehensive both of the unblemished sanctity of His personal character, and the perfect righteousness which would distinguish His spiritual government. In all His dispensations of grace and goodness, Christ is ever just. III. CONTEMPLATE MESSIAH IN HIS POWER—HAVING SALVATION. He has that which is to procure salvation. His salvation saves from a great danger, it frees from a great condemnation; it was bought at a great price; it admits to great and glorious prerogatives. Note also the mild and gentle manner of Christ's spiritual administration. "He is lowly." (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *The lowly King*:—I do not intend to expound the whole text at any length, but simply to dwell upon the lowliness of Jesus. Yet this much I may say: Whenever God would have His people especially glad it is always in Himself. If it be written: "Rejoice greatly," then the reason is, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!" Our chief source of rejoicing is the presence of King Jesus in the midst of us. Whether it be His first or His second advent, His very shadow is delight. His footfall is music to our ear. That delight springs much from the fact that He is ours. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. . . Behold, thy King cometh unto thee." Whatever He may be to others, He is thy King, and to whomsoever He may or may not come, He cometh unto thee. He comes for thy deliverance, thine honour, thy consummated bliss. He keeps thy company; He makes thy house His palace, thy love His solace, thy nature His home. He who is thy King by hereditary right, by His choice of thee, by His redemption of thee, and by thy willing choice of Him, is coming to thee; therefore do thou shout for joy. The verse goes on to show why the Lord our King is such a source of gladness: "He is just, and having salvation." He blends righteousness and mercy; justice to the ungodly, and favour to His saints. He has worked out the stern problem—how can God be just, and yet save the sinful? He is just in His own personal character, just as having borne the penalty of sin, and just as cleared from the sin which He voluntarily took upon Him. Having endured the terrible ordeal, He is saved, and His people are saved in Him. He is to be saluted with hosannas, which signify, "Save, Lord"; for where He comes He brings victory and consequent salvation with Him. He routs the enemies of His people, breaks for them the serpent's head, and leads their captivity captive. We admire the justice which marks His reign, and the salvation which

attends His sway; and in both respects we cry: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Moreover, it is written of Him that He is lowly, which cannot be said of many kings and princes of the earth; nor would they care to have it said of them. Thy King, O daughter of Jerusalem, loves to have His lowliness published by thee with exceeding joy. His outward state betokens the humility and gentleness of His character. He appears to be what He really is: He conceals nothing from His chosen. In the height of His grandeur He is not like the proud monarchs of earth. The patient ass He prefers to the noble charger; and He is more at home with the common people than with the great. In His grandest pageant, in His capital city, He was still consistent with His meek and lowly character, for He came "riding upon an ass." He rode through Jerusalem in state; but what lowliness marked the spectacle! It was an extemporised procession, which owed nothing to Garter-king-at-arms, but everything to the spontaneous love of friends. An ass was brought, and its foal, and His disciples sat Him thereon. Instead of courtiers in their robes, He was surrounded by common peasants and fishermen, and children of the streets of Jerusalem: the humblest of men and the youngest of the race shouted His praises. Boughs of trees and garments of friends strewed the road, instead of choice flowers and costly tapestries; it was the pomp of spontaneous love, not the stereotyped pageantry which power exacts of fear. With half an eye every one can see that this King is of another sort from common princes, and His dignity of another kind from that which tramples on the poor. According to the narrative, as well as the prophecy, there would seem to have been two beasts in the procession. I conceive that our Lord rode on the foal, for it was essential that He should mount a beast which had never been used before. God is not a sharer with men; that which is consecrated to His peculiar service must not have been aforesaid devoted to lower uses. Jesus rides a colt whereon never man sat. But why was the mother there? Did not Jesus say of both ass and foal, "Loose them and bring them unto Me"? This appears to me to be a token of His tenderness; He would not needlessly sever the mother from her foal. I like to see a farmer's kindness when he allows the foal to follow when the mare is ploughing or labouring; and I admire the same thoughtfulness in our Lord. He careth for cattle, yea, even for an ass and her foal. He would not even cause a poor beast a needless pang by taking away its young; and so in that procession the beast of the field took its part joyfully, in token of a better age in which all creatures shall be delivered from bondage, and shall share the blessings of His unsuffering reign. Our Lord herein taught His disciples to cultivate delicacy, not only towards each other, but towards the whole creation. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Palm Sunday lessons*:—To-day is this prophecy fulfilled in your ears. For once the Man of Sorrows was honoured on the earth, for once the despised and rejected of men was welcomed as a King, a Deliverer, a Prophet. But what did that procession on the Mount of Olives really mean? It was a procession of sacrifice. As the Paschal Lamb was brought out solemnly on the first day of the week, so now the true Paschal Lamb was brought out to die. He was welcomed by the Jews as the conqueror of the Romans; they did not understand that He was the conqueror of sin and death. They greeted Him as King of Jerusalem, they did not know that He was King of heaven and earth. How soon the feelings of the people changed, how short-lived were their praises. Let us learn our lesson from the palms. Many people are willing to receive Jesus as a King and a Deliverer, who reject Him as the Man of Sorrows. If He were to tell you to sit down on His right hand, to be proud of your religion, to condemn others, to believe yourselves righteous, then you would cry, "Hosannah." But if He tells you to learn of Him for He is meek, to judge not, to take the lowest seat, that the servant of the Lord must not strive, that you must forgive your enemies, that blessed are they that mourn,—then you cry, "Away with Him, crucify Him." Learn from this to avoid a form of religion which is only lip-service; it is very easy to talk about sacred things, but pious talk, remember, is not religion. We must show forth our faith not only with our lips but in our lives. Jesus is leading us, as He led the people on Palm Sunday, towards Jerusalem, the vision of peace, and none shall enter there but those who follow Him. (*H. J. Wilnot Buxton.*) *The coming of the King of Zion*:—The prophet speaks not of one event merely, but of the whole of our Lord's gracious conduct to His people. The children of Zion are called to be joyful in their King; for He is ever coming to them "just and having salvation," and by virtue of the blood of the ever-

lasting covenant bringing the prisoners out of the pit, and leading them all to a city of rest. **I. THE CHARACTER UNDER WHICH OUR KING IS PRESENTED TO US.** 1. He is just. It is not punitive justice that is here intended, but righteousness. (1) This character is illustrated by His Divinity. He is just, perfectly and unchangeably—perfectly because He is God; unchangeably, because essentially. It is His nature to be just, and therefore He cannot be otherwise. There is a holiness in the creature; but there is a peculiar holiness in God. (2) This character is illustrated by His incarnation. All that moral perfection which is in God shone forth from Him. His nature was spotless; and even His enemies gave witness to the immaculate purity of His life on which keened-eyed envy itself could fix no charge. The human nature of Christ was spotless, because the Divine nature into which it was impersonated was perfectly holy. No heresy can be more pestilent than the assertion that the holiness of Christ consists in acts and habits, and not in nature. That only which was perfectly uncontaminated could be united in one person with that which is ineffably holy. (3) By His death. As a sacrifice for sin. In this we see the most illustrious proof of His essential holiness, and His love of justice. (4) By His work in the heart of men. His kingdom is in the heart. Whatever rule He has over the outward conduct originates there. His work is to restore man, and exhibit him again as created anew in Christ Jesus. (5) By His conduct towards His Church. “A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.” By this sceptre He tries and governs His visible Church. He is Judge in His Church even now, though the judgment which He administers is not without mercy. 2. He has salvation. (1) He has it meritoriously. To save is an act to which the benevolence of His Godhead disposes Him; and “judgment is His strange work.” But guilty man is not merely an object of benevolence. He is a subject of moral government. What reason of joy there is in this consideration! The salvation which we need, and which all need, is in His hands. He has purchased the right to bestow it. The work is virtually accomplished, and nothing remains for us but to apply to Him, and avail ourselves of that which He has done on our behalf. (2) Salvation is the subject of His official administration. Does He give the Word? It is the promise and the rule of salvation. Does He collect a Church, and denominate it His body? His Spirit fills it, to discover the want of salvation, and reveal the means of obtaining it: to inspire desire, to assist our efforts, to realise within us all that the external Word exhibits to faith and hope. Does He perpetuate the ministry of the Gospel? He is with His servants unto the end of the world, to make them the means of conveying this salvation. Does He appoint His Sabbaths for ordinances? In these the Church is made the deposit and source of salvation to the world. The very sacraments are signs and seals of salvation. **II. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF HIS KINGDOM.** This is strongly indicated by the circumstances connected with His public and royal entry into Jerusalem. This event was intended to call off His disciples and us from the vain notion of a civil monarchy. They thought He was then assuming it; but even then we see Him rejecting it. There is a tendency in man to look even now, as formerly, for something more than a spiritual kingdom; a kingdom of visible power, and glory, and splendour. He entered this to show that He was a King; but He disappointed their expectation in the very circumstances of this event, in order to show that His kingdom was not of this world. He rode upon an ass, to denote that He was a peaceful sovereign. He returned by night to the Mount of Olives, which He certainly would not have done, had He been about to establish a civil reign. Children celebrated His praises, not the men. The true glory of Christ’s kingdom is, that it crests its dominion in the human mind and heart; spreads its light and power over all the faculties and principles of our nature; ordaining the praise of God out of the mouth; so that everyone who is brought under its influence becomes the instrument of instructing others, and subduing them to the service of the same Saviour. **III. THE EXTENT OF THIS SPIRITUAL DOMINION OF CHRIST.** 1. His dominion is to extend “from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.” 2. The state of mankind, it is true, is deeply affecting. It is a state of wretchedness and danger. They are “prisoners,” cast into a “pit wherein is no water.” Allusion is to the ancient punishment of criminals, who were sometimes thrown into a pit, and left to die of thirst; and sometimes, after enduring the torments of thirst, were brought forth to execution. 3. Then there follows an address to the prisoners. “Turn you

to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." Only a few had returned from Babylon. Zechariah addresses those who were left behind. In how much higher sense than the Jews are we prisoners of hope. Let such prisoners think of the blood of the covenant of deliverance which has been shed. (*R. Watson.*) *The coming King* :—"Rejoice, then, O Zion," city of God, built not of stones, but of souls of men. "Shout, ye daughters of Jerusalem," once as the stones of the desert, but now a spiritual seed of Abraham. From yon sepulchre thy King cometh, triumphant over death, and sending forth over all the world the message of reconciliation! Redeemed from bondage, we stand within the city of God, the visible Church. But how much has still to be done ere the temple of God be fully built—ere Christ be reflected in His members on earth! How many things have we each to deplore! The distracting effect of worldly business, want of energy, of love, of prayer. Hence little work for Him, and little fruit from that work, and little comfort. Let us dwell on the truth, "Thy King cometh." 1. In view of the fact commemorated to-day. His work of redemption was complete and effectual (2 Cor. v. 14). He took life unto the dominion of death. Even while the disciples mourned, He was carrying on a work of grace (1 Pet. iii. 19). He died that He might rise again for our justification. 2. He cometh to each soul, bringing help. In times of darkness or depression, when trials seem heavy, or our work arduous, He reminds us that though we see Him not, we are not beyond His care. 3. He cometh to establish His kingdom, to bring perfected salvation to those who wait for Him. (*James F. Montgomery, D.D.*) *Joy in the King unrealised* :—I have read in one of George MacDonald's novels of a born-blind lamplighter. He illuminated the city at night; but had no sense of what he was doing. So has it been with the land of Israel. She has presented the portrait to the gallery; she has heard the plaudits of the spectators; and she has refused to join in them. In all history there is nothing so unique. It is the enemies of this land that have crowned her world-king; it is the Gentiles that have come to His light. The lamplighter has been blind to the beauty of the throne she has illumined. Palestine has lit up the scene; she has listened to the crowd shouting their applause; and she has wondered why. She has been like a deaf-mute in a concert-room. She has struck by accident the notes of a harp, and by accident they have burst into music. The audience has cheered the performance to the echo; but the performer knows not her triumph. (*G. Matheson.*) *The Prince of peace* :—This prediction is of the literal kind, and it was literally and most exactly fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. The prophet doth not coldly inform Jerusalem that her King should come to her, and that when He did come she ought to rejoice. Wrapped into future times, he seems to have been present at the glorious scene. Standing upon Mount Olivet, he hears the hosannahs of the disciples, and beholds the procession approach towards the gates of Jerusalem. Religion, then, hath its joys; a prophet calleth us to exult and shout. The reason assigned why Jerusalem was called upon to rejoice, was the approach of her King. The prophets had promised her a king who should overcome her enemies, and triumph gloriously. When the King came, Jerusalem despised His appearance, and soon nailed a spiritual monarch to a cross. Righteousness, salvation, and humility distinguish the person and reign of Messiah. Righteousness leads the way. This is the name whereby He shall be called—"The Lord our righteousness." Salvation is the next sign and token whereby to know the King of Zion. He was to execute that part of the regal office which consisteth in rescuing a people from their oppressors. And if tidings of salvation are not tidings of joy, what tidings can be such? What is deliverance from a temporal adversary compared with the salvation of the whole world from the oppression of the spiritual enemy, from sin, and sickness, and sorrow, and pain, and death, and hell? This was the salvation which Jesus undertook to effect; and His miracles declared Him equal to the mighty task. Different to other kings the King Messiah was to be in His appearance and demeanour. He is "lowly." He appeared, in His first advent, in a state of humiliation. The nature of His undertaking required it, and their own law and prophets are clear upon the subject. The types and prophecies are as positive for His humiliation, as they are for His exaltation: nor could any one person accomplish them all, without being equally remarkable for lowliness and meekness, glory and honour. (*Bishop Horne.*) **His** dominion shall be from sea even to sea.—*The final triumph of Christianity* :—1. This triumph is assured by the PROMISES of the Bible. They leave

no room for doubt. II. THE DIVINE ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF CHRISTIANITY RENDER IT CERTAIN. Christianity itself is on trial. If it fails to subjugate the world; if it encounters systems of error, false philosophies, hostile forces, effete civilisations, which it is inadequate to transform and vitalise with its Divine life—then it will be demonstrated that it is not of God, and its high claims are false. A partial and temporary success will not suffice. It must conquer every race and clime and generation and form of evil and opposition in all the world, or be itself defeated and driven from the field. III. THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS WHICH IT HAS ALREADY ACHIEVED IS A GUARANTEE OF ITS COMPLETE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH. Christianity is not without its witnesses and signal triumphs in human history. There is nothing comparable with it. It has shown itself, on actual trial of 1800 years, to be “the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation.” It has subdued kingdoms and changed the face of the world. Idolatry, superstition, false philosophy, cannot stand before it. It saves “the chief of sinners.” It elevates the most degraded people. Nothing in the heart of man, or in society, can withstand its power. It is moving steadily and rapidly on to final conquests. “Christianity thus stands committed to the achievement of universal dominion. Its Founder puts it forth into history as the universal religion, foreordained to universal prevalence.” (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Universal bloom*:—As it has been positively demonstrated that the Arctic region was once a blooming garden and a fruitful field, those regions may change climate and again be a blooming garden and a fruitful field. Professor Heer, of Zurich, says the remains of flowers have been found in the Arctic, showing it was like Mexico for climate; and it is found that the Arctic was the mother region from which all the flowers descended. Professor Wallace says the remains of all styles of animal life are found in the Arctic, including those animals that can live only in warm climates. Now, that Arctic region which has been demonstrated by flora, and fauna, and geological argument to have been as full of vegetation and life as our Florida, may be turned back to its original bloom and glory, or it will be shut up as a museum of crystals for curiosity seekers to visit. But Arctic and Antarctic in some shape will belong to the Redeemer’s realm.

Ver. 11. By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.—*The delivered prisoners*:—Enlarge on the Gospel promise in immediate connection with the text. It calls on the daughter of Zion to rejoice in the coming of the Saviour. It describes His character; the nature of His kingdom; the means by which it shall be spread; and the extent of it. The deliverance of the Jews from captivity was a step towards the coming of Messiah, and the earnest of it. Just as, through the remembrance of His covenant with Israel by blood, God delivered the Jewish Church, so through the “blood of the everlasting covenant” does He deliver His people under the Gospel. I. THE PRISONERS AND THEIR PRISON-HOUSE. “Thy prisoners.” This most aptly describes the state of those who are convinced by the Spirit of God of their lost and undone condition, and who are looking only for wrath. The prison-house of such is described as “the pit wherein there is no water”; i.e. no comfort, no peace. No way of escape is apparent, and if the prisoner remain in it, he dies. But, though the pit is deep and horrible, yet the prisoner’s voice can be heard, when he calls for deliverance; and his voice is never unheard. Therefore let all prisoners cry mightily unto Him that is able to save. II. THE WAY OF DELIVERANCE. Justice must be satisfied ere the mouth of the pit can be opened. This is implied in the expression—“the blood of the covenant.” Jesus covenanting to shed His blood for their ransom—the Father covenanting to accept this ransom, and to set the prisoners free on account of it. Enlarge on this covenant as a covenant of promise, the greatness, the freeness, the sureness. How is this belief, this trust in the promise, brought about? Faith by hearing, hearing by the Word—the Spirit of God applying. (*John D. Lave, M.A.*) *The blood of the covenant*:—1. The deeper any of the people of God be in trouble, they lie nearer His heart and help; and He would have them look on the comforts of the kingdom of Christ and the covenant, as especially intended for them, therefore doth He apply the general comforts of Christ’s kingdom to the distressed Jews. 2. As the afflictions of the Lord’s people may be very bitter, and so ordered as they may be trials indeed; so there will be special notice taken of them when their rods become so insupportable that there is no subsisting under them; for

He eyes them, when they are prisoners "in a pit, wherein is no water," as sometime they may be. 3. God entering in a covenant with His people, condescends to take in all their outward necessities, and engages to have a care of them in these as well as in things spiritual; and so all their mercies come by covenant; for it is by "the covenant that the prisoners are sent forth." 4. The mercies of the Church are not only rich and refreshful in themselves, and in their original, that they come through a covenant of love, but in their purchase, that they are bought, and the covenant concerning them made sure by the blood of the Son of God. "By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners." 5. The Lord minds His covenant, and through and for Christ makes the promises of it forthcoming for His people's good, when they have broken it on their part; for, though for their perfidiousness they were scattered, yet the covenant stands to bring them back. (*George Hutcheson.*) *What Christ has done for, and what He is to His people:*—Though this passage may refer to many temporal blessings bestowed upon God's ancient Church; yet its spiritual significance is immediately connected with the kingdom of Messiah. I. THE RUINED STATE OF THE CHURCH. "Prisoners in a pit wherein is no water." 1. The degradation of this state. 2. The pollution of this state. 3. The misery of this state. 4. The hopelessness of our state. II. THE MEANS OF ACCOMPLISHING OUR SALVATION. 1. God is the Author of redemption. 2. Redemption was effected by the blood of the covenant. 3. By the covenant blood the circumstances of the Church are altered. III. THE PRESENT STATE OF GOD'S REDEEMED PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THEIR NAMES. "Prisoners of hope." 1. Until delivered they are actually prisoners—to sin, Satan, the law; and they are delivered also from the bondage of a corrupt and stubborn will. Under the Gospel dispensation every vessel of mercy is delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ, and is brought into a lively hope of eternal glory by faith of the operation of the Spirit. 2. Then this hope is in Christ. 3. This hope is according to the Word. 4. It is a sure hope of eternal life. 5. It is a present security to the soul. IV. CHRIST IS A STRONGHOLD TO ALL HIS PEOPLE. 1. From error and unbelief. 2. From sin and Satan. 3. To God they turn generally. 4. To God in Christ especially. "I will render unto thee double." (1) Pardon and righteousness. (2) Great peace of mind. (3) Full assurance of understanding. (4) Joy here, and certainty of glory hereafter. (5) Salvation of soul and body, from sin, death, and hell. (*T. B. Baker.*)

Ver. 12. Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.—*Imprisoned by hope:*—In ver. 8 is the assurance that the Divine blessing specially rests on Israel returned to Jerusalem. On this assurance is based an earnest plea, addressed to the Jews who were still remaining in Babylon, unwilling to break up their associations, and share with their countrymen in restoring the ancient nation. Zechariah pleads with them to return to the Lord's land. "Jehovah has begun to bless us, come back and share with us." The prophet fixes on one of their excuses, which was a serious self-delusion. He noticed that the hope of returning "some day," was keeping them from making a present decision, and responding at once to the claims of duty. Family ties, increasing wealth, business relations, were making their return to Jerusalem only a hope—a hope with which they were deceiving themselves. Not one of these men had refused to return. They intended to return, and quite hoped to return. But they procrastinated. They believed in the "unknown morrow," in what might happen some day. Procrastination includes hope, and in that lies the subtle slavery of it. But it is a hope that imprisons: it keeps a man easy-minded while he is neglecting his duty. This is the infinite sadness of it. I. AS REGARDS THE ETERNAL SALVATION OF OUR SOULS, WE ALL HAVE HOPE. Only in very exceptional cases, and those usually of disease, is hope quite lost. 1. None of us are without some knowledge of our spiritual state and condition. 2. None of us are without occasional impressions of the solemnity of our spiritual condition. 3. Even in calmest moments none of us are without an anxious desire to secure the settlement of our eternal interests. 4. None of us have settled it, that we mean to be among the lost. None of us expect to perish everlastingly. All have hope. II. AS REGARDS PERSONAL SALVATION, MANY OF US ARE IMPRISONED BY OUR HOPE. The figure of the text is taken from the peril of a country when its enemy is either passing close by it, or marching through it. Conquering Alexander was pushing his way from Phœnicia to Egypt, and Judæa lay right on his route. The people in the villages might imprison themselves by the hope that Alexander would not come their

way. And this hope would keep them from seeking the shelter of the stronghold. All wise people, in such a time of peril, would flee from danger to the security of the walled city. We are saved by hope, but it must be well-grounded hope. When the ancient Israelite had accidentally slain a man, it was imprisoning and imperilling for him to hope that the Avenger of Blood had not yet heard of it, and was not yet upon his track. There was not one moment to lose. At once, delayed by no hopes, or possibilities, or excuses, he must be away, flying to the city of refuge that was nearest at hand. Men do die in their sins. We hope that we shall not be among them. But unless that hope rests on some good and sure foundations, we are imprisoning ourselves in our hopes. Look at some of these imprisoning hopes, and see if any of them can reveal ourselves to ourselves, and be a gracious means of arousing us out of false security. 1. An idea very frequently cherished is this—the next world will provide a milder estimate of our sin than is formed in this world. It is strange how we let a notion of that kind cling to us. “Things may be better in the next life. Nobody knows.” It must be an imprisoning hope, for a man’s life, motives, and conduct must surely look better under the earth-shadows than when they are pushed out into the full sunlight of God. In the light of God, Job said, “I abhor myself.” 2. Another idea is, that opportunities for repentance, for turning away from sin, and for seeking the Saviour, will one day be sure to come to us, though we may miss them now. We think God’s time of mercy for us has not yet come, and there is nothing for us to do just now but wait for it, as the lame man in the “Bethesda porch” waited for the moving of the water. Only we never think of ourselves as helpless. We are quite sure that when the moving of the water does come, we shall be perfectly able to step down at once and secure our healing. But what a self-delusion that is! If we do not secure the opportunities of salvation that come to us now, on what ground do we hope that we shall seize some opportunity that may come by and by? Does the power of decision grow with the weakening years? Surely it is an imprisoning hope that keeps us from responding to the offers of Divine grace now, for “now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

III. AS REGARDS PERSONAL SALVATION, THERE IS REALLY NO HOPE UNTIL WE HAVE GIVEN UP HOPE. This is a fact of actual and repeated experience. There is no hope for us until we have come, in the sincerity of personal conviction and humiliation, to say, “Myself I cannot save, myself I cannot help.” The very first thing, and the all-essential thing is sweeping away those refuges of lies, our false, our imprisoning, hopes. In various ways God breaks down our self-confidences. There is no hope in God until hope in self is abandoned. IV. WHEN FALSE IMPRISONING HOPES ARE GONE, WE MAY FLEE AT ONCE TO THE STRONGHOLD. Then the soul is fairly roused and set upon seeking safety at once. Then the intensest interest is felt in the message of Gospel salvation. Then, we may run at once into the safe hiding-place of God’s salvation, and there find a hope that will not make us ashamed. Be not then hindered by doubts, or imprisoned by hopes; there is a duty to be done now. “Flee to the mountain, lest ye be consumed.” (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *Good news for prisoners of hope*:—There is a change in the phraseology of the remaining chapters of this book. Not now the Word of the Lord, but the burden of the Word of the Lord. By this term we are prepared for tidings of sorrow and disaster, which are about to fall on the nations addressed. These burdens lay heavily on the soul of the prophet, who was probably already advanced in years when he announced them. When Zechariah wrote this prophecy, the early troubles of the returned remnant in the reconstruction of temple, city, and state were at an end; but they were hemmed in and pressed by Tyre on the north, and by Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ekron on the south. It was for their encouragement, therefore, that he foretold an approaching invasion, before which their strong and hostile neighbours would be swept away. Though Tyre had built herself a stronghold on an apparently impregnable island, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets; and though her counsellors were famous for their wisdom—the Lord would dispossess her, smiting her power in the sea, and devouring her palaces with fire. And the devastation which would befall Damascus and Hadrach (a part of Syria), would extend southwards till the worst fears of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron would be realised in their utter destruction. Philistia would be as a young lion deprived of its prey, whilst the chosen city would be defended by unseen angel forces. “I will encamp about Mine house as a garrison, that none pass through or return; and no oppressor shall pass through them any more; for now have I seen with

Mine eyes." All these predictions were literally fulfilled within a few years by the invasion of the third of the great world-conquerors, Alexander the Great. Syria, New Tyre, and the old seaboard, including the cities of Philistia, fell under his arms; but both in going and returning, he spared Jerusalem, being much impressed by a dream, in which he was warned not to approach the city, and by a solemn procession of priests and Levites, headed by Jaddua, the high priest. In Eastern lands, liable to long spells of drought, it is customary to hew cisterns out of the solid rock for the storage of water, that provision may be made against the failure of the rains. These abound in Palestine. "They hewed out for themselves cisterns." It seemed to the prophet as though Israel might be compared to a terrified peasantry, sheltering in some dark, dry, mountain cistern, far up from the valleys, dreading every day lest their hiding-place might be discovered, and themselves dragged forth to dye with their blood the green sward.

I. THUS, IN EVERY AGE GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED. You may have been caught in the snare of this world's evil. You have no sympathy with it, yet somehow you have become involved in the snares and toils of malign combinations. You have no desire for them—they chafe and try you—but you cannot get off. It seems as though some evil spirit has lassoed you, not indeed in your soul, but in your home and circumstances. Or perhaps you have been led captive by the devil at his will. There is no doubt about your sonship; in your better moments, God's Spirit witnesses clearly with yours that you have been born again; and yet, during long and sad periods of experience, you seem the bound slave of the great enemy of souls; swept before strong gusts of passion. Or, perhaps, you have fallen into deep despondency, partly as the result of ill-health, and partly because you have looked off the face of Christ to the winds and waves. The clear-shining of His love is obscured, and at times it is difficult to believe in anything but the pressure of your own dark thoughts.

II. ALL SUCH ARE PRISONERS, BUT THEY ARE PRISONERS OF HOPE. There is a sure and certain hope of their deliverance. The clouds might more easily succeed in imprisoning the sun than any of these dark conditions permanently hold one of God's children. They belong to the light and day; and, though they see it not, Hope, as God's angel, is standing near, only waiting His signal to open the prison door. The prisoner, on whom the sentence of capital punishment has been passed, and who has no strong, wise friends to interfere on his behalf, may well abandon hope as he passes within the massive walls of the fortress. But where justice and truth are on his side, when he has been the victim of craft and guile, if there be friends to espouse his cause, though he be incarcerated, bound with chains on the Devil's Island, and though the weary years pass over him, yet he is a prisoner of hope, and shall come forth again into the light of day. All God's children are prisoners of hope.

III. THEIR HOPE RESTS ON THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT. "Because of the blood of thy covenant, I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit." When God entered into covenant-relationship with Abraham, the sacred compact was ratified by the mingled blood of an heifer of three years old, a she-goat of three years old, a ram of three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And, in after years, when beneath the beetling cliffs of Sinai, Moses acted as mediator between God and the children of Israel, he sent young men, because the order of priesthood was not established, which offered burnt-offerings and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord (Gen. xv. 9; Exod. xxiv. 7, 8). Similarly, when the new covenant—the provisions of which are enumerated in Heb. viii.—was ratified, it was in the blood of Jesus. As He took the cup, He said: "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many unto the remission of sins." "And for this cause He is the Mediator of a new covenant." The shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God indicates that God has entered into a covenant relationship with Him, and all whom He represents, who are, by faith, members of His mystical body, the Church. On His side, He promises to be a God to us, and to take us to be His people; on our side, Christ promises, on our behalf, that we shall be a people for His own possession, zealous of good works. This covenant embraces all who have believed, shall believe, and do believe in Jesus. It embraces thee, if thou dost at this moment simply believe in Him as thine, and art willing to be evermore His.

IV. BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, GOD WILL SEND FORTH EACH OF HIS IMPRISONED ONES OUT OF THE PIT. That blood binds Him to interpose on their behalf. That they might have strong consolation, He has confirmed His Word by an oath. Suppose two men were bound in the closest, tenderest friendship, not needing

to exchange blood from each other's veins, as the manner of some is, because heart had already exchanged with heart; and suppose one of these, travelling in Calabria or Anatolia, was captured by brigands and carried into some mountain fastness, threatened with death unless ransomed by an immense sum of money: can you imagine his friend at home, in the enjoyment of opulence and liberty, settling down in circumstances of ease, and allowing his brother to suffer his miserable fate, with no effort for his deliverance? It is impossible to imagine such a thing! With tireless perseverance he would leave no stone unturned, and the captive might rely on every possible effort being made for his deliverance. So it is with God. Whatever be the sad combination of disaster which has overtaken us, He is bound by the Holy Covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus, to spare no effort till our soul is escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler, until the snare is broken, and we are escaped. So, child of God, if you have made Jesus your King, He is sure to succour you. Behold thy King cometh, O prisoner of hope! Is not this the reason why some of us are not delivered? We should be glad enough to accept deliverance, but are not prepared to pay the price. We have not observed the Divine order, and crowned Jesus King of our hearts and lives. We are wishful that He should be our Saviour, but not altogether prepared to accept Him as King. He is first King of Righteousness, before He is Priest after the order of Melchizedek: and it is only when we confess with our mouths Jesus as Lord, that we shall be saved. But do not fear Him. He is lowly, and rides upon a colt, the foal of an ass. No prancing steed, no banner flaunting in the breeze, no long train of warriors. O prisoners of hope, lift up your heads! your salvation is come out of Zion. Turn you to the stronghold! Take up your abode in the stronghold of God's care and love, in the fortress of His righteousness, in the keep of His covenant. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The sinner's refuge*:—God's children have a place of refuge, and the reason why others have not is, they flee from it instead of fleeing to it. I. CONSIDER THE RELIEF PROVIDED. "A stronghold." Not any stronghold we may fancy, or prepare for ourselves, though the imagination of man is very fruitful in inventions of this kind. When conscience is alarmed, anything is sought to that will afford a little present ease. The physician of souls is neglected, and physicians of no value are applied to. Such has been and still is the conduct of sinful men. Some fly to the absolute and uncovenanted mercy of God; some to their Church privileges, and others to their good works and religious performances. What refuge does Scripture provide? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." The perfections of God, His wisdom, power, and goodness, are all engaged for the protection of His people. The covenant of grace, with its glorious provisions and extensive promises, is as a stronghold: here the righteous find safety in a time of danger, and comfort in a time of trouble. The Lord Jesus Christ especially is the refuge of poor sinners, and to Him the preceding verse evidently refers. He is both the foundation on which the believer builds, and the fortress in which he hides. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN OUR SEEKING THIS RELIEF? 1. It supposes that by nature we are turned another way, having not only an indifference, but a dislike to the true way of salvation. We choose to lie under the sentence of condemnation and death, rather than come to Christ for justification and life. Either we do not seek after salvation, or we do not seek it in God's way. Men by nature are without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. 2. It implies a principle of grace implanted in us, by which the mind is renewed and directed to the Saviour. This removes the darkness of the understanding, the perverseness of the will, and the carnality of the affections; so that we are led to form different sentiments, and pursue a different path from what we trod before. A wounded conscience wants ease and rest. 3. It implies the total renunciation of all other refuges as insufficient and vain. The things in which we formerly trusted, and in which we gloried, are now darkened, withered, and consumed. 4. There is now a joining ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten. Being turned to the Saviour, there is a cleaving unto Him with full purpose of heart. The soul that has fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us, will keep his hold, and never wish to turn back any more. Where there is a real closing with Christ, there will also be a cleaving unto Him. III. THE CHARACTERS ADDRESSED. "Prisoners of hope." 1. They are considered as prisoners. Satan's prisoners. Enslaved by their own corruptions and lusts. 2. They are prisoners of hope. All men are so in some sense, while life continues, and the sentence is not executed

upon them. Vessels of wrath, till they are filled with wrath, may be made vessels of mercy. Let not the young presume, nor the aged despair. Some are more especially prisoners of hope. (1) Those who enjoy the means of grace, and to whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and power. (2) There is hope of such as have frequent convictions of sin, some desires after God, and whose consciences retain a degree of tenderness, so that they neither neglect private duties nor are wholly unaffected by the preaching of the Word. (3) Those also are prisoners of hope whose chains have been broken, but who, through unwatchfulness, have been led captive by the enemy. Suffer the word of exhortation. O ye distressed sinners and afflicted, deserted saints, suppress your rising fears and your despondent thoughts. An open and effectual door is set before you. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

Hope in the prison:—I. A COMMAND. "Turn you." When God calls a sinner to turn, he must turn. Being born again refers to the first turn, but there are the after-turns in the experience of the called Christian, and when grace begins a work in the soul, grace never stops. II. THE THING COMMANDED. "Turn you to the stronghold." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." III. THE UNCTION OF THE GOSPEL. "Ye prisoners of hope." (*J. J. West, M.A.*)

Prisoners of hope:—There are three classes of prisoners in the moral universe without hope, and there are three classes of prisoners with hope. 1. The angels which kept not their first estate. 2. Men and women who have lived amid Gospel privileges. 3. The men and women in this city who are just as certain to be damned as they live and walk on the face of the earth to-day. There are prisoners with hope. 1. The men and women of earth who have taken up their cross to follow Christ. Prisoners of hope, now hemmed in by the environments of earth, but soon to be God's freemen in heaven. 2. The man who says, "God knows my heart, I wish I were a better man." There is hope at the Cross for the weakest man in the world. Then do not be a prisoner without hope, be a prisoner with hope. (*Sam. P. Jones.*)

Prisoners of hope:—This passage unquestionably has to do with our Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. If you begin to read at the ninth verse you will see that we have, from that place on to our text, much prophetic information concerning our Lord and His kingdom. We read, first, something about His own manner of triumph,—His way of conducting Himself in His kingdom: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." The King of the kingdom of grace is not high and lofty, haughty or proud, but condescends to men of low estate. We have not to set before you a Pharaoh or a Nebuchadnezzar; Jesus of Nazareth is a King of quite another kind. The next verse goes on to describe the weapons by which He wins His victories; or rather, it tells us what they are not. Not by carnal weapons will Christ ever force His way amongst the sons of men, for He says, "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow shall be cut off." Mohammed may conquer by the sword, but Christ conquers by the sword which cometh out of His mouth, that is, the Word of the Lord. His empire is one of love, not of force and oppression. The same verse reveals to us more concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom: "He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." There have been universal monarchies in the past, but there shall never be another till Christ shall come again. Four times has God foiled those who have attempted to assume the sovereignty of the world; but in due time there shall come One who shall reign over all mankind. I. A DIVINE DELIVERANCE. This must be a matter of personal experience; and therefore I should like that every one whom I am now addressing should say to himself or herself, "Do I know anything about this Divine deliverance in my own heart and life? If I do not, I have grave cause to fear as to my condition in the sight of God; but if I do, let me be full of praise to God for this great mercy, that I have a share in this Divine deliverance: 'As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.'" Do all of you know anything about the pit wherein is no water? 1. Regarding it as a state of spiritual distress, do you understand what it means to be in such a comfortless condition? It was a common custom, in the East, to put prisoners into deep pits which had been dug in the earth. The sides were usually steep and perpendicular, and the prisoner who was dropped down into such a pit must remain there without

any hope of escape. According to our text, there was no water there, and apparently no food of any kind. The object of the captors was to leave the prisoner there to be forgotten as a dead man out of mind. Have you ever, in your experience, realised anything like that? There was a time, with some of us, when we suddenly woke up to find that all our fancied goodness had vanished, that all our hopes had perished, and that we ourselves were in the comfortless condition of men in a pit, without even a single drop of water to mitigate our burning thirst. You need to know it, for this is the condition into which God usually brings His children before He reveals Himself to them. 2. The condition of being shut up in a pit wherein is no water is not only comfortless, but it is also hopeless. How can such a prisoner escape? He looks up out of the pit, and sees far above him a little circle of light; but he knows that it is impossible for him to climb up there. Perhaps he attempts it; but, if so, he falls back and injures himself. He lies fallen as a helpless, hopeless prisoner. 3. A man, in such a pit as that, is not only comfortless and hopeless, but he is also in a fatal condition. Without water, at the bottom of a deep pit, he must die. Many of God's children have known this experience to the fullest possible extent; and all of them have been, in some measure, brought into the pit wherein is no water. But concerning those who have believed in Jesus, our text is true, and God can say, "I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." Are you out of the pit? Then it is certain that you came out of it not by your own energy and strength, but because the Lord delivered you. Divine power, and nothing but Divine power, can deliver a poor law-condemned conscience from the bondage under which it groans. There is this further comfort, that if He has set us free we are free indeed. It is only God who can deliver a bondaged conscience; but when it is delivered by Him, it need not be afraid of being dragged back to prison any more. But how has He done this great work? This is one of the principal clauses of our text: "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." The people of God are set free from their bondage by the blood of the covenant. I trust that you will never be weary of listening to the doctrine of substitution. If you ever are, it will be all the more necessary that you keep on hearing it until you cease to be weary of it. That doctrine is the very core and essence of the Gospel. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "With His stripes we are healed." Nothing can give the soul repose when it is about to meet its God, except the knowledge that Christ was made a curse for us that we might be blessed in Him. No prisoners are set free except by the blood of Jesus; and, as the blood of the covenant is Godward, the means of our coming out of the pit wherein is no water, so it is the knowledge of Christ as suffering in our stead that sets the captive free. I hope I am not addressing any who will remain for a long time in the pit wherein is no water. I did so myself, but I blame myself now for having done so. II. A DIVINE INVITATION GIVEN. Do you catch the thought that is intended to be conveyed by these words? You have been taken out of the pit, and there, close beside you, is the castle of refuge; so, the moment you are drawn up out of the pit, run to the castle for shelter. The parallel to this experience is to be found in the 40th Psalm, where David says that the Lord had brought him up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set his feet upon a rock, and established his goings; and now that you are delivered from your prison pit, you are to go and dwell in the fortress, the high tower, which the Lord has so graciously prepared for you. The promises of God in Christ Jesus are the stronghold to which all believing men ought to turn in every time of trouble, and Jesus Christ Himself is still more their Stronghold in every hour of need. Sheltered in Him, you are indeed surrounded with protecting walls and bulwarks, for who is he that can successfully assail the man who is shielded and guarded by the great atoning sacrifice of Christ? Yet you will often feel as if you were still in danger. When you do so feel, turn to the Stronghold directly. Do you mourn your slackness in prayer, and does the devil tell you that you cannot be a Christian, or you would not feel as you do? Then, run to Christ directly. Has there been, during this day, some slip in language, or has there even been some sin in overt act? Then, run to Christ directly; turn you to the Stronghold. So, again, I say to you, never try to combat sin and Satan by yourselves, but always flee away to Christ. Inside that Stronghold, the most powerful guns of the enemy will not be able to injure you. They who have gone the furthest in the Divine life yet do well to walk in Christ just as they received Him at the

first. III. THE DIVINE PROMISE. "Even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee." 1. First, if you, who have been delivered from the pit wherein is no water, continually turn to Christ, you shall have twice as much joy as ever you had sorrow. The grief that we had before we found Christ was a very mountain of sorrow, but how has it been with you since you came to Jesus? Have you not, after all, had twice as much joy as you have had sorrow? Oh, the unspeakable delight of the soul that has found peace in Jesus after having been long in bondage to sin and Satan! I think I have told you before that I heard Dr. Alexander Fletcher once say, when he was preaching, that on one occasion, passing down the Old Bailey, he saw two boys, or young men, jumping and leaping and standing on their heads, and going through all sorts of antics on the pavement. He said to them, "Whatever are you at?" But they only clapped their hands, and danced more joyously than before; so he said, "Boys, what has happened to you that you are so glad?" Then one of them replied, "If you had been locked up for three months inside that prison, you would jump for joy when you came out." "A very natural expression," said the good old man, and bade them jump away as long as they liked. Ay, and when a soul has once been delivered from the pit wherein is no water it has a foretaste of the joy of heaven. The possession of Christ is, indeed, not only double bliss for all its sin, but much more than double. 2. More than that, God gives His servants the double of all that they expect. When we come to our Lord, it is as it was when the queen of Sheba came to Solomon. She said that the half had not been told her; and if you raise your expectations to the highest point that you can reach, and who come to Christ will find them far exceeded in the blessed realisation. He is indeed a precious Christ to all who believe in Him; but He is a hundred times more precious than you can ever imagine. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The condition of sinners* :—"Prisoners of hope." I. ALL SINNERS ARE PRISONERS. A prisoner implies—1. Criminality. 2. Deprivation: society, light, &c. 3. Bondage. A sinner is a slave. His soul himself is enslaved, death cannot free him. Some of the prisoners have—II. HOPE. Some, not all. None in hell. But some on earth. 1. Provision has been made for their deliverance. 2. The vilest of men have obtained deliverance. 3. Deliverance is freely offered to all. (*Homilist.*) *The place of hope in the Gospel* :—Fear and hope have two things in common. They are both prospective. They regard the future as possible. We neither hope nor fear that which cannot conceivably affect us. With these two points of resemblance, Hope and Fear are in all else opposite and contradictory to each other. Fear is the apprehension of a future possible evil. Hope is the anticipation of a future possible good. Human life is largely indebted to hope: almost all that redeems it from gloom and misery is, if you look into it, hope more than happiness. Hope, not fruition, is the happiness, while we are in the body, of man that must die. This hope has degrees. One man is full of it. He puts his hand to nothing without intending, expecting, resolving to succeed. And the hope which cheers also strengthens. Expectation is success—unless the calculation has been utterly fanciful, and the sum wrongly added. Certainly the absence of hope is a bar to success. Depression is always weakness. A man is not entirely responsible for it; health, temperament, nature, may alone be to blame. More often there is blame; a man has not braced himself by early discipline: he has let the fibre of character become loose and feeble; he has admitted into the memory, into the conscience, into the life, something of that which is utter weakness—sin. Great things are never done, even small successes are never achieved, where there is no hope. Not to hope is not to have. The Gospel will have a place for hope. We are to ask what it is. How does Christ use this powerful principle? He makes it everything. St. Paul even says, "We are saved by hope." Of Christ it is said, "For the joy which was set before Him, He endured the Cross." The anticipation of a blessed future, which is the definition of hope, supported our Lord in working out our redemption. You will find that everything ever done bravely and effectively in the strength of Christ by His people, has been done in the power of hope. Fear may teach watchfulness. Fear may keep a man to his duty. Fear may constrain a man to combat a sin, or shake off a bad companion, or to resolve to make his life less purposeless, and more decided; but fear, if it stood alone, could make no man a hero, nor a martyr, nor a saint. That is left for hope. We see in education the stimulus of hope. How largely do we use it in every school system that is worth the name! But there is a use of hope which is fallacious and mischievous. Hope is not irrational

because it is sanguine. There is no encouragement in man's life, or in God's Word, for that kind of hope which either dreams of reaping without sowing, or looks for sudden counteractions of influences wantonly indulged. There are men whose whole life is spent in reckoning upon results to which they have contributed nothing but hindrance. There are men who may call themselves waiters upon providence, but whom God would rather describe as gamblers in chances. It is so in reference to the things of this life; it is so in reference to a more serious thing—the condition of the soul, and the destinies of eternity. Gospel hope has for its object Gospel promise. See some of those future good things which God has promised, and therefore the Christian hopes for. One of these is growth, progress, at last perfection, in holiness. To a Christian person the prospect of becoming holy is the most blessed, most glorious revelation. If it be a revelation, certainly it is a hope. Holiness is sometimes preached as a duty, not preached as a promise. That is not God's method. Scripture sets holiness before us rather as a gift than as a toil. I have called this one of the objects of a Christian hope, but it is the sum of all. I knit into one the hope of holiness and the hope of heaven. I know indeed that many talk of heaven who have no thought for the way to it. Some hope to meet there lost friends; some dream pleasantly of the trouble of conflict ended, and the repose of the everlasting unbroken. But all this is vague and unsatisfactory: there is nothing of it in the Bible. . . . Then love too well Him who is your hope to count anything too difficult to do, or too precious to sacrifice for Him! Saved by hope, hope to the end. Where He went before, follow after! (*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*)

Saved by our hope :—The years of the history of the Church which have as yet resisted most successfully the efforts of scientific research are the earliest years. The first century is the most obscure. With or without a history satisfying to modern canons, the Church accomplished in that time a spiritual work which, for present moral effects, for power to attract and subjugate souls of every nation and degree of culture, for inspiring new motives of action to a languid and despairing world, has far surpassed any other change known to us in the history of man. If the question is asked, as it often is, on what does our faith in God and Christ depend, we ought perhaps to reply, on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, and that His resurrection restored Him as a living leader to His disciples, so that His presence welded them together as one community, zealous of good works, abhorring sin, sure of eternal life. "Never," says Ewald, "in the whole world has a whole community, through a course of many years, lived so exclusively with all its thoughts in heaven, as that primitive community of Christianity without a visible Christ did actually live." With this belief we must stand or fall. Christian exclusiveness rests upon a belief in the central doctrine of the resurrection. The firm and sturdy belief that Christ is risen, and that we are risen, will not be replaced by Leibnitz's immortality of unlimited progress, or by the impersonal immortality of Spinoza, which to the individual soul is hardly more than a promise of nothingness. "The impossibility of a future life is not yet proved. With modern science immortality remains still a problem; and if the problem has not yet received a positive solution, neither has it received a negative one, as is sometimes maintained." (*Archbishop Thomson.*)

Prisoners of hope :—The prophet exhorts both those who had returned from Babylon and those who continued in Babylon to direct their eyes to the Messiah, to shelter themselves in Him as their stronghold. I. THE CHARACTERS DESCRIBED. "Prisoners of hope." Such is the condition of man in general. Still, even these are prisoners of hope. They have not yet crossed the portal on which justice hath graven, "There is no hope." Still more emphatically are they "prisoners of hope" who feel their bondage and pant for liberty. II. THE DIRECTION HERE GIVEN. "Turn ye to the stronghold." The soul is invited to trust in Christ as the only refuge and hope of the guilty. III. THE PROMISE WITH WHICH THE TEXT CLOSES. "I will render double unto thee." This expression is used in Scripture to describe a blessedness exceeding all that we can ask or think. Not according to our former sufferings, but double; not according to the punishment we have deserved for our sins, but double; not even the like blessings as were enjoyed by saints of old, but double. (*Stephen Bridge, M.A.*)

Prisoners of hope :—I. THE IMAGE UNDER WHICH WE ARE ADDRESSED. "Prisoners of hope." Man, in more senses than one, is a prisoner. This earthly body is, in one sense, his prison. He is also a prisoner of sin. We are captives of Satan. But we are prisoners of hope. With the prospect of release and encouragement. Such

was the case with Israel's captives. In this life we are all prisoners of hope. And those who by Divine grace have been brought back to God are in a still more distinct and peculiar manner the prisoners of hope. II. THE ADMONITION GIVEN IN THE TEXT. The language is that of earnest solicitation. Imminent peril is threatened. The flying captives who have escaped their prison are in danger of being seized and retaken by the enemy; and here is an impregnable fortress opened, into which they are invited to turn. We have no hesitation in applying this language to Christ. (*D. Wilson, M.A.*) *Refuge in God* :—God is not content with merely promising some refuge for stricken souls, but fascinates our faith with the wealth of imagery by which He declares it. In this verse He calls, "Turn you to the stronghold." Fortified places were provided generally on the top of some steep mountain, or approached only by a narrow defile where one could withstand a multitude of assailants, and into which the people ran from the villages and fields when the land was invaded. In other passages God is represented as a "hiding-place," where evil cannot even find and attack the soul (Psa. xxxii. 7); a pavilion, where safety is supplemented with comfort and delight (Psa. xxvii. 5); the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, the caves and overhanging cliffs (Isa. xxxii. 2), beneath which travellers and cattle escape the intense heat. How He assures us that our refuge is not through human expediencies, but Divine interposition in the "Rock that is higher than I"! Indeed, our refuge is something better than even a Divine expediency; it is in God Himself (Psa. lxii. 7, 8: "My refuge is in God." Psa. lvii. 1: "In the shadow of Thy wings"). Emphasise the personality of the Divine comfort.

I. THE COMPLETENESS OF THIS REFUGE. From the guilt of sin through the Cross—from the power of sinfulness in us through the Holy Spirit; from fears of all sorts—His promises so many and so varied between us and anticipated evil, like the many stones of the fortress facing outward in every direction; from depression, the cup He gives us "running over"—the spiritual overplus as opposed to the depressive occasion in the flesh or in the circumstances; from the ennui of secular pleasures and business, His revelation lifting our minds to the contemplation of the vast and glorious truths of both His earthly and heavenly kingdom; from unrest—He will keep in perfect peace the mind that is stayed on Him; from the weariness of all selfish, imparting the spirit of love and unselfish devotion, &c.

II. HOW SHALL WE FIND THIS REFUGE? It is not far away; need not go to Rome for it (Popish pilgrims), nor to Jerusalem (Crusaders' expectation of finding relief at the Holy Sepulchre): "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart," &c. 1. It is not a mysterious refuge, or one hard to understand. There is no Esotericism of Christian experience, no favoured few, no especial soul-light in theological refinements; Grotius prayed for the faith of his serving man. 2. It is not difficult to attain. "Knock," "Ask," "All things are ready." The great heart of the Eternal is close about us; no whispering gallery so quickly catches sounds as God's quick intent to bless catches the soul's desire. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Message of grace to sinners* :—The Gospel of Christ is a true friend to the penitent sinner. It is a refuge for the destitute, a shelter for the oppressed, and a defence in all "times of trouble." It is a "stronghold," and all that flee into it are safe. The words of the text apply—1. To the unawakened sinner. You are a prisoner, though unconscious of your captivity. You are the prisoner of Satan, and in bondage to sin. But God, who is a God of mercy, hath provided a great deliverer to interpose in your behalf. He hath opened the doors of the prison-house. At His command the chains of bondage fall off. 2. To the awakened sinner. When we perceive a concern for the soul in any one we thank God for His mercies, and pray that the work may be abiding and prosper. 3. To the weak believer. Unbelief hides from your view and from your enjoyment the truths and promises of the glorious Gospel, and keeps your soul still the prisoner of doubt, lest you should not hold out to the end of the journey, and reach in safety the kingdom of heaven. You need the exercise of a more lively faith in the free and finished salvation of the Cross, and a more simple reliance on the redeeming love and power of Christ. Hear, then, the voice of your Lord and Saviour, "Turn to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." Look more simply to Jesus. He is a complete and almighty Saviour. (*C. Davy.*) *The Messiah in the character of a Redeemer* :—I. THE PERSONS WHOM HE COMES TO REDEEM. The description is of a mixed nature: it represents a state in the main bad, yet not so wholly bad as to be past recovery. Though this "pit" doth not yield any water, yet water may be brought to it. The description points at those

who feel their misery, and earnestly look and long for deliverance. By "prisoners of hope" we understand all sinners who are within reach of Divine mercy, and more especially those who are suing for mercy, under the felt burden of sin and misery. And even they who have obtained mercy may come under this description. The present condition of believers upon earth is neither a state of perfect liberty nor of uninterrupted peace. These are the blessed ingredients which constitute the happiness of the Zion above, but whilst they sojourn in this strange land they are liable to various and painful distresses. There are other prisons besides the pit of an unconverted state; prisons where those who are dear to God may suffer a temporary confinement. There they are "prisoners of hope." II. THE ADVICE OR COMMAND ADDRESSED TO THEM. By the "stronghold" is meant "the blood of the covenant," or rather the new covenant itself, ratified and sealed by the blood of Christ. It is an impregnable defence to all who flee to it for refuge. How are we to turn to this stronghold? 1. We must turn our back upon everything else, and abandon all other means of deliverance, as refuges of lies, which will miserably disappoint those who expect relief from them. 2. That we turn our eyes to this stronghold, and narrowly examine the security it affords. 3. That we actually flee to it, and improve it for all the purposes for which it was intended.

III. A GRACIOUS AND ENCOURAGING PROMISE. 1. The promise itself is most gracious. "I will render double unto you." 2. The comfort of this promise is greatly heightened by the manner of publishing it. "Even to-day do I declare."

(*R. Walker.*) *The prisoner of hope*:—The multitudes in this fallen world need some other place of refuge than that which they have already discovered. If they had already found peace and security, there could be no necessity for directing them to "turn" to any new stronghold or place of defence. I. THE FIGURE UNDER WHICH THE TEXT DESCRIBES THE GREAT MASS OF MANKIND. 1. "Prisoners." Even the real servant of God finds much to remind him that he has not yet reached the region of perfect liberty. As to the man of the world, he is altogether a prisoner. 2. They are "prisoners of hope." All who have fallen from God are to be considered as "prisoners of hope." To whom shall we deny the privileges of hope? While there is life there is hope. II. THE COUNSEL GIVEN IN THE TEXT. I. A stronghold is here pointed out to you. By stronghold is meant every refuge which the mercy of God has provided for His guilty creatures. But especially the love, the merits, and the righteousness of the Saviour of sinners, the Son of God, the Redeemer of a lost world. 2. We are directed to turn to the stronghold. (1) We must be persuaded of the inefficiency of every other. (2) We must be persuaded of its sufficiency for our safety. (3) It is essential that we actually take possession of it. Inferences—1. What a confirmation do topics such as this lend to the authenticity of that faith into which we are baptized. 2. If the provision made in the Gospel for the wants and distresses of human nature be one mark of its Divine origin, let us take care to apply it to the use for which it is so emphatically designed. (*J. W. Cunningham.*) *Counsel to prisoners*:—The text primarily alludes to the Jews in captivity. I. THE PRISONERS OF HOPE. We have in our country at the least three kinds of prisoners. 1. Those upon whom sentence is passed, and they are therefore consigned to further imprisonment, punishment, banishment, or death. 2. Those who are guilty of felony or misdemeanour, but who have not yet appeared before the judge to have their trial; and—3. Debtors who, in consequence of adversity or prodigality, have been brought into distress and prison. There are also three kinds of prisoners in a moral or spiritual sense. 1. Those who have died impenitent, and have received sentence of eternal death. These are not prisoners of hope, their state is eternally fixed. They must be banished for ever from God. Thanks be to God! this is not our state. 2. All who are living in sin are prisoners. Compare a man shut up in prison until the assizes when he must appear before the judge, and a sinner shut up in the prison of sin until death introduces him into the presence of the Judge of all the earth. The sinner is the bond-slave of Satan. A prisoner is liable at any moment to be brought to justice; and so is a wicked man. He is yet a prisoner of hope. 3. There are debtors who often, in consequence of carelessness or prodigality, have brought themselves into sorrow and confinement. This is the case with backsliders. Their case is pitiable, but not desperate. They are prisoners of hope. II. THE STRONGHOLD TO WHICH THESE PRISONERS ARE EXHORTED TO TURN. 1. A stronghold signifies literally a place of safety or defence; figuratively, it is put for the Church of God, and sometimes for the Lord Himself. 2. He is a place of safety and defence to His people. They are

shielded from the curse attached to a breach of the holy and righteous law of God. 3. This stronghold is accessible by all kinds of sinners. As soon as ever they come to themselves, and are sensible of their situation, they may find shelter in the love of the Saviour. III. ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION. "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." 1. Confess and forsake all your sins. 2. It is the will of God that you should thus turn from prison to liberty, from sin to holiness. 3. To return from your prison will be your highest interest, both in this world and in that which is to come. 4. If you refuse to turn to the stronghold you will be destroyed, and that without remedy. 5. Turn now! Delays are dangerous! (*B. Bailey.*) *The double blessing*:—In these words are to be noticed—I. THE PERSONS. "Prisoners of hope." Though all men are prisoners by nature, yet all men are not "prisoners of hope." Every natural man is a prisoner to sin and Satan, and shut up in unbelief; sin has dominion over him, he lies in the arms of the wicked one. The persons spoken to in the words of the text are the same persons who are mentioned in the verse which precedes the text. The people addressed are a people who were sent forth out of the pit wherein is no water, by which a state of nature doubtless is intended; which is a filthy, dark, wretched, and uncomfortable state, wherein no refreshment can be had. These are called in the text "prisoners of hope," which they are, not only because they possess hope as a grace of the Spirit in their hearts, but also because it causes its professors to hope for the enjoyment of those things which are promised to the people of God in the Word of God, and which they are not yet put in the possession of. Though these people are sent forth out of the pit of nature, yet they may be called "prisoners," because their consciences are not yet acquitted of guilt. They are prisoners, but prisoners of hope. II. THE EXHORTATION. "Turn ye to the stronghold." Christ undoubtedly is intended. It is by turning to Christ, in a way of believing, that guilty consciences can be liberated, and joy and peace experienced. Believing in Christ is also called coming to Him, looking to Him, turning to Him. Those who do this find themselves screened from the curse of the law; the charge of sin; the punishment of it; from Satan's rage; and from every other enemy. III. THE DECLARATION. "I will render double unto thee." Either by this the abundance of grace and mercy in Christ is intended; or by the term "double" is meant the pardon of their sins, and acceptance of their persons; or it is a promise of God's removing guilt from their consciences, and of His restoring peace, which also is a double blessing. The whole of this passage is a display of God's love and care, which He exercises towards all those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ, in virtue of which it is that God sends them forth out of the pit of nature, and then directs them as prisoners of hope to turn to the stronghold (Christ), and promises to render unto them the double blessings above-mentioned. (*S. Barnard.*) *The prisoners of hope*:—Turning to the Jews who still remained in Babylon, Zechariah invites them to quit the land of their captivity and hasten to Jerusalem, "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." They were in captivity, but that not an interminable captivity; they were prisoners of hope; and were now invited to a place of refuge and security. This is the primary meaning of the passage before us, but the language is suitable in the universal Church of God. The invitation of the Gospel is here addressed to "prisoners." "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (slave) of sin." Many who would justly spurn at the thought of being the slaves of any man are yet in bondage to a master of whose service they have more reason to be ashamed. All men are, by nature, servants of sin and children of wrath, exposed by their past transgressions of the law of God, and by the contrariety of their hearts to it, to His just displeasure. . . . I speak to those whose conscience tells them that they have never yet earnestly sought the deliverance that is provided for them. You are indeed prisoners, but you are prisoners of hope. To you the door of mercy is still open. There is an offer of deliverance, an invitation to a refuge, a place of safety. Are there some of you sensible of the danger of your state before God, convinced of sin, and tremblingly alive to its fearful consequences? Turn, then, to the stronghold. Turn to the covenant made by God with believers in Christ Jesus, the sure promise that He will pardon, justify, and deliver from condemnation, sanctify, and keep unto eternal life, those who cast themselves upon His mercy through Jesus Christ as their only hope. Are some of you desirous of turning to the stronghold, and yet know not how to set about your return? See the promise in Isa. xlii. 16. You who have fled to the hope set before you in the Gospel may have strong

consolation. (*M. M. Preston, M.A.*) *The ground of Christian confidence* :—The words of this text may be considered as justly applicable to the great Messiah, as highly expressive of the happiness which those shall enjoy who have recourse to Him for salvation. I. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE TO WHOM THE EXHORTATION IS ADDRESSED. They are “prisoners.” Enter into the feelings of the ordinary criminal prisoner. Consider the tumults of soul which he experiences from the review of his iniquitous deeds. When reviewing the wretched state of a prisoner of this description the reflection irresistibly strikes us,—how happy this man might have been had his conduct been uniformly influenced by the laws of righteousness. All men, by nature, are prisoners. They have all become obnoxious to those fearful judgments which this law hath denounced against its transgressors. The situation of the prisoner is a faint emblem of the wretchedness of the natural man. The prisoner was confined in a dark dungeon; so do clouds and darkness encompass the soul. The prisoner is loaded with fetters. Every man, in his natural state, is shackled by the galling fetters of sin. The prisoner must expect to end his guilty career by a disgraceful death. But these prisoners are called “prisoners of hope.” Dangerous is the state of sinful man, but not desperate. The stroke of death may yet be averted, and they may become heirs of eternal life. Loaded as men may be with iniquities, Omnipotence can easily release them from the oppressive burden. By the term “prisoners of hope” may also be meant those who have felt a deep sense of their misery and danger, who earnestly look for deliverance from the power and guilt of sin. Men of this description are in a most hopeful way. Those also may be included in the term who have already tasted that the Lord is merciful and gracious, but are subject to depression of mind. In the best of men there remains some portion of natural corruption. II. THE IMPORT OF THE EXHORTATION. By the stronghold is here meant the blood of the atonement, or the “blood of the covenant.” Through this blood those spiritual consolations are imparted to men which are so necessary to their happiness. This stronghold is a most impregnable defence to all who flee to it for refuge. The covenant of grace is adequate to all the wants and necessities of sinful men. It is there to be found unlimited pardon of sin; through it the Divine acceptance has been assured; through it grace is communicated to purify the soul from every stain of corruption; through it that wisdom is conferred which is profitable to direct in all things, and that power which shall enable man to surmount every difficulty. The fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in the Mediator of this covenant, and He becometh to all who believe, “wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and complete redemption.” What is implied by turning to this stronghold, the perfect righteousness and complete atonement of the Redeemer? It means that we renounce every mean or false security. Many are the grounds of false dependence on which unthinking, ignorant men rely. Let all who have hitherto relied on these grounds of false dependence henceforth renounce them for ever; and let them betake themselves to the finished work of Jesus, who is the tried precious corner-stone, the sure foundation which God hath laid in Zion. (*M. Galt, M.A.*) *Christ a stronghold* :—I. IN WHAT SENSE, OR ON WHAT ACCOUNT, ARE MANKIND REPRESENTED AS PRISONERS? The prison is of a spiritual description. It is not so much a place as a state of confinement. All men, by nature, are under the curse of God, and the power of sin and Satan. The law, the justice, the truth, the power of God; these are the walls and bolts and bars that confine you. The evil dispositions and passions of men answer all the purposes of chains and bolts, to disable their souls from rising towards heaven, or moving a step in the way of holiness. II. WHY ARE SOME CALLED PRISONERS OF HOPE, AND WHO ARE THEY THAT MAY BE SO CALLED? It implies that there are some without hope. The devil and his angels are such. Such also are all those among men who have died without repentance and pardon; and they are a multitude, we fear, greater than any man can number. Who are prisoners of hope? 1. All who are alive upon the earth. 2. Those who possess the means of grace are more particularly to be considered as prisoners of hope. 3. Those who feel religious impressions. III. WHAT IS THIS STRONGHOLD? It is Christ. 1. He secures us from the wrath of God. 2. From the assaults of sin and Satan. 3. From worldly confusion and calamities. IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN TURNING TO THIS STRONGHOLD? 1. You must be thoroughly convinced of Christ’s ability to defend you. 2. You must forsake all other refuges. 3. In order to obtain safety in Christ there must be an actual acceptance of Him, and a steady reliance upon Him for protection.

V. **HOW DO WE KNOW THAT CHRIST IS SUCH A STRONGHOLD?** 1. Consider His Divine perfections. 2. His Divine appointment. Have you turned to this stronghold? Some have. Some are still secure in Satan's confinement. Some feel the fetters begin to galling them, and they are sighing for liberty. Be often looking back to your former imprisonment. Adore the grace that provided such a stronghold. And beware of dishonouring this stronghold. This is done when men think it a confinement, and are uneasy under its restraints. (*S. Lavington.*)

A stronghold :—I HOW THE SAVIOUR MAY BE CALLED A STRONGHOLD. A stronghold implies a place of safety or security, and can only allude to Christ. The Psalmist called Him his castle, his fortress, his tower of defence, the rock of his might—doubtless impressed with the security afforded to the weak who can cleave unto Him. Few terms can be more forcible than the one contained in our text, but we must feel our weakness to appreciate the force of the term. We must feel the necessity of our having a stronghold to turn unto.

II. **TO WHOM THE TERM "PRISONERS OF HOPE" MAY REFER.** This evidently applies to the whole world. When Adam sinned he became a prisoner—a slave to sin and evil passions. This slavery he entailed upon all his children. It is the evil nature of man that holds him bound—it withers the germ of life; it destroys all the energies and Divine flowings of the soul; it throws a chain upon the creature that holds him down, so that he cannot get free. We are prisoners in the flesh. The heart of stone rests within. But although a prisoner, still in hope. Prisoners by sin hope in Christ, because Christ gave Himself a ransom for sinners. The penitent sinner has hope because he is awakened by a consciousness of his sin, and by the apprehension of his danger.

III. **THE PROMISE CONTAINED IN THE TEXT.** The exhortation contains a promise of infinite magnitude: "I will render double unto thee." You shall receive amends for the trouble you have endured, for the miseries of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us. (*G. Thompson, M.A.*)

Inspiration of hope :—In one of the great battles of history the General of the French was approached by an excited officer, who cried, "The battle is lost!" "Yes," was the cool reply; "but there is time to win another." And so it proved, for the retreating troops rallied, and pressed forward in a still fiercer attack because of their temporary repulse, and at night all victory rested on the French banners. No defeat is final, unless you choose to make it so. There is always time to win a victory. Suppose your temper gets the better of you instead of your conquering it. Suppose you yield to the temptation you meant to rout so gloriously. Is that a reason for giving up and throwing down your arms? Not a bit of it. The end has not come yet. There is still time to win another battle. Make your next onset all the fiercer because of that temporary defeat.

The hope of gain in dying :—There is a bird that mariners call the "frigate bird," of strange habits and of stranger power. Men see him in all climes; but never yet has human eye seen him near the earth. With wings of mighty stretch, high borne, he sails along. Men of the far north see him at midnight moving on amid auroral fires, sailing along with set wings amid those awful flames, taking the colour of the waves of light which swell and heave around him. Men in the tropics see him at hottest noon, his plumage all incarnadined by the fierce rays that smite innocuous upon him. Amid their ardent fever he bears along, majestic, tireless. Never was he known to stoop from his lofty line of flight, never to swerve. To many he is a myth; to all a mystery. Where is his perch? Where does he rest? Where was he brooded? None know. They only know that above the cloud, above the reach of tempest, above the tumult of transverse currents, this bird of heaven, so let us call him, on self-supporting wings that disdain to beat the air on which they rest, moves grandly on. So shall my hope be. At either pole of life, above the clouds of sorrow, superior to the tempests that beat upon me, on lofty and tireless wing, scorning the earth, it shall move along. Never shall it stoop, never swerve from its sublime line of flight. Men shall see it in the morning of my life; they shall see it in its hot noonday; and when the shadows fall, my sun having set, the last they shall see of me shall be this hope of gain in dying, as it sails out on steady wing, and disappears amid the everlasting light. (*W. H. Murray.*)

Prisoners of hope :—This title is not a fanciful one. To the Jew it had a triple significance. 1. He was under the yoke of a foreign despot, and longed to regain his freedom. 2. He was under the yoke of an unfulfilled promise of a coming Messiah, and yearned for the "day-star to arise." 3. He was under the yoke of the unrealised prophecies concerning the

glory of the Messiah's kingdom, and the eternal felicity of His followers. Rightly apprehended, the words of the text are the true designation of every real Christian. In two senses out of the three, however, they are not applicable to us. We are not under an alien yoke. The incarnation is not a hope, but a historic fact. In the third sense only are saints to-day "prisoners of hope." I. WE ARE PRISONERS TO AN UNREDEEMED BODY. In St. Paul's sense, "Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii. 23). Observe, then—1. There is a sense in which the body is already redeemed. Christ by His contact with human flesh has sanctified it, and separated it from the service of sin; so that now we are exhorted to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God." 2. There is another sense in which our bodies are not redeemed. (1) They are not yet free from manifold infirmities,—nervousness, drowsiness, debility, defects in the organs of sensation. (2) They are not yet redeemed from sensuous appetites. How soon the sensuous becomes sensual! 3. Hope anticipates the possession of an immortal body—(1) From which every element of weakness and infirmity is excluded. (2) In which carnal appetites shall have no place. (3) Which shall be no more subject to death. II. WE ARE PRISONERS TO A LIMITED AND SUPERFICIAL KNOWLEDGE. "Now I know in part,"—there is the bondage. "Then shall I know even as I am known,"—there is the freedom. 1. Our knowledge touches not the essence, but only the phenomena of things. What they really are Omniscience only knows. Names are but disguises by which we hide our ignorance. The more we learn, the less we seem to know. "There are two sorts of ignorance. We philosophise to escape ignorance, and the consummation of our philosophy is ignorance. We start from the one, and repose in the other." 2. Our knowledge reaches men, not as they are, only as they appear. All men are better or worse than they seem to be. The invisible part is the true man. 3. Even this knowledge is limited by the brevity of life and the conditions of its existence. The most profound thinker and the most extensive traveller must lay aside their work at the summons of death. 4. Since human knowledge is so limited, how irrational for human beings to impugn the Divine economy. As wise for the mole to criticise and condemn the landscape under which he burrows. Man's work is to trust and wait. 5. Hope anticipates the solution of the dark enigma of human life. "Then I shall know even as I am known." Things will appear as they really are. 6. Even this knowledge is progressive. The finite can never comprehend the infinite. Progress is heaven's law as well as earth's. III. WE ARE PRISONERS TO A CIRCUMSCRIBED CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP. The great family of our Father is sadly dismembered. Whilst one in spirit and faith, our fellowship is ruptured by—1. Doctrinal divergence. The Jews of bigoted ritualism still have no dealings with the Samaritans of a broader faith. 2. Suspicion, the offspring of imperfect knowledge, is another cause of circumscribed fellowship. 3. Social status is a barrier to universal Christian fellowship. 4. Distance and death contribute to the limited measure of fellowship enjoyed by Christians. 5. Hope anticipates the universal and perfect fellowship of saints. (1) This will include all ages; (2) and all climes; (3) and all classes and creeds. IV. WE ARE PRISONERS TO AN IMPERFECT VISION OF CHRIST. "Now we see through a glass darkly." There is the bondage. "Then face to face." There is the substance of our hope. Yet note—1. Christ is really apprehended by faith even here. This faith is a spiritual sense, akin to the eye of the body. It invests the invisible Saviour with a real personality. 2. This vision is at best a dim one. A reflected view, as when one beholds a face in a mirror. 3. Human nature in its present state is not capable of a more open vision. (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

Vers. 13-17. *The Lord of hosts shall defend them.—God works amongst the nations in the interests of His people:*—The double recompense which the Lord will make to His people will consist in the fact that He not only liberates them out of captivity and bondage, and makes them into an independent nation, but that He helps them to victory over the power of the world, so that they will tread it down, *i.e.* completely subdue it. The first thought is not explained more fully because it is contained *implicite* in the promise of return to a strong place, the double only is more distinctly defined, namely, the victory over Javan. The expression, "I stretch," &c., implies that the Lord will subdue the enemies by Judah and Ephraim, and therefore Israel will carry on this conflict in the power of its God.—Keil. I. THAT GOD WORKS AMONGST THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH.

God is here represented as raising up Zion against Greece. "And raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece." The literal reference, it may be, is to the help which He would render the Maccabees, as the heroic leaders of the Jews, to overcome the successors of the Grecian Alexander, Antiochus Epiphanes, and the other Grecian oppressors of Judah. He works with the Jew and the Greek, or Gentile—the two great divisions of mankind. He is in their conflicts and their battles. I. He works universally amongst men. He works with the "sons" of Zion and the "sons" of Greece. He operates with all, with the remote and the distant, with the little and the great, with the good and the bad; He is in all human history. All good He originates, all evil He overrules. 2. He works by human agency amongst men. "When I have bent Judah for Me, filled the bow with Ephraim." God carries out His purposes with man by the agency of man; wicked kings are His tools, obscure saints are His ministers of state. He works manifestly amongst men. "And the Lord shall be seen over them"; or, as Keil renders it, "Jehovah shall appear above them." 4. He works terribly amongst men. "And His arrow shall go forth as the lightning, and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south." "Like lightning will His arrow go forth, and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpets, and will pass along in storms of the south."—Keil. He is in the crashings of conflagrating cities, in the booming thunders of contending armies, in the wild whirlwinds of battling kingdoms; with Him there is "terrible majesty" as He proceeds on His march in human history. II. God works amongst the nations of the earth IN THE INTERESTS OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. He works for their defence. "The Lord of hosts shall defend them," or shelter them. 2. He works for their victory. "They shall devour and subdue with sling-stones," &c. "Jehovah of hosts shall protect them, and they shall devour and tread down the sling-stones, they shall drink, they shall be noisy, as those who drink wine; they shall be full as the bowl, as the corners of the altar."—Henderson. The idea is their complete triumph over their enemies. Hengstenberg observes that there is not the least indication that a spiritual conflict is intended. Quite true, but a spiritual conflict it may illustrate, and its victory too. 3. He works for their salvation. "And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people." 4. He works for their glory. "They shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land." Or, as Hengstenberg renders it, "For crowned jewels shall they be rising up upon His land." There is true glory awaiting the good. There is a crown of glory laid up in heaven, &c. 5. He works for their perfection. "For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids." We accept the rendering of Keil here, which is not only faithful to the original, but in harmony with the context. The prophet is speaking of the high privileges of God's people, and not of the excellences of the Supreme. It is an exclamation of admiration of the high privileges of the godly. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 16. They shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land.—*The Lord's people*:—Here we see—I. THE DIGNITY OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE. They are "stones, precious stones," set in the "crown" of the King of kings. God not only spares, but pardons and justifies them. In His righteousness they are exalted; they are not only saved, but ennobled. With kings are they upon the throne. II. HERE IS ALSO THEIR EXHIBITION. These stones of a crown are "lifted up." They are not to be concealed. Our Saviour compares them to a city set, not in a valley, but on a hill which cannot be hid; and to a candle, placed, not under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. Christians need not be concealed—everything in their religion will bear examination, and challenges the eyes of all, whether infidels or philosophers or politicians or moralists. They ought not to be concealed—everything in their religion is adapted to do good; but for this purpose it must be known. They cannot be concealed,—their principles must operate; the sun cannot shine without showing itself. III. HERE IS ALSO THEIR UTILITY,—these stones of a crown are to be lifted up "as an ensign upon His land." An oriflamme suspended over the royal tent, and designed to attract and aggregate followers to the cause in which he is engaged. Their calling, to hold forth the Word of Life. They are placed and displaced; to reprove, to convince, to excite and encourage others, to seek and serve God. They are witnesses for Him; trophies of the power

and greatness and riches of His grace. They proclaim what He is able and willing to do. (*William Jay.*)

Ver. 17. For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!—*God's goodness and beauty* :—There is no subject of contemplation more delightful to a serious mind than the goodness of the Lord. The prophet had been, in the preceding verses, describing the appearance of Christ as King of Zion, as just, and having salvation. He had been speaking of the blood of the covenant, by which the prisoners of Divine justice are delivered, and invited to turn to the stronghold. He had described the salvation which God should work out for His people by the Messiah, when they should be as the precious stones of a crown, lifted up on high, and God would save and favour them as His jewels and peculiar treasure. The prophet's heart was so affected with the prospect of this mercy that he breaks out into the joyful acclamation, "How great is His goodness!" Learn that the Divine goodness in our redemption and salvation claims our admiration and our praise. Here too we see the "beauty" of the Lord. How amicably His perfections shine in the dispensation of the Gospel; so that all who attend to it with serious minds will see and adore them. Here we observe mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace greeting each other. Here, at the Holy Sacrament, we see the King of Zion, the image of the invisible God, in all His beauty, and He appears fairer than the children of men, and altogether amiable and lovely. Here also we see the goodness of the Lord; with what peculiar lustre this perfection of the Divine nature shines in our redemption by Jesus Christ. That goodness appears great if we consider how universally it extends: even to all mankind. Jesus is a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. If we consider the *objects* of it; mean and miserable mortals, whose goodness cannot extend to Him. This goodness is to terminate in perfect and everlasting glory and felicity. The fountain of all our comforts and hopes is Divine goodness. The streams are plenteous, and various. They enrich, delight, and satisfy the soul, and they flow for ever. (*Job Orton.*) *The glory of Christ* :—This is manifested throughout all the Holy Scriptures. This is attested both by the Apostles and by our Lord Himself (Acts x. 43; Luke xxiv. 27; John v. 39). In the New Testament He shines like the sun in an unclouded atmosphere. In the Old, though generally veiled, He often bursts forth as from behind a cloud with astonishing beauty and splendour. Nor could the prophet himself forbear exclaiming with wonder and admiration, "How great is His goodness!" &c. I. THE GOODNESS OF OUR LORD. In the context He is set forth as the God of providence and of grace. And in order to behold His goodness we must view Him in both respects. 1. As the God of providence. As all things were created, so are they upheld and governed by Him. To Him we owe the preservation of our corporeal and intellectual powers. We are continually fed by His bounty, and protected by His arm. The meanest creature in the universe has abundant reason to adore Him—His own people in particular may discern unnumbered instances of His goodness in His dispensations towards them. His most afflictive as well as His more pleasing dispensations afford them much occasion for gratitude and thanksgiving (Psa. cxix. 75). 2. As a God of grace. Jesus is the one fountain of spiritual blessings to His Church (Eph. i. 22). Neither prophets nor apostles had any grace but from Him (John i. 16). To Him must we ascribe every good disposition that is in our hearts (Phil. ii. 13; Heb. xii. 2). What reason, then, have His faithful followers to bless His name! With what gratitude should they acknowledge His continued kindness! Though they have often turned back from Him, He has not cast them off. Yea, rather, He has "healed their backslidings and loved them freely." Surely every blessing they receive and every victory they gain should fill them with admiring thoughts of His goodness (2 Cor. ii. 14). If we have just conceptions of His goodness we shall be more able to behold—II. HIS BEAUTY. The world beholds "no beauty nor comeliness in" the face of Jesus. But the saints of old "saw His glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father." This we also may see if we survey Him—1. In this Divine character. "We cannot by searching find out the Almighty to perfection." Little do we know of the greatness of His majesty, or the thunder of His power (Job xxvi. 14). We cannot comprehend His unsearchable wisdom, His unspotted holiness, His inviolable truth and faithfulness. His glory is more than the feeble language of mortality can express. 2. In His human character. Here we look at Him, as the Jews at Moses when his face was veiled. And can

contemplate Him more easily because He shines with a less radiant lustre. But principally must we view Him during the course of His ministry. What marvellous compassion did He manifest to the souls and bodies of men! Not one applied to Him for bodily or spiritual health without obtaining his request. And when many were hardened in their sins He wept over them (Luke xix. 41). His zeal for God was ardent and unremitted. His meekness, patience, fortitude were altogether invincible. Whatever was amiable and excellent in man abounded in Him (Psa. xlv. 2). Nor, though continually tried in the hottest furnace, was there found in Him the smallest imperfection or alloy (John xiv. 30). 3. In His mediatorial character. With what readiness did He become a surety for sinful man (Psa. xl. 7, 8). What astonishing condescension did He manifest in uniting Himself to our nature! How cheerfully did He go forth to meet the sufferings that were appointed for Him. His obedience unto death was the fruit of His love and the price of our redemption. How beautiful is He now in the eyes of those who behold His glory! And how will He "be admired and glorified by all" in the last day! Satan must have blinded us, indeed, if we be yet insensible to His charms (2 Cor. iv. 4). If we be true believers, He cannot but be precious to our souls (1 Pet. ii. 7). (*J. Benson.*) How great is His beauty.—*The secret of beauty*:—The last words of Charles Kingsley were, "How beautiful is God!" Zechariah was thinking of the glory about to be given to Israel, about the prosperity soon to abound in the land, and he knows that it is all the good gift of God, so he cries, "How great is His goodness! How great is His beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids." Wise men who have thought about the nature of God have always said that there must be three perfect things in God. There must be perfect truth, perfect goodness, and perfect beauty. By remembering this you may always tell the difference between true and false ideas about God. Every man and every child who worships a God about whom he has hard, cruel thoughts, although a Christian in name, gives only heathen worship to the Most High. All through the Bible God has been teaching men that He is beautiful. The Jews were taught to make their worship beautiful. At last Christ came. He did not seem to bring beauty down to man at once. The word "beauty" is never mentioned in the New Testament. But this was because Christ wanted men to look deeper for beauty than on the face and form. The beauty which Christ brought was beauty of the soul, of the heart, of the life, spiritual beauty which will never fade away with age, will never wither or decay. Here in our flowers to-day can we not try to see the beauty of God? They teach that His beauty is perfect in little things as well as in great. The tiniest flower is as perfect as the large. And the beauty is not for mere show, but for comfort and use. How often a flower teaches people about God! I have read of a poor sinful woman pressing a white flower to her heart in an agony of tears, because it came to her like the voice of God, telling of His wish for her to be pure and bright. We would like to reveal God to those around us. If so, let us be God's flowers. Aim at three things in order that we may accomplish this our high task. 1. Let us have the beauty of worship. 2. Beauty of worship must lead to beauty of life. 3. All this will grow into beauty of character. This is the beauty that lasts for ever. To get this will take time. All the best things take time. (*H. H. Gowen.*) *Beauty*:—One by one the various traits of Divine excellence came before the mind of the prophet, and at last he, as it were, generalised them; and the whole vision struck him as one of extreme beauty. The wisdom of God, His justice, His purity, His truth, His love,—all of these, in quality, in quantity, and in harmony, form a symmetric whole, which deserves, if anything deserves it, the epithet "beautiful," and meets the highest conception, and overreaches the highest aspiration which the human heart has for the element of beauty. Is beauty, then, a reality in the higher spiritual life? Is there in the inward, invisible, and truly spiritual life that which answers to our idea of sensuous beauty? Or is it figurative? I hold that beauty is first spiritual, and afterwards natural and material. I hold that it was Divine; that it inhered in the nature of God, and the nature of spiritual existence. Examine the relation of beauty to moral qualities. As God has created the world, beauty is not a kind of seasoning scattered upon the weightier realities. Men think that the beauty of this natural world is a kind of decoration. Perfectness and beauty are identical. Maturity, whether it be of fruit, or flower, or what not, works by stages towards beauty in the material globe. So that

beauty is not an accident. Still less is it the trimming which God gave to the perfected work. It is the Divine idea of a mode of creation. As the human mind is cultivated, it becomes more and more sensitive to this quality. The less culture men have, the further they are from the admiration of beauty; that is to say, the less comprehensive is their admiration. When the human mind develops and grows toward its perfection, it grows toward the sense of beauty. But moral qualities come under this law, just as much as physical qualities do. Fulness, fineness, and harmony—there is the formula. In nature it is called quantity, symmetry: and the equivalent of this in moral elements is fulness, fineness, harmony. Whatever elements the mind produces when it acts so as to give fulness, fineness, and harmonious proportions to the product, are beautiful. That is to say, they produce the sense of beauty in those that look upon them, and tend universally to do it. Right things are commanded in the Bible, but it is not enough that we should be just, conscientious, true, amiable, or benevolent. There is to be fulness in each of these elements, and there is to be harmony among all of them. And here is the formula fulfilled which goes to make social and moral affections beautiful. It would seem enough to say to men, "Be kind, be generous, be benevolent"; but no, Let love be without dissimulation. God loves a cheerful giver. Give without grudging one to another. These are the elements that go to make beneficence; that free it from wrinkles; that give it largeness and generosity. The growth toward ripeness in moral experience is analogous to development in physical nature,—that is toward beautifulness. Just in proportion as any one of our better feelings becomes predominant over the others, men feel that character is growing lovely, attractive, admirable. And these are only step-stone words that bring you to the last one, "beautiful." There is nothing so beautiful in this world as beauty of character. Applications—1. All the world recognises beauty in the lower grade of qualities. It is the higher moral experience that men lack a knowledge of. Devotion is more beautiful than passion. The love of God in the soul is far more beautiful than any love of man can be. The qualities of religion to which we are called are supreme, not alone in importance, but in art even. They are essentially and intrinsically more admirable, more noble, more beautiful than all the lower experiences. 2. How great is the variety of spiritual things in the Christian life! and how few things are gained! How many persons are there that are beautiful in temper? How many whose good-nature is anything more than the mere product of good health? How little is the Church beautiful in its grace! 3. The unbeautifulness of Christian life is sadly shown in the popular impression with regard to religion. Men mostly feel that religion is something that may be obligatory, but that there is nothing attractive about it. The true idea is, that a man who goes into a Christian experience, goes into a larger liberty, and goes into a larger joy. 4. Christians should at least be as sensible to spiritual beauty as to physical. All men should love beauty in common things. 5. God is bringing all good men toward that realm, and that indescribable experience which is hinted at in the words of Scripture. The work which is going on in us, we do not ourselves at all appreciate. (*Henry Ward Beecher.*)

CHAPTER X

VER. 1. Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain.—*The latter rain*:—The rainfall in Palestine is normally periodical; occasional showers and even storms of rain may occur at any season, but as a rule it is at the time of the autumnal and that of the vernal equinox that the rain for the year falls. These two periodic seasons of rain the Hebrews spoke of as the early and the latter rain; and on the occurrence of them the fruitfulness of the field and the return of the harvest depended. In other passages both the former and the latter rain are referred to as indispensable to this. At an early period God promised to Israel that He would "give the rain of their land in due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that they might gather in their corn, and their wine (tirosh), and their oil" (Deut. xi. 14); and by the prophets the sending of rain, the former and the latter in their season, is represented as the

manifestation of special regard for His people by Jehovah (comp. Hos. vi. 3; Joel ii. 23; Isa. xxx. 23; Jer. v. 24). The latter rain only is mentioned here, probably because this was the more important for the fructification of the grain; and possibly also, because, being this, it might be regarded as including or representing temporal blessing generally. This the prophet here exhorts the people to ask of the Lord "at the time of the latter rain," i.e., at the season when it was due; though God had promised it to His people, it was fitting and needful that they should pray to Him for it at the time when it was required. This "direction to ask" does not "simply express the readiness of God to grant their request"; it does this, for when God enjoins on men the asking for blessing, He implicitly engages to give the blessing asked for; but besides this, and even more than this, there is intimated here that the obtaining of promised blessing is conditioned by its being specially asked of God in the season of need. God's promises are given not to supersede prayer, but rather to encourage and stimulate to prayer. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*)

The latter rain :—The "latter rain" was that which fell in the spring, and which was instrumental in bringing the corn into the ear and filling it; so that if this rain failed, the husbandman would be disappointed of his harvest, notwithstanding all his previous industry, skill, and anxiety. He was indeed dependent also on the "former" rain, that which fell at the seeding time; but there would be a yet more bitter disappointment, for there would be the utter loss of much labour, the fruitless expenditure of much effort and hope, if the "latter rain" were withheld. And, consequently, there was even greater reason for his asking rain in "the time of the latter rain" than in that of "the former." If the "former rain" were withheld, he might make some other use of his capital and enterprise; but if "the latter," his disaster scarce admitted of repair. Take it metaphorically, and the "latter rain" is the grace needed for ripening the believer and fitting him for heaven. God may give "the latter rain," if the husbandman, conscious of his dependence on God for the harvest, continue meekly to supplicate the necessary showers; He may withhold the rain, if the husbandman, calculating on the ordinary course of His dealings, grow remiss in petitioning, and give up his fields to the presumed certainties of the season. There is no point in the life of a Christian at which he can do without the supply of God's grace; none at which he can expect the supply, if he be not cultivating the spirit and habit of prayer. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Prayer and promise :—We have here expressed the connection between prayer and promise on the one hand, and prayer and the processes of nature on the other. The blessing of rain, which, to an agricultural people, was inclusive of all other temporal blessings, and symbolical of all spiritual ones, was promised; but this promise was dependent on its supplication in prayer. Just so the great blessing of the descent of the Spirit on an individual or a Church, though a free gift, must be obtained by prayer. It is this fact that makes the spirit of prayer in the Church at once an index of her piety, and of the spiritual blessings she may expect from God. When the Church pours out a fulness of prayer, God will pour out a fulness of His Spirit. The inspired writers see no difficulty in the connection between prayer and the processes of nature, such as the mole-eyed philosophy of modern times discovers. The inspired writers think that the God who has created the elements may direct them according to His will. We must not suppose that because God has begun to bless us, we may relax our prayers and efforts. The former rain may be given, but we must also ask for the latter rain. We may have the former rain of conversion, but if we would have the latter rain of ripened sanctification, we must continue to ask of God. So, also, in the revival of religion. The former rain may occur, and souls be converted, but if we would have the ripening seed in active Christians, we must ask of God, and He will give growth, greenness, and maturity. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*)

God in relation to the good and the bad :—I. GOD ATTENDS TO THE PRAYERS OF GOOD MEN. The abundance of corn promised in the last clause of the preceding chapter depends upon rain. 1. God gives rain. A pseudo-science would ascribe "rain" and "clouds" and "showers" to what they call the laws of nature. The Bible directly connects them with the working of God. "He watereth the hills from His chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Thy works" (Psa. civ. 13-15, lxxv. 9-11). 2. The God who gives rain attends to human prayer. But it is not absurd, because—(1) Man is greater than material nature. (2) Prayer is a settled law of the Divine government. To cry to the Almighty in distress is an instinct of the soul. Prayer, instead of interfering with the laws of nature, is a law of nature. II. HE

ABOMINATES THE CHARACTER OF RELIGIOUS IMPOSTORS. "For the idols [the household gods] have spoken vanity," &c. "Thus, under such misleading guides, such selfish and unprincipled shepherds, the flock was driven about and 'troubled.' They had 'no shepherd,' no truly faithful shepherd, who took a concern in the well-being of the flock."—Wardlaw. Now, against such impostors, Jehovah says, "Mine anger was kindled." "That the shepherds and the goats," says Hengstenberg, "are the heathen rulers who obtained dominion over Judah when the native government was suppressed, is evident from the contrast so emphatically pointed out in the fourth verse, where particular prominence is given to the fact that the new rulers whom God was about to appoint would be taken from the midst of the nation itself." Are there no religious impostors now, no false teachers, no blind leading the blind, no shepherds fleeing the flocks? III. HE WORKS IN ALL FOR HIS PEOPLE. From Him comes stability. All stability in moral character, in social order, in political prosperity, is from God. What a sublime view of the Almighty have we here! (*Homilist.*) *Asking of the Lord*:—1. Mark the importance of cultivating the spirit of dependence and prayer. We are, as creatures and as sinners, dependent for everything we need, whether for the body or the soul,—for this life or the life to come. It is fitting that we should feel this dependence, and that we should give it expression. Prayer is the expression of it; but prayer is something more. It is "asking of the Lord." It is a precious privilege; it is a sacredly incumbent duty. It is one of the Divinely ordered means for obtaining any desired good. God's Word ascribes to it an efficacy on His own counsels and doings; its being His inducement to act in one way rather than in another. 2. But we must never be satisfied with praying. We must never separate prayer from action. The two must go together. It will not do for the husbandman to be ever on his knees, pleading that his fields may be productive. All the labour and all the skill of husbandry must be put forth by him. He must work and pray: he must pray and work. It is a mockery of God if he does otherwise. To work without praying is ungodliness and presumption; to pray without working is enthusiasm and hypocrisy. And so it is in the spiritual department. It is not enough that we pray God to "work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure." We have no right to expect that He will hear us, or bestow upon us any portion of His gracious influences, unless, by the diligent use of the means of spiritual improvement, we are fulfilling the injunction, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In vain do Christians seek the conversion of Israel, unless they are putting forth efforts for removing the veil of ignorance and prejudice by the communication of the light of instruction. And in vain do they look for "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" filling the earth, if all they do is praying that it may. They must send it to earth's utmost bounds. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) So the Lord shall make bright clouds.—*Bright clouds*:—The water that a little while ago lay in yonder sluggish pool, is now raised up into the sky by the sun's attraction—all its impurities left behind, and itself transformed into a cloud, which glows like emerald or sapphire in the sunlight. Can you imagine two things more utterly unlike than the stagnant pool and the radiant cloud? Yet it is precisely the same substance. It is the same water in yonder cloud, white and fleecy as an angel's wing, that before made up the turbid pool. And what saith the Scripture? "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." This body taken out of the stagnant pool of our fallen humanity—taken out of the corruption of death and the grave, and now filled and completely permeated by the Holy Spirit, so that it is transfigured like Christ Himself. (*J. A. Gordon, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. The idols have spoken vanity.—*The world's oracles*:—There are not many who think for themselves; and even those who are reckoned to do so, depend for the materials of thinking upon what they hear, or see, or touch. In the things of God this must be so, much more than in others. God's place is to speak, and ours to listen. He expects us to listen, for He has a right to speak. But it is irksome to be always in the attitude of listeners; at least, of listeners to God. We prefer guessing, or speculating, or reasoning. If we find that we must have recourse to some authority beyond ourselves, we betake ourselves to any pretender to wisdom,—and above all, to any one who professes to be the representative of the invisible God, and to speak in His name. Hence

the Gentiles resorted to their "oracles," and the apostate Jews to their "witchcrafts," and to the household gods or teraphim. These are the "idols" referred to by Zechariah. They whom you consult as the depositories of Divine wisdom, who pretend to guide you, and to utter truth, have spoken vanity; they have cheated you with lies. Such was Israel's history. They trusted in faithless oracles. They became the dupes of those to whom they had come for guidance in the day of perplexity. Their teraphim spoke vanity. This has been man's history too, as well as Israel's. He has chosen another counsellor, instead of God; it may be the Church, or reason, or public opinion. The world's teraphim have not been few; nor has their authority been either weak or transient. There is "public opinion," that mysterious oracle, whose shrine is nowhere, but the echo of whose voice is everywhere. There is the standard of established custom—schools of literature, and philosophy, or theology. There is what is called the "spirit of the times." There is the idol of personal friendships, or of admired authors, or of revered teachers. Mark on what points these teraphim mislead us. They misrepresent the real end and aim of life, assuring us that the glory of the God who made us cannot be that end, inasmuch as that is something quite transcendental, something altogether beyond our reach, or our reason, or our sympathies. Why are men thus misled and befooled? They have no confidence in God Himself; nor have they learned to say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." They seek not the Holy Spirit, nor submit themselves to Him as their teacher. Men do not like the teaching that they get from God and His Word; it does not suit their tastes. Hence they choose the prophets of smooth things, the teraphim that utter lies and vanity. But how do these teraphim speak their vanities? They do not need to do so by uttering gross error. They mingle the true and the false together; so that the true is neutralised by the false, and the false is adorned and recommended by the true. And why do these oracles speak thus? They are fond of speaking, and they like to be listened to. It is a great thing to be consulted as an oracle, and to be quoted as an authority. They have no high and sure standard of their own, and hence they can only speak according to their own foolishness. It is as the angel of light that Satan is now the world's oracle, or rather, the inspirer of its oracles. He has changed his voice as well as his garb and aspect. He has hidden his grossness, and modified his language to suit the change. There are those who cleverly substitute philosophy for faith, reason for revelation, man's wisdom for God's; who prove to us that, though the Bible may contain the thoughts of God, it does not speak His words; who artfully would reason us into the belief that sin is not guilt, but only a disease; a mere moral epidemic; who maintain, with the philosophic Buddhist, that incarnation, not death, is the basis of Divine reconciliation; that the tendencies of creaturehood are all upward, not downward. As an angel of light, all his snares and sophistries partake, more or less, of light. He instructs his oracles to appeal to man's natural humanity; to our intuitions of virtue and uprightness. The illumination coming from the Sun of Righteousness is one thing, and that proceeding from Satan, as an angel of light, is quite another. Shun the idols that speak vanity. Listen to no voice, however pleasant, save that which is entirely in harmony with God's. (*H. Bonar, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Out of Him came forth the corner: out of Him the nail: out of Him the battle-bow: out of Him every oppressor together. — *The duty and dignity of magistrates*:—Laws are in Scripture called the foundations of the commonwealth. Magistrates are the pillars. When the Lord returns to a people in mercy, He doth give them righteous laws and gracious rulers. In this chapter you have the Lord returning unto His own people in mercy. There is a double visitation of God: one of His enemies in wrath; the other of His people in mercy. Though the appearances of God in this visitation were glorious, yet He makes themselves to be the instruments of it. God doth it, but He doth it by themselves. The text sets forth a glorious promise that God makes unto His people when they are delivered. 1. "Out of Him shall come forth the corner." The word employed in the Hebrew is commonly a metaphor used for magistrates and governors. There are three things wherein the analogy doth lie. (1) The corner-stone laid in the foundation. It upholds the building. The main weight of the building lies in the corner-stone. (2) The corner-stone joins and couples the wall. It is a uniting stone. (3) The corner-stone adorneth the building. More labour is spent in polishing the corner-stone than in the ordinary stones

of a building. 2. "Out of Him shall come forth the nail." This also is a metaphor used for governors. There is a double proposition in this metaphor. (1) The beams of the building are fastened and united by nails one to another. So that the corner-stone unites the foundation, and the nails unite the roof. (2) Upon the nails all the vessels hang: all the necessary utensils of the house. Upon the magistrate, as a nail, all the building of the commonwealth shall hang, even from the highest to the lowest. 3. "Out of Him shall come forth the battle-bow." The bow was an instrument of war much in use in ancient times, and therefore is here put for all the weapons of war, all their ammunition for, and all their discipline of war. When the Lord returns unto them in mercy, for their deliverance, they should have strength of their own against all the neighbour nations. They should be successful in war, because the Lord is with them. 4. "Out of Him every oppressor, or exactor, which I put both together." The word means tax-gatherer. Some make it signify, to exact a man's work. An exactor of labour and of tribute are both fitly to be understood here; for God doth not only deliver His people from the power of the enemy, but doth also put the enemies into their power; so that they shall rule over the nations. This shall be the glorious condition of the Church. You have then, in these words, the state of the people set forth after their deliverance. 1. In reference to their political state. They shall never want a governor, a faithful magistrate. 2. In their polemical state. They shall have all sorts of warlike provisions in themselves, and shall be very successful in war. Doctrine.—When the Lord returns to His people in mercy, He will give them governors that shall be for the supporting, uniting, and adorning of the commonwealth. I. To SUPPORT THE COMMONWEALTH. 1. Magistrates are called the foundations of the earth. 2. The breath of your nostrils. 3. The shoulders upon which all the weight is borne. 4. The arms of the people. But how may magistrates support the commonwealth? (1) He must take care that he uphold religion. Peace without godliness is but a vain, mock peace. Every magistrate ought to rule with God. (2) He must so rule that God may not break in in judgment upon the people. (3) He must so rule as not to destroy the foundation of his authority. (4) He must uphold the laws. (5) Magistrates must uphold their own authority. (6) They must uphold the people's liberties. (7) They must defend and preserve the property of the people. II. To UNITE THE COMMONWEALTH. How can rulers aid in uniting a people? 1. Religion is the great bond of union; let it be your great care that there be a unity in religion. 2. Let magistrates take heed to agree among themselves. 3. Labour for union amongst the ministers. 4. Take away all oppression and partiality in judgment. (*W. Strong.*)

Ver. 5. Because the Lord is with them.—*Jehovah with His people*:—There is nothing which so emphatically marks and so undoubtedly describes the people of the living God as His own presence with them. 1. The Lord is with His Church relatively. It is only a third part, and perhaps a small third. We might divide our own land into one-third of open enemies, one-third of false professors, and one-third of real Christians. The third part only are really spiritual characters, having the blessing of vital godliness. These shall remain; they shall be "left." God is with them relatively, that is, He is with them in covenant union eternally. 2. The Lord is with His Church experimentally. God has always been with His Church, as a body, and with the individual members. 3. The Lord is with His Church perpetually. It is His promise, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Consider how this fact that Jehovah is with His people, explains some mysteries. "Because the Lord is with them." 1. Then they shall fight victoriously and successfully. This explains why their enemies cannot destroy them. 2. For this same reason the truth of God must triumph. Note the distinct character of the Church and their destiny, as set forth in this text. Life Divine is a pledge of life eternal. If God be with you, your religion is a thing of life. God's yea and amen are stamped upon His people. (*Joseph Irons.*) *Victory, unification, and blessedness for the good*:—I. VICTORY. This victory was—1. Complete. The enemies were trodden down as "mire in the streets." 2. Divine. "Because the Lord is with them." 3. Re-invigorating. "I will strengthen the house of Judah." They would be strengthened by their victory, not only in wealth and security, but in courage. 4. Extensive. "And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad;

their heart shall rejoice in the Lord." "The prophet had," says Hengstenberg, "occupied himself first of all with Judah, the centre of the people of God." In verse 6 he proceeds to speak of Judah and Ephraim together. In this verse, and those which follow, he fixes his attention peculiarly upon Ephraim, which looked in the prophet's day like a withered branch that had been severed from the vine. He first promises that descendants of the citizens of the former kingdom of the ten tribes will also take part in the glorious conflict, and then announces the return of the ten tribes from their exile, which was to be the condition of their participating in the battle. Now, all these facts connected with this victory apply to that victory the grandest of all,—the victory of all true souls over error and wrong. II. UNIFICATION. "I will hiss for them, and gather them," &c. Observe—1. The ease with which the re-gathering will be effected. "I will hiss [or whistle] for them." The word is understood as referring to a particular whistle used by the shepherd for calling his scattered flock together, or by those who have the care of bees, to bring them into the hive. "As sheep flock together at the well-known call of the shepherd, as bees follow in swarms the shrill note of the bee-master, so should the Lord, by His own means, gather His scattered people from their dispersions, how widely soever distant, and bring them to Himself and to their heritage." With what ease God does His work; a mere look, a breath, a word! 2. The regions to which the re-gathering will extend. "And I will sow them among the people,"—or, as it should be rendered, "though I have scattered them among the nations,"—"and they shall remember Me in far countries [distant regions]; they shall live with their children, and turn again." They had been scattered, not only through Egypt and Assyria. It does not say that all Jews shall return, but a great multitude is implied. 3. The scene at which the re-gathering will take place. "I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt," &c. 4. The national catastrophes which the re-gathering will involve. "And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up." There is evidently an allusion here to their first deliverance from Egypt; and it means that something similar to that event will occur in the course of their re-gathering (see Exod. xxiv. 4-14). "And the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away." The idea probably is, that as "the haughty boastings of Sennacherib, and the sceptred power of Pharaoh proved alike feeble and unavailing against the might of Jehovah in former days, so should all the combined opposition of the most inveterate enemies prove in days to come. Before Him,—when He had a purpose to fulfil, or promise to His people to accomplish,—all pride should be abased, all power baffled, all counsel turned to foolishness." Now there is a unification, of which this is but a faint emblem—the unification of the good of all ages. "They shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and shall sit down with Isaac and with Jacob." What a blessed union is this! III. BLESSEDNESS. Here is the highest strength. "And I will strengthen them in the Lord." 1. Whether this refers to their national strength, their security in their own country, or moral strength,—strength of faith in Him,—or all, one thing is clear, that to be strengthened in the Lord is the highest strength we can get. The greatest blessing of life is strength: physical strength, to do with ease and to endure with patience. Intellectual strength, strength to master with ease all the great problems of life, and to reach a theory of being in which the understanding can repose free from all disturbing doubt. These strengths are blessings; but moral strength,—strength to resist the wrong, to pursue the right, to serve Almighty God with acceptance, and to bless the race with beneficent influences,—this indeed is the perfection of our blessedness. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," says Paul. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." 2. Here is the highest exercise. "They shall walk up and down in His name, saith the Lord." (1) All living men must walk the road that is "up and down." Human life is made up of "ups" and "downs"; the road is not smooth and level, but rugged and hilly, sometimes up and sometimes down: up to-day and down to-morrow. (2) This road can only be walked happily by walking it in the "name" of the Lord. A practical recognition of His presence and of His claims to our supreme reverence and worship. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 6. I will bring them again to place them. — *Unfulfilled promises to*

Judah and Joseph :—There can be no question that the gradual development of the great principles of the Reformation has led to a corresponding discovery of the duty and obligation of Christians towards God's ancient people. But our interest in the Jewish question should be based upon sound scriptural principles. If we confine our view exclusively to the hopes which unfulfilled prophecy presents, we shall be in danger of indulging speculations inconsistent with the history of the past, and irreconcilable with present duty. If we confine attention to the present aspect of the Jewish people, to the exclusion of the consideration of prophecy, we descend to the arena of political expediency. The destinies of the world are inseparably bound up with the Jewish people. In making any effort for the evangelisation of the Jew, there are three points demanding attention.

I. THE PERSONS TO WHOM WE ARE DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS. In the text we have an address to the two grand divisions of the nation,—Judah, and Joseph or Israel; and a blessing common to both is secured by virtue of the covenant relation in which God stands to them mutually. "I am the Lord their God." If we can find traces of Judah, and none of Joseph, probably the latter are in reserve, and sooner or later will come into the enjoyment of the promised mercy. It is objected, that the words of the text were fulfilled upon the restoration of the Jews after the captivity in Babylon. But the prophecy of Zechariah was delivered to the remnant which had returned. If Zechariah foretells fuller blessings than any which had been enjoyed up to the period of the restoration from Babylon, when were they enjoyed? If the two divisions or families of Israel returned after the Babylonish captivity, the distinction between Judah and Ephraim was at an end; and the conditions of the national covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so far as the land, the city, and the possession of the inheritance was concerned, must have been accomplished. But the facts of the case do not correspond with any of the leading provisions of the covenant.

1. Instead of an increase, there was a decrease of population. 2. The extent of territory inhabited by Jews after the captivity was even more limited than that which had been apportioned to the tribes by Joshua, and much less than that which was promised to Abraham. 3. Their civil polity did not correspond to the promise (Ezek. xxxvii. 22–24; Hos. i. 11). 4. If the return from Babylon was a restoration, and only one restoration is spoken of by the prophets, then how can we explain the full declaration in our text, "They shall be as though I had not cast them off"? Where are the myriads of Israelites who in their hiding-place have been in existence, and have been multiplying, for all we know, since the days of Shalmaneser until now? The little remnant sojourning in these western portions of the world can only be regarded as emigrants from a vast and populous nation, whose locality is as yet unknown and unvisited by us.

II. THE GROUNDS FOR SUPPOSING THAT ANY SUCCESS WILL ATTEND OUR EFFORTS. We may assume that the nation of Israel has not lost its place in the Divine purpose. However secretly and obscurely to us, the Jews occupy as important and influential a position in reference to other nations of the world as in the days of old. The fortunes of Israel have ever been bound up with the destinies of nations; and we have no reason to suppose that this universal rule of the Divine administration has been or will be departed from. The Jews have been and are the index to prophecy. We authenticate chronology and balance historical accuracy by reference to this wonderful people. If, under the Old Testament dispensation, the kingdoms of the Gentiles performed their appointed course around the visible centre of Israel, we must also believe that under the New Testament, which is a supplement of the Old, the empires of the world are now revolving round the same centre, although obscured and unseen.

III. THE PRIVILEGE OF PARTICIPATING IN THESE EFFORTS. 1. It is a privilege to have the grace of faith and prayer continually exercised. Effort for the good of Israel is a work of faith from first to last. No temporal or international advantage can enter into the consideration of it; no worldly or selfish motive can be charged upon those who engage in it. The friend of Israel walks by faith, not by sight. What encouragement is now presented in the results of work for the Jews! But mercy to Israel is mercy to the world. God has declared His will concerning "the precious sons of Zion." It is a privilege to know that the truth of God's Word is tested by His faithfulness to Israel. What is promised to individuals is promised to the nation. If the promises (such as Isa. xxiv., xxv., xxvi.; Hos. xiii. 14; 1 Cor. xv. 54; Matt. xxiii. 39, &c.) belong not to the nation, they belong not unto us. It would be a strange inconsistency for us as Gentiles to

employ these passages as a ground of our hope of a resurrection, and withhold them from the Jewish nation, who read them literally as a promise to their fathers (Acts xxiii. 6, xxiv. 21, xxvi. 6, 7). Do we look for the return of Christ? Then let us reconcile the contemporaneous existence of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus, the light of the Gentiles, is the glory of His people Israel. Gentile fulness and Israel's glory will flow in together. Like the sudden burst of two fountains they will join their living streams, and fill to overflowing the long-prepared channels, and flood the universe with blessing, and the "knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." (*W. R. Fremantle, M.A.*)

Ver. 8. I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them.—*Gathering the redeemed*:—I. THE PERSONS. "The redeemed." Redeemed in consequence of God's everlasting love towards them; for had they not been loved of the Father, they would never have been given to Christ, in order to be redeemed by Him. Redeemed from the law's curse; and from all iniquity; from the wrath to come. II. THE PROMISE. "I will gather them." This implies that the redeemed are by nature in a scattered state, or in a state of alienation from God. How universal is the departure. "We have turned every one to his own way," which is a sinful way, a God-dishonouring, and a soul-distressing way. The gathering work is accomplished in regeneration, at which time they are gathered to Christ for life and salvation: they are gathered or folded together in Church-fellowship; and shall by and by be gathered as wheat into the garner. III. THE MEAN TO BE MADE USE OF. "I will hiss for them"; *i.e.*, I will call for them; make the peculiar sound which they will heed, as a shepherd does to call his sheep around him. Shepherds used a whistle. The Redeemer called for His people, by the prophets of old; by John the Baptist; He called them Himself when He was here upon earth. He called them by His apostles; He calls them now by His ministers. (*S. Barnard.*) *The interposition of mercy*:—This passage refers to God's ancient people, who, for their crimes, had been scattered, but whom He here promises shall be gathered and blessed. I. THE INTERPOSITION OF MERCY REALISED. "I have redeemed them." By this I understand the redemption by the Son of God. The mediation of Jesus Christ is the meritorious cause of all good to sinful man. All the peace and happiness we possess is due to this mediation. It is the medium of all spiritual good to men individually. II. THE INTERPOSITION OF MERCY DESIGNED. "I will hiss for them, and gather them." 1. The end proposed. They are to be gathered. This leads us to reflect on their past condition. 2. The place of their assembling. They shall come to the Cross of the Saviour, to receive from Him all the blessings they need. They shall come to the bosom of the Church. 3. The result of their gathering will be their blessedness and the Divine honour. 4. The instrumentality God will employ. "I will hiss for them." The allusion is to the shepherd's pipe or whistle. It has pleased the Lord, in all ages of time, to gather men by means of human agency. III. THE CHURCH'S FUTURE PROSPERITY. The convulsions of nations, the revolutions of empires shall but contribute to the establishment of His kingdom. His signature is inscribed on every part of the earth; all is His, and He shall soon take possession. (*W. Lucy.*)

Ver. 9. And I will sow them among the people.—*God's sowings*:—At the end of the seventy years' captivity the people of God's ancient choice were distributed through Parthia, Media, Persia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya and Rome, Crete and Arabia. Everywhere, throughout the great Roman Empire, they fell into the ground to die. So far as their natural life was concerned, they seemed on the point of being obliterated among the nations of the world; but you might as well talk of the obliteration of the seed which the husbandman casts into the autumn furrows. They built their synagogues, thrived in the quarters assigned to them in the great cities, and disseminated new conceptions of God, high ethical standards, a fresh religious speech, destined to be of incalculable service to the early preachers of Christ's Evangel. It was thus with the first believers. By the rough hand of the persecutor, the rich wheat of Pentecost, which had lain too long in the bin of the mother Church, was scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria. "They therefore that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." "They therefore that were scattered abroad, upon the tribulation

that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phœnicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch." These spring sowings yielded a marvellous return. How many illustrations have existed, throughout the entire history of the Church, of the effect of God's sowings! "My Father is the Husbandman," said our Lord. With both hands He has prosecuted His work of sowing. There was a grand quality in the corn of the Waldensian Valleys, in the Paulicians, the Hussites, the Lollards, which was sown by the Master in the dungeons of the Inquisition, in mockings and scourgings, in bonds and imprisonment, in the fires of martyrdom, and in the current of swiftly-flowing rivers. But what harvests it all yielded! There was, for instance, the harvest of the Reformation in Germany, of the Huguenots in France, and of the Puritans in England. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 12. And I will strengthen them in the Lord.—*Further and continuing grace*:—This prophecy is closed with a promise concerning their way and carriage for whom the Lord doth all this, that they shall be encouraged and strengthened to be a holy people, and to persevere in faith and obedience, which is to be understood of the elect and truly godly among them, who yet at that time will be very many. 1. When the Lord hath done greatest things for His people, it is yet a new gift to give them the use thereof, to encourage and strengthen them thereby, for it is a new promise. "I will strengthen them." 2. As God can easily encourage the most feeble and faint-hearted, so their sure grip of it is to have it laid up in God for them, and by faith and dependence draw it forth as there is need. 3. Encouragement in God is only well improvén when it is made use of to strengthen unto holiness and perseverance, which is the only sweet fruit of all mercies, rendering them comfortable to the receiver, when he is led nearer God by them. "They shall walk" in their duty. 4. Holiness is then rightly set about, when we are constantly in it, when we adhere close to the rule, when by faith we drag furniture out of God, and aim at His glory, and give Him the glory of all our performances. 5. The Lord needs not be hindered to show Himself gracious, by the unworthiness and unholiness of His people, but when He is about to do them good, He can be surety to Himself, that the fruit thereof shall be forthcoming to His glory, and can make them He doth much for, to be such a people as His dealing toward them obliges them to be, therefore, after all the former promises, the Lord Himself undertakes to make them holy. 6. The sweet comfort and refreshment of the promises will only be felt by those who dwell much on the study of God the Promise-Maker, and consider how all-sufficient He is, and how worthy to be credited for the performance of what He promiseth. Therefore doth He subscribe His name to all this prophecy. "Saieth Jehovah." (*George Hutcheson.*) *Strong in God*:—Speaking of "England's Forgotten Worthies" of the sixteenth century, Mr. Froude says, "Wherever we find them, they are still the same; whether in the courts of Japan or China, fighting Spaniards in the Pacific, or prisoners among the Algerines, founding colonies that were by and by to grow into enormous 'transatlantic republics, or exploring in crazy pinnacles the fierce latitude of the Polar seas, they are the same indomitable, God-fearing men, whose life was one great liturgy. 'The ice was strong, but God was stronger,' says one of Frobisher's men after grinding a night and a day among the icebergs; not waiting for God to come down and split the ice for them, but toiling through the long hours, himself and the rest fending off the vessel with poles and planks, with death glaring at them out of the rocks. Icebergs were strong, Spaniards were strong, and storms, and corsairs, and rocks, and reefs, which no chart had then noted—they were all strong, but God was stronger, and that was all which they cared to know." *Walking in God's name*:—The Rev. John McNeil says, "I owe more than I can tell to my father. He had a habit of which he never spoke to us, nor we to him. He was a quarryman, and I used to hear him going downstairs in the dark mornings, and, standing on the threshold before passing out, he would say aloud, 'I go to-day in God's name.' Then, strong in that strength, would trudge off to the quarry, the blasting and risks of the work. I can never forget the impression this made upon me, and thankfully say to-day, 'My father's God is mine.'" (*Christian World Pulpit.*)

CHAPTER XI

VERS. 1, 2. *That the fire may devour thy cedars, &c.—The fallen cedar:—* In this chapter there is an announcement of the judgment that was to come on the Jewish State and nation because of their ungodliness, and especially their contemptuous rejection of Him whom God sent to be their shepherd. The prophecy here is not in any way connected with that in the preceding chapters, except as it may be regarded as continuing the account of God's dealings with Israel, and their behaviour towards Him consequent on the events predicted in these chapters. Hitherto the prophet has been a bearer of good tidings to Zion, tidings of deliverance from oppressors, and restoration to former privilege and felicity. But there was a dark side to the picture as well as a bright one. All trouble and conflict had not ceased with their restoration to their own land: nor was their tendency to rebellion and apostasy from Jehovah, their Shepherd and King, finally subdued. Treating Him with contempt, His favour should be withdrawn from them, and the bonds that united them should be broken. The iron hand of foreign oppression should again be laid heavily upon them, and the ruin of their State and desolation of their land should mark the greatness of their sin by the severity of the penalty it had entailed. The prophecy begins with a picture of ruin and desolation overspreading the land, and then the process is detailed by which this was brought about and the cause of it indicated. The description of the judgment commences dramatically. Lebanon is summoned to open her doors, that the fire may enter to consume her cedars; the cypress is admonished to howl or wail because the cedar is fallen, because the noble and glorious trees are destroyed; the oaks of Bashan are called upon to join in the wail, for the inaccessible forest is laid low. The cypress is here called to lament for the fall of the cedar of Lebanon, the glory of the forest, not as deploring that calamity so much as anticipating for itself a like fate. That this description is to be taken literally cannot be supposed; the language is too forcible, and the picture too vivid to be understood merely of the destruction by fire of a few trees, even though these were the finest of their kind. On the other hand, there seems no sufficient reason for regarding this description as symbolical and wholly figurative. The more simple and tenable view is that which Calvin suggested, namely, that by the places here mentioned is intended the whole land of Judæa, the desolation of which is predicted by the prophet. The catastrophe thus depicted was brought about by the misconduct of the people, and especially their shepherds and rulers, towards the Great Shepherd of Israel, whom God sent forth to feed and tend the flock. This is described in what follows, where the prophet is represented as acting as the representative of another, and as such is addressed. It cannot be supposed that the person addressed is the Angel of Jehovah, or the Messiah, for the person addressed in verse 4 is evidently the same as the person addressed in verse 15, and what is there said does not in any way apply to the Angel of Jehovah, or the Messiah. Nor can it be supposed that the prophet is here addressed in his own person, for as it was no part of the prophetic office to act as a shepherd of Israel, it could not be to the prophet as such that the command here given was addressed. The only supposition that can tenably be made is that what is here narrated passed as a vision before the inner sense of the prophet, in which he saw himself as the representative of another, first of the good shepherd who is sent to feed the flock, and then of the evil shepherd by whom the flock was neglected, and who should be destroyed for his iniquity. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*) *The cedars, fir-trees, and oaks of society:—*This chapter, it has been said, divides itself into three sections. 1. The threat of judgment (vers. 1-3). 2. The description of the Good Shepherd (ver. 4-14). 3. The sketch of the foolish shepherd (vers. 15-17). Lebanon, here, may be regarded as a symbol of the kingdom of Judah, its cedars as denoting the chief men of the kingdom. I. A VARIETY OF DISTINCTION. The "cedar" here, the "fir-tree," or cypress, and the "oaks," are employed to set forth some of the distinctions that prevailed amongst the Hebrew people. Now, whilst all men have a common origin, a common nature, and common moral obligations and responsibilities, yet in every generation there prevails a large variety of striking distinctions. There are not only the cedars and fir-trees, but even briars and thistles. There is almost as great a distinction between the highest type of man and the lowest, as there is between the lowest and the highest type of brute. There are intellectual giants and intellectual

dwarfs, moral monarchs and spiritual serfs. This variety of distinction in the human family serves at least two important purposes. 1. To check pride in the highest and despondency in the lowest. The cedar has no cause for boasting over the fir-tree, or over the humblest plant: it owes its existence to the same God, and is sustained by the same common elements. And what have the greatest men—the Shakespeares, the Schillers, the Miltons, the Goethes—to be proud of? What have they that they have not received? And why should the weakest man despond? He is what God made him, and his responsibilities are limited by his capacities. This variety serves—2. To strengthen the ties of human brotherhood. Were all men of equal capacity, it is manifest that there would be no scope for that mutual ministry of interdependence which tends to unite society together. The strong rejoices in bearing the infirmities of the weak, and the weak rejoices in gratitude and hope on account of the succour received. II. A COMMON CALAMITY. “Howl, fir-tree; for the cedar is fallen.” An expression which implies that the same fate awaits the fir-tree. There is one event that awaits men of every type and class and grade, the tallest cedar and the most stunted shrub, that is death. 1. This common calamity levels all distinctions. “Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for ever.” 2. This common calamity should de-materialise all souls. Since we are only here on this earth for a few short years at most, why should we live to the flesh, and thus materialise our souls? III. A NATURAL ALARM. “Howl, fir-tree.” The howl, not of rage, not of sympathy, but of alarm. When the higher falls, the lower may well take the alarm. If the cedar gives way, let the cypress look out. This principle may apply to—1. Communities. Amongst the kingdoms of the earth there are the “cedar” and the “fir-tree.” The same may be said of markets. There are the cedars of the commercial world; great houses regulating almost the merchandise of the world. 2. Individuals. When men who are physically strong fall, let weaker men beware. When men who are moral cedars—majestic in character, and mighty in beneficent influences—fall, let the less useful take the alarm, and still more the useless. (*Homilist.*) **Howl, fir-tree; for the cedar is fallen.**—*The cedar and the fir.*—The prophecy, of which these words are a part, had its fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews by the Romans. The text would become applicable at a time of great national calamity. By the cedar-tree the chief men of a country are represented, those who occupy the more prominent positions, and are conspicuous by station and influence. When the cedar-tree falls, when the princes of a land are brought down by disaster and death, men of inferior rank, who, in comparison with these princes, are but as the fir-tree compared with the cedar, may well tremble and fear, as knowing that their own day of trial must be rapidly approaching. These words, then, are universally applicable whenever calamity falls on those better or more exalted than ourselves, and such calamity may serve as a warning, teaching us to expect our own share of trouble. “Howl, fir-tree”—tremble, and be afraid, ye sinful and careless ones, who, though planted in the garden of the Lord, bring not forth the fruits of righteousness. “The cedar is fallen,”—shall, then, the fir-tree escape? “If judgment first begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of Christ?” Take the text as setting forth the sufferings of the righteous as an evidence or token of the far greater which, in due time, must be the portion of the wicked. If the wicked were to ponder God’s dealings with the righteous, if the fir-tree would observe what was done to the cedar, it could hardly be that future and everlasting punishment would be denied by any, or by any be practically disregarded. Let our blessed Saviour Himself be the first cedar-tree on which we gaze. “Smitten of God and afflicted.” “A Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” His sufferings only then assume their most striking character when they are seen as demonstrations of the evil of sin. The atonement alone shows me what sin is in God’s sight. The Captain of our salvation was “made perfect through sufferings,” but the same discipline has been employed, from the first, in regard of all those whom God has conducted to glory. Under all dispensations affliction is an instrument of purification. The nearer we approach the times of the Gospel, the intenser becomes the discipline of suffering; as though God has designed to prepare men for an increase in tribulation, with an increase of privilege. The fact is undisputed, that, through much tribulation, men enter the kingdom of heaven. No fact should be more startling to those who are living without God, and perhaps secretly hoping for impunity at the last. They cannot

deny that the cedar has been bent and blighted by the hurricane, whilst, comparatively, sunshine and calm have been around the fir. And from this they are bound to conclude the great fact of a judgment to come. Suppose it to be for purposes of discipline that God employs suffering—what does this prove but that human nature is thoroughly corrupt, requiring to be purged so as by fire, ere it can be fitted for happiness? And if there must be this fiery purification, what is the inference which ungodly men should draw, if not that they will be given up hereafter to the unquenchable flame, given up to it when that flame can neither annihilate their being, nor eradicate their corruption? It is probable enough that the wicked may be disposed to congratulate themselves on their superior prosperity, and to look with pity, if not with contempt, on the righteous, as the God whom they serve seems to reward them with nothing but trouble. But this can only be through want of consideration. It may certainly be inferred from these words, when applied in the modes indicated, that the present afflictions of the righteous shall be vastly exceeded by the future of the wicked. The “cedar is fallen,” and the fir-tree is called upon to “howl,” as though it were about to be rent and shivered, as by the tempest and the thunder. The sufferings of the righteous might save the wicked from future torments, and that which prepares a good man for heaven might snatch a bad one from hell. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Fallen greatness :—This word “cedar” applies to Jerusalem, to the temple, to Lebanon. It is a general and symbolic term. It applies to all great characters, to all noble institutions, all sublime purposes. There was an abundance of cedar-wood in the temple, so the temple was often called The Cedar, and what the temple was Jerusalem was. One element sometimes gives its character to everything into which it enters. The eternal doctrine of the text is that when the strong go down the weak should lay that significant circumstance to heart. How can the fir-tree stand when the cedar is blown down? How can the weak defend the city when the mighty men have failed? What can the poor do after the kings of wealth? And if God can smite the mighty, can He not overwhelm the weak and the little? if He can rend the stars, and hurl the constellations out of their places, what about our clay walls and huts of dust?—surely He could sweep them away as with the tempestuous wind. And yet the weak have a place of their own. Trees have been blown down whilst daisies have been left undisturbed. There is a strength of littleness, there is a majesty of weakness, there is a charter of immunity granted to things that are very frail. The whirlwind does not destroy the flower that bends before its fury, but it often destroys the mighty tree that dares it to wrestle. How much we depend upon the cedar in all life, in all society, in all institutions! What is done by one man may be comparatively insignificant and may never be heard of, and that self-same thing done by another quality of man fills the world with amazement. How is that? Simply because of the quality. There are people who burrow in the earth, and what they do no man cares for, no man inquires; there are persons who have lived themselves down to the vanishing point of influence, that it is of no consequence whatsoever what they think or do. Other men can hardly breathe without the fact being noted and commented upon; the pulse cannot be unsteady without the whole journalism of the empire being filled with the tidings. The difference is the difference between the cedar and the fir-tree. What is impossible in nature is possible in humanity: the fir-tree can become the cedar, and the cedar can become the fir-tree, and these continual changes constitute the very tragedy of human experience. Let it be known that some person has committed a theft in the city, and the theft will be reported in very small type, it is really of no consequence to cruel society what that person has done; but let a man of another sort do that very self-same thing, and there is no type large enough in which to announce the fact. It is not always so with the good deeds—“the good is oft interred with men’s bones.” There is no printer that cares to report charity, nobleness, meekness, forgiveness, great exercises of patience and forbearance. The printer was not made to intermeddle with that sacred fame. Such reputation is registered in heaven, is watched and guarded by the angels, and carries with itself its own guarantee of immortality. Yet this doctrine might easily be abused. A man might be fool enough to say that it is of no consequence what he does. But it is in reality of consequence, according to the circle within which he moves. Every man can make his home unhappy, every man can lay a burden upon the back of his child which the child is unable to sustain. That is the consummation of cruelty. If the man could but put a dagger into himself, and cause his own life continual agony, he might

be doing an act of justice, he might be trying to compensate for the wrongs he has done to others : but when it is felt that everything that man does tells upon the child to the third and fourth generation, so that the child cannot get rid of the blood which the great-grandfather shed, then every man becomes of importance in his own sphere and in relation to the line of life which he touches. We apply this text personally and nationally, founding upon it our lamentations over fallen greatness. The great statesman dies, and the Church at once becomes filled with the eloquence of this text—"Howl, fir-tree; for the cedar is fallen,"—the lesson being, that the great man has gone, the great strength has vanished, and now weakness is exposed to a thousand attacks; weakness feels its defencelessness. Nor ought such eulogy be limited. Sentiment has to play a very serious part and a very useful part in the education of life. When men cease to revere greatness they cease to cultivate it. There is a philistinism that is near akin to impiety and profanity. All men are not alike, all men are not of one value; some men have the genius of insight and foresight, and some have it not; and when men who can see the coming time, and interpret the time that now is into its largest significances, are taken away from us, then those of us who occupy positions of commonplace may well feel that some tremendous bankruptcy has supervened in history, and the world is made poor for ever. Yet this is not the spirit of the Gospel, which is always a spirit of good cheer and stimulus and hopefulness. We are not dependent now upon men, except in a secondary sense; we are dependent upon God alone:—The battle is not yours, but God's; they that be for us are more than all that can be against us; our cedar is the Cross, and the Cross has never failed. Rome boasted that it had obliterated the Christian name, but Rome boasted too soon. Ten persecutions followed one another in rapid and devastating succession; yet there were Christians still praying in secret, temples unknown and unnamed were frequented by ardent and passionate worshippers. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The death of great men*:—Mr. Jay was generally chaste and dignified in his composition, but occasionally used a quaintness of expression which in our day would be called "sensational." The selection of his texts was sometimes ingenious—*e.g.*, on two occasions, after the death of Robert Hall and Rowland Hill, his text was, "Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar is fallen." He always took advantage of public events, and thus brought nature and providence to his aid in instructing the people. *The cedar useful after it is fallen*:—The cedar is the most useful when dead. It is the most productive when its place knows it no more. There is no timber like it. Firm in grain, and capable of the finest polish, the tooth of no insect will touch it, and time himself can hardly destroy it. Diffusing a perpetual fragrance through the chamber which it ceils, the worm will not corrode the book which it protects, nor the moth corrupt the garment which it guards—all but immortal itself, it transfuses its amaranthine qualities into the objects around it. Every Christian is useful in his life, but the goodly cedars are the most useful afterwards. Luther is dead, but the Reformation lives.

Ver. 3. For their glory is spoiled.—*Bad men in high office*:—I. THE MEN HERE REFERRED TO called "shepherds," which is a designation of men in power, men who politically and ecclesiastically presided over the people, the leaders. The "shepherds" have sometimes reached their positions irrespective of the will of the people. The "shepherds" referred to here had an ambitious character. Likened to "young lions." 1. That a man in high office who has a bad character is of all men the most contemptible. A bad character in a pauper makes him contemptible; but a bad character in a king makes him ten times the more contemptible. 2. That it is the duty of all peoples to promote those alone to high office who have a high moral character. II. Bad men in high office GREATLY DISTRESSED. "There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds," &c. "The glory of these shepherds being spoiled," says Wardlaw, "signifies the bringing down of all their honour and power and the wealth and luxury which, by the abuse of their power, they had acquired, all becoming a prey to the sacking and pillaging besiegers. The pride of Jordan lay in its evergreens and brushwood with which its banks were enriched and adorned; and these being the covert and habitation of the young lions, the two parts of the figure are appropriate. As the lions howl and roar in dismay and fury when dislodged from their refuges and dwelling-places, whether by the swelling flood sweeping over their lairs, or from the cutting down or the burning of their habitations, so should the priests and rulers of Jerusalem be alarmed and struck with desperation and

rage, when they found their city, within whose walls they had counted themselves secure from the very possibility of hostile entrance, laid open to the outrage of an exasperated enemy, and all its resources given up to plunder and destruction—country as well as city thrown into confusion and desolation!" Such rulers may well be distressed—1. Because all the keen-sighted and honest men over whom they preside despise them. 2. Because the Righteous Governor of the world has denounced them. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **Feed the flock of the slaughter.**—*Oppressed people and their oppressors*:—I. A DUTY ENJOINED TOWARDS OPPRESSED PEOPLES. "Feed the flock (sheep) of the slaughter." These shepherds, these rulers of the Hebrew people, "slaughtered" the people. Their rights, energies, liberties and independency are "slaughtered," their means of subsistence and advancement are "slaughtered." People "slaughtered" in these respects abound in every state and place in Europe. "Feed" them—1. With the knowledge of their rights as men. 2. With the knowledge of the true methods to obtain these rights. Not by violence and spoliation but by moral means, by skilful industry, by temperate habits, by economic management, by moral suasion. 3. With the knowledge of worthy motives by which to obtain these rights. II. Here is a SKETCH OF THE AUTHORS OF OPPRESSION. 1. They are cruel. "Whose possessors slay them." 2. They are impious. In all their cruelties they "hold themselves not guilty." The greatest despots of the world have ever been ready to justify themselves to their own consciences. 3. They are avaricious. "And they that sell them, say, Blessed be the Lord; for I am rich." A miserable greed was their inspiration. (*Homilist.*) *A good shepherd*:—I would give my life for these poor people of the Soudan. How can I help feeling for them? All the time I was there, every night I used to pray that God would lay upon me the burden of their sins, and crush me with it instead of these poor sheep. I really wished it and longed for it. (*General Gordon.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land.**—*A terrible doom, and an invaluable privilege*:—I. A TERRIBLE DOOM. "For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land." What is the doom? The abandonment of God. 1. This abandonment came after great kindness. For long centuries He had manifested the greatest kindness to the Hebrew people. From their rescue from Egypt down to this hour He had been merciful to them. "My Spirit will not always strive with man." 2. This abandonment involved inexorable ruin. They were given up to the heathen cruelty of one another and to the violence of foreigners. If God abandon us, what are we? This will be the doom of the finally impenitent. "Depart from Me." II. AN INVALUABLE PRIVILEGE. "I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock." "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." "When He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion towards them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." "I am the Good Shepherd," said Christ. Conclusion—Thank God, we are not abandoned yet. God is with us as a shepherd. He is seeking the lost and feeding those who are in His fold. (*Homilist.*) *Abandoned*:—The saddest spectacle earth can show is a shipwrecked life—the terrible loss of all the possibilities humanity involves. If a man quenches the light God gives him, and by self-indulgence and unfaithfulness so debauches his spirit that at last he is deserted by every angel of purity and goodness, and becomes unvisited by even the desire for any spiritual attainment, then there is a lost soul in the most awful sense, whether here or in the world to come. (*Dr. Macleod.*) **And I took unto Me two staves.**—*Two shepherds' staves*:—In the next place is represented Christ's undertaking of this charge, and His going diligently about it, signified by two shepherds' staves; the first whereof, called Beauty, holds forth the sweet and beautiful order of His Covenant, and the doctrine thereof, whereby the Church is directed in faith, worship, and obedience of God. The second, called Bands, signifies that policy in Church and State whereby they are kept one, and without schisms among themselves. 1. Christ the Mediator became an obedient servant, and is willing, and takes pleasure to be employed for His Church's good; and will have a tender consideration of their case. 2. Christ in His care over the visible Church, hath an especial eye to His elect, and the regenerate in it, how abject-like soever they seem in the eyes of men, or in their outward condition. 3. Christ is a faith-

ful shepherd, singular and incomparable in His care and diligence about His people: for, saith He, "I took unto Me two staves," whereas other shepherds use but one. 4. The Covenant and doctrine revealed by Christ unto His Church, as it sets forth the beauty and excellency of God, so it is beautiful and sweetly ordered in itself, so as faith and obedience sweetly work to others' hands, and make the followers thereof to be beautiful and excellent above all people; for "the one staff I called Beauty." 5. As unity and concord in a Church is a fruit of Christ's feeding His flock, so policy and order, whereby unity is preserved, is a rich blessing. "The other I called Bands." 6. Christ's performances are answerable to His undertakings: what He saith He doth; and His practice will never give His promise the lie: for unto His promise, "I will feed," is subjoined, "And I fed the flock." (*George Hutcheson.*) *The staves of Beauty and Bands broken.*—I. UNITY FROM UNION WITH GOD IS NATIONAL BEAUTY.

It is the union of the members of the body with the head which gives to the entire frame its dignity and beauty. A headless trunk has no beauty, but when body and limbs are fitly framed together, that symmetry is attained which God intended. The beauty of a tree consists in the union of branches by union with the trunk. The unity of the Hebrew nation was destroyed by their wilful severance of themselves from their Divine Head. Lack of union with God brought discord into the nation and destroyed their national beauty (Psa. cxxxiii.). II. MEN MUST HAVE A SOUL-SHEPHERD, AND WHEN GOD IS REJECTED THEY MUST HAVE A BAD ONE. If a road is known to one person only, any other man who offers to guide the traveller must be his enemy. If a man is deeply wounded, he must have help from some one outside himself, and the quack who undertakes to heal him, and is ignorant of the proper way to treat him, will be likely to be his murderer. There is but one Being who is acquainted with the soul's needs; if He is rejected, any other must harm the soul. God claims to be the only Saviour. "There is none beside Me" (Isa. xlv. 21). Christ warned Israel against false shepherds, yet, as a nation, they chose them and rejected Him, and as He only could really lead and feed them, their choice necessarily issued in their ruin. III. SIN DISINHERITS MEN AND NATIONS OF THEIR GOD-GIVEN PORTION. (*Outlines by London Minister.*) *Beauty and Bands the two staves of the Divine Shepherd.*—As long as sin will be in the world the oppressor and the oppressed are sure to be here; for it is in the nature of sin to make men hard, cruel, and oppressive. The exaltation of a man above his fellow-men in wealth, honour, authority, and power is no reason whatever why he should despise and oppress them, but, on the contrary, it should be a reason for him to deal kindly towards them. The wealth of the rich man should be an inducement to him to remember the poor, and the strength of the strong should be an inducement to him to help the weak. For a consolation to the oppressed in their sufferings and a warning to the oppressor, the Bible teaches in a clear manner that God will surely visit the one in mercy and the other in judgment; the same hand that bestows favours graciously and tenderly upon the oppressed holds the sword of vengeance above the oppressor. In this chapter God said that He was going to visit the rulers of His people in judgment because they were oppressing them.

"Thus said the Lord my God: Feed the flock of slaughter; whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not." How abominable this must have been in the sight of God! After accumulating wealth through cruelty and oppression they sanctimoniously praised God for prospering them. But while these unjust and oppressive rulers were thus justifying themselves, destruction overtook them. "For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the Lord," &c. But when God visits the oppressor in judgment He does not forget the oppressed in their poverty, sufferings, and misery, for He said, "So I fed the flock of slaughter, verily the poor of the flock." So in the text we have a striking and beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus as the Great Shepherd of souls. It has been truly observed by an able commentator, that no image of Christ has so deeply impressed itself upon the mind of the Church as that of a shepherd, as is shown by Christian literature and art, and our hymns and prayers. The Eastern shepherd would never be seen without his staff or crook. But reference is made here to two staves, and David says of the Lord as his Shepherd, "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." In our text there are names given to the two staves; one is called "Beauty," and the other "Bands," which are to be taken emblematically to show that the Lord Jesus

Christ the Divine Shepherd will lead, protect, beautify, and unite His people as one great and glorious flock. I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST FEEDING HIS PEOPLE. "Lo, I fed the flock of the slaughter, verily the poor of the flock." When their own shepherds pity them not, the Divine Shepherd makes them to lie down in peace and security in the green pastures of spiritual blessings, and leads them beside the still waters of heavenly influences. He lives for the sake of His sheep, and so they find in Him their true Shepherd. Naturally the objects of our greatest care and anxiety will have the largest place in our affections, and it is not easy for us to conceive the tender affection and close attachment that would gradually grow between the Eastern shepherd and his sheep. II. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST PROTECTING AND GUIDING HIS PEOPLE. With the staves the shepherd rules, protects, and guides his sheep. He uses the crook to prevent them from going astray, and to pull them back from dangerous places. God's people, like sheep, are very prone to go astray. He very often draws them by His crook from temptations and dangers which they are not in the least aware of. Think of a promising young man, who has been brought up in a religious family, enticed by bad companions into the forbidden paths of sinful pleasures; but before he falls over the precipice of destruction, the Good Shepherd, through sickness, or the death of a companion or a near relation, mercifully draws him back by His crook. The apostle Peter wandered far astray, but Christ followed him faithfully, and gently brought him back. The Divine Shepherd dealt in a similar manner with Thomas, who had wandered far into the wilderness of doubt and unbelief. And we do not know from how many dangers and temptations we have been rescued by the Divine Shepherd with His crook. III. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BEAUTIFYING HIS PEOPLE. He will bring out to its highest perfection the beautiful individuality of each one of His followers. This is taught by the symbolic name of one of the two staves, which is called "Beauty." God, under the old dispensation, through various means and ministrations, aimed at ennobling and beautifying His people; and notwithstanding all their faults, they looked beautiful compared to the idolatrous nations by which they were surrounded. In the Book of the prophet Jeremiah they are called a "beautiful flock." Their God, who is called the Shepherd of Israel, had made them beautiful by saving, protecting, and guiding them, and richly bestowing His blessings upon them. So does the Lord Jesus Christ in a similar way sanctify and beautify His people; from His love, gentleness, care, faithfulness, and self-sacrificing Spirit there goes forth a mighty influence silently to purify their nature and ennoble and beautify their character. He washes them in His own blood, and beautifies and adorns them with His own heavenly Spirit. This is the beauty of holiness, "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." They are changed into the image of Christ from glory to glory by the influence of His Spirit dwelling in them. We can say that the Great Shepherd is perfectly impartial in the bestowal of His sanctifying and beautifying influences upon all God's erring children, whom He strives to gather together into one beautiful flock. The sun is perfectly impartial in the distribution of its heat and light, which bring out the beauty of the flowers and the trees. One flower cannot say to another, "The sun has taken more trouble to beautify and adorn you than me," for it shines equally the same for all. So Christ the Sun of Righteousness distributes its purifying and beautifying influences equally impartially to all. IV. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST UNITING HIS PEOPLE. In the union of the human and the Divine in the person of the Good Shepherd all men are virtually united in Him, and He will not rest satisfied until all are actually made one in Him. This blessed truth is implied by the name of the other staff, which is called "Bands," which teaches that the Divine Shepherd not only sanctifies and beautifies His people individually, but also unites them socially into one great and glorious company. As the shepherd carefully gathers his sheep together into the fold, so does Christ gather all men together. Moses, Socrates, Plato, Gautama, Zoroaster, John, Peter, Paul, Mohammed, Luther, Wesley, and others are all His under-shepherds, and ultimately He will bring all their flocks together. He has died for all, seeks all, and will save all. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." The shepherd feels restless and uneasy if one sheep is wanting in the fold. So Christ the Good Shepherd will not feel satisfied until the last erring sheep has been safely brought into the heavenly fold, and He will not leave the wilderness as long as there is one wandering sheep to be brought home. (*Z. Mather.*)

Ver. 8. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred Me.—A mutual dislike between God and man.—I. This mutual moral antagonism is MANIFESTLY ABNORMAL. It is not conceivable that the all-wise and all-loving Maker of the universe would create beings whom He would loathe and who would abhor Him. Such an idea is opposed at once to our intuitions and our conclusions. In the pristine state of humanity, God loved man, and man loved God. II. This mutual moral antagonism IMPLIES WRONG ON MAN'S PART. For Infinite Purity and Righteousness to *loathe* the corrupt and the wrong is not only right, but a necessity of the Divine character. He abhorreth sin; it is the "abominable thing" which He hates. This is His glory. But for man to abhor Him, this is the great sin, the fountal sin, the source of all other sins. III. This mutual moral antagonism EXPLAINS THE SIN AND WRETCHEDNESS OF THE WORLD. Why does the world abound with falsehoods, dishonesties and oppressions, unchastities, cruelties, and impieties? Because human souls are not in supreme sympathy with the supremely good, because they are at enmity with God, because God loathes sin. IV. This mutual moral antagonism ARGUES THE NECESSITY FOR A RECONCILIATION. The great want of the world is the reconciliation of man to the character and the friendship of God. Such a reconciliation requires no change on God's part. His loathing is the loathing of love, love loathing the wrong and the miserable. The change must be on man's part. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. (*Homilist.*) *Divine rejection*.—A time comes in the history of incorrigible nations and incorrigible individuals when they are rejected of heaven. I. THE CAUSE OF THIS LAMENTABLE EVENT. "My soul loatheth them." II. THE RESULT. The results here are threefold. 1. The cessation of Divine mercy. "I will not feed you." 2. Abandonment to self-ruin. "That that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off." "The wages of sin is death." "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." 3. Deliverance to mutual tormentors. "And let the rest eat every one the flesh of another." All these results were realised in a material sense in the rejection of the Jewish people. Josephus tells us that in the destruction of Jerusalem, pestilence, famine, and intestine discord ran riot amongst the God-rejected people. These material evils are but faint emblems of the spiritual evils that must be realised by every God-rejected soul. III. THE SIGN. "And I took My staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break My covenant which I had made with all the people." The Divine Shepherd is represented as having two staves, or crooks; ordinary shepherds have only one. Expositors in their interpretation of these staves differ here as in most places elsewhere in this book. Some say they indicate the double care that the Divine Shepherd takes of His people; some, the different methods of treatment pursued by the Almighty Shepherd towards His people; some, that they refer to the house of Judah and to the house of Israel, indicating that neither was to be left out in the mission of the work of the Good Shepherd; and some, that the one called "Beauty"—which means grace—represents the merciful dispensation under which the Hebrew people had been placed; and the other staff called "Bands," the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. One thing seems clear, that the cutting of the staff called "Beauty" asunder was a symbol of their rejection from all future grace and mercy. It may be stated as a general truth, that all heaven-rejected souls have signs of their miserable condition. What are the general signs? 1. Practical ignorance of God. 2. Utter subjection to the senses. 3. Complete devotion to selfish aims. 4. Insensibility of conscience. (*Homilist.*) *Abhorring the name of God*.—"For the last ten years I (Gambetta) have made a pledge with myself to entirely avoid introducing the name of God into any speech of mine. You can hardly believe how difficult it has been, but I have succeeded, *thank God!*" (*Dieu merci!*) Thus the name so sternly tabooed rose unconsciously to his lips at the very moment when he was congratulating himself on having overcome the habit of using it. (*E. D. Pressensé.*)

Vers. 10-14. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.—The goodly price of Jesus.—Satan's dealings with the human family may be truthfully described as one gigantic system of bribery and corruption. He has bribes of all sorts, and of different kinds and characters, and he knows how to apply them. He takes care to suit his bribe to the person who is being bribed. With some of us wealth is no particular object. But even while we spurn that bribe we are open to others. Before one man Satan puts the possibility of revelling

in pleasure, before another a dream of ambition, before another literary distinction, before another domestic happiness. This system of bribery and corruption was fully shown when Satan entered the lists against the Saviour of the world. When the Son of God, made man, stood before the tempter in the wilderness, it was after this fashion that he dared to proceed. On that occasion Satan presented to the view of our blessed Master the very highest bribe that was ever offered. Of all the assaults which he made on our blessed Lord, this seems to have been the least successful. On other occasions he was very subtle; he approached our Lord very cautiously, but he made no headway; on each occasion he was met with wisdom and firmness. Satan is very frugal with his bribes. What is all his bribery and corruption for? How comes it to pass that Satan thus exerts his malignant skill in endeavouring to gain an influence over us? Satan's prime object is, to carry out his rebellious purposes in the very face of the everlasting purposes of Jehovah. We, Christians, believe that in the end God will manifest His own wisdom by triumphing completely over Satan's malignant skill, but that for the time being appearances are otherwise. There is no class of persons in human history for whom we feel a greater contempt than for traitors. We all despise a traitor. Who is there that can have any respect for a man like Judas Iscariot? And yet the sin that Judas committed is the sin that is being committed by the slaves of Satan still. We have not, indeed, the power of doing what Judas did. But as it is possible for us to "crucify" our Lord afresh, so it is possible to betray Him afresh into the hands of His enemies. How can this be done? This nature of ours, what is it? It is a citadel of the living God; it should be an abode of the Eternal Spirit. Every one of you belongs to God. If we refuse to recognise His right it is simply because we are already in our own hearts traitors against His love. The Lord is aware of his enticements. So He says to us: "If it seem good unto you, give Me My price." If you are going to barter My rights for that which Satan offers you; if you are going to play the part of a base and perfidious traitor, make up your mind what your bargain is to be; look your own act in the face. If men and women were to sit down and ask themselves the question: "What price have I accepted for Jesus; for how great a consideration have I agreed with Satan to make over my soul to his influences, and to live the life that he would have me lead?" they would soon repent of their bribe. Little do you think that when you are selling the rights of Jesus you are actually selling your own interests. The man that sells Jesus sells his own soul, and there is no man that makes so bad a bargain as the man who accepts the devil's bribes for the betrayal of Jesus. Look at this miserable man Judas. Can you fancy how he crept down that dark street? He felt already as if he were standing on the very verge of hell. The bargain was struck. And what a bargain it was! It did not seem much to get for Jesus—thirty pieces of silver. Then the end for Judas. It is the way the devil's bribe will always end. He makes you fair promises; he takes you by the hand; he pleads with you; he lays all tempting things before you; but behind them all he has got the hangman's rope ready, and the scaffold is prepared, and the awful moment of doom is drawing nearer and nearer. By and by come the agonies of remorse, the terrors of despair, and the awful horrors of a lost eternity. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *A model spiritual teacher*:—Why these words should have been referred to by Matthew, and applied to Christ and Judas, I cannot explain. They may fairly be employed to illustrate a model spiritual teacher in relation to secular acknowledgments of His teachings. I. HE LEAVES THE SECULAR ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO THE FREE CHOICE OF THOSE TO WHOM HIS SERVICES HAVE BEEN RENDERED. "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give Me My price; and if not, forbear." He does not exact anything, nor does he even suggest any amount. II. HIS SPIRITUAL SERVICES ARE SOMETIMES SHAMEFULLY UNDER-VALUED. "So they weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver." Thirty shekels. An amount in our money of about £3, 2s. 6d. This was the price they put on His services, just the price paid to a bond-servant (Exod. xxxi.). 1. Do not determine the real worth of a spiritual teacher by the amount of his stipend. 2. Deplore the inappreciativeness of the world of the highest services. III. HIS INDEPENDENT SOUL REPUDIATES INADEQUATE SECULAR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. "And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." He felt the insult of being offered such a miserable sum. "Cast it unto the potter," a proverbial expression, meaning, throw it to the temple

potter. "The most suitable person to whom to cast the despicable sum, plying the trade, as he did, in the polluted valley of Hinnom, because it furnished him with the most suitable clay." A true teacher would starve rather than accept such a miserable acknowledgment for his services. Your money perish with you! (*Homilist.*) *Mean treatment of an old prophet by his people*:—Here is an old Jewish prophet honourably putting himself in the hands of his congregation, who is dismissing himself with thirty pieces of silver. I. AN OLD PROPHET'S MANLY OFFER TO HIS CONGREGATION. If you think good, give me my price. If you are weary of me, pay me off and discharge me. If you be willing to continue me longer in your service, I will continue; or turn me off without wages—I am content. His spirit is (1) pathetic, (2) submissive, (3) magnanimous. II. THE CHURCH'S MISERABLE ACCEPTANCE OF HIS OFFER. "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." They accepted the offer—1. Immediately. They took no time for consideration. The money was ready for dismissal. 2. Despicably. Thirty shekels. 3. Dishonourably. Dismissing an old pastor with such a paltry sum. Parting with the man of God with a sham testimonial. An old prophet, after a long service of usefulness, cast upon the world with thirty pieces of silver. 4. Studiously mean. "They weighed thirty pieces of silver." They shamefully put the lowest possible value on his ministry. See the extreme want of appreciation of good pastoral service. Zechariah's ministry was Divine. What wretchedness of dealing with the prophetic shepherd of Israel. Salary is no test of a good ministry. Some of the best are badly paid. The geniuses are frequently unworthily recognised by their congregations. Jonathan Edwards was too poor to get paper to pen down his superhuman thoughts in the ministry. III. The prophet's MANLY DISDAIN OF HIS PEOPLE'S MEANNESS. "And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter," &c. The act was—1. Divine. "And the Lord said unto me." 2. Manfully done. 3. A proof of their meanness. IV. An old prophet ROBBED OF HIS JUST CLAIM. 1. Scriptural claim. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth the corn." 2. Social. For the "workman is worthy of his hire." 3. Equitable. Every class of people have power to claim their due, why not the ministry? 4. Divine. "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? And who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit," &c. It is nothing but right for the ministry to get and have their due, for the credit of the Church and the good of their successors. Honesty is virtue everywhere. Conclusion—God frequently punishes publicly mean churches by presenting them with shepherds of extreme barbarity and cruelty. Meanness will be punished. (*J. Morlais Jones.*) *The price of our redemption*:—The exact agreement of this prophecy with the event it predicts would be sufficient to render this chapter more than ordinarily interesting. But it has a still greater claim on our regard, since it contains the passage which I have chosen as the subject of this discourse, than which no prophecy is more clear, no prediction more close and circumstantial. To whichever prophet or to what particular book the passage before us may be attributed, its circumstantial and prophetic description of an extraordinary event connected with man's redemption cannot be denied. How trifling was the sum for which Judas sold his immortal soul. What could be his motive we at this distant hour can scarcely conceive. It has been said to have been avarice. But the sum of two or three pounds is surely too small a temptation even for the most covetous of mankind to betray and deliver to certain death his kindest friend and benefactor. The Gospel expressly tells us the crime originated at the instigation of Satan. Man's salvation was bought with a price. What that price was, let the service of the Church at this season describe. Not even for a moment can a sincere disciple of Christ forget the words of the Apostle: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (*John Nance, D.D.*)

Ver. 15, 16. Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd.—*The instruments of a foolish shepherd*:—The command addressed to the prophet was, "to take unto him yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd." "Yet" means "again," "once more." "Beauty" and "bands" were also instruments of a foolish shepherd. He was to take other instruments so as to manifest more visibly and strikingly what a foolish shepherd is. By "foolish" understand ungodly, unregenerate, destitute of heavenly imparted wisdom, and therefore

in God's account a fool. The "foolish shepherd" is therefore a natural man lifted up by education, pride, covetousness, or presumption into a pulpit, and devoid of spiritual illumination and heavenly wisdom. He has certain instruments which the prophet was to take as emblems of his character. What they were the Holy Ghost has not here informed us, but as we may gather them from other parts of Scripture I shall take the liberty to put them into his hand. 1. A mask. The thing it represents, namely, deceit and imposture, is as old as the times of Jannes and Jambres. To wear a mask is to play a false part, to assume a fictitious character, to be a stage-player; for in ancient times the actors never appeared but in masks, the features of which imitated the persons they represented. Thus the foolish shepherd makes the people his stage, his holy countenance being his mask, and his false zeal loud speech, and impassioned rant his wardrobe; and thus by craft and cunning he entangles the simple in his net. 2. A sceptre. The badge of authority and power. 3. A pair of sharp shears; for we read that "they clothe themselves with the wool," and of course must have something to get the wool off with. To receive what is voluntarily given is a different thing from clipping off as much wool as possible, or cutting so close as to fetch blood, and take off a bit of the skin. 4. A long whip that shall reach every corner of the pen, to flog all that stir up the enmity of his carnal mind, by what he calls a discontented mind. 5. A bow, and a quiver full of arrows; to reach those at a distance who are beyond the lash of the whip. Come now to his character, which the Holy Ghost has here drawn, and as we learn much from contraries, it will afford us an opportunity of seeing from the contrast what the wise shepherd is. (1) The first thing said of this foolish shepherd is, that "he shall not visit those that be cut off," meaning such as, by a work of the law in their consciences, are cut off from all creature righteousness, all false refuges, all deceitful homes and rotten props; from finding any good in self, or resting on the testimony of man. The margin gives another rendering, "those that be hidden." Hidden from general view and observation. These "cut off," "hidden" ones the foolish shepherd "does not visit." (2) "Neither shall seek the young one." The new born babes, that desire the sincere milk of the Word. The foolish shepherd neglects these. (3) "He does not heal that which was broken." This may suggest those who have lost their first love, and backslidden from God. (4) "He feedeth not that that standeth still." Some of the Lord's quickened family are reduced to such straits in soul experience as to be able to move neither forward nor backward. They are like sheep *cast*, and cannot get upon their legs. Such are the four negative marks of the foolish shepherd; the things that he does not do. There are two positive marks, things that he does do. "He shall eat the flesh of the fat." He shall not take that which comes, that which is offered him, but he must go through the flock, and select the fattest for his own eating. "And shall tear their claws in pieces." Sheep are said to have claws. And these they will sometimes exercise upon the shepherd. When, then, the foolish shepherd feels the scratch of their claws, he puts forth all his strength, and tears them in pieces. (*J. C. Philpot.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VER. 1. *The burden of the Word of the Lord for Israel.*—*The burden and glory of God's Word to Israel.*—God presents Himself here as creating and speaking. It is to Israel that His Word is primarily addressed, for it is Israel that recognises His Word, and by Israel His Word is carried to the world, which thus becomes also Israel. Remember the meaning of the name, and its origin. Prince of God was the name which Jacob got from that long wrestling in the dark—Israel, prince of God, because he had power with God. The name denotes the fact and the power of communion. Israel is composed of those who seek God and cling to Him, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. **I. THE CREATOR OF THE HEAVENS AND EARTH AND THE SPIRIT OF MAN HAS AN ISRAEL.** The idea of Israel is fellowship with God and power with God, gained in and by that fellowship. Is such an idea reasonable? We think it a poor conception of God which represents

Him as so mighty and rich that He does not care for fellowship with souls. Do you think to convince me that God is wanting in sympathies and affections by showing that He is Almighty? The argument is all in the opposite direction. Should I have more ground to believe in His heart if He were less than all-powerful and all-wise? There is in man a longing after relation to the Infinite. All his history proves this. Something in him cries out after God, and the heavens and the earth have tended to intensify this cry. Man is haunted by a something issuing from heaven and earth that will not let him rest. It would have been sad if man had craved an infinite friend, had yearned after nearness to a perfect and eternal living One, and felt no hope, countenance, or stimulus in the world around him. But man stands in no such barren and dead world. A living world is round him, material, but full of spiritual suggestion, inviting him to seek God, and waking him up again when he grows dull and hard. Will it be said that this does not make probable the idea of an Israel—men that have power with God, it gives support to the idea of communion with God, but not to that of prayer, an asking that influences the Divine will? The answer is obvious. Communion with God, in the case of a being like man, an imperfect, sin-laden being, must take largely the form of prayer. Such a being, coming near to God, cannot but ask from Him. And this asking, so inevitable, cannot be a futile thing. If asking be a necessity with the spirit that has communion with God, there must be room and need for it on the side of God. What is true on the human side is true on the Divine side. The whole doctrine of prayer is found in the spirit of man, in the longings and necessities, and there can be nothing in real contradiction to these. They who seek God have a peculiar affinity with Him. God as a moral being has moral affinities. It is not a lowering or limiting of God to believe that He has an Israel. II. GOD HAS A WORD FOR HIS ISRAEL. Neither the heavens nor the earth nor the spirit of man take the place of a word. They are each a revelation. But they are fuller of questions than of answers. The heart of man needs a word. It is only in words that there is definiteness. One of the distinguishing peculiarities of man is that he employs words. By these he reaches the fulness of his being. He makes his thought clear to himself, and gives it an outward existence by words. He makes all shadowy and vague things firm and abiding by words. And shall not God meet him on this highest platform? A Word of God is a necessity to the human soul. God has a word to Israel which makes fellowship close and confiding. The word gives man the necessary clue to the interpretation of the universe and himself. It is God's Word to Israel as the ideal man. Israel is the ideal and complete man, and it is in proportion as any man approaches the ideal that he fully comprehends and embraces the message of God's Word to Israel. III. GOD'S WORD TO ISRAEL IS A BURDEN. This expression is often used by the prophets. No doubt it expresses, in the first instance, the weight of obligation and responsibility in the declaring of God's message, but this rests on the fact that the Word of God is a weighty matter for all men. 1. God's Word is a burden by reason of the weight of its ideas. Thoughts that may be put into words are of all degrees of weight—some light as a feather, some heavy as a world. Thoughts weigh upon the mind, even though they are felt to be precious. The ideas in God's Word are the weightiest of all—God, soul, sin, salvation, renewal, eternity. Men are never right till they try to lift these thoughts and weigh them. They are no judges of the weight of things till they try these. 2. God's Word is a burden of momentousness and obligation. There are many weighty thoughts that have little or no practical moment. But the thoughts in God's Word are of pressing and supreme importance. They are light, food, shelter, life. To reject them is ruin. Everything must depend on how we stand to these words. 3. God's Word is a burden which is easier to bear in whole than in part. The half or quarter, or some little fraction of God's Word is worse to bear, harder and heavier than the whole. A single truth taken out of the whole may be quite oppressive and intolerable. It may crush all joy and courage out of life. The truth about sin needs the truth about grace and redemption in order to be borne. The truth about duty needs the Divine promises. Relief is to be found not by throwing off any truth, but by taking up more. The hardest truths become pleasant in proper company. Every truth has relations to all the rest, and is not properly itself without them. Let the effort be to take the whole truth, and to take it as a whole. Then it will no more oppress than the vast load of atmosphere which every man carries. 4. The Word of God is a burden which removes every other load. Thought, conviction, and feeling bring their

inevitable burden. And if a man rejects burdens he is but making up a heavier burden. If a man will not have the burden of God's Word, then the whole riddle of the universe becomes his burden. But if I take up God's Word, and actually carry it as God's Word, I have no further care. There is provision for driving away every fear and every care in that Word. (*J. Leckie, D.D.*) **Which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth.—The universe :—**I. That the universe INCLUDES THE EXISTENCE OF MATTER AND OF MIND. The phrase "heavens" and "earth" is used here and elsewhere to represent the whole creation. 1. It includes matter. Of the essence of matter we know nothing; but by the word we mean all that comes within the cognisance of our senses, all that can be felt, heard, seen, tasted. How extensive is this material domain! 2. It includes mind. Indeed, mind is here specified. "And formeth the spirit of man within man." Man has a spirit. Of this he has stronger evidence than he has of the existence of matter. He is conscious of the phenomena of mind, but not conscious of the phenomena of matter. II. THAT THE UNIVERSE ORIGINATED WITH ONE PERSONAL BEING. It had an origin. It is not eternal. The idea of its eternity involves contradictions. It had an origin; its origin is not fortuitous, it is not the production of chance. Its origin is not that of a plurality of creators; it has one, and one only, "the Lord." III. THIS ONE PERSONAL CREATOR HAS PURPOSES CONCERNING THE HUMAN RACE. The "burden" may mean the sentence of the Word of the Lord concerning Israel. 1. No events in human history are accidental. 2. The grand purpose of our life should be the fulfilment of God's will. IV. HIS PURPOSE TOWARDS MANKIND HE IS FULLY ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH. His creative achievements are here mentioned as a pledge of the purposes hereafter announced. Every purpose of the Lord shall be performed. Has He purposed that all mankind shall be converted to His Son? It shall be done. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 2, 3. All that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces.—*Sin self-punishment* :—There is in this passage a principle by which the governor of the world punishes malicious men. That principle is this,—the reaction of their efforts to injure others to injury of themselves. Jerusalem would become confusion and destruction to the men who sought its ruin. 1. Jerusalem would become a "cup of trembling," or "intoxication." 2. Jerusalem would become to them a "burdensome stone." The idea is, that in their endeavours to injure Jerusalem they would crush themselves. I. It is WELL ATTESTED. It is attested by every man's consciousness. Every man who attempts to injure another feels sooner or later that he has injured himself. There is a recoil and a regret. In truth, the malign passion itself is its own punishment. In every malign emotion there is misery. 2. It is attested by universal history. The conduct of Joseph's brethren, and of Haman, may be cited as illustrations; but the conduct of the Jews towards the Messiah is an example for all times, most mighty and impressive. II. It is MANIFESTLY JUST. What man thus punished can complain of the righteousness of his sufferings? He must feel, and feel deeply, that he has deserved all, and even more than he endures. III. It is ESSENTIALLY BENEFICENT. It serves—1. To guard men from the injuries of others. 2. To restrain the angry passions of men. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 4-9. In that day, saith the Lord, I will smite every horse with astonishment.—*A good time for good people* :—I. It is a time when their ENEMIES SHALL BE VANQUISHED. "In that day, saith the Lord, I will smite every horse with astonishment," &c. II. It is a time when their POWER SHALL BE AUGMENTED. The power here promised is—1. The power of unity. "The governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of hosts their God." III. It is a time when they shall be SETTLED IN THEIR HOME. "And Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem." Here they are "strangers and pilgrims," and have "no abiding city." IV. It is a time when they shall be BLESSED WITH EQUAL PRIVILEGES. 1. They were to have equal honour. "The Lord also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah." 2. They were to have equal protection. "In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem," &c. Now, there is a good time coming, when all good people shall have distinguished honour and complete protection.

They shall settle down in the heavenly Jerusalem, and what a city is that! (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 8. In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem.—*The security of the Church in the midst of dangers*.—There is not a greater miracle of preservation and security than that which is exhibited in the salvation of the Church in her present condition as surrounded by spiritual enemies. **I. THE PROMISE.** “In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” 1. The defended. Jerusalem denotes the whole Church of Christ. It signifies the Christian. 2. The time of their defence. “In that day.” This may relate to the dispensation of the Gospel of Christ, when the Lord Jesus should accomplish His work for the defence and salvation of our souls. It may refer to the time of our conversion. 3. The person defending. “The Lord.” The defence is not put into the hands of an angel, or archangel; it is in the hands of the Lord. **II. THE PLEDGE GIVEN.** “He that is feeble among them. at that day, shall be as David.” The word “feeble” means that he cannot save himself from sin, Satan, or the world. “As David.” Look at the character of brave, strong, successful, beloved, elevated, hated, yet saved David. **III. THE SIMILE DRAWN.** “As God.” Like unto God in spotlessness, in spiritual resemblance, in general disposition, in immoveableness. **IV. THE EXAMPLE GIVEN.** “As the angel of the Lord.” This can only mean Christ. We are beloved as Christ by the Father. Perfect as Christ—in Christ—before God. Powerful as Christ, since it is in the power of Christ we overcome. (*T. Bagnall-Baker, M.A.*)

Vers. 9-11. And I will pour upon the house of David.—*The future outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Jerusalem*.—The text informs us that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews crucified, and whom for hundreds of years they have blasphemed, will yet upon these Jews pour His Holy Spirit, lead them to repentance, forgive their sin, and restore them to His favour. **I. ASCERTAIN THE MEANING OF THIS PROPHECY.** The Jews themselves allow that the passage refers to the Messiah; and in the Gospel by St. John the words “they shall look on me, whom they have pierced,” are applied to Jesus Christ. The work He promises to accomplish is beyond the power of any created being. God is the only dispenser of His Holy Spirit. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that it is the very and eternal God who shall put His Spirit upon Israel. Joel tells us it is the Lord who will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. The effect of the outpouring of the Spirit of grace and supplications is here described as true repentance, and sorrow for sin; He, therefore, who can bestow it must be the true and eternal God. Then how can He be pierced and wounded by the house of David? To be pierced He must have a body. Thus the prophet clearly announces the mystery of the incarnation. Consider the persons upon whom He will pour out the spirit of grace and supplications. They are Jews; and characterised as the authors of the violent death of Christ. The place mentioned is the literal Jerusalem. Another question concerns the *time* of which the prophet speaks. The day of Pentecost cannot be regarded as fulfilling this prediction. No other time can be referred to. Therefore the text informs us that there is a time still coming, when the Lord Jesus Christ will pour out His Spirit on the Jews, and do that for which He has been exalted a Prince and a Saviour; He will give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins. **II. TRACE OUT SOME IMPORTANT INFERENCES WHICH THE SUBJECT SUGGESTS.** 1. The restoration of the Jews to the land of their forefathers. 2. The national conversion of Israel is not to be by miracle, without the use of means. This prophecy of Zechariah, then, assures us that the day is coming when the lost sheep of the house of Israel shall be gathered to the land of their fathers, restored to the favour of their God, and be the monuments of His grace, as they have long been the victims of His wrath and righteous indignation. (*A. McCaul, D.D.*) *The promise of the Spirit*.—In the preceding verses God declares what He will do in the way of defending His Church. In the text He declares what He will do in the way of reviving and humbling and purifying His Church. **I. THE PROMISE.** The Divine purpose in giving a promise is, that we may be led to ask for its fulfilment. The promise is, the Holy Spirit personally, and in His offices in the economy of grace and salvation. The promise of the Spirit is co-extensive with the earlier promise of Christ. What Christ was for purchasing, the Spirit is for applying—salvation. All other promises resolve themselves into this one—the Holy Spirit—as they did in Christ. **In**

this instance the Spirit is not promised generally, but in certain of His offices or operations. He is promised—1. As a Spirit of grace. By grace we understand those combined excellencies which go to form a perfect moral character. The Spirit of grace is the Spirit originating, nurturing, and maturing these. To have the Spirit of grace is to have the Holy Ghost producing these in us—grace itself. 2. As a Spirit of supplications. Supplications and prayers are the immediate fruit of the Holy Spirit. He leads, or shows, the way to the Divine throne. Reveals the blessings of grace. Implants the eager desire. Gives prevailing strength to faith. Causes unwearying importunity. As the author of prayer, the Spirit is here promised. Prayer is a proof of the Spirit's presence; the want of prayer is His absence. The promise of the Spirit was originally made and fulfilled to Christ Himself. Through Him it belongs to all His people. This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. It is still on record, and its fulfilment is also on record. Why is His presence not felt and recognised? He has moved on congregations of late, and still, occasionally, individuals feel His quickening power. But the instances are few. Let us plead with God for His Spirit's presence. II. THE EFFECTS WHICH FLOW FROM THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT. It follows necessarily from the terms of the promise that grace and prayer will follow upon the fulfilment of this promise. But the text particularly describes certain results of the Spirit's presence which call for special attention. 1. Those on whom He descends shall look on Christ. It is the office of the Spirit to glorify Christ, as it was Christ's to glorify the Father. The Spirit makes the heart and eyes to turn to Christ, as the flower to the sun. The attention is then riveted on Christ. 2. It is on a pierced Saviour that the Spirit-anointed sinner looks. His body pierced with the scourge, thorns, nails, and spear. His heart pierced with many sorrows. His soul pierced with the arrows of the Almighty, which drank up His Spirit. His reputation pierced by calumny. His humanity pierced with the mortal shaft of death. 3. He on whom the Spirit rests looks on Christ as pierced by himself. His sins pierced Him in all these senses. He was represented by Christ's crucifiers. He has, by his conduct, crucified Him afresh, and put Him to an open shame. He has pierced Him in His people and cause. 4. When the Spirit has shown to a man Christ pierced by his sins, that man mourns. The sight of Christ pierced gives him a new view of sin. Each sin has been an arrow shot at God, and has penetrated the heart of Christ. This sight involves a new view of Christ's love—mercy—compassion. He sees what kind of Redeemer he has been thus treating. The sight of Christ pierced gives him a sense of pardon. His sins met their punishment in Christ. A pardoned sinner mourns. Lessons—1. The sympathy of the Spirit with the Son. He reveals Him pierced, and produces mourning. 2. Seek the Spirit as here described. 3. Try yourselves by these fruits of His presence. (*James Stewart.*) *The promise to the Church*:—I. THE PROMISE HERE MADE TO THE CHURCH, BOTH IN HER COLLECTIVE FORM AND EVERY INDIVIDUAL MEMBER. 1. The person who makes the promise. Jehovah Himself, the everlasting Father, who created all things by His power. What could induce Him thus to look upon such a miserable and guilty creature as man? He was under no obligations to do so; there was no necessity on His part; there was nothing amiable in man to invite Him. It was His own free, sovereign, unmerited love. 2. The persons to whom the promise was made. By the "house of David" is here meant the seed royal, and by the "inhabitants of Jerusalem" is meant the common people. So the phrases include the whole Jewish nation. They were typical of all the people of God in future ages. 3. Their state prior to the application of the promise. It is a state of most deplorable ignorance; ignorance of God in His character, His works and requirements; and of the Lord Jesus Christ and His mediation; and of themselves, their sin, misery, and need. 4. The promise itself. "I will pour the Spirit of grace and supplications." He is called the Spirit of grace, because He is a gracious Spirit; because He is the author and worker of every grace in the hearts of believers; because He indites our supplications; and because He assists us in the offering up of our supplications. The promise is made good in the experience of every real believer, without respect to names, or parties, or denominations. II. TWO LEADING EFFECTS INVOLVED. "They shall look on Him," &c. Who is this? None other than Christ and Him crucified. "They shall mourn": i.e., they shall possess evangelical sorrow for and repentance of sin. Three things in real repentance—1. Hearty sorrow for sin. 2. Genuine confession of sin. 3. Entire forsaking of it as a principle of action. (*Griffith Williams.*) *Faith and repentance pro-*

duced by the Spirit being poured forth.—This language refers in the first instance to the Jews. The time is coming when, in consequence of God pouring out His Spirit on that people, they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn. “Whom they have pierced.” This language was literally fulfilled. The text admits of a legitimate application to others besides the Jews. I. THE NEED OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT IN ORDER TO FAITH AND REPENTANCE. The sinner is described in the Word as being dead in trespasses and sins. Not only does the sinner yet in his sins need to be quickened, the very people of God require again and again the living power of the same Spirit who at first regenerated their souls. For even after he has been raised from his natural deadness, he is apt anew to fall into spiritual slumber. I need not dwell on the necessity of repentance. If all men have sinned, it needs no argument to prove that all men should repent. Those who would repent need to be told that in order to repent they need power from on high. It is when the Spirit is poured out that sinners are brought to genuine repentance,—that is, repentance unto life. Without this, there will always be a shying, an avoiding of the humiliation implied,—always an obstacle in the way—and the heart will turn aside like a deceitful bow. As long as the heart is untouched by the Spirit of grace, it either remains in a state of utter insensibility in reference to God and sin on the one hand, or, on the other hand, it is troubled with feelings of reproach and fear, but without being persuaded or changed. Mere natural reproaches of conscience and alarms of coming judgments may stun the heart for a time, but they cannot break or melt it. The very people of God have reason at times to mourn over a narrowness of heart, over unfitness for the service of God, and an aversion to spiritual things. But while they are straitened the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened. II. THE EFFECTS PRODUCED WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS POURED OUT—1. By looking unto a pierced Lord, we are to understand faith in one of its liveliest exercises. The believer looks to Christ and His wounds with the eye of the mind, just as the serpent-bitten Israelites looked to the serpent of brass which Moses raised by the command of God. Whenever the Spirit is poured out from on high, the instant effect is the production of faith. Faith, indeed, seems to be the first—always along with repentance—saving or spiritual grace of the Christian character. It must be so, from the very nature of things. Our attention is called in this passage to two features of saving faith—(1) You perceive that it looks to a “pierced Lord.” Many have enlightened views of the nature and character of Jehovah, who, alas! have none of that faith which appropriates salvation. Nor is it sufficient that we look to God through the medium of the operations of His hands in the work of creation. Faith looks specially to God the Mediator. The faith that saves is a faith in Jesus the appointed Saviour. Nor is it enough that we look to the Son of God as enthroned in heaven. If we would obtain that saving power which flows from Him, we must look to the wounds by which He was pierced, and the blood that flows from them. Never till we look to a pierced, a suffering, a bleeding Saviour, will we find our spiritual diseases healed, and our soul filled with light and comfort. (2) Another characteristic of saving faith is that it leads those who possess it to look to Jesus as pierced by them. But what share had *we* in the sufferings of Jesus? Every sinner has had, in a sense, a part in inflicting the sufferings to which our Lord was subjected. You must learn to connect your sins with the Saviour’s sufferings. Our sins are the true enemies and murderers of our Lord. It was the accumulated sins of all and each of His people which weighed Him down to the ground in the garden, and bowed His head on the Cross. This is a distinguishing feature of saving faith. The sinner connects his sin with the sufferings of the Redeemer. When he thinks of Christ’s sufferings, he thinks how his sins were the cause of their infliction, and he thinks that if Christ had not borne them he himself must have borne them. He thus looks upon Jesus, not so much in the light of a Saviour for others as one suitable to himself. His faith thus becomes a faith in Jesus as his Saviour; it embraces Christ, and appropriates the blessings which He purchased. 2. Another effect is mourning or repentance. When Paul was at Ephesus, he preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sense of sin that drives us to the Saviour, and we come to the Saviour by faith. The sinner looks to Christ by the eye of faith, and as he does so he mourns and repents. A believing view of God is necessary to full repentance. How should sorrow be the effect of a saving view of Christ? We are called to mourn over the sufferings of our Lord because of our connection with them. Note some of the characteristics

of evangelical sorrow. The penitent has a deep view of the evil of sin. The penitent mourns over his sin as deeply as over his greatest earthly loss. But this sorrow for sin is not a sorrow apart from Christ, or independent of Him; neither is it a sorrow without hope. If the wounds of Jesus cannot but open up wounds in our breast, they also supply the balm that heals the wounds. (*J. M'Cosk.*) *Effects of an outpouring of the Spirit*:—The immediate effects of this outpouring of the Spirit are strikingly set forth. They are indicated by a spirit of grace and supplication excited among the people; by their looking upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourning for their treatment of Him in deep repentance and bitterness of spirit. And when they shall thus be humbled for their sins, and shall look with an eye of faith to Him who is the only Saviour of lost men, God will show Himself their reconciled Father and Friend, receive them into His favour, and seal them heirs of His kingdom. In directing attention to the work of the Holy Spirit I shall assume two facts—1. That the influence of the Holy Spirit is exerted in every case of true conversion. 2. That there are times when this influence is granted in greater copiousness and power than at others. 1. One effect of such a visitation of mercy is to impart to the people of God a spirit of grace and supplication. Whenever God comes near to a people, and is about to display His power in the conversion of sinners, He always awakens a spirit of prayer among His friends; causes them to feel their dependence and need of His help. At such times there is wont to be felt, in the hearts of God's people, a deep and tender concern for the salvation of souls perishing in sin. They awake from their slumbers. They mourn over their past unfaithfulness in duty. They cast off the spirit of worldliness and unbelief, and realise in some measure, as they ought, the powers of the world to come. 2. Another effect is to arrest the attention of the impenitent, and turn their thoughts directly upon the things of their eternal peace. 3. Another effect is to produce in the impenitent a painful conviction of sin and danger. When God pours out His Spirit, an invariable effect is to convince men of sin, and to give them an abiding sense of its great evil, as a violation of His holy law. 4. Another effect is to cut off self-confidence, and produce a sense of entire dependence on God for pardoning mercy and renewing grace. 5. One other effect is to renew the heart and bring the sinner to repentance and cordial reconciliation to God. So it is plain that the effects of the outpouring of the Spirit are all of the most desirable and happy character. (*J. Hawes, D.D.*) *A revival of religion*:—1. There shall be a revival of religion in the future history of the Church that shall gather in the Jews. 2. This revival shall be characterised by the invariable marks of an outpouring of the Spirit, namely, a spirit of prayer and penitence. 3. Prayer is the barometer of the Church. When the spirit of supplication is low, there is but little of the Spirit of God, and as soon as the prayer-meeting begins to fill up with earnest suppliants, the Christian may hope for a blessing. 4. All true repentance arises from a sight of a dying Saviour, one who has died for us. Terror may produce remorse, only a sense of forgiven sin will ever produce true repentance. True repentance is after all only love weeping at the foot of the Cross, the soul sorrowing for sins that have been so freely forgiven. 5. True religion is a personal thing, and when it takes strong hold of the heart, will lead the soul apart to solitary wrestling with God, and acts of personal humbling before Him; confession of sins past, and resolutions of obedience for time to come. Grace needs solitary meditation in which to grow, just as much as the plant needs the repose and darkness of night. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The Spirit of grace and supplications*:—In studying prophecy, with a view to personal edification, two things should be borne in mind. Spiritual religion is ever and invariably the same, notwithstanding the different degrees of light which have marked different and successive dispensations. And, whatever promises of a purely spiritual nature are made to the Jewish nation may, and ought to be, generally and individually applied by those who constitute the true household of faith in all ages. The words of the text refer ultimately to the ingathering of the Jews, and their conversion to Christianity; but they receive an intermediate fulfilment in the case of every wandering sinner, Jew or Gentile, who is effectually brought home to God. They form a promise which applies to the believer's experience at all times; a promise to which he may advert, to his inexpressible consolation, until the language of prayer dies on his lips, and is superseded by songs of never-ceasing praise. By the "Spirit of grace and supplications" we are to understand that Divine Agent who helpeth the infirmities of the saints; whose influences are elsewhere predicted under the

metaphor of an *effusion* of grace; and whose coming was to give its full effect to the sacrifice of the Redeemer, and to assign its prominent character to the Gospel dispensation. I. OF PRAYER AS AN EXERCISE OF THE RENEWED SOUL. Prayer is the language of the heart addressing itself to God, either in habitual spirituality of desire, in the way of silent ejaculation, or by means of words immediately suited to convey a sense of its wants to the throne of the heavenly mercy. It is founded in a strong conviction of internal poverty, weakness, and dependence, and is drawn forth by a humble persuasion that it reaches the ear of the Lord God of Sabaoth. Spiritual prayer is an eager and determined effort of the soul to possess itself of the purchased blessings of salvation. Spiritual prayer is the fragrant incense which burns on the consecrated altar of the believer's heart. A renovating process must pass upon the moral system ere the spark of true devotion is lighted up. The man who is in willing league with sin and Satan cannot pray; nor can he who is absorbed in the cares of this passing world; nor he who addresses the Almighty under the impulse of sudden alarm, excessive grief, or occasional anxiety of mind. The exercise of spiritual prayer is habitual to him that engages in it. It may not always be the same delightful and refreshing employment. Too frequently, when the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. In every age and period of the Church the people of God have been a praying people. Then we have here a very close touchstone of self-examination. Are you in the habit of flying to a throne of grace for the purpose of obtaining relief to your burdened souls? II. THE COLLATERAL INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL PRAYER UPON THE EXPERIENCE. 1. If the fervency of holy feeling in some measure subsides when the Christian withdraws from the presence-chamber of his Lord, still a hallowed glow remains in his breast, which tells him that the Spirit of grace and of supplications has not departed from him. It is the tendency of prayer, by exciting a continual apprehension of the nearness of God, to produce a feeling of sacred awe, a habit of solemnity, not indeed opposed to cheerfulness, but at variance with unhallowed levity. 2. Prayer keeps the mind alive to the important realities of an eternal state. It loosens that associating tie which enslaves the immortal spirit, and would confine its everlasting solitudes to the vanities of time and sense. The praying Christian bears away his spirituality from the throne of mercy, and blends it with the pursuits of his temporal vocation. 3. Spiritual prayer tends to purify and sweeten our intercourse with each other. By deepening the channel of humility, it causes peace, with all its attendant virtues, to flow on in a gentle and even course. Prayer is health to all who move in its genial atmosphere. It stifles the feelings of envy, hatred, and uncharitableness. III. THE DIRECT RESULTS OF PRAYER AS AN APPOINTED MEANS OF GRACE. Prayer, like the rod of Moses, is intended to strike the rock, that the waters may gush out. It is the sinner's application for blessings that cannot be denied or withholden. True it is that the people of God are a waiting as well as a praying people; they are often kept in suspense, because there is a suitable time for prayer to be answered, and because spiritual blessings are never sent prematurely. It is likewise true that the prayer of faith itself is sometimes offered up ignorantly, or under erroneous impressions, and consequently fails in that particular point in which infinite wisdom saw it to be faulty. One piece of advice let me offer—Be not satisfied with the mere act of prayer, even as a spiritual exercise. Be thankful for enlargement of heart to prayer, and for a heavenly frame of mind, while you are prostrate before God. But still look beyond the effort itself. Watch the result of your petitions. Infer—1. The importance of the Holy Spirit's office in the economy of grace. 2. The necessity of attributing salvation wholly and solely to God. 3. The value of a prayerful disposition viewed as an earnest or pledge of salvation. He who is drawn to the Cross shall eventually be drawn to the throne. Continue to wait upon God, and you shall not be forsaken. (*W. Knight, M.A.*) *The Spirit of grace and of supplications*.—I. THE PROMISE OF THE TEXT. By the "house of David" is meant his descendants after the flesh, or the princes and rulers of the Jews; and by the "inhabitants of Jerusalem," the rest of the people. On these the Lord promises to pour out His Spirit for their conviction, conversion, and salvation. 1. The Holy Spirit is here promised as a "Spirit of grace." He is the author and giver of all grace, of all goodness. The Holy Spirit is the author of all preventing grace. We never really forsake God, we never truly turn to God by any strength or goodness of our own. It is sin who begins, as well as perfects, the good work in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the author of all renewing and sanctifying grace. Every

attempt to renew and sanctify our heart and conduct must, if we depend solely upon ourselves, be altogether in vain. The Spirit can renew us in righteousness and true holiness after the image of Him that created us, and make us new creatures in Christ Jesus unto good works. The Holy Spirit is the author of all quickening and reviving grace. Our souls too often cleave unto the dust; our hearts become cold and dead. Where are we to find a remedy for this distressing state of things? In the same Fountain of living waters. The Spirit must send us those refreshing showers which He sends on God's inheritance when it is weary. And the Holy Spirit is the author of all comforting and supporting grace. And do we not often need comfort and support in such a world as this? 2. The Holy Spirit is here promised as a "Spirit of supplications." We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities. This He does in various ways. (1) He shows us our need of supplications, by making us acquainted with our spiritual poverty and wants. Naturally, we are not at all conscious of our spiritual necessities. Though dead in trespasses and sins, we imagine we are living unto God. Though guilty of innumerable transgressions, we feel not our need of pardon. We think we are rich and have need of nothing. But the Spirit convinces us of our mistake. He leads us to feel our need of Divine mercy and grace, as well as our need of prayer and supplication for them. (2) He shows us the encouragement we have to use supplications. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He shows God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. He thus encourages us to approach the throne of grace, and to use supplications for the blessings we need. (3) He further inclines us, or makes us willing to do this, by exciting in us an earnest desire to obtain such blessings. He removes that apathy and indifference which we naturally feel, and creates in us that hungering and thirsting after righteousness, that ardent longing after spiritual benefits, which nothing can satisfy short of an actual participation in them. Prayer, fervent and persevering, becomes our constant employment. (4) And the Spirit assists us in this holy and delightful exercise. He removes that coldness, deadness, and formality we are so apt to feel. He gives us boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Jesus. II. THE EFFECTS ATTENDING THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE. "Shall mourn," &c. The speaker here is evidently the Lord Jesus Christ. This application of the passage to Christ proves at once both His humanity and His Divinity. It proves His humanity, for He was pierced. It proves His Divinity; for who can communicate the Spirit but God alone? It is here pretold by the Lord, that when He would pour out His Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of grace and supplications, sinners would be led to look upon Him whom they had pierced, and to mourn bitterly for their sins, and especially their great sin in rejecting Him. This prophecy was fulfilled in part on the day of Pentecost. It will also be more fully accomplished whenever the conversion of the Jews, as a nation, shall take place. But this prophecy is also accomplished whenever sinners, Jews or Gentiles, are now turned to the Lord. Notice the nature of the sorrow which they feel on such an occasion. 1. It is a godly sorrow. Produced in their hearts under the operations of the Spirit of God. What are its effects? It humbles them in the dust before God; it softens their hard and unfeeling heart. It is also a bitter sorrow, for it is said, "They shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son." We can scarcely conceive of any sorrow of an earthly nature more bitter than that of a father when mourning for his only son. The feelings of some are quicker and more susceptible than those of others. But whatever differences there may be, all who are really taught by the Spirit are made so to see and feel the evil and bitterness of sin, as to learn in all sincerity to hate and forsake it. It is a secret sorrow. "The land shall mourn, every family apart, and their wives apart." And is not this always characteristic of deep and real sorrow? Then let us ask ourselves, What know we of the effects attending the fulfilment of the promise in the text? How important it is that we should have the Spirit! And how earnestly and perseveringly should we pray for His gracious and saving influences! (D. Rees.) They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.—*Gospel mourning a fruit of saving faith*:—Here we have a glorious privilege mentioned, namely, a view or manifestation of a crucified Redeemer; and the gracious exercise that is consequential to this distinguishing and glorious privilege. "They shall mourn for Him." From the words we observe that all whose privilege it is to get a supernatural discovery of a crucified Redeemer will mourn for Him, as wounded and pierced for their sins. I. THE GLORIOUS

PRIVILEGE. 1. Though Christ is not now visible to the bodily eyes, yet such a sight of Him as is necessary in order to the exercise of faith upon Him, and a real participation of the benefits of His purchase is attainable by persons in this world. 2. A spiritual and saving sight of Christ as crucified is what all should be concerned to obtain when they are attending upon the ordinances of the Gospel, upon the dispensation of the Word and sacraments. 3. Such a sight of Christ as is necessary in order to the exercise of faith and repentance is an effect of the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of a sinner. 4. A spiritual manifestation of Christ is in a special manner necessary on a day of fasting and humiliation. 5. A saving manifestation of Christ is a rare and distinguishing privilege. 6. A saving manifestation is ever accompanied with godly sorrow for sin. **II. THE GRACIOUS EXERCISE.** 1. Godly sorrow for sin supposes an inward and thorough change of heart, and mind, and nature. 2. It is real sorrow. 3. Such a sorrow as flows from a particular conviction of sin. 4. It is great sorrow. 5. It is evangelical sorrow. Application—(1) Both faith and repentance are fruits of the Spirit. (2) True repentance is a fruit of saving faith. (3) True faith is rare. (4) Formality in religion easily explained. (*D. Wilson, M.A.*) *True repentance* :—Repentance is the first duty of a sinner under a dispensation of mercy; prepares for a right reception of Christ as a Saviour; and is a part of that new and holy course of life which every true Christian leads. It accompanies every other exercise of piety, and terminates only when we arrive at heaven. The text contains a prediction of the repentance and conversion of the Jewish nation. In part fulfilled at Pentecost, in part to be yet fulfilled. **I. THE SOURCE FROM WHICH TRUE REPENTANCE FLOWS.** If true repentance imply an entire change of heart, comprehending a genuine sorrow for sin as committed against God, a hearty forsaking of it, and an acceptance of God's mercy as revealed in Jesus Christ, then it is obvious that it must spring from the influences of Divine grace. Accordingly the source of it is thus spoken of, "I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications." The allusion is to the pouring out of water, which is the usual emblem for the bestowing of the influences of the Holy Ghost. Refreshing as water to the thirsty, is the grace of the Holy Spirit to the Church of God. The peculiar effect of the Spirit of God in His operations on the heart, is described in the titles here given to the Holy Ghost—"the Spirit of grace and supplications,"—that is, the Spirit by whose influence grace is implanted in the mind, and supplications are addressed to the throne of mercy. The Holy Ghost is promised as the Spirit of grace, because all grace and holiness proceed from Him. As the "Spirit of supplications," because one of the earliest effects of Divine influences is prayer. We pray in the Holy Ghost. It is by His sacred instruction that we discover our ignorance, poverty, defilement, misery, and danger. It is by His teaching we receive with faith the truths and promises of the Gospel. The Spirit produces a return to God, and a thorough conversion of heart and life. **II. THE CHIEF MEANS BY WHICH REPENTANCE IS PRODUCED.** "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." Repentance, generally speaking, springs from a view of a crucified Saviour. The view of the crucified Redeemer which is spoken of in the text, cannot be understood as a bodily sight by the eye of sense. It is a spiritual and rational contemplation of Him by the eye of penitence and faith. Surely there is no object which in itself should so powerfully attract our notice. If the very circumstances of the spectacle should fix our attention, still more should we be moved when we reflect on the Divine dignity of the sufferer. But this is not all. You and I have had a share in this death. God had "laid on Him the iniquity of us all." But what if all this woe and suffering should be for our salvation! Should not this lead us to regard the scene with still more intense earnestness? **III. THE EFFECTS OF THE SPIRIT OF GRACE THUS LEADING THE SINNER TO LOOK BY FAITH TO HIM WHOM HE HAS PIERCED.** The returning Jews, when they shall view by faith their crucified Messiah, will mourn for their national sins in piercing Him, and for all their personal transgressions. See verses 11-14. The spiritual import of this prediction is accomplished in every true penitent. Mourning for sin will arise from that view of its malignity and hatefulness which the Cross of Christ displays. The genuine sorrow of a penitent flows from the believing sight of a pierced Saviour. The law convinces of sin, but the Cross teaches us to abhor it. 1. Apply to the sincere Christian—that he may learn the important place which true penitence occupies in a Christian

life: the connection of repentance with the hopes and privileges of the Gospel: and that the exercise of evangelical repentance is connected with a holy and circumspect conduct. 2. To the ungodly and impenitent. If any subject can show them their obligation to repent, and affect their hearts with a desire to do so, it is the one we have been reviewing. (*D. Wilson, M.A.*) *Looking to the pierced One*:—Not only an external grace and favour was promised to the Jews, but an internal light of faith, the author of which is the Spirit; for He it is who illuminates our minds to see the goodness of God, and it is He also who turns our hearts. As Zechariah declares that the Jews would at length “look to” God, it follows that the spirit of repentance and the light of faith are promised to them, so that they may know God as the author of their salvation, and feel so assured that they are already saved, as in future to devote themselves entirely to Him. “Whom they have pierced.” Here also the prophet indirectly reproves the Jews for their great obstinacy, for God had restored them, and they had been as untameable as wild beasts: for this piercing is to be taken metaphorically for continual provocation, as though he had said that the Jews in their perverseness were prepared as it were for war, that they goaded and pierced God by their wickedness as by the weapons of their rebellion. As then they had been such, he says now that such a change would be wrought by God that they would become quite different, for they would learn to “look to Him whom” they had previously pierced. John says that this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, when His side was pierced with a spear (John xix. 37). And this is most true; for it was necessary that the visible symbol should be exhibited in the person of Christ, in order that the Jews might know that He was the God who had spoken by the prophets. The Jews then had crucified their God when they grieved His Spirit; but Christ also was, as to His flesh, pierced by them. And this is what John meant—that God by that visible symbol made it evident that He had not only been formerly provoked in a disgraceful manner by the Jews, but that at length, in the person of His only-begotten Son, this great sin was added to their disgraceful impiety, that they pierced even the side of Christ. (*John Calvin.*) *Looking to Christ as pierced, and mourning for Him*:—May we not reckon the passage in which our text occurs, as one of those of which the prophets themselves, by whom they were uttered, did not at first understand the full import? How should we be affected by the contemplation of the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus? 1. We should mourn to think of what He had to endure. A tale of woe may touch our hearts with sadness although we may have no personal concern with the individual of whom it is told. If we saw an innocent man led forth to execution, our hearts would be greatly moved. We wonder not then that when Jesus was delivered up to the will of His enemies, when one so holy, so meek, so beneficent, was led forth to be crucified, the spectacle could not be seen unmoved. 2. We should mourn to think of the wickedness of the men by whom He was so treated. Were the men of that generation which lived when Jesus was crucified, wicked above all others before them, or after them? No! Though temptation and opportunity combined to involve them in a crime, probably the greatest ever perpetrated on earth, they afford but a specimen of that depravity, it may be less fully developed, which we all have inherited. 3. We should mourn for our own sins, as we see in what was inflicted on our Surety the exceeding sinfulness and deep demerit of sin. How hateful must sin have been in the sight of a holy God, when for it He hid His face from His Son, and gave Him up to the pains of an accursed death! Notice some of the happy effects of penitent grief. (1) To yield to it may give even present relief to the troubled mind. (2) This sorrow may have a beneficial influence on all our tempers and affections. (3) This sorrow may give evidence of our interest in the promises of pardon and of peace with God. Sorrow for sin cannot be accepted as a price for forgiveness; yet we may find in the sense of it some proof that the change is begun which must be wrought by the Spirit of Christ in all to whom He applies the redemption which is through His blood. (*James Henderson, D.D.*) *Sinners mourning for their pierced Lord*:—What is true of a converted Jew, is true also of a converted Gentile.

I. THE CHARACTER OF GODLY SORROW. It is like a parent's sorrow for the death of a child. This is a real, not a pretended sorrow. If we look into our hearts many of us will see that our sorrow for sin is all pretence. This is a deep, not a superficial or slight sorrow. We may really mourn for a friend, and yet mourn for him very little. Not so when our children die. Our grief then is pungent and bitter. It is not only in the heart, but down very low in it. It is a secret sorrow. Most

of us, when our hearts are full, wish to be alone. Deep emotions of any kind send us to our chambers. II. ONE OF THE CAUSES THAT EXCITE GODLY SORROW. "Look on Me whom they have pierced." Who is the speaker here? God Himself, but God in Christ. What is meant by "looking" on Him? Outward bodily actions are made use of to describe inward operations, the actings of the mind. These penitents look on Him as "pierced." Some say the reason why the Jews are not converted is that we do not sufficiently exhibit the Lord Jesus to them in His exaltation and glory. Others say if we want to prize the Lord Jesus more, we must think of Him more as enthroned in heaven. We must not suffer men to mislead us. If we want life for our perishing souls, if we wish to have our hard hearts broken to pieces, it is on His Cross, not on His throne, that we must contemplate our Lord. And these contrite sinners look on Jesus as pierced by them. "The chastisement of our peace was on Him," so we wounded Him. III. HOW IS IT THAT GODLY SORROW ARISES FROM THIS SOURCE? Why does looking on the crucified Lord make the believer mourn? How, I would ask, can it be otherwise, as we think of our dying Lord, dying for us? Learn the high place that we ought to give sorrow for sin among the Christian graces. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*)

I. THE OBJECT OR SPECTACLE PROFOUNDED. Certain it is that Christ is here meant. 1. Specify and particularise the person of Christ, by the kind and most peculiar circumstances of His death. Not a natural but a violent death. The Psalmist says, "They pierced my hands and my feet," which is only proper to the death of the Cross. The prophet intimates that his heart was pierced, and this was peculiar to Christ. 2. Sever Christ from the rest of His doings and sufferings, to see what that is which we specially are to look to—Christ pierced. The perfection of our knowledge in or touching Christ, is the knowledge of Christ pierced. Know this, you know all. In the object, two things offer themselves. (1) The passion, or suffering itself. Consider the degree; for transfixerunt is a word of gradation; expressing the piercing, not of whips and scourges, or of nails and thorns, but of the spear-point, which went through the very heart itself. May a soul be pierced? It is not a spear-head of iron that entereth the soul, but a metal of another temper, the dint whereof no less goredh and woundeth the soul in proportion than those do the body. Soul-piercing includes sorrow and reproach. II. THE PERSONS. When one is found slain, it is usual to inquire by whom he came by his death. We incline to lay the sin of Christ's death on the soldiers, the executioners; on Pilate the judge; on the people who urged Pilate; or on the elders of the Jews who animated the people. The prophet here says that they who are willed to "look upon Him," are they who "pierced Him." In every case of condemnation to death, sin, and sin only is the murderer. It was not Christ's own sin that He died for. It must have been for the sin of others that Christ Jesus was pierced. God laid on Him the "transgressions of us all." It was the sin of our polluted hands that pierced His hands; the swiftness of our feet to do evil that nailed His feet; the wicked devices of our heads that gored His head; and the wretched desires of our hearts that pierced His heart. If we feel that we were the cause of this His piercing, we ought to have remorse, to be pierced with it. III. THE ACT OR DUTY ENJOINED. To look upon Him. A request most natural and reasonable. To this look Christ invites us. "Upon Me." Our own profit inviteth us. Our danger may move us to look. In the act itself are three things. 1. That we do it with attention. 2. That we do it oft, again and again; with iteration. 3. That we cause our nature to do it, as it were, by virtue of an injunction. In the original it is a commanding injunction. Look upon Him, and be pierced. Look upon Him, and pierce that in thee that was the cause of Christ's piercing, sin and the lusts thereof. As it was sin that gave Christ these wounds, so it was love to us that made Him receive them, being otherwise liable enough to have avoided them all. So that He was pierced with love, no less than with grief. And it was that wound of love made Him so constantly endure all the other. Which sight ought to pierce us with love too, no less than before it did with sorrow. We should join looking with believing. And believing, what is there that the eye of our hope shall not look for from Him? What would He not do for us, that for us would suffer all this? Our expectation may be reduced to these two things,—the deliverance from the evil of our present misery; and the restoring to the good of our primitive felicity. . . . Shall we always receive grace, even streams of grace, issuing from Him that is pierced, and shall there not from us issue something back again, that He may look for and receive from us, that from Him have and do daily receive so many good things? No doubt there shall;

if love which pierced Him, have pierced us aright. (*Bishop Launcelot Andrews.*) *Looking to Christ crucified*:—The words have reference, in their primary sense, to the house of David, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; and received their first fulfilment on the day of Pentecost. But the text invites us also to look on Him who was pierced for us, and mourn. We are to look long and earnestly on Him whom we have pierced, that by long looking we may learn to mourn, and mourning much may love much, and loving much, may have much forgiven. How shall we look on Him whom we have pierced? Not with our fleshly eyes, but with the eye of faith. We are to look to Him, in order to see that the “Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” It was our polluted hands that pierced His hands; the swiftness of our feet to do evil that nailed His feet; the wicked devices of our hearts that pierced His heart. Yet we must not look wholly to His bodily sufferings, the wounds we have given Him have gone deeper, even to His soul, yea, pierced Him through and through with many sorrows. The pangs which He suffered on His spiritual Cross were infinitely more than those He suffered on the natural. Great as were His bodily sufferings, from the prospect of them He never shrank. He ever views and speaks calmly of them. Not so does He announce His spiritual Cross, it was the internal Cross which caused His bitterest passion. Shall we not then look on Him, and “remember and be confounded, and never open our mouths any more, because of our shame,” as we look upward to that Cross to which our sins have nailed Him? He was lifted up on that Cross that all from the ends of the world might look unto Him and be saved. It is by looking on Him whom we have pierced that we alone can learn somewhat of the deadly bitterness of our sins, which might not be forgiven, but by that awful blood-shedding. It is at the foot of the Cross alone that the mystery of the Cross is learnt, and a true estimate of our sins gained. (*R. A. Suckling, M.A.*) *Jesus’ pierced side*:—Out of the pierced heart of Jesus proceeds a stream of tears, of grace, and of prayer. For us, also, as we look at the pierced side of the Saviour, there opens—I. A FLOOD OF TEARS. The prophet foretells the time when Israel at the sight of the Man of Sorrows shall break forth into deep lamentation, when the water which flows from the pierced side of the Saviour shall be turned into a stream of tears, flowing from the hearts of the children of Israel. It is the simplest but certainly also the most painful truth, that your sins and mine have brought Jesus to the Cross. Therefore a glance at Him must become a crystal glass which reflects our sins more distinctly, and which represents us in our sins blacker than the whole law from Sinai, with its thunder and lightning, its curse and judgment, can do. II. A STREAM OF GRACE. In ancient Athens, mercy was represented with eyes streaming with tears, holding in her hand a torn and bleeding heart. By God’s grace we have free access to the Father. We have a Saviour who opens the Father’s heart for us, and we need no other Mediator. III. A FOUNT OF PRAYER. In these prophetic words the Lord declares that He will pour out the Spirit of prayer and of grace. The stream of grace from the wounds of the Saviour, which He causes to be poured over us, is to become a fount of prayer, flowing from our heart to God’s heart. There has scarcely ever been a time in which the streams of Divine grace were so abundantly poured forth in the preached Word, as well as in works of mercy, and in zeal for the Lord’s house, as in our days. But how long will it last, if the Spirit of supplication does not join the spirit of grace? And that is wanting. Ours is a prayerless time. (*A. Schröter.*) *Christ pierced by us* (to children):—There can be no doubt about the reference of these words. St. John quotes them in his Gospel, and refers them to Christ. “They” are the Jews, and more particularly the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And the prophet informs us that a time is coming when the people of Jerusalem shall look upon Jesus, and bitterly repent of having refused to accept Him as their Messiah and their King. 1. The Jews were, and still are, God’s people, though now they are God’s people in disgrace. He chose them out of all the nations of the earth, and drew them close to Himself, and gave them the Scriptures, and the temple, and the sacrifices, and thus prepared them for the coming of the Messiah, or Christ, who was promised in the prophets. But when the Messiah did come they rejected Him. Their great and terrible crime brought down God’s wrath upon them. About forty years after the crucifixion of Jesus the Romans came and laid siege to Jerusalem, killed many Jews, and burnt the beautiful temple. We are expressly told that this destruction of Jerusalem was a punishment for the murder of Christ. From that time the Jews have been driven out of their own land, and scattered abroad amongst the nations of the

earth. There are Jews almost everywhere. But the Bible says that one day they will be gathered together into their own land again. But will they be Christians when they return? I think not. They will still reject the Lord Jesus Christ. But I believe that, when assaulted by enemies, the Lord Jesus Christ will come down from Heaven, and appear for the rescue of His people, to deliver them. At that moment they shall look on "Him whom they pierced," and the effect of their looking will be that they will mourn over their sin, and repent of it, and become true followers and disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then they will become the most successful preachers of the Gospel that the world has ever seen. 2. Now turn to ourselves. It is possible to look on Jesus, who was pierced, and to say, "Well, He was pierced, and I am glad of it, for He deserved His fate. He pretended to be what He was not." That is what the Jews nowadays think, and what many of them do not hesitate to say. And many of us are inclined to say, "I had nothing to do with the piercing of Jesus. I was not there at the time. It was a fearful deed, and I am sorry for the sufferings of Jesus, but I really do not think it true in any sense that I pierced Him!" Let us pause a moment, and think. The Lord Jesus, who was the Son of God and Son of Man, bore upon the cross the whole dark load of human sin. All the sins of all mankind were gathered, as it were, into one vast horrible mass, and laid upon Him, the Sin-bearer; and He could not get rid of it, or "put it away" except by dying. By dying on the cross He took it away from us, and shook it off Himself. Now your sin and mine were in that load, and because our sin formed part of the burden which was laid upon Christ we had something to do with His death. We helped to pierce Him. Our sin made it necessary that Christ should die, and therefore you and I had something to do really with "piercing" Christ, and nailing Him to His cross. But unless we have the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, we shall never think rightly or feel rightly in this matter. It was when "the Spirit of grace and supplication" was poured out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem that they looked on Him whom they pierced, and repented of their sin. What a deep feeling we have when a thing is brought home to ourselves, and we are made to feel that we did it. If we feel that we pierced Christ two things will happen. (1) We shall have a horror of sin. (2) We shall come to understand the wonderful love of God. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus, the Son of God, gave up His life for us; He died upon the cross for us; for there was no other way of saving us from our sins. Surely, if we have not got hearts of stone, we shall feel thankful, most thankful, for what He has done, and love Him because He first loved us. (*Gordon Calthrop, M.A.*) *Looking to Jesus in penitential sorrow*:—The legend of Camillo, the artist who sold his soul to the devil in order to gain power to paint to the life whatever subject he chose, is full of suggestion. After a long life of sin, Camillo painted a picture of the Christ, the Man of Sorrows. The tender, searching eyes were such a source of annoyance to him and to his sinful friends that he veiled the picture and went to a priest with his story. Following the priest's advice, he unveiled the picture and let the eyes of the Christ search his soul. Then he went out and made such reparation as he was able to the lives he had wronged. But he had no peace. The priest sent him back to the unveiled Christ. Again he went out, and ordered a dealer to buy up and destroy every inch of canvas he had painted that would suggest evil thoughts. Still he had no peace. Again and yet again he was led to realise and to renounce and to undo sin after sin. But the peace he longed for was withheld. At length, as he knelt in prayer before the Christ, came the realisation that he had sinned, not only against his fellow-men, but against Christ, and he yielded his life to Him. Then as the eyes of Christ looked into the sorrow and anguish of his soul, there came also joy and peace. *Looking at Him who was pierced*:—When the late Dr. Andrew Bonar was sitting in his study one day, a man and woman entered, to see him about joining the church. When they had told their errand the doctor said to them, "When any one comes to me and wishes to join the church, I generally ask them a few questions. Now, first, how did you come to think of joining the church?" "Ah!" said the woman, "it was all through our little son. One night I was telling him about the Jews killing my Lord Jesus, and how they nailed Him to the cross on Calvary, and, looking up into my face, he asked, 'Mother, was it your sins that nailed Him to the cross?' Ah, sir, I could not answer him. There was a big lump in my throat; and when he saw that I did not reply he turned to his father and said, 'Father, was it your sins that nailed Jesus to

the cross ? ' I stole a look at my husband, and I saw a tear glisten in his eye—he could not answer either. Then the little boy clasped his hands and said, ' O Lord Jesus, it must have been my sins which nailed Thee to the cross.' From that time, sir, he has been a changed boy, and it was that which made us think of joining the church. (*W. Thompson.*) *Looking at Christ*:—Passing through a graveyard with her parents, a little girl drew them after her to look at a beautiful stone figure of the Christ, with a face full of suffering and yet of tenderest pity, leaning upon a massive marble cross. As they paused to look she held her head down and said in a low voice, " I have done so many wrong things, I can hardly lift up my eyes to look at Him." It is just those who have done " so many wrong things " that have need to lift up their eyes and look at Him. (*Quiver.*) *Penitential sorrow*:—I. THE SUBJECTS. Jews, not Gentiles. The Jewish people had often been reduced to this state of sorrow. When in Babylonian exile, they wept when they remembered " Zion." II. THE CAUSE of this penitential sorrow. " I will pour." The prophet Joel (chap. ii. 28) refers to this outpouring of Divine influence. III. THE OCCASION of this penitential sorrow. A believing sight of Christ produces this penitential sorrow. IV. THE POIGNANCY of this penitential sorrow. " And they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." " There are few states of deeper and acuter sorrow than this—that which is felt by affectionate parents when bereft of those objects of their fondest affections. As to the poignancy of this grief, it is further said, " In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon," &c. Perhaps the greatest sorrow ever known amongst the Jews was the sorrow in the valley of Megiddon, occasioned by the death of King Josiah (2 Chron. xxxv. 24). Jeremiah composed a funeral dirge on the occasion; and other odes and lamentations were composed, and were sung by males and females. But true penitential sorrow is far more poignant than that occasioned by the death of an only son or a noble king. It is tinged with moral remorse. V. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THIS POIGNANT SORROW. " The land shall mourn," &c. All the families of the land shall mourn, and mourn " apart." Deep sorrow craves loneliness. (*Homilist.*) *True mourning for Christ*:—Though this prophecy is fulfilling there is not complete fulfilment. There was, among the Jews, no such general grief as Zechariah pictures. They showed no signs of heart-broken sorrow. We must seek further for the mourners looking on the pierced One. There is no doubt where they are to be found. Christians have succeeded to the place, and occupy more than the place, of the Jews; it is ourselves who are to be " looking upon Him whom we have pierced." Some great divines hold that Zechariah's words describe the special mourning of Lent and Holy Week and Good Friday. In any case we have a picture of the effect which a real spiritual view of the cross must produce upon faithful Christians, and one which supplies us with a test of our Good Friday reality and sincerity. It is a hard test, but we must not flinch from it. It is of God's own proposing; nay, rather, it occurs in the announcement of His most gracious purpose. Compare our recollections of earthly bereavements with our memory of Christ's death. Can we say that we feel for Christ at all as we feel at the death of husband or wife, father or mother? Yet God expects us to feel very deeply. We know that Christ's passion ought to excite in us the deepest imaginable sorrow. As there was never sorrow like unto His sorrow; as there was never death like unto His death; as there was never love like unto His love, so we cannot wonder if we are expected to feel a grief for Him as great as that which springs from the severest trial of our human affections. Yet it may safely be said that, generally, it is not so. We fall far short of that which is to be the state of the citizens of the true city of David, and of the inhabitants of Christian Jerusalem. (*M. H. Ricketts.*) *England's rejection of Christ*:—Let me set in order before you the greater sin that we have committed in rejecting Jesus than did the Jews. I. WE HAVE REJECTED JESUS AS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. What is the Church? It is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The Church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head, to pour into it continually the glory of His own power and the excellency of His own beauty and the perfectness of His own holiness. It is a Church embodied, that is the mystery, and not a Church disembodied. A Church disembodied is only a fraction of the mystery of godliness; the mystery of godliness is God manifest in the flesh. And the Church was intended to reveal the whole excellency and power of Jesus

seated on the throne of God. What were the Church's gifts? The word of wisdom, to search all the deep things of God. The word of knowledge, to tell all that was passing in all parts of His dominions; the gift of faith, never to doubt that whatever she desired she would receive. The gift of healing, to go forth and show the power of Jesus over all flesh, to forgive sin in the soul, and to heal disease in the body. The power of miracles, to order in the things of creation, to get all disorder into order, and to command the various powers of nature. To this the Church was called; deny it who dare! This is the dignity of the Church, but we reject it. The Jews rejected a man of flesh,—we have rejected a Man in the power of the Spirit. **II. JESUS HAS BEEN REJECTED AS THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.** This is a title which He maketh great account of. It is written on His raiment, and on His thigh. But it has been denied; it is denied round the whole world. In the papacy the pope has taken the supremacy. In the Greek Church it is denied; the Czar is the head of the Church. In Britain it is denied. Who is King of kings?—Their majesties the people. "All power is from the people." That is the baser denial—the basest of all denial. Power is no longer held as from Jesus, nor is it any longer held to be responsible to Him. **III. ANOTHER GREAT SIN HAS BEEN THE REJECTION OF JESUS AS THE OWNER OF ALL:** as the merchantman, as the householder, the head of the house, whose is all the goods and chattels, and all the furniture, and all the provision, and all the treasure of the house. There is not one man in a hundred to whom the idea has once occurred, everything in his house is Christ's; everything in the banker's hands is Christ's; everything in the funds is Christ's. There is not aught that hath not the stamp of His name. **IV. WE HAVE REJECTED CHRIST AS THE POOR MAN'S FRIEND.** Who was first the preacher of good tidings to the poor? Who blessed and honoured the estate of poverty? Who said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"? We have forgotten to preach Him as the Bringer of glad tidings to the poor. We have rejected Him who was the Redeemer of poverty,—who is its friend; and we have chosen for Him demagogues who are not worthy to be trusted with the lowest of the goods of creation. (*Edward Irving, A.M.*) *Sinners repenting:*—Consider the language of the prophet as denoting a state of mind which in its great lineaments is becoming to all men in all ages, and which must be felt in order to secure the enjoyment of spiritual blessing. **I. THE SORROW HERE EMBODIED IS TO BE REGARDED IN ITS CAUSE.** Here sorrow is traced to one cause. It is sorrow on account of sin. The sense of its being, its guilt and consequence, is pungently pressed upon the consciences. Observe—**1.** The particular order of the sin. Although, in their relationship to the death of the Lord Jesus, the Jews were of course peculiar, there is an important sense in which all men must be regarded as participating in the guilt of "piercing Him." His death was an atoning sacrifice; the sins of men being the cause of what He endured, in order to expiate wrath and to secure salvation. "He is the propitiation for our sins," and thus it is that every sinner becomes an accomplice in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. Set forth as Christ has been to men in the institutes and by the ministry of the Gospel, each thought and each deed of sin, cherished and loved, has been but striking at Christ another and another blow—rearing the Cross again, fastening the nails again. **2.** This being the precise nature of the sin, we must notice the influence by which the guilt of it is recognised and felt. The sinner admits no guilt; his heart is a heart of stone. The consciousness of guilt is ascribed directly to Divine influence, the influence of the Holy Spirit. **II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS SORROW.** The conviction of sin, arising from the influence of the Spirit of grace, leads men to that mourning which constitutes the theme of these verses. That mourning of sorrow will be found suggested to us in its three great characteristics of intensity, solitude, and prayerfulness. **III. THE RESULTS.** One is pardon: connected with pardon is sanctification. And the third result of this sorrow for sin is joy: nothing can compare with the joy arising from the hope of pardon for sin. (*James Parsons.*)

Ver. 12. And the land shall mourn, every family apart.—*Personal and family fasting:*—On the pouring out of the Spirit the land is to mourn, every family apart, and their wives apart. The duties of fasting consist of—**I. AN EXTERNAL AND CIRCUMSTANTIAL PART.** **1.** A proper time must be set apart for these duties. And this is to be regulated by Christian prudence, as best suits the circumstance of the person or family. As to the quantity of time to be spent

in personal or family fasting and humiliation, the duty, I judge, is to regulate it, and not it to regulate the duty. None need be solicitous as to what quantity of time, more or less, they spend in these exercises, so that the work of the time be done. 2. A proper place is to be chosen where the person or family may perform the duty without disturbance from others (see Matt. vi. 18). 3. Abstinence is included in the nature of the thing; abstinence from meat and drink, and all bodily pleasures whatsoever, as well as ceasing from worldly business. The rule for abstinence from meat and drink cannot be the same for all. These, however, are but the outward shell of these duties. II. THE INTERNAL AND SPIRITUAL PART. 1. Serious meditation and consideration of our ways. Such times are to be set apart from conversing with the world, that we may the more solemnly commune with our own hearts as to the state of matters between God and us. In them we are diligently to review our past life. 2. Deep humiliation of soul before the Lord; the which was signified by the sackcloth and ashes used, under the law, on such occasions. 3. Free and open confession of sin before God, without reserve. 4. The exercise of repentance in turning from sin unto God, both in heart and life, the native result of deep humiliation and sincere confession. The true way to deal with a hard heart is to believe the Gospel. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," and therefore impossible to reach true humiliation, right confession, and sincere repentance, which are very pleasing to Him. 5. Solemn covenanting with God, entering into or renewing covenant with Him in express words. 6. Extraordinary prayer, in importunate addresses and petitions unto our covenanted God, for that which is the particular occasion of our fast. Now consider personal fasting and humiliation in particular. III. THE DIVINE WARRANT FOR IT. 1. God requires it in His Word, and that both directly and indirectly. 2. It is promised that the saints shall perform this duty. 3. It is recommended unto us by the practice of the saints mentioned in Scripture. 4. The duty of personal fasting and humiliation may be thus evinced. (1) There is nothing in the nature of religious fasting and humiliation that of itself is public, or necessarily requiring a plurality of persons to join therein. The preaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments do, in their own nature, require society, and therefore are not to be used by a single person alone in his closet. But one may keep a fast alone. (2) Extraordinary duties are called for on extraordinary emergents and occasions. If, then, a church or congregation is called to fasting and humiliation on such occasions, is not a particular person called to the same, or such occasions in his cave? (3) Extraordinary duties to be performed by a whole nation, church, or congregation cannot soon be overtaken, because all bodies are slow in their operations. What should particular persons do in such cases? Should they not keep personal and family fasts? Now consider a providential call to personal fasting and humiliation. 1. When there is any special evil actually lying upon us, the Church, or our neighbour, in whom we have a special concern; whether it be a sinful or a penal evil. And when the tokens of God's high displeasure are gone out in afflicting providences, it is time for us to roll ourselves in the dust, and so to accommodate our spirit and way to the dispensation, humbling ourselves before Him with fasting. 2. When there is any special stroke threatening or impending. 3. When there is some special mercy or favour to be desired of the Lord. Take a variety of these particular cases—(1) When through a long track of sinning and careless walking, the ease of one's soul is left quite in disorder and confusion. (2) When one is under convictions, entertaining some thoughts to reform. (3) When the conscience is defiled with the guilt of some atrocious sin. (4) When one would fain get over a snare he is often caught in, and have victory over a lust that hath often mastered him. (5) When one is under a dead desertion. (6) When one is under a felt and smarting desertion. (7) When one is pressed with some outward affliction, whether in his body, relations, name, substance, or otherwise. (8) When, by the aspect of providence, one is threatened with some such affliction. (9) When one would have light and direction in some matter of special weight. (10) When duty being cleared in a matter of special weight, it comes to the setting to. (11) When one, having some unordinary difficulty to encounter, is in hazard of being ensnared either into sin or danger. (12) When one hath in view some solemn approach unto God; in which case a special preparation is requisite. . . . Now consider some directions ament personal fasting and humiliation. 1. Make choice of a fit time and place. 2. Make some preparation for it the night before. 3. Rise early in the morning, even sooner than ordinary. 4. Let holy thoughts

at once have access to your soul. 5. Let your ordinary duties of prayer and reading of the Word be first performed; for extraordinary duties are not to jostle out the ordinary. 6. Begin with a solemn review of your sins—the sins of your nature, of your childhood, of your youth, of your middle age. . . . To recommend the practice of these duties to persons and families, these five things are offered in favour thereof; namely, that the practice of them is a proper means—1. To bring strangers to religion acquainted with it. 2. To recover backsliders. 3. To prevent relapses. 4. To prepare for a time of trial. 5. To get matters clear for eternity. (*T. Boston.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VER. 1. In that day there shall be a fountain opened, &c.—*The Fountain of Life*.—To what can the prophet refer but the exclamation of John, “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.” I. EXPLAIN THE PROMISE. 1. The fountain. This image holds forth the Redeemer. In distinction from creatures, which are “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water,” He may well call Himself the “Fountain of living waters.” He shall possess a plenitude Himself. The fulness of the Christian is derived and limited; it is the fulness of a vessel. The vessel is supplied from the fulness of a fountain. This fountain is the Lord Jesus. His fulness is original and boundless. It is the fulness of a spring. 2. The fountain was to be opened. A fountain sealed would be useless; it would only provoke desire. What would the Saviour’s excellencies and benefits be to us if unattainable and inaccessible? The fountain was actually opened in His sufferings. The apostles laid it open doctrinally, in their preaching and in their epistles. 3. This fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness. There had been provisions for ceremonial pollution, under the Mosaic economy. The brazen sea. Ten lavers. See also the Pool of Siloam. Sin is uncleanness. Its very nature is contamination. Sin is a pollution the most deep and diffusive. The very conscience is defiled. It is the “abominable thing.” But there is a fountain that washes out even the stains of the soul,—and of sin. And it was opened for this very purpose. II. TO IMPROVE THE TRUTH CONTAINED IN THE PROMISE. Five classes have a relation to the truth before us. 1. The ignorant. Such as cry, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” 2. The presumptuous. Antinomian perversion is worse than mere ignorance. 3. The self-righteous, who hope to cleanse themselves in some other way. 4. The fearful. For it is no easy thing to satisfy the conscience of awakened sinners. 5. Those who by faith have applied to the Saviour, and who know by experience that there is indeed a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. (*William Jay.*) *The fountain for sin*.—I. WHAT THEY NEEDED. Two things: deliverance from guilt and condemnation, and deliverance from sin’s impurity. These are the very blessings for which our text represents provision has been made. The fountain is opened “for sin and for uncleanness.” The former meaning “guilt,” the latter “pollution.” The whole context prohibits our regarding the language as referring to anything ceremonial. The guilt, contracted, and requiring remission, is the guilt of “piercing,” that is, of putting to death the true, divinely promised Messiah, and the “uncleanness” points to those unholy and hellish principles and dispositions in the soul from which the guilt originated, by which the fearful act was prompted. The guilt was deep. The depth of moral debasement and violence was fearful from which they who had been guilty of it required to be purified. II. HOW THESE BLESSINGS ARE PROVIDED FOR THEM. 1. What is the fountain? It is a twofold figure, comprehending the grace of Christ’s Spirit as well as the virtue of Christ’s blood, cleansing as well as forgiveness. These blessings are always found in union. Christ died that sinners might be both pardoned and purified; and the two designs were emblematically indicated by the mingling of the blood and water that flowed from His pierced heart. The fountain means at once the blood of Christ’s atonement and the grace of Christ’s Spirit; the one required for forgiveness, and the other for regeneration and cleansing: the two, however, being inseparable; the faith which interests in the pardoning virtue of the blood, being the product of the grace of the Spirit,

and the grace of the Spirit effecting the renewal and sanctification of the soul by means of the doctrine which makes known the pardoning virtue of the blood : it being the same faith, under the agency of the same Spirit, which at once justifies and sanctifies. And it is thus that the blood is represented as the means of purifying as well as of procuring pardon. 2. When was this fountain opened ? When Christ died ; when His blood was shed on the cross, for the remission of sins ; when the blood and the water flowed in union from His pierced side. While strictly and properly, the fountain was opened then,—it might be said to have been opened from the time when it came first to be needed,—from the time when man sinned. It was then opened by anticipation. The first promise opened it. The moment man became a sinner he needed the two blessings of pardon and sanctification. 3. How is it here said to be opened “in that day” ? The answer is, that although there have now and then, since the judgments of God overtook the Jewish people for their unbelief, been instances of Jews brought to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour, and to obtain salvation by faith in Him ; yet to the large mass of that dispersed, and for the time divinely abandoned people, the fountain has not been open. It has been sealed ; sealed by themselves, and for their unbelief judicially sealed by God. When the time of mercy arrives the fountain shall, in God’s providence and by God’s grace, be opened for their cleansing from their guilt and their pollution. It is said of them, “They shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn.” 4. For what purpose ? Two—the washing away of guilt, and the washing away of moral defilement. Both these purposes were in the mind of God, as to be alike effected by the mediation of the Son. That the guilt of sin might be fully taken away, and thus the sinner escape its punishment, atonement was necessary. 5. For what persons ? not simply for the restored of Israel,—but for the “house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” The idea thus conveyed is that of all ranks, from the royal occupants of the palace to the tenants of the meanest dwelling. All shall be stricken through with the conviction and alarm ; all shall feel the bitterness of contrition ; all shall mourn. And for all, in like manner, the fountain shall be opened. All shall need it. All shall have access to it. All shall avail themselves of it. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The best fountain.*—It is a beautiful thing to see a fountain playing. Fountain in the text is the best fountain. What is meant by this fountain ? It means the blood which Jesus shed when He hung upon the cross. It is in consequence of what Jesus then suffered—the blood He shed, and the death He died—that God pardons the sins of men, and saves their souls. It is the best fountain—1. Because it is easy to get at. No long journey is needed. You may find it everywhere. 2. It never changes. Other fountains are sometimes in full play, and sometimes very feeble. Illustrate by the Pool of Bethesda. This is always the same. 3. Because of its wonderful powers. Some fountains cure diseases and restore health. This is designed for the souls of men. This has a wonderful cleansing power, and a wonderful healing power, and a wonderful preserving power against the worms of pride and selfishness that may imperil our souls, as they do the good ships ; a wonderful beautifying power, and a wonderful saving power. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Christ our fountain.*—I. WHEREIN IS CHRIST A FOUNTAIN ? When it is said Christ is our fountain, it holds forth two things : 1. Fulness. A fountain is not like a cistern ; a cistern may be full, but the fulness of it may be emptied ; so may the fulness of a fountain too, but then a fountain, or a spring, fills itself again immediately. So doth not a cistern. A cistern may be full, but it doth not rise up and run over, as a fountain doth, and that continually. For this reason the corrupt nature in us is compared to a fountain (Jer. vi. 7)—bubbling up in vain thoughts, inordinate desires, corrupt affections. Now, in Jesus Christ there is a fulness, and it is a fountain-fulness (Col. i. 19), fulness—all fulness, and all fulness dwelling, and by the good pleasure of the Father. What is He full of ? The two things that our poor souls have most need of towards the making of us happy. Merit and righteousness for justification ; and spirit and grace for sanctification. He hath merit enough ; His merit is of infinite value, sufficient to take away all sin (Heb. vii. 25)—able to save. He hath Spirit enough, to sanctify us throughout, to break the power of every lust, to strengthen us to every good word and work. He is such a fountain as can open in us a fountain, springing up into eternal life (John iv. 14, i. 16). 2. Uses—fulness. A fountain is of great use. What striving was there in Abraham’s time, and Isaac’s time, and Jacob’s time, about wells of water (Gen. xxi. and xxvi.). When Achsah was to ask a boon of her

father Caleb, Give me, said she, springs of water (Judg. i. 15). Were we to ask but one thing of our heavenly Father, there were reason it should be, Lord, give us a fountain. Why, blessed be His name, He hath given us one. Not only springs of water, useful for our outward man, a land of springs, like Canaan, but a Christ, a Christ for our souls. A fountain of water is useful for three things : (1) For quenching of thirst. How glad is the weary traveller, or labourer, of a spring of water ; though it be but fair water. Oh, says he, it hath saved my life. The Israelites in the wilderness, when there was no water, what an affliction was it to them. When they had it, it was sweet as honey and oil (1 Cor. x. 4). Now, this fountain is very useful for this purpose. Is thy soul athirst?—athirst for peace, pardon, life, salvation, for grace, strength? Here is a fountain for thee, come and drink (Isa. lv. 1)—buying frightens ; therefore, come freely. Thou art called (John vii. 37 ; Rev. xxii. 15). See the discourse of our Lord Jesus with the woman of Samaria (John iv. 10-14). Alas ! the most of men know not what this means—they are sensible of no need, and therefore of no desire, but (Psa. xlii. 1) “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.” (2) For washing away filth. Water cleanses ; we could not tell what to do without it—to make our bodies, our clothes, comfortable. This fountain also is cleansing. Sin defiles, leaves a blot, a stain, upon the soul. It is uncleanness. The guilt of it is so : from that we are washed by the blood of Christ, satisfying God’s justice and making atonement ; also purging the conscience (1 John i. 7 ; Rev. i. 5 ; Heb. ix. 14). The corrupt nature, which is the root and principle of it, is so (Psa. xiv. 3). From this the Spirit of Christ washes in the laver of regeneration (Tit. iii. 4, 5 ; 1 Cor. vi. 11). (3) For watering the earth and making it fruitful. They use to have fountains for that purpose in their gardens, to be ready in a dry season to fetch water to refresh the plants. Herein also Christ is our fountain. Did He not water us every moment, grace in us would languish and die (Isa. xxvii. 3, xlv. 3, 4). Now, it is the second of these especially that this text speaks of—Jesus Christ is a cleansing fountain ; we have need of Him as such, for we are filthy and defiled.

II. WHAT KIND OF FOUNTAIN IS THE LORD JESUS? As a cleansing fountain He hath these properties. 1. He is full, He hath enough wherewithal to cleanse us ; merit enough, spirit enough. Under the law they had cleansing appointments as to ceremonial pollutions, but ours is beyond theirs. They had blood, but it was but the blood of bulls and goats, and that in a bason only ; but we have the blood of the Son of God, not in a bason, but a fountain full of it. They had water ; one particularly, called the water of purification, made of the ashes of a red heifer. Open and free as to terms. We say—What is freer than a gift? He is the gift of God (John iv. 10), the free gift (Rom. v.), the unspeakable gift (2 Cor. ix. 15). Though thou hast no worthiness, no matter, He is worthy. Cordial acceptance makes Him ours. He forgives freely (Isa. xliii. 25). 2. The only fountain. Besides Him there is no other (Acts iv. 12). We may think, perhaps, as Naaman—“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?” (2 Kings v. 12). But no other fountain will do.

III. THE APPLICATION, IN FOUR PARTICULARS. 1. Here is matter for thanksgiving to God, who—(1) Appointed this fountain in the counsel of His will from all eternity (John iii. 16). (2) Opened it in the fulness of time, after it had been shut for four thousand years (Gal. iv. 4). (3) Opened it to us ; to us of this nation, country, neighbourhood, of this present age and generation. We are within hearing of the joyful sound. (4) And specially, that He hath brought us to it and washed us in it. This is certainly the mercy of mercies,—“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. i. 5). This is more than angels can say. When ten lepers were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks (Luke xvii.). 2. Here is matter for conviction. Convincing! Of what? Of your need of this fountain to wash in. That which is unclean doth certainly need washing ; but thou art unclean, I mean, thy soul, thy mind, thy conscience ; inwardly, spiritually. I am sure thou wast so by nature ; born in guilt and filth ; like an infant weltering in blood and pollution (Ezek. xvi.). And art thou washed? When, and how? And by whom, and with what? I am sure that every sin thou hast committed hath added to that original pollution, and hath made thee more and more filthy (Psa. cvi. 39 ; Matt. xv. 19, 20). Even vain thoughts (Jer. iv. 17). So is the world also (Jam. i. 27). Nay, our best duties have their pollutions (Isa. lxiv. 6). But there is one particular

kind of sins, those against the seventh commandment, that is especially called uncleanness. And have we been in no sort guilty of that, neither in thought, word, nor deed? (*Philip Henry.*) *The fountain opened*:—I. A FOUNTAIN. Water is much valued in the East. We cannot wonder that spiritual blessings are so often exhibited to us in Scripture under images borrowed from water. These images found their way at once to the understandings and feelings of Jewish men. The Lord Jesus is meant by the text. He is represented as a fountain for a particular purpose; not for the thirsty to drink from, but for the unclean to wash in. Here again the text carries us into eastern climes. Bodily ablutions are much more common there than among us. With the Jews, too, they partook sometimes of a sacred character. The prophet mentions two things, sin and uncleanness, but he has only one in his mind—sin under the figure of uncleanness. Does uncleanness degrade whatever it touches? So has sin degraded us. Is uncleanness a disgusting and loathsome thing? If there is anything disgusting in the universe, it is sin. When God calls it by this name, He represents it as something which He cannot bear to look upon. In the text is a remedy for this hateful evil. It is a suitable, a real, effectual remedy for it. It is a fountain that can remove uncleanness, and is intended to remove it. This fountain is nothing else than the precious blood of God's own dear Son. That blood was shed for us. As water removes uncleanness from the body, so does this blood remove the guilt of sin from the soul. It does away with it, frees the soul from it, makes our condition as safe, and in the end as happy, as though we had never sinned. This effectual remedy for sin is here described as an abundant, lasting remedy. Thousands may wash in it, and it will be as everflowing as ever, able to cleanse thousands and thousands more. II. FOR WHOM THIS FOUNTAIN IS INTENDED. For the Jews first, then for all others. 1. The utter insufficiency of all rites and ordinances to cleanse the soul from sin. Who were these men? The very men to whom pertained the law, with all its sacrifices. When guilt oppressed or conscience disquieted them, they could in a few minutes be in their temple, and sharing in its sacrifices and service. But the text addresses them as if they were the very heathen. All their legal ordinances could not expiate their guilt. It is the same with our Christian sacraments. God has ordained them, not to take away sin, but to keep us mindful of it, and of that blood which can take it away. 2. We are taught here the all-sufficiency of Christ's blood to cleanse the soul. There is no guilt too great for the blood of Christ to wash out, no sinner whom He cannot recover and save. III. THE TIME WHEN THIS FOUNTAIN SHALL BE OPENED TO THESE SINFUL MEN. "In that day." The day of our Lord's crucifixion. They point also to a day yet to come, when the Jews as a nation shall be brought to repentance and the reception of Christ. Learn—1. There can be no real knowledge of Christ without repentance. 2. Wherever there is real repentance there also will God give in the end a real knowledge of His salvation. Would that we might all learn from this Scripture to seek for ourselves a deeper consciousness of sin, a more heartfelt and abiding sorrow on account of it! (*C. Bradley.*) *The fountain for sin and uncleanness*:—The prophet leads us to consider the legal uncleanness so much and so fully developed in the Old Testament, and leads us through them to look at the great disease of sin—the leprosy of the soul. I. THE GREAT UNCLEANNESS—THE SPIRITUAL LEPROSY OF THE SOUL. This is that that defileth a man. It is not poverty; it is not sickness nor disease—however terrible or however sinful. That which defileth a man. This inward leprosy maketh a man an offence to God. This evil pervadeth the world, and yet men are as insensible of it as if there were no truth in it. II. A FOUNTAIN OPEN FOR SIN AND FOR UNCLEANNESS. The fountain is the blood of Jesus. A bubbling fountain, ever full, ever abundant. III. THIS FOUNTAIN IS SAID TO BE OPENED. Formerly, this fountain exclusively belonged to the priests and to the Jews; now, it is for the whole house of David, and for all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There it stands, a fountain without cover, open and free for the very vilest. (*J. H. Evans.*) *The fountain opened*:—The text contains one important prediction which was fulfilled in Christ. It relates to the consequences of His death, with regard to His people, and shows of what great importance this event was to the whole Christian Church. The accomplishment shows with what confidence and comfort we may rely on the great doctrine of the atonement which it involves. I. THE PROMISE OF PROVISION TO BE MADE AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF SIN. 1. The prophet speaks of a fountain to be opened. A fountain is properly the source or spring-head of waters. Springs or fountains are called, "living," when they never

cease or intermit, but are always sending forth their streams. 2. The blood of Christ was shed expressly, by appointment of God, and by covenant with the Son of God, for the expiation of human guilt, and for the cleansing and purifying of sinful men. 3. There is an inexhaustible fulness and sufficiency of merit in this blood of the Redeemer for the complete expiation of human sin. In its atoning and cleansing properties, the blood of Immanuel is as infinite as the mercy of God which it procures for sinners, and for the exercise of which it prepares the way. 4. This blood of Jesus Christ may be appropriated to the case and wants of any sinner that comes. Sinners may apply believingly to this blood, and obtain from it, not only the cleansing they require, but also plenteous forgiveness, substantial peace, and animating hope. II. THE PERSONS FOR WHOM THIS PROVISION AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF SIN IS PROMISED. 1. By this expression the prophet intended primarily God's ancient people, the Jews. But the Jews, as the peculiar people of God, were a type of Christians, and His people everywhere. It is no presumption in us to conclude, as we have already assumed, that this promised provision is intended for us. 2. The double phrase may denote both the rich and poor in God's Church. III. THE TIME WHEN THE PROMISE WAS TO BE VERIFIED. The promise was actually fulfilled on the day of the Saviour's crucifixion on Calvary. (*J. Jaques, M.A.*) *The opened fountain*:—The application of this prophecy to Messiah is beyond all doubt. It contains the announcement of a divinely appointed and effectual remedy for the guilt and misery of man. 1. The certainty of this provision. "There shall be a fountain." 2. The perpetuity of this provision. 3. The freeness of this provision. 4. The sufficiency of this provision. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *The Lord Jesus Christ a fountain*:—I. IN WHAT SENSE MAY THE LORD JESUS BE DEPICTED AS THE FOUNTAIN OPENED? In opposition to those many broken cisterns of human invention to which men are prone to apply. In opposition to those rivulets, those brooks, which are occasionally good, but which soon flow away and are lost. Under the law there were various lavers prepared for the purpose of purifying from ceremonial guilt and pollution. Jesus is a fountain in opposition to all these types and images. The Lord Jesus is the fountain, because He Himself in His own power, in His own essence, contains inexhaustible and perpetual fulness. II. FOR WHAT PURPOSE WHE LORD JESUS IS THIS FOUNTAIN. For sin and for uncleanness. All sin is uncleanness. Repeating the expression gives more enlarged views of the efficacy of faith, and the grace of our Lord. For the purpose of giving comfort and peace to the believer the terms are doubled. This fountain cleanses not only from the guilt of sin, but also from the accusing and terrifying power of sin in the conscience. III. TO WHOM IS IT OPENED? "The house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem." In the East there were often contentions over fountains; this one is free to all. An open fountain, to which all ranks, all stations, all ages, all conditions, may repair. (*Archdeacon Law.*) *The fountain opened*:—I. THE FOUNTAIN THAT IS OPENED. 1. The plenteude of Divine grace. It is not a wasting stream, that soon exhausts its store, but a never-failing fountain, ever flowing in plenteous supplies for every demand. The Lord Jehovah is emphatically styled, "The God of all grace." Millions have been refreshed by this fountain, and still it is undiminished. There is "enough for all, and enough for evermore." 2. The freeness of Divine grace. It is not a fountain sealed up, and forbidden; but freely opened and accessible to all. None are excluded from participating its richest blessings (Rev. xxii. 17). No personal merit, or moral worthiness, is required in its willing recipients. II. THE PERIOD WHEN IT WAS OPENED. "In that day," &c. When this expression occurs in the prophetic writings, it generally refers to the actual appearing, or spiritual reign of the Messiah. But we ought to notice respecting this fountain, that—1. It was virtually opened in the original scheme of redemption. According to God's gracious promise to mankind, Christ is called, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." 2. It was actually opened in the mediatorial work of the Redeemer. When the fulness of time was come, Christ was manifested in the flesh, to accomplish the will of God, and procure the salvation of sinners. He then fully opened this fountain, by fulfilling all righteousness in His own person—becoming the propitiation for our sins—rising again for our justification—ascending to heaven to be our Advocate with the Father—and diffusing an enlarged dispensation of the Holy Ghost; it was ministerially opened in the labours and writings of the Apostles, as "ambassadors for Christ" (1 Cor. i. 23, 24, 30); and it still continues open. III. THE PEOPLE TO WHOM IT IS

OPENED. "The house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." It is very evident—1. This fountain was primarily opened to the Jews. To the Jews Christ was promised, and to them He came as His own people, according to the flesh. His personal ministry was generally confined to them; and He commanded His apostles to open their commission at Jerusalem, and preach the Gospel first to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Luke xxiv. 46, 47). 2. This fountain is now graciously opened to the Gentiles. The blessings of the Messiah were not to be confined to the Jewish Church. He was sent "to be a light of the Gentiles, and for salvation to the ends of the earth." "By the grace of God He tasted death for every man." IV. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH IT IS OPENED. It is "for sin and for uncleanness." This implies—1. A fountain is opened for the expiation of sin. The death of Christ was a perfect sacrifice, by which an atonement was made for the sins of mankind. 2. A fountain is opened for the destruction of sin. It must not only be sacrificially expiated, but personally destroyed. The Son of God effects this destruction by the merit of His death, and the operation of His grace (Titus ii. 14). All sin is moral uncleanness, and spreads its infectious disease through every power, both of body and soul. The ceremonial purifications under the law were emblematic of the efficacy of this fountain (Heb. ix. 13, 14). (*Skeletons of Sermons.*) *The fountain opened*:—The fulfilment of this prophecy has never yet taken place, and will probably be considerably posterior to our times. Though not fulfilled to the Jews, yet, to us the fountain is opened. I. WHAT IS THIS FOUNTAIN? The ancient Jews had their sacrifices, and purifying oblations. They have now been long without a sacrifice and a priesthood. We are not to understand that these Levitical fountains will be opened again, as some have dreamed. The blood of animals might be an instituted means of taking away a ceremonial guilt, which yet left the sinner as he was before, in regard to the Governor of the world; but it had no fitness to take away moral guilt, because it failed in the two great principles of a true atonement,—a manifestation of the evil of sin, and a demonstration of God's righteous government. These meet in Christ, who is the true fountain. II. ITS EFFICACY. In the removal of "sin and uncleanness." 1. Sin is the "transgression of the law." The law is transgressed in three ways,—by a violation of its precepts, by a neglect of its injunctions, and by a defect in its observance. Bringing all under the penalty of death. 2. Uncleanness (margin, "separation for uncleanness"). Allusion to arrangements in the Levitical system; typical of the manner in which sin separates between the soul and God. III. THE DAY WHEN THE FOUNTAIN IS OPENED. The day of our Lord's crucifixion. The day when the Gospel is first preached in a heathen land. The day when a "Spirit of grace and supplication" is poured out. Whenever a penitent mourns. In every means of grace, that pardon may be repeated, and our sinful nature cleansed. We need never attend any of the ordinances of religious worship without receiving a renewed application of the blood of Christ, and a fresh communication of sanctifying grace. (*R. Watson.*) *The fountain opened*:—In the text the prophet anticipates the personal manifestation of the Messiah, and the unspeakable benefits to mankind from His atoning sacrifice. I. THE FOUNTAIN THAT IS OPENED. Fountain is a metaphor. It represents the mediatorial character of Christ, as the source and medium of salvation to the human race. A fountain opened implies—1. The plenitude of Divine grace. It is a never-failing fountain, ever flowing in plenteous supplies for every demand. 2. The freeness of Divine grace. It is not sealed, but freely opened, and accessible to all. II. THE PERIOD WHEN IT WAS OPENED. "In that day." This expression, in the prophetic writings, generally refers to the actual appearing, or spiritual reign of Messiah. It refers to Christ's assumption of our nature, and sacrifice for our sins. 1. It was virtually opened in the original scheme of redemption. 2. It was actually opened in the mediatorial work of the Redeemer. III. THE PEOPLE TO WHOM IT IS OPENED. 1. This fountain was primarily opened to the Jews. 2. It is now graciously opened to the Gentiles. IV. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH IT IS OPENED. It is "for sin and for uncleanness." This implies—1. A fountain is opened for the expiation of sin. The death of Christ was a perfect sacrifice, by which an atonement was made for the sins of mankind. 2. A fountain is opened for the destruction of sin. The ceremonial purifications under the law were emblematic of the efficacy of this fountain. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) *The new economy of grace*:—It is not to the advent of a person, or to the occurrence of any historical event, that the prophecy in the beginning of this section refers: what is announced is the estab-

lishment of the economy of grace, the bringing in of the kingdom of God, free access to which should be given to all, small and great. There was provision made for the cleansing from sin and uncleanness of all without respect of persons; the Jew first, but also the Greek. The manifestation of this was by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who came to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; but it is the thing done rather than the doer of it that is here announced. It is for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem that this fountain is said to be opened. They seem to err grievously, however, who infer from this that this prophecy refers to the final conversion of the Jewish people. The prophets are wont to describe the new dispensation in language borrowed from the condition and usages of the old, and we interpret them aright when keeping this in view, we understand their descriptions, not as representations of simple historical facts, but as serving as the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, and as finding their fulfilment in crises and conditions of the kingdom of God on earth. They go upon the presumption that the Israel of God was never to be abolished, that its continuity was never to be interrupted, that though the outward national Israel might be cast off, because of their rejection of the Good Shepherd, the true Israel, the reality of which the other was but the symbol, the Israel that was really Israel, should continue for ever. This idea our Lord and His Apostles adopted, and in their teaching and administrations carried out. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*) *A fountain for sin*:—Remission of sins and sanctification, purging away the guilt of sin by the grace of God in forgiving sins through Christ's blood, and the virtue of His blood applied by the Spirit, and laid hold upon by faith, for purging all uncleanness of sin; this is compared to a springing fountain made open to all, in opposition to the small measure of water carried into the temple for legal washings. This benefit will be very conspicuous toward converted Israel, when the Redeemer shall turn iniquity from Jacob. 1. The great and chief privilege of the Gospel is remission and purging of sin, which, as they are only attainable through faith laying hold on Christ's blood and the grace of God offered through Him in the Gospel, so without these, no other advantages by the Gospel will avail much, or be comfortable. 2. The free grace of God toward lost man, and the virtue of Christ's blood is a treasure inexhaustible, and which cannot be overcome, with the greatness and multiplicity of sin in those who flee unto it, for it is a fountain or spring. 3. Pardon and virtue for purging of sin is not only purchased, and the way to it made patent, by the death of Christ, giving access unto God through Him; but is held forth in the offer of the Gospel and ministry of the Word, that none may pretend ignorance, nor any who need it seclude themselves from so free an offer, "A fountain opened." 4. As the greatest must be in Christ's reverence for this benefit, even those who have greatest gifts and are rulers of others, so the meanest in the Church, however they be not equal to others in gifts, yet have a like interest with them in this saving benefit. 5. When the Lord pours out upon His people the spirit of repentance and humiliation, it is a forerunner of ample manifestations of the grace of God, in opening up the treasures of the Gospel by the ministry of the Word, and in granting of pardon, and growth in purity. For, when "the land shall mourn," "in that day there shall be a fountain opened." (*George Hutcheson.*) *A word full of Gospel*:—The twelfth chapter of Zechariah is principally occupied with the indications of some particular day. Thus, we read again and again: "In that day" (ver. 3); "In that day" (ver. 4); "In that day" (ver. 6); "In that day" (ver. 8); "In that day" (ver. 9); and "In that day," in the opening of the thirteenth chapter—"In that day there shall be a fountain opened." The reference is not in reality to some particular day; the day was not the same, the calendar was filled with that particular day, and yet the day was singular from all other days round about it. In all the previous instances we find nothing equal to the music that is discoverable in the opening of the thirteenth chapter. We read, "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone"; "In that day I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness"; "In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf"; "In that day shall there be great mourning in Jerusalem"; but now, in the thirteenth chapter, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness"—a fountain of water, a living fountain, hidden all the time in the rock; not a new fountain, the fountain was always there, but not always open; its existence was recognised by many a ceremonial action. We read of water in the Book

of Numbers that is known in the literal Hebrew as "the sin-water," that is to say, the water that was applied to the cleansing of moral and spiritual offences. We delight to give an evangelical interpretation to this fountain. We call Jesus Christ the Son of God, the fountain that was opened for sin and for uncleanness. He offered to make men clean, He offered to refresh the souls of men with living water; He is described as the Water of earth, or the Water of heaven. David did not open the fountain, the fountain was opened in his house; the very grammar suggests an external and superintending act. In this living fountain we recognise God's supreme miracle. For whom is the fountain opened? For a special class, and for that class only. It is not opened for Pharisees, righteous persons, or those who would carve their own way to heaven. This fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness. Is any man conscious of sin? Here is the fountain. Has any man sat down by rivers of water and taken to him soap and nitre, and tried to cleanse his life of sin stains, and has consciously and pitifully failed in his attempt? Here is the fountain opened for uncleanness. Have we tried this fountain? Until we have tried it we cannot condemn it; until we have gone to it and sat beside it and invoked the spirit of its Creator, we cannot tell what virtue it possesses. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The fountain of life* :—

Old mythology tells of one who discovered in his wanderings a fountain of peculiar qualities, and on bathing in it, found himself endowed with immortality. In the Holy Scripture this fiction is turned into solid fact. The Saviour's fulness is original and boundless; the fulness of a spring always flowing and never diminished. The whole abundance of God's free grace is poured unto us from this unfailling source. The fountain of life was opened on the day when the Divine Redeemer suffered and died for us. During the brief period of our Saviour's ministry, the fountain flowed in partial streams, but at His death it was fully and for ever opened. The Mosaic law had made ample provision for ceremonial pollution, and there were pools, like that of Siloam, where bodily disease might be cured, but the soul must be washed in another fountain. The stains of sin were so deep and so pervading, that even the conscience itself was defiled, and "the everlasting benediction of God's heavenly washing," could alone render the soul meet for His presence and glory. Such provision, accordingly, has been made, and a fountain has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. There are those who hope to cleanse themselves by some methods of their own. Would God have opened this fountain, if any other would have sufficed? The fountain stands open in the means of grace; in the invitations of God's Word; in the nearness, the power, the grace of our adorable Lord and Saviour. (*John N. Norton.*) *The gospel age* :—I. It is a "DAY" FOR THE ABOUNDING OF SIN CLEANSING INFLUENCES. —To the Jews, washing from sin and ceremonial impurity was an idea with which they were well acquainted. It was enjoined by the law (Numbers viii. 7, see also Ezekiel xxxvi. 25). That sin and uncleanness are in the world. This is a fact written in all history, patent to every man's observation and consciousness. 2. The removal of sin is the world's great necessity. Its existence is the cause of all the miseries of the world, physical, social, political, religious. 3. Provision for its removal abounds. "A fountain opened." Sin and uncleanness are not an essential part of human nature. Men have lived without sin, and men in heaven do now. It is a mere stain on human nature, separable from it, and the means of separation are provided, provided in the Gospel. It is a fountain. This implies—1. Abundance. It is not a rill, a brook, a lake, but a fountain. What is the fountain? Infinite love. This implies—2. Freedom. Flowing, ever open to all. This implies—3. Perpetuity. The hottest sun does not dry up the fountain. It has an under connection with the boundless deep. II. It is a "day" in WHICH IDOLATRY SHALL BE UTTERLY ABOLISHED. What a blessed age will that be, when all men on the face of the earth shall have their souls centred in love and devotion on the one great and common Father of us all! III. It is a "day" in which ALL FALSE RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS SHALL CEASE. "And I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirits to pass out of the land," &c. 1. False religious teachers are great curses to a community. This is implied in the promise here of their destruction. They deceive souls on the most vital of all points. 2. False religious teachers may become objects of indignation even to their nearest relations. Thank God there is an age of reality coming, an age when men will recoil from shams as from "demons vile." 3. False teachers will on this "day" be ashamed to exercise their mission. If any false prophets should continue to exercise their function, they will have to do it—(1) in secrecy;

(2) and disclaiming their profession. Should their disclaiming be questioned, they will take shelter in falsehood. "And one shall say unto Him, what are these wounds in Thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends." *Christ cleanses as well as forgives* :—A criminal, condemned by our law to die, can only be spared by the King empowering the Home Secretary to reprieve or pardon. Even then to remove the stain that must always rest upon that person's character is utterly beyond the power of them both. How different with Jesus. His power is unlimited. He not only is able to forgive sins, but He can cleanse away every trace of guilt, and present us faultless unto God. *The cleansing fountain* :—"A fountain," says James Bailie, "not a stagnant pool or a sluggish canal, but a torrent, a waterfall. God's love flows forth like a great river over the Rock of Ages. Men bathe in that fountain, and their sins are swept away into the dead sea of God's forgetfulness. God has pardoned transgressions, the very recital of which would have utterly destroyed our faith in human nature. One of the strongest proofs of Divine origin of Christianity is that it has received in its embrace liars, swindlers, and adulterers, and having cleansed and purified them, made them ornaments of society. *The remedy near at hand* :—Do you know that the wound that Hedley Vicars received before Sebastopol was not necessarily fatal? It was a wound that was very common, and a wound over which the surgeons had complete control, yet he died. How was it? It was because, in the hurry and haste of the march in the grey morning from the heights of the Crimea, the tents where the stores were, were left behind. Had there been a bandage near, had there been lint and cotton-wool near, Hedley Vicars would have been saved; but he bled his life away before they could reach the tents. Ah, David tells you to-day that the tents where God's supplies are, are never too far away. Blessed be God, the bandages, and lint, and healing efficacy of the blood of Christ, are not confined to Calvary, where it was shed. Here it flows. Oh, plunge into the fountain that was opened for sin! (*John Robertson.*) *The sense of sin* :—The sense of sin, we are told, is weaker to-day than it once was. Are we quite sure, if we could penetrate beneath the crust of men's hearts? An American humorist has put it, but oh! so truly, "In his heart of hearts no man can have much respect for himself." In our heart of hearts, in our moments of colloquy with ourselves, when we feel ourselves to be in the presence of another whom we cannot name, we accuse ourselves, and there is no escape from the accusation and its penalty. The sense of sin may be outwardly weaker, but you are always upon safe ground if you appeal to the condemned conscience that is in every man. We have seen our life is marred by the presence of sin; and that mournful fact is not partial but universal. Touch the man and you touch one who has been seared and scored by the presence of an enemy, and that enemy is sin. (*R. J. Campbell, B.A.*)

Ver. 6. What are these wounds in Thine hands?—*The Christianising of Christianity* :—Christ, or Christianity—the system of thought and life which bears the name of Christ—has been injured by its friends, more, perhaps, than by its enemies. The process of Christianising modern Christianity is a process of purification, of elimination, of dropping what is inferior, of what is a mere misrepresentation; a process of exalting those great spiritual principles that Christ brought into the world, and for which He gave His life. The question is asked, Why is it that Christianity has not yet conquered the world? Christianity did not succeed in the East, its triumphs were only in the West, and we are hearing on every hand to-day that the forces of Christianity in the Western World seem to be spent. We are even told it is not holding its own against the advancing intelligence of Europe and America. I don't believe these objections are true. I believe real Christianity is conquering and has conquered. I believe that real Christianity is holding its own against this advancing intelligence. I do but mention these objections to call attention to the process that is going on in these days—the process of eliminating from this current popular Christianity that which is unreal in it, and does not belong to it. The first great mistake of the Church was the association of Christianity with the State. Christianity ceasing to be a spiritual religion, and becoming simply a political system allied to the existing Government. Christianity was made into a vast secularised power. Hardly had Christianity time to show what was in it, and what it could do, than the stormy barbarisms of Europe broke upon it, and a wild sea of

barbarian tribes surged and heaved where once the cultured fields of the Old World had been. There was thus destruction of civilisation, and there could be no greater proof of the vitality that was at the heart of Christianity, than the fact that after this storm had spent itself, the Church was the only power that raised its head. The sight that met the Church might have appalled the stoutest heart. Half-naked savages were masters of the world. As we look back on the conversion of the barbarians, it was very wonderful, but at the same time most unsatisfactory. It is idle to blame the past. It is the very genius of Christianity to take the world as it finds it, and bring out of its evils and errors some love of goodness and truth. Hallam says, "Had religion been more pure, it would have been less permanent, and Christianity has been saved by means of its corruptions." The corruptions of medievalism encased the spiritual truths of Christ which were too pure and lofty for that generation to receive. The Church consecrated almost all the ceremonies of the barbarians, and absorbed a great many of their superstitions. Medieval Christianity is not the Christianity of Christ. It is an amalgam; a union of three things,—the simplicity of Christ; Roman imperialism; and barbarian superstitions. There was, at the time of the Reformation, a great protest against Roman imperialism, and a grave protest against the barbarian superstitions; and these protests are going on to-day. On the political side it is going on in all Protestant countries. On the religious side, it is the movement which aims to bring to the front what is distinctively Christian. So that when it is said that Christianity has spent its force in the West, that it is not holding its own against advancing intelligence, that missionary triumphs are not so great to-day as in the apostolic era, we must remember that Christianity has not yet had time to free itself from the alliance with the State, nor yet had time to free itself from barbarian superstitions; and that this process is going on to-day. It is a process that we can all see going on before our eyes. (*K. C. Anderson, D.D.*)

Christ wounded in the house of His friends.—Wittingly or unwittingly, through a culpable negligence or haste, Christ is wounded in His cause, or in His spiritual body, in the house of His friends. 1. He is wounded when Christians grow cold in zeal, slack in duty, or forgetful of their solemn vows. They show indifference, ingratitude, selfishness. 2. When His cause is injured by the unbecoming conduct of His followers. Scandal in the Church is scandal heaped upon His name. 3. When indifference is shown by them to the success of the instrumentalities by which His cause is promoted. These instrumentalities are vital with Christ, as though His blood flowed through them, and His voice spake by them, and His heart beat in them. He is in the word, the sermon, the prayer, the praise. 4. By inattention to the Gospel, with its messages of duty, its invitations and exhortations. 5. By their lack of sympathy and co-operation within their sphere, with the institutions of charitable beneficence for the spread of the Gospel. 6. When Christians, instead of keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, treat one another with superciliousness and bitterness; when their intercourse is not marked by that gentleness and forbearance which the Gospel requires. Here looks may be daggers, and words blows. And are there not those who, by inconsistent conduct, by neglect of the ordinances of the sanctuary, by worldliness, by passion, by unbrotherly feeling and act, dishonour their profession, disregard their solemn vows, and do injury to the cause of Christ? Is it not a fact, that all the assaults of infidelity, all the rage of profanity, all the recklessness of vice and crime, do far less to check the power of the Gospel than the scandals and offences of professed disciples? (*E. H. Gillet.*)

The unkindness of friends.—

I. WHO IS THE PERSON MENTIONED AS BEING WOUNDED? No other than the great God, our Creator and Redeemer, the "Man Christ Jesus." It was this mysterious man, this God-man, of whom the prophet inquires in the words of our text, "What are these wounds in Thy hands?"

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY BEING "WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF HIS FRIENDS"? This "fair world" is meant by "the house of His friends." "All things were made by Him." The house of His friends was His own house; He built it for them; He came into it because He had a right to; He came into it to do them good, to save them from their wickedness and woe; but they wounded Him, and cast Him out. You all know the history of the Divine Jesus, who was "wounded for our transgressions." In what sense can they be called His "friends" who used Him thus? I may call a man my friend in one or both of two senses. 1. Because he acts a friendly part towards me, though I have not deserved it; or, 2. Because I act a friendly part towards him, though he has not deserved it. A man may be a friend to

me; or I may be a friend to him. Christ calls us friends, because He was a friend to us, though we were no friends to Him. III. WHAT IS MEANT BY ITS BEING MENTIONED THAT HE WAS WOUNDED IN THE HANDS? By the feet are signified the ways or goings of a man, his moral conduct. By the hands are signified the works of a man, or the deeds of his life in general. The hands are the instruments of the heart, or will, or mind, or soul. In the house of His friends, Jesus was taunted with all His good deeds. His hands were pierced, because He wrought His Father's will; and His feet were nailed because He chose His Father's ways. IV. WHAT THINK YOU OF THE CREATOR AND PROPRIETOR OF THE WORLD BEING THUS DEALT WITH BY HIS UNGRATEFUL CREATURES? Nevertheless, He deigns to designate them by the gracious name of friends. What think you of the human beings who could persecute to death the benefactor that was come to bless them, to buy them with His blood? Can you possibly be guilty of their crime? Every evil deed you do crucifies the Lord of Glory. (*W. H. Henslowe, M.A.*) *Wounded by friends*:—The prophet says, that such would be the discipline among the new people after having repented that each in his own house would chastise his sons and relatives: and it is an evidence of perfect zeal, when not only judges perform their office in correcting wickedness, but when also private individuals assist to preserve public order, each according to his power. We may gather from the answer what proves true repentance. "Say will" one (it is put indefinitely), or it will be said, "What mean these wounds in Thine hands?" Then He will say, "I have been stricken by My friends." The prophet shows that those who had previously deceived the people, would become new men, so as patiently to bear correction; though it might seem hard when the hands are wounded and pierced, yet he says that the punishment, which was in itself severe, would yet be counted mild, for they would be endued with such meekness as willingly to bear to be corrected. Some apply this to Christ, because Zechariah has mentioned wounds on the hands; but this is very puerile; for it is quite evident that he speaks here of false teachers, who had for a time falsely pretended God's name. As then they say, that they were friends by whom they were smitten, they acknowledge themselves worthy of such punishment, and they murmur not, nor set up any complaint. (Marekins, Adam Clarke, and Henderson, agree with Calvin in repudiating the notion that this verse is to be understood of the Crucifixion of our Saviour,—a notion commonly entertained by papal expositors.) (*John Calvin.*) *Wounded by friends*:—There is no wound so painful as the wound inflicted by a familiar friend. The secret devices of the hireling may be anticipated. The blows of an avowed foe can be healed. The neglect of the proudly indifferent can be endured. But the slight of a friend, the faithlessness of the lover, inflicts a wound for which earth provides no cordial and no balm. "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." When, in the palace of the High Priest, in the dim light of the early morning, "one of the officers, which stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand," the wound was only skin-deep; but when in the outer court of that same palace a friend called Peter was saying, "I know not the man," the wound was attended with an agony. When the chief priests and elders "gave large money unto the soldiers" to induce them to give false witness, the pangs of the crucifixion were intensified; but when "Barnabas also was carried away with dissimulation," our Lord was crucified afresh. I am not doubting the friendship; nay, it is essential to my purpose that we should quietly assume its sincerity and its strength. I am not now dealing with masked foes, who wear the King's livery, who have caught the King's tones and expression, but who are inwardly fiercely and determinedly hostile to His claim and dominion. No, I speak of His genuine friends, friends as genuine as Simon Peter, and I want to speak of some of the ways in which we sorely wound Him when He abides beneath our roof. 1. We wound our Lord by our destructive zeal. Zeal is a very essential element in the religious life. It is as welcome a thing in the indifferent world as a warm fire on a winter's night. Zeal is genial and heartening. It keeps the affections fresh and radiant; it provides the requisite atmosphere in which all the powers of the life can attain their maturity. If the flame of zeal be in any way corrupted it works against the kingdom of our Lord. If the fire of zeal be kept clean it is the friend of life, if it become unclean it is the friend of death. The pure fervour may so easily become an evil fever! when we assume we are working in hallowed zeal. "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him, because he followed not with us." How friendly was the

disposition to the Lord, and how strong and decisive the act! A fiery zeal for truth was being corrupted into a clouded passion for sect. "Master, wilt Thou that we call down fire from heaven to consume them?" How zealous, and yet how blind! It is always so much easier to burn your enemies than to convert them. You know what kind of armour is used by an illiberal zeal. In the supposed interests of the Kingdom we use methods of misrepresentation, misinterpretation, exaggeration—I do not say wilfully, for that would place us outside the ranks of the Master's friends, but blinded by our perverted zeal—and the issue of such warfare is not the discomfiture of the devil but the wounding of the Lord. We detach things from their context. 2. We wound our Lord by our thoughtless kindness. "And they brought unto Him little children, that He should touch them: and the disciples rebuked them." The disciples acted in presumed kindness to their Master, and yet how unkind was the ministry! They were protecting the Lord because He was tired, saving Him from the embarrassment of the multitude. Their purpose was right; the means they employed were thoughtless. And it frequently happens that even when our deeds are right, the manner in which we perform them is offensive. We can wound the Lord by the clumsy way in which we serve Him. There are some men who boast of their want of refinement. We are responsible to God both for the man and the manner. It is not enough that we serve Him; we must serve Him in a way that will make no wounds. "Let your light so shine!" It is not enough that the light is shining; we are to take pains that it shines in the right way. There are well-meaning men who throw their kindness at you. All such kindness wounds the Lord Himself. "What are these wounds in Thine hands?" They are the wounds the Master received from the clumsy kindness of His friends. 3. We wound our Lord by our faithlessness when in the warfare of life the odds are against us. It is easy to be His friends when He walks along the palm-strewn ways of Jerusalem, and everybody vies with everybody else in acclaiming Him the King of Glory. But when the crowd melts away, and the minority is very small, it is so easy to become ashamed of the leader and to say: "I know not the man." Our true friends are revealed when we are "down." The nightingale is lovely, not because his song is sweeter than the note of the thrush, but because he sings in the night. And this is just our Lord's friendship; He is at His best when we are at our weakest. If I am in company, and the intercourse is unseemly, am I a friend of the Lord or a deserter? I would far rather be called a prig by the men of the world than be known as a faithless friend of my Lord. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The wounds of Jesus*.—The wounds of Jesus speak more eloquently than words. I. OF WHAT DO THEY SPEAK TO US? 1. Of the love of God. How full the Bible is of messages of God's love. 2. Of sin. 3. Of forgiveness, intercession, and atonement. II. TO WHOM DO THESE WOUNDS SPEAK? 1. To the children of God. To the advanced Christian ripe for glory. To him they speak of the heavenly perfection to which the Captain of our salvation attained through the suffering of which they are the sign. To those just starting out in the Christian life. To such they point to the path of suffering for His sake; that by the fellowship of suffering we may also be united with Him in His glory. To those who have been unfaithful and neglectful of duty. To these they speak reproach, that they have wounded the Lord afresh, and the voice of tender appeal that they may repent and return to Him. 2. To the doubting, trembling inquirer who has not yet accepted the Lord as his Saviour, and to the hardened unbeliever. III. BY WHOM INFLICTED? The text says they were received in the "house of His friends." You ask how the friends of Christ may wound Him? 1. By indifference. The present indifference of the Church greatly wounds the Divine heart of our Lord. 2. By opposition. Many things that are being done by His professed followers are out of harmony with His desires, and therefore must wound Him. 3. By preferring other persons and other things to Him. He wants the first place in the hearts of all His disciples, and not to give it to Him wounds Him. (*J. I. Blackburn, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. *Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd.*—*The sword of Jehovah smiting His Shepherd*.—We have our Lord's own authority for applying this passage to Himself. I. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN US OF HIM. In looking at the terms in which our Lord is here described, we are struck at once with the natural manner in which they bring together His Divine and human nature. This mode of describing Him is of frequent occurrence in the

Old Testament. It seems as though the Holy Spirit exulted beforehand in that union of the two natures, which was to be accomplished in His nature, and wished the ancient Church also to foresee and exult in it. In the text, He is described in the same twofold character. He is a man, and yet "the man that is My fellow," saith the Lord of hosts. "My fellow" signifies "my equal," "my companion." It is expressive of our Lord's Divine equality with the Father, and His eternal existence with Him. It intimates exactly what St. John afterwards plainly declared,—*"The Word was with God, and the Word was God."* But He is man as well as God. Not, however, originally, naturally man, as He was God. Here is an anticipation of a character He afterwards took on Him. And this assumption of our nature was necessary for the work of suffering He had to go through. In this human nature, He is set forth in the text under a third character. He is a shepherd. So called because the charge of His people devolves upon Him; because He performs towards them a shepherd's part, watching over, providing for, and guiding them. He is called God's shepherd, because the flock under His charge is God's flock, a flock committed to Him by God, to be rendered back by Him to God again. Happy they who are fed by Him! II THE COMMAND GIVEN BY JEHOVAH. It is couched in figurative and highly poetic language. The Lord places Himself on the throne of a king or magistrate. They who bear these offices have often a sword near them as an emblem of their authority, and if need be, a ready instrument to execute any sentence they may pass on the guilty. Here the Lord describes Himself as suddenly addressing the sword near Him, and calling on it to smite, not the guilty but His own Son, and Him as shepherd. 1. We see in it that the sufferings of our Lord were divinely appointed. The persecuting Jews indeed were willing agents in all they did against Him. They did it voluntarily; yet they did "whatsoever God's hand and God's counsel had determined before to be done." 2. Here, too, we see that the sufferings of our Lord were most severe. Man can inflict much misery, but his power is limited. When God calls off our attention from man as the author of our Lord's sufferings, and directs it to Himself, we feel at once that our Lord must be a most severe sufferer. The language of the text conveys this idea forcibly. It is sword—not a scourge or a rack. It is "smite"; strike hard. Mark the word "awake." It implies that, up to this hour, the sword of Jehovah had been sleeping. Now it is to awake, to rise up in its vigour and majesty. It is to strike in the greatness of its strength. 3. The text represents our Lord's sufferings as surprising. Against whom? The very Being of all others, whom we should have expected Him to shield from every sword. The Being who is the nearest and dearest to Him, the man that is His fellow. To add to our surprise, the Lord seems to afflict Him, not reluctantly, but willingly; yea, more than willingly, almost eagerly. He is well-pleased in this thing for "His righteousness' sake." III. THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH ARE TO FOLLOW THE EXECUTION OF THIS COMMAND. 1. The shepherd is to be smitten, and the sheep, frightened at the violence done to Him, are to be scattered. 2. The smiting of this shepherd is to be followed by a signal interposition of Jehovah in behalf of the scattered sheep. "I will turn My hand upon the little ones." This term represents to us the feeble and helpless condition of our Lord's followers at the time of His crucifixion. These timid disciples of our Lord were strangely kept together, in spite of their unbelief and fears, after His crucifixion, and sheltered from every danger. And we know what the early Church soon became. It was a wonder in the world, itself doing wonders. Look at the practical purposes to which we may turn this text. 1. To strengthen our faith in Holy Scripture. I do not allude to the predictions we find in it, which were afterwards so exactly fulfilled. I refer rather to that beautiful harmony of thoughts and expression, which exists between this verse of the Old Testament, and another passage of the New. (Compare the passage John x.) 2. The fearful evil of sin. There are moments when we cannot read this text without an inward shudder—it exhibits the great Jehovah to us in a character so awful, and in an attitude so dismaying. He is represented as an offended Judge, calling for, and eager for the sacrifice of His own dear Son. Evidently, the evil of sin is a reality; the Divine justice is a reality; the inflexible unbending character of God's law is a reality; his determination to punish every breach of it, everywhere throughout His wide universe, is a reality. The cross of Jesus Christ proclaims all these things to be most solemn realities. 3. The perfect safety of all who are indeed resting for safety on our crucified Lord. You have nothing to fear from this awful God. In the greatness of Him whom He here commands to

be smitten for you, you may see the sufficiency, the completeness, and more than that,—the grandeur and glory of the atonement He has made for sins. (*C. Bradley.*)

Jehovah's sword :—I. THE COMMISSION GIVEN TO JEHOVAH'S SWORD. 1. Whom was it to smite? 2. In whose hand was it to inflict the stroke? II. THE GROUNDS AND REASONS OF THIS COMMISSION. 1. To show His indignation against sin. 2. To reconcile justice with mercy in the salvation of sinners. III. THE EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF IT. 1. The immediate effect was the scattering of our Lord's disciples. 2. The ultimate effect was their restoration and recovery. (*G. Brooks.*)

The Passion sermon :—It is the observation of SS. Austine and Gregorie, that the four beasts mentioned by St. John mystically represent the four main acts of Christ, or works of man's redemption, His Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. I have to do with a prophecy somewhat dark before the light of the Gospel shone upon it. "Awake, O Sword," &c. I. THE SPEAKER, "the Lord of hosts." II. THE SPEECH. "O Sword." As all the creatures are God's soldiers, so when He employeth them against man they are called His swords. When the Lord is pleased to execute His wrath He never wanteth instruments or means. Of the blow here threatened, God Himself is the Author. God never awaketh His sword to smite, but for sin. In this shepherd there was no sin of His own. "Against My Shepherd." Popish writers say that a shepherd should have three things, a scrip, a hook, and a whistle. This Shepherd is the good, the universal Shepherd. Daniel says,—The Messias shall be slain, but not for Himself, "God hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The first and main cause of the Shepherd's slaughter is, our sins. "The man." Hebrews have four words for man—Adam, red earth; Enosh, a man of sorrow; Ish, a man of a noble spirit; Geber, a strong man. "My fellow," for in Him the Godhead dwelleth bodily: and yet a man. God's fellow to offer an infinite sacrifice for all mankind, and a man that He might be Himself the sacrifice killed by the sword that is now awake to smite Him. Consider this, and tremble, ye that forget God. The Shepherd is smitten; if you look to it in time, it may be for you; if not, a worse disaster remaineth for you than befell these sheep. (*D. Featly, D.D.*)

The character and sufferings of Christ :—I. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST, AS HERE REPRESENTED. 1. God's Shepherd (Psa. xxiii. 1). Great Shepherd (Heb. xiii. 20). Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. v. 4). The term shepherd is relative, and refers to His followers, whom He calls His sheep (John x. 16). It expresses His tender care over them, which is always proportioned to their peculiar trials, temptations, &c. (Isa. xl. 11). He expresses also His love to them, infinitely surpassing the love of the sons of men. He died for the sheep (John x. 15). 2. God's fellow—His equal. They are one in essence, intimately and essentially one. They are one in power. When on earth the Son did the works His Father did. One in honour and glory. His sacrifice was voluntary. As Jehovah's equal, He had an absolute right and propriety in Himself, and could lay down His life, and take it up again, when He pleased (John x. 17, 18). II. THE AWFUL MANDATE HERE GIVEN AGAINST GOD'S SHEPHERD AND GOD'S FELLOW. "Awake, O Sword, smite the Shepherd!" The command proceeds from the Eternal Father, whose justice demanded the death of our Lord (Isa. liii. 10). Divine justice had no demands on Christ, simply considered as the Son of God; only when viewed as our voluntary substitute. 1. The principal scenes of sorrow were in the Garden of Gethsemane. 2. Also in the hall of judgment. 3. Calvary was the place that witnessed the dreadful deed. III. THE EFFECT TO BE PRODUCED. "The sheep shall be scattered." 1. By the sheep are meant the disciples of our Lord. 2. Jesus foretold that His disciples would forsake Him. It was fully accomplished (Matt. xxvi. 56). IV. BEHOLD THE TENDER COMPASSION OF A GRACIOUS GOD. He promises to turn His hand upon the little ones. Little ones who at that time had but little knowledge of human nature, little faith, and little courage. See God's gracious dealings with the apostles and disciples of Christ. Thus He will deal also with all the faithful followers of Christ. Improvement. 1. Behold in this awful transaction the displeasure of God against sin. 2. As Divine justice is fully satisfied by the tremendous sufferings of Jesus Christ, here we behold sufficient ground for a sinner's hope of pardon. Jesus hath died; the sinner may be forgiven (Rom. iii. 25). (*T. Hannam.*)

The character of Christ as the Shepherd of Israel :—That this text contains clear and remarkable revelation of the Saviour no one of spiritual discernment can hesitate to believe. It is one of the clearest of those prophetic testimonies which declared to the Church beforehand "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." I. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN

OF THE SAVIOUR. 1. My Shepherd. What precise view of the Saviour's place and character is this expression intended to convey? The expression significantly points to His mediatorial character and work. It reminds us that a people have been committed to His hands—that He has graciously undertaken on their behalf—and that, in the whole matter of their salvation, He is their head, representative, surety. Whatever is affirmed in the text concerning Him is affirmed in this view of His character and work. The ideas suggested by this title as to the benefits derived by His people from the exercise of His mediatorial offices are full of interest and comfort to the children of God. Why is He designated "My Shepherd"? Because He was appointed and commissioned by the Father, in the counsels of eternity, to execute this office. 2. The man. Believers, in their zealous regard for the glory and honour of the Divine Redeemer, sometimes lose the comfort to be derived from a believing contemplation of the man "Christ Jesus." The righteousness wrought out was wrought out in the nature of man. 3. The fellow of Jehovah. The equal of Jehovah. "God was manifest in the flesh." This is the crowning of truth in the doctrine of salvation. II. THE VIEW OF GOD'S DEALINGS. Our thoughts are directed to the immediate infliction of the Father's wrath. He pierced Him even to the soul, till the sword of infinite justice was satisfied with blood. Learn—1. Every word in the text is comforting and instructive to the sheep of Christ. 2. There is precious light in this subject for awakened and trembling sinners. 3. There is here a lesson of solemn warning to careless sinners. (*Robert Elder, A.M.*) *Messiah smitten*.—We know what was the transaction in which this prophecy was fulfilled; we know the awful epoch which that transaction bears. We hasten to no imaginary scene, but to a true historic one—to an actual time in the calendar of the world's ages. I. THE CHARACTER OF THE VICTIM. We perceive in His character—1. Manhood, "found in fashion as a man." Man, as never man otherwise could be. Man by a most astonishing process of condescension and self-diminution. 2. Mediation is included. As the shepherd guards his flock, and perils his own life for its rescue and deliverance, so we are considered as entrusted to the hands of Christ, that He may ward off every danger from us to which we are exposed. How far-reaching is His sympathy! How touching is His care. 3. Co-equality is supposed. If He be the associate and compeer of the Lord of hosts, then it may suggest the emulation of His honours, the expression of His glories, the assimilation of His deeds, and the concentration of His affections. II. THE PECULIARITY OF THE ACTION. The "sword" is the emblem of state, of authority, of power, of justice, or retributive execution. 1. This person is the subject of Divine complacency. 2. This person was the object of the Divine infliction. The sword is not the weapon of correction, of momentary chastening; it is the instrument of vengeance and of wrath. The same personage is the subject of Divine complacency and of Divine infliction. How is it explained? Christ is without sin. He is relatively liable for certain penalties, to which He subjects Himself voluntarily and solely. Substitution is the simplifying principle of all. We cannot place the doctrine of atonement on any other than the vicarious principle. See then—(1) The necessity for the atonement. (2) Mark the nature of justice. (3) Learn what is sin. (4) We see what is the great concert and covenant between the Father and the Son. (5) What must be the position of the unbeliever who rejects the atonement of Christ, to whom all this is as strange things, an idle dream? (*R. Winter Hamilton, D.D.*) *The Shepherd of the flock smitten*.—Observe that it is God the Eternal Father who gives the decree for the smiting of the Shepherd. "Saith the Lord of hosts." We have no sympathy with the unguarded language of those who speak of God as an avenging deity, whose wrath can be appeased and propitiated only by offerings of blood. Love is a thing that cannot be bribed. God's love needed not thus to be purchased. That love was the primal cause of all blessing to His creatures. The manifestation, however, of love on the part of a great moral Governor must be compatible with the exercise of His moral perfections. God's justice, holiness, righteousness must be upheld inviolate. While mercy and truth go before His face, justice and judgment must continue the habitation of His throne. As the Omnipotent, God could do anything. So far as power is concerned, He could easily have dispensed with any medium of atonement. But what God, as the Omnipotent, could do, God, as the holy, just, righteous, true, could not do. He could not promulgate laws and leave the transgressor to mock them with impunity. Was there, then, in the case of guilty man, any possible method by which the honour of God's name and character and throne

could be preserved intact, and yet the transgressor be saved? Reason is silent here. The principle of substitution—the innocent suffering for the guilty—is one undreamt of in earthly philosophy. The Shepherd has been smitten. The Divine honour has been upholden. Mercy and truth have been betrothed before the altar of Calvary; God hath joined them together for the salvation of the human race, and that marriage covenant never can be disannulled. Justice is now equally interested with love in the rescue of the fallen. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Christ smitten by the Father*.—I. THE PERSON TO BE SMITTEN. 1. He is Jehovah's fellow. He is in equality with God. 2. He is man. His humanity—His manhood—are as distinctly affirmed as His Deity and His equality with God. 3. The title given to Him as the Son of man—the Shepherd. II. THE SWORD WHICH IS TO WAKE AGAINST HIM. 1. What is this sword? It is the sword of Divine justice. 2. What are we to understand by its awakenings? Every manifestation of God in punishing sin is as nothing compared with the manifestation in Christ's sufferings. 3. Who demands this sword, who calls for its awakening? "The Lord of hosts." The crucifixion as much as the exaltation of Christ was "the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." 4. What was the sword to awaken to? It was to smite unto death. III. THE REASONS WHY IT WAS SAID, "AWAKE, O SWORD, AGAINST THE VICTIM." It was to make manifest Divine justice, that there should be no connivance with the enormity of sin. IV. THE EFFECTS WHICH FOLLOWED. "The sheep were scattered." But they were brought back again from their dispersion. (*J. Stratten.*) *The fellow of Jehovah*.—I. THE TERMS IN WHICH OUR LORD IS DESCRIBED. 1. The man that is the fellow of Jehovah. 2. Jehovah's Shepherd. II. THE COMMAND GIVEN IN REFERENCE TO HIM. 1. It relates to sufferings divinely appointed. 2. It relates to sufferings most severe. 3. It relates to sufferings most surprising. III. THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH ARE TO FOLLOW THE EXECUTION OF THIS COMMAND. 1. The dispersion of the sheep. 2. A signal interposition in their behalf. (*G. Brooks.*) *The solitariness of Christ's death*.—Four things to consider. 1. The commission given to the sword by the Lord of hosts. 2. The person against whom it is commissioned. 3. The dismal effect of that stroke; and 4. The gracious mitigation of it. Doctrine.—That Christ's dearest friends forsook and left Him alone in the time of His greatest distress and danger. (1) Who were the sheep that were scattered from their Shepherd, and left Him alone? They were those precious elect souls that He had gathered to Himself, who had long followed Him, and dearly loved Him, and were dearly beloved by Him. They had faithfully continued with Him in His temptations. They were resolved so to do. (2) But were they as good as their word? Did they stick faithfully to Him? Theirs was not a total and final apostasy, only a temporary lapse. It was a very sinful and sad relapse; for it was against the very articles of agreement, which they had sealed to Christ at their first admission to His service. So it was unfaithfulness. It was against the very principles of grace implanted by Christ in their hearts. They were holy, sanctified persons, in whom dwelt the love and fear of God. By these they were strongly inclined to adhere to Christ in the time of His sufferings, as appears by those honest resolves they had made in the case. Their grace strongly inclined them to their duty; their corruptions swayed them the contrary way. It was much against the honour of their Lord and Master. By this their sinful flight they exposed the Lord Jesus to the contempt and scorn of His enemies. As it was against Christ's honour, so it was against their own solemn promise made to Him before His apprehension, to live and die with Him. They break promise with Christ. It was against Christ's heart-melting expositions with them, which should have abode in their hearts while they lived. It was against a late direful example presented to them in the fall of Judas. In him, as in a glass, they might see how fearful a thing it is to apostatise from Christ. It was against the law of love, which should have knit them closer to Christ, and to one another. This their departure from Christ was accompanied with some offence at Christ. 3. The grounds and reasons of this scattering. God's suspending wonted influences and aids of grace from them. They would not have done so had there been influences of power, zeal, and love from heaven upon them. But how, then, should Christ have "trodden the wine-press alone"? As God permitted it, and withheld usual aid from them, so the efficacy of that temptation was great, yea, much greater than ordinary. As they were weaker than they used to be, so the temptation was stronger than any they had yet

met withal. It is called, "Their hour and the power of darkness." That which concurred to their shameful relapse, as a special cause of it, was the remaining corruptions that were in their hearts yet unmortified. 4. The issue and event of this sad apostasy. It ended far better than it began. They were scattered for a time, but the Lord turned His hand upon them to gather them. Peter repents of his perfidious denial, and never denied Him more. All the rest likewise returned to Christ, and never forsook Him any more. And though they forsook Christ, Christ never forsook them. Inference—1. Self-confidence is a sin too incident to the best of men. Little reason have the best of saints to depend upon their inherent grace, let their stock be as large as it will. Shall we be self-confident after such instances of human frailty? 2. A resolved adherence to God and duty, though left alone, without company, or encouragement, is Christ-like, and truly excellent. 3. Though believers are not privileged from backslidings, yet they are secured from final apostasy and ruin. 4. How sad a thing it is for the best of men to be left to their own carnal fears in the day of temptation. 5. How much a man may differ from himself, according as the Lord is with him or withdrawn from him. 6. The best of men know not their own strength till they come to the trial. 7. The holiest of men have no reason either to repine or despond, though God should at once strip them of all their outward and inward comforts together. (*John Flavel.*) *The flock scattered*.—I. THE PERSON HERE REPRESENTED IS SMITTEN BY THE SWORD OF DIVINE JUSTICE. This is none other than the Messiah, the Christ. To Him alone can the language here used to describe the object of the smiting apply. No other being but He is at once man and the fellow of Jehovah, the Lord of hosts; and He alone is the Shepherd whom God promised to set over His people Israel to feed them as a flock. II. THE STROKE INFLICTED ON HIM. This was the deadly stroke of Divine justice. The sword had long slept in its scabbard, but when the fitting time arrived God summoned the sword to awake and do execution on the appointed victim. There is but one event to which the command here given can be understood as pointing—the slaying of Him who, as God's Shepherd, laid down His life for the sheep. Wherefore was He thus smitten? Because, though Himself sinless, He bore the sins of others. The flock had gone astray, and incurred the penalty of apostasy, and He, the Shepherd, had come to give His life for theirs. III. THE CONSEQUENCE TO THE FLOCK OF THIS SMITING OF THE SHEPHERD. It was twofold. The sheep were to be scattered, but God was to turn back His hand over the humble and meek ones of His flock. The former of these applied to the dispersion of His disciples as consequent on His crucifixion; the other was realised when the Lord, having been raised from the dead, showed Himself to individuals and to groups of them. But though preserved and rescued, Christ's little flock would not escape all trouble and suffering. God would bring them through the fire, and refine and purify them in the furnace of affliction. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*) *God's government of the world*.—I. AS BRINGING PENAL RUIN UPON MANY. 1. The destruction of their leader. In the Bible language political religious leaders are represented as shepherds. It was applied to Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 28). The person defined is represented as "the man that is my fellow." Dr. Keil's rendering is, "the man who is my neighbour"; and Dr. Henderson's, "the man who is united to me." Who is this man? On this question there are different opinions. "Calion thought it was Zechariah himself, as representative of all the prophets, and that the prophecy referred only indirectly to Christ. Grotius, Eichhorn, Bauer, and Jahne apply it to Judas Maccabeus, Ewald to Pehak, Hitzig to the pretended prophets spoken of in the preceding verses." The expression "my fellow" does not necessarily mean one who is equal in nature and character, but rather one who has the fellowship of interests and aims. Evangelical writers, however, apply the language to Christ without much critical examination and without hesitation. They do this mainly on the ground that Christ Himself quotes the passage on the night in which He was betrayed, as an illustration of what was immediately awaiting Him (Matt. xxvi. 31). He does not say that the prophecy referred to Him, but merely that the passage was about being illustrated in His history. The shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep scattered. This, indeed, is a common fact in the history of the world; when the leader is gone the fold is scattered. Our point is that God often brings sufferings on a people by striking down their leader. There are few greater calamities that can befall a people than when nations lose their shepherds and leaders, or when churches

lose their pastors. Even when families lose their heads the loss is incalculable. Here is—2. The dispersion of the flock. This comes to most communities when the true leader is taken away. The removal of a leader in a family, a parent, often leads to a scattering of the children. The scattering is a great evil. Unity is strength and harmony; division is weakness and disorder. When communities are broken up and dispersed the various members often place themselves in antagonism with each other, and rivalries, jealousies, and envyings run riot.

3. The ruin of multitudes. "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two-parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein." Probably this refers primarily to the destruction of two-thirds of the inhabitants of Judea by the Roman arms, and the famine or the pestilence and other destructive influences which are the usual concomitants of all wars. Thus the afflictions of the great majority of the human race here represented as the two-thirds of a community come upon them as the retribution of justice—the Divine sword here invoked. They are not disciplinary, but penal. "They are cut off and die." Here we have God's government of the world. II. BRINGING REMEDIAL DISCIPLINE TO A FEW. "And I will bring the third-part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined," &c. The very calamities which were penal, and utterly ruinous to two-thirds of that population, were morally disciplinary and improving to the remaining third. In the one case they were the strokes of the "sword" of justice. In the other the calamities were but fire in the "pot of the refiner." These by the purifying influence of trials—1. Pray and are heard. "Shall call on My name, and I will hear them." 2. Are accepted of God as His people. They acknowledge their relationship. "I will say it is My people, and they shall say, the Lord is my God." Conclusion. This doctrine stands out in sublime prominence—that afflictions which are penal and destructive to the many are remedial and merciful to the few. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 9. And I will bring the third part through the fire.—*Trials and triumphs of the Christian*:—This chapter, though consisting of nine verses only, is a little Gospel. In some of the preceding verses are to be found all the particulars of the Gospel—such as, the substitution of Christ as a sacrifice in behalf of His offending people, the satisfaction made to Divine justice by His death, the purification of the Church through sanctified afflictions, the blessed privileges and intercourse they are allowed to enjoy with their God and Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The text was fulfilled when the nation was destroyed by the Roman army, and when, amidst all the dreadful scenes which were then beheld, He preserved His own people. This is the primary meaning of the text, but it refers also to the dealings of God with all His people, in all generations of the Church, down to the end of time. The words describe the trials and triumphs of God's people. The trials which come before their triumphs in some cases, and the triumphs which accompany their trials in others. I. THE TRIALS OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. "I will bring them through the fire." 1. This implies that He will bring them into the fire. Afflictions are our lot. They are what we must expect. We may resist them, avoid them, be angry with them, harden our hearts under them, ascribe them to second causes, but we cannot escape them. 2. The nature of afflictions. They are called "fire," which denotes the severity of the Divine chastenings. Afflictions must be felt, or they are not afflictions. If we do not feel, the end of these afflictions is not answered. 3. The end and design of affliction. "I will bring them through the fire." God does not chastise for the sake of chastising. Fire is searching, and fire is purifying. II. THE TRIUMPHS OF THE CHRISTIAN. 1. Ultimate deliverance. It is a happiness to know that He can bring you through, and a still greater happiness to know that He will bring you through. 2. Communion with God. They that belong to God make their requests known to Him. He has commanded and encouraged them to do this. In this we may win a triumph. 3. Covenant relation to God is another part of the Christian's triumph. God owns them in adversity. There is no backwardness on the part of the believer to own the relationship when God says that it exists. (*W. Thomas.*) *As silver is refined*:—"I saw in Rome," says a modern writer, "an old coin, a silver denarius, all coated and crusted with green and purple rust. I called it rust, but was told that it was copper, the alloy thrown out from the silver until there was none left within; the silver was all pure. It takes ages to do it, but it does get done. Souls are like that. Something moves in them slowly, till the debasement is all thrown out. Some

day, perhaps, the very tarnish shall be taken off." Well, there is this alloy, this tarnish in all of us, and the education of life is to purge it all away—by sorrows, by disappointments, by failures, by judgments—

"By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove
And purge the silver ore adulterate."

(*Great Thoughts.*)

God's method of dealing with His people.—The wisdom, sovereignty, and power of the Supreme Ruler are nowhere more clearly and impressively set forth and illustrated than in the fundamental methods which mark His government of mankind. What these methods or principles are it is not difficult to determine from Scripture and providence. And the choice of methods and the disclosure of them are made for the purposes of instruction and moral discipline. Among these methods are the following—1. Agencies wholly inadequate, seemingly, to accomplish purposes so grand and infinite. 2. Instruments, "weak" and "foolish" in themselves, chosen to "confound things that are mighty"—the wisdom, philosophy, pride, and wealth of the world. 3. God's method is one to compel faith—the whole structure of the Supernatural rests on faith. (1) It is true in regard to the Scriptures. From Genesis to Revelation we "see as through a glass, darkly." God gives light enough to discern duty, but not to satisfy a thousand anxieties. We must believe, trust, patiently wait, or perish. (2) Providence is a book full of painful mysteries. We cannot break the seals and interpret. Darkness that may be felt encompasses our path here. We are shut up to faith. 4. The Divine method is the method of severe discipline. By the way of the Cross to the Crown! Fellowship in suffering the condition of joint-heirship in glory. "Whom He loves He rebukes and chastens." 5. God's method is one of slow growth and development. Light, grace, prosperity, favour, discipline, as we can bear it. 6. God's method of dealing has respect to that system of rewards and punishments which forms a part of His moral government. Sin and misery, virtue and happiness, obedience and reward, are so conjoined in this life that no man can mistake the will of God, or reasonably doubt that the law of eternal rectitude is bound ultimately to prevail. 7. Occasionally by "terrible acts of righteousness" God reveals Himself to the nations, "that all the earth may know there is a God in Israel." (*Homiletic Monthly.*) **I will say, It is My people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.**—*Intercommunion between God and man*.—What a vivid representation this passage affords of the personality of God! Here He appears as One who thinks, observes, feels, and purposes; a far higher and juster view of the Eternal Power than that which sees only abstract law behind and above Nature. And how striking is the intercommunion here pictured between the Creator and His creatures! Owing to man having been made in the Divine image, he is capable of spiritual intercourse with his Maker. And what a delightful intimacy distinguishes this communion!

I. THE VOICE OF GOD—"It is My people." 1. My rightful people. The Lord of all asserts His authority, puts forward His claim. This is a view of religion often overlooked. We are God's by right. 2. My loved people. We hear in this utterance the tone of affection. There is a touching tenderness in the possessive "my," in such expressions as "my friend," "my father," "my son," "my husband," "my wife." So here, when the Lord says, "My people." 3. My redeemed people. 4. My sealed people. It is usual to mark property with the owner's name. It is by the renewed character and the obedient life that the Lord's property in His own people is most surely attested. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and, "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." Religion may be regarded as consisting of man's acknowledgment of God's revelation; an acknowledgment which is first of the heart—when it is faith; next of the language—when it is confession; and further, of the life—when it is obedience.

II. THE VOICE OF MAN. "The Lord is my God." 1. This cry is a response to the Divine assurance. It is the faithful echo to the heavenly voice. 2. The Lord alone is our God, whom we honour supremely. None other divides our heart with Him. 3. The Lord is our God to trust. The greatest and most pressing need of man in this life is One upon whom his weakness and helplessness can absolutely rely. 4. The Lord is our God, to appropriate and enjoy. What gladness fills the soul when a long-hoped-for discovery has been made, a long-sought treasure found, a long-lost friend recovered! 5. The Lord

is our God, to serve and glorify. 6. The Lord is our God for ever. Our God is the eternal God. (J. R. Thomson, M.A.)

CHAPTER XIV.

VERS. 1-3. *And thy spoil shall be divided.—A sketch on bad men:—*Three facts concerning such. I. THEY ARE CAPABLE OF PERPETRATING THE GREATEST ENORMITIES ON THEIR FELLOW-MEN. In the account given by Josephus of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans we have a record of enormities at which we might stand aghast. The particulars, says Dr. Wardlaw, here noted are such as usually, it might be said, invariably attend the besieging, the capture, and the sacking of cities; especially when, as in this case, the assailing army has been exasperated by a long, harassing, and wasting defence. The entrance of the un pitying soldiery, the rifling of houses, the violation of women, the indiscriminate massacre, and the division of the spoil, are just what all expect, and what require no comment. And never were such scenes more frightfully realised than at the destruction of Jerusalem when God in His providence in judicial retribution gathered all nations against the devoted city to battle. "All nations," a correct description of the army of Titus, the empire of Rome embracing a large proportion of the then known world, and this army consisting of soldiers of all the different nations which composed it. And, while such was to be the destruction brought upon "the city," the desolation was to extend, and that in different ways, at short intervals, throughout "the land." The fact that men are capable of perpetrating on their fellow-men such enormities show—1. Man's apostasy from the laws of his spiritual nature. 2. The great work which the Gospel has to do in our world. II. THAT WHATEVER ENORMITIES THEY PERPETRATE, THEY ARE EVERMORE INSTRUMENTS IN THE HANDS OF THE WORLD'S GREAT RULER. The period in which these abominations were enacted is in the text called the "day of the Lord," and He is represented as calling the Roman armies to the work. "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished." God in His retributive procedure punishes the bad by the bad. In this case—1. No injustice is done. The men of Jerusalem deserved their fate. They "filled up the measure of their iniquity." 2. There is no infringement of free agency. Good men might revolt from inflicting such enormities upon their fellow-creatures, but it is according to the wish of bad men. This is God's retributive method, to punish the bad by the bad. III. THOUGH INSTRUMENTS IN HIS HANDS, GOD WILL PUNISH THEM FOR ALL THEIR DEEDS OF ENORMITY. But where is the justice of punishing men whom He employs to execute His own will? Two facts will answer this question. 1. What they did was essentially bad. 2. What they did was in accord with their own wills. He never inspired them or constrained them. He did but use them. (*Homilist.*)

VERS. 4, 5. *And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.—God in relation to a suffering world:—*The men in Jerusalem were in great suffering and imminent peril, and here is a figurative representation of the Almighty in relation to them. I. HE OBSERVES THEIR TERRIBLE CONDITION. "And His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east." The idea suggested here is that God observes men in all their calamities and dangers. His eye is on them. This is especially the case with His people. We are assured that His eye is ever upon the righteous; Job said, "He knoweth the way I take." 1. He sees what we have to endure. 2. He sees how we behave ourselves in our condition, whether under our afflictions we are trustful, patient, and submissive or otherwise; whether in our perils we are making an effort to escape. "Thou compassed my path and my lying-down, and art acquainted with all my ways." II. HE MAKES A WAY FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE. "And the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley." "These verses," says Dr. Henderson, "convey, in language of the most beautiful poetical imagery, the assurance of the effectual means of escape that should be provided

for the truly pious. We accordingly learn from Eusebius that on the breaking out of the Jewish war the Christian Church at Jerusalem, in obedience to the warning of our Saviour (Matt. xxiv. 16) fled to Pella, a city beyond Jordan, where they lived in safety. As the Mount of Olives lay in their way, it is represented as cleaving into two halves, in order to make a passage for them." It is not necessary to suppose that the Mount of Olives was thus riven asunder. The idea is, that the obstruction to their escape, though formidable as a mountain, should be removed. The Almighty would give them every facility to escape to the refuge. This He does for our suffering race. He makes a way for their escape, from guilt, ignorance, and misery, which has been blocked up by mountains of difficulties. III. HE PROVIDED A REFUGE FOR THEIR SAFETY. 1. The scene of refuge, "Azal." An unknown place. Some spot to secure them from danger. 2. The impulse of flight. 3. The necessity for the flight. "The Lord thy God shall come." In some great manifestation of His power. Conclusion. How thankful we should be to know that God has not deserted humanity in its sins and sorrows. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 6. It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark.—*The day of the Lord*:—This phrase denotes not one time, but many. Any signal manifestation of the Divine government of the world, or any such event as made men's hearts quake within them for fear, is described as the day of the Lord. Though all nature is, in truth, an exponent of the judgment, as well as the beneficence of God, there are times and places in which His right hand, as it were, is more manifestly bared. There are times when the fervent spirit is tempted to wish for one of the days of the Lord. Yet there are many reasons why, even in the worst times, we should not wish to hasten that day which will in appointed course come surely and will not tarry. Instead of encouraging in ourselves impatience for some great day of the Lord, let us rather engrave upon our minds a conviction that such coming will be at last inevitable. We may estimate the character of such general judgments as are here alluded to, by reading the description of those of old. What, then, is the sort of temper or sentiment with which the idea of any great national visitations should be blended in our minds? As citizens we should be aware that crime inevitably brings down judgment. There is emphatically $\text{ο}\nu\mu\epsilon$ "day of the Lord." The great day of the Lord, previous to the day of judgment, is the Gospel dispensation, as commencing with the first destruction of the Christian Church of the Holy Spirit. (*R. Williams, B.D.*) *Mixed providences*:—The day of the Church's conflict is mixed, and yieldeth wonderful variety of providence. Sometimes truth and righteousness getteth the upper hand, and sometimes the contrary party, that foment error and unrighteousness. It is a doubtful day in a twofold regard—because light and darkness are either intermixed or alternate. Or else because our estate in respect of either is not durable and fixed, but liable to great uncertainties. There is an intermixture of providences at the same time, and the Church is in several respects both happy and miserable at once. Here things go well and there ill. It is a rare case when there is a perfect harmony between our private condition and public happiness. Successively there is a vicissitude and interchange of conditions. Good and evil succeed each other by turns. Human affairs, under God, depend much on the people's hearts, and how uncertain are they! Inquire the reason of this, why the day of our conflict is such a mixed, doubtful day. Consider—1. The equity of it. It is such a day as is very suitable to our condition in the world. We are in a middle place, between heaven and hell, and therefore partake somewhat of both. We have mixed principles—flesh and spirit. As long as sin remaineth in us we cannot be perfectly happy. The flesh needeth to be weakened by divers afflictions. As our principles are mixed, so are all our operations. There is a mixture of good and evil in all our services. 2. Consider the wisdom and justice of God in it. He hath many wise ends to be accomplished by these mixed providences. That a people worn out with long misery may be more pliable to God's purpose. By such mixed providences God will weaken and waste stubborn nature. To work us from earthly things to things heavenly. To put a cloud and veil on His proceedings. To prevent the excesses of either condition, God tempereth and qualifyeth the one with the other. To make way for the exercise of our faith. Faith is neither made void by too great a light, nor extinguished by too great a darkness. To win the heart by the various methods of judgments and mercies,

and to gain upon us by both means at first. God doth it to bring His people to a Christian union and accord. When religious interest is divided, God keeps the balance equal, and success is sometimes cast on this side, sometimes on that. To prevent contempt and insolency towards those that are fallen under God's displeasure. It is also a ground of patience. Heavy afflictions lack not their comforts to make them tolerable. He measureth out good and evil with a great deal of wisdom and tenderness. To show that our comforts and crosses are in His hand; and He doth variously dispense weal or woe as our condition doth require. Application. What use should we make of all this? 1. Be sure you do not make an ill use of it. This is done when we are not thankful for our mercies, because they are not full and perfect. It is an abuse if we are discouraged in God's service because of this uncertainty. When you have any respite, or breathing-time, then is the time and season to put your hand to the work. If there be uncertainties, remember that never a great work is brought to pass without troubles. And change cometh not until our condition proveth a snare for us. 2. The right use we should make of it. By way of caution, take heed of human confidences, and presuming too much on temporal success by means and instruments. For direction—Walk by a sure rule. Get a sure guide. Encourage yourself by the sure promise that you have to build upon. A man wrapped up in the peace of God, and the quiet of a good conscience, and hopes of eternal life, is fortified against all encounters, storms, and difficulties whatsoever. (*T. Manton.*) *Light and solace:*—These verses present a suggestive description of human history as a whole, and of each godly life in that history. I. THE MIXED CHARACTER OF OUR EARTHLY EXISTENCE. "The light shall not be clear, nor dark"; "It shall be one day, not day, nor night." That is, the lot even of a good man is chequered. Every height has its hollow. And each blessing has its accompanying affliction. But no Christian is ever in absolute darkness. If the rough wind be blowing, God will take care that it be not from the east. Observe—1. Through the trials of the past God has disciplined us into fitness for present duties. Present trials are the prophecies of future efficiency. 2. Trials are frequently connected with our sins. Evil deeds are evil seeds which produce a harvest of bitterness. 3. Trials lead us to long for heaven, and wean us from the world. II. THE CHRISTIAN'S SUPPORT UNDER THIS MIXED EXPERIENCE—"It shall be one day which shall be known," &c. This means—1. Our condition as a whole—not one separate part, but the whole "day" of light and dark—is known unto the Lord. 2. Our lot is ordered for us by Jehovah, just according as the grand total demands it. III. THE HAPPY TERMINATION OF THIS MIXED STATE OF THINGS—"And it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light." All doubts and clouds shall have been driven away by the Sun of Righteousness. Relief shall come when it is least expected. Light is the synonym for joy, for purity, for knowledge. In heaven all the elements of darkness shall be absent. It shall be light. (*Homilist.*) *Mingled experiences:*—1. The language of the text is descriptive of the PRESENT MINGLED STATE OF AFFAIRS, both in the Church and in the world. Darkness is the effect of our low situation. There is nothing really dark with God—nothing imperfect in the Gospel. The Gospel is to our perception not so distinct as to be perfectly clear; but it is not so dark as to be useless and unintelligible. There are clouds and obscurities resting on the subject arising from our weakness and imperfection of understanding. Illustrate—(1) By the partial distribution of the Gospel among the nations of the earth. (2) The language is also descriptive of the imperfect attainments of real Christians. In the matter of personal experience it is but twilight. You have faith, but not "the full assurance of faith." You have hope, but how few of you hope ever blooming! You have obedience, but it is partial, irregular, imperfect. You have joy, but it is meddled with. (3) The text finds its illustration in the inscrutable dispensations of the providence of God. How vast, how profound a subject! II. THE SUPERINTENDING CARE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE DURING THIS CHEQUERED AND MYSTERIOUS STATE OF THINGS. This intimates—1. God's superintendence of all things. 2. God's foreknowledge of all things. 3. The harmony of Divine providence. 4. The beneficial tendency of the providence of God. 5. The language is a ground of unlimited resignation and contentment; and 6. A motive for unlimited confidence. III. THE WONDERS AND GLORIES OF THAT AUSPICIOUS DAY IN WHICH THIS SINGULAR STATE OF AFFAIRS SHALL TERMINATE. This promise contains a reserve of consolation for the feeble Christian against the hour of dissolution. And a reserve of consolation for

the feeble Christian in seasons of perplexity and difficulty. The promise contains also an assurance of the final glory, the millennial reign of the Son of God. (*Joseph Beaumont, D.D.*) *Dark and bright periods in human life*:—The word rendered “clear” is in the margin “precious,” and is in the plural. The word here rendered “dark” is in the margin “thickness.” I. A period of UNMITIGATED DISTRESS. This period of unmitigated calamity primarily refers, we have no doubt, to those long centuries of oppression, cruelty, mockery, and scorn, to which the Jewish people have been subjected ever since the destruction of Jerusalem. In the predictions of Joel (ii. 31, iii. 15) referring to the destruction of the Holy City and breaking up of the Jewish commonwealth, the period is referred to as a period when the sun shall be “turned into darkness,” and the “moon into blood.” Three remarks are suggested concerning this dark day.

1. Such a day is the hard destiny of some men. Their life is a day of darkness. It is so with some nations. The history of some nations and tribes is little less than a history of crushing oppression, bloody revolutions and untold cruelties and sufferings. 2. Such a day is deserved by most men. All men are sinners and deserve this blackness and darkness for ever. The very tendency of sin, in fact, is to quench every light in the firmament of the soul. II. Here is a period of UNINTERRUPTED JOY. 1. Such a day as this is destined to dawn on every good man. Heaven is a scene of light. No clouds of ignorance or suffering obstruct the rays, nor will the sun ever go down. “The Lord God is the light thereof.” 2. Such a day as this is destined to dawn on the world in the future. (*Homilist.*)

Light and shade in the Christian life:—I. THE MIXED CHARACTER OF OUR EARTHLY LIFE. “The light shall not be clear nor dark.” The lot even of the good man is chequered. No Christian is ever in absolute and unrelieved darkness. It may be a long twilight with him, but it is never night. Why does God permit so much of darkness in our lot? Set forth some of the reasons why we have so much of difficulty and affliction to contend with. 1. Through the trials of the past God has disciplined us into fitness for the duties of the present. We did not see this at first, but we have discovered it now. Resistance is needed for the development of physical vigour, and difficulty is as much required for the formation of strength in moral character. 2. Our trials are frequently connected with our sins. Illustrate from the history of Jacob. 3. The shades of darkness in our earthly lots lead us to long for heaven. If everything here were as we should wish to have it, we should not desire to go elsewhere; but “God has provided some better thing for us” in the world beyond, and He takes care that we shall not get wedded entirely to the concerns of earth. II. THE CHRISTIAN’S SOLACE AND SUPPORT. Suggested by the words, “It shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord.” 1. Our condition is known to the Lord. The world is governed by a Person, and He under whose eye all things come to pass, is our Father. 2. Our lot is ordered by Jehovah. Our lives are not “by chance.” There is an order in them, and a plan running through them. Then things that seem to be working against us must really be working for us. III. THE HAPPY TERMINATION OF THIS MIXED STATE OF THINGS TO THE CHRISTIAN. Relief shall come, and that at the time when it is least expected. If the day has been lowering, we look for a deeper darkness than ordinary when evening comes: but here, when men usually anticipate that it will be evening, it will be morning. You have seen this illustrated very often in separate passages of your lives. These separate chapters are only miniatures of life as a whole, for, at its evening-time there comes to the Christian the dawning light of heaven. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Mingled light and darkness:—The first clause of the text is religious. It does not refer to the light of the natural heavens. It refers to all there is in the religion of man, and in the things which affect him in the experience of it. His condition is to be one of a mixed character, not wholly good, and not wholly evil—not all light, not all dark. This mixture may be seen in several particulars. 1. In the matter of a believer’s holiness. Therein there is some light, but it is not clear nor dark. The believer has some true conformity to God, but it is not a perfect conformity. He often wonders at himself,—at the inconsistencies and contradictions that he finds in his own experience. In his poor soul faith struggles to get the better of unbelief—the love of the world comes up to combat the love of God. His heart is inconsistent, his soul unsteady, his way devious, and he cannot be ignorant that his holiness is only of an imperfect character. Whenever God spares a regenerated sinner upon the earth after the time of his regeneration, such a regenerated sinner will have this chequered experience.

2. This mixture may be seen in the believer's knowledge. There is a mixture of clearness and obscurity in the knowledge of God's people which nothing could describe more perfectly than Zechariah has here described it. They have knowledge, but, in all parts of it, it is limited. Behold a disciplined believer. He is in the furnace. He knows who put him there. He knows that the process will stop when the purpose of it is accomplished. But there are other things he does not know. He attempts to know them, but he cannot find them out. He asks, For what particular sin am I thus afflicted? He knows not why God has sent that particular affliction on him. Behold a believer examining his own heart. He knows something about it. He very well knows its deceitfulness. But it is a wonder to him how his deceitfulness will work. When shall he ever be sure of a heart that has so often wandered? We ought to remember that the imperfection of our knowledge results from our creature littleness and the imperfection of our present state; and that so far as we have any necessity of knowing in order to be saved, our knowledge may be as clear and definite as our capacities will allow. 3. The comforts of God's people have in them a wonderful mingling of light and gloom. It is not all clear day with them. It is not all night. The alternation of comfort and depression which Christians experience, constitutes a chapter of facts which shows the mingled character of their life, whether we can have knowledge of the reasons for it or not. 4. The condition of life. We fail in few things as Christians more than we fail of fitly noticing the changes we pass through as God is leading us on. However this may be, there are strange minglings of light and darkness in our condition. So fluctuating and uncertain is the condition of life here, that no mortal can be found whose biography has any considerable resemblance to his anticipations; his life has not carried out the plans of his youth. We are knocked about in the world. Our condition is shifting, fluctuating, varying. There is scarcely a believer among us who is not compelled, amid this mingling of light and darkness, to recognise the immediate hand of his God. Amid all this mixture of good and evil, we cannot understand why it is so. How needful is faith! After Zechariah has mentioned the mingled clearness and obscurity of our state, he immediately points us to One who can understand it. "It shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night." Of itself it is of a mixed character. To us it is mixed. We cannot understand it. God can. We can turn over the chequered scene into His hands. It is to Him all one day. He sees no darkness in it. It is all alike light—all "one." He has one intent in all the dispensations that affect us. When it is said, "At evening-time it shall be light," we are not to understand that the evening or night shall be turned into day. The mingled character of the believer's experience shall pass. Light shall come at the end. This may find illustration in all the features of the believer's experience. (*T. S. Spencer, D.D.*) *The mixed experience of the Church*:—The Church has had a mixed experience, not all dark, not all bright; now defeat and now success; now joy, now grief; mingled light and shade, but "at evening-time" light has always come. So with each Christian, the Church in miniature. Tears and smiles, sighs and songs mingle. Why this discipline? 1. We need it to correct mistakes of nature. 2. Our deliverance from sin and the development of Christian virtues are processes which involve this mingled experience. 3. Our hold on God by faith and prayer is made more steady. "But it shall be one day known to the Lord." A precious compensation is this assurance that God knows. God is working out a definite plan. The golden thread of His purpose runs through all that to us seems mixed and contradictory. He weaves the warp and woof. Nothing is confused. "It shall be light." (*J. Jackson Wray.*)

Ver. 7. *At evening-time it shall be light.*—*Aged people's service*:—Nature's sunset is beautiful, so beautiful that every painter strives in vain to catch it and give it permanence on his canvas. But the sunset of life transcends it, as the reality always transcends the type, as the spiritual always transcends the material, as the heavenly always transcends the earthly. What is there more beautiful in itself, what more interesting to contemplate than snowy age sustained by a living faith, and moving on toward the end of life's journey, calm, serene, cheerful, full of trust in God and the hope of heaven? But why picture a day of storms instead of a day of brightness and sunshine? Why a life of trials and sorrows and difficulties? Herein lies the chief beauty of the picture, the preciousness of the promise. Light is ever most glorious in contrast with darkness;

peace most blessed by contrast with strife. A peaceful, trustful, calm old age is pleasing always. But best is the peace after strife, the trust after doubt, the rest after toil. Such an old age bespeaks completeness. It is the maturing of the human mind, the ripening of a Godlike character, the perfecting of an immortal soul. Those lines of strength and beauty, those tokens of ripened character, that quiet patience, that glowing faith and hope, that chastened joy—all have been imprinted upon the aged face by the hand of experience the most painful. Sanctified sorrow is an indispensable element of heavenly joy. Spiritual strength and maturity cannot be attained except through difficulties overcome by the grace of God. Without strife there can be no conquest, no triumph. The promise of light at evening-time from its very nature implies something of storm during the day. But is there light? No; not always. Sometimes the promise seems to fail. Not every troubled and toil-worn life ends in peace and hope. Too often advancing years only bring increased darkness. Disappointment deepens into a perpetual bitterness of spirit. Old age is marked by peevishness, complaining, and discontent. It need not be so with any life. The promise is to all a Divine promise. Whence shall this light come? From the shining of the sun upon the clouds. And from the shining of God's love upon our trials. It is the brightness of His love that transfigures life, and fills its closing years with light and promise. The glory of the evening light comes, not from the removal of all clouds of evil, but from their transformation. Apart from difficulty and trial, we could never know the infinitude of God's love and power. So may it be with every soul that claims this promise; the darkness of the morning, and the storm of the noontide shall but enhance the glory of the evening light. If to any of you the evening-time still seems dark and gloomy, let in this light unto your soul; let it stream through your life, and it will brighten and transform everything with the likeness of its own glory. (*George H. Hubbard.*) *The light of evening.*—Evening is the time for stillness, and low, quiet tones, and communion with things and persons far away. So deep is the peace, so sweet the refreshment of that hour to one who, having done his work as a true man, may rest with a good conscience. Enlarge the range of view. Such as is the evening hour after a day of honest toil, such ought to be the latter years in every good man's life. As comes the evening to each mortal day, so comes an evening, at last, to all our days together; and with it the evening light, better far than the growing brilliancy of the early hours, or the set glare of the noonday sun. When the day of life has been a good and useful day, not idly spent or wasted, but passed in the fear of God, in piety and honesty, and in the performance of duty, then must its ending be calm and still. 1. In what does the light of the evening hour consist? In the evening of life comes the final and distinct realisation of the little value of this world. A true man outgrows, step by step, what he was; at last, if he live long enough, he outgrows the world. 2. To pass from this life to that in front, will be to go from ignorance and imperfection unto a wider knowledge and a deeper wisdom. The evening brings the time when the servant of God shall see and know many of the secrets of the universe, and read through and through what had long been dark mysteries to him. How many things there are which we do not understand! 3. It must bring great peace at last, to look back upon the life, and consider its moral and its lesson. One thing comes clearer and clearer out; the steady, never-failing presence and providence of God. 4. Many have feared lest they might, somehow, lose their faith. That is the darkest of all spectres to a Christian. How blessed then to know at last that, whatever mistakes are made, whatever sins are committed, we are saved from that gravest error, that heaviest and most hopeless sin, the denial of the Catholic faith. (*Morgan Dix.*) *Light at evening-time.*—There are different evening-times that happen to the Church and to God's people, and as a rule we may rest quite certain that at evening-time there shall be light. God very frequently acts in grace in such a manner that we can find a parallel in nature. The works of creation are very frequently the mirror of the works of grace. But sometimes God oversteps nature. In nature, after evening-time, there cometh night. But God is pleased to send to His people times when the eye of reason expects to see no more day, but fears that the glorious landscape of God's mercies will be shrouded in the darkness of His forgetfulness. But, instead, God overleapeth nature, and declares that at evening-time, instead of darkness, there shall be light. Illustrate—1. From the history of the Church at large. Especially the time of the Reformation. 2. This rule holds equally good in the little as

well as in the great. We know that in nature the very same law that rules the atom, governs also the starry orbs. It is even so with the laws of grace. "At evening-time it shall be light" to every individual. There are our bright days in temporal matters. After them we have had our sunsets. Times of trouble, but they passed into times of deliverance. If God prolong thy sorrow, He shall multiply thy patience. 3. From the spiritual sorrows of God's own people. God's children have two kinds of trials, trials temporal and trials spiritual. Illustrate from the scene of Bunyan's pilgrim meeting Apollyon. 4. To the sinner when coming to Christ this also is a truth. 5. We shall all get into the evening-time of life. In a few more years the sere and yellow leaf will be the fit companion of every man and every woman. Is there anything melancholy in that? Did you ever notice how venerable grandsires when they write a letter fill it full of intelligence concerning their children? The grey-headed man thinks of his children and forgets all besides. If he has served God, he has another light to cheer him. He has the light of the remembrance of what good God has enabled him to do. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Light at evening*:—It is when the day is drawing to its close that most men have their hour of leisure. We know, most of us, how nature looks at evening, better than we know how she seems in the busier hours of the day. In our evening leisure we have many a time had the opportunity of marking the sun's gradual withdrawal, the shadows as they darkened upon the landscape, the mist stealing upward from the river, and its murmur deepening upon the ear, the leaves so motionless, the silent fields, the universal hush and quiet. The one thing that makes evening is the gradual withdrawal of the light. It is the lessening light that makes the evening-time. "At the evening-time there shall be light," that is, light shall come at a period when it is not natural, when in the common course of things it is not looked for. It would be no surprise that light should come at noonday. If when the twilight shadows were falling deeper and deeper, with a sudden burst the noonday light were to spread around,—that would be a surprise. To state the promise in the form of a general principle, great and signal blessing shall come just when it is least expected. This special light is promised at the end of a day which should be somewhat overcast and dreary; not one of unmingled serenity, nor yet of unrelieved gloominess. At the evening-time there should be an end of the subdued twilight. Then there should be light at last. When the Christian's little day has drawn to its close; when the Christian's earthly sun has set, then there should be to him the beginning of a day whose sun shall never go down, and whose brightness shall be lessened by no intrusion of the dark. 1. In God's dealings with His children, it very often happens that signal blessing and deliverance come just when they are needed most, but expected least. Show the prevalence of this law in the Almighty's treatment of believers individually. How often the case has proved so as regards the collective Church. The least acquaintance with the history of the world will bring before us a host of instances in which the oppressed and persecuted, sometimes the cold and apathetic Church of God found better days dawn when they were least looked for, and so found the fulfilment of the promise, that "at evening-time there should be light." The humble Christian's life is the best sermon upon this text, and his own memory the best preacher. Illustrate by times of conversion and renewal; seasons of great trial—losses, disappointments, bereavements. Or the time of death—as the evening advances, as the hours go on in which the light that had lasted through the day might naturally grow less, how often it is that that unwearied light does but beam brighter and clearer! It is not indeed always so. Such a thing has been known as a true Christian dying in absolute despair, but in such a case disease is unusual and the mind unhinged. Perhaps with many Christians the death is as the life was: the evening is what the day was, "not clear nor dark." Is then the text not true? No, far from that. The light does come; and it comes at evening: but evening is the close of day; and the light may perhaps not beam forth until day has entirely closed. Not upon this side time may the blessed promise find its fulfilment. "At evening-time there shall be light," if not in this world, then in a better. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *Lux e Tenebris*:—This old promise has received a thousand fulfilments, is receiving fulfilments every day, and will to the end of time. Nations that have fallen under the shadows of evening have often realised this truth. When the foot of the conqueror was about stamping on their heart, and the night of despair was settling on them, deliverance has come, light has broken on the darkness. Churches that have passed into twilight,

and about sinking into the night of extinction, have in unnumbered instances experienced the truth of the promise. The world at large had a grand fulfilment of it in the advent of Christ. Evening had settled on the pagan and Jewish world, the lights of the old philosophies and religions were all but quenched, when the Divine Logos rose like a sun into the heavens. But we may mention a few instances in individual life where fulfilments of the promise are abundant. I. In the PROCESS OF REPENTANCE. In passing through repentance, through the regions of a godly sorrow for sin, what darkness gathers around the soul. All the stars of hope, and the lights of self-righteousness are extinguished, and sometimes deep and horrible is the darkness that overcasts the heart. But then comes the light, Christ appears, "thy sins are all forgiven." II. In the EVENTS OF LIFE. How often the good man in passing through the world is brought into darkness, purposes broken, plans frustrated, hopes blasted, and he knows not whither to look. Just when it is not only evening with him, but almost midnight, light breaks forth, his heart is cheered, his path is made clear, and his energies are renewed. III. In the ARTICLE OF DISSOLUTION. Death is felt to be an evening with man. "The valley of the shadow." Most look forward to it as a terrible night; but the Christly, when the evening has come and the shadows have fallen densely all around, have found the breaking of the night. It was so with Dr. Johnson, who through life, it would seem, looked forward to the last hour with horror and alarm; but when the evening came, light came, joy seized his withered veins, and one bright gleam shone all around his heart. All men wish to die in the light. Goethe cried out in dying, "More light, more light"; and all will have it the centre of whose soul is the light of the world. (*Homilist.*) *Light at eventide* :—What is true of the Church is true also of its individual members. In reference to the dark days which now and then fall to the believer's lot in his earthly pilgrimage, the text suggests—1. That the day of severe affliction shall be followed by an eventide of calm and renewed confidence in his Father-God. In our day of trial we are too prone to centre all our thoughts in the scene immediately around us, and forget that our greatest affliction may be the harbinger of the greatest blessing. 2. That the day of temptation shall be followed by an eventide of triumph and repose. 3. That the day of providential bereavement shall be followed by an eventide of submission. At such times how hard it is to say "Thy will be done"! 4. That the believer generally realises the fulfilment of this promise in the evening of life. (*William Hurd.*) *Light at sundown* :—While "night," in all languages, is the symbol for gloom and suffering, it is often really cheerful, bright, and impressive. As the natural evening is often luminous, so it shall be light in the evening—1. Of our Christian sorrows. The night-blooming assurances of Christ's sympathy fill all the atmosphere with heaven. 2. In the time of old age. It is a grand thing to be young. Mid-life and old age will be denied to many of us, but youth—we all know what that is. But youth will not always last. Blessed old age, if you let it come naturally, and if it be found in the way of righteousness. 3. In the latter days of the Church. It is early yet in the history of everything good. Civilisation and Christianity are just getting out of the cradle. 4. At the end of the Christian's life. Life is a short winter's day. Baptism and burial are near together. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory. At evening-time it shall be light. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Evening-song* :—So saith the sailor, when tossed about on a rocky coast, and dark clouds cover the heavens from his view, and the lights of the shore are shrouded in mist. So saith the star-gazer, when a strange comet visits the heavens, exciting the fears of the ignorant, and evoking the wonder of the wise. So saith the man of business, as in the dim and dingy city office he pores over doubtful debts, or ponders upon bad bargains, sensitive stocks, dull markets, baffled speculations. We ought ever to keep a sharp lookout for stars of promise, as we sail over the ocean of chance and change to the undiscovered continent of certainty. Let us, by the joint light of revelation and experience, consider heaven's cheering rays for earth's darksome seasons. The promise of the text applies to every stage of Christian experience. 1. At the evening-time of retrospect it shall be light. The Christian often looks back in his pilgrimage to the land whence he has come, not with feelings of regret at the step he has taken, but of thanksgiving that God has led him from the regions of death to the realms of life. These meditations on the past are sometimes disturbed by distressing doubts. But "at evening-time it shall be light." 2. At evening-time of conviction it shall be light. Conviction is the wrestling of fact with feeling. We

do not always feel equally convinced of our acceptance with God. But God has promised, if you wait patiently on Him, to renew the strength of your languishing convictions. 3. At evening-time of anticipation it shall be light. The Christian's home is not below, but above. The future is at best a land of shadows, the symbol of the uncertain and unreal. When the darkness grows deepest, the light begins to glow. The application of this balm of Gilead rests with each of you. (*G. Victor Macdona.*) *At evening-time it shall be light* :—1. The primary application of these words. The chapter is eminently prophetic. It refers to Israel as a people, to Canaan as their land, Jerusalem as their capital, and our Lord Himself as their King. I believe in the literal restoration of Israel to their own land. 2. The figurative meaning we may attach to these words. The words "evening" and "light" are expressive of two states: they are opposite terms, meaning opposite things. "Evening," or darkness, is figurative for woe or sorrow, while "light" stands for joy, prosperity. At the time when things seem to have come to their worst, then prosperity begins to dawn, and the dismal past be succeeded by a bright and happy future. This is exemplified politically and religiously in secular and sacred history. Illustrate from experience of Israel in Egypt. From the condition of England in the time of King John. That was the darkest moment of English history. The darkness of sin brought forth the light of redeeming love. Sin gave cause for a Saviour. When the Saviour came, did the brightness immediately shine forth? No. Again sin darkened the world's light. The Saviour's love only excited the sinner's hatred, and He who loved the sinner was murdered by those whom He loved. But resurrection morn dispelled the darkness of crucifixion night. Learn that it is our duty to cheerfully expect the future to be happier than the present. (*Campbell Fair.*) *A surprising glory* :—The prophet refers to spiritual, not natural light; and his prophecy is, that in the experience of the believer in Christ, when, in the natural course of things he may expect spiritual darkness, behold light! 1. A long and fearful sickness overtakes the child of God. A fearful darkness gathers in his sick chamber. Wife and children are dependent upon him. As weeks and months painfully wear away the gloom deepens. Sun, moon and stars, one by one go out. When, in the course of nature, he faces death, suddenly the clouds disperse and the chastened soul rejoices in a light of peace and joy full of heaven, and goes forth, as it were, redeemed from the grave. 2. It is true of the whole discipline of life. The reference is to the end; at evening, &c. A long and weary pilgrimage may have to be taken; a severe and oft-repeated series of sorrows, losses, disappointments, first be endured. The light does not flash on him at the beginning; submission does not come with the first use of the rod. No; he must go through the scene—endure to the end. And, if he endure, just when the darkness seems to be settling down upon him, and the last ray of joy and hope seems about to be quenched, at the evening-time it becomes light! 3. Millions of deathbeds bear glorious testimony to this truth. Instead of a great darkness, celestial radiance! Instead of dismay, a peace unspeakable! (*Homiletic Review.*) *Glorious endings* :—The sacred writers are always true to nature. They never contradict natural facts. I. THE AMBIGUOUSNESS OF PROPHECY. Many of the prophecies have been literally fulfilled. But there is not a fulfilled prophecy on record which, prior to its accomplishment, was not more or less dark, obscure, or enigmatical in its meaning. What idea could the guilty pair in Eden form of their promised deliverer from sin and guilt? From the nature of prophecy it could have been but a sort of twilight knowledge of the Christ which ancient believers derived from it. The entire Old Testament dispensation was a day, known it is true to the Lord, but to His people it was "not day nor night." But as with all other days of nature, providence, or grace, that also had an end. The clouds that had covered the horizon of the moral world for long centuries broke at last. The evening of the Old Testament day, which witnessed the coming of the Son of God, was the brightest period of time that the world had seen since the fall of man! Turn to unfulfilled prophecy. How will it be realised; and when? The twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse has given occasion to hundreds of conjectures and theories of the millennium. But the Gospel dispensation, in regard to unfulfilled prophecy, is "neither clear nor dark,"—it is "not day nor night." But "at evening-time it shall be light." Presently all will be clear, and the Divine idea and purpose will be fully revealed. II. GOD'S GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OF HUMAN AFFAIRS. It is often unintelligible. The government of an empire is too intricate to be understood by any

but the emperor himself. We are confused and perplexed when we attempt to trace out and explain God's government of the world from its beginning to the present day. We do not know often what He intends or means in His dealings with our race. The light is neither clear nor dark,—the light of providence. But the revolution of years is silently bringing nearer and nearer the evening-time of the moral world. Then there will be adjustment of contrary things. Then we may well be patient, and trust in God. (*W. H. Luckenbach.*)

Light at evening-tide.—In recalling the incidents of his last year's ministry at Walton, Mr. Pennefather often spoke of the fact that during that time he had been called to attend the dying-beds of thirty of the most attached members of his flock, all in blessed hope of a joyful resurrection. "Do you call it a dark valley?" said one aged believer; "it is a very sweet valley to me! All praise! all praise!" "It is one thing to speak of Jesus," said a dying woman, "but it is another thing to have Him in full view."

Light at evening-time.—It is said that Mirabeau cried out frantically for music to soothe his last moments; that Hobbes, the deist, said as he gasped his last breath, "I am taking a fearful leap into the dark"; that Cardinal Beaufort said, "What! is there no bribing death?" Men with the Christian light have met death in another way. When Melancthon was asked if there was anything he desired, he said, "No, Luther, nothing but heaven." Dr. John Owen said at last, "I am going to Him whom my soul loveth, or rather, who has loved me with an everlasting love." John Brown of Haddington could say, "I am weak, but it is delightful to feel one's self in the everlasting arms." George Washington could say, "It is all well." Walter Scott, as he sank in the slumber of death, "Now I shall be myself again." Beethoven, as he could almost catch the melody of the mystic world, "Now I shall hear." Wesley could cheerily meet death with the words, "The best of all is God is with us." Locke, the Christian philosopher, exclaimed at dying, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the goodness and knowledge of God!" Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Paul, "having a desire to depart"; and, "to die is gain." (*F. Hastings.*)

The sunset glow.—In the thought and in the speech of the world night is made the symbol of the dark experiences of human life. It is common to speak of the day of prosperity and of the night of adversity. Both of these symbols are frequently used in the Bible, the day standing for the bright experiences and the night standing for the dark experiences of life. But the Bible studs the night of darkness with stars of hope and suns of promise. "At evening-time it shall be light." That is grace overstepping and going beyond Nature. Nature's evening-time is darkness. When the evening-time comes in the experiences of God's people, and they fear that there shall be no more day, then God steps in, introduces a principle beyond Nature, and declares, "It shall come to pass that at evening-time it shall be light." 1. This is a promise for the evening-time of the world. The morning of the world was a bright and glorious sunrise. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And when He had finished His wide and wise creation, "God saw that it was good." But soon the dark cloud of man's sin overspread the earth. Light was shut out. Darkness reigned. Out of that darkness the world has been gradually emerging, until, through all the tears and tyrannies of the centuries, it has come into the noonday splendour of the Christian civilisation of our century. And it is distinctly Christian. It was the historian Froude who said: "All that we call modern civilisation, in a sense which deserves that name, is the visible expression of the transfiguring power of the Gospel." Our highest literature is swayed by the purest influences of Christianity. The scientific spirit of research and investigation, so conspicuous a fact and so important a factor in our modern life, owes its stimulation to the encouragement of Christianity. Christianity has created the laboratory as well as the library. Christianity is the parent of education. It has founded schools, established colleges, endowed seminaries. To benighted lands and to blighted homes Christianity has sent the teacher with the preacher. Our civic liberties and our social order are based upon Christianity. Burn the Bible, proclaim "there is no God," write over your cemetery gates "Death is an eternal sleep," and there is no power in all this land that will stay the ravages of that beetle-browed hag—infidelity's twin-sister in every age and in every land—Anarchism. I know that there are historians of discontent and prophets of calamity who cannot enjoy the splendour of the world's midday, and who are ever telling us that the former times were better than these. They discount all inventions and all advancement by claiming that the morality of the present,

if as strong, is no stronger than the morality of the past. They are right in holding that all advancements go for naught if the people are not better than they were. The test of the world's advancement and strength is not that the grandson rides to-day in the Pullman car, while the grandfather rode yesterday in the stage-coach. The test is, Is the grandson a better man than the grandfather was? This world has not seen a brighter era since the gates of Eden were closed upon man than the last days of the nineteenth century. And the twentieth century will be better. Christ Jesus is to reign in this world. He has not yet ascended His throne. He is now on His Father's throne. When He went into Heaven He sat down at His Father's right hand, "henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool." When His enemies shall be subdued, then, rising upon them as upon His footstool, He shall ascend His throne and reign. And it shall come to pass that in the evening-time of the world it shall be light. 2. The promise pertains to the Church of God. The Church of God has had two organisations in the world—the theocratic organisation of the Old Testament dispensation, and the spiritual organisation of the New Testament dispensation. Through all the Old Testament we can trace a gradual unfolding of the Church's life and power. This unfolding was not in a continuous advance. The whole history of the Old Testament Church shows a succession of onward marches, and then of quick retreats—progressing, retrograding, standing still for a while, then progressing once more, and again falling back. But in no instance did she fall back as far as she had been, and so her history was, on the whole, one of advance and growth. So with the Church of the New Testament dispensation. The Church was born on Pentecost—that was the sunrise of the Church, and it was glorious. From Pentecost the disciples went forth to tell the story of Him who had been crucified, who rose and ascended into heaven, and as the story spread the Church grew. Then came opposition and hatred and persecution, but the Church advanced through all until she entered the darkness of the Dark Ages. The heavens were shut, and a black cloud of superstition spread over the earth. Rome sat upon her ebony throne and stretched her rod of cruelty across the nations. It seemed as if the evening time of the Church had come. In that time every lamp of prophecy had ceased to shine. He who thundered in the streets of Rome had been burned at the stake, Savonarola had received the martyr's crown at Florence, the black clouds of ignorance, superstition, and vice shut out the sunlight of God's love from the world. It was evening-time, but God said, In the evening-time it shall be light. He kindled a beacon in the soul of a young monk in the monastery at Erfurt. As the monk mused the fire burned, and out from Erfurt went Martin Luther to proclaim God's message; and Rome shook, the Vatican trembled, the gates of brass were opened, the rod of cruelty was sundered, Germany was delivered, and civil and religious liberty were secured to the world. There came a time in England when religion became a formality, and when all good men trembled for the Church and longed for the mighty Puritans, who would crush the giant forces of evil beneath their onward progress. It was evening-time, and God had said, "It shall come to pass that at evening-time it shall be light." Four young Oxford students—William Morgan, Robert Kentham, Charles and John Wesley—met for prayer and Bible study. They were called by their fellow-students "Bible Moths," "the Holy Club," and "Methodists," because they were so methodical in all studies and their work. One resistance after another the Church has overcome; at times pressed back, but ever pushing onward, multiplying her victories and extending her dominions. No more hospitals, for there are no more sick; no more asylums, for there are no orphans; no more prisons, for there are no criminals; no more almshouses, for there are no poor; no more tears, for there is no sorrow. The long dirge of the earth's lamentations has come to an end in the triumphal march of the blessed redeemed Church; the New Jerusalem is with men, her children are gathered home, and across that city of a redeemed humanity earth's grandest outburst of hope and welcome breaks antiphonal from wall to jasper wall. The sunset glow; the evening-time of the Church, and at evening-time it shall be light. 3. This promise is for all human experience. The great promises of God, which apply to the whole kingdom of the redeemed, may be appropriated by each individual member of that kingdom. In Nature the laws which control the great forces direct the minute elements. The law that rules the grain of sand on the seashore governs the planets in their course. It is so in the realm of grace. "At evening-time it shall be light" to the Church; "at evening-time it shall be light" to every individual believer.

In the matter of the experience of the believer in Christian service it is true that "in the evening-time it shall be light." The majority of the men who have lived and laboured to make this world better have received the scorn and obloquy of the world. John Wesley was howled down by the mob to whom he preached; they threw bricks at him, they spat upon him, but where is there a more honoured name to-day? Light at evening-time. Wendell Phillips was scorned and spurned for his advocacy of the slave. Boston would not hear him, but in less than a generation afterward Boston built a monument to his honour, and men who would not defile their lips with his name taught their children the pathway to his tomb. "At evening-time it shall be light." 4. The promise brings its helpful message to every believer in his season of adversity and trouble. Very few people in this world escape the time of adversity. The bright, sunshiny day of prosperity is pretty certain to have a nightfall. "It was good that I have been afflicted," cries David. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away," exclaims Job. "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," says Paul. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," exclaims John in apocalyptic vision. At evening-time it shall be light. Ten thousand saints of God have found it so in the evening-time. 5. The text has a message for old age. Sometimes men look forward to it with trembling. It is a mistaken notion that youth is the time of gladness and old age the time of sadness. America's beloved artist, Horatio Greenough, a few days before his death, said: "I have found life to be a very cheerful thing, and not the dark and bitter thing with which my early days were clouded." At evening-time it was light. At eighty years of age Albert Barnes stood in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, and said: "The world is so attractive to me that I am very sorry I shall have to leave it so soon." Dr. Guthrie, past eighty, said: "You must not think that I am old because my hair is white; I never was so young as I am now." At evening-time it was light. New lights shall burn when the old lights are quenched; new candles shall be lit when the lamps of life are dim. At the evening-time of his life the Christian has many lights that he did not have before. There is the bright light of experience; the pleasing light of sweet memories; the cheering light of service done for God and humanity. The scientist tells us that no physical force is ever wasted. We whisper into the telephone, and the vibration, though it be less than one one-hundred-thousandth part of an inch, affects a diaphragm a thousand miles away, and our exact voice is heard by the listening ear in Chicago. So they tell us that the light from the farthest fixed star has been travelling steadily undiminished for more than a million years to greet our upturned eye to-night, and to reassure us that "the hand that made it is Divine." If it be true of physical forces, how much more is it true of moral and spiritual forces, that they are never lost! What a halo of glory this casts about the old age of a man, out from whose life have poured forth the streams of holy and sacred influences! At evening-time it shall be light. John Bunyan was right when he located Christian old age in the land of Beulah, in full sight of the ripe fruitage and the ravishing prospects of the Celestial City. The infirmities of old age are only "the land birds lighting on the sails, telling the weary mariner that he is nearing the haven." "And it shall come to pass that at evening-time it shall be light." 6. This promise is for the time of the death of the believer. "It is a dark passage through which you are passing now," said a young man as he sat beside his dying mother. And her whole countenance lighted up as she said: "Oh no, my son; there is too bright a light at the other end to have it dark," and she passed out, and up, and into the palm and to the crown and to the throne. At the evening-time it was light. Paul drew near the end, and he said: "The time for the weighing of the anchor has come. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." Take the promise with you into the future. Remember that if sorrow camps with you over-night, joy cometh in the morning. (J. F. Carson, D.D.)

Ver. 8. *Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem.*—*The living waters.*—Like all his predecessors, Zechariah speaks much of Christ. Some of his prophecies, owing partly to the predominance of figurative and symbolical language, are difficult and obscure. In the text he refers to Gospel days and to the Gospel blessings. He speaks of the Gospel under the figure of living, springing, running

waters; and under this figure he indicates to us the beginning, the progressive course, and the perpetual extension of the Gospel, together with its ultimate triumph, as seen in the universal dominion of the Messiah. 1. The character of the Gospel. We must think of the world as a desert, a vast moral waste, void of spiritual beauty and of moral life; and this is in strict accord with the actual condition of peoples apart from the Gospel. The land, the home, the heart, unvisited by the Gospel, is cursed with spiritual barrenness and moral death. If we caused a rivulet of living water to flow over a barren land, what would be the result? The desert land would soon cease to be barren. Let this land be ploughed, let the seed be cast into it, and what is the result? The desert becomes a garden; the wilderness a fruitful field, and the barren land a forest. So let the Gospel waters flow through the desert wastes of a sinner's heart, or through the moral wastes of a country, and what a blessed transformation is the result! Death gives place to life, depravity to beauty, and barrenness to fertility. It was so in the beginning of Christianity. The power of the Gospel has been strikingly proved in the missions to Fiji. 2. The progress of the Gospel. The living waters go out from Jerusalem. Christianity was not a new religion. It was the development, the outgrowth of Judaism. But the waters were to flow in every direction, carrying spiritual fertility with them: everywhere turning the desolate heritages of the Gentile world into the garden of the Lord. Note also the constancy with which the living waters flow; "in summer and winter shall it go." The summer heat usually dries up the rivulet. The frost of winter congeals it; but these living waters shall flow on through summer and winter. How strikingly has this been illustrated all through the Christian centuries. Nothing has proved able to arrest or stay the progress of the Gospel. 3. The triumph of the Gospel. From the beginning the Lord Christ has indeed been King over all the earth, but in the text there is associated with the idea of kingly authority that of willing submission. He shall then be universally acknowledged Lord, every knee to Him shall bow, and every tongue confess Him. The day will surely come when men shall be blessed in Him, all nations shall call Him blessed. (*Walford Green.*) *The course of the Gospel*:—I. THE DESIGNATION OF THE GOSPEL. Here called "living waters." It points out the purity of the Gospel. Not the stagnant pool, but the running stream. Holiness to the Lord is stamped on all its principles, commandments, and rites. It is a dispensation of mercy, but it gives no indulgence to the least sin. It points out the refreshment which it yields. How sweet are its offers of pardon to the awakened conscience! It points out also the fertility which the Gospel produces. Christianity aims at forming the love of God in the heart and conduct. II. THE PLACE FROM WHICH THESE WATERS ISSUE. When Christ ordered repentance and remission of sins to be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, the banks within which these living waters had flowed were broken down, and the stream began to rush over the Gentile world. These waters flow from Jerusalem, as it is by the Church that they are communicated. They are brought to the Church not only that they may be improved, but diffused. III. MARK THE COURSE OF THESE LIVING WATERS. The statement seems to intimate that the Gospel should bless the nations of the Eastern and of the Western world. There are various circumstances which indicate that a more extensive diffusion of the Gospel will soon take place. IV. THE CONTINUANCE OF THE COURSE OF THESE LIVING WATERS. Their flow shall neither be impeded by the drought of summer nor the frosts of winter. The effects of the Gospel on the souls of disciples are perpetual also. The knowledge it gives is everlasting light; the peace it yields is everlasting consolation; the love it inspires is a charity that never fails; and the holiness it forms is a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (*Henry Belfrage, D.D.*) *The Gospel river*:—I. ITS NATURE AND ITS RISE. 1. Its nature. It is "living water." Water is precious, but not so precious as the Gospel. That is the river of life, the pure water of life. 2. Its rise. "It shall go out from Jerusalem." The Gospel might be said to have commenced at Jerusalem. "Beginning at Jerusalem." In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, the river might be said to have broken forth. II. ITS DIFFUSION AND CONTINUOUSNESS. 1. Its diffusion. "Half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea." It is to go from the east and from the west, from its rising to its setting. The Gospel is for all climes. It is world-wide in its provisions, adaptations, and claims. 2. Continuousness. "Summer and winter." In all seasons of human life individually and corporately. (1) It is constant in the

fitness of its supplies for human wants. Men, through all changes, in all places, and through all times, want Divine knowledge, moral purity, heavenly forgiveness, fellowship with the Eternal. The man will never be born who will not require these things. (2) It is constant in the fulness of its supplies for human wants. It is an inexhaustible river. After countless myriads have had their wants supplied it remains deep and full as ever. (3) It is constant in the availableness of its supplies for human wants. (*Homilist.*) *The changeful and the constant in life*.—I. THE CHANGES IN THIS SCENE OF OUR EARTHLY LIFE. Suggested by summer and winter. The changing seasons of nature may be regarded as only symbols of the constant mutations in our mortal life. 1. Human life has its changes. The man who reaches his three score years and ten, has run through all the seasons; the freshness of spring, the luxuriance of summer, the ripeness of autumn, and the dreary desolations of winter. 2. Human institutions have their changes. These changes are useful. (1) They supply us with excitements to action. (2) They impress us with the constant activity of God. (3) They remind us that this is not our rest. II. THE CONSTANT IN THIS SCENE OF OUR EARTHLY LIFE. "In summer and in winter shall it be." What is the "it" here, that is to remain so constant amidst the changes? The preceding part of the verse answers the question: "living waters." The reference is undoubtedly to Christianity, which is the "water of life." But our point is its constancy. In "summer and winter" it flows the same. The changes of the world have no influences on it: it continues the settled amongst the unsettled, the permanent amongst the transitory, the immortal amongst the dying. "Though all flesh is as grass the Word of our God shall stand for ever." 1. It is constant in the fitness of its supplies for human wants. Men through all changes, in all places, and through all times want Divine knowledge, moral purity, heavenly forgiveness, fellowship with the Eternal. 2. It is constant in the fulness of its supplies for human wants. It is an inexhaustible river. 3. It is constant in the availableness of its supplies for human wants. (*Ibid.*) *Summer and winter*.—I. THE CHANGEFUL IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE. There is as much variety as in the difference between July and December; between all that is summerly and all that is winterly in our English climate. 1. There is this changefulness in the experience of individuals. In the difference of differing age: Robustness of youth, decrepitude of age. In the difference of differing health: Buoyancy of strength, feebleness of disease. In the difference of differing circumstances: Prosperity, anxiety, poverty; success, failure; popularity, neglect, or scorn. In the difference of differing moods: Joy, sadness; doubt, faith. 2. There is this changefulness in the experience of families. Unbroken home circles, and desolated hearths. Wedding days, and funerals. The cradle the centre of the household, and anon the coffin. 3. There is this changefulness in the experience of nations. Commercially there is a summer and a winter. So politically; so religiously. Rome, Greece, Spain, &c., have had summer and winter. We seem getting towards winter. But though all, whether individuals, families, or nations, thus have "in the changes and chances of this mortal life" their bright, genial, glowing summers, and their chill, gloomy, cruel winters, we notice—II. THE UNCHANGEABLE PROVISION GOD HAS MADE FOR MAN'S NEEDS. The prophet is telling of a river of blessing that, though it roll through winterly and summerly landscapes, is itself unchanged, perpetually the same. In summer and winter it shall be. That river is surely the revealed love of God in Christianity. What else fulfils what the prophet declares about—1. The fountain, 2. The progress, 3. The winter of this river? God's love in Christ does. And that is the sublimely unchangeable it, which remains the same in all the summers and winters of human experience. (*Urijah R. Thomas.*) *Christianity*.—The Bible is full of promises. Some of them refer to temporal and some to spiritual things. Some relate to the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. I. THE DISPENSATION OF CHRISTIANITY. Here are four things. 1. Its representation. It is called—"living waters." This softens, purifies, refreshes the soul. It fertilises. It is described as "living water,"—water that springs up. Rising, or springing up, in thought, desire, prayer, pursuit, until it even reaches heaven. All is vitality where this living water is. It is the all-healing balm. It produces a principle of life which strengthens amidst bodily debility, and grows amidst bodily decay. 2. Its origin. "Go out of Jerusalem." Our Lord was of Jewish parents; the apostles were Jews; and most of the first disciples were Jews. In the Acts of the Apostles we discover how these "living waters," issuing from the land of Judea, spread

abroad in every direction. In this we see—(1) The accomplishment of prophecy. (2) The proof that Christianity can bear investigation. (3) Showing the goodness of God our Saviour. No nation was ever so favoured as the Jews. Yet they rejected the Messiah. 3. The directions of these “living waters.” “Half of them toward the former sea; and half of them toward the hinder sea.” The meaning is that these living waters were to spread all abroad. The Jewish Church was a local stationary witness for God. The Christian Church is not local and stationary, but is to go to the world. No dispensation of God can be final, but that which is universal. The blessings procured by our Saviour’s death, are offered freely to all men. 4. Its perpetuity. “In summer and in winter shall it be.” The most unfavourable seasons for rivers are here mentioned; yet they are not able to hinder the flow and efficacy of these “living waters.” Earthly rivers may be frozen by the cold of winter, and dried up by the heat of summer; not so with the river of life. II. THE GLORIOUS RESULTS OF CHRISTIANITY. “The Lord shall be King over all the earth.” It is impossible to think of the introducing of Christianity, without expecting great results. The effects of Christianity are described in two ways. 1. By universal subjection. At first sight this seems to announce no more than what He is already. But we must distinguish between right and acknowledgment. The design of Christianity is to make men feel their obligations to God. There is a difference between God’s providential and God’s spiritual government. The great thing to be attained is, for God to reign in us, by His grace; for Christ to reign in the heart, in the conscience, and in the affections. 2. By uniformity of homage. “One Lord, and His name one.” Here the image changes, and the prophet leads us from the palace to the temple. “Our Lord” does not exclude personal distinctions in the Divine essence. Now there are lords many and gods many. Many have idols in their hearts. The time is coming when all these idols shall be utterly destroyed. “His name one.” The Lord shall be known by all the tribes of mankind, and in all places of His dominion. (*Timothy Gibson, M.A.*)

Ver. 9. The Lord shall be King over all the earth.—*The Second Advent of Christ*.—That the passage Job xix. 25–27 has reference to Jesus Christ, and to His coming to judgment at the last great day, I think there can be no dispute. Unless, then, we look to the reappearing of the Son of Man upon this earth, we stultify the expectation of the patriarch, we impugn the inspiration of his prophecy, virtually esteeming his declaration as little better than words of a mere sound. That we may arrive at some knowledge of wherein the reward of the Son, after having made His soul an offering for sin, consists, let us search the Scriptures. In Psa. ii. Jesus is invested with supreme and absolute authority in the administration of His inalienable sovereignty. But has Jesus, the Son of Man, ever occupied the earth as here represented? “His own received Him not.” Has He ever dashed in pieces like a potter’s vessel the heathen, either the baptized or unbaptized portion of them? It may be said that, in His spiritual dominion, He may be said to occupy the earth by subjugating the hearts of His people, making them willing in the day of His power. We need not make light of Christ’s spiritual government; but we are compelled to look for something more than a spiritual sovereignty as the result of the Father’s grant, even to the personal occupation of the earth as the seat of His kingly power. And the attitude of expectation naturally excites watchfulness, watchfulness producing prayer, and prayer holiness. (*M. J. Taylor, M.A.*) *Meat out of the Eater*.—One day; one entire period and joint of providence. Described by its beginning and progress; and by its end and close. The comfort and happiness of this glorious evening is set forth in three things. The propagation of the Gospel; the reign of Christ; the unity of the Churches. Doctrine.—That in the latter days there shall be great unity in the Church of God. And that this unity shall spring from their acknowledging of the right Lord and the right way. As to the unity, observe—1. This will suit best with the quiet and happy estate of those times. God will usher in the glorious and everlasting estate by some preparative degrees. 2. God will then make some visible provision against the scandal of dissensions. 3. The misery of these times doth seem to enforce the greater unity. For use of consolation, consider your hopes; and know the reason of such providences. For use of exhortation. It serveth to exhort and press you to hasten, and set on these hopes. Promises do not exclude action, but engage to it. The promises hold forth unity; strive after it, by prayers, and by endeavours.

Let every one of us mortify such ill affections as may any way engage us to a disturbance and vexatious bitterness. Keep yourselves pure from ill opinions. You must as carefully avoid an error in judgment as a vice in conversation. Do not impropriate Christ to any one party or sort of professors. Never serve a faction or party to the prejudice and detriment of truth and religion. As far as truth and conscience will give leave, there should be a profession of brotherhood, a condescension and yielding to one another in love; a walking together, or at least, a Christian forbearance. Abstain from reproaches and undue provocations, and dispense all civil respects with meekness. Let me entreat you to mind a few things. Beware of passion in your own interests; though they may be much shaken and endamaged in the present controversies, yet self-denying patience will be the best way to settle them. Press doctrines of Christ, and the main things of religion. When you deal with the errors of the time, do it with a great deal of caution and wariness. Take heed of aggravating and greatening matters, making them of more importance than indeed they are. Former ages were possessed with this spirit, every lesser dissent and mistake was made a heresy or error in the faith. Let me entreat you to improve your interests for brotherly and friendly collations. Rational and friendly conviction will do much, at least it will beget a sweet and brotherly correspondence, and it is to be hoped we shall find more meekness where things are not carried in the way of a set disputation. (*T. Manton.*) *The coming moral reign of God on the earth*.—Physically, God reigns everywhere. Morally, His reign depends upon the will of men, and that will is hostile. The coming moral reign is—I. TO BE EXTENSIVE. "All the earth," or "land," may mean the land of Judea, but we are authorised to believe that He will one day reign over all the earth, that all souls will bow to His influence, as the ripened fields of autumn to the winds of heaven. II. TO BE EXCLUSIVE. He will be regarded as the one King whose laws all study and obey. The great question of all souls will be, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" No other power will rule the soul where He becomes the moral monarch. III. It will be BENEFICENT. "All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem." Taking verses 10 and 11, we gather at least two beneficent results of His moral reign. 1. The removal of all obstructions to the river of truth. "The land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon," &c. That is from the northern to the southern boundary of Judea. The levelling of this land would not only leave Jerusalem conspicuous but allow the "living waters" to have free flow. 2. The elevation and establishment of the good. Jerusalem is here represented not only as being razed and made conspicuous, but as settling down and dwelling securely. "It shall be lifted up and inhabited in her place." There shall be no more utter destruction, Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited. Conclusion: Who will not pray, Let Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven? (*Homilist.*) *The kingdom of Christ upon the earth*.—I. THE INCALCULABLE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROPHECY. 1. To the world at large. 2. To the Church in particular. 3. To every individual of mankind. II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PERIOD TO WHICH IT REFERS. 1. It will be a season of temporal prosperity. 2. Spiritual blessings will most richly abound. It will be a season when God will manifest Himself on earth. Then (1) Seek the establishment of Christ's kingdom in your own souls; and (2) Seek to promote its establishment throughout the world. (*C. Simeon, M. A.*) *One heart and one way*.—The Lord forewarns His people of greater sufferings that they were to undergo in the last times. Here we have the judgment itself denounced. A description of their miserable condition at this time. The assurance of deliverance, and that by divers agents. Though the trial were sharp, it should be short. The issue should be happy for the evening should be light. The author of their deliverance shall be Jehovah. As to the manner of doing it, God will make it appear to be His work. Look at the glorious condition of this Church after this deliverance, and that in these particulars—after this Jerusalem shall be made eminent and honourable. Jerusalem shall be exalted, as the mother Church. The blessed and glorious government of this state after this deliverance. Here is the fruit and consequence of this government, "Jehovah shall be one, and His name one." The name of God is diversely taken in Scripture; but here is meant the religion that God has set forth in His Word, and the worship that He hath set up in the Church. The meaning of the promise seems to be this, whereas before they worshipped many gods, now they should turn from dead idols and serve only the living God.

The Lord promises that as all the idols shall be taken away, so all idolatrous and superstitious worship also. Jehovah one, the rule of His worship one, and His worship according to that rule one. Doctrine—When a people turn to God by repentance, and He returns to them in mercy, He will give unto them one name, that is, He will free them from all superstitions, and human mixtures in His worship. 1. In all ages it hath been the main labour of Satan and all the enemies of the Church, when they could not root out the worship of God wholly, then to corrupt the simplicity of it by human inventions, traditions, and superstitious mixtures. 2. When they turn unto God, and God unto them, He will free them from all these. (*W. Strong.*)

Vers. 12-14. **And this shall be the plague.**—*The punishment of God's enemies.*—This is a figurative description of the punishment of sin. The first element of the punishment is corruption, which is set forth by the terrible image of a living death, a fearful anomalous state, in which the mouldy rottenness of death is combined in horrible union with the vivid, conscious sensibility of life. The soul of the sinner, in its future consciousness of sin, shall feel its loathsome corruption as vividly as now it would feel the slow putrefaction of the body that rotted piecemeal to the grave. The second element is—mutual hate and contention (ver. 13). The image is that of a panic-struck army, in which man clutches and strikes in frantic fury his nearest neighbour. Hell shall be hate, in its fiercest and hatefullest forms. Sin is now the cause of all the quarrels on earth; it shall be the cause of endless quarrels in hell. The third element is—loss of the blessings previously enjoyed (ver. 14). This is represented by the image of spoil. The wealth of the nations that besieged Jerusalem shall be taken by Judah and Jerusalem, which are here combined in the triumph, as they were combined in the struggle described in chap. xii. A fourth element is—the infectious nature of sin. It defiles all that it touches. It has defiled the earth and all it contains, so that it must be burned up; and it will hereafter transform the dwelling-place of its possessors into a hell, and their companions into fiends, and make it necessary that the very instruments of enjoyment they have possessed in life should be taken from them and destroyed. Learn that the most fearful punishment of sinners is simply to leave them to themselves. Sin is but hell in embryo, hell is but sin in development. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *The elements by which the Divine government punishes sin.*—I. PHYSICAL DISEASES. “And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord shall smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth.” “This description of the plague-stricken people,” says a modern author, “is shocking, but it is not more than what actually occurs.” See Defoe's *Plague of London*. Kingsley says, “What so terrible as war? I will tell you what is ten times and ten thousand times more terrible than war, and that is outraged nature. Nature, insidious, inexpensive, silent, sends no roar of cannon, no glitter of arms to do her work: she gives no warning note of preparation. . . . Man has his courtesies of war and his chivalries of war, he does not strike the unarmed man, he spares the woman and the child. But nature . . . spares neither woman or child; . . . silently she strikes the sleeping child with as little remorse as she would strike the strong man with the musket or the pick-axe in his hand.” One could scarcely imagine a more revolting condition of humanity than is here presented, a living skeleton, nearly all the flesh gone, the eyes all but blotted out, the tongue withered. Physical disease has ever been one of the instruments by which God has punished men in this world, pestilences, plagues, epidemics, and so on. But it is not merely a plague amongst the people, but also amongst the cattle, as we see in ver. 15. II. MUTUAL ANIMOSITY. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them, and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour.” The idea is, perhaps, that God would permit such circumstances to spring up amongst them as would generate in their minds mutual misunderstandings, malignities, quarrellings, and battlings. “They shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour.” “Every man's sword shall be against his brother.” Sin punishes sin, bad passions not only work misery but are in themselves miseries. Another element of punishment here is—III. TEMPORAL LOSSES. “And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem.” Not against Jerusalem. “And the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold and silver, and apparel in abundance.” Earthly

property, men in their unrenewed state have always valued as the highest good. To attain it they devote all their powers with an unquenchable enthusiasm, and to hold it they are ever on the alert, and their grasp is unrelaxable and firm. To have it snatched from them is among their greatest calamities, and how often this occurs in society ! (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 16. Shall go up from year to year to worship the King.—*The genius and inner heart of Christianity*.—1. It brings us into the possession of a new life. We are Christians, not because we avow a certain creed, or conform to certain outward exercises ; but because we have received the life, the Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us in Jesus. And is it possible to restrict the manifestations of life ? Is not God's life always the same in its abundant and infinite variety ? So surely the life of God in the soul should, and must, express itself in all the outgoings of our existence,—in speech, act, movement—equally on the six days as the one day ; as much in the kitchen, or the shop, as the Church. If you are possessed by the life of the Holy One, it will as certainly appear as the idiosyncrasy of your character, which underlies, moulds, and fashions your every gesture. 2. Christianity is consecration to Christ. It may be questioned if we have a right to call ourselves Christians unless we regard Him as our Judge, our Lawgiver, and our King, and are deliberately obeying and serving Him. But if we are going to reserve our religion to certain days, places, and actions, we necessarily exclude Him from all that is not contained within the fences we erect. What right have we to suppose that our Master Christ will be satisfied with an arrangement which asks Him to accept a part for the whole, a composition for the entire debt ? 3. The needs of the world demand an entire and unbroken religious life. The world does not see us in our religious exercises, whether in our private retirement or our public worship. It has no idea, therefore, of the anguish of our penitence, the earnestness of our desires for a right and noble life, the persistency of our endeavours. And if we do not give evidence of our religion in dealing with matters that the men of the world understand, they will naturally and rightly consider that religion is an unpractical dream, the child of superstition and emotion. We should, therefore, refuse to maintain the false distinction between things that are sacred, and those that are secular. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The public worship of Jehovah*.—I. IT IS A DUTY BINDING ON ALL PEOPLE. “The feast of tabernacles was meant to keep them in mind that, amidst their abundant harvests, and well-cared-for fields and vineyards, that as in the desert, so still it was God who gave the increase. It was therefore a festival most suitable for all the nations to join in, by way of acknowledging that Jehovah was the God of Nature throughout the earth, however various might be the aspects of nature with which they were familiar. Besides, there can be little doubt that by the time of Zechariah, and probably long before, this feast had become a kind of symbol of the ingathering of the nations” (*John iv. 35*).—*Dr. Dods.* Whilst the thousands neglect public worship, not a few argue against it, they say it is uncalled for and unnecessary. In reply to this we state, where there is genuine religion—1. Public worship is a natural development. The Being we love most we crave an opportunity for extolling, we want that all shall know His merits. 2. Public worship is a happy development. What delights the soul so much as to hear others praise the object we love the most ? This at once gratifies the religious instinct and the social love. 3. Public worship is a beneficent development. There is nothing that tends so much to quicken and ennoble souls as worship, and nothing gives such a vital interest in one soul for another, as public worship. II. ITS NEGLECT EXPOSES TO TERRIBLE CALAMITIES. 1. The greatness of the punishment. “Upon them shall be no rain.” Now the absence of rain involves every temporal evil you can think of, famine, pestilence, loss of physical enjoyment, loss of health, loss of life. 2. The fitness of the punishment. (1) To the offence. “The withholding of the rain.” (2) To the offender. The idea of not having rain would not, perhaps, terrify the Egyptians, for they had the Nile. Hence a plague is threatened to them. The punishment here was to come because of the neglect of public worship. And this is punished by—(a) Loss of the highest spiritual enjoyments. (b) Hereafter, by the reproaching of conscience, and the banishment from all good. (*Homilist.*) *The worship of God a duty and a privilege*.—Though it is generally admitted that Zechariah is the most obscure of all the minor prophets, yet there were two topics on which we may safely affirm that

he was as luminous, or more so, than the rest. The first respected the public worship of God. He and Haggai were conspicuously active in urging the Jews, on their return from their captivity, to re-build their temple; and when the sanctuary was erected, we find him not only administering to the tribes themselves, but to the strangers and foreigners who had mixed themselves up with them to frequent the house of God, lest renewed judgment should break forth upon them to their injury and ruin. I. PRESS IT UPON YOU AS A DUTY AND PRIVILEGE. 1. It is founded in the relation in which we stand to God. He is our Creator, Preserver, Benefactor; He is our Father. We are the families of Israel here addressed; and has not God dealt fraternally with you as His children? Show your filial gratitude &c. 2. It is suggested by the appointment of Divine ordinances. 3. It is enforced by the commands and exhortations of the sacred Scriptures. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua issued these precepts. They are echoed by the prophets (Psa. xcv. 1-4, 7; c. 2-5). 4. It is recommended by the example of the best of men who ever lived. We are to be followers of "all those who through faith," &c., and ought we not to copy them in this feature? Read the histories of Moses—Joshua—Nehemiah—of the prophets and apostles—or select one conspicuous example, David; what was his principal wish? "One thing have I," &c. What his chief affliction? "The sparrow," &c. What his chief joy? "I was glad," &c. What his prayer for others? "O send out Thy light," &c. This was his testimony, this his appeal—"Lord, I have loved the habitation." "They continued daily in the temple," &c. 5. It is urged upon us by the advantages connected with its observance. It is the house of God which He has promised to keep with His especial presence. Of Zion He says, "This is My rest; here will I dwell," &c. It is through His institutions that light, grace, and comfort are imparted to His Church. II. TO SHOW YOU THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEGLECT OF THAT WORSHIP WHICH GOD REQUIRES. "Even upon them there shall be no rain." No doubt there was a literal meaning attached to this menace. But we must not satisfy ourselves with this comment. In making a spiritual application of this part of the text, observe that rain is often employed as a metaphor to denote the abundant communication of spiritual blessings—thus, the coming of the Messiah, and the bestowments of His grace; the influences of the Spirit; the instructions and consolations of the Word of God. "My doctrine shall drop as the rain." (*Evangelical Preacher.*)

Vers. 20, 21. In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord.—*Universal holiness* :—This text may be a prediction of the latter-day glory, when the knowledge of Christ shall cover the whole earth. But at all times, and in all places, "holiness becometh the house of the Lord." It is His royal will and pleasure that all who name His name should depart from all iniquity. This holiness, which we call universal holiness, because it extends to the whole man, and to his whole conduct, is described in the text in a remarkable manner. The prophet foretells that holiness to the Lord shall be written on the bells and bridles of the horses. It was originally engraved on a plate of gold, and fixed on the mitre or turban of the high priest. In wearing this, he was a type of Christ, our great High Priest. The meaning of writing this on the trappings of the horses is, that religion shall not be confined to sacred persons, times, and places, as this inscription originally was to the high priest; but that all real Christians, being a holy priesthood, shall be religious at all times and in all things; that true holiness shall extend itself to the ordinary concerns of life. The proposition we enforce is, that universal holiness becomes the profession of the Gospel. To be holy signifies, in Scripture, to be set apart from a common or profane use, to God and His service. Holiness is the renovation of our nature by the Spirit of God. The holiness required by the Gospel is something far superior to what is called morality. Holiness supposes the renewal of the heart. There is a universal change made in a real Christian, which is far superior to mere morality. God Himself is the author of holiness; there is nothing in our fallen nature to produce it. The principal instrument employed by the Spirit of grace in effecting this holy change, is the Word of the Gospel. "Sanctify them through Thy truth." The holiness of the Gospel has for its grand objects, God and our neighbour. Religion is to influence the common concerns of life. Holiness is not to be confined to sacred things, but mingled with our ordinary affairs. We see little practical religion among many nominal Christians and unstable professors. Even the most exemplary have cause to lament their deficiencies. I. WHAT SHOULD

BE THE CHRISTIAN'S TEMPER AND VIEWS WITH REGARD TO HIMSELF? Let the Christian remember that he is "the temple of the Holy Ghost," and that the temple of the Lord must be holy. II. HOLINESS TO THE LORD IS TO BE EXEMPLIFIED IN THE RELATIVE DUTIES OF SOCIAL LIFE. In general, the Christian has two things to regard,—to do no harm, and to do much good. Active benevolence is a necessary fruit of holiness. There are certain situations in life wherein persons, being mutually related to each other, are expected more particularly to manifest the holiness of the Gospel. The conjugal state. The relation of parents and children. Of masters and servants. Then are we holy? A soul un sanctified can never gain admittance into heaven, the residence of a holy God, holy angels, and holy men. (*G. Burder.*) *Holiness* :—1. The holiness here predicted is evangelical. 2. The holiness here predicted is conspicuous and attractive. 3. The holiness here predicted is exemplified in the lives of the ministers of the Gospel. 4. The holiness here predicted embraces the transactions of ordinary business. 5. The holiness here predicted reaches to the social enjoyments of Christian professors. 6. The holiness here predicted pervades religious worship. 7. The holiness here predicted purifies the communion of the Christian Church. (*G. Brooks.*) *Holiness unto the Lord* :—The prevalence of sin in the world is a subject which the Christian daily reflects upon with unfeigned sorrow and humiliation. In every place iniquity abounds. Divine things are continually treated with presumptuous irreverence and disregard. The mind, however, is relieved from its depression, occasioned by the present gloomy state of things, while it contemplates the prospects of a brighter day, which in God's good time will arise. The sure word of prophecy unfolds to our view the most glorious representation of the Church prospering in the latter times. Zechariah foretells the general sanctification of men, and the consequent establishment of true religion in the world. I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THESE ENCOURAGING WORDS—"In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord"? This appears to be a prediction of the general prevalence of pure and undefiled religion. It teaches us that holiness shall become universal in its extent, entire in its influence, and unveiled by shame or fear. 1. Holiness shall hereafter become universal in its extent. It shall be written upon the bells or bridles of the horses. It shall not be limited to persons of any particular order or profession; it shall extend to all who are engaged in secular occupations and pursuits. Men shall then become, as it were, priests unto God. In God's good time, the things of God will be exalted to their just pre-eminence; and as they deserve, will occupy the attention and influence the hearts of men. Religion will be everywhere regarded as the one thing needful. 2. Holiness shall then become entire in its influence. It shall not be partial and defective; but perfect and complete. It shall govern the whole man, and regulate all that pertains to Him. As all men will make a profession of religion, so all who profess it will become truly and completely religious. Their piety will not be limited to particular occasions. They will walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long. They shall be influenced by a continual sense of His presence, and actuated by an habitual reverence for His laws. But not only shall the personal holiness of men be entire, their possessions, and everything pertaining to them shall, as it were, be holy too. "The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar." At present we have to lament that sacred things are most shamefully abused and profaned, but hereafter the case will be reversed; things of a worldly nature shall be sanctified to the purposes of religion. 3. Holiness shall be open and unreserved in man, free from any false feeling of shame, or fear of reproach. II. WHAT INSTRUCTION MAY BE DEDUCED FROM THESE WORDS? The prophet says, "In that day." The period has certainly not yet arrived; nor can it be expected till the mystery of iniquity has ceased to work. It is, however, even now in its progress towards fulfilment; for it has a reference to the whole period of the Gospel dispensation. Then what manner of persons ought they to be who make a profession of that Gospel? Surely holiness becomes the house of God. Every one that nameth the name of Christ should depart from iniquity. All who are privileged to bear the Christian name are required to cultivate extraordinary purity and holiness. 1. You are required to be holy by the very relation which you bear to God. 2. This is according to the express command of heaven: "for this is the will of God, even your sanctification." 3. This is the very end for which the Redeemer died. 4. The Scriptures represent this as an indispensable qualification for heaven. "Without holiness no man

shall see the Lord." Are you then living as persons truly devoted to God, and letting your conversation be in all things as becometh the Gospel of Christ? These questions are of supreme importance to us all; they are, as it were, the turning-point on which life and death, heaven and hell, depend. (*E. Whieldon, M.A.*) *Universal holiness the object of Christian hope*:—The words "Holiness to the Lord," were written on the mitre placed on the head of the Jewish high priest. They were intended to point out the sacredness of the office, and the peculiar sanctity of the priestly character; but they referred to a greater than he, even the High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. **I. EARTHLY EMPLOYMENTS SANCTIFIED.** 1. This is not the case at present. Even the people of God find themselves in much danger of being careful and troubled about many things. There is not now on the bells of the horses, "Holiness to the Lord." 2. There is a time when it shall be so. It will be evident, by the way in which common duties shall be discharged, that holiness to the Lord is the governing principle. All the intercourse of society shall be under the influence of Christian principle. In conducting the concerns of business, there will be no fraud or deceit—no taking advantage of the ignorance, the necessities, or the liberality of another—no tempting others to sin, in order to make gain by their iniquity. Many are the temptations necessarily arising from being associated with those who fear not God. **II. SPIRITUAL SERVICES BEAUTIFIED.** This embraces religion in the Church and in the family. 1. The services of the sanctuary. Things which have been deemed of small importance shall be attended to with a spirit of elevated piety. There is a prevalent error in undervaluing the devotional part of the service. The day is coming, may God hasten it on, "when the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar." 2. The religion of the family. In private dwellings a spirit of devotion shall run through all the engagements of the family. Look how much this is neglected. How many who wait on God in His house, do not serve Him in their own. **III. THE PROFESSING CHURCH SHALL BE PURIFIED.** 1. Charity in circumstantial matters shall be exercised. There are now often more disputes about the way of worship than endeavours to attain the right spirit of worship. Love of party destroys the love of Christ. 2. Agreement in fundamental truth. There shall be none to broach heresy, or to lessen the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ; but dependence on His righteousness shall be universal. Applying this subject to ourselves we see—(1) Ground for serious inquiry. Can we say, as respects business, public ordinances, Sabbath and home duties, &c., that everywhere is written, "Holiness to the Lord"? 2. A source of important instruction. See here a standard for your daily conduct. Pray, and try to attain to it. No Christian man is so happy as he who sees and enjoys Christ in everything. 3. A subject for fervent prayer. Pray that you may exhibit in your lives the power of grace in the soul. We see the principles on which we ought to act, in order so to pass through things temporal, as not to lose the things which are eternal. We may have the world, and we may use the world, but let us not forget that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Let it be our constant prayer that God may be our guard and our guide in our religious intercourse with our families, with His Church and people, and with our own hearts in our prayer chambers. And may the Lord Jesus Christ fulfil in us all the good pleasure of His will, and the work of faith with power. (*J. G. Breeny, B.A.*) *Religion and business*:—How to retain the spirit of serious piety in the busy activities of life, is a question vital to Christian character. The practical divorce of religion and piety in our daily affairs is fraught with peril. Too many regard religion as out of place in the thoroughfares of trade, as a fabric of too fine a texture, or as an exotic transplanted from a tropical to a polar clime. The easy quietude of the sanctuary or closet befits it: "Holiness to the Lord" may be put on the Bible, but not on the ledger; on the mitre of priest, but not on the bells of horses. How can religion and business be properly blended? 1. By having all actions constrained by holy motives. We do not, indeed, have God as a distinct object before us every moment, but we do the work which He has appointed us, in our special sphere, as a service to Him: "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The blood circulates silently in our veins, and so religion is a silent, but vital, force in our hearts. 2. We are to remember that religion is being good and doing good. It is not quietism or asceticism, but a dominant principle that guides our thought and speech and action. It is a reflection of Christ's life in the flesh. It shows itself in minutest details—the soft step, the gentle voice, the courteous demeanour; in honest

speech, in nobility of dealing and truthfulness of disposition. True religion, someone says, puts no sand in sugar, alum in bread, water into milk, or otter into butter; it keeps the wife from ill-temper when her husband's dirty boots soil the floor, and keeps him from having dirty boots; it prevents him from fretting at a late dinner, and keeps her from having late dinners. 3. Religion is doing secular acts from sacred motives oftener than it is doing merely sacred acts, so called. When piety stamps our life, all our acts are religious. It is wrong to separate toil and worship, and to forget that motive gives character to deeds. An automaton may do many of our acts, but it has no moral character. The heart makes the work of the workman holy. "An anvil may be consecrated and a pulpit desecrated." A religion that is not fitted to week-day work never had a Sabbath-day origin. (*C. H. Buck.*) *The true Christian holiness*:—These words indicate that the great design, and ultimate result, of the diffusion of the Gospel is to promote holiness. In the view of many, salvation is simply deliverance from punishment. But salvation is a character as well as a condition, and the two can never be really divorced. Christianity is a life as well as a creed. The bestowment of forgiveness is not the great end of the Gospel, but only a means to the higher end of lifting men from their degradation and making them in heart and in conduct, as well as in name, the sons of God. To rest in pardon is a mean and contemptible thing, displaying a disposition of the grossest selfishness. When salvation is really possessed, it is a living character, produced by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and rooted in the simple faith which the soul is exercising in Jesus Christ. I. WHAT HOLINESS IS. What precisely do we mean when we say of a man that he is holy? We imply not simply that he is virtuous, but rather that his virtue has a special and peculiar quality. In our common speech there is a recognition of the distinction between virtue and holiness. The virtuous man regulates his conduct by moral principles alone, while the holy man maintains a close and constant fellowship with the living God. The one gives you a lofty idea of his own excellence, the other makes you feel the greatness and purity of God. The scriptural significance of the term is "consecrated to Jehovah." Holiness, so far as it is an inward principle, is the maintenance of close communion with God: and so far as it is an outward manifestation, it is the consecration of the life to God. Holiness is a disposition lying back behind all virtues, and giving to each of them its own distinctive peculiarity. Holiness is an inward, all-regulating principle. II. HOW THIS HOLINESS IS TO BE ATTAINED. Clearly, it is not possessed by every man. No man has it naturally, and as a thing of course. Indeed, the very reverse is true. Men do not like to retain God in their knowledge. How is all this to be changed? Not by the individual himself. From an unholy soul nothing but that which is unholy can proceed. By no mere process of development, or natural selection, can the unholy man train himself into holiness. Neither can this change be accomplished by means of external rites. The Scriptures state with the utmost explicitness that we are regenerated by the power of the Holy Ghost. If we inquire into the mode of His operations, we get no reply. If we ask how He can work in and upon a man, while not infringing on his free agency, we are not told. Though silent as to the mode, Scripture repeatedly asserts the fact. The other element of holiness is consecration to God. But the essence of sin is self-will, and so it is impossible that a man can dedicate himself to God until sin within him has been crushed. In order to holiness, the sinner needs to be reconciled to God, and to be made like to God. But these are the very things which are to be accomplished through his belief on the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost. As to consecration to Him, the sight of the means by which his guilt and depravity have been removed, produces in the believer's soul a deep feeling of personal indebtedness to God. He cannot lay claim to himself after God has redeemed him to Himself by the precious blood of Christ. His gratitude takes the form of self-dedication. It follows, also, that we must seek to have faith, strong and abiding, in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and in His death as the propitiation for our sins. This is a view of the Cross which is too seldom before our eyes. III. WHERE THIS HOLINESS IS TO BE MANIFESTED. It is to characterise the believer's life in all occupations and under all circumstances. Under the New Testament we have no holy places, or holy persons. To the Christian there should be nothing purely secular. Wherever piety is genuine, and our consecration unreserved, we shall seek in all things to glorify God. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Holiness on the bells of the horses*:—The period to which these verses

refer is still future. Piety is to be almost universal, extending generally to all persons and acts. Gather from the text what real piety is. Use the text as a standard. 1. On the bells of the horses, "Holiness to the Lord," not on the priest's mitre only. Common occupations are to be performed with an eye to God. We are to serve God indirectly in our callings, as well as directly in our ordinances; secular things are to be conducted on the same holy principles of faith and obedience as our sacred services. Horses are used for state occasions, for recreation, for journeying, for merchandise. And bells on the horses give notice of their approach. And wherever a Christian comes, holiness to the Lord should attend him. 2. "And the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar." Lesser things in the service of God should be attended to, as well as the more important; earthen pots, as well as golden bowls, should be held sacred. Where there is real holiness people are not nice and particular about ceremonial holiness. The true worshipper seeks to worship in spirit. This is the main thing. At the same time, he does not disparage sacred persons, places, days, and things, because he can make ordinary persons, places, days, and things, conducive and helpful to his spiritual growth. You should carry your religion into your ordinary affairs, but you should not carry your ordinary affairs into your religious worship, except for the sake of guidance and blessing, and that you may go forth to conduct them in a right manner and with a proper spirit. (*H. C. Mitchinson, M.A.*) *Holiness to the Lord*:—Jerusalem and Judah are referred to in a literal sense, but, as is common, they are ultimately referred to as a type of the universal Church of the latter day. In its real scope the prediction extends to the whole world. Everything in prophecy and providence unites to prove that the entire fulfilment is at the door. The term "holy" signifies "set apart," "devoted." To be holy to the Lord is to be consecrated to Him. But "holiness to the Lord" is a still more forcible expression, and denotes consecration in the abstract. Men will write "holiness to the Lord" on all that they are and have. This implies that they will go through and re-examine all their habits, and bring all to the touchstone of Scripture. They will consecrate to Him all their powers of body and mind, all their time, influence, and possessions. You have come upon the stage at a time when Christendom is teeming with projects and institutions to meliorate the condition of man, and to advance the kingdom of Christ. See that you give these institutions firm and unwearied support. Fall in with the spirit of your age. You ought to be wholly for God, because He made you what you are, and built the world you inhabit, and furnished it for your use, and placed you in it, and commanded you to serve Him with all your heart and soul. You are not your own. You ought to be wholly for Christ, because He died to redeem you from eternal fire and raise you to immortal happiness. You must devote your lives to the interests of His kingdom if you would most promote the happiness of men. You must be wholly devoted if you would wish for a life of comfort. A divided mind is an uneasy mind. Many people have just enough religion to make them wretched. A heart and life consecrated without reserve to Christ, would bring peace of conscience, the strong exercise of benevolent affection, the satisfaction of a delightful employment, and crown all with ecstatic communion with God, and an assured hope of immortality. (*E. Dorr Griffin, D.D.*) *Holiness to the Lord*:—The prophets and apostles often speak of a glorious day, which is to dawn upon the Church in the latter ages of the world. Respecting this glorious day two things are predicted in the chapter before us. The true religion shall then universally prevail. Christians shall make much greater attainments in religion, and its sanctifying influence shall pervade all the common concerns and employments of life. 1. These expressions of the text imply that, when the day here predicted arrives, all the common business, employments, and actions of men shall be performed with as much seriousness and devoutness, as the most pious Christians now feel when engaged in the most solemn duties of religion. The meaning of the prediction evidently is that, while persons are engaged in all the common business and concerns of life, whether at home or abroad, whether in the house or by the way, they shall feel as serious, as devout, as much engaged in the service of God, as did the Jewish high priest, when he wore that sacred inscription upon his forehead. 2. In that day, every house, every shop, and the whole world itself, will be a house of God, a temple consecrated to His praise. A temple is a place consecrated and devoted to God for religious purposes. But in that day every house will be such a place. 3. Every day will then be like a Sabbath.

4. Every common meal will be what the Lord's Supper is now. 5. When this day arrives, there will be no insincere worshippers found in God's house, no hypocritical professors in His Church. Application. Learn—1. Our great and innumerable deficiencies. 2. Whether we have any religion or not. 3. What pleasures, pursuits, and employments are really lawful and pleasing to God. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Holiness to the Lord*:—Zechariah describes, in the last chapters of his book, great troubles coming on the world. All the world gathered round about Jerusalem to destroy it. The Lord Himself coming down from heaven to deliver the sacred city. There was no thought more pressed upon the mind of the Jew than that of holiness. It was the motto of the national life. The same conception of universal sanctity was carried forward from Judaism to Christianity. I. THE HIGHEST STATE OF MAN, THE MOST BLESSED CONDITION OF THE WORLD, IS HERE SET BEFORE US. The first meaning of holiness is separation. Separation looks two ways, to the past and to the future. There is something from which we are separated, and something to which we are separated. When we think of holiness practically, in respect to our present life, we are apt to regard it as representing an unattainable height. Holiness is absolute purity. Sanctification is ever represented in Scripture as though it were equivalent with a positive perfection already attained in this life. Holiness describes, not a realised height of nature or life, but a law or condition of life,—a process, a growth, springing out of faith, going on with us to our eternal future. Holiness is consecration. II. THIS DIVINE IDEA OF HOLINESS IS UNIVERSALLY APPLICABLE. There is nothing which cannot be consecrated. The first thing in true consecration is the act of the inner self. We have none of us altogether conquered our old selfishness: we battle with it still. But holiness is the renunciation of all for Christ. And we have all an outside life to bring under this law of entire surrender. Holiness is not the condition of human nature, left to itself, it is the gift of God. There is a spurious holiness into which we are invited. Outside sanctities will never quicken the soul into new life. (*R. A. Redford, LL.B., M.A.*) *The holiness of the gospel church*:—These words describe the purity and holiness of the gospel church in such terms and notions as are proper to the Old Testament dispensation. Notice the inscription, or impress,—“Holiness to the Lord.” The things inscribed are particularly enumerated, the horse-bells; the bowls, the pots. What was used in the kitchens of the temple; and the utensils of every ordinary house and family. Notice the time. “In that day.” The whole state of things under the Gospel, which is as it were but one day. But where is this universal holiness to be found? Prophecies of things belonging to our obedience are to be often understood of our duty, rather than of the event. As to the event, it is to be understood comparatively, not absolutely. And the Gospel state hath its ebbs and flows in several ages. Doctrine—God in and by the Gospel will effect an eminent and notable sanctification both of things and persons. I. THAT DEGREE OF HOLINESS WHICH IS HERE PROPHESED OF. 1. All such things as were before employed against God should be then employed and converted to His service, for the horse-bells shall be inscribed. 2. Upon all the utensils of the temple there shall be “Holiness to the Lord,” whether pots or bowls. 3. The expressions imply a proficiency and growth in holiness; for the pots of the kitchen of the temple shall become as the bowls of the altar for purity and holiness. 4. As it is a progressive holiness, so it is also a diffusive holiness, which spreadeth itself through all actions, civil and sacred; in things which belong to peace and war. II. OF HOLINESS IN THE GENERAL. Consider it—1. Relatively. Four things are in it. An inclination towards God. From this tendency towards God ariseth a dedication of ourselves, and all that we have to the Lord's use and service. From this dedication there results a relation of the persons so dedicated to God, so that from that time forth they are not their own, but the Lord's. There is another thing, and that is the actual using of ourselves for God. We are vessels set apart for the master's use. 2. Positive holiness may be considered either with respect to our persons or actions. Our persons, when we are renewed by the Spirit, or there is an inward principle of sanctification wrought in our hearts. As a person is holy by his principle, so an action is holy by the rule, when it agreeth with it as to manner and matter and end. III. REASONS WHY THIS EMINENT HOLINESS, BOTH OF PERSONS AND ACTIONS, SHOULD TAKE PLACE IN THE GOSPEL, ABOVE THE TIMES OF THE LAW. 1. Because of our principle, the new nature wrought in us by the Spirit of God, which is suited to the whole will of God. 2. Because of the exactness of our rule, which

teacheth us how to walk in our several businesses and employments. 3. Because of our pattern and example, Jesus Christ, who was exact in all His actions. 4. Because of our obligations to Christ; partly because of His dominion as the Lord and Redeemer by right of purchase. In all conditions and states of life He hath a right in us, therefore in every state of life we should glorify Him. Partly from our gratitude to Christ as Saviour as well as Lord. Use—To persuade us to this universal obedience. None enter upon God's service but with a consecration. Sundry directions. (1) Undertake nothing but what will bear this inscription upon it. (2) Be sure to exercise your general calling, as a Christian, in your particular. Your particular calling is that way of life to which God hath designed you by your abilities and education. (3) Turn all second-table duties into first-table duties. (4) Go about your earthly business with a heavenly mind. (5) Content not yourselves with the natural use of the creature, as brute beasts do, but see God in all. (6) In all your ways acknowledge God, depending upon Him for direction and success, and consulting with Him, and approving thy heart and life unto Him. (7) God should be worshipped by every faithful person in His own house in as God-like a manner as He was worshipped by the Jews in the temple. A Christian must be alike everywhere, at home and abroad. (T. Manton.) *The bright future of the world, the reign of holiness*:—Holiness will be the salient feature in the future of the world. The holiness will be universal.

I. IT WILL EMBRACE THE AFFAIRS OF COMMON LIFE. "Upon the bells of the horses." It was common amongst ancient nations to have bells on horses for use or ornament, or perhaps for both. It is said that in Alexander's funeral procession the horses had gold bells attached to their cheek straps. II. IT WILL EMBRACE ALL DOMESTIC CONCERNS. "Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts." The idea is that holiness will extend even to the minutest concerns of domestic life, the members of families will be religious. The very pots in which the priests cooked their food should be as sacred as the bowls that caught the victim's blood. Observe—(1) That the distinction between the sacred and secular is to be abolished, but—(2) not by separation from the world, nor by making all things secular, but by making all things holy, by carrying into all occupations the spirit and delight of God's presence. Holiness to the Lord is not to be obliterated from the High Priest's mitre so that he might feel as little solemnised when putting on his mitre and entering the Holiest of all, as if he were going into his stable to put the collar on his horse; when he puts the collar on his horse and goes to his day-work or recreation, he is to be as truly and lovingly at one with God as when with incense and priestly garments he enters the Holy of Holies."—Dr. Dods. III. It will embrace all RELIGIOUS CHARACTERS. "In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." "By Canaanite," says Dr. Herjerson, "is meant merchant. The Phœnicians who inhabited the northern part of Canaan were the most celebrated merchants of antiquity. The word may fairly be regarded as standing for mercenary men, men animated by the mercenary spirit." Such men are ever to be found in connection with religion. The old prophets bemoaned this spirit. It was found in the earlier ages of the Christian Church. Men who considered "gain as godliness," the Canaanite or the merchant do not necessarily belong to mercantile life but to other avocations as well and even to the priestly life. Perhaps the mercenary spirit is as rife in priests and ministers now as ever. But in the coming age there will be no more the Canaanite—the mercenary man—in the house of the Lord, all will be holy. (Homilist.) *Holiness has to do with every part of our life*:—Religion is one of the colours of life which mingles most intimately with all the other colours of the palette. It is that which lends them their appearance of depth, and the best of their brilliance. If by a subtle process it is taken away, all become tarnished and discoloured. (W. Mallock.) *Holiness applies to common things*:—I pray my friends not to be so spiritual that they cannot do a good day's work, or give full measure, or sell honest wares. To my disgust, I have known persons professing to have reached perfect purity who have done very dirty things. I have been suspicious of superfine spirituality since I knew one who took no interest in the affairs of this world, and yet speculated till he lost thousands of other people's money. Do not get to be so heavenly-minded that you cannot put up with the little vexations of the family; for we have heard of people of whom it was said that the sooner they went to heaven the better, for they were too disagreeable to live with below. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Holiness in the common things of life*:—There

is a legend of an artist who sought for a piece of sandal-wood out of which to carve a Madonna. At last he was about to give up in despair, leaving the vision of his life unrealised, when in a dream he was bidden to shape the figure from a block of oakwood, which was destined for the fire. Obeying the command, he produced from the log of common firewood a masterpiece. In like manner many people wait for great and brilliant opportunities for doing the good things, the beautiful things, of which they dream, while, through all the plain, common days, the very opportunities they require for such deeds lie close to them, in the simplest and most familiar passing events, and in the homeliest circumstances. They wait to find sandal-wood out of which to carve Madonnas, while far more lovely Madonnas than they dream of are hidden in the common logs of oak they burn in their open fireplace, or spurn with their feet in the woodyard. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*)

Holiness unto the Lord :—Holiness stands for three things—first, and in its deepest conception, separation from sin or common use, as the one day in the week, the one mountain of Zion amid the hills, and the child Samuel in his mother's home, dedicated to the service of God. Secondly, holiness stands for consecration or devotion to God; that which is not used for sin is set apart for His holy service; that which is not used for ordinary purposes is dedicated, like the communion plate, to one most holy and sacred purpose. Just as you would not use the chalice or paten of the communion for any common meal, however urgently you were pressed to it, so the holy thing is set apart for God. Thirdly, holiness implies a growing capacity for the likeness of God. The nature which is yielded to God receives more of God, and, by receiving God, becomes changed into the likeness of God. So Holiness unto the Lord was engraven as a sacred motto upon the golden plate, on Aaron's forehead, and every one that saw the high priest so arrayed felt that there was a rightness, a holy fitness, that a man who was set apart for the service of God's house should wear such a tablet. Probably, if you were told that you should daily wear a similar badge, you would exclaim, "No, not so. I am quite willing to be a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I am looking one day to stand before Him, rid of all imperfections and impurity, in the Temple of God, but I dare not assume that title now. I am not holy. I know it myself, and those that know me best would confess it too. That inscription and that golden plate are not for me." Then you are missing the point of Zechariah's conception of this dispensation. Anticipating the time in which we live, he said, "The Holy Spirit will be so brought within the reach of ordinary people that the sacred inscription which had been reserved for the high priest will be inscribed upon the very bells of their horses' gear, while the utensils and vessels which are devoted to common use will become, as it were, dignified and sanctified, as much so as altar vessels; while those which the priests employ for common purposes will be as bowls in which the blood of the victim is received, and into which the priest dips his hand to sprinkle the blood on the Day of Atonement." Three words will indicate our line of thought, namely,—Abolition, Inclusion, Elevation. I. ABOLITION. There is an abolition in our present dispensation of the old distinction between sacred and secular. Many people live in two houses—of their sacred and of their secular duty; and though they pass from one to the other yet there is a distinct demarcation between what they are at sacred hours and at other times. People seem to suppose that religion can be put on and off as a dress; that it is separate from their real life; that it resembles undigested food, which is taken into the body but does not become part of their nature, and is therefore a burden and inconvenience. Now, this cannot be right. If you consider the genius of our religion the idea of such a partition cannot be admitted for a moment. What is the Christian religion? A creed? A performance? A donning of a certain outward behaviour or habit? It is a life; and surely life must express itself by speech and act, and in all the various outgoings of doing and suffering. The life of a flower must always exhale sweet fragrance; the life of a bird must always pour itself forth in carol and song; the life of a fish must always show itself, whether it flashes up from the surface of the water or buries itself in the depth. So the life of God always expresses itself; it is not located in certain acts, but it pervades a man as the spirit of selfishness might do. A student's knowledge will affect his life at every turn. An artist cannot find enjoyment at one time in that which jars on his well-balanced tastes at another. So when we receive the new life of God it must pour out through the channels of our whole being; or, if ever we are inconsistent with it, it will rebuke and call us back, through confession and prayer, to the old standard. You cannot be religious

there and irreligious here ; if you have life it will show itself as much on Monday as Sunday. Religion is also a recognition of Christ's kingship, the presenting Him with the keys of one's whole being. But if you are only going to serve Christ on certain occasions, and on Sundays, there are six-sevenths of your time taken out from His holy government. How can you call yourself a slave of Jesus Christ if you are only serving Him in certain specified duties and acts, whilst the residue of your life is spent according to your whim ? Is not that the way in which the wandering tribes of Siberia acknowledge the Tsar of Russia, whilst they assert a good deal of autonomy of their own ? Is not that detrimental to all consistency, all true devotion and consecration ? Does the planet ever leave the sphere of the sun's influence ? Religion is a testimony to the world. The world does not come to our places of worship or see us at our best ; the world does not intrude upon our domestic privacy, and overhear our prayers. The world can only judge us when we cross its track, when we are engaged in the same duties as it is familiar with, or undergoing privations and discipline it can appreciate. II. INCLUSION. The Jews were forbidden to buy or own horses. Horses were identified with war, with proud display and show. But here we note that instead of the horses being kept outside the national life, they are permitted, and, instead of their being under a ban, Holiness unto the Lord is written upon their bells—Calvin says upon their blinkers. In the old times men said that religion consisted in their attitude towards God, and that therefore everything which could not be directly used for His service must be viewed with suspicion. Hence the relationships of family life were carefully abjured by monk and nun ; and through the Middle Ages especially, when the ascetic idea dominated men, we have hardly any reference to natural beauty. The Christian idea is infinitely preferable. You may have your horses, but they must be consecrated. You may have the horse-bells to make sweet music, but see to it that they are inscribed with Holiness unto the Lord. You may have the vessels and implements of daily service, but mind that every one of them is handled as the bowls of the altar. Of course, if you feel that certain things, which are innocent in themselves, are getting too great a hold upon you, or are influencing other people wrongly, then you are bound to put them away. Whatever you may do rightly you may do for Him, and whatever you may do for Him you are right in doing. III. ELEVATION. Zechariah says that there is to be no distinction between sacred and secular, but he does not say we are to level down the sacred to the secular. He does not say that the holy bowls in which the victim's blood was caught are to be levelled down to that of the other vessels of the Temple ; but that the ordinary vessels are to be levelled up to these. He does not say that the priest is to take off his plate, and have no more reverence for the worship of God than he felt when he went to saddle his horse for an afternoon's excursion, but that he is to saddle his horses for his pleasure ride with the same reverence and devotion to God as when he entered the temple at the call of sacred duty. The whole tendency of the present day is to make everything equally secular, but we must take care to make everything equally sacred. You must have your church, that your workshop may become imbued with the spirit of your church ; you must have your Bible reading, that all books may be read under the light that shines from your Bible ; you must have the Lord's Supper, that you may eat and drink always to the glory of God. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI.

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

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

¹ Stanley, *The Jewish Church*.

² Calvin is disposed to identify Malachi with Ezra.

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

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

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

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

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

MALACHI.

CHAPTER I.

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

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

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

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

The sovereignty of God in relation to man's secular condition of life:—1. Some men on this earth seem to be more favoured by providence than others, yet they are often unconscious of it. This is true of individuals, and of nations. 2. This difference in the privileges of men is to be ascribed to the sovereignty of God. That sovereignty does not imply either partiality on His part, or irresponsibility on man's part. 3. Those whom the sovereignty of God does not favour are left in a secularly unenviable condition. They will—(1) Have their possessions destroyed. (2) Their efforts frustrated. (3) Their enemies prospering. (*Homilist.*)

God's love to His Church:—The first fault reproved in this people is their ingratitude, and not observing or esteeming of God's love toward them, which therefore He demonstrates, from His choosing of Jacob their father, and preferring him to Esau the elder brother ; not only in the matter of election to eternal life, but in that God had chosen Jacob to be the root out of whom the blessed seed should come, and the Church propagated in his posterity ; and accordingly (as an eternal evidence of this rejection of Esau and his posterity) the Lord had given to him but a hilly, barren country, and had now cast them out of it, and laid it desolate, as a habitation for wild beasts ; whereas the seed of Jacob had gotten a fruitful land, and were now restored to it again after their captivity. Doctrine—1. The chief and principal study of the visible Church, and the godly in it, ought to be the love of God manifested toward them, as being that which God will not allow to be suspected, and which ought to oblige them to Him ; that which will be the sad ground of a process when it is forgotten and undervalued ; and that which, being looked on when God reproves, will encourage and strengthen to take with it, and make use of it. Therefore doth He begin this doctrine, and the sad challenges with this, "I have loved you, saith the Lord," that is, all of you in general have tasted of respects suitable, and beseming My Bride and the visible Church ; and particularly the elect among you have tasted of My special love. 2. God's love to His Church is often met with great ingratitude, in not being seen and acknowledged as becomes, especially under cross dispensations, in undervaluing the effects of it, when they fit not our mould, and in deeds denying it, while thoughts of it do not beget love to Him again ; for "yet ye say, wherein hast Thou loved us ?" 3. Election unto eternal life is a sufficient testimony of God's love, to be acknowledged and commended, although all things

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“ Let the echo fly
The spacious earth around.”

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

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

II. THE PREDICTION THAT A PURE OFFERING SHOULD BE EVERYWHERE PRESENTED TO JEHOVAH. We have considered the offering of incense to imply the benign effect of our Lord’s pacification, in rendering the worship and service of mankind acceptable to Jehovah, and surely the “pure offering” will express the sanctification of the Church, and of each individual believer, and the consequent purity of those offerings which are brought near to Jehovah by His spiritual household. In this pure “offering” see—1. The extraordinary extension and purity of the Church. Contemplate the entire extermination of the lewd and sanguinary rites of paganism, and the abolition of all bloody sacrifices, through the oblation of one great victim, who by actually putting away sin has annulled all symbolical immolations. Henceforth we are to render only unbloody offerings—the sacrifice of thanksgivings. We are warranted to contemplate the Catholic Church as one magnificent offering to Immanuel. The Church, indeed, teems with nominal Christians, self-deceivers, and hypocritical pretenders. But from this it shall hereafter, even in its visible pale, be wholly or extensively purged. Another thing constituting the adult Church “a pure offering” will be this—that its worship will be no longer debased with fiction and mummery. The doctrines of transubstantiation, indulgences, masses, penances, purgatory, and supererogation will fall to the ground, and with them will expire the adoration of images, saints, and angels. And the universal Church will be free from sectarian distinctions. We may also anticipate a considerable abridgment of ecclesiastical ordinances. 2. The religious worship of that brilliant age will have a peculiar purity, owing to the improved character of the individual Christians. They will have attained a much higher illumination. The conscience will then be thoroughly pure and undefiled. There will be none of that double-mindedness and self-delusion with which the purest minds of this silver age are more or less alloyed. We are even led to expect a state of perfect exemption from the dross of earthliness. The kingdom of Christ will be developed in their bosoms in all its purity and fulness; and to them it will be not less easy than delightful to have “their conversation in heaven.” The promise of the text is most encouraging. What manner of persons, then, ought we to be? If the blessed Trinity is incessantly employed in this work of regeneration, shall we not help it forward as humble but zealous instruments, with the best faculties that we have? (*J. N. Pearson, M.A.*)

A worshipping world. :—I. THE GLORIOUS PREDICTION OF A WORSHIPPING WORLD. We accept any promise according to the known worth or truthfulness or power of him who gives it. Here is the very highest authority, even that of God Himself. The image is very significant; it is taken from the wide circuit and prevalence of solar light which visits every portion of the globe. There can be no vividly more glowing nor general promise of the widespread power of the Gospel than this. II. THIS DIVINE TIME OF GENERAL HAPPINESS INCLUDES MILLENNIAL GLORY FOR THE WORLD. The second image employed indicates the glorious season of true religion possessing the hearts of men in all its Divine purity and hallowed devotions. The contrast is lovely between the two figures used. Light, the most beautiful element in nature; perfume, the sweetest of elements; the incense of most precious odours represents the purity of soul-worship presented to God, whether in public devotions or from private hearts. We need not enter on the question, whether this Divine time shall be before or after the second advent in glory. The sweet incense and pure offering which Jehovah now demands and loves are spiritual devotions, true prayers, praise, obedience, love, and charity. These are to be found “in every place.” The coming glory of Christ in the conversion of the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

stand this remonstrance aright, we must remember what were the laws respecting the offerings. The *prime* of each offering was to be presented to God. But these profane priests thought that anything would serve for a sacrifice, though never so coarse and mean. They picked out the worst they had, that which was neither fit for the market nor for their own tables, and offered that at God's altar. With every sacrifice the law commanded them to bring a meat-offering of "fine flour, mingled with bread": but they brought "polluted bread," of coarse and refuse material. The principle illustrated is—that the service of God admits of nothing short of the most perfect offering that can be presented; and everything below this affixes upon the offerers the character of "deceivers," and the condemnation of being "cursed." I. THE SERVICE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

1. It is profane service whenever it is not intelligent, whenever it is not founded on a right understanding of the object of worship. You, who have watched the movements or the torpidity of your minds at the time of supposed prayer, will bear me witness how often you have failed to recognise the simple being of the God before whom you bow down. 2. No offering of worship is acceptable which is not also solemn and reverential. This it could not fail to be if we were possessed by a just sense of the transcendent greatness of Him to whom prayer is presented. His majesty is infinite and ineffable, and therefore we stand at an immeasurable distance from Him. And yet to such a Being we address ourselves in prayer. Do any of us detect in ourselves the vacant gaze, the roving thought? 3. Acceptable worship must be spiritual. Why so? "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." They must so worship Him, because it is not possible that He should receive any other. Do you assert that "God is a Spirit," then you contract Him into the narrow dimensions of your own being if you give Him no more than the devotions of the body, if you give Him not the ardent services of your soul. 4. If our worship be genuine, it will be marked by intentness of mind. Languor and laxness of the spirit are sure tokens that it is not a glad offering, but an irksome task. In all these cases what is the sin which we charge home but that very sin for which the prophet utters his rebuke? They have a better offering which they might offer. They are capable of a worship more worthy of God. Instead, they bring the lame, and the sick, and the torn, they "sacrifice unto the Lord a corrupt thing."

II. THE HABITUAL SERVICE OF THE LIFE. Here too the service of God admits of nothing short of the most perfect offering that can be presented. Our baptismal covenant, made for us in our unconscious infancy, when our own reason was not privy to the engagement, is sealed and confirmed in maturer age; and then it is that we deliberately and personally "vow" to give the choice thing in our flock. But where is he to be found that fully recognises and performs the baptismal oath? The baptised man, the communicant, and the parent for his child, and he who is in near danger, has *vowed*, deliberately, unto God, the male that is in his flock; but he leaves off with sacrificing unto the Lord "a corrupt thing." (*R. Eden, M.A.*) I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts.—*Jehovah a king*:—What God is Himself, what constitutes His essence no language can describe.

What God is to His creatures, and what relations He sustains with respect to them, may without difficulty be stated in language sufficiently intelligible. Sometimes God styles Himself a father, sometimes a master, and sometimes a king. I. JEHOVAH IS A KING. A king is the political head or supreme ruler of a kingdom. There are kings by right, and kings in fact. The king by right has claim to the throne, though he may not possess it. The king in fact actually possesses the throne, though he may have no right to it. He alone who has both the right and the possession can properly be called a king. And such a king is Jehovah. His kingdom is the whole created universe, and of this kingdom He is in actual and full possession. And He is the rightful sovereign of the universe. All men were born into the dominions of Jehovah. Men cannot cease to be His subjects without ceasing to exist. He possesses all the insignia of royalty. He has a throne, a crown, royal robes, &c. II. JEHOVAH IS A GREAT KING. Great is the Lord, and His greatness is unsearchable. See the greatness, duration, and stability of His empire. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

1. If God is a king, He is under obligations to make laws for His subjects. When He assumes any office He binds Himself to perform all the duties of that office. The first and most indispensable duty of an absolute sovereign is to make laws for his subjects. It is as much his duty to make laws, as it is their duty to obey them when made. 2. He is under obligations to make

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

CHAPTER II.

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

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

duration to which it is destined, the curse of God on those who wantonly brave His love and benevolence, will be seen to be a necessary result of His goodness, as well as a declaration of the righteousness of His character. It is the same Word of heaven which shows us—now the Cross of Christ, and now the flaming sword of justice. God does not lift up His voice to say, “I will curse your blessings,” till men have first abused those blessings, and provoked Him to interpose His vengeance. A reason is given for the curse—disobedience. A warning of its approach is likewise given; and every successive threatening is a new mercy, for its tendency is to arrest the sinner ere it be too late, and is an interposition which justice did not require. A captious mind may refuse to call those things blessings which in the result shall only augment the wretchedness and accumulate the perdition of the sinner. But objects which are in themselves capable of benefiting the person on whom they descend, though an evil heart may, by wilful misapplication, turn them to the most serious and fatal injury, are, nevertheless, blessings. God can curse the blessings He bestows in a variety of ways. He can remove them; He can render them ineffectual and powerless; He can make them turn to our hurt. The curse consists in continuing unaltered the blessings He bestows, and in leaving the individual who receives them to himself. In point of fact, the sinner inflicts the curse upon himself. The only part which God takes in the visitation is that He suffers it to be so.

1. Among the blessings which God confers upon sinful men, the first in nature, and among the foremost in importance is time. The days and years which God may add to man’s forfeited life are of inestimable price. They are the seed-time for eternity. If it be not used for its intended purpose, God will turn it into an awful curse. And does it not prove so, when, as time moves on, the heart becomes harder, the conscience less impressive, love of the world more vehemently impetuous, and when moments accumulate not so fast as sins, which shall go to fan the flames of the unquenchable fire?

2. Another of the blessings from the hand of God is health. This gives a zest to every other gift of heaven, and the want of it takes away the charm of every other enjoyment. It is an unspeakable aid in the pursuit of every good work incumbent upon us. Beware then lest this blessing be presumed upon and misused, and God may give up the disobedient to their own curse. Talents and education are blessings from the hand of God; they place the individuals who possess them higher in the scale of being. But if they are perverted from their lawful ends,—if they should be found enlisted on the side of infidelity or worldliness,—the blessing will become a curse.

3. I might proceed to speak of other blessings, of which the misimprovement will fatally transmute into the curse. Riches, honour, friends, rank, influences, and the various interferences which deliver men from evil, or avert its approach, are all the good gifts of God. They are capable of a use of the most important nature both to ourselves and others. The perversion of them will be as ruinous in aggravating the misery of the future. Refer especially to this richest of blessings, the glorious Gospel. Even this crowning gift may, by the wilful unbelief and worldliness of the heart, become hurtful as it might have been beneficial. Can there be a more dreadful curse than when the very means employed for the soul’s conversion, place it further and still further from that necessary issue? (*T. Kennion, M.A.*)

Cursed blessings :—There is no accommodation in Divine righteousness. We never read that to-day we may intermit a little, the law shall no longer be so rigorous and ruthless, the law shall be oiled down into smoothness so that it shall be easy, and the spirit of disobedience shall be less exasperated: never. The law never changes. The moral tone of the Bible is never lowered in accommodation to human weakness or human selfishness. Nor is judgment lessened that a man may feel the more comfortable with himself. There is wondrous originality in the way of putting the Divine judgment before the consideration of men. Probably the judgment was never more vividly and powerfully depicted than in this instance:—“I will curse your blessings”: what to you is a blessing shall cease to be such and shall become a curse: I will make your health the worst disease you ever had; I will make you poor through your very wealth; I will send upon the richest results of your labour such a darkness that you will flee away from the very image of your own success. How terrible is God! but always how terrible in righteousness. Why does this punishment fall upon the priestly race or house? Simply because the priest has been unfaithful, self-considering, base in heart, forgetful of his duty to God and his service to man. The Lord does not make priests for nothing: whatever

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(*Homilist.*) *A minister's inconsistency.*—A minister of Christ had been preaching in a country village very earnestly and fervently. In his congregation was a young man who had been deeply impressed with a sense of sin under the sermon. When the service was over, he sought the minister as he went out, in the hope of walking home with him. They walked together till they came to a friend's house. On the way the minister talked about everything except the subject about which he had been preaching, though he had preached very earnestly, even with tears in his eyes. The young man thought within himself, "O! I wish I could unburden my heart and speak to him; but I cannot. He does not say anything *now* about what he spoke so fervently in the pulpit." When they were at supper that evening, the conversation was very far from what it should have been; and the minister indulged in all kinds of jokes and light sayings. The young man had gone into the house with eyes filled with tears, feeling as a sinner should feel; but as soon as he got outside he stamped his foot on the ground and cried out: "It is a lie from beginning to end! That man has preached like an angel, and now he has talked like a devil!" Some years after, the young man was taken suddenly ill and sent for that same minister to visit him. The minister did not remember him. "Do you remember preaching at the village of —?" said the young man. "I do." "Your sermon was very deeply laid on my heart." "Thank God for that," said the minister. "Do not be so quick about thanking God," said the young man. "Do you know what you talked of that evening, afterwards, when I went to supper with you? Sir, I shall be damned; and I shall charge *you*, before God's throne, with being the cause of my damnation. Oh, that night I *did* feel my sin, but you were the means of scattering all my impressions and driving me into a deeper darkness than I had ever been in before!" Minister of Christ! this is a true narrative. It is a common sin. In how many thousands of cases the testimony of the pulpit has been undone by the after conversation by the way, or at the dinner or supper table, only "the day" will declare! O! the account that we ministers will have to render for the light, frivolous, frothy conversation on such occasions, by which immortal souls have been sent further from God or altogether lost! What eyes have been upon us, secretly taking note of all and receiving from us a deadly influence! What opportunities for God presented and lost by our unwatchfulness and frivolity! Minister of Christ, aim to live out of the pulpit what you have preached in it. If you preach Christ, live Christ. What men hear in the pulpit let them see at the dinner table and the visit. (*F. Whitfield.*) *Partial in the law.*—*An evil partiality.*—The possession of the law was the strength and glory of the Jewish priesthood. They had in it a Divine standard of human action, and it was their duty to maintain its authority, and enforce its requirements. Being selfish and corrupt they made their exalted position the means of gratifying their avarice; the vices of the rich were unproved, the faults of the poor were severely dealt with. They "knew faces" (Heb.). They were misrepresenting the character of God, bringing the law of God into contempt, and ruining the nation. I. THERE MAY BE PARTIALITY IN THE LAW ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO ADMINISTER IT TO THE PEOPLE. All righteous law is Divine. The principles of the decalogue underlie all just legislation. Administrators of righteous laws should feel that they are revealing and enforcing Divine, universal, and eternal realities. There should be no respect of persons. Partiality leads to—1. Loss of confidence in constituted authorities. 2. Rebellion and anarchy. 3. The increase of crime. Every Christian minister has to bring God's law into contact with public vices and personal sins. This must be done fearlessly, faithfully, firmly, and impartially. He must not adapt it to men's humours. He must not modify it to hinder its application to offenders of any

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

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

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

Vers. 10-12. **Have we not all one Father?**—*One Father*.—I. GOD IS NOT ONLY THE CREATOR, BUT THE COMMON FATHER OF MANKIND. This relationship implies two things: a resemblance in nature; and the existence of parental sympathy; and also the obligation of filial devotion. II. THIS RELATIONSHIP IS AN ARGUMENT why man should do no wrong either against his fellow-creature or his God. The wrong with which the Israelites were charged was—1. A wrong committed against mankind; and—2. Against God Himself. III. THE PERPETRATION OF WRONG EXPOSES THE DOER TO THE MOST LAMENTABLE RESULTS. This is only a shadowy picture of the evils that ever flow from wrong. It is sin that kindles and feeds the flames of retribution. Then haste the time when men shall realise the fact that they are all children of one Father, so that all wrongs against one another shall cease, and the spirit of universal brotherhood prevail! (*Homilist.*)

God our Father.—I once said to a young person, "Well, Elizabeth, do you love God?" And what do you think her answer was? "Ah, I've been trying, sir; but it's hard, it's hard." That was how she answered. Then I said to her, "I'm afraid you don't know who and what God is. Try and find that out," I continued, "and then I think you'll love Him and have no difficulty in doing so." And it was just as I said it would be. Elizabeth went home, and before she slept that night she made one of the grandest discoveries any one ever made. What do you think it was? Why, she discovered that there was One up in heaven who felt for her all a father's love. She found out by reading her New Testament that God was her Father. (*A. Scott.*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. THE PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING. John the Baptist prepared the way "of the Lord"—1. By his singular birth. 2. By his awakening ministry. 3. By direct testimony. "He saw and bare record that this was the Son of God." II. THE TIME OF HIS COMING. Suddenly, or immediately after the preparation of His

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

relinquishes His fixed and steady gaze upon the soul from which He seeks to remove the earthly dross. The refiner of gold has certain tests by which he discovers the progress of his work. At the beginning of real change, a deep orange colour spreads itself over the molten mass in the cupel. At the next instant, a flickering wave passes rapidly over the surface; and with increasing heat, the fiery mass becomes still, and the colour pale and faint. Now, attention is deepened. Expectation is on tiptoe. In another second the supreme moment may come. As the refiner's eye is steadily fixed upon the burning metal, its surface suddenly becomes as a burnished mirror, and flashes back his pictured face. Thus, also, does Christ watch unweariedly. The process of change is very tardy, very reluctant. The purpose for which this purification is sought demands a closing word. Before the precious metals were put into the cupel, they were full of earthly impurities; were unmalleable, inductile, comparatively useless. Being now purged from all dross, they become the standard and representatives of a nation's wealth. They are fashioned into coins bearing the king's image. They are wrought into vessels fitted for the king's use. Thus it is also with individual members of the Church of Christ. Before our purification, we were but ill-adapted to serve our Divine Lord. The attempt to render this service was marred by our lack of holiness. After our purification, we are made "vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work." There is no duty, however humble, which we are not the better fitted to discharge. There is no service, however noble, which we shall not the more acceptably perform. What love is shown by Christ to His people in all this patient watching and working for the removal of the dross of sin. Be patient, therefore, in your particular trial, of whatever sort it is. (*J. Jackson Goadby.*)

The refiner's fire:—The state of the Jewish community in the days of Malachi was very similar to what it was when our Lord appeared on the earth. A proud and self-righteous pharisaism had supplanted all true spirituality of worship, and attention even to the outward forms of piety had become little better than a name. Manifestly such a state of things could not last, for unless some spiritual revolution took place, religion could not go on much longer breathing an atmosphere of universal degeneracy. Malachi tells the people of a coming Reformer. But what is the character of this reformer to be? Will he be mild, gentle, indulgent; or will he go with just severity to the root of all existing evils, and when he begins, will he make an end of abuse and wrong? The prophet does not hesitate to clothe the coming One with attributes of surpassing glory and awfulness, and to represent Him as wielding prerogatives of the most scathing power. The figure in the text refers to the process of refining gold. As the agency of fire separates the dross from the precious metal, by disintegrating the particles of which the mass is composed; so Christ, not only in His capacity as the final Judge, but more especially in His character as the present embodiment of truth, and as the administrator of the Gospel kingdom, is subjecting the world to a searching fiery test. Malachi deals with the relation of the truth of Christ, and Christ Himself, to four aspects of human affairs. I. THE NATION. The difference between a nation defiled by error and sin, and a nation purged by truth, is just this—the one is cursed and repulsive; the other is blessed and delightful. In every case where nations have attempted to rob God of His prerogative of government, the action of the refiner's fire has revealed the weakness of their corruptible systems. II. THE CHURCH. When Christ refines the Church, He tests her government, her doctrine, and her discipline. As to government; He is not indifferent to the way in which His kingdom is administered. Order must here be reconciled with liberty. Christ is most jealous of His truth. To say that false doctrine does not necessarily bring with it moral corruption, is to say that the Christian's understanding is useless as an element of mind. But is it so? As to discipline, there is no Church that has not spots in her feasts of charity. III. SOCIETY. In the unrefined condition of society one man is preying upon another, every man seeking his own pleasure and indulging his own passions, without the slightest regard to the welfare of the community. But when society is refined, men "speak often one to another." They take an interest in one another. It is not then every man for himself, but every man considering what is best for all the rest. No one who gravely considers the characteristics of our time will deny that society stands much in need of purification. IV. THE SOUL. The unrefined soul is addressed in Mal. iv. 2. But the address to the renewed soul is given in Mal. iv. 2. Our text goes deeper than

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

it free from all dross, and pure metal for the workers; or that mass of iron itself, burning in the flames, and turned, now this way and now that, until every part has been fully subjected to the fierce flame. It is hard for us to suffer, but if we saw things aright, should we not think it even harder for Christ to make us suffer? (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *The Divine refiner*.—In the preceding verse, Christ is a refiner's fire, but in this He is the refiner sitting and watching the metal in the fire. His position suggests—I. THAT HIS PEOPLE NEED REFINING. The dross of sin cleaves to the holiest. Nothing cleaves so closely. Christ sees dross where we do not. We are not always willing that it should be purged away when we do see it. The furnace is necessary. II. THAT HIS PEOPLE ARE BEING REFINED. They find life a fiery ordeal. They often suffer more than sinners. The heat is often very penetrating; sometimes very hard to bear with patience. They do not always recognise the purpose of suffering. The process goes on even when the results are not perceived. A refiner's furnace is the truest simile of life. III. THAT HIS PEOPLE ARE VALUABLE IN HIS EYES. He watches them in the furnace. He waits for their perfection. They are silver, not common earth. Often despised by the world, they are highly esteemed by Him. The refiner only watches precious metals in the fire. "Reprobate silver" may be consumed, but every particle of pure metal is preserved. Christ's people are precious to Him. IV. THAT HIS PEOPLE WILL HAVE THEIR FIERY TRIALS TEMPERED TO THEIR SPIRITUAL REQUIREMENTS. He aims to make them spiritually perfect. He tempers the fire that He may separate "the sin that He hates from the soul that He loves." He seeks not to give carnal enjoyment, but purity. He, sitting to watch, manifests solicitude, patience, expectancy, and care. V. THAT IN THE END HIS PEOPLE WILL BE FULLY PURIFIED. His purpose shall be accomplished in them. We often see the purification going on. The refiner uses the silver he purifies. Perfect purity will bring perfect blessedness. Learn—

1. To trust more perfectly the watchful care of your Refiner under your trials.
2. To estimate your trials by the amount of purifying they accomplish.
3. To co-operate with the refiner in His efforts to purify you. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Christ the refiner.—All the inventions of two thousand years have not relieved the watcher at the furnace door from the same anxieties and cares that rested upon the alchemist of Israel over his rude fireplace. What a beautiful figure the illustration furnishes of the plans and providences of God in Christ Jesus. The world's great crucible is ever before Him; the fire of His judgment ever burning beneath; the confused alloy of humanity seething and bubbling within; the solvent and separator of His truth cast ever and anon into the mass; the absorbent of the great unknown ready to receive the refuse; the purified matter growing brighter and brighter; but through all times and in all methods, the same watchful oversight, the same touch of the practised hand, the same unfailing Godlike patience, directing and ensuring final success. God who sent His only Son into the world, that He might gather out of the world a peculiar people for Himself, did, by the sending of His Son, set in action certain laws and orders that separated the evil from the good, and that refined and purified the good; but God over all, and God watching all, and God guiding all things, with untiring love and patience, kept those laws and principles to their purposes, subjecting generation after generation of men to the test of their action, regulating the nature and extent of those tests, taking the purified mass out of the fire before it should be consumed, and acting always upon the coming of that critical moment, when He could see His own image in the mass under trial; sitting and watching, as holding the great results in His own hands. There is a further side to the illustration. A very beautiful phenomenon known as the fulguration of the metal, attends the removal of the impurities from the silver. During the earlier stages of the process, the film of oxide of lead, which has constantly remained over the melted surface of the mass, is removed as rapidly as can be, and the colour of the metal is dark; but when the silver is almost clear of impurities, the film of litharge upon its surface grows finer and finer, and a succession of beautiful rings, of iridescent tints, form, one after another, until at last the film of oxide suddenly melts away and disappears, and the brilliant surface of the silver flashes forth in all its purity and glory. Under the old methods, the watcher did not disturb the crucible until that last change came,—until he could see his own image on the glowing surface. Then his work was done, and his purpose fulfilled. Think of the Lord Jesus under this figure, and then read history again. There is the mass of humanity in the cupel (shallow crucible) of God's law, and here, in this age, the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Messiah's Kingdom.—These last sentences from Malachi's scroll are the specifications for the Kingdom of Christ. The perfected outline of this character and kingdom, and the preparation needed for the return of the Lord, is the theme of our chapter.

I. THE COMPLETED PICTURE OF THE COMING MESSIAH. Isaiah brings before us the Man of Sorrows. From Isaiah onwards the lineaments seem to change, and the tints to deepen. We become familiar with a martial step and warlike notes.

II. THE CHURCH IS TO BE PURIFIED AND REVIVED. This is a service which Christ will constantly render and require of His Church,—their cleansing. It is, as it were, a permanent employment. He is watching the crucibles and the scales, like the silversmith at his bench. This is the answer to a question of the day, "Is God doing the best He can for this world?" Controversy, the shaking and sifting of small and great, of good and bad, may have its wholesome results when presided over by the magisterial and gracious presence of Christ.

III. SOCIETY IS TO BE JUDGED AND TRANSFORMED. "And I will come near you to judgment." When the Lord comes into His temple He appears also as a swift witness against the iniquities of society. He is a swift witness against evil-doers.

IV. SPECIFICATIONS ARE MADE TO THE CHURCH, SOCIETY, AND THE INDIVIDUAL, IN REGARD TO THEIR SHORTCOMINGS. Men do not wish to be definite in their faith, or confine themselves to commended and well-tested helps to a Divine life. But even an imperfect comprehension of a great character yields more than an accurate inventory of an insignificant person or thing. Much is said about religion not meeting the needs of men, but the truth is overlooked that men do not comply with the conditions of Divine help. (*William K. Campbell.*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Look at Simon Peter, what a strangely human character his is. At first a man carried away by his enthusiasms. What a strange mixture there is in his character. Who shall separate that strength from that weakness? Well, it is done. You pass on, and you look at St. Peter in his own epistles, and there you see quiet, firm strength without any bluster. He has acquired spiritual stability. How? In the discipline of life. And so it is always. God casts us into the furnace of affliction in order that He may deal with us just as that one is dealt with—separates in us that which is displeasing to Himself from that which is true to our true human nature, and He purifies us. We are not surprised, therefore, when people say to us we are simply actors in our religious life. It is not true. If it were true that all life was unified, that man was either wholly of the world or wholly of God, then the criticism would be true. But when a new higher nature is awakened within me, and becomes within me a real yearning, yet the lower nature co-exists with it. How different a person I am in one house to what I am in another. What a different person I am when I am kneeling before God—it may be in His sanctuary—lifted up to the worship of the Eucharist, and what I am when I find myself, well, in my own home, it may be an hour afterwards. And yet I am not a hypocrite in either case. The only thing is that there is brought clearly out before my eyes the co-existence in my character of contradictory forces. There is dross and there is gold. What do I want? To be my true, better self, which, God knows, I long to be, and which I am not sustainedly. What do I want? Why, plainly, the setting free of my higher self from all the power of this lower self. I want to have the dross purged out of my character, I want to be purified within. And so this truth comes before us: God has a loving purpose in consigning me to this great world, to the conditions of life in which we live. It is the essential condition, as far as we see, for the working out of us what is bad and what is mean, and for the development within us of what is grand and beautiful and true. Only, we must remember this, if this is the purpose of suffering, it is not always an attained purpose. Certain characters very often deteriorate under the discipline of suffering. But there is just one essential condition for the metal which is cast into the furnace: if it is to be separated from the dross a current of air must be always breathing over the living flame; if not, the effect would be this, that instead of fire separating the metal from the ore it would cause them to recombine, and under conditions of greater fixity, so that it would be more difficult than it was before to purify it. Is not this a wonderful parable? It is only when suffering is borne in God, only when suffering is borne through the action within us of the Holy Spirit, the true wind of God, that it is a purifying force within us. And so the first essential condition of our being purified by suffering is this, that we give ourselves to God up to the measure in which it is possible for us, in the submission to His will, to endure suffering. Here, as ever, we are face to face with that mystery of will. The issue in your character and mine of suffering conditions under which we live our lives depends entirely on the posture of the will. If we refuse to give up our wills to God our characters will deteriorate and not be purified or beautified. And the second thing is this, is it not? Giving ourselves thus up to God, if we are called on to live this life of suffering it ought to be a life in which we have keen realisation of the conditions under which we suffer in the thought of the Holy Spirit. Devotion to the Holy Ghost is of great importance in every aspect of our Christian life, but it is of emphatic importance in connection with our life of endurance of God's discipline. If we try to meet it with fixity of resolution, with solidarity of purpose, we shall fail, but if we throw ourselves upon God to enable us by His Spirit to endure the suffering which He lays upon us, in simple abandonment to the aid of the Holy Ghost, we shall be able patiently to endure. Lastly, remember this. All the time the process of the refining of the silver is going on the Refiner is watching. So it is here. We suffer under His watching eye; we suffer for the realisation of the dear Lord's loving purpose. He knows what we suffer. He has a heart that can understand. He does give me more than pity. He can give me sympathy, He bears with me so patiently, He comforts me so tenderly; in my rebellions He can forgive me so continuously. Yes, Lord, yes; I can bear these fiery burdens. Within the very flames I will look up and see Thy loving eye fixed on me, so that Thou knowest where I am, so that Thou feelest for me, so that Thou givest me effectual help. (*G. Body.*) **An offering in righteousness.—An acceptable offering:—**This offering was presented to God after the purification of His people had taken place. **An offering in righteousness. I. MUST HAVE NOTHING UNRIGHTEOUS**

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

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

"There is a history in all men's lives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

been spared. They had often merited destruction, but in His unchanging mercy He had remembered His covenant with their fathers, and His purpose to bless the whole race through them, and so they were not consumed. This is true of the Church now. Its sure resting-place is the immutability of God. It will abide, however evils may abound, scepticism darken, or superstition deprave. Consider, then—1. That the continued existence of the Church does not arise from its faithfulness, but from God's unchanging mercy and purpose. 2. That as the continued existence of the Church arises from God's immutability, there should be in the minds of the members deep humility, fervent adoration, and ardent gratitude. 3. That as the permanence of the Church rests upon the immutability of God, there should be, in the members, full confidence in its stability and ultimate triumph. 4. That this should lead any who have wandered from the Church to return to its privileges again. 5. That it should make the enemies of the Church consider the futility of their attacks upon it, and repent of their folly. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *Christ unchangeable*.—Christ is like the rock in mid-ocean, that never changes, and braves every storm; feeling is like the restless, shifting water that rolls round it. Christ is like the grand old church tower standing foursquare to every wind, grey with centuries, a shelter and a home to all who will come; feeling is like the bells in the tower, which only ring on rare occasions, and easily change their tune; most demonstrative on Sunday, and often still all the week when duty much needs their merry music. Christ is like the sun, whose light and heat are constant; feeling is like the fleecy cloud, now beautiful as an angel's wing, now a cold grey sky. Christ is the tree of life, with root deep and the soil firmly gripped, lifting into the sky leaf and blossom and branch; feeling is a mere blossom, a child of the gay summer time, unfit for storm or winter service. Christ is the guide who never leaves the traveller; feeling is the torch sometimes burning brightly, but very liable to be blown out. He who trusts mere feeling will trust a light most likely to have gone out when most he needs guidance and comfort, while it will often burn brightly when it is least needed. *The saints' final perseverance secured by the immutability of God*.—This glorious doctrine stands—1. On the perfections of Jehovah. 2. Upon the covenant work of the Lord Jesus. 3. Upon the faithfulness of the faithful and eternal Spirit. Of the perfections of God, His immutability is here placed before us. This is declared to be the security of the sons of Jacob. I. "THE SONS OF JACOB," who are they? Some consider the passage as having regard to the literal Jacob, the literal restoration and conversion of the Jews. These "sons of Jacob" are God's own sons. These are they who, clad in the garment of their elder brother, do inherit all blessings. These are they that "wrestle," like their father Jacob; they "wrestle" in prayer with God. And they cannot live without Him. More than that, these are the "Israel," and they "prevail." But these "sons of Jacob" have all the elements of destruction in them. They have the indwelling corruption of their nature. It goes with them where they go—stays with them where they stay. It defiles all that they touch, and all that they think and all that they do. Besides the fountain of evil, there is the actual evil—what a man does. Both in sin as a principle and in sin as an act there is in a "son of Jacob" the very element of his own destruction. II. **THOUGH THIS IS SO, THEY ARE NOT CONSUMED.** Though they are often placed in a hot fire; sometimes so hot that faith seems almost to be gone. They are tried; their grace is tried, their faith is tried, hope tried, love tried, every "fruit of the Spirit tried," and yet they are not consumed. III. **WHEREFORE ARE THEY NOT CONSUMED?** "I am the Lord; I change not." The description can only be true of God Himself. He is unchangeable in His being, in His perfections, in His faithfulness, in His justice, in His holiness, in His love. (*J. Harington Evans, M.A.*) *The unchangeableness of God manifested in the preservation of Israel*.—I. **A FACT STATED.** "The sons of Jacob are not consumed." This is a remarkable fact concerning the literal descendants of the patriarch. It is true still. II. **THE REASON ASSIGNED.** "I am the Lord; I change not." Had it depended upon the nations of the earth they would long ago have been consumed. God had entered into covenant with them, and given them great and precious promises. And though they have broken the covenant, the Lord on His part changes not. There is abundant encouragement in this subject for every child of God. Abide in Him, and no enemy shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus your Lord. (*M. S. Alexander.*) *The unchangeableness of God*.—It is of very serious consequence to man that he

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

in which the sin can be committed. Robbery means taking either by fraud or violence that which belongs to another, and appropriating it to our own use.

I. APPLY THIS CHARGE OF ROBBERING GOD TO A LARGE PORTION OF MANKIND, GENERALLY CONSIDERED. To a pious mind, it is an affecting and melancholy thing to consider what a conspiracy seems ever going on to shut God out of His own world, to deprive Him of His rights in the homage which is due to Him from His creatures. Atheism robs Him of the glory of His existence; Deism, of the glory of His revelation; Paganism, of the glory of His spirituality and perfections; Mohammedanism, of His exclusive manifestation of Himself through the person and work of His own Son, in regard to the purposes of His grace to our world; Judaism, of the glory of His relationship to His only-begotten and well-beloved Son. So that we see, on a very large scale, God's rational creation continually robbing Him of His glory. If we come from systems to men, we shall see that the same felony is continually going on against Him, as the God of nature, providence, and redemption. Is not man-worship one of the most striking characteristics of the age in which we live? Looking abroad upon society, we see a felony continually going on, in robbing God of His glory, and not giving Him the honour that in all these things is due unto His name. In the sphere of religion, what robbery of God there is in taking from Him His Sabbaths—taking them from religion, and giving them to pleasure and business. Socinianism deprives Him of the glory of the Divinity of His Son. Popery corrupts every thing in religion—raising up a rival to God in the pope, a rival to the Bible in tradition, a rival to the Saviour in priests, a rival to the Cross in the crucifix.

II. APPLY THIS CHARGE OF ROBBERING GOD TO PARTICULAR CLASSES. 1. It lies against the man who is living without personal, decided, spiritual religion, whose heart is not yet converted to God. The man who is living without religion, that man is committing a wholesale robbery upon God. He robs God of himself. He belongs to God. His body does, and he takes it from Him, for sensuality, for vice, or for worldliness. He is robbing God of the soul, with all its faculties. The intellect belongs to God; and yet, though thousands of thoughts are streaming off from that man's mind day after day, none of these go to God. He is robbing God of his will, of his affections, &c. An unconverted man robs God of his time. The same remark may be made as to influence; as to property. It is God's world we live in, His ground we tread upon, His sun that shines upon us, His rain that falls upon us, His creatures that support us, His wool and cotton that clothe us; and we have no right to use any of His creatures but in a way that, while it does us good, shall at the same time glorify God.

III. APPLY THIS SUBJECT TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS. Can they stand altogether exempt from the accusation? Ought not their life to be "a whole burnt-offering" to God? A Christian ought to be a partaker of that religion which brings out a holy morality in all the stations, occupations, and circumstances in which he is placed. Are we then living for God or for ourselves? Are there no pulpit robbers of God? None who, instead of seeking God's glory, are seeking their own? From the very nature of the ministerial office, self is the idol that we are in danger of lifting up, if not in the place of God, yet side by side with Him. What duty arising out of this subject shall I prescribe? Restitution. Yield yourselves unto God. (*John Angel James.*) Is it probable? Is it possible? Can he be so disingenuous? What! rob a Father, a Friend, a Benefactor! Can he be so daring? To rob a Being so high and sacred; and whose glory so enhances the offence! Can he be so irrational, so desperate? Yet, says God, "Ye have robbed Me." And the charge falls on those who are to be found in the house of God. Who has not robbed God of property? Our wealth is not our own. We are only stewards. It always looks suspicious when a gentleman's steward becomes very rich, and dies affluent. Substance is entrusted to its occupiers, for certain purposes plainly laid down in the Scripture. Do you discharge those claims? How much do some unjustly expend; in table-luxuries, in costly dress, in magnificent furniture? Who has not robbed God of time? The Sabbath. Our youth-time, so often squandered away in vanity, folly, and vice. All our moments and opportunities are His: and He commands us to redeem the time. Who has not robbed God of the heart? The fear, the confidence, the gratitude, the attachment of the heart, we have transferred from the Creator, God over all, blessed for evermore. And may not the same be said of our talents—whether learning, or the powers of conversation, or the retentiveness of memory, or our influence over others? Let us not affect to deny the charge; but let us repair to the footstool of mercy, and cry, "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Those who were the immediate objects of the prophet's ministry had departed from the service of God. The priests having broken their covenant, the people were ruined by their vile example, and went back from God by a perpetual backsliding.

I. THE NATURE OF THAT SERVICE WHICH GOD DEMANDS.

1. Our service to God must be sincere. All true religion ceases when the heart is not right with God.
2. Our Christian service must be scriptural.
3. This service must be uniform. There is, in matters of true religion, a balance power—always keeping its possessor in happy and perfect equality.
4. In this service you must be diligent.
5. In this service you must be employed until you die. Having once put your hand to the plough, you are not to look back.

II. THE ADVANTAGES OF THAT SERVICE.

1. It gives, in return, the richest blessings. The Christian service gives us liberty, and liberty of the highest kind; for, if the Son make you free, then are you free indeed. So rich are the blessings this service bestows, that we cannot speak their worth; and so numerous, that to tell their vast amount our efforts are all vain.
2. Another advantage is elevation and honour.
3. This service brings contentment.
4. This service takes away the fear of death.
5. This service will be rewarded in heaven. Apply to four descriptions of persons. (1) You who are not engaged in this service. (2) Those who have just entered on this service. (3) Those who were once engaged in this service; but have left it. (4) You who are old servants in this good cause.

(*R. Croxton.*) *Religion delineated and depreciated*.—**I. RELIGION DELINEATED.** Three expressions used to represent it. 1. To serve God. A great difference between serving God and serving man. In the one case the servant benefits the master, in the other the sole benefit is the servant's. In the one the service is estimated by work actually done; in the other by work earnestly purposed. In the one there is a surrender of freedom; in the other there is an attainment of it. He who engages to serve man must surrender some portion of his liberty; he who serves God alone, secures the highest freedom. 2. To keep His ordinance. This is only a branch of the service, or, perhaps, the method of doing it. God has ordinances or institutes, some are moral, some are ceremonial; the latter may cease to bind, the former are everlastingly in force. 3. To walk mournfully before the Lord. To "walk" before the Lord is religion in perfection, religion in heaven. It implies an abiding consciousness of the Divine presence, and continual progress in the Divine will. Walking "mournfully" characterises the religion of earth; it is associated with penitence, contrition, &c. The walk of religion is only mournful here.

II. HERE WE HAVE PRACTICAL RELIGION DEPRECIATED. "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God, and what profit is it," &c. 1. Men say this when religion does not answer their secular expectations. Many take up with religion in these days because of the secular good they expect will accrue from their profession of it; if the good come not they think it vain. 2. Men say this when they see the truly religious in poverty and affliction. Asaph saw this when he said, "I have washed my hands in vain." 3. Men say this when they have taken up religion from selfish motives. A man who takes up with religion for the sake of good will get no good out of it; nay, will get disappointment, for "he that seeketh his life shall lose it." No truly religious man has said religion is vain, he feels it to be its own reward—the highest reward. In truth, it is the only service on earth that will not prove vain. (*Homilist.*)

Is religion useless?—The charge here is, that they who sin, prosper. A similar complaint common to all ages. God takes it as a charge against Himself. **I. THE CHARGE.** Those who profess to serve God complain that there is no "profit." They are not happy—not blessed. What is the inference? That the proud, the self-willed, self-confident, self-complacent, are "happy." "The tempters of God," who practically set Him at defiance—dare Him to do the worst—are delivered. Happiness and visible advantage are connected with rebellion.

II. EXAMINE THE FACTS.

 1. The religion itself is not that which God requires, and which He has promised to bless.
 2. The happiness is only fleshly, imperfect. The deliverance is present and temporal. The happiness is not true—not of the whole man. See the true servant of God; pardoned, spiritually renewed, glorifying God in body and spirit. See him in the peace and joy of his soul. See him walking under the guardianship of providence. Dying in hope. Carried to Abraham's bosom. Accepted in the judgment. Admitted into heaven. Will you say then, "It is vain to serve God," and that there is no profit in walking before Him? (*G. Cubitt.*)

Unacceptable sacrifices.—The law was not only a typical institution; it was a system of government appointed and administered

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

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

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

broadest significance. Every day of the soul's allegiance to God its frontiers became more invulnerable to attack and invasion. Spiritual growth is cumulative—as eternal as the life of God. And the God-fear power is aggressive. 2. There is a Divine recognition and support of the fear-power developed in the life of grace. "The Lord hearkened and heard." If the claims of earthly loyalty are recognised, and if they command support, how will not loyalty to the highest enlist the prowess of heaven, and the valour and prestige of angelic soldiery. 3. The ultimate end contemplated and achieved in this God-fear power is the glorious exaltation of man in the scale of being. "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts." (*H. M. Dubose.*)

Men that feared the Lord :—I. THE PEOPLE MENTIONED. By the "fear of the Lord" we are not to understand slavish fear, which dreads the punishment rather than the sin which is the cause of the punishment; but a filial fear; a holy affection in the soul, whereby it is inclined to reverence God, and to approve of His words and ways. This fear is a new covenant blessing, and the gift of God. II. THE EMPLOYMENT THEY WERE ENGAGED IN. "They spake often one to another." Of the love of God; and if they had been Christians, we should have added, of the redemption in Christ, and of the operation of the Spirit. He who has a heart for God, has a mouth to speak for Him, as well as to Him. III. THE HONOUR CONFERRED ON THEM. "The Lord hearkened." This shows God's special regard for them; the notice He takes of them, and His approbation of them. "A book of remembrance was written." In allusion to kings that keep registers (*Ezra iv. 15.*) (*S. Barnard.*)

Godly fear the distinguishing character of believers :—Times of prevailing and abounding wickedness are seasons of painful trial to the people of God. I. SOME OF THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURES IN THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE WHOM GOD CLAIMS AS HIS OWN. 1. They are described as those that "feared the Lord." Distinguish the fear of God which is of nature from that which is of grace. The most wicked and abandoned of men have their seasons of fear. They cannot shake off all dread of Him whose authority they venture to question, and whose laws they presume to disregard. Could we inspect the hearts of those that know not God, we should cease to estimate so highly their boasted felicity. But the true fear of the Lord arises from a different source, and produces different effects. It is that feeling which is spoken of in Scripture, as the beginning of wisdom, as a strong confidence, as a fountain of life. Those who possess it are described as objects of the peculiar favour and gracious protection of God. On account of its importance, as well as its actual effects, it is often put for the whole of religion, and considered as comprehending all its duties. They that fear the Lord are such as have not only the form, but the power of godliness. The fear of God dwells and rules in their souls, it forms their temper, and influences their conduct. 2. "They thought upon His name." It is a mark of the ungodly, that God is not in all his thoughts. But these delight to think upon a name endeared to them as the name of Him who has done wondrously for them. In seasons of painful and afflictive dispensations they delight to think upon God. They delight to recall the gracious thoughts of God towards them. The feeling is not a mere notion of God, or a transient feeling of His power and excellency: it is the habitual feeling of the soul, and a source of holy comfort and heavenly peace amidst the vicissitudes of life: it gives a sanctity even to our worldly employments, and renders our ordinary occupations a means of glorifying God. True believers set God always before them. 3. Those who "feared the Lord" also "spake often one to another." Conversation is a peculiar gift: it forms the chain of intercourse between man and man, and reminds us that we were born, not to waste our lives in selfish pleasures, or in unprofitable seclusion from the world. The Christian's duty consists, not in a life of separation from his fellow-creatures, but of active exertion for the benefit of all who are placed within the sphere of his influence. In order to promote these important purposes, he is furnished with the gift of speech, and is enabled to communicate with others on their necessities, and to invite from them reciprocal love and friendly intercourse. The talent only becomes valuable when it is employed for useful purposes. We do not say that the conversation of Christians will always be on the subject of religion, but true religion will always give a savour of grace to the conversation. There is a special sort of conversation which Christians enjoy with each other, which is doubtless spoken of in the text. They converse on the things of peace, and things wherewith they may be edified. They delight to speak of the glories of the Redeemer, and the blessedness of His saints. Believers, in their social intercourse, rise superior to the things of time, and converse on those of eternity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian intercourse :— Few persons are so unhappy as to be ignorant of the value of social intercourse, and as not to have realised its influence in heightening the enjoyments of human life, and mitigating its sorrows. This pleasure, like every other, is refined and elevated by the mutual experience of personal religion. Convinced that a free social intercourse, of a spiritual and experimental character, among Christians may be highly subservient to their advancement in religion, it is proposed to offer a few remarks adapted to direct its exercise and to promote its cultivation.

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

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

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

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

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

The communion of saints :—However abandoned and wicked a people or nation may be, nevertheless God has reserved to Himself a seed to serve Him, a people to show forth His glory. The period to which the text alludes may be considered emblematical of the times in which we live; and it should be our object, as the professed people of God, to imitate the example of those who are so honourably mentioned by the prophet in the words before us. I. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. 1. They are said to "fear the Lord." In order that we may fear the Lord we must know Him. The fear meant is that reverential, affectionate fear of God which is produced in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit. 2. They are those who meditate upon Him. "In the multitude of their thoughts within them His comforts delight their soul." 3. They are those who hold communion one with another. They "considered one another, to provoke unto love and good works." We can imagine them saying, "Come, all ye that fear the Lord, and we will tell you what He hath done for our souls." II. THE APPROBATION WHICH GOD HERE TESTIFIES OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. He testifies His approbation by paying attention to their occupations. 2. By granting them a share in His remembrance. 3. By promising to recognise and spare them at the final day. "They shall be Mine when I make up My jewels." God even speaks of them as His "sons." Do we possess the characteristics which are here given of the people of God? May God, in His infinite mercy, place His fear within our hearts, and then the gracious promise of the text shall be ours. (*Henry Cleare.*)

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

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

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

about the performances and promises of Christ? That surely is our duty. If our hearts are full of Christ, can we help talking about Christ to those with whom we constantly live? The speaking about God and Christ, about religion and heaven, I am recommending, is the speaking of them in plain, natural, hearty language; the speaking of them because you think of them, and feel deeply their importance. To speak about these things in phrases imitated from others is a vile and almost profane practice; it is certain to lead to self-deceit, and the mistake of talking for doing, of sounds for realities, of lip-religion for heart-religion. No talking comes from the heart, or goes to the heart, that is not plain, natural, and unforced. Regularly maintained silence is impossible if you feel deeply. If you are regularly silent, you do not feel deeply. (*T. K. Arnold.*) *Christian fellowship in a backsliding Church*:—The temple was built when Malachi wrote, and the Divine ordinances were established there; but few were devout and sincere worshippers. The priests were given to secularising tendencies; many professed worshippers were guilty of sacrilege. This is a dark picture. It is relieved by the few “zealous for the Lord of hosts.” These, by their invincible faith in God, by the oneness of their unity, and by the holiness and frequency of their fellowship, rebuked the infidelity of the period. I. TRUE PIETY MAY EXIST IN A CORRUPT CHURCH. This Church was corrupt. The priests were unfaithful to their sacred trust. The people were guilty of treacherous dealing, of departing from the Divine ordinance, and of seeking to justify this manifold wickedness before God. But a few had genuine piety. 1. They “feared the Lord.” This was a filial fear. The sinner fears God because of the penal consequences of sin. The fear of the Christian springs from different considerations, filial not slavish. 2. They “thought upon His name.” Here we have devout meditation. (1) Pious meditation is possible to all. (2) It is profitable to all. Our piety will be dwarfed if this duty is neglected. “His name.” Every appellation of Jehovah is calculated to inspire the Christian with confidence and courage. II. CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP MAY BE MAINTAINED IN A DEGENERATE SOCIETY. These pious Jews had communion with each other. 1. They “spake one to another” words of encouragement. There may be fellowship without words. There is a heart fellowship. Then the countenance speaks. 2. They spake “often.” Then they must have assembled often. The topics of conversation are not recorded, but “out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh.” III. GOD ENCOURAGES THE FAITHFUL TO MAINTAIN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IN THE TIME OF THE CHURCH’S DEGENERACY. 1. He delights in their fellowship; listens to and permanently records their conversation. 2. He rewards with present security and eternal salvation. They are God’s “jewels” in the highest sense, who are faithful when many in the Church backslide. (*E. D. Solomon.*) *Christian friendship*:—I. THE TIMES OF MALACHI. The nation had sunk into a state of political degradation, and had become successively subject to the Persians, Syrians, Romans. It is precisely that political state in which national virtues do not thrive, and national decay is sure. Illustrate—Italy, Spain. There was a want of unity, manhood, and simple virtues. It was a state in which there was no visible Divine interference. Except this solitary voice of Malachi, prophecy had hushed her harp. What was given to Israel in that period? Retrospect, in the sublime past which God had given her for her experience. Prospect, in the expectation of better times. And between these two there was a pause. They were left by God to use the grace and knowledge already given by Him. This is parallel to God’s usual modes of dealing. A pause after every revelation until the next. So in the natural world, so in human life; between its marked lessons there is a pause in which we live upon past experience—looking back and looking on. We live in the world’s fourth great pause. Miracles have ceased. Prophecy is silent. The Son of God is ascended. Apostles are no longer here to apply infallible judgment to each new circumstance as it arises. We are left to the great Gospel principles which have been already given, and which are to be our food till the next flood of God’s Spirit, the next revelation—that which is known as the Second Advent. II. THE CONDUCT OF DIFFERENT CLASSES IN THESE EVIL TIMES. 1. Some lived recklessly. 2. Others lived uselessly, because despairingly. 3. A few compared with one another their hopes, and sought strength in Christian communion and fellowship. This communion of saints is twofold: it includes church fellowship and personal friendships. Christian friendship is a blessing, as the interchange of Christian hope and Christian feeling. And it is a mighty

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

Their discourse, on every subject, will be regulated by the laws of religion. But we need not be so shy, as we commonly are, on the head of religion. II. THAT GOD OBSERVES, AND WILL REWARD IT. He hears indeed everything, and forgets nothing. The prophet means that He takes a gracious notice of this particularly, among other good actions of His servants. Persons may, by concealing to which side they belong, escape some little persecution, and secure some little interests; but while the disposer of all things gives them their desire in these respects, He sends leanness into their souls. Our religion is not to be dissembled but avowed. Application to present occasion. Beneficial as pious discourse and consultation is in general, the benefit may both be increased to ourselves and to others by our uniting into regular societies for the more constant intercourse of mutual edification and support of religious behaviour. (*Archbishop Secker.*)

The faithful in dark days:—History has few darker pictures than the closing scenes of the Jewish dispensation. Reading the record, we watch the death-agony of a world. Judaism, like all noble things which have abased and degraded themselves, died a hard and terrible death. The heathen world was full enough of suffering; but its anguish was unto life, however sharp the birth pangs; the anguish of the Jewish state was unto death, and fearful were the throes. Malachi lived when the nation was far advanced on the apostate's path. The next great act in the Divine drama would be the coming of the great and terrible "day of the Lord." But amidst the dissolute and reprobate throng there were a few men of Divine mould; like the soul in the flesh, they kept it from rotting utterly. In the darkest hours of human history God is never without a few to serve Him; the more loyally, the more intensely, because of the impiety and profligacy around. There are but a few in any age that live after the divinest pattern; whose springs are all in God, whose hopes are all in heaven; who know that their mission in the world is ministry; who live, like Christ, that they may bless and save. Such have a communion with the Lord, and with each other, of which the world knows nothing. Godliness is here presented as the firm basis of confederation and communion. The godly are truly confederate, and they alone. There is no purer joy than that which springs from the discovery of like-mindedness, mind meeting mind, and heart meeting heart in sympathy. Man yearns to be confederate with man. There is but one confederation which is real and solid to the depths, the confederation of godly souls for godly ends. All other combinations perish. In every evil confederation there is the principle of discord. There is schism in every unholy alliance. This is the godly enterprise of every age, to demonstrate the vital force of godly confederacy. Such know what speech means. Speech, like friendship, is essentially holy, and lends not all its strength to the uses of sin. Evil cannot speak out. The faithful can speak and speak out; their words ring true as the metal of their own spirits. They speak often one to another; their speech fans the flame of love and resolution, and lays up for the sterner times of trial rich stores of consolation and hope. Nor are we left to guess at their themes. They thought upon His name; the reality of the existence, and the reign of the righteous and almighty Lord. 1. His holy name. 2. His awful name. 3. His precious promises. 4. His immutable truth. Thus they strengthened themselves. Thus they made confederacy and communion; a confederacy which did not perish in the wreck, but was prolonged through ages, and brought forth out of its bosom the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. (*Baldwin Brown, B.A.*)

Christians in conversation:—They that feared the Lord spake often one with another. It is strange, one has said, that what is every man's chief concern should be so few men's conversation. How we shrink from talk about the soul and eternity, about the pilgrim way and the celestial city, about God and Christ! What a poor book Bunyan's great allegory would be, if the travellers to Zion never had opened their hearts to each other as they paced the King's high road. The book to which I owe so much had scarcely been worth the reading. What a different life Bunyan himself would have led, if the Lord's people had had nothing to say to one another about His grace to them. It was, you remember, the talk of three or four poor women sitting in the sun on Bedford Street, who spake as if joy did make them speak, it was this which convinced him that he was still outside the family and the fold of the Good Shepherd. There may be listeners of whom I am not aware, when I recount the great things my Saviour has done. There is one Listener of whom I can be sure. The Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before Him. (*A. Smellie.*)

Christianity, a social religion:—When

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

Almighty, and shrink from the scorn of his brethren. Pass to the right hand of the Judge. Contemplate a truly humble, devout, exemplary Christian, with the holy thoughts and good deeds of a life of piety spread out before him, not veiled, as they were on earth, by the self-abasement of a lowly spirit, but sparkling in heaven's pure sunlight, seen of angels, owned by the benignant Redeemer, approved by God the Judge of all. Moreover, as his earthly life is thus reviewed in heaven, he sees not only each act itself, but its happy, glorious, perhaps still widening and brightening results. Did he sow a seed of humble charity? He sees not the seed, but the tree which has sprung from it. Did he cast his bread upon the waters? He sees not the bread, but the hungry souls whom it has nourished. Did he labour, and pray, and live, for the salvation of souls? He sees not his efforts, but their fruits, going forth it may be, even for the healing of the nations. But it may be said, the best of men have been, to a greater or less degree, sinners; and if memory be perfect and entire, while the pious look back with pleasure on their good deeds, must not the remembrance of their folly and sin cloud their joy, and mingle strains of sadness with their songs of rapture? But surely to the awakened memory of the consistently virtuous, in the world to come, worthy and holy thoughts and deeds must so occupy the foreground, as to throw follies and sins completely into the shade. Then, too, against every disobedient purpose and act there will be written in the book of memory the cancelling vows of contrition that succeeded it, and the holy resolutions that forbade its repetition. The sins of the exemplary and devout will be to them in heaven as the sins of our infancy are to us now. If then a "book of remembrance" is kept, how vigilant the prospect of its pages being brought to light should make us—how prayerful against secret faults—how watchful against besetting sins! (*A. P. Peabody.*)

The book of remembrance:—I. THE SAINTS' REMEMBRANCE OF GOD. 1. We have a common principle. The fear of the Lord was the bond that united those to whom the prophet here makes allusion. 2. There was frequent communion. There was an oft and repeated meeting of the faithful. We shall always find in the history of the Church of Christ that the most pious have ever been earnest and persevering in their public religious exercises. 3. We have a repeated confession. They spake of the things which pertained to God. The only Father-confessor to whom we should make known our wants, and confess our sins, is God. There was mutual instruction. There was great sympathy aroused. II. GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF HIS SAINTS.

1. Special acts of piety are specially remembered. 2. The Almighty does not pass by the doings of men without any regard to the character of those doings. Our book of remembrance is being written. The life we lead will meet us as a resurrection of forgotten acts. (*H. G. Parrish, B.A.*)

*God's book of remembrance:—*The prophet is here speaking of the conduct and reward of those who remained faithful to God at a time of great national apostasy. Such a time had, in the providence of God, been permitted to cast its dark shadow over the people of Israel. The course of their history shows that the recurrence of certain evils brought on, as by natural sequence, a repetition of punishment, or a fresh chastisement. Violated law brought in due time its appropriate punishment; and in this way God's moral government, as it were, rectified itself to the eyes of men. The transgressor never got off with impunity; but the present seemed to be an exception. The ungodly were allowed to go on in sin without calling down any token of Divine displeasure. They even prospered in sin. God's people had begun to think the service of God to be vanity. What profit had the righteous man in walking mournfully before the Lord? The prosperity of the wicked became a stumbling-block to the righteous. Those who continued faithful to God were perplexed when they saw the success of sin, and so they met to hold mutual intercourse, and to impart mutual encouragement. They would help each other to fathom the providential mystery. Our short-sightedness keeps us from seeing beyond the present, otherwise we would perceive a higher good than earthly greatness, and true success would be tested not by outward conditions, but by moral character. I. THE CONDUCT OF THE FAITHFUL AT A TIME OF APOSTASY. Instead of envying at the wicked, and bewailing their own condition, they met for mutual encouragement, and for the defence of God's righteous dealings against blasphemers. Their object was not only mutual encouragement, but the vindication of their God from the aspersions cast upon His name. What a beautiful picture is this of Christian fellowship and fidelity; and happily, even the darkest days of the Church have been brightened by examples

of a like kind. Illustrate—Catacombs, Waldenses, Covenanters, &c. God was subjecting these men who feared Him to a Divine test. They took their united stand on common ground—the fear of God. At the peril of their lives they bore testimony and were not ashamed. There are times when such men are specially needed. Men to stand up for the defence of the truth; not merely devout believers, but able apologists. II. **THE LORD KEPT A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE FOR RECORDING THE NAMES AND DEEDS OF THE FAITHFUL.** In speaking of a book, we do not insist on an actual volume. The expression is an accommodation to our modes of speech. He who is Omniscient needs no book to keep Him in mind of His people's services. Their deeds were as particularly recorded as if actually written in a book. The object of this record is to form the basis of judgment. According to what is written there, so will men be rewarded or punished. Nothing will be left unnoticed that will add to the final award. As a guarantee of the correctness of every entry in that book, we are assured that the Lord Himself hearkens and hears. Nothing will escape His searching scrutiny. The contents of this book may be regarded as a sort of moral diary, of which we ourselves are the unconscious recorders. By our conduct we are supplying material for each impression made upon it. We ourselves must be regarded as the writers. Surely this thought is fitted to impress us with the solemnity of life! The impression once made, no power of ours can blot it out. Seek, then, to do something that will keep the memory fragrant when you are gone, something for which God will own you at last. III. **THE REWARD PROMISED TO THE FAITHFUL.** The faithful are likened to "jewels," and to "sons." The two ideas are "preciousness" and "likeness." They who were once polluted and impure are now as jewels, clean and bright, and they who were once rebels have now become sons. A jewel is a precious stone, ranked by its owner among his most valuable possessions. Its value depends partly on its nature, and partly on the labour bestowed on it in the process of refinement. What has God done for His people? They are now the crown-jewels of the King of kings. The highest reward of all is, that God's faithful people will be owned as sons. This involves that God's people will be like Him, and will be His heirs. The furnace of discipline will manifest the likeness by consuming the unlikeness. (*D. Merson, M.A., B.D.*) *The Lord's book of remembrance*.—The fidelity and steadfastness of man must rest on the fidelity and steadfastness of God. "He is faithful who hath promised," is a principle which underlies the whole relation of God the Redeemer to our race. We have considered the condition of the faithful few in Malachi's dark days. The sadder their estate, the darker the night around them, the more closely did they associate for communion and concert. The Lord was not observant of them. It was the Lord for whom they were enduring, who nerved them to endure. Three main features of description. I. **THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE.** Probably the rudiment of this idea is to be found in Ezra vi. 1-5. There was a roll found, on a critical occasion, "in the place which is in the province of the Medes," the remembrance of which the Jews would not willingly let die. What concerns us is the fundamental thought. It is precisely what the Lord declared of old to Moses. "I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in My sight." Those who, like all these men, stake all on fidelity to God, are the upper ten thousand of the universe, the peerage of heaven, throughout eternity. God knows them by name as living persons. As friends He holds them dear. God's love is not for qualities, abstractions, any more than man's. He caused to be written in His book of remembrance, not a catalogue of their principles, but their names, their designation, as living human souls. Trampled in the mire on earth, their names should be read out in heaven. II. **THE RECOGNITION OF THEIR SONSHIP.** Perhaps the saddest thought of the righteous, in the midst of an ungodly world, springs from the sense of their own imperfectness, the feebleness of their witness, the languor of their zeal, the poverty of their work. The word son—"his own son"—reassures. A father's love wearies not and wanes not; a child's feeblest efforts please him better than a stranger's bravest work. "He will spare them," in the furnace of discipline; the Lord will temper its fierceness. In the battlefield of life, the Lord will be their strength and their shield. In the shadow of death, His rod and staff shall comfort them there. "They shall be Mine,"—Mine for ever, "in the day when I make up My jewels." III. **THE DAY WHEN THE BOOK SHALL BE BROUGHT FORTH.** "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" is God's answer to the cry of many a faithful, patient spirit, who wins no recompense on earth but a cross. There is a life which can

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. THE TIME APPOINTED FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS REGARD. “In that day.” It betokens either temporal visitation, the day of death, or the day of judgment. Probably the final day is meant, when He will vouchsafe a peculiar manifestation of His favour.

III. THE SECURITY BY WHICH THIS PROMISE IS CONFIRMED. This security is not of man, but of God. “They shall be Mine.” (*W. Mayers, A.M.*) *Jehovah’s jewels*:—I. THE PRECIOUS IN PRINCIPLE. Regard for the greatness of God. Obedience to the commands of God. Dread of the punishment of God. Trust in the mercy of God. Fear of God is the foundation of piety; it casts out all other fear.

II. THE PRECIOUS IN PRACTICE. 1. Frequent religious association. They often met together apart from the world. An expression of spiritual separation from evil society. An index of devotedness to a common purpose. 2. Concentrated mental action. “Thought upon His name.” Mind the greatest thing in man. The believer sees God in all things, and his meditation of Him is sweet. Constant mutual edification—“Speak often,” &c. Information, counsel, warning, encouragement.

III. THE PRECIOUS IN PRIVILEGE. 1. Divine attention. “God hearkened and heard it.” 2. Divine remembrance. “And a book,” etc. All the services of the good registered for compensation. 3. Divine promise. Tender treatment. “I will spare.” Great honour. “They shall be Mine.” Great destructiveness. “Then shall ye return.” (*B. D. Johns.*) *The dignity of the people of God*:—1. The people of God are dignified with the Divine approbation. 2. By the Divine solicitude. 3. By the Divine security. 4. By the Divine regard. They are to Him as jewels. 5. By a Divine promise “I will spare them.” Learn from this subject full confidence in God. He has made full provision for you in the obedience and death of Jesus. He will take care of you here, and glorify you with dignity hereafter. Also learn humility; for what maketh you to differ from others but the grace of God alone? (*Hugh Allen, M.A.*) *The making up of God’s jewels*:—The Lord makes up His jewels—1. By the word and ordinances of His grace. The word of inspiration is the grand instrument which the Lord uses for hewing His jewels out of the rock of corrupt nature, and bringing them from the dark mine of misery to the light of everlasting felicity. It is an instrument of great power. It commands holiness, supplies motives, and presents encouragements to the mind. The exercises of praise and prayer are admirably adapted to refine and polish the soul in the beauties of holiness. 2. By the operations and dispensations of His providence. Looking at providence on a comprehensive scale, redemption is its most striking and grand display. The darkest as well as the brightest aspects of providence are necessary to the making up of God’s jewels. God’s own saints are often the better for being afflicted. Trials are necessary to purify the Church from corruptions, to cleanse the heart, and rectify the life of individuals, and to beautify them both severally and collectively in time, and make their character shine in the light of eternity. 3. By the work and influences of His Spirit. The word and ordinances of grace, aided by the operation and dispensations of providence, can do nothing to convert or sanctify a single soul, unless the Spirit accompany them with His blessing. Just as the hammer, or the chisel, or the saw, or the file, without the hand of the mechanic, cannot hew a single jewel out of the quarry of nature, or polish it into beauty, so without the agency of the Holy Spirit, ordinances and providences, powerful instruments though they are, cannot convince a sinner of sin, or lead him from the paths of error into the way of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers to polish and fit them for shining as jewels in the mediatorial crown of glory. Let all Christians then, make a right improvement, both for their own and their brethren’s sake, of God’s dealings. The more faith Christians exercise, the more godly will they become; and the more godly they are here, the brighter shall they shine hereafter in that world where everlasting peace reigns, and grace never declines, where the sun of glory never sets, and where the sky of blessedness is never overcast with clouds. (*John Shoolbraid.*) *The Lord’s jewels*:—I. HOW MAY THE SAINTS BE COM-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

any such resolution, or entertain such a thought. There are some who do wander away from God; not, however, with a deliberate purpose so to do, but because they have been led captive by the enemy. But God will never lose sight of His "jewel," but will follow him by His Spirit and His providences, making use of those things that are best calculated to bring a rational soul back again to the fold from whence it had wandered away. (*Homer M'Vay.*) *God's crown jewels* :—

I. THE NAME BY WHICH GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE. "My jewels." The comparison suggests—1. The preciousness of good people. Jewels are, on account of their intrinsic worth, or historic interest, the most valuable and highly prized things on earth. God alone can comprehend the value of a soul. He knows the price which was paid for his ransom. 2. Good people are compared to jewels on account of their beauty. How the diamond sparkles and flashes! But its beauty is eclipsed when compared with the beauty of holiness which God puts upon all His saints. That beauty is not fully disclosed on earth. 3. God's people are like jewels because they need so much polishing. While a single stain of sin remains upon our souls we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Every trial the Spirit of God employs as a means of sanctifying us, and polishing us, to shine among the crown jewels of heaven. II. GOD CLAIMS A SPECIAL PROPERTY IN GOOD MEN. "They shall be Mine." All souls belong to Him by creation and preservation: but true believers are His by redemption. III. GOD WATCHES OVER HIS PEOPLE, SO THAT NOT ONE OF THEM IS LOST. "When I make up My jewels."

They are widely scattered now, but He will bring them together by and by. On the day when He shall crown Immanuel Lord of all not one of them shall be missing. (*David Winters.*) *Crown jewels* :—The Lord Jesus has been gathering up His treasures for a good while, and on the great coronation day of the judgment He will, in the presence of the assembled universe, show that the good of all ages are His crown jewels. I speak to you of the jewel-finding, the jewel-grinding, the jewel-setting. You have noticed the great difference between jewels. Let not a Christian man envy another Christian man's experience. You open the king's casket, and you see jewels of all sizes, shapes, and colours. Do not worry because you don't have the faith of that man, or the praying qualities of this, or the singing qualities of another. The trouble is that you are not willing to be ordinary gold, you want to be gold of twenty-four carats. Notice jewel-grinding. Christian character, like black spots in an amethyst, must sometimes be cleared out by the flame; it must go through the furnace. Nearly all God's jewels are crystallised tears. You can tell God's jewel, as the lapidary tells the diamond. If the breath of temptation comes on it, and soon vanishes, it is a real diamond. Note the jewel-setting. The lapidary gets the gems in the right shape, gathers them on his table, and then puts them into head-bands, or hilts of swords, or into crowns. The Lord Jesus will gather up His people, and before the assembled universe their splendour shall shine forth. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Gem formation* :—

In nature there is hardly a stone that is not capable of crystallising into something purer and brighter than its normal state. Coal, by a slightly different arrangement of its particles, is capable of becoming the radiant diamond. The slag cast out from the furnace as useless waste, forms into globular masses of radiating crystals. The very mud on the road, trampled under foot as the type of all impurity, can be changed by chemical art into metals and gems of surpassing beauty. God can make jewels out of the most worthless rubbish. Let the cases of John Newton, of the woman that was a sinner, of the thief upon the cross, of Augustine, of John Bunyan, of Colonel Gardiner, and of thousands more, bear witness to the almighty power of the alchemy of Divine grace. It only requires a supreme surrender of ourselves into the hands of the Holy Spirit to ensure the Scripture assurance, "They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels." (*Cyclopædia of Nature Teachings.*) *A name for God's people* :—The impiety and irreligion which so strongly marked the character, both of priests and people, in the days of this prophet, are concentrated, as it were, in verses 13-15. Amidst this general departure from God, others existed of a different description. Note—1. The endearing name here given to the people of God. "Jewels." "His jewels," or special treasure. Jewels are often purchased at an immense price. The people of God are "bought with a price." They may be called "jewels" from the comparative fewness of their number. And also from their glory and beauty. It is customary for the great and noble of the earth to adorn themselves with their jewels on particular occasions, and so the Lord glories in His people, and sets them "as a seal upon His heart," and has them "graven on the palms of His hands." 2. The expression, "When

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

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

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

Christ may be assured that all the faithful are there, and that not one is wanting. The King whom the saints serve has His book of chronicles where the name of every faithful one and all his noble deeds are minutely recorded (Esther vi. 1-3). We find frequent allusions to this book of records in the Scriptures (Psa. lvi. 8; Heb. vi. 10; Rev. iii. 5; Luke x. 20). When the Lord of hosts makes up His jewels there will be something analogous to the calling of the roll. Jesus Christ has covenanted with the Father that He will keep all those committed to Him. There must be no ground for the Father in that day to charge the Son with unfaithfulness, with having lost one through inability or neglect. Jesus Christ has also covenanted with us that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. There must be no room in that day for a single soul to say, I believed in His Name, and yet He has not saved me. III. THE EXHIBITION OF HIS JEWELS. Having called the roll and ascertained that all the faithful ones are there, He will exhibit them, hold them up as His most magnificent trophies, His greatest, noblest work. Some of us are old enough to remember the first Great Exhibition of the Industries of all Nations in 1851. On the first entering that "Palace of all Nations" how impressive, how overwhelming the scene! We have had similar exhibitions since in Paris, Chicago, and elsewhere. Jesus Christ is going to have the greatest exhibition the universe has ever known. Throughout the centuries He has been preparing for it. In China, India, and Japan, on the continents of Europe, Africa, America, and Australia, in the islands of the sea, in northern latitudes among the Esquimaux and Laplanders, God's agents are building up characters and beautifying souls for the great exhibit. All nations will be represented in that vast gathering. On the Cross He made a public exhibition of the enemies He conquered. "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly." But when He comes on His throne of judgment He will exhibit His friends, make a show of them openly, that the intelligent universe may behold and admire His workmanship in the innumerable multitude He has saved and sanctified, the jewels He has burnished and made to flash with the beauty of God. There are the children of sorrow and afflictions on whom God has employed the chisel, the hammer, and the file to beautify and glorify them. Millions more of all climates and countries, of all nations and ages, will be there. Their names may not be registered in the chronicles of earth, or carved in enduring marble, but they are written in the chronicles of the King of saints, and He will publish them in high places in the hearing of the principalities and powers in that day when He makes up His jewels. IV. THE APPROPRIATING OF THEM. "They are Mine." Under Roman law when a man received into his family a stranger and adopted him as a son two ceremonies were necessary; the one domestic the other legal, the one private the other public. The ceremony of adoption was first observed in the family, where the stranger was formally received and acknowledged as son in the presence of the entire household. But in order to make the new relation between the adopting father and the adopted son legal, the ceremony must also be observed publicly in the presence of civil authorities and witnesses. The saints here on earth are brought into the family of God, become members of the household of faith, receive the Spirit of adoption whereby they cry Abba, Father. This adoption is private; the knowledge of it is limited at first to God and the adopted believer. Afterwards it becomes known only to a limited circle of kindred spirits, to whom the adopted may communicate the joyful fact. It is not an event that the world cares to hear, or that awakens interest in any beyond the select few. But our text points to a period when there will be a public recognition of them as the sons of God. "In that day." This will not take place in this life, not at death, and not on the entrance of each soul into the heavenly world, but at the general resurrection. Until then only a fragment of the saintly nature will be glorified. The Old Testament saints are not to be perfected without us or before us; the New Testament saints are not to be perfected before the saints of the Old Covenant: we are to be perfected together. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Noah, Moses, &c., will not be made perfect without us. See how changed, how transfigured they all are, how old things have passed away and all things have become new; they owe it all to Me and to My dying love, therefore they are all Mine. To-day they are to be crowned kings for ever. (*Richard Roberts.*) *Touchstones of character*:—Cornelia's noble answer to the haughty princess who, on one occasion, visited her, is worthy of remembrance. Proudly displaying her own flashing jewels, her royal guest said, "And where are yours?" upon which the mother of the Gracchi, as proudly calling her children, said, "These

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

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

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

sublime and beautiful, it is confined chiefly to the productions of art. At most, he admires only parts, not a whole; and looks with wonder at the mere creature, without raising his thoughts to the great Creator. The truly religious man is the very reverse of this. He can retire, as it were, within his own bosom, as into a sanctuary, and converse with God. Every species of excellence is admired in proportion as it approaches His wisdom, His goodness, or His power. 3. By "lifting up our hearts unto the Lord" in the fervour of prayer and thanksgiving it is impossible not to enjoy the highest sensibility of which the human soul is capable;—a sensibility very unlike the sickly offspring of a "worldly sorrow." The sensibility cherished by an habitual intercourse with God, purifies and ennobles the mind. 4. Akin to this intellectual enjoyment, is lively and impressive gratitude. It concerns both Divine and human obligations. 5. A constant sense of the benefits which he receives from God, prompts the pious man to imitate the Divine love, within the small circle of his power and abilities. Equally active is this Divine principle in promoting peace, in teaching forbearance, and in the forgiveness of injuries. 6. None but the pious man can have a proper sense of the dignity of his nature. Whatever the condition allotted to us here, however humble and dependent, we know that not all the world can estrange us from our Maker, or banish us from the presence of God. And nothing but sin can render the sense of this Divine presence afflicting, or leave us, in our sufferings, comfortless or degraded. 7. He who serves God with truth and fidelity will be endowed with a larger portion of fortitude than he who serveth Him not. It was proper that a life of discipline should abound with difficulties and dangers, temptations and calamities. They are the appointed measures of our virtue and obedience, and they form our spiritual warfare with the world. The pious man ever regards them as the means of improvement in righteousness and true holiness; as such, he submits to them with patience and resignation. Full of trust and confidence in the Divine wisdom and goodness, he learns "to suffer as a good soldier of Christ." If we take, therefore, from human life this grand principle of action—a principle that equally influences our hopes and fears—that gives steadiness of conduct, and fortitude of resolution in every situation, and that combines itself with all our nobler passions; is it not easy to perceive that we destroy the strongest support of moral duty, that we diminish the worth of every virtue, and poison the purest source of happiness in the human heart! Contrast, in conclusion, these two characters in the text, on the bed of sickness, and in the hour of death. (*J. Hewlett, B.A.*)

Two classes:—
I. THERE ARE TWO GREAT CLASSES INTO WHICH THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE MAY BE DIVIDED. 1. They are distinguished by their state. 2. They are distinguished by their character. **II. THESE TWO CLASSES ARE NOW SO INTERMIXED AS TO OBSCURE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEM.** 1. They are intermingled in the family circle. 2. They are intermingled in the arrangements of civil society. 3. They are intermingled in the house of God. 4. They are intermingled in the membership of the Church. **III. THERE IS A PERIOD WHEN THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THESE TWO CLASSES SHALL BE RENDERED VISIBLE.** 1. The season of temporal calamity. 2. The day of judgment. 3. Eternity. (*G. Brooks.*)
*The obliteration of moral distinctions:—*It is a sad state of society when the faculty of moral discrimination is blunted. The minor prophets were appointed to rebuke just such religious degeneracy. 1. One sign of the practical obliteration of these vital distinctions may be seen in the prevailing depreciation of sound doctrine. Men try to mix truth with error, as though they were not inherently different. To depreciate the importance of discovering and embracing the truth undermines, also, the true basis of morals. Sincere convictions may thus be urged to justify crime, as the Spartans upheld secret theft, and David Hume secret adultery. 2. Another sign is found in the practical association of those that serve God and those that serve Him not. God decrees separation as the means of expressing and impressing these vital distinctions. (1) Many believers are only secret disciples. Their very success in practising Christian virtues is disastrous, fostering self-righteous hopes in worldly hearts, and leading men to confuse worldly morality with genuine piety. (2) Another thing which contributes to the confusion of godly and ungodly, is the fact, that many worldly men are professed disciples. Secret believers make the world seem more godly; unregenerate professors make the Church seem more worldly, and so there is double confusion. (3) Whatever relaxes the demand for godliness of character, lowers the standard of piety, and so lessens the contrast between righteous and

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

diminution of being, no stinting of faculties, no abridgment of opportunities. II. REASONS FOR CONSECRATION TO GOD. 1. Refusing, or failing in this, we rob God. Men's faculties find their rest, and possibilities of profitable exercise, only when intentionally and gladly used for their Creator. Time, talents, all that there is in and of life, belong to God by virtue of creation and preservation. 2. Disobedience is followed by penalty. For this sin Malachi pronounced a curse upon Israel. Israel is not alone in this. 3. The rewards of obedience. A general enfranchisement and empowering of faculties come to the soul when consecrated to God. Among the rewards of obedience, a prominent place should be given to the peace of mind which comes from harmony with God. Christian fellowship has glad rewards for those consecrated to the same Master. III. HOW IS THIS CONSECRATION MADE? 1. Deliberately. 2. Personally. 3. Affectionately. However full and irrevocable the surrender which the soul makes of itself, it is made gladly and lovingly. Meanwhile, till the day of reward comes, every burden is lightened, because borne for God; every sorrow is assuaged, because faith loves the hand that chastens; every dark cloud has a bright lining, every weariness sings of coming rest, disappointments point to the time, not far away, when every soul shall be satisfied, awaking in the Divine likeness. Consecration on earth transfigured and fulfilled in the glories of heaven. (*Sermons Monday Club.*)

CHAPTER IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sun of Righteousness:—This passage seems to refer principally to the second coming of our Lord; the text itself may be safely understood of His first coming in the flesh. It points out, primarily at least, the judgments to be brought upon the unbelieving and impenitent Jews.

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

II. THE SALVATION WHICH THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS WITH HIM. "With healing in His wings." The Son of God came to earth as a Saviour. This character He maintained through the course of His ministry upon earth, during which He went about doing good. How did this Sun of Righteousness bring healing in His wings (or, as we should rather say, in His beams and rays) at His rising? 1. The most natural interpretation is, of the cures which He wrought upon the bodies of men. 2. The great act of salvation was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. "By His stripes we are healed." This healing procured the pardon of our sins, and the grace of the Spirit of God, to enable us to fulfil the conditions required of us. Only by joining these two together can the salvation be regarded as complete. Notice how great is His mercy in administering comfort to the penitent.

III. THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED OF THOSE TO WHOM THE SON OF GOD WILL PROVE A SAVIOUR. "You that fear My name." Religious fear of God is necessary to qualify a man to receive the healing grace of Christ. To the soul which has no fear Christ brings no healing. This is the state of the true Christian; in which his terrors are never so great as to extinguish his hopes, and his hopes never prevail so much as to make him confident and secure. (*T. Bowdler, A.M.*)

Sun of Righteousness:—I. ILLUSTRATE THE COMPARISON OF OUR LORD JESUS

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

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

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

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY "HEALING IN HIS WINGS"? The beams of this heavenly luminary may indeed be perceived by us, but do they pervade our hearts and lives? "To fear the name is to reverence Him as God and man; to participate by faith in His incarnate sufferings; to accompany Him to the scene of His cruel death. It has its foundation in a deep sense of the enormity of sins, and a humbling conviction of our depravity. (*Samuel Crouther.*) *The Sun of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings*.—I. THE CHARACTERS SPOKEN OF. The "name of the Lord" signifies the perfections of the glorious God of heaven—the greatness and goodness of the Lord—God Himself. It is the peculiar character of the people of God that they "fear His name." It is a fear of offending God, the tenderness of the child that fears to offend its parent. This fear is an abiding principle, and it is a practical principle; it operates upon the life. II. THE BLESSED PRIVILEGE OF THOSE THAT FEAR THE NAME OF GOD. The Sun of Righteousness is Immanuel, God with us. And He arose at His birth, because more conspicuous in His ministry; was eclipsed at His death, shone forth brighter after His resurrection and ascension, and attained His meridian splendour when the Jewish dispensation closed and the Christian dispensation was fully established. But the promise of our text is daily receiving its fulfilment in the hearts of God's believing people. The promise of the text, however, still awaits the consummation of its fulfilment. (*Benjamin Maturin, B.A.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*.—I. THE PERSONS. Those that "fear the name of the Lord." Fear is the passion of our nature opposed to hope, and by it the author of our being guards us against danger. The "fear of the Lord" is the sublimest principle which can influence a soul. It casts out all other fear. Filial and godly fear is always accompanied with love. II. THE BLESSINGS. The Messiah should be, to the spiritual world,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ver. 4. Remember ye the law of Moses.—*Moses defended*.—Of all the books of the Old Testament, the first five books are the most vital. The Pentateuch is not a branch of the tree of revelation; it is one of the very roots. If objectors must attack some portion of the Old Testament, let them assail the Book of Kings, the writings of Solomon, the prophecies of Daniel, the glories of Ezekiel, the sublimities of the Book of Job, for these, though inspired, are not of such vital importance; but of the foundation truths of Genesis, we say, "Touch not, handle not." If the writings of Moses are not authentic; if the facts therein recorded are untrue; if, in fact, Moses in his offices and character, be a mere fiction of the brain, then the most tremendous results must necessarily follow. If such be the case, then the whole of revelation must be blotted out. If the Pentateuch suffer an eclipse, the New Testament suffers the same. You cannot have a partial eclipse. The Pentateuch and New Testament are woven together in one seamless robe. If you make a rend, you destroy the whole. The Epistles of St. Paul are full of Moses. If Moses falls, St. Paul falls with him, and all the glorious apostles. He that rejects the law must reject the Gospel also: for the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Moses spake of Christ, and testified of Christ. The man who rejects Moses must reject the Lord Himself. We have other witnesses to the authenticity of the Pentateuch than the inspired Word of God. The testimony of the rocks of Sinai, &c. (*Alfred Cay, A.K.C.*) *The law, its place and power*.—In our text Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, shows that the fear of the Lord necessarily involves reverential regard for His law. This law is described as that which was given to Moses in Horeb, and the charge is given: "Remember ye the law." These words seal up the Old Testament revelation. Our text expresses a necessary, universal, and perpetual obligation: "Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb." In very many minds there are very hazy notions in reference to the relation of the Old Testament to the New, of the Mosaic to the Christian dispensation, of the law to the Gospel. It is quite true that there are statements in the New Testament which indicate that some old things had passed away, and that some new things had come. There is a sense in which the revelation of the Gospel is in contrast to that of the Old Testament—not, however, the contrast of contradiction, but rather of fuller and clearer development. We must remember that the term "law of Moses" is used in two senses—the one covering the whole Mosaic legislation, the other having special reference to what are called the "Ten Commandments." There were things in the legislation of Moses which were purely civil—which could apply only to the Jews as a nation. There were other things which were ceremonial—belonging to a dispensation which was symbolical, typical, and preparatory. All these things, national and ceremonial, passed away with the dawn of the new dispensation. But there was one part of the revelation given by Moses—and this the central and most important part—called distinctively "the law," the moral law, the ten commandments, which is of universal and perpetual obligation. I. THE LAW IS A GLORIOUS REVELATION OF THE CHARACTER AND WILL OF GOD. God is the Creator and Governor of the universe. He hath made all beings and things by His almighty power. He governs them according to His own infinite wisdom. Over material things and irrational creatures His control is a matter of forceful operation; but over all orders of rational, responsible beings His control is a moral government. This renders an intelligible revelation necessary. His moral nature is at once the source and the standard of all purity and beauty. The moral law reveals Him as the just and holy God, pointing out the way of duty and demanding obedience. This law is perfect. It reveals God's character, declares His will, and discloses the fundamental, unalterable principles of His moral government. II. THE LAW IS SUITED TO THE NATURE OF MAN, AND IS FITTED TO SECURE HIS HIGHEST DEVELOPMENT AND HAPPINESS. Man is a moral, responsible being, who was created in the image, and intended for the service and glory of God. 1. Likeness to the Divine character is essential to man's true development. The moral law revealing the purity and beauty of God, or declaring His holy and righteous will,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parental responsibilities.—Malachi, in his last chapter, prepares the people for the long silence of revelation by two words, of which one is a promise, and the other a precept. The command is, to walk by the law of Moses. The promise is, that in due time the Messiah's forerunner, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, shall usher in the solemn yet glorious day of Christ, by his preparatory ministry. This was to be the next prophet whom the Church was entitled to expect. But his work was to be prominently a revival of parental fidelity and domestic piety. The work upon fathers and mothers was to be far more than the removal of domestic alienations. It was to embrace a great revival of parental and filial piety, an awakening of parents' hearts to the salvation of their children, and the docile seeking and reception of parental instruction by the children. This revival of domestic piety and parental fidelity is necessary to prevent the coming of the Divine Messiah from being a woe instead of a blessing to men. God's way of promoting revival is, not to increase the activity of any public and outward means only, but to "turn the hearts of the parents to the children." The duty of parental fidelity is equally prominent in both dispensations. The old terminates with it, the new opens with it. This is the connecting link between both. The fidelity of the parents ought to imply the docility of the children. The duties are mutual.

I. THE URGENCY OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY APPEARS IN A SOLEMN MANNER FROM THE NATURE OF THE PARENTAL RELATION ITSELF. Wherever human society is, there a parent is. Every human existence begins in a parental relation. The glory of the Divine beneficence towards the human race appears in this, that the parents, without alienating anything of their own immortality, are able to multiply immortalities in ever-widening and progressive numbers. Here are the two facts which give so unspeakable a solemnity to the parent's relation to his children. He has conferred on them, unasked, the endowment of an endless, responsible existence. He has also been the instrument of conveying to this new existence the taint of original sin and guilt. Can the human mind conceive a motive more tender, more urgent, prompting a parent to seek the aid of the great Physician, for dealing with the spiritual disease which they have conveyed?

II. FROM THE UNIQUE AND EXTENSIVE CHARACTER OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY. Men will be held accountable according to the extent of the powers intrusted to them. The trust is that of immortal souls. Let the extent of the parent's legitimate or unavoidable power over his children be pondered. Neither Divine nor human law gives the parent a right to force the tender mind of the child, by persecutions, or corporeal pains or penalties; or to abuse it, by sophistries, or falsehoods, into the adoption of his opinions. But this power the providential law does confer: the parent may and ought to avail himself of all the influences of opportunity and example, of filial reverence and affection, of his superior age, knowledge, and sagacity, to reinforce the power of truth over the child's mind, and in this good sense to prejudice him in favour of the parental creed.

III. BUT THIS POWER HAS SUITABLE CHECKS AND GUARDS. One is found in the strict responsibility to which God holds the domestic ruler. Another is found in the affection which nature binds up with the parental relation.

IV. THE PARENT'S INFLUENCE FOR GOOD AND EVIL WILL BE MORE EFFECTUAL THAN ANY OTHER. As parents perform or neglect their duties, the children usually end in grace or impiety. The parent has the first and all-important opportunity. Application—1. The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. 2. The Church-membership of the children of believers may be reasonable and scriptural. (*R. S. Dabney, D.D.*)

Family government.—True family government is instituted for the sole benefit of the governed. "The true end of government is to make the pathway to virtue and morality easy, and the pathway of crime difficult and full of peril."

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

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

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







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