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THE PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

THE

Preacher's Complete Homiletical

COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN).

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c., &c

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS.



New York

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

LONDON AND TORONTO

1892

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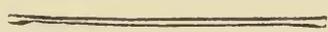
HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOKS OF

CHRONICLES.

BY

REV. JAMES WOLFENDALE.



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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

INTRODUCTION.

THE two Books of Chronicles, like the Books of Kings, formed originally one, and were divided, as in the English Bible, by translators of the Septuagint. The division was adopted in the Latin Vulgate by Jerome, whence it passed into various branches of the Western Church. In Hebrew the title is *Dib-rey hay-yamim*, meaning "The acts of the days" (*acta not verba dierum*), a title applied to accounts which historians wrote of kings. A daily record, a sort of "Court Journal," was usual at Oriental palaces (see Esth. ii. 23; vi. 1; x: 2), cf. *Speak. Com.* The Books record the leading incidents of the times. The term *chronicon* was suggested by Jerome, as equivalent to the Hebrew title; and this in the plural form, *chronica* or *chronicorum liber*, was adopted in some editions of the Vulgate, whence the English translators took it.

The Author. Ascribed to Ezra generally. Its close connection with the book of Ezra is very apparent. "The same spirit breathes through both, and numerous little expressions, identical or nearly so in the two works, indicate almost certainly the same hand. The curious fact, moreover, that the one Book ends and the other begins with the same passage, suggests the same author, and probably indicates that originally the two books were united and formed but one work, which it was afterwards thought better to divide into two" (*Speak. Com.*).

The Date. Internal evidence proves that Chronicles were written after the Captivity. This opinion is supported by the *orthography* and the nature of the *language* employed, both of which are Aramæan in complexion, and harmonise with books written after the exile. "If Ezra was the author, the date could not be much later than B.C. 435, for Ezra probably died about that time. There is nothing in the contents or style of the work to make the date B.C. 450-435 improbable; for the genealogy in ch. iii. 23, 24, which appears to be later than this, may be a subsequent addition" (*Speak. Com.*).

The Style. The work is one, a record of annals, a supplement of former historic books. The Septuagint designates the work *Paraleipomena*, things left out or unnoticed. We have repetitions of Samuel and Kings, and important supplements to fill up earlier narratives. A high value is set upon "Levitical spirit," that is, regard to externals in religion. Its history has been termed

“ecclesiastical,” that of Samuel and Kings “political.” In the mind of the writer the religious establishment is of primary, the State of secondary importance (cf. *Speak. Com.*). “There are three principal features—(a) a greater tendency to dwell on the ritual, on the details of the Temple worship, the various functions of the Priests and Levites, the arrangement of the courses and the like; (b) a marked genealogical bias, and desire to record names of persons engaged in events narrated; (c) a more constant, open, and direct ascription of all the events of history to Divine agency, and especially a more plain reference of every great calamity or deliverance to the good or evil deeds of the monarch, or the nation, which Divine Providence so punished or rewarded (cf. *Speak. Com.*).

The Object. It is historical, yet the writer seems to forget former histories and gives his own. First to give an entire history from the very beginning to meet the difficulties of the time—to preserve true genealogies of families—and since future prosperity depends upon the preservation of the Temple with its priests and service, he begins with David, describes Solomon’s acts, and then follows out the history of Judah (not of Israel), and shows how kings maintained its worship or introduced idolatry, and were rewarded or punished according to their conduct. “It is thus apparent that the object of Ezra in writing the Books of Chronicles was to place before the Jews such an aspect of their past history as would show them that from the peculiar constitution of their government as a Theocracy, the glories and decadence even of the Davidic monarchy were most closely associated with the recognition of the Lord’s presence by a faithful maintenance of the worship which he had ordained for that purpose. Such a view of their history was calculated to strengthen the religious element of their nationality, to teach them that their highest glory was the special sovereignty of God over them, and that although that sovereignty was exceptionally exercised through prophets, its natural and ordinary manifestation was to be found in association with the Levitical system” [*J. H. Blunt*].

The Analysis. Naturally divided into four parts. Part I. a series of genealogies or a summary of ancient history of man in the line of Israel to David. 1 Chr. i.–ix. Ch. i. from Adam to Israel; chs. ii.–vii. the twelve tribes of Israel; chs. viii.–ix. the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Part II. contains the history of David’s reign from the death of Saul, partly agreeing with the account in the Books of Samuel, yet with important additions concerning the Levites, chs. x.–xxix. Part III., in nine chapters, comprises the reign of Solomon, 2 Chr. i.–ix. Part IV. gives a history of the kingdom of *Judah* (while *Israel* remained, x.–xxviii.; and after *Israel*’s downfall), especially in connection with the worship of God, xxix.–xxxvi. The account continues to the proclamation of Cyrus authorising the return of the people and the rebuilding of the Temple. “There are twenty whole chapters and twenty-four parts of chapters occupied with matter not to be found in other books of Scripture. These books, therefore, are highly important on account of the new material as well as the new aspect of things which they present.”—See *Murphy*, *The Books of Chronicles* (Clark).

“And these are ancient things” (1 Chr. iv. 22).

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The writer gives no explanation or introduction, presumes upon the knowledge of the reader, and simply enumerates names from Creation to the Flood, contained in Gen. v. The Deluge, 1,656 years from the creation of Adam.

Vers. 1-4.—These names embrace Gen. i.-ix., which the reader is presumed to know. This furnishes a principle of interpretation to other parts of the book. The Hebrew pointing will often account for the orthography of the names.

Vers. 5-7.—*List of sons and grandsons of Japheth* (cf. Gen. x., Noah's sons in order of Genesis x. 1). Beginning with *Japheth*, youngest, to dispose of what is not exactly required, the writer gives seven sons—three through *Gomer*, the eldest son, and four through *Javan*, the fourth son.

Vers. 8-16.—*Descendants of Ham, sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons.* Four sons of *Ham*; six grandsons, including *Nimrod*, through *Cush*, the eldest son of *Ham*; seven grandsons through *Mizraim*, second son of *Ham*; two great-grandsons through *Raamah*, *Cush's* fourth son; 30 altogether.

Vers. 17-27.—*Shem's descendants to Abraham.* A pause half way at the name of *Peleg*, ver. 19, to mention *Joktan*, his brother, and then *Joktan's* thirteen sons, vers. 20-23. Then repeating the first five names of lineal descent, and picking up the thread at *Peleg*, the remaining five to *Abraham* are given—Gen. xi.-xvii.—given as briefly as possible. *Abraham* the tenth from *Noah*, and twentieth from *Adam*.

Vers. 28-33.—*The collaterals of Isaac.* This reaches from Gen. xvi.-xxv. *Isaac* put first as child of promise, though born fourteen years after *Ishmael* (Gen. xvii. 25 and xxi. 5). So *Shem* put first, though second son. This must be kept in mind in examination of lists. From call of *Abraham* to birth of *Isaac*, thirty years. Vers. 29-31 taken from Gen. xxv. 12-16. *Their generations*, a new starting-point, modified from Gen. xxv. 12, to include *Isaac* as well as *Ishmael*. Vers. 32, 33 abridged from Gen. xxv. 1-4. The sons of *Dedan* omitted (*Murphy*).

Vers. 34-37.—*Descendants of Esau* (cf. Gen. xxxvi. 10-14). *Timna*, ver. 36, seems to have been concubine of *Eliphaz* and *Amalek*, another son by her. Ver. 37, four grandsons of *Esau* by *Reuel*.

Vers. 38-42.—*Descendants of Seir.* *Seir* probably a Shemite, though his relation is unrecorded (cf. *Murphy*). Twenty-seven names given agree with Gen. xxxvi. 20-27, except for *Homam*, *Alian*, *Shephi*, *Amram*, and *Jakan* we have *Hemam*, *Alvan*, *Shepho*, *Hemdan*, and *Akan*.

Vers. 43-50.—*The Kings of Edom* (cf. Gen. xxxvi. 31-43). *Before any king*, before *Israel* had any civil government, or became a nation with a king. There are eight names, the parentage or the land of each given.

Vers. 51-54.—*The Dukes of Edom.* Eleven given. Some think a list of places, not of persons, compared with Gen. xxxvi. 15, 41, 43. This ch. contains genealogies which embrace about 2,300 years. Not a remark given apparently, moral, religious, or didactic. It connects *Israel* with *Adam*, and retraces the pedigree of men to its original source.

HOMILETICS.

THREE PAGES OF HUMAN HISTORY.—Ver. 1.

Names are potent things, represent mighty factors, sustaining forces in life, and important periods in history. We are apt to think genealogies are dry, and names of no significance, but Scripture nomenclature reads a different lesson. How suggestive the names in ver. 1!

I. The creation of man. *Adam* first and representative of the race. The historic man, apparently no "prehistoric man." The creation of man a decree and last work of God, the crowning point of all. In man, and through man, nature finds its purpose and transformation. **II. The inspiration of hope.** *Seth* means *fixed*, *settled*, or compensation. He came in the place of *Abel* taken away. At birth of *Cain*, *Eve* hasty in joy (I have gotten the man); in *Abel* (*vanity*, perishable) desponding; in *Seth* confident. Divine

power compensated for what human cruelty took away, inspired hope of permanent blessing. God can wonderfully comfort. If one gone, He can give another. He can strengthen, establish, and perpetuate the family and the Church, so that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against them." **III. The beginning of public worship.** *Enos* designates weakness, human frailty, a sorrowful remembrance of Abel (Ps. viii. 5; xc. 3). How soon are hopes dashed! But God becomes great when we feel small. "Then began men to call upon (proclaim, announce) Jehovah" (Gen. iv. 26). A new line of promise in Enoch (*Enos*) after line of Cain had lost it. Hope finds expression in formal worship. The Sethites merge into a community, outline a church, and publicly honour Jehovah. In a new race and a believing generation God's name ever presented with higher glory and greater attractions.

SOLEMN VIEWS OF HUMAN LIFE.—*Verses 1-4.*

I. The beginning of human life. In Adam a distinct beginning of humanity on earth, not as a physical act merely or completion of physical progress. It happened in the supernatural and spiritual. "Not merely *formation, animation*, but direct, divine *inspiration*" (Gen. ii. 7) [*Taylor Lewis*]. From the first man spring all the race. History and science cannot present the contrary. "The first man was made a living soul." **II. The length of human life.** Before the Flood men long-lived (*cf.* Gen. v.). Accounted for 1. *By natural causes.* Habits simple, food nutritious, and climate healthy. 2. *By providential design.* To establish institutions, people the earth, and propagate truth. **III. The corruption of human life.** The Cainites ungodly—first civilisation worldly, art and culture misused, polygamy prevails, races intermix, unbelief and Titanic pride corrupt the race. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. vi. 5). **IV. The destruction of human life.** Evil contagious, rapidly spread and deteriorated the race. They were *flesh*, wholly carnal or animal. "He also is flesh" (Gen. vi. 3). In wanton deeds, divine warnings despised, the Holy Spirit grieved. The world ripe for judgment. God repented, that is, changed his procedure, not his purpose, concerning man (Gen. vi. 7, 8). The Flood swept "every living thing from off the earth." **V. The deliverance of human life.** A few were saved (1 Pet. iii. 20). Noah and his family preserved, and were progenitors of a redeemed race. God held human life sacred, bound himself by signs never more to destroy it by flood. Noah, the last of Sethic race and first in the line of Shem, a second ancestor of the human family. Man rises to a higher place in the world. As a believer he is saved from general wreck, inherits a new earth purged from sin, and becomes heir of a righteousness by faith.

THE HUMAN RACE, IN ITS UNITY, PROGRESS, AND DECLENSION.—*Verses 1-54.*

Glancing at these names, what an insight into human life, human activity and circumstances!

I. The unity of the race. The race not merely represented but comprehended in Adam. "Made of one (blood) all nations of men" (Acts xvii. 26). Mankind not "a living sand-heap," without generic connection. The Bible sees in Adam "the power of a single life—men one before they became many; and as many, still one." One natural "fatherhood," and one "common brotherhood" in him. "One touch of nature makes the world kin." **II. The progress of the race.** Every movement implies beginning, progress, and consummation. This makes history. 1. *In knowledge.* Not from barbarism at

first, but from supernatural light shining directly or indirectly on human steps. 2. *In arts.* Lamech's three sons authors of inventions (Gen. iv. 20-23). Culture and science as old as humanity. Barbarism and brutality result from corrupt civilisation. 3. *In civil government.* Cities built, states founded, kingdoms formed, titles given, and rulers chosen. 4. *In population.* Beginning from a single pair, in seven generations the human family attained considerable increase. "If Abraham's stock, in less than 400 years, amounted to 600,000, Cain's posterity, in the like time, might arise to the like multitude" [Willet]. It should remind of the reality and power of God's blessing (Gen. i. 28). 5. *In religion.* Abel's piety revived in the godly Sethites. "While the family of Cainites, by the erection of a city and the invention and development of worldly arts and business, were laying the foundation for the kingdom of this world, the family of the Sethites began, by united invocation of the name of the God of grace, to found and erect the kingdom of God" [Delitzsch]. Separation from ungodly associates needful. This, with social worship, checks declension and secures advancement. **III. The declension of the race.** Before the Flood, licentiousness and violence, pride and self-gratification. This 1. *Seen in sinful works.* Nothing wrong to build cities, handle harps, and cultivate poetry and music. These intended for the benefit of men, and should be consecrated to the service of God. But sadly misapplied when they lead to pride and forgetfulness of God. 2. *Seen in ungodly lives.* Cain, the murderer; Lamech, the polygamist; Nimrod, the powerful tyrant (Gen. x. 8). "The earth was filled with violence." 3. *Seen in significant names.* Qualities, principles, and characteristics seen in names of Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Lamech, &c. (Gen. iv. 23-26). Adah and Zillah indicative of sensual attractions. Learn the danger of intellect and civilisation separated from religion, the downward progress of sin, and the necessity, in these days of science and mechanical invention, of steadfastly fearing God and maintaining public worship.

"Grieved at his heart when, looking down, he saw
The whole earth filled with violence" [Milton].

POSTERITY OF NOAH'S SONS.—Verses 5-23.

I. The enemies of the Church. 1. Sons of *Japhet* (vers. 5-7 and Gen. x. 2-5). Trace the wide world-wandering, in which future generations disappear from the theocratic line. 2. Sons of *Ham* (vers. 8-16). Hamite culture early, corrupt and mixed with Cainite elements. **II. Allies of the Church** (vers. 17-23). In the line of Shem we have the gravitation of humanity to its centre, the gradual preparation for the calling of Abraham, and for the Messianic descent. Shem's history, the last in the world, first in the kingdom of God.

THE MIGHTY HUNTER.—Verse 10.

In the formal register of Gen. x. 8-12, a brief account of an individual inserted. A fact of importance, because it concerned the Hebrews to know that though their own ancestors came from the region where Nimrod played so conspicuous a part, the great kingdom, afterwards known as Babylon, was of Cushite, not of Semitic origin [Dr. Dods]. 1. *His descent.* Cush begat Nimrod. He is put back before the time of Abraham and assigned to the Ethiopian race. 2. *His occupation.* "He was a mighty hunter." Hunting of ravenous beasts a benevolent act for the human race. Powerful huntsmen pioneers of civilisation, as in the myth of Hercules. Nimrod, successful, became a great man, conqueror, and ruler. 3. *His extensive empire* (Gen. x. 10-12). As a mighty hunter, he founded a powerful kingdom. The founding of the kingdom is shown to have been the consequence or result of his strength in

hunting, so that the hunting was most intimately connected with the establishment of the kingdom. Figuratively, he was "a hunter of men" ("a trapper of men by stratagem and force," *Herder*), and became a tyrant and oppressor of liberty (cf. *Keil*, Gen. x. 9). 4. *His great fame*. Recognised as mighty; became a proverb, "It is said," &c. Expression *before the Lord* added as if God himself must take note of his skill. Some think that blame is intended, that his notoriety for boldness and wickedness is expressed; something so bad that God could not take his eyes from it. Learn the responsibility of power. Check the tendency to do homage to greatness which takes the form of "hero-worship." Wisely use and not abuse the endowments entrusted to your care.

"O execrable son, so to aspire
Above his brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurped, from God not given" [*Milton*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Genealogies and their use. 1. In helping Jews to identify their tribes. After return from captivity, all confusion. In prospect of future, needful to revise and reconstruct. 2. In illustrating Jewish History. Here and there names of great importance, and significant of solemn crises of history. 3. In tracing the descent of the Messiah.

Vers. 1, 4, 28. *Three covenants*—Adam, Noah, and Abraham. *Double names*—*Abraham*, the natural and spiritual name; *Jacob*, supplanter and prince.

Ver. 10. *Nimrod's threefold position*. 1. As the pioneer of civilisation; 2. As oppressor of patriarchal liberties; 3. As the instrument of God for the development of the world [*Lange*].

Ver. 19. *Peleg, or Division of the earth*. Its time, method, design, and commemoration (Gen. x. 25).

Vers. 24-27 (Gen. xi.). Other nations shaken off—line from Shem to Abraham given here. 1. *Ishmaelites* (vers. 29-31): 12 sons = 12 princes (Gen. xvii. 20). 2. *Midianites*, children of Keturah (vers. 32, 33). 3. *Edom-*

ites (vers. 36-54, cf. Gen. xxxvi.): (a) Kings of Edom (vers. 43-50); (b) Dukes of Edom (vers. 51-54).

Ver. 47. *Hadad dead* (cf. ver. 43). Notice 1. Changes in earthly governments—"reigned and died." 2. Uncertainty of human life: (a) In life's circumstances, "reigned"; (b) In life's end, "died."

Vers. 1-54. In list we find: 1. Progenitors of a new race. 2. Founders of great nations. Napoleon vowed that he would found a family, though not himself, of great lineage. *Many famous men*: Adam, the first man; Methuselah, the oldest; Lamech, polygamist, musician, and poet; Enoch, Noah, Nimrod, Abraham, &c. *Great events*: Creation of man; invention of arts; translation of Enoch; flood of Noah; call of Abraham, &c. *Suggested subjects*: "The Antiquity of Man"; The Origin of Civilisation; The Division of Nations; The Unity of the Race; The Foundation of the Israelitish People.

"For human weal, Heaven husbands all events" [*Young*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1. These chronicles have a mission. As no star was useless in the heavens, and as every atom has been created for a purpose, so God would not devote these chapters to

a pedigree without design. The end is Christ.

Ver. 1. *Adam*. Every human being is a volume worthy to be studied, and I thank God that my own lot is bound

up with that of the human race [*Channing*]. No man can think too highly of his nature, or too meanly of himself [*Young*].

Vers. 5-18. Threefold division of nations according to the names Japheth, Ham, and Shem. For part played by the several races in civilisation, cf. Fairbairn's *Studies in Phil. of Religion*, and Noah's prophecy (Gen. ix. 25-27). "All these sons, the white posterity of Japheth, the yellow and dark sons of Ham, however they may live in temporal separation, are all still God's children, and brothers to one another."

Ver. 27. *Abram*. The tenth from Noah, and the twentieth from Adam. The letter H, which was added to the original name of the patriarch, occurs twice in the sacred name of Jehovah. It was added, also, to the name of

Sarai. The addition in each case seems to mark a new and closer relation to God. "And I will write upon him the name of my God" [*J. H. Blunt*] (Gen. xvii. 5). The sacramental character of a name consists in its divine appointment to represent and commemorate and testify some special grace and blessing, and so to be a permanent pledge of its bestowal. Wilkinson, *Personal Names*, &c.

Vers. 44, 45. *Bela dead, Jobab reigned in his stead*. A great hand is sometimes laid even on the fly-wheel of life's engine [*George Macdonald*].

"What exhibitions various hath the world
Witness'd of mutability in all
That we account most durable below!
Change is the diet on which all subsist,
Created changeable, and change at last
destroys them" [*Cowper*].

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The sons of Israel. Names more numerous than Genesis, without regard to order. Greater interest by filling up former accounts.

Vers. 3-12.—*Posterity of Judah*. Vers. 1, 2, sons of Leah first; sons of Rachel between Dan and Naphtali (cf. Gen. xxix.-xxxv.). Vers. 3-8, Judah first, pre-eminent (Gen. xlix. 8), and descendants given to third generation. Vers. 3, 4, abridged from Gen. xxxviii., and ver. 5 found in Gen. xlvi. Vers. 6-8, descendants of Zerah, Zimri, Zabdi in Josh. vii. 1; the other four given 1 Kings iv. 31; called "sons of Mahol," or "sons of music." *Achar* (Achan, Josh. vii. 1), "troubler." Ver. 10, *Ram*, first as ancestor of David. Line given in Ruth iv 18-22. "The five names from *Salma* to David cover a period of at least 450 years from the Exodus to the birth of Solomon."

Vers. 13-15.—*Sons of Jesse*. Three eldest (1 Sam. xvi. 6-9); next three here only. Some think Raddai is Rei (1 Kings i. 8).

Vers. 18-20.—In remainder of this ch. the writer obtains scarcely any assistance from the earlier Scriptures, and must have drawn almost entirely from genealogical sources, accessible to him, which have since perished (*Speak. Com.*). *Caleb*, son of H. (ver. 18), to distinguish him from other Calebs in ch. *Hur*, companion of Aaron (Gen. xvii. 12). *Bezaleel*, famous artificer (Ex. xxxi. 2).

Vers. 21-24.—Resumed reference to *Hezron*. *Jair*, son of *Manasseh* (Num. xxxii. 41), belonged to Judah by father's side, yet attached himself to the house of Machir. His wife an heiress, and her inheritance was to follow her tribe (cf. Num. xxvii. and xxxvii.), cf. *Murphy*. He pushed his conquests far and wide (Deut. iii. 14).

Vers. 25-41.—A second interruption in account of Caleb's posterity. Descendants of *Jerahmeel*, vers. 25-27. Vers. 28-33, sons of Onan to seventh generation in line of *Shammai*, to fourth in *Jada*.

Vers. 42-49.—*Offspring of Caleb resumed*, probably of *Jerioth*, a different mother, ver. 18. Two concubines of Caleb introduced, ver. 46-49. *Ephah's* sons unknown. Second concubine mother of four or five sons and a daughter.

Vers. 50-55.—A little difficulty in these verses. Some maintain only one Caleb, and others that there were several (cf. *Speak. Com.*). Ver. 55, *scribes*, civil or ecclesiastical officers of Kenite origin, classed with Judah, not as descendants, but dwelling in its territory, intermixed through kindly feeling and incorporated with them (Ex. xviii. 10-19;

Num. x. 29-32; 1 Sam. xv. 6). *Rechab*, ver. 55, father or progenitor of the Rechabites who retained to late date nomadic habits of Kenite ancestors (cf. Jer. xxxv. 10; 2 Kings x. 15).

HOMILETICS.

THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS.—*Verses 1, 2.*

This is a most important register of Israel, who should dwell alone and not be reckoned among nations. Notice—**I. The six sons of Leah**—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon (Gen. xxix. 32-35). Learn—1. *God's grace in Leah's fruitfulness.* Leah loved less than Rachel (Deut. xxi. 15). God works above human thoughts, neither to compensate Leah for lack of Jacob's love, nor to punish Jacob for sinful partiality; but to manifest sovereign power, to teach that children are a heritage from him, and to indicate his purpose in fixing the line of promise, not by the fruit of nature, but the gift of grace. 2. *Leah's gratitude expressed in names of her sons*—Reuben, behold a son; Simeon, hearing; Levi, joined; Judah, praise. "God hath endued me with a good dowry" (Gen. xxx. 20). **II. The two sons of Rachel**—Joseph and Benjamin. 1. *In Joseph renewed faith*; reproach taken away, an expression of spiritual life and dependence, not on human device (mandrakes), but on God for offspring and help. 2. *In Joseph revived hope.* "He shall add" another son (Gen. xxx. 24). Grateful for one, she expects God will give another. Experience of divine faithfulness a great help in looking to the future. "Experience (worketh) hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." The wish was realised, but she died in Benjamin's birth. The fulfilment of our wishes may be dangerous and fatal.

A FAMILY HISTORY.—*Verses 3-12.*

In this record of Judah, as in all families, a record bright and cheering, dark and disgraceful.

I. A record of family shame. Some were wicked, guilty of abominable crimes. 1. *Sin ending with untimely death.* Er's wickedness great, a special sin in Israel's descendants, a defiance of God and his word to make them a numerous nation. Onan refused to raise up children in his brother's name. An indication of his envious disposition and vile pollution of body. Both displeased the Lord, and were cut off by untimely death. Many, it is feared, act in the same way—dishonour body and destroy soul (Gen. xxxviii. 8-10). 2. *Sin connected with shame.* Tamar guilty of incest (Gen. xxxviii. 16-18). 3. *Sin bringing trouble.* "Achar the troubler of Israel." "He transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and wrought folly (trouble) in Israel" (Jos. vii. 15). In *Israel*, in the Church, and among the people of God, with God's presence to provide for them and protect them! guilty of theft, sacrilege, and invading the rights of God, by converting for private use what is designed for his glory. Achan, branded with disgrace, a monument of judgment, and a perpetual warning. These sins were early, unnatural, and grievous. Yet Thamar received a place in the Toledoth of Christ (Mat. i. 3), and the "valley of Achor" becomes "a door of hope" (Hos. ii. 15). **II. A record of family honour.** The potentiality of families great. Children become saints or scourges, joys or sorrows. 1. *Some greatly distinguished in position.* Ram, an ancestor of David (Ruth iv. 18-22); Nahshon, a prince in Judah, and led the van during encampment of Israel in wilderness; Salma was in post of honour when they entered Canaan. 2. *Others excelled in mental qualities.* Varied gifts of body and mind in members of the same family. (a) *Eminent in wisdom*—Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara, the glory of their father's house. For when Scripture magnifies the wisdom of Solomon, he is declared to be wiser

than these four men (1 Kings iv. 30). When Joseph was in authority they dwelt in Egypt, cultivated natural talents, distinguished for social wisdom and fine arts, and became eminent among the sons of Egypt and the East. (b) *Skilled in music.* The family of Zerah, or Ezrah, said to be sons of Machol, or the choir (1 Chr. xv. 17-19). Psalm lxxxviii. is ascribed to Heman the Ezrahite, and Psalm lxxxix. to Ethan the Ezrahite. Hence they were choristers, skilled in music and its kindred arts—poetry, singing, and dancing. These qualities cultivated in tribe of Judah, and attained highest lustre in David and Solomon. Thus families have their sunshine and their shame, their glory and decline, their troublers and comforters. Secure your name in the record of heaven, that when the page of history fades, your title may never expire.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Pre-eminence.* Reuben, natural firstborn; Levi, legal firstborn; Judah, Messianic firstborn. "The names of Jacob's sons a type of human weakness and divine salvation in his house" [*Lange*].

Ver. 3. *Er and Onan.* One acted "wicked in the sight of the Lord," another "displeased the Lord." Both the same in perverting a natural ordinance, militating against purity and development of the theocratic family, and deserving Divine reprobation.

Ver. 4. *Tamar.* Guilty of temptation, practised deception, and committed incest. These events in Judah's family display the goodness and severity of God, illustrative of grace and judgment. "Why did God and the

Holy Ghost permit these shameful things to be written? *Answer:* 1. That no one should be self-righteous. 2. That none should despair on account of sin. 3. To remind us that Gentiles, by natural right, are mother, brothers, sisters of our Lord" [*Luther, in Lange, Gen. xxviii.*].

Ver. 6. *Sons of Zerah.* A famous choir. Influence of music in the family and the Christian Church. "The music of the spheres" [*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 7. *Achor,* the transgressor and troubler. The connection of sin with trouble. Trouble leadeth to discovery of sin. Sin ending in death of individuals and punishment of community. "That man perished not alone in his iniquity" (Jos. xxii. 20).

HOMILETICS.

THE FAMILY OF JESSE.—Verses 13-15.

* A special account kept of this family for the sake of David and the Son of David, a rod out of the stem of Jesse (Isa. xi. 1)." Several principles illustrated in history of this family.

I. The mistakes of human judgment. A family of imposing persons—Eliab, majestic in appearance; Abinadab and Shammah, great in physical power and brave in battle (1 Sam. xvii. 13). "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." No! look not on the beauty of countenance and the height of stature, &c. **II. The law of divine choice.** David chosen. Weak things to confound mighty; cripples to overcome giants, and shepherds to rule men. Unlikely men to the front. God takes out of range of appearances, pays no regard to human prejudice. "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Learn that human judgment is not infallible. God's choice is best; submit to it, and seek its proof in its spiritual gifts and results.

THE DESCENDANTS OF CALEB.—Verses 18–24, 42–49.

In the list we find—

I. Persons of note. *Hur*, the companion of Aaron, who rendered help to Moses and to Israel on the mount (Ex. xvii. 20); *Bezaleel*, the famous artificer of the Tabernacle, grandson of Hur (Ex. xxxi. 2); *Jair*, the taker of cities, to which he gave his name (Num. xxxii. 41): threescore cities (towns or livings) fell before his valour (Jos. xiii. 30). *Hezron* himself was eminent, one of the seventy that went down to Egypt with Jacob (Gen. xlvi. 12). **II. Illustrative incidents.** Events displaying God in history and God in the family. 1. *In human families.* One childless (ver. 30); another no sons (ver. 34). Intermarriage in vers. 34, 35. Perhaps the Egyptian was upright and wise, and became a proselyte to the Jewish religion. 2. *In human history.* *Ephrath* (ver. 19), named after her who gave the name to the town Ephrath, which is Jerusalem. “We begin here to learn the interesting and unexpected fact that the intercourse of Israel with the localities in Palestine, where their ancestors had acquired property, was kept up so long as they were a free and honoured people” [*Murphy*]. *Machir* is called “father of Gilead” (ver. 21), who was born before death of Joseph (Gen. i. 23). “Gilead, memorable in history of Jacob and the scene transacted there remembered by Joseph, an observant youth at the time of the parting covenant between Laban and Jacob. If Jacob established any title to the mount at that time, this would be an additional reason for calling a son of Machir after this celebrated spot” [*Murphy*]. Thus we learn that God can make the obscurest eminent, and smallest service memorable. He presides over the destinies of families and the relationships of life. We can trace Divine impress upon records of history.

OFFSPRING OF CALEB CONTINUED.—Verses 50–55.

Since Hur was the son, not the father, of Caleb, a difficulty presented here. Best way to read “sons” for “son” before the word Hur. All difficulty will disappear, and we shall have the sense. “These (the list in verses 42–49) were the sons of Caleb. The sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah, were Shobal... Salma... Hareph.” The clause “these were the sons of Caleb” corresponds exactly to that which concludes the genealogy of Jerahmeel (ver. 32), and properly belongs to what has gone before, not to what follows [*Speak. Com.*]. In the list we discover—

I. The company of colonisers. Fathers, first settlers of places. Shobal, Salma, Hareph; the four families mentioned in ver. 53, who left parents and residence (Kirjath-jearim) to colonise towns and villages in neighbourhood from which sprang Zorah and Eshtaol. **II. The family of scribes** (ver. 55). A trio of civil or ecclesiastical officers, the heads of whom were *Tirah*, *Shimea*, and *Suchah*, of Kenite origin, dwelling in Judah, but distinguished from another Kenite clan which dwelt in Mannasseh (Judg. iv. 11). **III. The famous Rechabites** (ver. 55). Not only famous for nomadic habits of their ancestors (2 Kings x. 15), but for honourable connection with the ancient Abrahamic tribe of the Kenites to which the father-in-law of Moses belonged (Judg. i. 16; 1 Sam. xv. 6, xxvii. 10). Their descendants were men of character and influence, and highly commended by God (Jer. xxxv. 18, 19).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 13–15. *The story of Boaz.* character of Jesse, as indicated by the Prominent in the Book of Ruth. *The incident of the text.*

Ver. 19. *Bezaleel*, art consecrated to God. *Jair*, prowess and valour employed in advancing the cause of God.

Ver. 24. *Hezron was dead*. A suggestive hint, a solemn reminder, in pursuits of life and conquests of nations that earthly possessions cannot be kept.

"And that small model of the barren earth,
Which serves as paste and cover to our
bones" [*Shakespeare*].

"Nothing can we call our own, but Death."

Ver. 55. *Scribes*. A class devoted to exposition of law, instruction of the nation, and preservation of its records

1. *A noble calling*. To study and expound sacred books, intone society, and spread the will of God. 2. *A family calling*.

"The families of the scribes." Hereditary pursuits in all communities.

Advantageous to fix traditions and habits in persons, to pursue studies in cities, colleges, and schools. 3. *A needful calling*.

The revelation of God, written and printed, requires study, application, and circulation. A literary profession useful to society; a learned ministry the want of the times. "Writing is now the mightiest instrument on earth"

[*Channing*]. "*The families of the scribes*. These were the public notaries, or, as some think, text-men, who took the literal interpretation, as

distinct from Wise, that is, teachers of traditions, and from Disputers, that is, teachers of allegories and mysteries (see 1 Cor. i. 20; Jer. viii. 9; Ezra vii. 6). The first were the best of the three, and of these were the Rechabites, who being Shuchathites, that is, dwellers in tents, might dwell where they pleased, and now dwelt at Jabez, a place which seemeth to have its name from that good Jabez of Judah, who prayed so hard (*cf.* iv. 10), having haply the help of these holy Kenites, the posterity of Jethro (see Judg. i. 16)." [*Trapp*].

Vers. 18-55. I. What multitudes unknown! Men with names and nothing more. They live, die, and are buried in oblivion! So we think. But what do we know of history? Best men, quiet service, and patient endurance gain no record. II. But men unknown and most obscure may be honoured. "Nobodies" become "notabilities," and through divine grace introduce Christ to man and bless the world. "There will be a resurrection of names some day," says Ruskin.

"Whose silent prayers and labours Heaven employs
To do the good, whilst others make the
noise" [*Jane Taylor*].

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To do the good, whilst others make the
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ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1-13. *Sons of Israel, sons of Judah, &c.* "The child is truly and literally 'the heir of all the ages.' The past, with all its legacies, has existed for it, just as all the future will be its own. To whatsoever heights of human excellence it may rise, or to whatsoever depths of human degradation it may sink, the child is now an element in the sum of human life; a new unit in the aggregate of mankind. It is therefore worthy both of study and reverence. Did we but form an adequate conception of the dignity and also the marvellousness of human existence, the oldest man might well stand bareheaded and thoughtful in the presence of a babe" [*Anon.*]. (Luther's schoolmaster taking his hat off to his pupils.)

Vers. 19 and 24. *Was dead*.

"How he marks his way
With dreadful waste of what deserves to
shine!

Art, genius, fortune, elevated power!
With various lustres these light up the
world,
Which Death puts out, and darkens human
race" [*Young*].

Vers. 18-55. Live for something. Do good and leave behind you a monument of virtue that the storms of time can never destroy. Write your name by kindness, love, and mercy on the hearts of thousands you come in contact with year by year, and you will never be forgotten. No, your name, your deeds will be as legible on the hearts you leave behind as the stars on the brow of evening. They shall shine as brightly on earth as stars of heaven [*Dr. Chalmers*].

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CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Having completed list of descendants of Jerahmeel and Caleb, writer returns to ch. ii. 15, gives line of David, royal house of tribe of Judah, to the Captivity and afterwards. Many difficulties in names and order cannot be touched here.

Vers. 1-9.—Sons of David. First, those born in Hebron. *Daniel*, Chileab (2 Sam. iii. 3). *Reigned*, ver. 4 (2 Sam. ii. 11, v. 5; 1 Kings ii. 11). Second, those born in Jerusalem, vers. 5-9. *Shimea*, Shamnuah; *Bathshua*, Bathsheba; *Ammiel*, Eliam, letters merely transposed. *Concubines.*—Ver. 9 (2 Sam. xv. 16), "One daughter (*Tamar*) mentioned according to rule, that daughters are given only when the line is saved, or that they had for special reasons made a place for themselves in history" [*Murphy*].

Vers. 10-16.—Descent to Captivity. First, as far as King Josiah, vers. 10-14. *Abia*, or *Abijah*, for *Abijam* (1 Kings xv. 1). *Azariah* ("help of Jah"), called *Uzziah* ("strength of Jah") in 2 Kings xv. 30, immediately after death, and so named elsewhere (2 Chr. xxvi. 1; 2 Kings xiv. 21). Four successions follow sons of Josiah, vers. 15, 16. *Jeconiah*, ver. 16, *Coniah* in Jer. xxii. 24, and *Jehoiachin* in Kings, meaning "Jehovah will establish."

Vers. 17-24.—Descent to Exile and afterwards. This text is difficult and disarranged apparently. The following arrangement is given by Dr. Davidson (*Hermeneutics*): "V. 17. And the sons of Jeconiah the captive; *Salathiel* (asked of God) (*Shealtiel*, Ezra iii. 2; Neh. xii. 1; Hag. i. 12, 14; ii. 2) his son: v. 18. And the sons of *Salathiel*; *Zerubbabel* (sown, *i.e.*, begotten, in Babylon—who was the direct son of *Pedaiah*; but omitting several intermediate links, is called the son of *Salathiel*, Mat. i. 12) and *Shimei* (renowned): and the sons of *Zerubbabel*; *Meshullam* (friend, *i.e.*, of God), *Hananiah* (graciously given of God), and *Shelomith* (pacific), their sister. V. 19. And *Hashubah* (esteemed), and *Ohel*, and *Berechiah* (blessed of Jehovah), and *Hasadiah* (beloved of God), *Jushab-hezed* (whose love is returned). 20. And *Malchiram*, and *Rephaiah*, and *Shenazar*, *Jecamiah*, *Hoshama*, and *Nedabiah*. 21. The sons of *Haniah*; *Pelathiah* and *Jesaiah*: the sons of *Rephaiah*; his son *Arnan*, his son *Obadiah* (worshipper of Jehovah), his son *Shecaniah* (dwelling with Jehovah)."

Ver. 22.—Shemaiah, or *Shimei* (ver. 19, cf. Zech. xii. 13). *Hattush* probably accompanied *Ezra* from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra viii. 2).

HOMILETICS.

THE SONS OF DAVID.—Verses 1-10.

I. Their places of birth. The verses classified according to the place of birth. In *Hebron*, six sons born, each of a different mother. In *Jerusalem*, thirteen, four of one mother and nine of others not mentioned. Places often identified with birth of important persons. *Bunyan* and *Bedford*, &c. Let character and conduct give renown to place. **II. Their varied lives.** *Absalom*, son of a king's daughter, a murderer and rebel, "died a fool." *Amnon* violated his sister *Tamar*, and was slain. *Adonijah* conspired against the throne, and met with bitter disappointment. *Nathan* reminded his father of the prophet who reproved his sin, brought him to repentance, and had the honour of belonging to the ancestry of *Jesus* (Lu. iii. 31). *Solomon*, wisest, most gifted, and successor. But what checkered lives! Little to give parental joy. Much to cause anxiety and grief. Amid the splendour of his reign and the power of his palace, his cup was mixed with grief and sorrow, &c. "Trust not thou in their (children's) life, neither respect their multitude: for one that is just is better than a thousand; and better it is to die without children, than to have them that are ungodly" (Ecclus. xvi. 3).

"Virtue, not pedigree, stamps nobility."

THE GOLDEN AGE.—Verses 10–16.

David's successors given up to the Captivity. For convenience call it the golden age.

I. The description of the period. 1. *A long period.* "Seldom has a crown gone in direct line from father to son for seventeen descents together as here"—say Henry. Judah survived Kingdom of Israel by 135 years, and lasted from B.C. 975 to B.C. 586. 2. *A prosperous period.* In population, resources, and empire Judah great; soil fertile; aristocracy hereditary in sacerdotal caste; an army always subordinate; a venerated centre of worship and administration; on the whole, peaceful and uninterrupted success of kings. In language, literature, and religion a glorious period. **II. The nature of individual reigns.** Peaceful and warlike; powerful and weak; long and short. Kings wise and foolish; godly and idolatrous; reigned by natural right and fixed on throne by foreign potentates. The first part began in splendour, the latter ended in desolation. In David and Solomon we pass from conflict to peace; in Jeconiah and Zedekiah from grief to exile.

"This strange, sad world is but our Father's school;
All chance and change His love shall grandly overrule"

[F. R. Havergal].

THE DECAYING GLORY.—Verses 17–24.

In these verses we have the royal remnant during captivity. The decaying glory.

I. The dark beginning. Jeconiah adopted Salathiel, otherwise written childless, the signet God plucked from his hand, dear as an ornament, yet rejected (Jer. xxii. 24). There is a striking contrast between this beautiful name (*Jehoiakin*, Jehovah will establish) and the miserable fate of the man. Enthroned by Necho, powerless against Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem was besieged, Jeconiah taken prisoner, bound in fetters and carried to Babylon (2 Chr. xxxvi. 6, 7).

II. The gradual decay. Zerubbabel the last with any shred of authority. After him royal line disappears into obscure private life. Nehemiah next governor of whom we read. Sennacherib repulsed, religious revivals under Hezekiah and Josiah, but the impious reign of Manasseh and the lingering decay of the people under the four feeble descendants of Josiah prepared for the final ruin. Babylon in successive deportations drained away their strength. The temple was destroyed amid wailing of prophets; the nation ceased amid taunts of heathen tribes, released from the yoke of David. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish: yea, those nations shall be utterly destroyed."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1–24. Review the list.

1. *Indicative of God's providential discipline.* In bestowing mercy upon bad men, fulfilling his word to good men, and unfolding his purpose in wonderful events to all ages. 2. *Indicative of vicissitudes in human life.* In joy and grief, in splendours of the palace and the obscurity of exile. Revolutions in time and place. Change everywhere. "There is no remembrance of former things: neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to

come with those that shall come hereafter" (Ecc. i. 11). 3. *Indicative of vanity of worldly fame.* The humorist Thackeray asks, "What boots it whether it be Westminster or a little country spire which covers your ashes; or if a few days sooner or later the world forgets you?"

"Thus are we fortune's pastimes; one day live

Advanced to heaven by the people's breath,
The next, hurled down into th' abyss of death" [May].

Vers. 10-16. Sketch the lives of David and Solomon, Hezekiah's reign, Manasseh's wickedness, and Josiah's piety.

Ver. 19. *Zerubbabel*. 1. *Distinguished in work*. (a) Leading a liberated people to their own land. (b) Rebuilding the Temple. (c) Instituting civil government. 2. *Distinguished in the prosecution of that work*. Courage, patience, faith, and enthusiasm. A personal example and a power among his people. 3. *Distinguished as the object of prophecy*. Often addressed by name by

Haggai and Zechariah; received glorious predictions concerning temple he was building and future magnificence of Jerusalem and Judah, which exercised great influence upon his mind and preserved a spirit which endured till the coming of Christ. *A name suggestive of important events*. 1. Return of captives. 2. Restoration of national government. 3. Establishment of religious worship. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house," &c. (Zech. iv. 9).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1-24. *Sons of, &c.* It was, perhaps, ordained by Providence, to hinder us from tyrannising over one another, that no individual should be of such importance as to cause, by his retirement or death, any chasm in the world [*Dr. Johnson*].

"Men die and are forgotten. The great world

Goes on the same. Among the myriads Of men that live, or have lived, or shall live,

What is a single life, or thine, or mine, That we should think all nature would stand still

If we were gone?

The great are not great to me unless they are good" [*S. Richardson*].

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Obscurity often arising from brevity conspicuous in this passage. Yet we discern an order in it, indicated in first verse. It contains descendants of Shobal, Hur, Carmi, Hezron, and of Pharez. The section chiefly of local interest, intended to point out founders of some of the towns in the province of Judah [*Murphy*]. *Reaiah* conjectured to be same as Haroeh, ii. 52. 3, 4. *Descendants of Hur*. *Father, i.e.*, joint founders of Etam, a town on rocky hills of Judah (Judg. xv. 8; 2 Chr. xi. 6). *Gedor*, now Jedur (Jos. xv. 58). *Hushah*, of unknown site, but indication of the place (2 Sam. xxiii. 7; 1 Chr. xi. 29).

Vers. 5-10.—*Descendants of Ashur* (Carmi), posthumous son of Hezron by Abia, called *father* or chief of Tekoa; with two wives, three children to one, and four to the other. *Jabez*, ver. 9, son or maternal kinsman of Ashur, who names the town (ii. 55).

Vers. 11-15.—*Descendants of Hezron*. *Chelub*, brother of Shuah, to distinguish him from others. The group in vers. 11, 12, unknown. In vers. 13-15 return to names not quite strange. *Even* (and) *Kenaz*, ver. 15, translate as marg. *Uknaz*, or suppose a name (*Jehaleel*) to have fallen out after Elah.

Vers. 16-20.—*Descendants of Pharez*. From vers. 17, 18, difficult to come to any conclusions. *And these*, an interesting phrase, indicative of sojourn of these persons in Egypt, when Israel was free, prosperous, and respected. "It was then as becoming for a sovereign of Egypt to give a daughter in marriage to Mered, as at a later period a sister-in-law to Hadad. This Pharaoh may have been the last of the dynasty that preceded the eighteenth" [cf. *Murphy*].

Vers. 21-23.—*Descendants of Judah*. We have been ascending from Shobal to Hur, to Carmi, to Hezron, to Pharez; now we rise to Judah himself. A list of descendants of his son Shelah here given [cf. *Murphy*]. Linen, a staple commodity of Egypt. *Ashbea*, a

descendant of Shelah, had a factory there. Ver. 23, last of Judah, and leave the tribe in obscurity. Some of these potters, and others gardeners.

Vers. 24-43.—*The sons of Simeon*. Classed with Judah, because possessions partly in their territory (Jos. xix. 1). Differences of particulars in list occasioned by some having more than one name (cf. Gen. xlv. 10; Ex. vi. 15, and Num. xxvi. 12, 13). Ver. 27, *Shimei* distinguished from his brethren by a large family. "Progeny of Simeon here traced to settlement in Canaan." Vers. 28-33, *His territory*. Eighteen cities given in Jos. xix. 2-7. Changes in name took place in time between Joshua and David. Vers. 34-38, *Subsequent increase* of certain families of Simeon; *princes*, ver. 38. "The number of names is thirteen, corresponding to number of cities in first list (vers. 28-31), so that it may be suspected that the princes mentioned were registered chiefs of those cities in time of Hezekiah (see ver. 41)" [*Speak. Com.*]. Vers. 39, 40, the first migration. *Valley* into which mountain streams ran to fertilise the land, suitable for Simeonites, quiet and peaceable on account of seclusion and long undisturbed inhabitants. *Ham*, ver. 40, on their way to Africa induced by fertility of soil and abundance of water. Vers. 41-43, *further migrations*. *Days of Hez.*, hence date of Simeonite expedition, before captivity of ten tribes (2 Kings xviii. 8). *Rest*, ver. 43, remnant left by Saul's great slaughter (1 Sam. xv. 7, 8), and by David (2 Sam. viii. 12).

HOMILETICS.

THE CHIEFS OF JUDAH.—Verses 1-23.

Judah the most famous and most important of all tribes. A tribe which survived other tribes, and whose register was specially cared for. **I. Posterity of Shobal** (vers. 1-4). From these came the Zorathites (ch. ii. 53). **II. Posterity of Ashur** (vers. 5-10). Ashur, posthumous son of Hezron (ch. ii. 24), whose mother was probably a daughter of Carmi. If so, he is grandson of Carmi, hence introduction of this name in ver. 1. **III. Posterity of Chelub** (vers. 11-20). Men of Rechah as inhabitants of an unknown place of that name. **IV. Posterity of Shelah** (vers. 21-23). Shelah, son of Judah, a family ingenious and industrious above others. Honest labourers are the salt of society; the healthy, luxurious and dissolute, the idle and predatory would corrupt it. 1. *Craftsmen* (ver. 14). A wise arrangement that men should be fitted for different employments. 2. *Weavers* (ver. 21). This an ancient and skilful labour. Children excelled and became famous in their business. "He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good." 3. *Rulers in Moab* (ver. 22). Entrusted with power for many generations. But this long ago ("ancient things"). A great change. Fathers had dominion then, posterity in servitude now! 4. *Potters*, and 5. *Gardeners* (ver. 23). "With the king," on the king's property; or preferring to stay with him in Babylon rather than return to their own country. "Unworthy the name of Israelites are those who dwell among *plants* and *hedges* rather than go to Canaan."

JABEZ THE HONOURED NAME.—Verse 9.

This a strange description in a catalogue of names. The man worthy of remembrance, an honoured name deserving attention. **I. The circumstances of his birth**. Born in sorrow. 1. *Sorrow the lot of all* (Gen. iii. 16). Man born to sorrow as sparks fly upward (Job xiv. 1). 2. This, perhaps, *special sorrow*, which the mother wished to perpetuate in name. O. T. names significant of qualities and circumstances of life. Benjamin (Ben-oni), son of *my sorrow*, by Rachael; son of *my right hand*, by the father.

"I do beseech you,
Chiefly that I might set it on my prayers,
What is your name?" [*Shakespeare*].

II. The dignity of his character. "More honourable." Not a title of position or office as "The Hon." and "The Right Hon.," &c. 1. *Honourable in himself*, literally "a man of weight." Jews say, a famous doctor of the law who had disciples and founded a city which took his name (ch. ii. 55). But honourable and upright in personal character and conduct. A man of prayer and fervent piety, whose name is held in everlasting remembrance. 2. *More honourable than others.* Some think he was exalted above them as judge, signalised in war, or gained larger estates than his brethren. Not richer in material wealth, but in moral worth; more dignified in private life, more distinguished in action and public philanthropy. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." Seek this honour of character and life, not worldly honour which decays like a flower, but honour from God, perpetual and true.

THE REMARKABLE PRAYER.—Verse 10.

Many things deserving attention, which make it a model of thoughtful, earnest, and successful prayer. **I. Its spiritual characteristics.** Devotion an expression of spirit, not lips. 1. *Its view of God.* Right views of God essential. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is," &c. Not *Jehovah*, the Almighty, Self-existent, and Eternal; but *God of Israel*, the covenant God who keeps his word and never forgets his people. 2. *Its humble tone*, a kind of vow. If thou wilt bless me, thou shalt have my heart and service (Jacob. Gen. xxviii. 20), but without thee undone, &c. 3. *Its earnest spirit.* "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed." Language of ardent feeling and intense desire, becoming and needful. "O God, let me not fall from earnestness. Grant me to hate every false way," cried Thomas Chalmers. **II. Its worthy object.** Most personal and direct, straight as an arrow to the point. 1. *For personal blessing.* "Bless me indeed." This the beginning, the most needful of all. 2. *For successful undertaking.* "Enlarge my coast." Expulsion of Canaanites, or special effort in which he desired to succeed. All success from God. Pray when you enter life, start business, begin some fresh pursuit, take a journey, or enter a new residence. 3. *For preservation from danger.* "Thine hand with me." His undertaking risky. He wanted something beside reputation, shields, and soldiers. Wealth, friendship, and human aid, nothing without God. "Uphold me with thy right hand." 4. *For deliverance from evil.* Evil of sorrow implied in his name. Deeply impressed with his mother's conduct. Let it not be. Desired to be joy and help to parents, not a grief. Evil of sin generally. In remembrance of Achan, perhaps. Sin ever brings sorrow, "keep me from evil." Deliver me from its guilt and consequences. "Let sin have no dominion over me." **III. Its gracious answer.** "God granted him that which he requested." God preserved in danger, gave success in enterprise, delivered from grief and sin, and exalted him to honour and position. This to magnify his grace, encourage piety and prayer.

"In all thou dost, first let thy prayers ascend,
And to the gods thy labours first commend;
From them implore success, and hope
A prosperous end." [W. Fleming].

JABEZ THE "HONOURABLE."

According to a worldly standard, this list includes more hon. names than that of Jabez. But in the estimation of heaven, the only reputation that will live must have connection with God. The words we specially emphasise are, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!" Some analogies suggested by the sea-coast may teach the following lessons. **I. An enlarged**

“coast” suggests an expanded horizon. Carnal sympathies and lack of faith limit to narrow visions of divine truths and holy revelations. Our spiritual relations determine whether soul vision commands outlook from a small bay, or toward broad ocean. To the mother of Jabez his entrance into the world was associated with some special suffering, and she named him “*sorrowful*.” Years rolled on, God by his prophet knighted him and pronounced him “more honourable than his brethren.” Even so now according to our faith will be the significance of our individual history. Let our vision be bounded by time and sense only, and life will be a baptism of grief. Let faith widen our coast, expand our horizon, and all along the coast the lamps of “hope” shall hang, and a “more honourable” name be gained than those who refuse the “faith, which is the substance of things not seen, and by which the elders obtained a good report.”

II. An enlarged “coast” suggests a broader surface. The glory of a coast is its wide sweep of the ocean. There go ships, whose massive keels skim the surface of the waters. There floods lift up their voice, whose swelling waves declare the fulness of its strength. Such in figure is the human soul when possessed and enlarged by the Spirit of God. What sublime possibilities of divine enlargement belong to the heart of man! Sin circumscribes, hems in, and we are “straitened in ourselves.” But the coast may be enlarged; hills of difficulty be removed, and mountains of unbelief levelled, until an expanded horizon sheds calm and enlivening radiance all around, and the renewed soul takes up the language of a renewed earth (Is. lx. 4, 5).

III. An enlarged “coast” suggests a more extended pathway. Sometimes a narrow strip of land forms the only path when walking on the sea-coast. Then we are in danger of falling, slipping over a precipice; and but for a helping hand many would have thus perished. These words are singularly applicable. Similar are those of the Psalmist, Ps. xviii. 35, 36; cxix. 32 (Prov. iv. 12). This enlarged pathway will secure two things. (1) *Safety*. “Kept” by the divine hand. No other power to keep. In the king’s highway alone is security. This a way of holiness. “A highway shall be there, it shall be called the way of holiness.” (2) *Peace*. Jabez not only desires safety, but prays that sin may not “grieve” him. This a fine test of sincerity of prayer and the cleanness of heart. What various motives, prompt obedience to divine laws! What a great gulph of moral disparity between the sayings, *Sin hurts me physically, and sin grieves me spiritually!* [*The Study*, 1874].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 10. *The Mighty Hand.* Available, ever ready, and always sufficient. A hand of universal control and perpetual activity. “God’s right hand doeth valiantly.”

Ver. 13. *Othniel’s adventure* (cf. Jos. xv. 15, 16; Judg. i. 12, 13; iii. 9). The brave man waits not for numbers and applause. Enough for him to know the cause is just, that danger threatens, that action is required.

“Where duty bids, he confidently steers,
Faces a thousand dangers at her call,
And, trusting in his God, surmounts
them all.”

Ver. 18. *The Egyptian convert.* This passage records a very interesting fact,

the marriage of an Egyptian princess to a descendant of Caleb. 1. The marriage must have taken place in the wilderness. 2. The barriers of a different national language and national religion kept the Hebrews separate from the Egyptians; but they did not wholly prevent intimacies, and even occasional intermarriages between private individuals of the two nations. 3. Ere such unions, however, could be sanctioned, the Egyptian party must have renounced idolatry, and this daughter of Pharaoh, as appears from her name, had become a convert to the worship of the God of Israel [*Jamieson*].

HOMILETICS.

THE POSTERITY OF SIMEON.—*Verses 24-43.*

The sons of Simeon are classed with those of Judah, because their possession was partly taken out of the extensive territory of Judah (Jos. xix. 1).

I. The cities they possessed. The same list given (Jos. xix. 2-6) with a little difference in spelling; eighteen given. Virtue and self-control better than taking a city (Prov. xvi. 32). **II. The conquests they made.** In the days of Hezekiah a generation animated to conquests. 1. *Some took Gedor* (ver. 39). A place in Arabia, the entrance of Gedor, inhabited by Ham's posterity. 2. *Others took Mount Seir* (ver. 42). Smote the remnant of devoted Amalekites and possessed the country. The curse pronounced on Ham and Amalek, though dormant, was not dead. To Simeon the curse (Gen. xlix. 5-7) was a blessing, to the others a terrible reality. **III. The prosperity they enjoyed.** 1. *Increase of numbers.* They increased wonderfully, but not like the children of Judah (ver. 27). 2. *Enlargement of boundaries.* In possession of limited area, they were forced to seek accommodation elsewhere. They established themselves in the fertile pastures of Gedor (Gerar), which soon proved inadequate, and a new colony settled on Mount Seir. They enjoyed a land of peace and plenty, numerous flocks and quiet habitations. Thank God for fixed homes, but ever guard against the perils of prosperity.

SURVEY OF THE GENEALOGY.—*Verses 1-43.*

I. How great the obscurity of most men! Not many known and prominent here. But obscurity hides not God. We are *great* if the world gains by our life and example. **II. What folly to seek place and power only here!** From place we shall be ejected, and of power we shall be deprived. A family of princes were captives in exile (ver. 22). "Where will ye leave your glory?" **III. How needful to secure renown hereafter!** Better to have names written in heaven than rolled in lists of honour and published in daily papers. "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven," said the dying Haller, when friends congratulated him on the honour of receiving a visit from the Emperor Joseph II.

ORIGIN AND USE OF ARTS AND INVENTIONS.—*Verses 14, 21-23.*

I. Useful arts emanate from the wisdom and goodness of God. In early history man taught of God in special callings. Human inventions had no existence save in the purpose of God. Proof from reason and scripture. "This also cometh from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." **II. Useful arts are beneficial in their tendency.** They mitigate human toil and alleviate suffering; prolong human life, increase sources of comfort, and secure universal peace. **III. Therefore all engaged in useful arts promote the welfare of society.** It is better to excel in trade than to gain dominions of territory. In the construction of the tabernacle an illustration of this principle. Let us be among the "willing-hearted" and the "wise-hearted," and contribute our share. "Produce! produce! were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it, then" [*Carlyle*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 32. *These cities unto reign of David.* In consequence of the sloth or cowardice of the Simeonites, some of the cities within their allotted territory were only nominally theirs, but were never taken from the Philistines until David's time, when the Simeonites having forfeited all claim to them, he assigned them to his own tribe of Judah [*Jamieson*]. Hence danger of delay.

Ver. 33. *Habitations and genealogy;* or Homes and Registers.

Ver. 38. *Princes in Families.* Thirteen names corresponding with number of cities in first list (verses 28-31), so that the princes mentioned were registered chiefs of those cities in the time of Hezekiah (see ver. 41) [*Speak. Com.*]. 1. Families and kingdoms of divine appointment. 2. Rulers of families and kingdoms represented God and order, justice and truth. 3. Hence subjection needful for order, happiness, and success.

Ver. 40. *Fat pastures.* 1. Prepared

by God, natural formation. 2. Discovered by God's direction. They found, did not create. Application in comfortable homes, favourable situations and spiritual refreshment.

Ver. 43. *Doom of Amalek.* Sin not forgotten, judgment not neglected nor fails in execution. Curses may be dormant but not dead. "Preservation from the sword of Joshua (Ex. xvii. 13), of Saul (1 Sam. xv. 7), and of David (2 Sam. viii. 12) was but a reservation to this utter destruction, which God had solemnly sworn, with hand laid upon his own throne (Ex. xvii. 16)" [*Trapp*].

Vers. 39-43. *A fragment of famous history.* Learn from this chronicle of events — 1. Expedition first, under thirteen leaders, with many followers, against Hamites and Mehurrim. 2. Expedition second, smaller, but more adventurous. Under four chiefs, a band of 500 smote powerful enemies and possessed their quarters. Be valiant for God spiritually.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 9. *Honourable.* Virtue and honour are such inseparable companions that the heathens would admit no man into the temple of honour who did not pass through the temple of virtue.

"If it be of a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive"
[*Shakespeare*].

Ver. 10. *Evil.* The greatest evil is sin. 1. In the nature of it, as being contrary to the greatest good, even God. 2. In the effect and consequences of it here and hereafter. 3. Therefore to pray against sin is to pray against all other evils whatever; for the devil, the evil one, cannot hurt us but by sin [*Bishop Hopkins*].

Be with me. *Ora et labora* is the legend of the Christian's faith, and the plan of his life. His fervent

prayer begets honest, manly, unshrinking work; his work as it is faithful and it is faithful in proportion as he realises it is for God, throws him back upon prayer [*Stevenson*].

Vers. 14, 21, 23. *Craftsmen, potters, &c.* If all men affected one and the same trade of life or pleasure of recreation, it were not possible they could live one by another; neither could there be any use of commerce, whereby life is maintained. It is good reason we should make a right use of this gracious dispensation of the Almighty, that we should improve our several dispositions and faculties to the advancing of the common stock, and that we should neither encroach upon each other's profession nor be apt to censure each other's recreation [*Bishop Hall*].

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This ch. contains Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manasseh east of Jordan, with two episodes, one on the wars of these tribes, and the other on the removal by Tilgath-pilneser. The upper Assyrian monarchy began 1273 B.C., the lower 747 B.C. [*Murphy*].

Vers. 1-10.—*Reuben* lost his birthright. The priesthood given to Levi; the double portion (Deu. xxi. 17) to Joseph, whose sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, reckoned as distinct tribes. *Judah* had supremacy, ver. 2. *Chief ruler*, prince, *i.e.*, David, and eventually Messiah (Mic. v. 1). Ver. 3, sons four, as Gen. xlv. 9; Ex. vi. 14. *Vers. 4-6.* *The line of Joel.* Ver. 7. *Brethren*, kinsmen of Joel, chief was Jeiel. Ver. 10. *Hagarites*, Hagarenes (Ps. lxxxiii. 6), a tribe of North Arabia, perhaps *Agraioi* of Strabo [*Speak. Com.*], or Ismaelites as descendants of Hagar.

Vers. 11-17.—*Gad.* Chiefs, ver. 12, and seven others, ver. 13. "Their pedigree traced back ten generations. For Buz and Ahi are really parts of one name, Buzahi, for which Sept. has Ahibuz by transposing parts. Not informed to what family Guni belonged" [*Murphy*], must have been contemporary with Solomon or David, therefore before the secession of ten tribes.

Vers. 18-22.—*Wars of Eastern tribes with Arabs.* Jetur and Nephish (Naphish) among descendants of Ismael in Chr. i. 31, and in Gen. xxv. 15. Of Nodab, nothing known. Hagarites made raids from desert. Hence war in self-defence. Confederate tribes prevailed over invaders. Booty indicates dense population and extensive campaign; "may be compared with that from Midianites (Num. xxxi. 32-35), and does not exceed amount which kings of Assyria constantly carried off in raids upon tribes of no great note or name" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Captivity of Tiglath-pileser* (2 Kings xv. 29).

Vers. 23-26.—*Half Manasseh*, north of Gad. Three names given of three parts or "summits" of Antilebanon. *Valour* or special bravery of Manassites (*cf.* ch. xii. 21). *Famous, i.e.*, "men of names," celebrated men. *Transgressed*, a long description in 2 Kings xvii. *He carried, i.e.*, Tilgath. Pul only levied tribute on the land. Deported to places named, as parts of region to which remainder of ten tribes removed by Shalmaneser.

HOMILETICS.

THE FORFEITED BLESSING.—Verses 1-3.

Reuben, rash and impulsive, lost splendid position and power through passion (Gen. xlix. 4). **I. The sin through which the blessing was lost.** A most abominable and iniquitous act, worthy of death under law of Moses (Lev. xviii. 8), and not to be mentioned among Christians (1 Cor. v. 1). Sin dethrones from excellency, stamps disgrace upon character, and entails loss upon posterity. **II. The persons to whom the blessing was bestowed.** Taken from one and given to another. 1. *Joseph's sons had double portion.* Ephraim and Manasseh reckoned distinct tribes; blessed by the expressed will of Jacob (Gen. xlviii. 22) and in the partition of Canaan (Jos. xvi., xvii.). 2. *Judah had pre-eminence.* Honour to Judah, and birthright to Joseph. One need not envy the other. (a) *In power.* The sceptre assigned to Judah (Gen. xlix. 10). (b) *In dignity.* From him came chief ruler David first, and afterwards the Saviour. Those related to Christ, the Prince of Peace, have a better portion than men endowed with wealth and perishing honour. **III. The principle on which the blessing was given.** The writer careful to explain why Judah was made supreme. "The genealogy not reckoned after the birth-right;" not in natural, but in providential order; "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

THE LINE OF REUBEN.—Verses 1-10.

I. The chief of the tribe. The genealogy traced to *Beerak*, the head of the clan, when carried into Assyria (ver. 6). What are termed "unfortunate positions" and "evil days" are controlled, if not created, by God. "My times are in thy hand." **II. The privileges of the tribe.** Degraded, but not entirely disinherited. Sullied honour not always lost happiness. Reuben's sons had their share of honour and estate, were "valiant" in war, and "helped" in victory. Their inheritance received before Judah or Ephraim. **III. The enlargements of the tribe** (vers. 9, 10). They increased in cattle and population, crowded out their neighbours, and extended conquests into the wilderness and near the Euphrates. **IV. The disinheritance of the tribe.** The prediction exactly fulfilled in history, "Thou shalt not excel." Reuben made no figure, and produced no judge, prophet, or eminent person. He lingered among the sheepfolds, preferred the shepherd's pipe to the trumpet of battle. Robbed of pre-eminence, his individuality fades away. Remote from the centre of government and religion, he lost faith in Jehovah, "went after other gods," and finally carried off into captivity.

UNITY AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS.—Verses 11-22.

The three tribes united went to war and gained victory. **I. A description of the army** (ver. 18). 1. *Courageous in character.* "Sons of valour." 2. *Skilful in the use of weapons.* "Men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with the bow and skilful in war." 3. *Aggressive in spirit.* "Went out to war." 4. *Great in number.* "Four and forty thousand seven hundred and threescore." **II. The method in which they fought** (ver. 20). 1. *United in rank.* "Men who could keep rank" (1 Chr. xii. 3). 2. *Earnest in prayer.* "For they cried to God in the battle." 3. *Thoroughly reliant upon God.* "They put their trust in him." "They cried unto thee and were delivered; they trusted in thee and were not confounded." **III. The success they achieved.** Not only "helped" and "delivered," but enriched. 1. *The booty enormous.* "They took away their cattle," &c. (ver. 21). 2. *The slain numerous.* "There fell down many slain," &c. The Church united, courageous, and prayerful, ever victorious.

THE APOSTATE TRIBES.—Verses 23-26.

Special attention paid to this great sin of the tribes, this beginning of national evil and national suffering. **I. Shameful apostasy.** A full description in 2 Kings xvii. of idolatries, heathen and native. 1. *Beginning in forgetfulness of God.* "They transgressed against the God of their fathers" (ver. 25). One known to them as a nation, venerated by their fathers and worthy of their service. 2. *Ending in forsaking God.* "Went a whoring after the gods of the people." Forsaking their own God, they worshipped idols of the heathen. Man must have a god, will worship something, even if he adores himself. *Whoring*, a strong, emphatic word, indicative of special aggravation and intense jealousy. **II. Merited judgment.** We have a full and impressive vindication of divine procedure. Patience exhausted, and God, whom they had forsaken, permitted captivity to cure national evils. 1. *Utter defeat.* (a) First God stirred up Pul, King of Assyria (ver. 26). The first of northern sovereigns who invaded Palestine was bribed by silver to return (2 Kings xv. 16-20). Tribute was imposed, which caused prophetic protest, great dissatisfaction, and

impoverished the kingdom by reducing its territory and its inhabitants. (δ) Then Tiglath inflicted utter defeat. Valour and numbers of no avail. When God has left us, defence is gone. 2. *Helpless exile.* They were "carried away" into distance and slavery. God's instruments, many and varied, to chastise. Idolatry most destructive sin to people loved and led by Jehovah. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Judah prevailed.* 1. God in family history. 2. Persons giving pre-eminence to families, David and Messiah from Judah. 3. Grace distinguishing families in civil and religious matters, in national and individual life.

Vers. 18-20. *Cried in battle.* So did Jabez (ch. iv.); Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. xx.); the thundering legion; the late King of Sweden, whose prayer before the great battle of Lutzen, where he fell, was, "Jesus, vouchsafe this day to be my strong helper, and give me courage to fight for the honour of thy name." Prayer alone he held the surest piece of his whole armour [Trapp].

Ver. 25. *Transgressed.* 1. *Danger of proximity to the world.* The tribes on the borders had intercourse with neigh-

bouring people, then drawn into sin. 2. *Fearful consequences of yielding to enticements of the world.* Cast off by God, invaded by enemies, and displaced by Providence. Be governed by faith, not by sense. Lot.

Ver. 26. *Stirred up.* 1. God's influence over men's spirit. *Stirred up,* moved, prompted. "The king's heart," the most absolute and uncontrollable will, "is in the hand of the Lord as rivers of water" (Prov. xxi. 1). 2. God's control over man's conduct. Despotism, political projects, and ambitious wars directed to the fulfilment of his purpose. Pul restrained in conduct. "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few" (Is. x. 7).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 2. *Judah's pre-eminence.*

* Some must be great. Great officers will have

Great talents. And God gives to ev'ry man
The virtue, temper, understanding, taste,
That lifts him into life, and lets him fall
Just in the niche he was ordained to fill"
[Cowper].

Ver. 18. *Valiant men.* It is not the will of God that his people should be a timorous people [Mt. Henry].

Ver. 20. *Helped.* We are like William of Orange, with a few followers and an empty purse, making war against the master of half the world with the mines of Peru for a treasury.

But like William, too, when questioned concerning our resources, we can reply, "Before we took up this cause we entered into a close alliance with the King of Kings" [Sword and Trowel].

Ver. 26. *Carried away.* When lesser warnings will not serve, God looks into his quiver for deadly arrows. Abuse of mercy ripens us for judgment [Nicholls].

"Heaven gives the needful but neglected call.

What day, what hour, but knocks at human hearts

To wake the soul to sense of future scenes?"
[Young]

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter refers wholly to tribe of Levi. Gives the family of Aaron, vers. 1-15; the descendants of Gershom, Kohath, and Merari, vers. 16-30; the pedigrees of the song-masters, vers. 31-48; the line from Aaron to Ahimaaz, vers. 49-53; and the towns assigned to the tribe, vers. 54-81.

Vers. 1-3.—The sons of Levi. The genealogy of Levi follows (Ex. vi. 16-25), as far as Phinehas, after which the writer must have had documents before him which have not come down to us [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 4-15.—Line of priests unto Captivity. This list must have been obtained from the priestly registers. It is given in inverse order (Ezra vii. 1-5), with omission of names between Meraioth and Azariah II. It wants the name Meraioth between Ahitub II. and Zadok II. (ix. 11). It is not a succession of high priests, but simply the line from Eleazar to Jehozadak [cf. *Murphy*]. *Zadok*, ver. 8, priest with Abiathar (2 Sam. viii. 18), one probably in Gibeon, the other in Zion. *Azariah*, ver. 9, grandson of Zadok, in the court of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 2). *Temple*, ver. 10, first to distinguish it from second existing in days of writer. *Amariah*, ver. 11, high priest under Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. xix. 11). *Shallum*, ch. ix. 11 (Neh. xi. 11). *Hilkiah*, ver. 12, in office under Josiah, took part in reformation then (2 Kings xxii. 4-14; xxiii. 4; 2 Chr. xxxiv. 9-22). *Seraiah*, ver. 14, put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at time of Captivity (2 Kings xxv. 18-21; Jer. lii. 24-27).

Vers. 16-30.—Sons of Levi. Having traced high priestly line from Levi to Jehozadak (vers. 1-15), writer returns to fountain head and gives general account of branches of tribe of Levi as far as materials allow. Vers. 16-21. *The Gershomites*, after first-born of Moses (Ex. ii. 22). Vers. 17-19. These appear in Ex. vi. Vers. 20, 21. This line appears to coincide with part of that of Asaph (vers. 39-43), except in Jeaterai, who may have been another son of Zerah. Vers. 22-28. *The Kohathites*. The same as that of Heman (vers. 33-38). Object of list to trace genealogy of Samuel, prophet and judge of Israel. Vers. 29, 30. *The Merarites*.

Vers. 31-48.—Pedigrees of the three song-masters. Asaph, Heman, Ethan, or Jeduthan (Ps. lxxxix.), sons of Korah, set over departments of musical service. *House*, a tent erected by David to receive the ark, considerable time before building of the Temple. *Waited* in order, instituted by David, doubtless directed by Holy Spirit, for regulation of worship. 33. *Shemuel, i.e., Samuel*. Ver. 48. *Levites* employed in door-keeping or attending to priests.

Vers. 49-53.—Office of Aaron and his sons (cf. vers. 3-8). Eleazar, third son, chief of Levites (Num. iii. 32), ministered with his brother Ithamar, before death of Aaron, and succeeded him (Num. xx. 28). In Eleazar's family high priesthood remained till the time of Eli, who was descended from Ithamar. It returned to Eleazar in Zadok, fulfilling the words of 1 Sam. ii. 30.

Vers. 54-81.—The cities given to priestly families and to other Levites. Jos. xxi., its parallel. 54-60. *Cities given to Aaron's family.* *Castles*, places of defence against robbers or beasts of prey. Vers. 61-81. *Cities of the Levites*, their number and distribution: 13 cities to Gershom, ver. 62; 12 to Merari, ver. 63, as in Jos. xxi. 34-40; cities of other Kohathites, vers. 66-70; of Gershomites, vers 71-76; and of Merarites, vers. 77-81. Vers 80, 81, agree with those in Joshua. Ten only of twelve named. Only 42 out of 48 named, and some different from original cities assigned to Levites. This proof of accuracy of author. He remembers whole numbers in time of Joshua. But political arrangements readjusted in course of ages. State of things given which had supervened in time of David (vii. 2) [cf. *Murphy*].

HOMILETICS.

A GLANCE OF HISTORY.—Verses 1-15.

In these verses we have a glance from deliverance in Egypt to bondage in captivity. Notice two or three features of the period.

I. The inequalities of men. Inequalities physical, mental, and social appear in whatever light we regard mankind. In this list some exalted to

sacred office and perform noble deeds. Others fall into sin and disgrace. Vast differences in character and career! Royalty and beggary, grandeur and wretchedness, palaces and slums! "There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor." **II. The vicissitudes of families.** Aaron a priest, but Aaron's sons terrors of divine justice. Samuel a prophet, but Samuel's sons perverted justice and dishonoured religion. According to political and religious feeling, ancestors exalted and descendants rejected. **III. The events of Providence.** Deliverance from bondage. Scenes of conflict and triumph. Times of revival, relapse and punishment. Accession and dethronement of kings. Providences, special, striking, and constant. "He hath not dealt so with any nation."

THE SONS OF LEVI.—*Verses 16-30.*

I. Their chief Fathers. *Gershom* the eldest, *Kohath* the second, and *Merari* the youngest son accompanied Levi into Egypt with Jacob (Gen. xli. 11), and became heads of three great divisions of Levites. **II. Their numerous descendants.** Many unknown or passed over. Others eminent in character, distinguished in service, and remarkable in career. Children of privilege and monuments of judgment, born in sunshine and dying in shadows. What a mixture of good men and bad men in life! What a contrast between character and circumstances, beginnings and ends!

THE MINISTRY OF SONG.—*Verses 31-48.*

Song a divine gift, has a mission or ministry. **I. Song an element of Christian worship.** "The service of song in the house of the Lord." A branch of natural and revealed religion in all ages, prevalent in Jewish and heathen worship. A duty reverently to be performed. Its decay a mark of desolation (Ezek. xxvi. 13). **II. Song an expression of human feeling.** Joy and sorrow, gratitude and prayer, must have appropriate and audible expression. When the ark is in captivity, in times of darkness and depression, our harps are hung upon the willows. When the ark finds rest and fixed residence in times of revival, we sing praise to God (David's joy, 2 Sam. vi. 17-21, xvi. 1-3). "Is any merry? let him sing psalms." **III. Song a power for which its possessors are responsible.** In pagan and Jewish nations recognised as a divine gift. It is a talent entrusted to individuals; a faculty to be cultivated, for which there is room, and which should be consecrated to God. The duty of all who have the gift to lay it upon the altar of God, in the home, the school, and the sanctuary.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Three chief Fathers.* Their names, history, and pedigree.

Ver. 3. *Nadab and Abihu.* Improper spirit in worship; unlawful method and awful judgment. Perished on day of consecration! (Lev. x.).

Ver. 4. *Phineas,* a memorable name (Num. xxv. 7-13; Jos. xxii. 10-33; Ps. cvi. 30, 31).

Ver. 10. *Azariah's* important

service. High priest in temple of Solomon. "*Executed,*" &c. Some think that he withstood King Uzziah, and thus risked life in faithful reproof (2 Chr. xxvi. 17, 18).

Ver. 13. *Hilkiah* most celebrated of seven bearing this name as priest and reformer. He discovered "the Book of the Law" (2 Kings xxii. 8); was zealous in reformations of Josiah

(2 Kings xxii. 14-20, xxiii. 4-27); and prominent in observing the Passover (2 Chr. xxv. 1-19).

Ver. 15. *Jehozadak*. Three forms of this name (see Ezra iii. 2; Hag. i. 1; and this verse). Only two forms in original. *Jehozadak* full form, and *Jozadak* contracted. The meaning is, "Jehovah is righteous." It is noted

as remarkable that the heads of both the priestly and the royal stock carried to Babylon should have had names (*Zedekiah* and *Jehozadak*) composed of the same elements, and assertive of the "justice of God," which their sufferings showed forth so signally [*Speak. Com.*].

Ver. 22. *Korah's* sin and punishment (Num. xvi. 1-33).

HOMILETICS.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.—Verses 32-53.

The order of song a matter of importance in time of David. The ark had a settled place. Choral service was established in the Temple, and chief singers were appointed. **I. Worship varied in its forms.** Music and singing, prayer and praise, must not become formal and stereotyped "All manner of service." **II. Lively in its spirit.** Dulness and despondency dishonouring to God and unprofitable to men. "This duty must be our delight." Then it becomes attractive and helpful. "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing." **III. Orderly in its method.** "They waited on their office according to their order." Things not left to chance; arrangements made with care and thought. Each his own work, place, and time in keeping up the service. "The order of the sanctuary." "Let all things be done decently and in order." **IV. Universal in its participation.** They "waited with their children" in the choir. The service of song for the whole "congregation" not left to the choir to sing, nor to the preacher to pray. All *hearts* and all *lips* must join. Congregational worship must be sought and cultivated. "Let the *people* praise thee, let *all* the people praise thee."

THE ANCIENT PRIESTHOOD.—Verses 49-53.

Aaron and his sons, "the house of Aaron," appointed to the priestly office. Other Levites given to them and performed subordinate duties. **I. Its sacred dignity.** Not the investiture of man; endowments for the work from God. The office not a personal assumption, but in obedience to divine call, manifest in Providence, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the help of friends. "No man taketh this honour unto himself." **II. Its solemn duties.** On the brazen altar, the golden altar and the mercy seat in the holy of holies, they performed their functions. This chiefly "to make an atonement for Israel" (ver. 49). A constant need for this; the life of the individual and the nation imperilled by sin; covenant relations must be restored. "The day of atonement," an impressive scene and a typical truth. **III. Its typical character.** The high priests in official character, the ceremony of sprinkling blood were figures of good things to come. Under the gospel all believers are priests, ministering to God in his spiritual temple. Each has an appointed service which contributes to the perpetual worship and benefit of the whole. Only in fulfilment of prescribed ordinance can we secure the presence and favour of Jehovah.

CITIES AND DWELLINGS OF LEVITES.—Verses 54-81.

First cities given to the priestly family of Aaron (vers. 54-60). Next the number and distribution of those assigned to other Levites (vers. 61-81).

Regard them as—**I. A fulfilment of prediction.** Jacob's dying prophecy was accomplished and this tribe was "scattered in Israel" (Gen. xlix. 7). God's people are preserved, and events are arranged for their possessions. **II. An arrangement of providence.** These cities wisely ordered, a provision of mercy and safety. 1. *To facilitate the administration.* Centres of justice and law, freeing individuals from avenging themselves, fixing authority and promoting peace and order. 2. *To disseminate light.* Each city the centre of light and instruction, the place where law was expounded and administered. A school of learning and social influence to the people. 3. *To support the ministry.* Cities allotted to priests and Levites for residence and maintenance. Certain provisions made for spiritual service. Men set apart for God, dependent upon the people they serve. Those who "preach the gospel" may reasonably expect "to live of the gospel." "Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 31. *The vicissitudes of the Ark.* Without a proper resting-place from victory over Philistines in time of Eli till the tabernacle of David, about fifty years (1 Sam. iv.; 2 Sam. vi.).

Vers. 32 and 33. *Waited on their office.* 1. Each an office or work, fixed in choir, leading in service of song, officiating at the altar, and waiting at the door. 2. Each responsible for the performance of his work—not envying his neighbour, waiting for something better; but with diligence, order,

and delight each fills his position and renders his service.

Vers. 31–48. *Three chief song-masters.* Heman's pedigree (vers. 33–38). Pedigree of Asaph, the Gershonite (vers. 39–43). He stood on right hand. Pedigree of Ethan, the Merarite (vers. 44–47). He stood on the left of Heman.

Vers. 49–53. Priests and Levites, two orders of ministry in the Jewish Church. Their divine appointment, special duties, and worldly provision.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 31. *Service.* The three intentions of song: To improve the understanding, to improve the heart, and to soothe the mind. The three things which ought to pervade song: Perfect learning, perfect vigour, perfect nature [*Catherall*].

Ver. 32. *Waited in office.* Man hath his daily work of body or mind appointed [*Milton*].

"A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine"
[*Geo. Herbert*].

Ver. 54. *Cities.* If the history of

cities and their influence on their respective territories be deducted from the history of humanity, the narrative remaining would be of no very attractive description. If anything be certain, it would seem to be certain that man is constituted to realise his destiny from his association with man, more than from any contact with places. The great agency in calling forth his capabilities, for good or for evil, is that of his fellows. The picturesque may be with the country, but the intellectual, generally speaking, must be with the town [*Dr. Vaughan's Age of Cities*].

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] *Vers. 1-5.—Issachar.* A tribe of more than average strength, since the entire return from all the tribes, except Judah, was no more than 800,000 men (2 Sam. xxiv. 9) [*Speak. Com.*]. In days of David, ver. 2, probably from census taken by Joab (xxi.).

Vers. 6-12.—Benjamin. Ten, Gen. xlvi. 21; five, viii. 1; three here, most eminent mentioned, or other families extinct. Ver. 7. *Bela*, list different from ch. viii. 3-5 and from Num. xxvi. 40. "Probably persons mentioned not literally 'sons,' but among later descendants of Bela, chief men of family in time of David's census" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 10. *Jediael*, sons may include grandsons. Ver. 12. Three other sons of Benjamin named (*cf.* Num. xxxvi. 39; Gen. xlvi. 21; and ch. viii. 5).

Ver. 13.—*Naphtali* (*cf.* Gen. xlvi. 24; Num. xxvi. 48). His territory originally included in Judah (Jos. xix. 40).

Vers. 14-19.—Manasseh. An intricate and defective passage, appears to refer to western side of Jordan; other side in ch. v. 23-26. Ver. 15. *Daughters* (*cf.* account Jos. xvii. 3-6; Num. xxvi. 33). Vers. 16, 17. None of these mentioned elsewhere, unless "Bedan" is the "judge" of 1 Sam. xii. 11. Ver. 19 "This paragraph is of peculiar interest as illustrating the freedom and independence with which sons of Israel moved in period before the new king arose that knew not Joseph" [*Murphy*].

Vers. 20-29.—Ephraim. Difficult to solve the question of chronology and genealogy of this passage. The line of Shuthelah is traced to seventh generation, viz., to another Shuthelah. "Ezer and Elead, perhaps two brothers of the first Shuthelah, *i.e.*, own sons of Ephraim." Men of *Gath*, settled inhabitants (contrasted with strangers, nomadic Hebrews, Amalekites, &c.), attacked shepherds of Ephraim, and the conflict produced the usual result. Ver. 23. *Beriah*, "in evil," some render "a gift," to the house by the birth of another son. Ver. 24. *Beth-horon* (Jos. x. 10; xvi. 3-5; xviii. 13, 14). Vers. 25-27. Two other sons of Ephraim added, *Rephah* and *Resheph*, from latter sprang Joshua (Jehovah, Saviour). *Elishama*, son of *Ammihud*, prince of Ephraim in time of Exodus (Num. i. 10; ii. 18). *Non*, for *Nun* (Num. xiii. 8-16). Vers. 28, 29. Possessions and boundaries of the two tribes here given.

Vers. 30-40.—Asher. Sons, daughters, and grandsons, given as in Gen. xlvi. 17 and partly Num. xxvi. 44, if we allow for slight changes of spelling in names.

HOMILETICS.

REGISTERED SOLDIERS.—*Verses 1-40.*

In this chapter a genealogy of those tribes only who were "mighty men of valour."

I. Issachar, the industrious tribe (ver. 1-5). 1. *Patient in labour.* He possessed a fruitful district, willingly submitted to toil and tribute (*cf.* Gen. xlix. 14, 15; Jos. xix. 17-22). 2. *Great in number* (ver. 5). 3. *Valiant in war* (ver. 5). **II. Benjamin, the warlike tribe** (ver. 6-12). Quick, rapacious, and powerful (Gen. xlix. 27; *cf.* Judg. v. 14, xx. 16). Ehud, Saul, Jonathan. Paul from this tribe. **III. Naphtali, the heroic tribe** (ver. 13). Beautiful and active, comparable to the gazelle (2 Sam. ii. 18). Remarkable also for culture. "He giveth goodly words," rich in poetry and speech (Gen. xlix. 21). **IV. Manasseh, the divided tribe** (ver. 14-19). One half of the tribe on the other side Jordan (ch. v. 23). Division, perhaps, according to the fitness of those who composed it at the time. More warlike adapted to coast of Jordan. **V. Ephraim, the exalted tribe** (ver. 20-29). Manasseh the elder, but Jacob gave the preference to Ephraim (Gen. xlviii. 10-12). Great things declared of this tribe in best days. Here notice—1. Its *bereavement* (ver. 21). 2. Its *possessions* (ver. 28). 3. Its

vicissitudes. Its predicted greatness (Gen. xviii. 19) nipped in the bud. Powerless to protect itself, thrown into grief, humbled, yet comforted and distinguished in its sons (ver. 27). **VI. Asher, the undistinguished tribe** (vers. 30-40). A few "choice and mighty men of valour," but inferior in numbers, no great record in sacred history, furnished no hero or judge to the nation. "One name only shines out of the general obscurity. The aged widow, 'Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser,' who, in the very close of the history, departed not from the Temple, 'but served God with fastings and prayers day and night'" [Stanley].

FAMILY SORROW.—*Verses 21-23.*

I. The cause of the sorrow. Gathites robbed sons of E. of their cattle, and slew them when defending themselves (ver. 21) Life often exposed and lost by wealth; the sword devours; death takes away children. Families bereaved and thrown into grief. "Ephraim mourned many days." **II. The sympathy in the sorrow.** "His brethren came to comfort him." The affliction of others should excite our own pity and grief. Relatives and intimate friends should ever be ready "to comfort" the bereaved. Hard to bear the burden alone. "Bear ye one another's burdens." Most available and tender is the help of one "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." **III. The remembrance of the sorrow.** Afflictions may be overcome, but occasions of them never forgotten. 1. *Perpetuated in joy.* Another son born (ver. 23) in Beriah. Like Seth, another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew 2. *Perpetuated in sorrow.* "It went evil with his house." Weeping yet rejoicing; humbled by the stroke, yet grateful for deliverance. God compensates for the loss in human sympathy, heavenly gifts, and perpetual joy. "The Lord buildeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."

"Shrink not from suffering. Each dear blow
From which the smitten spirit bleeds
Is but a messenger to show
The renovation which it needs."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. Valiant men of might. 1. Times of conflict. Days of war in Israel many. Thank God for peace and advance of civilisation and humanity. 2. Men fitted by God to engage in conflict. "Apt to the war and to battle" (ver. 40). Physical strength, skill in command, statesmanship, and success. The gift of God needful, and should be consecrated to holy purposes.

Ver. 17. Bedan (*cf.* mentioned in 1 Sam. xii. 11). A great deliverer in Israel.

Ver. 24. Loss replaced or a famous

daughter. Sherah, a virtuous woman, who built cities at her own charge (one Uzzen-sherah, named after her), and became an honour to the family. "A gallant woman, famous in her generation for beautifying and fortifying of sundry cities. Thus also God made up Ephraim's loss" [Trapp].

Ver. 22. A great leader; Joshua, son of Nun. In name and work a type of Jesus; yet a contrast (Jos. xiii. 8-16). Human life a register and rapid genealogy, but we have a place and work.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Benjamin, son of Bilhan (vii. 10), great-grandson of son of Jacob. Posterity given on account of history of Saul. This tribe remained faithful during the revolt of the ten, and returned with Judah from Babylon.

Vers. 3-5.—The nine sons of this Bela are all different in name from the five sons of the earlier Bela (vii. 7). The names Gera, Naaman, and Shephuphan (Num. xxvi. 39) are heirlooms from the household of the former Benjamin (Judg. iii. 15) [*Murphy*].

Vers. 6-12.—Ehud same as vii. 10; others either Abihud of ver. 3, or Ahoah of ver. 4. Some of sons heads of houses in Geba, now Jeba, probably removed by force to Manhahath, ver. 7. Ver. 8. “*Shar*, from some untold cause, made a temporary migration to the plains of Moab, as Elimelech and David afterwards (Ruth i. 2; 1 Sam. xx. 3).” Ver. 9. *Hodesh*, third wife, from whom seven sons, some names indicating Moabitish affinity. Ver. 12. These places mentioned, Ezra ii. 33; Neh vii. 37. *Lod*, same as *Lydda* (Acts ix. 32), which is now *Lydd* [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 13. *Ber*. and *Sh.*, names to be attached to last verse to complete list of sons of Elpaal [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 14-18.—Nine sons of Beriah, vers. 14-16; seven other sons of Elpaal, vers. 17, 18; twelve altogether.

Vers. 19-21.—Nine sons of Shimi, the Shema (ver. 13), son of Elpaal, associated with Beriah.

Vers. 22-28.—Eleven sons of Shashak, son of Beriah, ver. 14. Ver. 27 *Jeroham* as Jeremoth, ver. 14. Ver. 28. *These*, descendants of Bilhan, given from beginning of ch. *Dwelt*. Jerusalem partly within the limits of the tribe of Benjamin (Jos. xviii. 28); but we do not hear of Benjamites inhabiting it until return from Captivity (1 Chr. ix. 13; Neh. xi. 4).

Vers. 29-40.—Genealogy of Saul and Jonathan. *Gibeon*, not Gibeah, capital of Saul’s kingdom (1 Sam. x. 26; xiii. 2); modern name *El-jib*, five or six miles from Jerusalem. *Father*, i.e., chief of city, whose name Jehiel dropped out here, but given ch. ix. 35, where this genealogy is repeated. Ver. 30. *Baal*, between which and *Nadab* should come “*Ner*,” restored ch. ix. 36; *Zacher* (Zacchariah), to which add Mikloth, ch. ix. 37. Ver. 33. *Kish*, called after his uncle, ver. 30. *Abinadab*, another name for Ishui, 1 Sam. xiv. 49; xxxi. 2. *Esh-baal Ish-bosheth* (“man of shame”), as Jerub-baal and Jerub-besheth, 2 Sam. xi. 21. *Merib-baal* (“striving with Baal”) called Mephi-bosheth, 2 Sam. iv. 2. Ver. 36. *Jehodah*, *Jarah* in parallel list ch. ix. 42; and *Rapha* (ver. 37) *Rephaiah* (ver. 43). Ver. 40. This genealogy of the house of Saul appears, by the number of generations, to belong probably to time of Hezekiah (cf. ch. iv. 41). Ulam’s “sons’ sons” are in the thirteenth generation from Jonathan, as Hezekiah is in the thirteenth generation from David [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE NATURE OF INSPIRED HISTORY.—*Verses 1-40.*

I. The materials of which it is composed. Persons and events histories and genealogies, exhortations and warnings, giving variety and interest.

II. The difficulties which surround it. In names and repetitions, chronology, numbers, and authorship. Difficulties in history and condition of text itself. But these do not destroy the value of the record. Difficulties an evidence in favour of its Divine character, in harmony with its professed design, and a moral test and training. “The very difficulties and limitations of revelation are adapted to the conditions of moral growth. It requires and repays toil. It tasks, tries, and puzzles and strengthens faith. It is like man to make everything regular, easy, and plain; but that is not like the God of nature, of history, and of the Bible” [*Smyth*].

III. The principles on which it is written. Special in design; substantial unity in authorship, periods, and growth. Hence care in choice of matter, and providence in preservation of the records. Methods to bring in prominence and to keep in shade. Records in

full, and apparently insignificant allusions; but one grand aim, one directing force, one unbroken leadership in all ages, arranging and guiding for the accomplishment of one purpose.

THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN.—*Verses 1–32.*

The tribe mentioned, ch. vii. 6–12; reverted to because Saul, the first king of Israel, came from this tribe. The genealogy contains its chief men, and forms an introduction to the history recorded in these books. **I. The changes through which it passed.** Its history to entrance into Promised Land as meagre as afterwards full. After departure from Egypt, the smallest tribe but one (Num. i. 36); in the time of the Judges involved in civil war, upon the occasion of iniquity of Gibeah, almost extinguished, and little hope of revival, for nearly all women slain, and the eleven other tribes bound by oath not to marry their daughters to any man belonging to Benjamin (Judg. xix. 20, 21; xxi. 10, 21). But increase of tribe so rapid, that in time of David it numbered 59,434 able men (1 Chr. vii. 6–12); in that of Asa, 280,000 (2 Chr. xiv. 8); and in that of Jehoshaphat, 200,000 (2 Chr. xvii. 17). The tribe honoured with giving the first king to Israel, and after the exile, along with Judah, constituted the flower of the Jewish colony (*cf.* Ezra xi. 1; x. 9). **II. The notices by which it is characterised.** Several circumstances conduce to the importance of this small tribe. 1. The only tribe that produced skilful archers, men expert with the bow, ver. 40 (*cf.* 1 Sam. xx. 20; 2 Sam. i. 22; 2 Chr. xvii. 17), and with sling (Judg. xx. 16). 2. From this tribe sprang a deliverer. After first conquest of country the nation under foreign yoke, groaned in misery, and turned to Ehud, son of Gera, for help (ver. 6). Proficient in use of left hand, a practice confined to Benjamites, who did work with small risk (*cf.* Judg. iii. 15; xx. 16; 1 Chr. xii. 2). 3. Baanah and Rechab, captains of predatory bands, were of “the children of Benjamin” (2 Sam. iv. 2).

THE ROYAL FAMILY.—*Verses 33–40.*

A particular account given. **I. Its head or chief.** “Saul, son of Kish.” Good-looking and of commanding appearance, the choice of Israel, but not by the will of God (1 Sam. ix. 2). A man of valour, with capacity to govern and lead; the first king of Israel who occupied a position between the heroic age of Judges and the settled monarchy of David and Solomon. **II. Its posterity.** Numerous, able, and honoured in sacred genealogy. Jonathan’s line given for about ten generations. The list ends in Ulam, whose family became famous in the tribe (ver. 40), and qualified to serve their country. This better than wealth and high position. In this list trace the hand of David in fulfilling his promise (1 Sam. xx. 15; 2 Sam. ix. 1, 3, 7). A mark of generosity to remember in prosperity what we promised in adversity.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 8 and 9. *Shaharaim*, the Benjamite polygamist, sent away (by divorce many think) Hushim and Baara, his wives, and this prepared the way for another, Hodesh (new, recent). Others say that Hodesh is another

name for Baara, so called because her husband, after long desertion, returned in affection to her.

Vers. 9–11. Seven unknown sons. How many pass away never mentioned, unknown and buried in oblivion!

Ver. 13. *Drove away.* A deed showing—1. That inheritance gained by violence may be taken away again. It is insecure. Wicked schemes may prosper, but justice tracks their steps and ruin is inevitable. “So are the ways of everyone that is greedy of gain, which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.” 2. Hence retribution certain. In ch. vii. 21, the men of Gath slew the Ephraimites; in this verse Beriah and Shema “drove away the inhabitants of Gath.” “They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

Ver. 28. *Dwelling in Jerusalem.* After return from Babylon, in the city was danger, civic duties and lack of population. Hence—1. *Preference for position of duty and danger.* 2. *Imitation of noble example.* Their ancestors dwelt in the city, and they were induced to take their place. “The glory of children are their fathers.” Let us become children of “parents passed into the skies,” take their place and carry on their work. 3. *Blessedness in the result.* “The people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem” (Neh. xi. 2).

Ver. 33. *Jonathan, who was, as the*

Romans said of Pompey, a most amiable son of an odious father [*Trapp*].

Vers. 33, 34. Suggestive names. *Esh-baal*, Ishbosheth (2 Sam. ii. 8; iii. 7-14; iv. 4-12). *Meri-baal*, Mephibosheth (2 Sam. ix. 12). The Hebrew word *bosheth* is always applied in Scripture to denote an idol, “as exposing the devotee to shame, as well as being an abomination to the Lord.” *Esh*, a man of shame, and Merib-baal (contender against Baal), the destroyer of shame, exterminator of idols [*Gesenius*].

Ver. 40. *All these sons.* 1. *The natural succession of the race.* We read of “sons,” “children,” and “fathers,” and “children’s children.” “One generation passeth away and another generation cometh.” “The earth is a stage, persons passing and vanishing before our eyes” [*Beza*]. 2. *The moral connection of the race.* Men an honour or dishonour to their own lineage; influenced by their fathers as they are influencing posterity. There are laws of influence and dependence which run through the whole race. Every human being sustains a relation, possesses a right and is endowed with power to subserve the great end. “No man liveth unto himself.”

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] In this chapter a list of inhabitants in Jerusalem (vers. 1-34); and genealogy of Saul repeated (vers. 35-44).

Vers. 1-6.—*Reckoned*, registered in form of gen. First after captivity, 4 classes. *Nethinims*, root *nathan*, “to give,” a sort of *hieroduli*, or sacred slaves—persons given to Levites to perform lower and more laborious duties of sanctuary [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 3. *Eph.* and *Man.*, some attached themselves to David when a fugitive, and were citizens of Jerusalem when it became capital (2 Chr. xxiv. 9). Vers. 4-6. Sons of Judah. *Uthai*, chief of family called after his name and not same as *Athaiah* in Neh. xi. 4 [cf. *Murphy*]. Ver. 5. *Shilonites* (Shelani), family of Shelah, third son of Judah (ch. iv. 21). *Zerah*, not mentioned after return, though an officer of this house was in Persian court (Neh. xi. 24).

Vers. 7-9.—*Sons of Benjamin.* *Sallu's* gen. different from that in Neh. xi. 7, 8. Vers. 10-13. Three priests, heads of families in Jerusalem, origin of their names found in ch. xxiv. 7-17.

Vers. 14-16.—*Levites.* Shemaiah head (Neh. xi. 15). Nehemiah and author of Chronicles fairly agree. The principal differences are that Nehemiah contracts “Obadiah” into “Abda” (ver. 17), gives Shemaiah an additional ancestor, Bunni (ver. 15), and in gen. of Mataniah substitutes “Zabdi” for “Zichri” (ver. 16) [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 17-27.—*Porters, i.e.,* keepers of the temple gates (2 Sam. xvii. 26; Mark xiii. 3; John x. 3). Ver. 18. *Companies,* orders or courses of service. Ver. 19. *Korahites* occupied a higher position, their office more directly connected with sacred service than others. Ver. 21. *Porter,* chief in reign of David (ch. xxvi. 1, 2; xxvii. 2). *Tabernacle,* lit. tent of meeting (Ex. xxix. 42), and points to tabernacle on Mount Zion in time of David. Ver. 22. *Seer,* ancient popular term for prophet. Ver. 23. *Children,* office hereditary; *wards,* according to watches in set time. Ver. 24. *Quarters* (cf. ver. 18 and ch. xxvi. 14-16). Ver. 25. *Seven* (2 Kings xi. 5), change of watch on Sabbath, which began at sunset. Ver. 26. *Chambers,* for use of priests (1 Kings vi. 6; xii. 18; xxii. 14). Ver. 27. *Lodged* during week of office.

Vers. 28-34.—Various other functions of Levites. *Charge of vessels,* "sacrificial bowls, trays for the shew-bread, and cups and flagons for the libations, vessels for holding stores not directly used in worship," also ver. 29. *Charge of ointment,* compounding which of special service, ver. 30 (cf. Ex. xxx. 23). *Charge of baking,* ver. 31. *Charge of shew-bread,* laid in order on table every Sabbath, ver. 32 (cf. Lev. xxiv. 8). *Charge of singing,* ver. 33, free from any special duty besides supervision, therefore could devote themselves night and day. Ver. 34. Closes first part of chapter.

Vers. 35-44.—A repetition of ch. viii. 29-38. Some propose to cancel in one place or other. This unnecessary, *fitly* given in both places. In ch. viii. an account of subdivisions of tribe of Benjamin, and could not properly omit the most celebrated family of that tribe, that of Saul. Here bent on connecting the genealogical section of work with historical, and find it most convenient to effect the junction by re-introducing the gen. of the person with whose death his historical section opens [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

RETURNED EXILES.—Verse 2.

First implies that others returned and settled afterwards in places not occupied by first. Numbers returned successively under Ezra, Nehemiah, and in later periods. Some who returned to the ancient inheritance had lived before time of captivity (Ezra iii. 12; Hag. ii. 4-10). Four classes, representatives mentioned. 1. *Israelites.* Laymen. The whole nation including Judah. The name "Jews" gradually supplanted the name "Israelites," especially among foreigners. 2. *Priests.* Mediation essential idea of priesthood. Israel had representatives between them and Jehovah. The office typical, and a perpetual inheritance from father to son. 3. *Levites.* A special order to aid priests in higher functions. The first-born performed priestly offices before the organised temple service. To prevent disorder in domestic relations, and secure greater efficiency, primogeniture conferred upon tribe of Levi, which was to give undivided attention to duties of the sanctuary (Num. iii. 11-13). They had to guard tabernacle and temple, take charge of vessels, and encamp round the tabernacle to form a partition between it and the people. 4. *Nethinims.* As Levites, so these were given to help. A great increase of them when Gibeonites submitted (Jos. ix. 23); enlargement made by David (Ezra viii. 20). After return from captivity, their services most important on account of small number of Levites who returned (Ezra ii. 40). These classes set forth different kinds of Christian work. "In the work of the service," positions of trust and honour, duties lowly and menial, variety and unity. All appointed by God, calling forth ability and activity of man. "Who, then, is willing to consecrate himself?"

ABILITY FOR GOD'S SERVICE.—Verses 13-24.

The return was a critical time, exposing to danger, requiring courage and physical strength. "Able men for the work of the service." This ability requires **I. Intelligence to understand the work.** It must be received as a divine appointment, "ordained in their set office" (ver. 22). No prosecution without comprehending its nature, design, and responsibilities. Porters and

overseers, confectioners and singers, must train and cultivate gifts and power to work. Be well informed in the science of duty and of God. "Take your wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you." **II. Perseverance to prosecute the work.** They lodged all night (ver. 25); attended a week in turn (ver. 25); and were employed night and day. Many get tired, work half time, or leave entirely. The nobles bent not their necks to work, but Nehemiah *continued* at the wall (ch. v. 16). Steady, patient, faithful service acceptable to God. "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned." "Pray and stay are two blessed monosyllables" [*Donne*].

ORDER IN GOD'S SERVICE.—Verses 23–34.

Extreme care taken to secure regularity and reverence in God's house. "Order is heaven's first law." **I. In the appointment of officers to rule.** Each his own place and authority. Priests at the altar, porters at the gate, and leaders in the choir. Times of duty and relief fixed. Many disorderly, unsympathetic, and fail. "For we sought him not after the due order" (1 Chr. xv. 13). **II. In the regular method of worship.** Variety but unity. In sacrifices to present, bread to lay out, and songs to arrange, "they waited on their office according to their order." Order gives cheerfulness, alacrity, and success. Disorder produces aversion, resistance, and failure. "Let all things be done decently and in order." "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. xiv. 33–40).

"The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the whole must fall" [*Pope*].

PEDIGREE OF SAUL.—Verses 35–44.

To construct Saul's genealogy, compare various statements in Scriptures (*cf.* 1 Sam. ix. 1; xiv. 51; 1 Chr. vii. 6–8; viii. 29–33; ix. 35–39). In the choice, anointing, and pedigree of Saul, which enter the history of Israel, notice—1. *The condescension of God.* Both to human weakness, in asking a king, and to smallest and apparently trivial events in life. 2. *The sovereignty of God.* Independent of earthly and human relations. Saul not notable, from a prominent family; but unknown, "from the smallest family of the smallest of the tribes." 3. *The providence of God.* In preserving the record for the instruction of others. "How has God, the Holy Ghost, stooped to become a historian of the smallest, most contemptible affairs on earth, in order to reveal to man, in his own language, in his own business, in his own ways, the purposes, the secrets, and the ways of the Deity" [*Hamann*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. *Carried away.* 1. The sin. 2. The punishment. 3. The return, and 4. The restoration. Many remained in Babylon, others returned to possessions, privileges, and honour. This typical of spiritual conduct. "A wonderful providence that as the land

kept her Sabbaths for those seventy years, so the country should be all that while kept empty, till the return of the natives; for we read not that any colonies were sent thither, nor any displaced to make room for these at their return" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 13. *Very able men.* Men of *valour* or men of *work* for the service; in either sense we get *aptitude or fitness for service*, bodily, mentally, and spiritually. "Able ministers of the New Testament" (2 Cor. iii. 6; cf. Ep. iii. 7; 1 Tim. i. 11, 12).

Ver. 20. *Phineas*, highly favoured. 1. God's presence a mark of time. In individual life and national history. "The object of this verse is to mark the time to which the writer refers in the verse preceding" [*Speak. Com.*]. 2. God's presence the source of honour. "The ruler over them." 3. God's presence the source of success in effort. "The Lord was with him" in his action at Baal-peor (Num. xxv.).

Ver. 22. *Samuel the seer* a privileged person. One who receives dreams and visions, gets insight into divine revelation, and is consulted by the people. All teachers should be seers in opening the eyes and giving the

light and knowledge of God (2 Cor. iv. 6).

Ver. 26. *Doorkeepers.* 1. To open the doors of God's house every morning and shut them at night (ver. 27). 2. To keep off the unclean and hinder those from intruding who were forbidden by the law. 3. To direct and introduce into the courts those who came to worship and facilitate their safety and profit [cf. *Henry*]. This required *zeal*, to be there first; *patience*, to stay until the last; and *care*, to be exact and successful. A mean employment in the estimation of many. Nothing mean for God. "I would rather be a *doorkeeper* in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

"The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask—
Room to deny ourselves—a road
To bring us daily nearer God" [*Keble*].

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The genealogical introduction now closed. Narrative in twenty chapters describes the reign of David. The first 12 verses in this chapter a second edition of 1 Sam. xxxi., with variations in diction and in facts, partly from brevity and an interval of five or six centuries.

Vers. 1-7.—The death of Saul. *Gilboa* on which Gideon triumphed (Judg. vii. 1-8). *Followed.* Hebrew implies that Saul was special object of pursuit. Ver. 2. "Sons of S.," without article: four altogether (cf. ix. 39). Ver. 3. *Wounded*, not dangerously, perhaps. "Some read he *trembled* before the archers," who *hit*, literally found, reached him in pursuing. Ver. 4. *Abuse me*, mock me. *Afraid* out of respect for royalty and in the same peril. Ver. 6. *House*, not whole family or all his sons, for Ishbosheth survived and succeeded him in portion of kingdom (2 Sam. ii. 8-16; iii. 6-15); but "all his household," or body of attendants in war.

Vers. 8-12.—Treatment of remains. *House* of Ashtaroth (1 Sam. xxxi. 10). Customary to deposit spoils of war in heathen temples. Ver. 10. *Head*, skull. *Dagon* (1 Sam. v. 2). This temple destroyed in time of Maccabees (1 Macc. x. 82-85). The headless eclipse fixed to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Sam. xxxi. 10). Ver. 11. *Jab-gil.* moved by gratitude for former help (1 Sam. xi. 1-3). *Buried* the bones (after burning of the bodies, 1 Sam. xxxi. 12) under *oak* or terebinth, "the tree" or tamarisk in Samuel. The word in both places generic, different names from one root, refer to large variety of oaks [cf. *Dr. Thom., The Ld. and Bk., pp. 243, 244*].

Vers. 13, 14.—Moral of Saul's death. *Transgression* in sparing king of Amalekites (1 Sam. x. 8; xiii. 15); and in consulting a familiar spirit (1 Sam. xxviii.). Ver. 14. *Inquired* in form, not in right spirit. *Impatient consultation* considered by the writer as no inquiry at all.

HOMILETICS.

THE HEIGHTS OF GILBOA.—*Verses 1-6.*

Mount Gilboa a noted place in the lot of Issachar, "flanked by the Little Hermon ridge on north-east, and by Gilboa on south-east; a mountain range of ten miles long, about 600 feet high, and mentioned only in the melancholy connection of this history." **I. The important battle.** Philistines an old and inveterate enemy, more numerous, perhaps better led and better posted, began attack. Some think Saul had gone to consult the witch and left the camp. Israel ever exposed to a watchful foe. Christian life a conflict. When thrown off our guard and God forgotten, we are easily surrounded and overcome. **II. The disgraceful flight.** Best of troops put into disorder. The people of God chased by the enemy, and multitudes slain! How different from yore, when one put a thousand to flight! But when a people walk contrary to God, He will send a faintness into their hearts, and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth (Lev. xxvi. 23-36). **III. The pride of Israel slain.** Sad scenes on Gilboa's top! The chosen of God and the hero of Israel wounded by archers and falling upon his own sword! The king's sons, the bodyguard and the pride of his army, perish with him. "How are the mighty fallen!" Learn that one sinner not only destroyeth much good, but entails much suffering. 1. *Upon his own kindred.* Parents sin, and children suffer. Princes disobey, and their heirs are cut off. 2. *In society at large.* Not only the family, but the subjects of Saul suffered. How many homes, how many nations have been thrown into sorrow and deprived of their glory through sinful leaders! Achan perished not alone in his iniquity. "If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

THE DEATH OF SAUL.—*Verses 3-7, 13, 14.*

The life and conduct of Saul full of incident, dramatic effect, and solemn warning. Learn—

I. That a splendid beginning may have an awful ending. Saul loved and elevated, called from obscurity to the service of his country; had gifts of body and mind; but opportunities lost, calling unfulfilled, and life a failure! "The chosen of the Lord" died a self-murderer! "All is well that ends well." **II. That divine judgments overtake men's sins.** "The Lord slew him." He had disobeyed law, defied the authority of Samuel; persisted in his self-will, and became the proud controller of his own life. Frightful to die in rebellion, to rush unbidden into God's presence, and become a monument of judgment! From Scripture, history, and moral law we learn that "God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness." **III. That in national calamities the godly suffer with the ungodly.** The sons, the family, and the dynasty of Saul suffered through his guilt. Sin is personal, but its consequences extensive and self-propagating. The innocent involved by the guilty. A father's conduct ruins the children; a monarch's government destroys the nation. If by the arrangements of society and by the law of influence we entail good or evil, let the ungodly beware and the righteous be faithful, "for none of us liveth to himself."

SCENES IN THE CAPITAL OF GATH.—*Verses 7-10.*

I. Tidings of the deaths of the royal family. When day after battle dawned, the Philistines found dead bodies of father and three sons.

Tidings told in capital of Gath and published in the streets of Ashkelon. **II. Welcome to the victorious army.** Daughters of accursed race rejoiced and welcomed back their victorious army. Retribution had come for the fall of their champion leader. **III. Trophies suspended in the temple of the gods.** This customary. "As head and sword of Goliath were carried off to the sanctuary, so head of Saul cut off and fastened to the temple of Dagon at Ashdod, and his arms—the spear on which he had so often rested, the sword and the famous bow of Jonathan—were sent round in festive processions to the Philistine cities, and finally deposited in the temple of Ashtaroth, in the Canaanitish city of Bethshan, hard by the fatal field. On the walls of the same city, overhanging the public place in front of the gates, were hung the stripped and dismembered corpses." A lasting memorial of Israel's ignominious defeat and subjugation.

THE DEVOTED CITY.—Verses 11, 12.

I. The patriotism of the city. In general defection trans-Jordanic towns loyal to the fallen house. Jabesh-gilead specially devoted. Concerned for the land defiled by exposure of dead bodies, and for the crown of Israel profaned by uncircumcised. **II. The zeal of the city.** Enthusiasm contagious. Seen—1. *In arming the people.* "All the valiant men arose." 2. *In a successful raid.* A long journey, a distance of about twelve miles; dangerous in the night, and by a narrow upland passage; guard surprised and bodies rescued. **III. The gratitude of the city.** All this in remembrance of services rendered by Saul against their enemies (1 Sam. xi. 1–13). Gratitude expressed—1. *In solemn funeral rites*; and 2. *In fasting and sorrow.* Rare to show gratitude to a fallen foe. This act commended by David (2 Sam. ii. 5), and mentioned by Josephus (*Antiq.* vi. 6, ch. xiv., sect. 8). Cherish the memory of past help; repay when opportunity comes, for come it will. You shall reap what you sow, a reward from God and man. "The Lord show kindness and truth unto you; and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing" (2 Sam. ii. 6).

SAUL'S TRANSGRESSION.—Verse 14.

I. He was a disobedient king. God's command definite: "Slay man and woman." Saul's conduct was partial, he spared Agag the king, and kept best of cattle (1 Sam. xvi. 1). Men never prosper who violate God's commands. Sooner or later punishment overtakes them. Adam, Balaam, Jonah. **II. He was an untruthful king.** "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Saul had a bad heart and a false tongue. He coveted Agar's wealth and Samuel's blessing. The bleating of sheep convicted the lying king. God will expose the untruthful. Abraham, Ananias, &c. **III. He was a hypocritical king.** "The people spared the fattest of the sheep and the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord." When convicted of sin he blamed the people, but attributes their sin to a sacred motive. Hypocrisy adorns herself in the most attractive attire. One sin opens the gates for another. Disobedience leads to falsehood; falsehood to hypocrisy; hypocrisy to ruin. Bad men disqualify themselves for exalted positions. When kings refuse to obey God, he will cut them off. When great men fail, God appoints their successors. God can raise up men for the most arduous duties [*J. T. Woodhouse*].

THE LOST KINGDOM.—Verse 14.

I. Lost through sin. Disobedience, obstinate pride, and self-will. **II. Transferred by divine appointment.** “He turned the kingdom unto David, the son of Jesse.” God overturns one and raises up another. Royalty no shelter against judgments, power no defence against heaven. “Thy kingdom shall not continue.” A proud man, elated by talent and success; a boasting church, a people glorying in wealth or wisdom, in anything but Christ, may soon be abased. God brings down the mighty from their seats and exalts the humble, “to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1-7. *Battle against Saul*, who was—1. *Abandoned to despair.* “Sore afraid,” ver. 4, *i.e.*, he trembled, was frightened at archers. After scene of Endor might well fear. 2. *Failed in resources.* No prophet, no divine guidance, sorely wounded and unable to defend himself. A fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Ver. 2. *Jonathan.* That peerless prince, the glory of chivalry, that *lumen et columen* of his country. He dieth among the rest, and hath his share as deep as any other in that common calamity; so true is that of Solomon, “There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked” (Ecc. ix. 1, 2); but God maketh them to differ (Mal. iii. 18), as the harvest-man cutteth down the good corn and the weeds together, but for a different purpose [*Trapp*].

Ver. 4. *Abuse me*, *i.e.*, my body, whereof he took more care than for his precious soul. A common fault. His body was abused nevertheless [*Trapp*].

Ver. 5. *Fell likewise.* Evil examples, especially of the great, never escaped imitation: the armour-bearer of Saul follows his master, and dares do that to himself which to his king he durst not [*Bp. Hall*]. *Fell* by Saul’s evil example, and perhaps in love to him, as loth to outlive him whom he had held the joy of his heart, the breath of his nostrils. He had done better if he had died by the hand of the enemy, in his master’s defence [*Trapp*].

Ver. 4. *Suicide as illustrated by the case of Saul.* **I. Causes:** 1. Not

merely accumulated misfortunes, but long-continued wrongdoing; 2. Cowardly fear of suffering (ver. 3), even in a man formerly brave; 3. Caring more for disgrace than for sin; 4. Abandonment of trust in God as to this life and the future life. **II. Effects:** 1. Others led by the example into the same folly and sin (ver. 5); 2. Personal dishonour not really prevented (vers. 4, 9, 10); 3. A crowning and lasting reproach to the man’s memory [*Lange*].

Vers. 11, 12. *Exploit of men of Jabesh-gilead.* 1. It was a brave deed; 2. A patriotic deed; 3. A grateful deed (ch. xi); 4. But the bravery, patriotism, and gratitude had been better shown before Saul’s death by helping him (which they do not appear to have done). Honours after death make poor amends for neglect and unfaithfulness during life; 5. And care of the poor remains could avail little for the man’s reputation in this world, and nothing for his repose in eternity [*Lange*].

Ver. 13. *A familiar spirit.* He turned aside (1 Sam. xii. 20), indicating not only *external* defection in non-fulfilment of the word, but *internal*, a falling away in fellowship and walk with God, was not subject to God’s will and word. Learn—1. *The possibility that a man may fall from spiritual communion with the divine and invisible.* “God is departed from me and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams.” 2. *The rapidity with which a man may fall from the highest eminence.* “Because thou

obeyedst not, therefore hath the Lord done this thing." 3. *The certainty that one day the impenitent will want their*

old teachers. "Bring me up Samuel" [*City Temple*, vol. i.].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER X.

Ver. 6. *Saul diel.* There is not in sacred history, or in any other, a character more melancholy to contemplate than that of Saul. Naturally humble and modest, though of strong passions, he might have adorned a private station. In circumstances which did not expose him to temptation, he would probably have acted virtuously. But his natural rashness was controlled neither by a powerful understanding nor a scrupulous conscience, and the obligations of duty and the ties of gratitude, always felt by him too slightly, were totally disregarded when ambition, envy, and jealousy had taken possession of his mind. The diabolical nature of these passions is seen, with frightful distinctness, in Saul, whom their indulgence transformed into an unnatural monster, who constantly exhibited the

moral infatuation so common among those who have abandoned themselves to sin, of thinking that the punishment of one crime may be escaped by the perpetration of another. In him also is seen the moral anomaly or contradiction which would be incredible did we not often witness it, of an individual pursuing habitually a course which his better nature pronounces not only flagitious, but insane (1 Sam. xxiv. 16-22). Saul knew that the person should be king whom he persisted in seeking to destroy, and so accelerated his own ruin [*Kitto*].

Ver. 14. *Turned.* Because of unrighteous dealings, the kingdom is turned from one people to another (Ecclus. x. 8).

"Kings then at last have but the lot of all, By their own conduct they must stand or fall" [*Cowper*].

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The writer here passes by the 7½ years of David's reign over Judah, at which he had glanced in his introductory section (chap. iii. 4), and hastens to the glorious period of his inauguration as king over the whole people of Israel. This, as we learn from 2 Sam. iv. 5, was at the death of Ish-bosheth, who succeeded Saul as king over all the tribes, except that of Judah [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-4.—*David made king.* Hebron, chap. iii. 4, an ancient royal and priestly city (Jos. xii. 10; xxi. 11); most mountainous, safest part of Judah, and divinely selected (2 Sam. ii. 1). Ver. 3. *Covenant*, "league" (2 Sam. v. 3). *By Samuel* (cf. ver. 10) added by writer to mark divine origin of Davidic Monarchy, which he had not previously declared [cf. *Speak. Com.*].—*covenant*, a solemn transaction before the Lord, united monarch and people in terms of government and obedience.

Vers. 4-9.—*Zion taken from Jebusites.* Jebuz (cf. Josh. xv. 8; Judg. xix. 10). Ver. 5. *Said* abbreviates; full speech 2 Sam. v. 6. *Zion* mentioned first in 2 Sam. v. 7, meaning lofty, bare, rocky top, exposed to sun; Heb. a fortified place. *City* extended northward and southward; the royal residence and stronghold. Ver. 6. *Chief* head of government. *Captain* command of army. Prowess of Joab on this occasion, and the part which he took in building city of David, known only from this passage—*repaired* breaches made in siege, rebuilt houses, demolished and reconstructed old part of city occupied by Jebus. David built a new town.

Ver. 9.—*Waxed.* Literally, "went on and grew great," as 2 Sam. v. 10. *Hosts.* Sept., the Lord Omnipotent.

Vers. 10-47.—*David's mighty men* (2 Sam. xxiii. 8-39). *Strengthened*, exerted themselves; "assisted with all Israel in making David king"—margin, "held fast with him" in affection and obedience. **Ver. 11. Number.** In Hebrew a plural pronoun ("these"; and a singular noun. Moreover, the number not given; therefore read, "These are the names" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Jash.*, called son of Zabdiel (ch. xxvii. 2); hence grandson of Hachmoni (cf. ch. xxvii. 32). *Three*, 800 in 2 Sam. xxiii. 8. One or other of these corrupt [*Speak. Com.*]. Some suppose he attacked 800 and slew 300 of them. **Ver. 12. Eleazar and Jashobeam** only two here; Shammah third in 2 Sam. xxiii. 11. **Ver. 13. Pas.** Place where Goliath slain, between Shoehoh and Azekah (1 Sam. xvii. 1). **Ver. 14. Parcel.** This achievement given in detail (2 Sam. xxiii. 9-11). Eleazar had given up from fatigue, and then Shammah helped by his prowess to keep the field. These feats performed when David acted as general of Saul against Philistines. **Vers. 15-19. Feat of three men** of the thirty mentioned in vers. 26-40. *Rock* (cf. 2 Sam. xxiii. 13). **Ver. 17. Well** (2 Sam. xxiii. 15-17). This feat performed by a second three, Abishai chief (ver. 20); not the three in vers. 15-19. **Ver. 21. Hon.**, yet not on a par with first three. **Ver. 22. Kab.** South of Judah (Jos. xv. 21; Neh. xi. 25). *Many*, three daring deeds given as specimens. *Lionlike*, two Ariels; literally, lions of God, great lions, or champions in David's war with Moab (2 Sam. viii. 2). **Ver. 23. Stature**, i.e., measure, aspect, conspicuous for size. **Ver. 24. Three mighties.** The second three, of whom Benaiah held second place. **Ver. 25. Guard.** Ges. gives "David took him into his privy council," as margin of 2 Sam. xxiii. 23. He was captain over Kerethi and Pelethi, a body-guard of the king. **Vers. 26-47. The 48 men of war.** "Valiant men of the armies" (cf. list in 2 Sam. xxiii. 24-38). *Asahel* (2 Sam. ii. 18). **Ver. 27. Haroite, Harodite**, a native of Harod (Jud. vii. 1). *Helez* "the Paltite." **Ver. 28. Tekoite** of Tekoa (2 Sam. xiv. 2). *Antothite*, of Anathoth (Jos. xxi. 18). **Ver. 29. Sib.**, Mebunnai in Sam. *Ilai*, Zalmon. **Ver. 30. Mah.**, chief of detachment of guards (ch. xxvii. 13). **Ver. 39. Nah.**, armour-bearer to Joab. **Vers. 41-47.** These sixteen are a supplement to Samuel. *Uriah*, well known (2 Sam. xi.); the others associated with places unknown, or connected with cities and districts on east of Jordan.

HOMILETICS.

THE CHOSEN KING.—Verses 1-4.

After the death of Saul, country on east of Jordan, and in short time west also, with exception of province of Judah, over which David ruled in Hebron, was brought, by skilful generalship of Abner, to acknowledge Ishbosheth as king (2 Sam. ii. 8 seq.). Not till Abner and Ishbosheth were dead, and no one left belonging to house of Saul, but lame Meribosheth, who was then only twelve years old, that all the Israelites resolved to make David king. These verses an account of the assembly in which the resolution was carried into effect [*Keil*].

I. The reasons for the choice of a king. Not a rash, blind, and imprudent choice. 1. *Blood relationship.* "We are thy bone and thy flesh." Close and affectionate relationship, which ensured deep interest and patriotism. 2. *Military leadership.* "Thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in." Past services of value, who so likely in future to rule? Qualifications for leadership, inborn, called out by circumstances and cultured under a sense of responsibility. Prove men before you choose them for office. "Let these also first be proved." 3. *Divine appointment.* "The Lord thy God said." Samuel the seer, who anointed Saul, nominated his successor. David often designated, now chosen by the nation. Trial and patient waiting now rewarded. Time fulfilled, all things ready, and "they anointed David king over Israel according to the word of the Lord." **II. The duties of the chosen king.** "Thou shalt feed my people Israel, &c." This first time, the king called pastor. The servant described as the master; the under-shepherd's duty like that of chief-shepherd. 1. *To rule.* Not in pride and tyranny, but in love and humility; respecting liberty, property, and human life. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. xxiii. 3). 2. *To feed.* The true king a real shepherd to his people, watching over their interests, providing

for them and defending them. This picture of a theocratic king invested with moral grandeur; should be copied by every servant of God, high or low in position; but only completely realised in Messiah. "A Governor who shall rule (shepherd) my people Israel" (Matt. ii. 6). **III. The allegiance given to the chosen king.** All Israel were assembled, united and represented by elders. For once *vox populi vox Dei*. In this ceremony king reminded of solemn responsibility and people of implicit obedience. In form *a covenant*, mutual agreement on both sides to be true and helpful one to another. Notice—1. *Unity in the covenant.* The unity introduced by Samuel, weakened by Saul, restored internally and externally on the theocratic basis. "All Israel" represented in the choice. 2. *Loyalty in the covenant.* Attachment to the person of the king, adhesion to his cause and determination to obey his word. Service is poor and cold in warmest subject without the glow of loyalty. Our Master deserves and seeks it in every servant. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." 3. *Solemnity in the covenant.* "Before the Lord," acting in his sight. People and king jointly render unconditional obedience to the Invisible Ruler. "King David made a league with them before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Sam. v. 3).

THE CAPTURE OF THE STRONGHOLD.—Verses 5–9.

David now begins to act, seeks to establish his throne, and subdue his enemies. Zion the centre, chief stronghold, and boast of the Jebusites (2 Sam. v. 6). **I. The taking of the city.** The south and middle of Palestine unsafe, as long as this citadel unconquered. Its siege and capture a daring act. 1. *Taken against great opposition.* Its *natural position* very strong. Built on a precipice, waterfalls and gorges round about. Thought to be impregnable. "David cannot come in hither." Its *defenders* very courageous. Quarters very close; a matter of life or death; but except the Lord keep the city, builders and watchmen in vain. 2. *Taken by personal valour.* Joab scaled the rocks, led the assault, and captured the city. For this act of bravery he was promoted, confirmed in position, and increased in influence. 3. *Taken in God's strength.* Valour, numbers, and resources avail not without this. Victory only when God vouchsafes it. "All this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam. xvii. 47). **II. The repairing of the city.** "David built round about from the Millo (the mound) and inward" (2 Sam. v. 9); and "Joab restored (revived) the rest of the city" (*cf.* Neh. iii. 34). Houses restored, fortifications reared, rebuilding regarded as restoration to life. No longer a dry, barren rock, but a place of beauty and strength. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion." **III. The royal residence in the city.** David took up his abode, "therefore it is called *the City of David*." It becomes the seat of government, the centre of festivities, the memorial of its founder's name. Mount Zion becomes "the city of the great king," a type of the royal seat and the dominion of Messiah. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

DAVID'S PROSPERITY.—Verse 9.

The words, *then David went, &c.*, indicate the point of time from which his becoming great first dates; *then* (from the conquest of Jerusalem) David *became continually greater and greater* [*Keil*]. Learn—**I. God is the true source of prosperity.** "The Lord of Hosts was with him." Not fleets and armies, skill of captains and valour of soldiers; but from presence of God. "Ascribe

(by word and conduct, give) ye greatness unto our God" (Deut. xxxii. 3). "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty." **II. God determines the real nature of prosperity.** Temporal, spiritual, or both. Regal qualities, prudent counsellors, faithful friends, and devoted subjects; crowns, capitals, and thrones; personal influence, religious privileges, gifts of any kind, progress of any degree, bestowed by God. **III. God fixes the exact time of prosperity.** From conquest of Zion a turning-point in David's fortunes. His life a series of successive stages and positions in which one prepared for the other. "Even when Saul was king, David led out and brought in Israel." After he was anointed, "he waxed greater and greater," "went on growing and growing." Our life's work fashioned by God, not by ourselves, may be long time and go through strange discipline in its attainment; but God appoints means and fixes seasons. "My times are in Thy hands." Use the means, wait in faith and seek the aid of God for progress and position here and hereafter.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. Then. 1. Great honours often preceded by great trials. Through suffering to glory. **II. Great trials often end with unexpected relief; or,** 1. Men divinely designated, specially trained for position. 2. When specially trained, God's providence fulfils God's word in placing them in position. 3. When so placed by God's providence, often an epoch in their own, and a blessing in history of others. *Feed my people.* The shepherd king. Evil rulers termed roaring lions, devouring wolves, &c. (Ezek. xix. 2). Teachers and prophets pastors of people (Ezek. xxxiv. 23), to feed "by procuring for them the wholesome food of the word, by going before them in good example, by driving away the wolf, by tending them, and tendering their good every way" [Trapp].

Ver. 3. David king. How he reached the throne. 1. By aspiring to it only because divinely appointed. 2. By deserving it (a) in what he did;

(b) in what he refused to do. 3. By waiting for it: (a) continuing patient through a long course of trials; (b) using all lawful means in his power to gain it (e.g., 2 Sam. ii. 5; iii. 20-36); (c) preparing for it consciously and unconsciously; learning how to rule men, and to overcome difficulties [Lange].

Ver. 5. The Castle of Zion. Like the human heart, harder to take and keep for Christ than Khartoum. Pride, selfishness, and envy must be driven out. Like heaven, only gained by violence (Matt. xi. 12), and under the leadership of the Captain of salvation. *David dwelt* (ver. 7). A type of Christ, who subdueth all our enemies, and openeth unto us the heavenly Jerusalem [Trapp]. **Ver. 8. Joab repaired.** Heb. revived *vivificavit vel sanavit*, as 2 Chron. xxiv. 13. *City of David*, as Constantine called Bizantium Constantinople after his own name; making it also the metropolis and seat of the empire [Trapp].

HOMILETICS.

FAMOUS EXPLOITS.—Verses 10-47.

These are the heads, chiefs of David's heroes, heroes among heroes, attached to his person, with whom he carried on *the Lord's war*, and whose deeds are "works" of "great deliverance." **I. The two mighties** (ver. 10-14). The third, Shammah (2 Sam. xxiii. 11), not given here. 1. *Exploit of Jashobeam* (ver. 11). Chief of captains, riders (or knights, Sam.), bodyguard of king. *He lifted up*, brandished his spear time after time in strength and courage, and

slew 300. In Sam. 800 given—attacked 800 and slew 300, or slew 300 at one time and 800 at another. 2. *Exploit of Eleazar*. A fugitive in the wilderness with David. (a) Stood when others fled in fear and disgrace. (b) Weary, yet would not quit the work; hand cramped round hilt of sword, but held the weapon. Faint, yet pursuing (Judg. viii. 4). (c) Advantage followed up, and victory gained. "A great victory that day." Heb. in theocratic form of *deliverance, salvation* from God. Aided by Shammah ("they set themselves") the parcel of ground preserved. (d) Then people returned for spoil and share honour. Many quit the field in danger, and hasten back for gain, willing to share the victory, not the fight. The men of Ephraim (Judg. viii. 1). **II. The three captains** (vers. 15-19). 1. *The chivalrous act they performed* evinces enthusiasm and readiness for humblest wish of the king. (1) *A dangerous act*. To force passage through garrison of the enemy at risk of life. (2) *A brave act*. Fearless of results, glad to defy Philistines, and ambitious to serve their king. Be you ready, like Jesus, to comply with every intimation of God by his word and providence. (3) *An unselfish act*. No thought for themselves, all for their sovereign and their fellows. (4) *A loyal act*. Indicative of affection and loyalty. No command, no request; perhaps a wish *overheard*, and they spring into action. Service free and spontaneous, not pressed nor constrained. First a willing mind, then it is accepted to what we can do. 2. *The generous estimation of the act*. The water refused, gained at peril of life, and too sacred to gratify a wish foolishly expressed. *Poured it out* as a libation (Gen. xxxv. 14; Ex. xxx. 9; Judg. vi. 20). A practical acknowledgment of his error; an expression of sympathy with the bravery and devotion of the men; a check to impulse and rashness in future. The sacrifice to God of what we most desire gives the strength and earnest of future success. **III. The second couple** (vers. 20-25). 1. *Abishai*, "a man of repute," had a name, and renowned for valour; held high position, chief leader of his company; slew 300; but was excelled in heroic conduct by the three in vers. 11-14. 2. *Benaiah*, a valiant man, accustomed to danger, "had done many acts" (great of acts, lit.); commander of bodyguard (marg., privy councillor). (a) Slew three heroes. An *Egyptian*, terrible in height and appearance, well armed; thus displayed courage (only a *staff*), dexterity, strength, and skill by snatching the spear out of the giant's hand and killing him with it (David and Goliath). Slew *two lion-like men*, "two sons of Ariel of Moab" [*Keil*]. Ariel a title of honour given to King of Moab. A feat performed probably in war between David and Moabites (2 Sam. viii. 2). (b) *Slew a lion* (ver. 22), "probably in a cave in which he took refuge from a snowstorm, and in which a savage lion would have its lair. This far greater achievement than if the monster had been previously snared in a pit." *On a snowy day*, when greater courage and hardship would be required. Benaiah's influence and fidelity known in Solomon's time (1 Kings i. 8, 10, 44). 3. *Ashael*, chief of men historically unknown (2 Sam. xxiii. 24); captain of 4th division (xxvii. 7); slain by Abner (2 Sam. ii.). After him, names in Samuel are thirty, and one over Uriah the Hittite. Some of the list are Gentiles, who cast their lot with Israel, and reminds of that service in which is neither Greek nor Jew, bond nor free, but all one.

DAVID'S CONDUCT IN REFUSING TO DRINK.—Verse 19.

I. An act of great unselfishness. Thought of others, not himself; appreciated the deed of the noble three, and felt that he had no right to claim the blood of others. Men do not exist for us, but we exist for them. Sir P. Sidney took the cup from his thirsty lips to give to the poor. **II. An expression of profound humility.** He bowed before the Lord, laid the cup at his feet, through whom it was gained and to whom it belonged. None

so fit to rule as those who stoop. "Before honour is humility." **III. An estimate of the value of human life.** Great regard for the worth of men. Soldiers not made for powder and shot. Blood, sacred and inestimable. Human life an opportunity, a power for service, must not be thrown away. Wellington valued the life of his men. "Of every man will I require the life of man." Life is

"No trifle, however short it seem ;
And howsoever shadowy, no dream ;
Its value what no thought can ascertain,
Nor all an angel's eloquence explain" [*Cowper*].

TRUE HEROISM.—Verses 10-47.

I. In its real nature. Not mere physical vigour and exuberant spirit. Not foolhardiness nor reckless waste of strength and life, but self-sacrificing love, which shuns no duty and braves all danger. Often seen in forbearance, in provocation, patience, in trial, tenderness towards others, and self-control in adversity and prosperity. It is the stuff of which martyrs are made, who refuse wealth, honours, and applause for conscience sake. Seen in Eliot—"Lion Eliot, that great Englishman"—who refused the bribes and defied the tyranny of Charles I. ; in Savonarola, the Italian monk, "a Reformer before the Reformation"; in Luther, before the Diet at Worms; and in all "brave men of old."

II. In its hidden source. Love to God, "strengthened themselves with him" (ver. 10). Acquaintance with David, loyalty to him prompted to arms and conflict. Great men attract and excite to enthusiasm. King Arthur had his knights, Cromwell his Ironsides, and David his heroes. Jesus Christ has followers devoted to him, led to victory by him. "Through God we shall do valiantly." **III. In its noble achievements.** Enterprises full of risks; leading a forlorn hope; a successful skirmish; a dashing charge and a splendid capture. In our hearts and lives, in the Christian church and the world, what have we done for God? "Quit yourselves like men."

"Let us go forth, and resolutely dare
With sweat of brow to toil our little day" [*Lord Houghton*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 15. *Cave of Adullam.* 1. A place of exile. 2. A centre of attraction—"a great host, as the host of God," gathers round David. 3. A picture of Christ's reign. Rejected, yet gathering those in spiritual debt and distress unto himself. "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was bitter of soul, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them."

Ver. 41. *Uriah the Hittite* (2Sam. ii. 3). The mention of this name in list suggests (1) a man of distinguished merit; (2) an aggravation of David's guilt towards him. He was a foreigner, a Hittite. But his name and manner of speech indicate that he adopted the Jewish religion.

Happy the people that has heroes who (1) advance in God's strength, (2) courageously stake their life for God's honour and the people's welfare, and (3) are counted worthy by God to work great deliverance for their people.

Hail to the throne that is encompassed by heroes who (1) find their highest nobility in the real knighthood that roots itself in the true fear of God, (2) with humble heroism defend altar and throne, (3) seek their highest honour in being God's instruments for the aims of his kingdom and for the revelation of his power and righteousness, and (4) set the whole people an example of self-devoting love and fidelity and of unterrified courage [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XI.

Vers. 4-8. During the wars of Nassau a council of officers debated whether to attack a certain town. A Dutch general had so much to say about the formidable guns mounted on the defences of the place that many grew discouraged and advised giving up the dangerous job. "My lords," said Sir Horace Vere, a stout English baron, "if you fear the mouth of a cannon you must never come into the field." Without the Christian's courage it is useless to enter the Christian's fight.

Ver. 11. *Lifted up*. "Courage mounteth with occasion" [*Shakespeare*].

'Do not for one repulse forego the purpose
That you resolve to effect.'

Ver. 18. *Brake through the host*.

"He holds no parley with unmanly fears;
Where duty bids, he confidently steers;
Faces a thousand dangers at her call,
And, trusting in his God, surmounts them
all" [*Cowper*].

Ver. 19. *God forbid*. That which especially distinguishes a high order of man from a low order of man—that which constitutes human goodness, human nobleness—is surely not the degree of enlightenment with which men pursue their own advantage; but it is self-forgetfulness, it is self-sacrifice, it is the disregard of personal pleasure and personal indulgence, personal advantages remote or present [*Froude*].

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter entirely new matter—supplementary to Samuel—contains a list of those who joined David in time of Saul (vers. 1-22), and of those who came to make him king over Israel (vers. 23-40).

Vers. 1-7.—*Benjamin and Judah came to Ziklag*. A town which belonged to Simeon (Jos. xix. 5), but given to David for residence it fell to Judah. *Close*, hidden (cf. 1 Sam. xxvii. 30). *Brethren*, i.e., Benjamites, i.e., members of the same tribe; disgusted with his treatment of David or persuaded that God was with him. Ver. 3. *Azmav*. (viii. 13, 30; xi. 33). Ver. 4. *Geder*. (Jos. xv. 36). Ver. 5. *The Haruph.*, sons of Hariph (Neh. vii. 24), probably Benjamites. Ver. 6. *Korahites*, not of tribe of Levi, but descendants of some Korah of Judah. Ver. 7. *Gedor* (ch. iv. 4).

Vers. 8-15.—*Gadites aided David*. *Ho'd*, cave of Adullam, or a fort in wilderness of Judah (1 Sam. xxii. 5); *faces* (cf. 2 Sam. i. 2, 3; ii. 18); *buckler*, lance or spear (ver. 24). Ver. 15. *Jordan*, to help brethren (cf. Jos. iii. 15), *first month*, in spring, when river is swollen; *valleys*, literally all the valley on both sides Jordan. Ver. 14. *Over*, equal to (as in margin).

Vers. 16-18.—*Men of Judah and Benjamin*. Ver. 17. *Meet*. David reason to suspect perhaps, feared treachery and required a solemn declaration. Ver. 18. *Came upon*, literally clothed. A. spoke not of himself, but as the Spirit of God prompted him.

Vers. 19-22.—*Men of Manasseh*. Seven are given who joined David, when dismissed by Philistines from their army (cf. 1 Sam. xxix. 1-11). Ver. 21. *Band*, the troop of Amalek (1 Sam. xxx. 8), which sacked Ziklag during absence of David. Ver. 22. *Host* of God, a formula for great things.

Vers. 23-40.—*Different tribes who attended and made David king at Hebron*. Vers. 24, 25. Judah and Simeon, two southern tribes, had already acknowledged David. Vers. 26-28. Many of the Levites closely associated with these tribes. *Jehoiada*, father of Benaiah (xi. 22); *leader*, commander of priestly troops. *Zadok* became high-priest at a later time (2 Sam. viii. 17; 1 Kings i. 8). Ver. 29. Benjamites few, for greater part still in service of Saul's house. Ver. 30. *Famous*, men of name or renown. Ver. 31. *Expressed*, i.e., nominated and deputed by the rest of the tribe to go to Hebron and make David king [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 32. *Understanding*, best interpreted politically (Esth. i. 13) [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 33. *Not of double heart*, falling into rank not with double heart, i.e., with firm and faithful mind. Naphtali decided, Dan in full strength, and Asher in great force. Ver. 37. A large contingent from eastern tribes.

Vers. 38-40.—Great majority enthusiastic, *agreed in heart*, i.e., had a common wish (2 Chr. xxx. 12) to make David king. Ver. 40. Tribes, near and distant, brought provisions on beasts of burden; every one made it a festival of joy.

HOMILETICS.

THE ASSEMBLY AT ZIKLAG.—Verses 1–22.

These joined David in the time of Saul, were early helpers in the time of exile and danger.

I. The ingenious tribe (vers. 1–7). Benjamites, Saul's kinspeople, and for some reason not satisfied with his rule. Several leading men given. Men of great dexterity. 1. *Skilful archers*. "Shooting arrows out of a bow."

2. *Famous slingers*. "Hurling stones." 3. *Well disciplined*. Active and wonderful in "use of right hand and left."

II. The courageous tribe (vers. 8–14). Gadites. 1. *Able-bodied*. "Men of might and men of war fit for battle."

2. *Specially trained*. "Could handle shield and buckler." 3. *Remarkably fleet*. "Swift as the roes upon the mountains," not in flying from the foe, but in pursuing, so that none escaped. "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, &c."

(2 Sam. xxii. 34; Hab. iii. 19). 4. *Splendidly courageous*. (a) They went over Jordan in time of floods. (b) They put to flight the people of the valley.

5. *Awfully determined*. "Whose faces were like the faces of lions." Saul and Jonathan "swifter than eagles and stronger than lions" (2 Sam. i. 23).

III. The suspected tribes (vers. 16–18). Some of Benjamin and Judah. Benjamites probably invited Judahites to go with them to prevent suspicion; their anticipations well founded, as seen by results. David thought they were secret emissaries of Cush (Ps. vii. inscription), but soon persuaded otherwise, by (a) their entire submission, "Thine are we David and on thy side;" (b) their earnest prayer for his success, "Peace be unto thee."

IV. The volunteer tribe (vers. 19–22). These "fell" not by lot, but by desertion from one to another. These persons left the service of Saul for that of David. Transfer allegiance from a bad to a good master, from a losing to a winning cause. Nothing else known of these seven captains. But one noble act may immortalise.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Saul's brethren. Some akin to Saul came over to David. 1. A testimony to unblemished character. 2. A protest against grievous wrong (done to David). 3. A determination to share the fortunes of the king. "It is God who worketh men's hearts and fashioneth their opinions. Paul had friends in Nero's court, and Luther in the Pope's" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 2. *Both right hand and left*. The word "*left-handed*" (in Septuagint) in Judges iii. 15 is rendered *both-handed*. 1. Some are *left-handed*, weak and awkward in every good work. 2. Others are *right-handed*, active, but single-handed after all. 3. *Both hands* required. Head, hands, heart, and all for Christ. "Both hands earnestly" for good, not for evil.

"Take my hands; and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love."

Ver. 8. *Separated themselves*. 1. From what connections? Service of Saul and other Gadites who remained with him. 2. For what purpose? To serve David, the anointed king. 3. At what time? When David was in distress and danger. We must come out of the world, separate from evil company, and never be ashamed of Christ and his cause. Thus shall we be renowned and registered with his people.

Vers. 17, 18. Notice—I. *The earnest appeal*. 1. In its spirit. He does not imprecate nor condemn. 2. In its purpose. What are you come for, peace or war? 3. In its requirement. Loyalty to me. II. *The grounds of the appeal*. 1. Their intimate relation. Both parties descended from the same ancestors and dependent upon the same God. "The God of our fathers."

2. His solemn declaration of innocence. "Seeing there is no wrong in mine hands." 3. His reliance upon divine interposition: An appeal to God as righteous and omniscient judge to rebuke, avenge, and help. III. *The response to the appeal.* Amasai gave a beautiful, prompt, and earnest reply. 1. In unconditional submission to the king. "Thine, David." 2. In sincere pledge of their services. "With thee, son of Jesse." 3. In wishing success to his cause. "Peace to thee," everything thy heart desires. "Peace to thy helpers," among whom we wish to be numbered. 4. In assurance of divine help. "For thy God helpeth thee." IV. *The results of the appeal.* When David saw the passionate earnestness and the loyal surrender—1. He received them heartily. "Then David received them." 2. He trustfully promotes them. "And made them captains of the band." Submit to God, follow him implicitly, and you shall be promoted to honour.

Vers. 14, 15. *Sons of Gad. Honourable mention.* 1. High in command.

"Captains of the host." 2. Physically strong. "Least could resist an hundred, &c." (*cf.* margin and Lev. xxvi. 8). 3. Brave in danger. Exploit well known in crossing Jordan, only needed simple allusion. 4. Victorious in fight. They overcame all in the valleys, east and west of the river.

"I sing the warrior and his mighty deeds." Ver. 18. *The spirit came upon (clothed) Amasai.* An unusual expression. We hear constantly in O.T. of "the Spirit of God," but only here (and possibly in 1 Chr. xxviii. 12) of "the Spirit" absolutely. Clear, however, the two expressions mean the same (*cf.* Jud. vi. 34 and 2 Chr. xxiv. 20). A. spoke not of himself, but as God's spiritual influence moved him [*Speak. Com.*]. The need of the Holy Spirit to submit to Christ and recognise him king—to preach his word and carry on his cause. Tarry until ye be endued (clothed) with power from on high (Luke xxiv. 49).

"Angels give thee in command
What to the smallest tittle thou shalt say."

HOMILETICS.

THE HOST OF GOD.—Verse 22.

In distress David had few friends, 600 who served as guards. When he had to act for God many were disposed to help from different tribes. All welcome. So the army grew "like the host of God," great in numbers, valour, and success. **I. Animated by the presence of God.** David counted for something. "How many do you reckon me?" said a leader to his fainting soldiers. What inspiration and strength to have "the Captain of salvation" with the Church! Wellington, one day in battle, rode into the midst of his wavering men. One who saw him cried, "There's the Duke; God bless him!" Then followed a tremendous cheer, and the tide was turned. "I am with you always." **II. Increased by the grace of God.** God only makes "willing in the day of power" (Ps. cx. 3); the power of his Spirit and word. Numbers not always increase and efficiency. Many desert or weaken the cause. Grace adds such as are being saved (Acts ii. 47). "The Lord make his people a hundred times so many more as they be." **III. Successful through the help of God.** 1. *In gathering numbers.* Confederates came to David in successive bands "day by day," as emergencies required. A gradual, constant accession, incessant progress in the army and cause of Christ. 2. *In gaining victories.* Everything possible to David's captains, counsellors, and friends. "Men of might and men of war." In service of God warriors numerous as dewdrops of the morning; strong in the strength of the Lord of Hosts; certain to overpower all opposition. "There is no disputing," said one to Caesar, "with him that commands legions."

“For the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.”

THE ASSEMBLY AT HEBRON.—Verses 23–40.

This was seven years after Saul's death. “They should have come sooner,” says Trapp; “but better late than never.” Briefly classify and describe different tribes. 1. Judah, *the equipped tribe*. “Ready armed” (ver. 24); expecting and prepared to fight. Though fewer than others, they entertained those from afar. “Given to hospitality.” 2. Simeon, *the tribe of valour*. “Mighty men of valour for the war” (ver. 25). 3. The Levites, *the priestly tribe* (vers. 26–28). Earnest, led by famous men and recognised the providence of God in call of David. “Priestly troops” required now to fight and to pray. 4. Benjamites, *the tribe small in number*. Affection for their kin and jealousy for their honour kept many in army of Saul. All must be left for Christ. “Kindred should never over-rule conscience.” 5. Ephraim, *the renowned tribe*. “Famous throughout the house of their fathers” (ver. 30). 6. Manasseh, *the deputed tribe*. “Expressed by name” (ver. 31). “Deputed by the rest of the tribe to represent them” [*Speak. Com.*]. 7. Issachar, *the intelligent tribe* (ver. 32). (1) *Men of political sagacity*. “Had understanding of the times.” No longer “a strong ass” (Gen. xlix. 14). (2) *Men of insight*. Knew “what Israel ought to do” in their critical condition. (3) *Men of authority*. For “all their brethren were at their command.” Some knew how to rule and the rest how to obey. 8. Zebulun, *the enthusiastic tribe* (ver. 33). (1) *Sincere in heart*. “Not of double heart,” not of doubtful and divided mind. (2) *Fixed in purpose*. Not of distracted mind, divided purpose, and half a heart; but *one* in effort and interest. (3) *United in discipline*. They “could keep rank,” in the march and on the field. Ever obedient to command and united with the companies. 9. Other tribes are given (vers. 34–37). Naphtali very decided (ver. 34). Dan in great strength (ver. 35). Asher expert, able to marshal war (ver. 36). Eastern tribes grouped together, make a large contingent and well-equipped (ver. 37). Thus came friends and adherents, to make David king and render loyal obedience to him.

FITNESS FOR THE SERVICE OF THE GREAT KING.

Each tribe noted for some special quality. Sum all up and describe qualifications needful in God's service. **I. Intelligence is required.** Knowledge enough for personal salvation and for communication. Ignorance is unfitness and must never be excused. Knowledge must be the mind's nutriment, “*vigour of mind*;” must become wisdom and power in action. Many generals opposed to Napoleon were acquainted with military science, but he excelled where victory depended upon wise movement and sudden thought. We must understand the times in which we live and the duties we have to perform. **II. Courage is required.** “Woe be to fearful hearts and faint hands,” says the son of Sirach. A stout heart a great blessing. Cheering to see men in humble life and public conflict suffering in patience and triumphing in their integrity. Instances of courage in daily life and fields of action. “The heroic example of other days is in a great part the source of the courage of each generation; and men walk up composedly to the most perilous enterprises, beckoned onwards by the shades of the brave that were” [*Helps*]. “Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed.” **III. Unity is required.** Divided counsel leads to broken ranks. Party spirit and envy will frustrate design. Rank must be kept in Christian efforts and co-operation

given in national interests. "United we stand," broken we are scattered from the field. Tacitus said of Germans what the world says of Christians, "Whilst fighting separately, all are conquered together." "One *body*, one *spirit*." **IV. Enthusiasm is required.** This makes up for lack in numbers and weapons. Ardour is a help in life, a useful and energetic motive-power. How often does it cool down by time, get repressed by toil and sneers! To succeed, enthusiasm must be contagious in our ranks and never die out. "Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is the triumph of enthusiasm" [*Emerson*]. "Stir up (blow up, keep alive, as a dull fire) the gift of God within thee" (2 Tim. i. 6). Thus are we to qualify and equip ourselves for the warfare of life. "Men of understanding," "mighty men of valour," and "ready armed;" unity, spiritual sagacity and enthusiasm, all needful in leaders of tribes and soldiers of the "host of God."

THE PROPRIETY OF CONSIDERING TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES.—*Verse 32.*

From the character here given of the men of Issachar we shall take occasion to show—I. That our conduct must often be affected by times and circumstances of whatever nature. 1, Civil; 2, Social; 3, Personal. But your conduct must be influenced by them in temporal matters. There is still reason to inquire—II. How far it may be properly affected by them in the concerns of religion. 1. That we may attend to times, &c., is certain (example of Christ and apostles). 2. But how far is not easy to determine. III. What there is in the times, &c., of the present day to affect our conduct. Application: suggest a caution or two. 1. Guard against yielding to any corrupt bias. 2. The future judgment will be according to motives. 3. Seek for wisdom that is profitable to direct [*C. Simeon, M.A.*].

THE JOYOUS ENTERTAINMENT.—*Verses 38–40.*

Supplies of provisions furnished in abundance by neighbours and others from distant parts. All enthusiastic for David, and wished to feast on a liberal and magnificent scale worthy of the occasion. **I. The cause of joy.** Three reasons for it. 1. *United under one king.* End of divided rule. Prospect of settlement under strong government. 2. *A king chosen of God.* Divine frown, clouds and darkness taken away. A king given under different circumstances, "a man after God's own heart." 3. *Universal loyalty to the chosen king.* All joined in the choice, submission, and gratitude. **II. The manifestation of joy.** A cause or religion without expression or room for joy neither suits the wants of man nor accords with the will of God. 1. *In unity of purpose.* "To make David king." 2. *In sincerity of feeling.* "With a perfect heart." No deception, no half-hearted, no double-hearted. "Were of one heart and one soul." This oneness expressed in thought and act towards each other and towards their sovereign. 3. *In social fellowship.* Three days feasting. Not selfish, individual joy; but domestic, social, and national. **III. The extent of the joy.** "All the men of war" and "all the rest of Israel" (ver. 38). The soldier and the priest, the weak and the strong—all ages, all classes participated—none shut out from national feasting and rejoicing. This suggests the pure and unmixed joy in crowning and serving Christ as our king—the perfect happiness and order when he shall become the chosen of all nations, kindreds, and tribes. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 28. *Zadok the warrior priest* (cf. 2 Sam. viii. 17; 1 Kings i. 8). Notice—1. His profession. A soldier and priest. The cause, a “holy war.” 2. His qualifications. (a) “A young man.” (b) “Mighty of valour.” The need of young, valiant men, religious and devoted to God. “*The history of heroes is the history of youth*” [Lord Beaconsfield].

Ver. 32. *Understanding. Noscentes scite tempora*, such as well knew what was to be done and when to do it, by a singular sagacity, gotten by long experience, rather than by skill in astrology. See Esther i. 13. David set a high price upon these; so doth God on such as regard and use the season of well-doing [Trapp].

Ver. 33. *Not of a double heart.* Heb., without a heart and a heart; plain-hearted; *non aliud in ore promptum, aliud in pectore conclusum habentes*; downright dealers [Trapp]. 1. Men of fluctuating sentiments. “A

double-minded man” (having two minds) “is unstable in all his ways” (Jas. i. 7). 2. Men of compromising habits. “Woe be to the sinner that goeth two ways” (Ecclus. ii. 12). 3. Men of hypocritical worship. “Come not unto the Lord *with a double heart*” (Ecclus. i. 28).

Unity of purpose. Its strength and advantage. “Napoleon gained his victories by consolidation. Austria and Russia attacked in columns and separate bodies; he concentrated his forces and fell on one point like an avalanche. So it must be with the Church. Scepticism will never be broken, Popery will never be dissipated, till the whole Christian Church is more thoroughly at one with each other” [Dr. Cumming].

Ver. 38. *Under discipline.* I. What keeping rank involves. 1. Obedience to authority. 2. Regard to the general peace of the whole. 3. Mutual help. II. The importance of keeping rank in church life and action [Bib. Museum].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1. *These came to David.* The good and the great draw others after them; they lighten and lift up all who are within reach of their influence. They are so many living centres of beneficent activity. Let a man of energetic and upright character be appointed to a position of trust and authority, and all who serve under him become, as it were, conscious of an increase of power [S. Smiles].

“Whose spirit lent a fire
Even to the dullest peasant in his camp”
[Shakespeare].

Ver. 8. *Separated themselves.*

“The man whom I
Consider as deserving of the name,
Is one whose thoughts and actions are for
others,
Not for himself alone; whose lofty aim,
Adopted on just principles, is ne'er
Abandoned while earth or heaven afford
The means of its accomplishment”
[Blanchard].

Ver. 32. *Men of understanding.*

Happy are those that, knowing in their births they are subject to uncertain changes, are still prepared and arm'd for either fortune; a rare principle, and with much labour learn'd in wisdom's school [Massinger].

Ver. 40. *Joy in Israel.* Joy is regarded as a happy accident of the Christian life, an ornament and luxury rather than a duty [Dr. Dale]. Joy in the Lord is strength, positive actual power for ministry. It creates around us the most favourable atmosphere for evoking our resources; raises our entire nature to the highest pitch of energy, and gives unwonted elasticity and capacity of tension to all our faculties. When the heart is brimming over with gladness, labour is acceptable, opposition helpful, duty a delight, and responsibility a privilege [Dr. Clifford]. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” [stronghold, marg.] (Neh. viii. 10).

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter corresponds closely with 2 Sam. vi. 1-11; but in the first verse of that chapter is stated, with great brevity, what is given here in full (vers. 1-5).

Vers. 1-5.—The Consultation. *Leaders* (omit *and*, for leaders intended) are captains named, *i.e.*, chiefs of people. If civil and military organisation existed before this, "David seems to have been the first to recognise in these officers of the host representatives of the people, to consult them on public affairs and to give them a certain political position (see, besides the present place, ch. xv. 25; xxvi. 26; xxviii. 1)" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 2. *All* assembled together; *send* quickly everywhere; *left* at home. Ver. 3. *Enquired not* (*cf.* 1 Sam. vii. 1, 2; xxviii. 6; 1 Chr. x. 14). Ver. 5. *Shihor*, probably one of the names of the Nile (*cf.* Jos. xiii. 3; Is. xxiii. 3; Jer. ii. 18); was the southern bounds, as Hemath was the northern of Canaan [*Pat.*]. *Kirjath-jearim*, where it had been since it returned out of land of Philistines (*cf.* 1 Sam. vi.).

Vers. 6-8.—The Undertaking (*cf.* 2 Sam. vi. 2-11). *All Israel*, 30,000 in Sam. Ver. 6. *Baalah* (Jos. xv. 9-60). *Whose name*, rather "who is worshipped there." Ver. 7. *Uzza* and *Ahio*, sons or grandsons of Abinadab, who from age or death was unable to accompany procession. Ver. 8. "*Harps and lutes*, stringed instruments; *timbrels and cymbals*, percussive instruments for keeping time in march or solemn dance." Trumpets used by priests, generally on joyous occasions (Num. x.; Ps. xcvi. 6). Some suppose that Ps. xxxiv. was sung in parts on this occasion.

Vers. 9-14.—The Breach. *Chidon*, Nachon (2 Sam. vi. 6). *Stumbled*, descent steep and dangerous. *Hand*, ark not to be touched, would not have required it, if in obedience to law, it had been carried on the priests' shoulders by poles (*cf.* Ex. xxv. 14; Num. iv. 15). Ver. 11. David displeased and afraid at such sudden vindication of holiness. Ver. 14. *Obed*, a Levite, and afterwards doorkeeper in tabernacle (1 Chr. xv. 18; xvi. 5). *Gittite*, of Gath-rimmon, one of the Levitical cities (Jos. xxi. 24).

HOMILETICS.

THE FIRST COUNCIL.—Verses 1-5.

David securely established on the throne, taken and fortified Jerusalem, organised and trained an army, turns attention to civil and religious concerns. First thing to restore the ark to its proper place. Hence consultation with chiefs. **I. The parties of which it was composed.** David begins well. Instead of ignoring the people, he calls their representatives; he "consults" them and decides nothing absolutely, and unconstitutionally. Many sovereigns, proud and tyrannical, will yield nothing, give nothing, overrule the wish and rights of the people. "I am the state," said one. The people's allegiance is best secured by consent in their representatives. "If it seem good unto you." **II. The purpose for which it was convened.** Many historic councils summoned for important objects. This not called to celebrate success, organise plans of campaign; but to unite the people and establish the worship of the sanctuary by the restoration of the most sacred of all symbols. This—1. *A religious movement.* Former neglect great, people degenerated by influence and example of Saul; careless and indifferent concerning ordinances and worship of God. "We enquired not in the days of Saul." 2. *A national movement.* "If it seem good unto you." The throne established, national government under one head; foundation laid for internal unity by concentrating national life on its centre and source. Not like other kings, David displays in

proceedings the *popular character* of his rule, assembles all round the sanctuary before the throne, and under the government of Jehovah (Ps. xxiv. 1-10). 3. A *divinely sanctioned movement*. "If it be of the Lord our God." All enterprises opposed to *his will*, though carried on with numbers and valour, will come to nought. This first, "Is it the will of God?" For "man proposes, but God disposes." "Ye ought to say if the Lord will we shall live and do this or that." III. **The decision at which it arrived.** The purpose noble, and reasons for execution weighty and abundant. 1. A *wise decision*. "It was *right*." Always wise to seek first the kingdom of God, &c. "Oh that they were wise!" 2. A *unanimous decision*. "*All the congregation* said it was right." People rightly consulted readily agree. Leaders should never fear to appeal in God's name to the nation, seek to rouse its conscience and gain its sympathies. The response will be cordial and unanimous. "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey" (Jos. xxiv. 24). 3. A *firm decision*. "*We will do so*." Needful to be prudent in counsel and firm in execution.

THE ARK IN THE ROYAL CITY.

A place of honour, influence, and right, as—I. **The centre of unity.** Politically and morally, outwardly and inwardly people one. Unity in worship not complete, for there were two holy places, one in Gibeon, another pitched over the ark, but internal unity which did not exist before. II. **The source of religious life.** Under Saul it had fallen from the height to which Samuel had brought it. The royal family had lost piety, and, as instanced by Michal, had become proud. In her father's house she had an idol god. But this act—1. *Purified religious life*. Elevated its tone and grandeur. 2. *Unified religious life*. External unity destroyed by war between Saul and David. Now national life one centre and source in dwelling of God in Zion. The sanctuary in Gibeon retires from view. 3. *Organised religious life*. He arranged priests and Levites, divided them into classes for service, gave a new impulse to music and culture. Reorganisation raised divine worship from its disintegration and lawlessness under Saul to an artistic and beautiful order. III. **The sign of God's presence.** David had captains and mighty men, but God was required. Conscious of dependence upon God, he confesses desire to rule according to the will of God. If it be "of the Lord our God." This act one of reverence and gratitude, which enthrones God the king of glory (Ps. xxiv.); makes Jerusalem the city of the Great King (Ps. xlviii. 3); from whence proceed all manifestations of glory and might (Ps. xx. 3); and before whom it is an unspeakable privilege to worship. "Who may be guest in thy tent? who may dwell on thy holy mountain?" (Ps. xv. 1).

THE SOLEMN PROCESSION.—Verses 6-8.

Extreme anxiety to have the ark in the city, for counsel and succour on all occasions. To attain this all classes eager to undertake any effort and submit to any inconvenience. A procession formed which befits the object in view. I. **In military escort.** The way rugged, the enemy defeated, but not destroyed. We must ever be on guard. II. **In united ranks.** "All Israel" (30,000 in Sam.), king, priests, and people in order and position. All ranks indebted to God, all should join in service and praise. III. **In festive joy.** "The festival," says Dean Stanley, "was one which exactly corresponded to what in the Middle Ages would have been 'the Feast of

the Translation' of some great relic, by which a new city or a new church was to be glorified. Long sleepless nights had David passed in thinking of it (Ps. cxxxii. 4), as St. Louis of the transport of the Crown of Thorns to the Royal Chapel of Paris." Such joy is natural and becoming, pleasing to men and acceptable to God.

THE LESSON OF UZZA.—Verses 8–12.

David loved God, venerated the symbol of his presence, desired to restore appointed worship, and put the ark where it should be. But right things must be done in right manner, or they will fail. In this case failure, sad and signal, for Uzza died and the ark turned aside to the house of Obed-edom. **I. The failure.** Here multitudes, "David and all Israel," yet business nought. Crowds do not ensure blessing. Here pomp, singing, harps, trumpets, &c., yet ended in mourning. Gorgeous ceremonial no guarantee of grace. Here energy; "they played before God with all their might"—no dull and sleepy worship, but a bright, lively service, yet the matter fell through. But there was no thought as to God's mind. David confessed, "We sought him not after the due order" (1 Chr. xv. 13). The priests not in their places, nor Levites to carry the ark; oxen took the place of willing men. The worship was not sufficiently spiritual and humble. There was no sacrifice. This a fatal flaw, for how can we serve the Lord apart from sacrifice? There was little reverence. We hear little of prayer, but much of oxen, a cart, and the too familiar hand of Uzza. Now, even David must keep his place, and the Lord's command must not be supplanted by will-worship. Therefore the breach upon Uzza, and David greatly afraid. May we not expect similar failures, unless careful to act obediently and serve the Lord with holy awe? Are all observances and practices of our churches scriptural? Are not some of them purely will-worship? **II. The fear.** The terrible death of Uzza caused great fear. Thus the Lord slew Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire; and the men of Beth-shemesh for looking into the ark. "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. x. 3). Sense of wrong-feeling caused fear in David, for we read, "And David was displeased" (ver. 11). We are too apt to be displeased with God because he is displeased with us. Sense of unworthiness for such holy work made him cry, "How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" His feeling that he failed in that which God expected of his servants created a holy fear. "Sanctify yourselves, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God" (1 Chr. xv. 12). He meant well, but erred and came to a pause; yet not for long. Ark remained with Obed-edom three months, not more (ver. 14). Some make the holiness of God and the strictness of His rule an excuse for wicked neglect. Others are overwhelmed with holy fear, and pause awhile till they are better prepared for the holy service [*Spurgeon*].

RIGHT THINGS DONE IN A WRONG WAY.

I. The matter and right manner of performing duties are, in the command of God, linked together. He will have his service well done, as well as really done, with a perfect heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. Masters on earth challenge to themselves a power to oblige their servants, not only to do their work, but to do it so-and-so; and though they do the thing itself, yet if not in the manner required, it is not accepted. **II. The doing of a duty in a wrong manner alters the nature of it,**

and makes it sin. Hence, the ploughing of the wicked is sin (Prov. xxi. 4). Hence, prayer is accounted a howling upon their beds (Hos. vii. 14). Unworthy communicating is not counted as eating the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. xi. 20). If a house be built of never so strong timber and good stones, yet if it be not well founded and rightly built, the inhabitant may curse the day he came under the roof of it. **III. Duties not prepared according to the right order are but the half of the service we owe to God, and the worst half too** [*Thos. Boston*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Send abroad. Erumpamus, dimittamus.* Let us break forth and send, *i.e.*, let us send speedily and effectually. See his zeal for the Lord of Hosts [*Trapp*].

Ver. 8. *Played before God.* Public joy should always be as *before the Lord*, with an eye to him, and terminating in him, otherwise it is no better than public madness, and the source of all manner of wickedness [*Benson*].

Vers. 7-10. *Perez-Uzza.* 1. *The act of Uzza.* Rash, lacking faith in God's power or providence to preserve the ark; irreverent; disobedient. 2. *The punishment of Uzza.* Sudden, signal, and severe. Apparently out of all proportion to the act. But we are improper judges of wrong, desert, and divine justice. God displays holiness, to secure discipline and check sin, to which we are prone. One instance of justice may benefit generations and ages. 3. *The results of the punishment of Uzza.* (a) The procession was broken up. (b) David was afraid. "How could such a festal joy which knew nothing of holy fear, however well meant, prove acceptable to God? It is not enough that we mean well, and have pious thoughts; we must also, in what we do, hold fast to God's word and commandment, and in all our joy in the Lord must not allow ourselves to forget that we have to do with a holy God."

Uzza, or Irreverence in sacred things.

1. Rashness in devotion. "God smote Uzza for his *rashness* (marg.);" (2 Sam. vi. 7). Worldly thoughts and plans brought into the very house and presence of God. Haste in spirit and utterance. "Be not rash with thy mouth," &c. (Ecc. v. 2). 2. Thoughtlessness in Christian effort. No due preparation, trust to accidents or emergencies. Inconsiderate effort has blasted many a noble project. Prudence and thought required. Collect and arrange materials; for an unfurnished minister can never be "a wise master-builder." "Prepare thy work (set it in order) without and make it fit for thyself in the field" (Prov. xxiv. 27). 3. Sinfulness in the Christian ministry. Uzza a type of all who, unsanctified in spirit, take upon themselves to rescue the cause of God. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." *Profanation of the ark.* It is of importance to observe the proportionate severity of the punishment attending the profanation of the ark. The Philistines suffered by diseases, from which they were relieved by their oblations, because the law had not been given to them; the Bethshemites also suffered, but not fatally, their error proceeding from ignorance or inadvertency; but Uzza, who was a Levite and well instructed, suffered death for his breach of the law [*Jamieson*].

HOMILETICS.

PEREZ-UZZA AND ITS LESSONS.

Arrangements of David for transport of the Ark differed from those which God had prescribed (Num. iv.). Never carry on the work of God by means

which God has forbidden. Learn—I. If God be absent from a people, and the ark be long in obscurity, that people will lose a sense of reverence. All thought of divine power in the ark forgotten, a question of mere safety, not reverence; arrangements those of heathen nations, not divine injunctions. II. That God, mindful of his honour, often singles out guilty men to be monuments of his displeasure. God will be sanctified in those who come nigh him (Lev. x. 3). Uzza presumptuous and irreverent, like Nadab and Abihua, suffered for sin. “When many have sinned, God commonly punishes one or two of the leaders, in order that the others may remember their sin and beg forgiveness.” III. That by such examples of terror God warns others. King, priests, and people inspired with dread of divine majesty. Judgment opened the eyes and humbled the soul of David, who wisely delayed for thought, self-examination, and, under divine teaching, to learn the right way. “For when thy judgments are in (strike) the earth, the inhabitants of the world (earth) will learn righteousness” (Is. xxvi. 9).

“Heaven wills our happiness, allows our doom;
Invites us ardently, but not compels” [Young].

DAVID'S DISPLEASURE.—Verses 11, 12.

The king greatly agitated, dreaded God's displeasure might be extended to himself and people if ark further conveyed. Resolved to wait. The word betokens anger and grief, used by Jonah (iv. 1-9). I. He was afraid of personal danger. He had neglected duty; knew not what might happen; dangerous to bring ark into the city. A guilty conscience makes cowards. II. He was vexed at the interruption of his plan. People disappointed, his prestige damaged, and his enemies encouraged. We are often tempted to find fault when our religious enterprise is interrupted, when we as leaders are dishonoured, and our purposes broken. Complain of God's providence when we should accuse ourselves. “Should it be according to thy mind?” III. He was overcome with superstitious dread. Something about the ark itself he did not understand. He misinterpreted the event. Superstition ever misdirects, scares by expected evil. “It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of him, for the one is unbelief, the other is contumely; and certainly superstition is the reproach of the Deity” [Bacon].

THE HOUSE OF OBED-EDOM.—Verse 14.

People dismayed, David perplexed, one perfectly calm and ready to welcome the ark. Obed. not a great warrior; for great talents no guarantee for holy life and faithful service (Balaam, Saul, Byron), but a man of sincere heart and upright conduct. I. The service which he rendered. The ark was carried “aside into the house of Obed-edom.” A most signal service which no one else would undertake. A service for which he was trained, and which he was ready when required to give. Lonely homes are scenes of highest trust and purest character. Not the palace, but the cottage often the residence of God, and the national glory. II. The spirit in which he performed this service. Uzza slain for rashness, David shrinks in fear, Obed-edom receives ark gladly. 1. *In filial fear.* In love to God and earnest desire to help his cause. 2. *In striking courage.* He knew what had been done among the Philistines and the Bethshemites, yet invites the ark to his house. “O the courage,” says Bishop Hall, “of an honest and faithful heart! Nothing can make God otherwise than amiable to him; even his justice is lovely.” III.

The reward which he gained. "The Lord blessed the house." 1. A *personal* blessing. 2. A *social* blessing. 3. An *extensive* blessing. "All that he had." None suffer whose guest is the ark of God. Piety is the best friend to prosperity. Happy and attractive the home in which God dwells.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 9-13. 1. God's people misinterpret his dealings. 2. How much they lose by this interpretation. 3. How much they gain who receive God simply. (1) Beware of flying from God or shutting out God. (2) Let God into the heart and the dwelling [*H. Bonar*].

Ver. 14. *Ark in the house.* Family devotion, its nature, duty, and results. Howard, the philanthropist, never neglected family prayer, if even but one, and that his domestic servant, declaring that where he had a tent, God should have an altar. "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name."

The Ark with Uzza, David, and Obed-edom; or the Ark the cause of judgment, fear, and blessing, according to its treatment.

Ver. 14. *Blessed.* As he will do all those, both small and great, that favour his cause and further his kingdom; for he is a liberal paymaster, and his retributions are more than bountiful. If Abinadab was not so well blessed as Obed-edom, it was haply because he entertained not the ark with like reverence. As men measure to God in preparation, &c., so will God measure to them in blessing [*Trapp*].

"A Deity believed, will nought avail,
Rewards and punishments make God
adored" [*Young*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIII.

Vers. 6-8. *Singing.* Oh that we might have such joy as that which inspired the men at the battle of Leuthen! They were singing a Christian song as they went into battle. A general said to the king, "Shall I stop these people singing?" "No," said the king. "*Men that can sing like that can fight*" [*Talmage*].

Ver. 11. *Breach.* God would have us read our sins in our judgments, that we might both repent of our sins, and give glory to his justice [*Bishop Hall*].

Ver. 14. *Blessed the house.* Parents! if you would banish Satan from your households, and with him all the train

of sins that bring misery and desolation into many a home, and convert into a wilderness with wild beasts what might be a family paradise, where every human affection bloomed in beauty, grew in grace, and brought forth fruit to God's glory, seek the constant presence of Jesus Christ, and covet, above all earthly honour or renown, that your family should be like that one of old in Bethany which "Jesus loved." *His* presence will be your true prosperity, making your daily mercies true mercies, and your seasons of bereavement seasons of richest blessing and deepest peace [*Rev. Nor. Macleod, D.D.*].

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter runs parallel with 2 Sam. v. 11-25, and presents a general verbal identity, which is insufficiently represented by the Authorised Version. The only important variations from 2 Sam. v. are in verses 4-7 and 12, in the former of which passages the sons of David are given somewhat differently, while in the latter the fact is added that the idols taken from the Philistines were burned [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1, 2.—David's house. *H.* elsewhere Hiram (2 Chr. ii. 3; viii. 18; ix. 10; cf. 2 Sam. v. 11). A Phœnician, a Canaanite, speaking the language of David, and sovereign of a city trading in cedars and abounding with craftsmen in stone and wood [cf. *Murphy*]. Ver. 2. *Confirmed* in contrast to his former state and the fate of Saul's kingdom.

Vers. 3-7.—David's family (cf. 2 Sam. iii. 5). Concubines in ch. iii. 9; a list of children vers. 5-8; those born in Jerusalem, 2 Sam. v. 14-16. But names of Eliphalet and Nogah not found, and Beel'ada appears the same as Eliada.

Vers. 8-17.—David's victories. *Seek* to ruin him before consolidated in kingdom. Ver. 9. *Rephaim* (xi. 15) south east of Jerusalem, near capital of David. Ver. 10. *Enquired* for high priest to give tone to his reign. Ver. 11. *Smote* in the engagement at Mount Perazim (Is. xxxviii. 21), in valley of Rephaim. This first victory. Ver. 12. *God's images* carried into battlefields (1 Sam. iv. 4-11; 2 Sam. v. 21).

Vers. 13-17.—Second victory. *Again* in next season campaign renewed. Ver. 14. *Not up* to meet them directly; come upon them by stratagem in the rear. Ver. 15. *Sound*, the rustling of leaves by strong breeze, the appointed sign and moment for attack. Ver. 16. *Gibeon*, now *Yefa*, in Judah. Ver. 17. *Fame* in all the surrounding nations. This verse an appropriate conclusion, not found in Samuel.

HOMILETICS.

THE BUILDING OF THE ROYAL HOUSE.—*Verses 1, 2.*

David had conquered Jebusites; made Zion capital; had now wisely made a treaty with a neighbouring prince. Magnanimous and godfearing. In Hiram's conduct notice—**I. An instance of true friendship.** History gives noble examples of love and friendship. 1. *This was genuine.* Real and excellent. David need of artisans. War and disorder had depopulated. "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

" Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

2. *This was lasting.* Friends often change with change of principles and circumstances; vary with temperature and desert in meanness. Hiram did to the son what he had done to the father (2 Chr. ii. 3); "for Hiram was ever a lover of David" (1 Kings v. 1). **II. An illustration of human agency in the service of God.** None independent. All require friends and help. Rich to give to poor; wise to teach the ignorant, and kings to rule subjects. All may communicate, interchange stores of thought, knowledge, and substance. 1. *Agency in men.* Tyrian workmen renowned and skilful; helped David to build a city, so splendid in cedar structures that Jeremiah exclaimed, "Thou dwellest on Lebanon and makest thy nest in the cedars" (Jer. xxii. 23). 2. *Agency in materials.* Israel agricultural, furnished corn and oil; Tyre commercial, gave its manufactures and foreign produce. Thus mutually helpful. All the

treasures of art and materials of nature subserve man's highest interests and God's work. **III. A proof of God's providence.** David more than "fortunate in having a friend in Hiram at this time." 1. *Providence in Hiram's conduct.* God disposed him to render help. The God of infinite wisdom has a purpose in the rise and fall of empires, in all events of life, obscure or illustrious. As a gardener directs rills of water through different parts of his ground, so "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. xxi. 1). 2. *Providence in David's accession to the throne.* "David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel." By internal unity, external peace, and friendly connection with Hiram. 3. *Providence in the honour and extension of David's kingdom.* "And that his kingdom was exalted on high." Respected at home and abroad among nations; elevated as the people of God above others in knowledge, privilege, and destiny. In building characters, churches, and societies rely upon God, not too much upon human friendship and human instrumentality, wealth, eloquent preachers and active evangelists. Recognition, consciousness of God, gives strength and success. "David perceived," &c.

HIRAM AND DAVID.

The treaty between these two kings illustrates—**I. The providence of God in the exaltation of a good man.** "Confirmed him king." Scholars, ministers, statesmen, fitted and exalted from obscurity to honour. Joseph from prison to prime minister; Garfield from log cabin to White House; Livingstone from Blantyre to Westminster Abbey. "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." **II. The influence of a good man upon others when thus exalted.** David's influence far and near. Men pay homage to moral worth and holy life. This power every Christian may possess and wield. The secret is, "The Lord was with him." **III. The design for which God exalts a good man.** "For his people Israel's sake" (2 Sam. v. 12). Not for themselves, but for others are men enriched and honoured. Great interests often sacrificed for selfish ends. Kings, popes, and emperors forget that others are as dear to God as they. Elevation should never separate. Kings created for the people, not the people for kings.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. 1. *David's house built.* Fit for his court and homage. Workmen of a wealthy prince helped to rear it. "The sons of strangers shall build up" the walls of the spiritual house, "and their kings shall minister unto thee" (Is. lx. 10). 2. *David's kingdom established.* Saul not established. Nothing to shake or disturb possession. Exalted before friend and foe. "Higher than the kings of the earth." 3. *God's hand recognised in this.* Many blessed and honoured do not perceive this, will

not acknowledge God, talk about their "fortune," "star," and "chance." "David perceived," &c. "By this I know that thou favourest me" (Ps. xli. 1).

Ver. 2. *Lifted up.* Man throws down. God lifts up persons, societies, and nations; lifts up above distress, opposition, and danger. "A good man in great prosperity." 1. He ascribes it all to the Lord. 2. He regards it as given him for the benefit of his fellow-men" [*Lange*].

HOMILETICS.

THE EXTENSION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.—Verses 3-7.

When the palace was built and the kingdom established, David's family multiplied and increased. Of his sons, see 1 Chr. iii. 1-9; and his concubines, 2 Sam. xv. 16; xvi. 22; xix. 5. This—**I. In worldly policy.** Always thought to be politic to have many children; marry them into powerful families, and thus strengthen interest and gain support. The custom of Oriental monarchs to gather a numerous harem. This an essential part of court-state, and a symbol of royal power. But David overstepped the mark and went astray. "Men who have once broken the fence will wander carelessly." **II. In disobedience to God's command.** Multiplication of wives expressly forbidden to the kings of Israel. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deut. xvii. 17). Worldly policy often contradictory to God's design. Expediency never safe. Divine wisdom the only preservative and redemptive force in life. "When wisdom entereth into thine heart and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee."

"To know
That which before us lies in daily life
Is the prime wisdom" [Milton].

FAMOUS BATTLES.—Verses 8-17.

Philistines afraid of David's growing power—that he would wipe away the national dishonour of Gilboa, and that his knowledge of the country would give superior advantage in war—resolve to attack, surprise, and ruin him. *Went up to seek*, with intention to crush him before consolidated in his kingdom (*cf.* 1 Sam. xxiii. 15; xxiv. 2), but were overcome in two famous battles. **I. The counsel by which they were undertaken.** "David enquired of God" (ver. 10); "David enquired again of God" (ver. 13). In all affairs look to God for direction. Have his will and word for your guide. Means always at hand to discover his will. Submit thoughts, plans, and ways to God's approval—to check if wrong, to perfect if right. If depressed by their weight, "commit" (literally, roll as a burden which you cannot bear) "*thy way* unto the Lord" (Ps. xxvii. 5). "*Roll thy works*" (thy undertakings) "upon the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 3). **II. The help by which they were fought.** This from above. 1. *In divine direction.* "The Lord said unto him, go up." Never stir without this. 2. *In hearty co-operation.* David did not entrench himself in Zion, nor act merely on the defensive, but made the attack and conquered. "To serve the gods was to reign," said a heathen writer. **III. The victories which they gained.** Brilliant and complete. 1. *The enemy overcome.* "David smote them"—like rising waters, overflowing their banks and sweeping everything before them. 2. *Their false confidence destroyed.* Philistines carried their gods into battle, with the belief, common in ancient nations, that they would grant success. Their owners left them helpless on the field; the victors carried them as trophies to the capital, and consumed them in the flames. "They were burned with fire." 3. *David became famous.* "The fame of David went out unto all lands" (ver. 17). As a great warrior, a powerful monarch, and a good man. 4. *God was honoured.* Acknowledged as the source of victory—"God hath broken in" (ver. 11)—praised for his gift and presence, and feared above all the gods of the earth. Give to him the glory due to his name.

SIGNALS FOR DUTY.—*Verses 15, 16.*

In the responses to David's inquiries we not simply have commands in words, and symbols in sound, but signals for duty or action. **I. God's answer to man's prayer.** Given twice, in terms direct and explicit. 1. *Prayer for knowledge of duty.* "Shall I go?" 2. *Prayer for assurance of success.* "Wilt thou deliver them into my hand?" David often defeated. For his own encouragement and that of his army, he desires grounds of confidence. True prayer will give knowledge, hope, and strength. **II. God's help in man's circumstances.** These often strange and apparently against us; render powerless and insufficient. God's help adequate to feeble men and scanty resources. In his service never left without indications of his presence. "God is gone forth before thee." **III. God's signal for man's action.** We need not only to *know* and strength to *obey* God's will, but the call to duty—the signal to "go" at the exact time. A detachment on one occasion waited for orders, longed to join their comrades in battle, instead of standing in silence, exposed to danger. At length Wellington gave the command, and the attack was successful. "They serve who stand and wait." A time to "stand still" and to "go forward," but God must give the signal. Wait for his salvation. "The vision shall come and not tarry."

THE BATTLE OF BAAL-PERAZIM.—*Verses 8–12.*

Here the Philistines marched from Rephaim, pitched their tent, and offered battle (2 Sam. v. 18–20). **I. The spirit in which it was fought.** Most commendable and advantageous. 1. *A spirit of reliance upon God.* "Shall I go?" An attitude of conscious danger and helplessness. 2. *A spirit of humility.* David talks of his "hand," not his sword. God is the giver, he only receives with the hand. None fit to be great but those who can stoop lowest. "Before honour is humility." 3. *A spirit of obedience.* "They came up." Wise to listen to and obey law—to be convinced of its divine authority and justice. Men ever ready to *order*, to *modify* and *repeal*, in danger and doubt. But "the wise in heart will receive commandments." 4. *A spirit of courage.* Victory promised by God, hence bravery and enthusiasm. "A good cause makes a stout heart."

"He holds no parley with unmanly fears,
Where duty bids, he confidently steers,
Faces a thousand dangers at her call,
And trusting in his God, surmounts them all" [Cowper].

II. The scenes by which it was characterised. Battlefields never pleasant to inspect. Great soldiers have often wept on them. 1. *Shameful defeat.* "David smote them," and like an impetuous flood carried all before him. The defeat terrible, and perpetuated in name of place. "*Baal-perazim* water-breach" (*cf.* Is. xxviii. 21). 2. *National disgrace.* The gods were forsaken, lost, and destroyed. The disgrace of the Philistine's capture of the ark was wiped away, and the idolatrous people dishonoured. God makes men weary of things they love, and compels them to desert what they worship. "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats" (Is. ii. 20).

THE BATTLE OF GIBEON.—*Verses 14–17.*

Again the enemy renewed hostile attempt with greater force. God interposes in a peculiar way, caused a sound to be heard, and David suddenly attacked from

behind the mulberry-trees. Notice—**I. A special change in tactics.** Much depends upon methods in war. David not permitted to act as in first battle, though successful. This would have been natural. But God alone must be followed; not rules of earthly warfare, not past experience, nor past success must guide. God does “a new thing.” “Thou shalt not go up; fetch a compass behind them.” **II. A special sign by which these tactics are carried out.** “When thou shalt hear a sound of going, &c.” 1. *A supernatural sign.* “Sound of going”—viz., of God. Soldiers must look to the commander for orders. This, many think, was a noise made by angels, who came to help (*cf.* 2 Kings vii. 6). 2. *A disciplinary sign.* Requiring an *upward look*, an *open eye* to see, an *attentive ear* to hear. Duty of soldiers to wait and watch in readiness and order. 3. *A typical sign.* In the setting up of Christ’s kingdom, disciples waited to be equipped for work. The Spirit “came with a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.” When they heard and felt that, they bestirred themselves, and went forth to conquer.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. 1. A vigilant foe. “Philistines heard.” 2. An army on guard. “David heard.” 3. An army prepared to meet the foe. “Went out against them.” A Christian’s duty like that of a soldier. He does not attempt to meet temptation, to fight the enemy in his own strength. His watchfulness lies in observing its approach, telling God of it in prayer, and being prepared in God’s strength.

Ver. 10. 1. The thing to ascertain. Is it God’s will? 2. The power required to perform it when known. Many wish for God’s favour and help without doing God’s will. The order can never be reversed; first God’s will, then God’s help. No answer and no power, if not in right attitude and relation to him.

Ver. 11. *God hath broken asunder* or through mine enemies as a breach of waters, *i.e.*, as a violent torrent makes a *rift* or *breach*. Philistines scattered suddenly, unexpectedly and violently. God’s terrors awful. “Thy fierce anger goeth over me (as waves of the sea); thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together” (Ps. lxxxviii. 16, 17).

Vers. 9–11. 1. An instance of self-conquest. David conquered self, and then consulted God. 2. A lesson of

dependence upon God. Pray, look up, and expect. 3. An instance of success through obedience.

“God fights the battles of a will resigned.”

Ver. 15. *Sound of going* applies figuratively to us also in our spiritual conflict with the children of unbelief in the world. There, too, it comes to nothing that one should make war with his own prowess and merely in the human equipment of reason and science. Success can only be reckoned on when the conflict is waged amid the blowing of the Holy Spirit’s breath and with the immediate presence of the Lord and of the truth of his word [*Krummacher*]. *God before thee.* 1. In the pledge of success. 2. By confounding the enemy. Sound something amazing, like the noise of a mighty host. Hence panic and flight.

Ver. 15. *Before thee.* 1. A word of *consolation* in sore distress. 2. A word of *encouragement* amid inward conflict. 3. A word of *exhortation* to unconditional obedience of faith. 4. A word of *assurance* of the victory which the Lord gives [*Lange*]. *The rustling of the Lord’s approaching help* in the tops of the trees. 1. Dost thou wait for it at his bidding? 2. Dost thou hear it with the right heed? 3. Dost thou understand it in the right sense?

4. Dost thou follow it without delay? [*Idem*]. *Victory comes from the Lord.*
1. When it is beforehand humbly asked for according to the Lord's will and word. 2. When the battle is

undertaken in the Lord's name and for His cause. 3. When it is fought with obedient observation of the Lord's directions and guidance [*Idem*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIV.

Vers. 1, 2. *Hiram and David.*

"A generous friendship no cold medium knows,

Burns with one love, with one resentment glows" [*Pope's Homer*].

It was reckoned a crime among the Romans to be without a friend. "Friends," says one, "are to be inventoried as well as goods."

Ver. 8. David heard of it. "Set double guard on that point to-night," was an officer's command when an attack was expected.

Ver. 10. *Shall I go up?* The English Ambassador to the Court of Prussia sat at a table of Frederick the Great, then meditating a war whose sinews were to be mainly formed of English subsidies. Round the table sat infidel French wits, and they and the king made merry over decadent superstitions, the follies of the ancient faith. Suddenly the talk changed to war. Said the Ambassador, "England would, by the help of God, stand by Prussia." "Ah!" said the infidel Frederick, "I did not know you had an ally of that

name," and the infidel wits smirked applause. "So, please your Majesty," was the swift retort, "He is the only ally to whom we do not send subsidies" [*Baxendale*].

Vers. 14-16. Luther's strength lay in the way in which he laid the burden of the Reformation upon the Lord. Continually in prayer he pleaded, "Lord, this is thy cause, not mine. Therefore, do thine own work; for if this gospel do not prosper, it will not be Luther alone who will be a loser, but thine own name will be dishonoured" [*Spurgeon*].

Ver. 17. *Fame of David.* "Begin with modesty, if you would end with honour."

"Some men are raised to station and command,
When Providence means mercy to a land.
He speaks, and they appear; to him they owe
Skill to direct, and strength to strike the blow,
To manage with address, to seize with power
The crisis of a decisive hour" [*Cowper*].

CHAPTER XV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The bulk of this chapter consists of new matter, which the writer of Chronicles found in his authorities, and regarding as important for his purpose, introduced at this point into the narrative. Only verses 25-29 are parallel with 2 Samuel, corresponding to ch. vi. 12-23 [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-3.—*Preparation to remove ark. Houses.* Interval of three months employed in building his palace and city for accommodation of his wives and family. *Tent,* a new one, old one still at Gibeon (2 Chr. xvi. 39; 2 Chr. i. 3); thought to be too old, perhaps. Ver. 2. None, except Levites, to bear ark, nor convey it in cart (*cf.* Num. i. 50; Jos. ix. 7-17). "External things carried on waggons under charge of Gershonites and

Merarites ; but articles of the sanctuary to be borne on poles by Kohathites " (Num. iv.). Ver. 4. *All* representatives of nation.

Vers. 5-15.—Priests and Levites. "This classification of sons of Aaron, as the special priests, and of the Levites, is constantly observed (ch. xii. 26, 27; xxvii. 17). The mention of the six representative Levitical families follows. That of Kohath (ver. 5) takes lead, because, though second in order of birth (Gen. xlvi. 11; Ex. vi. 16-19; ch. vi. 1-30), its priestly importance gave it always first rank. To the same head belonged also three of the remaining five families, viz., Hebron (ver. 9) and Uzziel (ver. 10), who were brothers, as being both sons of Kohath (Ex. vi. 18); and Elizaphan, who, though son of Uzziel (Ex. vi. 22), had come to represent a distinct family (Num. iii. 30). The other two required to complete the six are Asaiah (ver. 6), of the house of Merari, and Joel (ver. 7), of the house of Gershom. The representatives, then, of these six families, with the company of the brethren belonging to each of them, and the two priests, Zadok and Abiathar (ver. 11), are now summoned into the presence of David to receive a short but special charge."

Vers. 11-13.—David's address. Sanctify, according to Mosaic requirements, before engaging in any service (Num. i. 50; vii. 9; x. 17; 2 Chr. xxix. 5). Ver. 13. *Did not* sanctify yourselves before. Levites even sadly to blame. *Breach* (ch. xiii. 11). *Order* that ark should be borne on shoulders of Levites (*cf.* ver. 15).

Vers. 16-21.—The singers. Sacred song in use from earliest times (Ex. xv.; Deut. xxxii.; Jud. v.). This first occasion on which duty of conducting musical services expressly laid on Levites. Hitherto music seems to have been cultivated in "schools of the prophets" (1 Sam. x. 5). Henceforth services of tabernacle and temple were regularly choral, and a considerable section of Levites was trained in musical knowledge and set apart to conduct this portion of national worship (*cf.* ch. xxiii. 5; xxv. 1-31; 2 Chr. v. 12; vii. 6; xxxv. 15) [*Speak. Com.*].

Ver. 17.—Heman (*cf.* 1 Kings iv. 31; 1 Chr. ii. 6). *Ver. 18. Second*, subordinate leaders, or forming the second choir. *Porters* applies to Obed-edom and Jeiel (or Jehiah, ver. 24). *Ver. 19. Cymbals*, instruments of percussion, making clanging sound. *Ver. 20. Psalteries*, a kind of lute. *Alamoth*, "psalteries of high pitch," whose tones resembled voices of girls (*alamoth*) [*Speak. Com.*]. *Ver. 21. Shem.*, the eighth in a series of times, or an instrument with eight strings; uncertain meaning. *Excel*, lead or preside: harpers with bass voices led, and lutists with treble followed.

Vers. 22-24.—Bearers of ark. *Chen.*, chief, from his office, and different from Chen. in ch. xxvi. 29. *For song*, marg. for carriage. *Instructed*, presided over bearing. *Ski'ful* in customs and observances in carriage of holy things. *Vers. 23, 24.* This part of cortege arranged thus: Berechiah and Elkanah went before to open doors. The seven priests followed, blowing trumpets (Num. x. 8), and Obed-edom and Jehiah brought up the rear and closed the doors, when the ark was put in its place. Arrangements here merely for the occasion, and it was possible for these two doorkeepers to sing in choir and afterwards close the sacred doors [*Murphy*].

Vers. 25-29.—The procession. *Ver. 26. Helped*, regarded with favour. *Offered*, distinct from that in 2 Sam. vi. 13. *Ver. 27. Linen*, made of *buts* (byssus), a species of flax; a robe worn by highest rank kings and priests (Esth. viii. 15; 1 Sam. xxii. 18). *All Levites* formed part of procession. *Ver. 28. Cornet*, first time mentioned. *Ver. 29. Danced* accords with brief account in 2 Sam. vi. 15. *Michal* (*cf.* 2 Sam. vi. 20-23).

HOMILETICS.

A PLACE PREPARED FOR THE ARK.—Verses 1-4.

David anxious to convey the ark from house of Obed-edom to tabernacle in Zion. **I. An evidence of his desire for God's presence.** He thought more about a place for the ark of God than the splendour of the palace and the enlargement of the city. Men build houses, buy land, and make fortunes, but have no room for God, for a church in the house, for a temple in the city. **II. An indication of a better state of mind.** Not now afraid, did not cry, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam. vi. 9). In three months wonderfully changed. Obed-edom's prosperity and divine judgment broke down prejudice, humbled him, and induced him to arrange for return of ark. "Thy judgments are made manifest." **III. A proof of anxiety for the welfare of his people.** Not anxious to fill

the city with soldiers, to build warehouses, but to pitch a tent for God. The seat of government should be the centre of worship. The presence of the ark asserted the presence, supremacy, and claims of God. The king desired the people to remember *Him* in their homes and their business. **IV. An earnest endeavour to secure that welfare.** David first to move, prominent in effort, and earnest in consulting the people. He prepared a place, was ready to employ labour, and make sacrifice to accomplish the work. To "the chief of the fathers" he gave a solemn charge and a personal example. Let us thus work ourselves, and incite others to follow our example.

REMOVAL OF THE ARK, OR CARRYING ON THE WORK OF GOD.—*Verses 1-24.*

The chapter gives an account of preparation and procession in the removal of the ark. Learn—**I. Preparation for God's work.** The work important and needful, should never be undertaken without thought, purpose, and preparation. 1. *By personal sanctification.* "Sanctify yourselves" (ver. 12). Legal defilement unfitted for solemn duties. Removal of sin from heart and life, the first requisite in seeking and serving God. Secret sin forsaken, the heart made steadfast and sincere. "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away." 2. *By implicit obedience to God's command.* God's work done in *God's* way, not in ours. Trifles most serious. Difference between a cart and poles in conveying ark seems small. But "to the law and testimony." No right to put the plans, the ordinances of men for the commandments of God. **II. Hearty co-operation in God's work.** David sought fit persons, and appealed to priests and Levites to help. This co-operation given. 1. *Gained by consultation.* David could not force, calls the assembly and makes appeal. Well-conducted meetings. Teachers' Meetings, Ministers' Conferences, and National Councils of great help in effective work. "Come now and let us take counsel together." 2. *Displayed in united ranks.* In "due order" (ver. 13). In obedience to God, and special rank in procession. Neglect of this brought failure at first. Worship, work, and liberality should be systematic. "Order gave each thing view" [*Shakespeare*]. 3. *Expressed by individual effort.* Each took his place and gave his work. Some played with cymbals, harps, and psalteries; others "did blow with the trumpets." Some sang and others danced. Some door-keepers and others commanders. All joined the order and the shouts (2 Sam. vi. 15). "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." **III. Success achieved in God's work.** If sincerely consecrated and unitedly engaged, we shall succeed in God's service. When all was done reverently and in order, "God helped the Levites that bare the ark." They might tremble in remembrance of former judgments; but they did not *stumble*. The sacrifices were acceptable to God, and the favour of God was not withheld. Songs of praise were given, and the ark "came to the city of David."

THE PROCESSION WITH THE ARK.—*Verses 3-28.*

After due preparation, the procession arranged, and we have all particulars. **I. The bearers of the ark.** "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites." David had carefully ascertained legal requirements, and anxious they should be strictly carried out. 1. *Rightly chosen.* 2. *Properly arranged.* Three families of Levites (vers. 4-7). Kohathites not priests (vers. 8-10); Zadok and Abiathar, the princes of two priestly lines of house of Aaron. **II. The regulations for conveying the ark.** These varied.

1. *Sacrificial rites.* (a) At beginning for help. (b) At the end in gratitude. These forgotten in first attempt, hence the breach. 2. *Musical accompaniments.* Leaders in song and subordinate or second choir. Psalteries, cymbals, and lutes, accompanied procession. 3. *Rapturous joy.* Joy unbounded, expressed in corresponding gestures and rhythmical movements. (a) *The king danced.* A religious ceremony in which highest and holiest feeling found expression. (b) *The people shouted and sang.* The festival was popular, right, joyous. The king took the lead, and God made the whole people glad. Every one did "soar above the heights of earth."

"Joy is the sweet voice, joy the luminous cloud.

We in ourselves rejoice!

And then flows all that charms our ear or sight,

All melodies the echoes of that voice,

All colours a suffusion from that light" [Coleridge].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *A place for the ark.* 1. A lovely thought. 2. A wise consultation to carry it out. 3. An example worthy of imitation.

Ver. 2. *None ought.* 1. Wise men may be guilty of oversight and wrong. The king and priests knew the law, and should have carried it out. 2. God's methods of bringing them to acknowledge and confess wrong, often severe, memorable, and beneficial in results. "When pious men, who have been betrayed into unwarrantable conduct, have had time for self-examination, searching the Scriptures, and prayer, they will discover and confess their mistakes, and be reduced to a better temper; they will justify God in his corrections; they will be convinced that safety and comfort consist, not in absenting themselves from his ordinances, or in declining dangerous services, but in attending to their duty in a proper spirit and manner; they will profit by their own errors" [Scott].

None ought to carry, &c. Gentle reproof. 1. Do we not deserve it? Have we not erred from God in doctrine and conduct? 2. Can we receive it without offence from prince or peasant? 3. When thus reprov'd, are we ready to amend? "To reprehend well," says Feltham, "is the most necessary and the hardest part of friendship. Who is there that does not merit a check? And yet how few will endure one!" "Its nail," says an old author, "must be well oiled with kindness before it can be effectually driven home." "Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, and it shall be an excellent oil; it shall not break my head."

Vers. 2-24. 1. The call to service—personal, pressing, and worthy. 2. The response to the call—ready, universal, and immediate. 3. The directions to carry it out—clear, right, and safe. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

HOMILETICS.

PERSONAL HOLINESS ESSENTIAL TO SACRED SERVICE.—Verse 12.

Sanctify yourselves, a needful duty for any work for God. Present comfort and eternal happiness depend upon this. **I. Personal holiness required in those who serve.** Holiness means setting apart, fitting for special use. God's servants separated from a profane world and devoted to God. 1. *In heart.* This must be purified, and filled with holy thoughts and aspirations. Likeness

to God in mind and disposition. Root and centre of spiritual being rectified. "Sanctify the Lord God *in your hearts.*" 2. *In life.* Holiness of heart reproduced, translated into life, retain. "Be ye holy in all manner of *conversation*" (deportment, course of life) (1 Pet. i. 15). **II. Personal holiness the pattern according to which we must serve.** "As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy;" "Be ye holy as I am holy." *Idea* of perfection lost through sin. Christ brought God's holiness from the region of abstraction within sight and easy reach. Infidels even admire his character, but to believers he is a model of imitation, the standard, the law of life and service. There is innate likeness by regeneration and the indwelling Spirit; outward likeness by conformity, study, and obedience. He did the will of God, went about doing good, and sets an example. "Be ye therefore followers" (imitators) "of God, as dear children" (Eph. v. 1). **III. Personal holiness is the only condition on which we can serve.** Not only necessary for personal salvation, but for personal usefulness. 1. *By this we influence others.* Doctrines not always understood. Holiness seen, felt, and admired. Holy living wins to Christ and helps his cause. 2. *By this we answer the end of our being.* Of no use whatever without holiness; worse than a rose without blossom, or a tree without fruit. Use the design in view. "He hath not called you to uncleanness, but unto holiness."

SACRED JOY: ITS SOURCE AND MANIFESTATIONS.

The conveyance of the ark an occasion of general rejoicing (*cf.* Pss. ci.; xv.; lxviii.; xxiv.; cxxxii., which are supposed to commemorate the event). **I. The source of sacred joy.** Sacred—that is, true joy, not a common feeling, must have some cause or spring. By nature, too full of ingratitude and morbid feeling. 1. *God's presence with us.* In our hearts, renewing and cleansing them. In our homes, sanctifying bereavements and guiding domestic affairs. In duties, public and private. With God, even in trouble and obscurity, our life may be "a sunshine in a shady place." "All my springs are in thee." 2. *God's blessing upon our efforts.* Effort essential to health and joy. God's blessing upon work rightly done gladdens the heart and turns grief into gladness. "God hath made them rejoice with great joy." **II. The manifestations of sacred joy.** Joy not self-concealing. Here seen in forms fit and natural. From beginning to end, all "with joy" (vers. 16 and 25). 1. *In sacred psalmody.* "The singers with instruments of music, &c." (ver. 16). Reminding of Milton's "sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies." 2. *In sacrificial rites.* Without these, ceremony incomplete. In the success of any enterprise, the completion of any work, offer thanksgivings, "sacrifices of joy." Duty performed with the presence and by direction of God will create enthusiasm in numbers, and bring many a festal day!

"A solemn yet a joyful thing is life,
Which, being full of duties, is for this
Of gladness full, and full of lofty hopes."

DAVID BEFORE THE ARK.—Verses 25–29.

"It was the greatest day in David's life. Its significance in his career is marked by his own pre-eminent position—conqueror, poet, musician, priest in one. The sacrifices were offered by him; the benedictions, both on his people and on his household, were pronounced by him. He was the presiding spirit of the whole scene" [*Stanley*]. **I. David's attire.** "Clothed with a robe of fine linen" (ver. 27). 1. *Priestly attire* White ephod worn only by priests. David

the head of "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. xix. 6), and on this occasion performed the functions of a priest. 2. *A penitential dress.* Although king, David laid aside royal robes and put on the dress of a servant, and owned himself as mere minister of God. He sets forth his humility in the presence of whole people. In position and spirit expresses dependence upon God, and becomes the faithful leader and overseer. **II. David's conduct.** His joy increased as procession went on, expressed according to the manner of the times—singing, shouting, and dancing before the Lord, as music inspired and directed, till the ark was fixed in position. 1. *Misinterpreted by Michal.* She had no share in people's joy. Her heart not attuned to high devotion. The ceremony a foolish masquerade to her. A cold, unspiritual nature cannot understand enthusiasm, any more than an Icelander can understand tropical heat. 2. *Defended by himself* (cf. 2 Sam. vi. 21–23). In his procedure he had an eye to God's glory, from whom he received his kingdom, and before whom he ought to be judged. He did not lower himself in his own opinion—honoured with being on a level with the maids whom she despised. Honour with God more highly esteemed than honour with men (John xii. 43). David a noble example of firmness and enthusiasm for God.

"He put so much of heart into his act
That his example had a magnet's force."

MICHAL'S CONTEMPT.—Verse 29.

"One only incident tarnished its brightness. Michal, his wife, in the proud—we may almost say conservative spirit of the older dynasty, not without a thought of her father's fallen house (2 Sam. vi. 21), poured forth her contemptuous reproach on the king who had descended to the dances and songs of the Levitical procession. He, in reply, vowed an eternal separation, marking the intense solemnity which he attached to the festival" [*Stanley*]. 1. *Springing from pride.* She blamed him for exchanging royal robes for sacerdotal dress. He forgot his dignity, mixed with the common people, and put himself on a level with them. "Worldly hearts see nothing in actions of zeal but folly and madness" [*Bishop Hall*]. She could admire his valour, not his piety—the soldier, not the saint. 2. *Punished with barrenness.* "Michal had no child until the day of her death" (cf. 2 Sam. vi. 20–23). This a dishonour, the deepest humiliation for an oriental woman. She unjustly reproached David, and God put her to perpetual reproach. As we sow, we reap. "God hath still a barren womb for mocking Michal," says Trapp.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 25–28. *Sacred joy.* Its source, manifestations, and results. "All God's services must be performed with joy, or else they lose their lustre" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 29. Michal a type of many who despise devotion, enthusiasm, and liberality in the cause of God. "In the present day there is no lack of people like Michal. In the pure fire of the Spirit from on high these persons also see only a morbid fanaticism; in the most animated and vigorous expression of hallowed exultation of soul, a hypocritical display. The life from and in God remains a mystery to every

one until, through the Spirit of God Himself, it is unsealed to his *experience*" [*Krummacher*]. Learn—1. To be misunderstood, ridiculed, and opposed in God's service. 2. That a man's foes may be those of his own household. 3. To exercise true charity. Michal should have commended David; been less bitter and ironical in spirit. David calmly defended himself, and explained to Michal that he had regard to the glory of God in all his procedure. "Charity is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XV.

Vers. 3-24. Order in procession.

“The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre,
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office, custom, in all line of order”
[Shakspeare].

Ver. 29. *The pride of Michal.* She was a king's daughter, with all the

haughty temper of her birth. She forgot that there was a greater king than Saul or David, before whom the princes of the earth are as vanity. It is the tree which stands high and alone that is in danger of being struck by lightning. Her soul, in its pride, was scorched by the fire of divine judgment [S. S. Magazine].

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] In 2 Sam. vi. 17-23, only three verses and a clause parallel with this chapter.

Vers. 1-6.—*The ark lodged in tent.* After this event Levites entered upon their duties before the ark, instructed by David. *Blessed* (ver. 2) as head or father of the people. *Dealt* with remains of extensive thankofferings as in ancient royal hospitality. *Appointed* (ver. 4) Asaph and associates first company with cymbals; Zechariah and colleagues, with whom were conjoined Jeiel and seven others, in second company with lutes and harps.

Vers. 7-37.—*A psalm of thanksgiving.* First, the order of worship then appointed for first time. This special hymn prepared for the occasion. “The language is remarkably archaic, and there can be no reasonable doubt that it is in the main an extract from a record of the time of David” [Speak. Com.].

Vers. 8-10.—Thanksgiving (cf. Ps. cv. 1-15). *Wondrous* miracles. *His strength*, the ark called such (Ps. lxxviii. 61; cxxxii. 8) because strength shown by it at Jordan, Jericho, &c.

Vers. 11-13.—Call to seek the Lord. *Seed of Israel* (of Abraham in Ps. cv. 6).

Vers. 14-19.—Covenant with Abraham. *Mindful*, admonition. *Few*, literally men of number (Gen. xxxiv. 30).

Vers. 20-22.—Preservation when wandering. *Reproved* (Gen. xii. 17; xx. 3). *Anointed* as kings, and priests, and prophets (Ex. xix. 6).

Vers. 23-33.—God salvation of all nations (cf. Ps. xvi.). *Gladness* (beauty); *place* (sanctuary); *kindreds* (ver. 28), generations and families. *Give* (ascribe); *offering* (ver. 29) in public worship. *Stable* (ver. 30), idea moral, not physical (Ps. xvi. 10). *Sea* (Mediterranean); *fulness*, striking poetic figure. *Trees*, allusion to *Kirjath-jearim*, “the city of woods,” where the ark had rested.

Vers. 34-36.—This (ver. 24) verse is found at the commencement of Ps. cvi.; cvii.; cxviii.; and cxxxvi. It was the ordinary Jewish doxology, and may be regarded as closing the first or thanksgiving portion of the service, which is then followed by a short prayer (ver. 35), after which comes a second doxology [Speak. Com.]. Ver. 35. *Say* (not found in Ps. cvi. 47), a liturgical direction. *Deliver*, longing for freedom. *Amen* (ver. 36), a description of the manner in which the ceremony terminated.

Vers. 37-43.—Sequel, a description of appointment of musicians and their respective duties. *Brethren* (cf. ch. xxvi.). *Porters* (door-keepers). *Gibeon*. Hence two places where worship was performed in time of David. *Continually* (Ex. xxix. 38; Num. xxviii. 3-6). *Bless* (cf. 2 Sam. vi. 19, 20).

HOMILETICS.

THE INAUGURAL SERVICE.—Verses 1-6.

Stress here laid upon the fact that Asaph entered for the first time upon the duties assigned him, and that the order of worship appointed by David now com-

menced. **I. Service to commemorate an important event.** "The ark of God set in the midst of the tent." No longer in obscurity, nor in a private house, but fixed in the city, venerated as the centre and symbol of God's presence. In the accomplishment of any work, at the beginning of every new period in life, "thank and praise the Lord." **II. Service conjoined with sacred rites.** Rites significant and expressive, by which king and people acknowledged God's authority and sought his favour. 1. *Appropriate sacrifices.* "Offering the burnt offerings," by which victims were wholly presented and consumed. "They offered *peace-offerings*" in acknowledgment of God's favour. The former speaks of *atonement* (Lev. i. 3-9), the latter of *reconciliation* (Lev. iii. 1-5). One indicates complete self-surrender, the other thanksgiving to God. Grateful recognition of divine mercies and entire consecration to God's service reasonable, and required at all times. 2. *Earnest prayer.* David publicly blessed the people and besought continued help. Needful to petition for future, as well as to be thankful for past, mercies. 3. *Musical arrangement* (vers. 4-7). Levitical service of thanksgiving dates from this time. Music cultivated in the schools of the prophets and in the palace of the king now consecrated to the highest service, and constituted part of the worship of Jehovah. Music should not minister to debauchery and excess, but to gladness and praise. **III. Service connected with hospitality.** Devotion to God will lead us to think of man. When God blesses us we feel that we should distribute to others. A glad heart will open a wide hand. David's generosity was on a large scale. 1. *Suitable in variety.* "Bread," "flesh," and "wine." Flowers cannot grow in one element. Man requires variety; in body, animal and vegetable food, bread and water; in mind, something more than dogmas. In the house of God a table spread with boundless variety. 2. *Universal in application.* Women, a recognised place in the assembly, or not forgotten in their homes (*children*, says Josephus). Not merely to great men, but "he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel" (2 Sam. vi. 19). In that day the people fared well. "That they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor" (Ezra ix. 22).

A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING.—Verses 7-22.

This a composite psalm, represents a form of service rather than a psalm. The whole of it, with slight variations, found in Pss. cv. 1-15; xcvi.; and cvi. 47, 48. It celebrates redemption as unfolded in history of Israel, proclaimed to the world, and triumphant in judgment. This part sets forth—**I. An exhortation to the noblest work.** The work of praising God—a work in which our faculties find their vigorous, harmonious, and happy development—a work for which all rational and created beings are made. In three ways, chiefly, is this duty recommended. 1. *In giving thanks to God* (ver. 8). Author of all benefits, therefore to him all gratitude and praise. (a) *By singing psalms* (ver. 9). Best thoughts in sweet sounds. "Sing unto him," not to please others or gratify self. (b) *By social conversation.* "Talk ye"—men love to speak and to hear of "wondrous works." Christians have plenty to talk about—themes interesting and inexhaustible. Wonders of grace, mercy, and providence. (c) *By glorying in his name* (ver. 10). A name above every name, full of wonder and reverence, untainted with lust and blood. A name in which we may boast without shame, and rejoice without fear. 2. *In seeking God.* Seek "his face" and "his strength," his favour and help. (a) *Seek earnestly.* The word repeated to stir us up—"seek, seek, seek." (b) *Seek joyfully.* Not in dulness and despair—in gladness of heart and cheerful hope. (c) *Seek continually* (ver. 11). Not by assembling occasionally in tabernacle or temple, not

by observance of external rites, but in constant fellowship, "for evermore." 3. *In commemorating God's works.* "Remember his marvellous works" (ver. 12). They are striking and impressive. Remember their nature, number, and design. What more could God have done for us? Yet how forgetful and ungrateful! II. **Motives to influence us in this noblest work.** The argument founded upon God's character and God's care for them from beginning of history to removal of ark. 1. *God's great love.* "The Lord God of Israel," "the Lord our God." A relation filial and unique. But Israel's election united to universality of Jehovah's reign, therefore he is the God, not of one, but of all nations—may be our God and Father. 2. *God's great manifestations of love.* In heaven above and earth beneath, among angels and men. Making and confirming his covenant, receiving offerings and worship in his sanctuary. "Glory and honour in his presence, strength and gladness in his place" (ver. 27). 3. *God's great dominion.* Maker of heaven and earth, Universal Sovereign; "above all gods," for "the gods of the people are idols," impotent and worthless—mere nonentities, for an idol is nothing; supreme in grandeur and government. 4. *God's great claims.* For creation, covenant mercies and protecting care. God has right to homage and praise. They are due to him. As children, we are bound to love him; as servants, to consult his will, declare his goodness, and advance his kingdom. 5. *God's vindication of these claims.* His rights can never be given to another. Men, however intelligent; gods, adorned with gold or silver, must never receive homage due to him. "He cometh to judge the earth." "He shall judge the people righteously;" "judge the world with righteousness and with truth."

THE SEEKER ENCOURAGED.—Verse 10.

Yet many believe, or pretend to believe, that religion is a joyless thing! The *heart* has very little, if any, share in other enjoyments, which only gratify appetites, strike senses, and charm imagination. But where is the heart? Even in laughter the *heart* is sorrowful; the end of that mirth is heaviness. In religion the heart finds relief, repose, satisfaction, and joy. "Let the heart of them that rejoice *seek* the Lord." There are three reasons for this. *First*, because it is an evidence of grace. They may conclude against themselves, refuse to be comforted; but no man can seek to know, enjoy, and serve God from mere nature. Actions may not indicate the state of mind, but desires spring from it. We may be forced to do, but cannot be compelled to prefer and choose. *Secondly*, because their success is sure. This the case in no other pursuit. In fields of worldly labour we spend our strength for nought. A rival may bear off a prize which we have long been chasing, at the very moment we are seizing it. The cup of enjoyment, filled with eager hope, is often dashed to the ground from the very lip that touches it. But their heart *shall* live that seek God. "He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall *doubtless* return again," &c. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." "Is there unfaithfulness in God? Did he ever say to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye in vain?" *Thirdly*, because, when they have found, their aim and wish in seeking are fully answered. All they desire is treasured up in him, and they that seek the Lord shall not want *any* good thing. The wise man tells us of success in other cases. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit"—vexation if we miss, and vanity if we gain. To one of these alternatives we are inevitably subjected. We must be disappointed in acquiring them, and this often the case; or in possessing them, and this always the case. Everything earthly falls short of hope, but impossible to form adequate expectation of the riches of glory of the inheritance in the saints. What to have God himself for

our possession and exceeding joy! To be blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ! To realise happiness which solitude increases, trouble improves, and death perfects! "Eye hath not seen," &c. While thus the heart of them that seek rejoices, the heart of others should be induced to seek him. He invites you to seek, therefore "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found" [*Jay*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 7-11. *Holy duties.* "Give thanks—call upon—make known—sing—talk—glory ye."

Ver. 11. To seek his *face* is to desire his presence, smile, and favour consciously enjoyed. First we seek *him*, then his *strength*, and then his *face*; from the personal reverence we pass on to the imparted power, and then to the conscious favour. This seeking must never cease, the more we know the more we seek to know. Finding him, we must "our minds inflame to seek him more and more." He seeks spiritual worshippers, and spiritual worshippers seek him; they are therefore sure to meet face to face ere long [*Spurgeon*]. *Threefold seeking.* 1. The Lord for mercy. 2. His strength for service. 3. His face for happiness [*A. G. Brown*].

Vers. 12-15. *Subjects of Remembrance.* Marvellous works God has done, and wonderful judgments (words) God has uttered. Or—1. God's faith-

fulness. "He hath remembered his covenant" (Ps. cv. 8). 2. Our mindfulness of this faithfulness. "Remember" (ver. 12), "Be mindful" (ver. 15). "If the Lord keeps his promise in memory, surely we ought not to forget the wonderful manner in which he performs it. To us it should be matter of deepest joy, that never in any instance has the Lord been unmindful of his covenant engagements, nor will he be so, world without end. O that we were as mindful of them as he is!" [*Spurgeon*].

Vers. 12-15. 1. The operations of divine providence. Acts wonderful, beneficent, and memorable, comprehending the mightiest and most insignificant creatures. 2. The notice which should be taken of these operations. Amid displays of power and beauty we should not be deaf nor blind, but attentive, appreciative, and apt to learn. We should remember, relate, &c.

HOMILETICS.

THE NATIONAL COVENANT.—Verses 15-22.

Its nature, blessings, and contracting parties all specially set forth. Learn—**I. That God's method of intercourse with men has ever been in the form of a covenant.** A covenant is generally defined as an agreement between two parties, on certain terms—a conditional and a promissory; one to be performed and the other to be fulfilled. This method of divine procedure in Adam and Christ. God requires from us faith and obedience, then he will give life and salvation. In old time ever reminded of this by symbol and sacrifice. Hence "the books of the covenant," "the ark of the covenant," "the blood of the covenant," and "the tables of the covenant." "The old covenant" and "the new covenant." We must acknowledge God. "There is no *religion* without this idea of covenant with a personal God, and therefore all such views as those of Comte, Mill, and Spencer are, for all moral and religious purposes, wholly atheistical" [*Tayler Lewis*]. **II. That this covenant method of intercourse with men displays the sovereign will and free grace of God.** Man not disposed, not able

to make an agreement with his Maker. God might have left man in his guilty condition, without promise, hope, or mercy. But God graciously condescended to pledge his word and bestow his grace in Christ. Adam failed, in Christ everlasting life secured. In scripture everything is traced to the sovereign grace and mere good pleasure of God. Not to merit, foreseen belief, and holiness, but "according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise and glory of his grace" (Eph. i. 5). **III. That this covenant method of intercourse puts men under deep obligation to God.** Rightly viewed, it affords no ground of complaint or despair, but for submission and hope. 1. *They are chosen to great favours.* "His chosen ones." Elected, exalted in mind, character, and destiny. 2. *They should render thanks for these favours.* Never be slow to acknowledge debt and praise God for his mercy. He ceases not to be good, cease not to be grateful. **IV. The obligations of men to God for his covenant mercies can never cease.** As long as we exist we depend upon God and should praise God. He never ignores his claims, nor alters his covenant. 1. *It is of divine authority.* Higher, more sacred, more certain than the law of man. 2. *It is confirmed from time to time.* Made with Abraham, confirmed to Jacob, established with Noah (literally, made to stand, Gen. vi. 18), not because impaired, changed, or destroyed in itself. But it had been broken and forgotten—like something which had fallen down, it needed repetition and prominence. Hence 3. *It is "an everlasting covenant"* (ver. 17). To last as long as moral government through the ages of the world. "Made with man as an immortal being, and in itself an evidence of his designed immortality." *A covenant of eternity* (Is. xxiv. 5).

THE INFANT NATION.—Verses 6–22.

If interesting to trace some mighty river from its source to its entrance into the sea, some magnificent building from foundation to its topstone, what to trace the beginning and watch the progress of God's people! Early incidents and history briefly given. **I. The humble origin of the nation.** Numbers noisy, attract, and commend. Israel "few, even a few" (very few, Ps. cv. 12), lit. men of number, who could be counted at first; but "the fewest of all people" gradually increased and made numerous as the sands and the stars. Small churches, poverty of members, no barriers to God. **II. The wonderful preservation of the nation.** Few, unsettled and helpless Israel ever exposed and kept. 1. *In their journeys.* Migrating from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people. They were not lost, nor prevented from ending their journeys. "The Lord guided them on every side." 2. *Amidst their enemies.* In Egypt, Philistia, and Canaan, the heirs of promise secure. This not by forbearance of neighbours, for many sought to injure and destroy, to cut off root and branch, but "He suffered no man to do them wrong, &c." **III. The rich inheritance of the nation.** "The lot of your inheritance" (ver. 18). 1. *Not gained by their own skill.* "For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, &c." (Ps. xlv. 3). 2. *Bestowed by divine appointment.* "The lot of your inheritance." God planted and enriched them in gratuitous and sovereign favour. "He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents" (Ps. lxxviii. 55). **IV. The high destiny of the nation.** Blessed and exalted above all others. 1. *In their special relation to God.* "Children and chosen ones;" bound to imitate their father in fervent prayer, holy faith, and obedience. If God sets his choice upon us, let us be more devout and zealous than others. "A people near unto him." 2. *In their elevation to bless others.* Not put into Canaan to be secluded and shut up from

intercourse with other nations, but to bless them. Israel a missionary people, gave a Bible and a Saviour to the world. "To make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, in name, and in honour."

EVILDOING RESTRAINED.—Verses 19–22.

I resolve the words into three parts. 1. Here is the nearness and dearness of the saints unto God. They are dearer to him than kings and states, simply considered; that is, otherwise than as they in their persons are also saints; for you see for their sakes he reproveth kings, and so showeth that he preferreth them to kings. 2. Here is the great danger to kings and states to deal with his saints otherwise than well. It appeareth many ways; for he doth not only in words give a charge not to touch them, but he carries it in a high way (for so God will do when he pleads their cause). Touch them not; as if he had said, Let me see if you dare so much as touch them; and it is with an intimation of the highest threatening if they should; upon your peril if you do so; for that is the scope of such a speech. In deeds he made this good; not that he did altogether prevent all wrong and injuries, for they received many as they went through those lands; but at no time did he let it go unpunished. He plagued Pharaoh for Abraham's wife's sake (Gen. xii.), and also Abimelech (Gen. xx. 3). 3. Here is the care and protection which God had over them, set and amplified—(1) By the number and condition of the persons whom he defended; though "*few men in number*," that is, soon reckoned, for their power and strength, a few, or very small, as Septuagint. (2) By what he did for them. He suffered no man, however great, to do them wrong, however small, not without recompense and satisfaction. Though the people had an ill eye at them (Gen. xxvi. 11), God caused Abimelech to make a law on purpose, and to charge all his people in Isaac's behalf, and spake in the very words of the text, "He that toucheth this man or his wife shall be put to death" [*Thomas Goodwin*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 19–22. 1. *The condition of Israel.* Few, very few, strangers and migrating. Men of number, accounted unworthy, not distinguished by external dignity and power, as Rome marks her communicants. Humblest parts of communities, but honoured of God. 2. *The estimation in which they are held.* God's anointed kings and priests, ordained to reign with Christ. God's prophets to declare and set forth his will. 3. *The protection which they enjoyed.* To them intrusted the word of life, preserved to the world. To them a safe passport to accomplish God's design among men. Vers. 20–22. 1. God's people may often be removed. 2. They can never be injured. 3. God's property in them will never be renounced [*Spurgeon*].

HOMILETICS.

THE GREATNESS OF JEHOVAH.—Verses 23–33.

These verses, like Psalm xcvi., celebrate Jehovah's greatness. Great in essence and supremacy; great in mercy and dominion. All who hear and know this greatness are to tell it to others, that heaven and earth may rejoice in his reign. **I. Jehovah's transcendent greatness.** 1. *He is the only true God.* "The gods of the people are idols," images in wood or stone, vanities and nothings. 2. *He is the Creator of the world.* "The Lord made the heavens."

His Godhead, proved by his works, chief of which is the architecture of heaven, whose lamps shine, and whose rain falls upon all mankind. 3. *He is glorious in operations.* His works are "marvellous." No petty deity presiding over one nation, or one department of nature. Great in power and act, infinitely to be adored. Earthly potentates count themselves famous and strong. "God alone is great," Massillon declared, and imperial majesties bowed their heads. **II. Jehovah must be worshipped on account of his greatness.** "Worship the Lord." Tribes and families called to honour him in his courts. "All worship be to God only" is a fit motto of a city company. 1. *By submitting to his authority.* No worship without submission. Recognise his claims and authority. Give him "the glory and strength" of intellect, heart, and life. 2. *By presenting our gifts.* Sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving springing from humble submission; gifts of money and effort prompted by love. To him who gives all, we should gladly "bring an offering and come into his courts." "None of you shall appear before me empty." 3. *By a true spirit.* God looks not at architecture and apparel. Worship must not be sinful and superficial; but reverent and sincere. (a) *In the beauty of holiness.* "Purity is the white linen of the Lord's choristers," says Spurgeon, "righteousness is the comely garment of his priests, holiness is the royal apparel of his servitors." (b) *In profoundest awe.* "Fear (*tremble*) before him, all the earth" (Ps. xcvi. 9). Jehovah no earthly sovereign, but clothed in omnipotent grandeur. Dread of idols, mere superstition. Holy fear the spirit of true religion. **III. Heathen nations shall know and recognise Jehovah's greatness.** "Declare his glory among the heathen" (ver. 24). The name of God dishonoured by heathen idolatry, vices, and cruelties. But they shall hear of his wonders of grace and mercy. The duty, the privilege of the church to tell them. A truly loyal and living church will resolve to publish salvation to the ends of the earth. **IV. The world shall rejoice in the reign of the great Jehovah.** "Say among the nations, The Lord reigneth" (ver. 31). 1. *Joy in heaven.* "Let the heavens be glad." 2. *Joy in earth.* "Let the earth rejoice." 3. *Joy in which all creatures shall participate.* "The sea, no more troubled over shipwrecked mariners, and rehearsing grief of widows and orphans, shall adopt a cheerful note." The *fields* shall rejoice in culture, abundant harvests, and freedom from rapine. The *trees of the wood*, no longer sheltering horrid cruelty, shall "sing out at the presence" of God in the retirement and devotion of men. "These verses are full of comprehensive beauty and power. They present the gathering together of everything under the confessed dominion of the reigning Christ. Things in heaven, as well as things on earth, rejoice together in the acknowledged blessing of the Lord of peace. The Psalm is throughout a very sweet strain of millennial prophecy" [Arthur Pridham].

"The truth that David learned to sing,
Its deep fulfilment here attains.

'Tell all the earth the Lord is King!'

Lo, from the cross a King he reigns!" [Mrs. Charles].

THE BEAUTIFUL PLACE.—Verses 27-29.

Place, abode of the ark, the tabernacle and temple, apply to the sanctuary; public worship in God's house. **I. Beautified by God's presence.** God pleased to locate his presence of old. "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." Here "glory and honour" are constant attendants. In God combined, not in outward show and parade, all that is mighty and lovely, powerful and resplendent. Displays of mercy and love "beautify the place of his sanctuary and make the place of his feet glorious." **II. Beautified by**

attractive services. 1. *Cheerful song.* "Sing unto the Lord." No dismal rites celebrated; no bacchanalian shouts heard; mourning turned into joy. Singing a fitting expression of love, a reverent method of worship. 2. *Free-will offerings.* No part given reluctantly, but gladly. Offerings responsive signs and inspiring examples to fellow-worshippers. 3. *Spiritual fervour.* In Ps. xcvi. we have a triple call, "sing . . . sing . . . sing." No discordant note, no voice silent. Jew and Gentile, heaven and earth should join. The sacred fire of praise should burn and bless in perpetual flame. **III. Beautified by loyal attendants.** The house of God the centre of joys and fellowships. 1. *Regular in attendance.* They "come before him," habitually, punctually, and reverently; do not forget to assemble themselves together as the manner of some, but resolve "we will not forsake the house of our God." 2. *Mindful of its interests.* They bring their offerings, respond to its claims, contribute to its support, and encourage its enterprises. 3. *Obedient to its rules.* Law everywhere, and should be decency and order in God's house. "In beauty of holiness," a certain prescribed attire like splendid robes of ancient priests; or in right form and spirit, "in holy reverence" [*Boothroyd*]. Holiness in thought and heart required. Repeated and solemn warnings on this point. "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me."

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP — Verses 28, 29.

I. It is due to God. "The glory due unto his name." 1. *It is right.* However much we adore we cannot give more than he deserves. All honour, natural and reasonable, due to him as Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Redeemer. 2. *It is acceptable.* Though not enriching, yet well pleasing to him. "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth me." **II. It befits our moral nature.** Man made to worship, the only creature capable of it. 1. *It meets our aspirations.* We long for God, restless and dissatisfied without him, ever display anxiety to find him. "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat." 2. *It satisfies our wants.* Nothing but a personal God will do this. We feel for a *living* God. No sympathy with force, nor adoration of mere law. A senseless power satisfies no social or religious instincts, draws out no song or psalm. "My soul *thirsteth* for God, for the living God." 3. *It dignifies our character.* "In beauty of holiness." It detaches from earth and sin, gives *beauty* to contemplate, *strength* to imitate, and *fear* to humble and guide. Fellowship with God most holy and most exalting. "It is good for me to draw near to God."

A GRAND PROSPECT.—Verses 30–33.

Here find a splendid prospect for the heathen, "a grand missionary hymn" for the Christian Church! **I. Jehovah reigns supremely.** "The Lord reigneth." No abstract principle, no blind force nor law rules the world. Infinite and unchangeable, absolute and independent, almighty and supreme—the fountain of all being, filling heaven and earth with splendour. **II. The reign of Jehovah a cause of joy to the world.** "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitudes of isles be glad." 1. *It is a reign of righteousness.* Others tyrannical and oppressive have produced injustice, bloodshed, and terror. Truth and justice conspicuous everywhere in his dominions, shines bright as stars in heaven. "The heavens declare (put before us, in our sight) his righteousness" (Ps. xcvii. 6). 2. *A reign of moral stability.* "The world," shaken with revolutions, impaired with sin, "shall be

stable," settled in government and free from invasions, "that it be not moved." Society is safe, social and political order secure where Christ is supreme. 3. *A reign of purity.* Idolatry shall cease, peace prevail, the earth purified; blessed with the presence and delivered by the grace of Messiah. On this account earth may rejoice and heaven be glad. "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

THE CLOSING PRAYER AND DOXOLOGY.—Verses 35, 36.

God's mercy had commenced deliverance, encouragement is given to pray for its completion. The prayer is based upon the promise, Deut. xxx. 3, and is a psalm of thanksgiving for its prospective accomplishment.

I. The Prayer. 1. *In its spirit.* Earnest, humble, and sincere. 2. *In its purpose.* (a) For deliverance. "Save us and deliver us." (b) For unity. "Gather us together." (c) For gratitude. "To give thanks to thy holy name." No longer a scattered people, but united in God's courts to triumph in praise. God's people a prayerful people, saved, united, and grateful to God for his goodness. Hence—**II. The Doxology.** 1. Praise to God *as their God.* "The Lord God of Israel." 2. Praise *universal.* "Let all the people say, Amen." 3. Praise *continual.* "For ever and ever." God blessed from eternity, will be through eternity, let him be praised without intermission, "from everlasting to everlasting."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 23–33. *A song of praise.*
1. Setting forth God's excellencies. Creator, Ruler, and majestic. Claiming homage and service as due to his great name. 2. Asserting God's supremacy in the world. "Above all gods," overruling physical nature and social communities for the welfare of men. 3. Predicting God's universal kingdom. Triumphant over evil and bringing universal joy.

Vers. 23, 24. Notice—**I.** The end desired. To see the earth singing unto the Lord and blessing his name. **II.** The means suggested. The showing forth his salvation from day to day; declaring his glory, &c. **III.** The certainty of its accomplishment. The Lord hath said it. "O sing, &c." When he commands, earth must obey [*Treasury of David*]. **I.** Declare among the heathen the glory of God's perfections, that they may acknowledge him as the true God. **II.** Declare the glory of his salvation, that they may accept him as their only Redeemer. **III.** Declare the glory of his providence, that they may confide in him as their

faithful guardian. **IV.** Declare the glory of his word, that they may prize it as their chief treasure. **V.** Declare the glory of his service, that they may choose it as their chief occupation. **VI.** Declare the glory of his residence, that they may seek it as their best home [*William Jackson*].

Vers. 28, 29. *The claims of God to the worship and homage of his creatures.* What I have to demonstrate is—**I.** That God is entitled to the homage of his creatures, and claims it as proper and right. **II.** That these claims are made upon *us*, his intelligent creatures. It will therefore be necessary to show that we are capable of knowing God to all the extent necessary to excite in our minds the feelings of awe, reverence, and admiration, since these are essential to homage and worship. Also to prove that such claims are not only reasonable, but founded in justice and right. **III.** That the worship and homage required is such, that it not only does not degrade, but elevates the man that pays it; that it is not the hard requirement of despotism, but the

righteous claim of infinite excellence, not the service of flattery and servility, the free-will offering of a discerning and admiring mind [*J. Robinson*].

Ver. 29. *The beauty of holiness.* The religion of the gospel of Christ is "the beauty of holiness," as it concerns its Author, its plan, its fruits. 1. As it concerns its *Author*. Whatever we can understand as meant by beauty or holiness, we see in the attributes of God, whether we consider them in all their harmony, or contemplate any one of them in particular. 2. As to its *plan*. Survey the gospel where we will, or regard whatever we can that is revealed concerning it, we find it to be all "*beauty*;" and we cannot call it by a more appropriate name than "*the beauty of holiness*." 3. As to its *fruits*. There is a holy separation, a beautiful

character of holiness, a separation as to character, feelings, and conduct; these are all the various fruits of grace; and so the man becomes beautiful in holiness [*Legh Richmond*, 1772-1827].

Ver. 34. Thanks for divine goodness. I. God its source. II. Displayed in suitable ways. Mercy to the miserable. III. Lasting in its nature. Outweighing sin and rebellion. "Endureth for ever."

Ver. 36. *The people's amen.* 1. Indicating attention, appreciation, and interest in the service. 2. A solemn sealing. Ratification and acceptance of what has been done. 3. A real duty. The people to respond (not the minister merely) with hearty and universal voice. "Amen so be it."

HOMILETICS.

MINISTRY BEFORE THE ARK.—*Verses 37-42.*

The sequel of this chapter describes the arrangement of services, appointment of musicians and porters, with their respective duties. **I. An orderly service.** Asaph and his brethren officiated as singers; Obed-edom and Hossah served as doorkeepers, each in his place and in his time. "Order gave each thing view" [*Shaks.*]. **II. A musical service.** This chiefly at Gibeon, where Heman and Jeduthun presided over the sacred music. In both places "musical instruments of God" used. **III. A cheerful service.** "To give thanks to the Lord." It becomes the redeemed to praise God. The greater, more numerous God's blessings, the greater honour and service we should feel are due to him. "Gratitude is the memory of the heart." **IV. A perpetual service.** At Jerusalem before the ark, ministry was "continually as every day's work required" (ver. 37). At the altars at Gibeon, priests attended, incense burnt "continually, morning and evening." A permanent local ministry and regular choir are established, in fixed place and due order. Prayer and praise should ever be kept up in God's house, and in our own hearts and lives. "His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 43. *David's attention to his household.* Personal religion was exemplified by David. I. By the work in which he had been engaged. 1. It was a glorious work. 2. It had been performed in a manner most acceptable to God. II. By the work to which he returned. He returned to bless his house, that is—1. To obtain blessing for them by prayers. 2. To

render himself a blessing by his conduct. Consider (1) How highly we are privileged. (2) How we should improve our privileges [*C. Simeon, M.A.*]. He that had "blessed the people" (v. 18) returns to "bless his household" (v. 20). Piety in public and in private—public worship and family worship. A good man after public religious duties, returns joyous,

thankful, and loving to his house (*cf.* Lange, 2 Sam. vi. 20). Ministers must not think that their public performances will excuse them from family worship; but when they have blessed the public assembly they are to return and

bless their own households. And none is too great to do this. It is the work of angels to worship God; and therefore certainly can be no disparagement to the greatest of men [*Benson*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XVI.

Vers. 4-7. *With harps.* The meaning of song goes deep. Who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect that music has on us? A kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that [*Carlyle*]. Like her friend *Mdlle. Janotha*, *Jenny Lind* believed her art was the gift of God, and to be dedicated to his service. "I have always put him first," said she, in her last illness [*Church Worker*].

Vers. 8-11. The Psalmist speaks of singing to the name of the Lord, blessing, extolling, thanksgiving, exalting (*cf.* vers. 28-31). Just as the stem which is full of sap throws out many branches, so the believer who is full of a spirit of praise will give vent to it in many different forms [*P. B. Power*].

Ver. 26. The Lord made the heavens. This verse is a notandum. What a tribute to astronomy is it that the Lord is so often done homage to as having made the heavens! Let the

theology of nature be blended with the theology of conscience—a full recognition of the strength and the glory which shine palpably forth in the wonders of creation, with the spiritual offerings of holy worship and holy service [*Thomas Chalmers*].

Vers. 32-38. *Sea roar, and trees of the wood sing.*

"His praise, ye winds, that from four quarters blow,
Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops,
ye pines,
With every plant, in sign of worship
wave" [*Milton*].

Vers. 34-36. *For ever.* A line of praise is worth a leaf of prayer, and an hour of praises is worth a day of fasting and mourning [*J. Livingstone*]. It was the law in some of the old monasteries that the chanting of praise should never be interrupted, and that one choir of monks should relieve another in the holy service [*Bib. Museum*].

CHAPTER XVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter coincides with 2 Sam. vii.—records David's purpose to build a house for God (vers. 1, 2), and Nathan's approval. God refuses to permit this, promises a perpetual kingdom in David's line (vers. 3-15); grateful response to this promise (vers. 16-27).

Vers. 1, 2.—*David's purpose.* Sat in splendour and rest. *Curtains* as a common tent. David probably fancied the time predicted (Deu. xii. 10, 11) had come. *Nathan* followed his own impulse, and fell into mistakes like others (1 Sam. xvi. 6; 2 Kings iv. 27).

Vers. 3-15.—*God's refusal and promise.* *Thou* (ver. 4), Hebrew emphatic, "Not thou shalt build," but some one else. *Tent to tent* (ver. 5). "I was walking in a tent and in a dwelling," from one place to another travelling and resting with his people. *Judges*, suitable antithesis to David. *Cedars*, costly materials. David elevated from low condition—"sheepcotes," rude structures of mud walls—to govern Israel (ver. 7). *Name* (ver. 8) as warrior and king. *Place* (ver. 9) fixed. Settled kingdom, constant changes before. *House* (ver. 10), a family, a line of successors. Ver. 11. *Go*, promise now personal. *Seed* indefinite, not yet known which son. Vers. 12-14 refer to Solomon, and faithfully fulfilled to him. *Mercy*, alluding to Saul. *Evermore* (2 Sam. vii. 16).

Vers. 16-27.—*David's prayer and thanksgiving*, which indicates teaching of deep significance and far-reaching promise. *Sat* (cf. 2 Sam. vii. 18-29). *House*, dynasty, family—i.e. from David onward in remote future. *Knowest* (ver. 18), therefore no necessity for further expression of gratitude [*Keil*]. *Servants* for thy word's sake (2 Sam. vii.). *Heart*, all attributed to divine mercy. *Let be estab.* (ver. 24). Rather "And let thy name be established and magnified for ever;" that is to say, Let not only thy promise stand firm, but let thy name also stand firm (continue to be held in honour) and be magnified, &c. [*Speak. Com.*]. *To bless* (ver. 27), it hath pleased thee (marg). "*For thou, O Lord, hast blessed it, and may it be blessed for ever*" (cf. 2 Sam. vii. 29).

HOMILETICS.

THE KING'S PROPOSAL.—*Verses 1-10.*

David had established worship on its proper basis, reorganised the priesthood, and introduced music, yet not content. Gods of other nations had splendid temples, why not adorn Jerusalem with a house for God which should be the emblem of the nation's consecration?

I. David's proposal. "All that is in thine heart." 1. *A noble purpose.* To build a house for God. Good to erect asylums and benevolent institutions, more useful to help to build houses for God. Such work needful, must be done, and greatly appreciated. He "hath built us a synagogue." 2. *A generous purpose.* "I dwell in an house of cedars, &c." He felt ashamed of the contrast between his house and the house of God. One substantial and costly, the other only a tent. Impropriety, injustice, and dishonour for him to have more costly surroundings than the ark of God. God should always have our best. Many have "an house of cedar" for worldly life—best talents, most time and money, keenest insight for business, but only meagre remnants for God. 3. *A purpose commended by the prophet.* Nathan here introduced for first time. The king opened his mind to him. Purpose reasonable, he commended it. "Do all, &c." (ver. 2). But holy prophets did not know God's will until revealed to them; often spoke as religious men, from human aspects, and found out their error. Kings and prophets have need to consult God. **II. God's disapproval of David's proposal.** God not displeased with intention, did not condemn nor entirely reject, but forbade David to build. "Thou shalt not build" (ver. 4). 1. *God knows all our purposes.* David's known "the same night" it was formed. He sees the heart and reads our inmost thoughts; knows whether our desires are mean or generous towards his house. "The Lord looketh on the heart." A sincere heart better than finest gold, a beautiful life more than cedar. 2. *God often hinders the accomplishment of our purposes.* They may be selfish and not for his glory. We may ignore God in forming them. "If the Lord will, ye should say." God may seek to save us from spiritual pride and self-dependence; to increase reverence, faith, and purity; to withhold one thing to give a better. "Oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, but was let (hindered) hitherto" (Rom. i. 13). "My purposes are broken off" (Job xvii. 11). **III. Reasons for God's disapproval of David's proposal.** Some given here and others found elsewhere. 1. *It was something entirely new.* No such building had ever existed, perhaps not possible in Israel's wanderings; nor had God ever commanded the erection of a temple as he did the tabernacle. No suggestion had been given to tribe, judge, or leader. God had shared the pilgrim lot and unsettledness of his people. 2. *It was untimely in its beginning.* Time for building not yet. Present condition of the people not fit, must be improved. They were surrounded by hostile nations, had no permanent rest, therefore God's sanctuary must still be a tent. Not in David's reign, but in Solomon's must plan be accomplished. God's time always best. We delay, act before the time, or become too hasty in plan and purpose. Enter upon great engagements

with much thought and prayer. 3. *David was not the right man to build.* War a necessary evil in his life. The temple, significant of peace, must not be built by a man of war. Kings in Middle Ages desired to atone for a wicked life by erection of a church or monastery. God will choose his own men and fix his own terms. "Thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight" (1 Chr. xxii. 8; 2 Chr. ii. 3).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 3-6. *Nathan's message.* 1. Its form. "All this vision" (ver. 15). 2. Its contents, showing that God seeks to correct mistakes of his servants, that he alone is fit judge of what is pleasing to him, and that not even a prophet must step in between.

Ver. 5. *From tent to tent.* Not like heathen gods, confined to localities, and carried about from place to place. The Heb. *Mithhallel* a travelling God. An active, constant companion of his people, going when they go, resting when they tent. Learn—1. God's condescension. 2. God's providence. 3. God's help in all its adaptations to camp or tent, synagogue or city. Happy in mean accommodations if God be with us!

Vers. 5, 6. *God's house in relation to man's condition.* 1. It is not required by God himself. The Most High dwells not in temples made with hands (Acts vii. 4), neither worshipped with men's hands (Acts xvii. 24). Hence the purity and spirituality of Bible religion. Other religions mean in thought, indicate that God needs temples and gifts. 2. It is required only by man, as a dependent spiritual being, craving for God, for a "tabernacle of witness," that God concerns himself with man, and will hearken to prayer. God's dwelling-place the human heart; not sacred groves, consecrated temples, or grand cathedrals.

"Ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost."

Vers. 9, 10. *Israel's well-being from God.* 1. A place appointed for them. So for us in habitations and Christian work. 2. Settlement in the appointed place. "I will plant" as a tree, and they shall grow (a) without disturbance. "Children of wickedness shall waste," afflict, or injure them no more; (b) without termination. "Shall be moved no more," at least until important ends are answered. "These gradually advancing manifestations of the Lord's favour to David look to the well-being of the people of Israel. (1) He thereby prepared a place for them; that is, by subduing their enemies, made room for a safe, unendangered expansion in the promised land; (2) Planted them; that is, on the soil thus cleansed and made safe He established a firm, deep-rooted national life; (3) They dwell in their (own) place, their life-power unfolds itself within the limits secured them by the Lord; (4) They shall no longer be affrighted by restless enemies. In these words the discourse turns to the future of the people. The sense is: after all these manifestations of favour in the past up to this time, the Lord will for the future assure his people a position and an existence, wherein they shall no more experience the affliction and oppression that they suffered from godless nations" [Lange].

HOMILETICS.

GOD IN PERSONAL LIFE.—Verses 7, 8, and 11.

God's grace wonderfully magnified in David's history. Every age and every nation its prominent men with special mission, proving the possibilities of personal life and the providence of God in their development. I. God

elevates men from the lowest to the highest station in life. David, "from the sheepcote to the throne;" Amos, from flocks of Tekoah to prophetic office; fishermen, from their nets to be heralds of the gospel. History full of illustrations of God selecting, qualifying, and in due time raising men to fill their place as reformers, preachers, and rulers. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." **II. God helps men to do the work for which they are elevated.** This special work not left undone. No failure in God's plans. "Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it." 1. *By his constant presence.* "I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked." David, Daniel, Luther never left to themselves. 2. *By continual victories.* Much opposition to overcome. If God with us, opposition disarmed; "enemies cut off." None can prevent us rising, none frustrate our work. "I will work, and who shall let (hinder) it?" (undo it. *Horsley*) (Is. xliii. 13). "The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?" (xiv. 27). **III. God honours men for faithful performance of the work to which they are elevated.** David greatly honoured in his own life and that of his posterity. 1. *Honoured in reputed life.* "Made thee a name like the name of the great men that are in the earth." Names are made, as well as fortunes, by God. Many ambitious for a name, but get one of ill-repute. Love of fame, not love of virtue; often becomes a passion, and tramples on the rights of humanity and sheds innocent blood. Byron sought fame, pronounced it worthless: "'tis nothing but cold snow." "A good name rather to be chosen"—renders more useful and gains more respect—"than great riches." This we may register in the annals of the Church and "in the book of life." 2. *Honoured in peaceful death.* "When thy days be expired, thou must go to be with thy fathers" (ver. 11). Days gradually drawing to an end. Then go to lie with thy fathers (Deut. xxxi. 16). Death a sleep, quiet and peaceful to the Christian. Not "an eternal sleep"! A family gathering hereafter, "with thy fathers." As Strafford disrobed and prepared himself for the block, he said, "I thank God that I am nowise afraid of death, nor am daunted with any terrors; but do as cheerfully lay down my head at this time as ever I did when going to repose."

GOD'S PROMISES TO DAVID.—Verses 11–15.

More given to David than acceptance of his proposal. The spiritual superior to the material. The political throne falls, but a kingdom is established for ever. Here are three things chiefly—**I. The erection of the house of God by the seed of David.** Seed raised up, one of his sons should succeed him and build. David lived on in Solomon, who used the materials his father collected, and carried out the plans that his father suggested. Death never cuts off the influence nor destroys the work of a good man. "When thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam. vii. 12, 13). **II. The elevation of David's seed to sonship with God.** "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." God a father to Solomon in early life and reign. Tender love and providential care ever displayed. Mercy not taken from him as from Saul. He became popular, wealthy, and wise. What a privilege to take the place and receive the honour of sons! In bestowment of the blessing a display of love and grace beyond expression, and calls forth admiration from all who partake. "Behold what manner of love, &c." **III. The establishment of everlasting**

dominion in David's seed. Promise added to promise, embracing present and all future time. "God's thoughts not as our thoughts." David dies, Solomon succeeds, the family prospered and remained in power 400 years; but "his throne shall be established for evermore" in the Messiah, David's seed and son.

DAVID'S RECEPTION OF THE NEWS.—*Verses 16-27.*

David sat before the Lord in waiting attitude and devout meditation; received the message from Nathan with admiring wonder, and petitioned for its accomplishment in himself, family, and kingdom. **I. In grateful praise.** "The content of this thanksgiving prayer is like a clear glass, wherein we see into the innermost depths of David's heart. His soul wholly taken up with the divine revelation and promise, expresses itself in the utterances which follow one another quickly, in accordance with internal excitement of feeling." 1. *In spirit of deep humility.* "Who am I?" (ver. 16). An expression of deep feeling of nothingness in contrast to God's greatness and goodness. Divine loftiness and human lowliness (*cf.* Ps. viii. 5; cxliv. 3). 2. *In astonishment for personal favours* (vers. 17-19). (a) Favour to his house. (b) Favour for the future. If unworthy to receive former mercies, how should I feel in regard to promises reaching in the far future—"a great while to come"? Silence most befitting and eloquent, for language fails to express feeling. "What can David speak more?" 3. *In adoration of God's greatness* (vers. 20, 21). He is great; the incomparable God—"none like thee;" the only God—none "beside thee." Let his attributes and lovingkindness awaken our gratitude and praise; prompt us to adore his excellence and glory. 4. *In remembrance of national mercies.* David passes from present blessings to review the past—"rises from his personal experience to the whole line of God's glorious manifestations in the history of his people" (*Hengs.*). Israel the only nation redeemed by its God. This redemption incomparable and peculiar, an act which separated them, and made them independent. Deeds of "greatness and terribleness" followed. Nations expelled to make room for Israel, whom he claimed as specially his own, adopted them that he "might become their God." **II. In earnest prayer** (vers. 23-27). Connected with thanksgiving for present and past, David prays for the future. 1. *For the fulfilment of the promise.* "Do as thou hast said." Royal dignity set up, "establish it for ever." Everlasting continuance promised, let the word become deed. 2. *For the glorification of God's name.* This the design or consequence of the fulfilled word. Not the honour of his house, not the glory of his people, but solely the honour of God had David in view. 3. *For the continuance of the blessing.* The blessing secures the continuance. Neither posterity nor power without this. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (literally, its builders labour in vain in it) (Ps. cxxvii. 1). Needful to pray for families, temples, and churches. "Let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, &c." (ver. 27).

THE GREATNESS OF DIVINE FAVOURS.—*Verses 16-19.*

We briefly fill up an adapted sketch from Lange (2 Sam. vii. 18). **I. They infinitely surpass human desert.** "Who am I, and what is mine house?" David's gifts and graces eminent, his honour, success, and reputation great. His house of the royal tribe, and allied to the best families, but no worthiness in family or head. **II. They fill all times from remotest past to distant future.** "For a great while to come." From beginning

of David's reign to end of the world, through David's seed. From the fall of man to his redemption in glory. **III. They spring from sovereign mercy.** "According to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness." People made great not by their own deeds, but by works which God in free sovereign mercy performs for and in them. **IV. They are beyond all human comprehension.** What can David say more? (v. 18). Words cannot express our obligations, and even a sense of obligation. **As** heaven is high above the earth, so are God's thoughts above our thoughts.

TRUE PRAYER.—*Verses 23–27.*

Founded upon God's promise and declared purpose. David honoured God's faithfulness, expressed his heart's desire, and becomes a model to us in this prayer. **I. It is grounded on God's promise.** "Thou hast spoken." Without this darkness and uncertainty—no hope, no encouragement to pray. The labourer in the field, the soldier in the army, and the maidservant in the family animated by promise. The Bible filled with promises well adapted to our moral condition, and reveals "exceeding great and precious promises." **II. It regards God's honour solely.** "That thy name may be magnified" (ver. 24). This shall be the sum and aim of all our prayers. Magnify self less and God more. Both as "Lord of hosts and God of Israel," that is as universal Ruler and covenant God let him be glorified. **III. It ascribes all to God's free grace.** "Thou hast told thy servant." The beginning, the revelation from thee. None could have guessed, been assured, or predicted without thy word. All of God's good pleasure, whose name is mentioned no less than eight times in these few verses (*cf.* parallel passage, 2 Sam. vii. 24–29). **IV. It appeals to God's faithfulness.** "Thou art God," unchangeable, powerful, and fit to be trusted. "Thy words are *truth*" (2 Sam.), never fail, and their accomplishment may be relied upon. The Bible invites unbounded trust in God's character and procedure—represents it to be the grand duty and joyous privilege of all men. **V. It receives the fulness of God's blessing.** God blesses now, and his blessing cannot be revoked (ver. 27). Independent of future mercies, prayer is a training, discipline, and dignity—the appointed means for our spiritual and future good, and the needed preparation to attain it. Never in vain. Good to draw near now to receive that blessing, "which maketh rich, &c."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 13. *I will be his father and he shall be my son.* This true—(1) of Solomon and other descendants of David who were kings of Judah; (2) of Christ, "the son of David" (Heb. i. 5); (3) of every one who is a believer in Christ and thus a child of God (1 Jno. iii. 1; v. 1) [*Lange*].

Vers. 17–22. *A model of devout thanksgiving.* I. Over that he rejoices. 1. Over great blessings received in the past. 2. Over yet greater blessings promised in the future (ver. 17). II. In what spirit he regards these favours. 1. As utterly undeserved by himself

(ver. 16). 2. As the gift of God's sovereign grace [*Ibid.*].

Vers. 20–22. *God's relation to his people.* Let us for the illustrating of these words consider—I. The relation which God bears to his people. 1. He has chosen them out of the world, which lieth in wickedness. 2. He has given himself to them in a peculiar way. 3. He avows that relation to them before the whole universe. II. Inquire what, under that relation, we may expect at his hands. 1. The care of his providence. 2. The communications of his grace. 3. The manifestations of his

love. 4. The possession of his glory. III. What, under that relation, he is entitled to expect from us. 1. That we "be a people to him." 2. That we give ourselves to him, as he has given himself to us. Conclude with two proposals—(1) That we at this very hour accept Jehovah as our God; (2) That we now consecrate ourselves to him as his people [*C. Simeon, M.A.*].

Vers. 23–27. *The relation between God's promise and prayer.* I. The promise prompts to prayer. The character of him who makes the promise, the value of the blessing promised stir up and never prevent prayer. II. The promise assures success in prayer. It is not a mere venture, presumption, or uncertainty, but confident hope of God's blessing. *Characteristics of true prayer.* "The prayer of David after the reception of the Lord's promise of favour bears testimony to the unexpected, joyfully surprising revelation that was made to him and mirrors his childlike humility, fervid devotion,

and unshakable confidence towards his God." To this prayer, which proceeds from a joyfully shocked and deeply moved heart, applies (so far as is possible from the Old Testament standpoint) what Bernard of Clairvaux says of true prayer: "If the way to God's throne is to stand free and open to our prayer, and it is there to find ready acceptance and hearing, it must proceed from an humble, fervid, and trusting heart. Humility teaches us the necessity of prayer, fervour gives it flight and endurance, trust provides it with an unmovable foundation" [*Lange*]. "This thanksgiving confirms anew the fact that the only foundation on which the true godliness and everlastingness of the kingdom can rest is the purity and holiness of an humble heart, and therefore the hearty and living humility of David's thanksgiving may give us the strongest assurance that here is really enthroned the culmination of all royal rule" [*Baumgarten*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 7. *From the sheepcote.* Be not ashamed of your origin. It is well for the great who have risen to be reminded of the humble place which they once occupied. At one of Napoleon's grand imperial receptions, where his brothers and sisters were, all of them elevated to high rank, and some of them with royal titles, it is reported that one of them said to another, "What would our father and mother have said if they had seen us as we are now?" [*S. S. Teacher*].

Ver. 11. *Days expired.* God respects not so much after what manner we die, as what manner of death we die [*Augustine*]. Is that a death-bed where a Christian dies? Yes; but not his—" 'tis Death itself that dies" [*Coleridge*].

Vers. 16–19. *What speak more.* Debt to grace. When a friend observed to Rev. John Brown, of Haddington, that we must run deeper and deeper into grace's debt, he replied,

"Oh, yes; and God is a good creditor; he never seeks back the principal sum, and indeed puts up with a poor annual rent" [*Life of, &c.*].

Vers. 20–26. *A great God to trust in.* Wesley, preaching at Doncaster, said, a poor Romanist woman, having broken her crucifix, went to her priest frequently crying out, "Now I have broken my crucifix, I have nothing to trust in but the great God." Wesley exclaimed, "What a mercy she had a great God to trust in!" A Romanist present was powerfully affected—"the great God to trust in" touched his heart. He was very deeply convinced of his need of salvation, and joined the Methodist Society, and became an ornament to religion [*Bib. Museum*].

Ver. 26. *Promised.*

"The thing surpasses all my thought,
But faithful is my Lord;
Through unbelief I stagger not,
For God hath spoke the word."

[*John Gill*].

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter, parallel with 2 Sam. viii., gives an account of David's wars (vers. 1-13); and a list of his chief officers.

Vers. 1, 2.—Gath, "the arm bridle," so called (2 Sam. viii. 1) for its supremacy, as capital of Philistia, over other towns, or because in its capture and dependencies, David gained complete control of his restless neighbours. *Moab*. Severities by which they were treated, and probable reason for such retribution, given in Sam. *Gifts, i.e.*, became tributary to Israel.

Vers. 3-8.—Zobah conquered. Had., "derived from Hadad, a Syrian deity. It seems to have become the official and hereditary title of the rulers of that kingdom" [*Jam.*]. *Ver. 4. Chariots*. Great discrepancy between this and 2 Sam. viii. 3-14. *Houghed, i.e.*, cut the sinews, lamed the horses, and made chariots useless. *Ver. 6. Garrisons*, not in text, rightly restored from Sam. [*Speak. Com.*]. *Ver. 7. Shields*, indicative of wealth. *Ver. 8.* These places specially given on account of brass or copper obtained there.

Vers. 9-11.—Congratulations from Tou (Toi in Sam.). *Ver. 10. Had.*, Joram. *Enquire*, "to greet him and congratulate him." *Had war*, lit. was a man of wars (*cf. Is. xli. 12*). *Ver. 11. Edom*, from Aram; more fully in 2 Sam. viii.

Vers. 12, 13.—Edomites, having provoked David, he sent an army, subdued and made their country a tributary province. Valley of Salt south of Salt Sea. This annexation of Edom enlarged Israel on south-east to Red Sea, fulfilled divine prediction (*Ex. xxiii. 31*), and gave command of its ports.

Vers. 14-17.—Officers of the King. Joab, supreme command, minister of war. *Jehos.*, not keeper of records merely; but referee on internal affairs, the *chancellor*, who drew up and issued royal decrees. *Zadok*, became high-priest after David's accession, through his father Ahitub, a descendant of Aaron's son *Eleazar*. *Abim.*, Ahimelech, through Abiathar from *Ithamar*, younger son of Aaron (1 Chr. xxiv. 3-6). *Shavsha*, a variant from "Shisha" (1 Ki. iv. 3); the "Sheva" of 2 Sam. xxii. 25, and the "Seraiah" of 2 Sam. viii. 17, are probably corrupt readings [*Speak. Com.*]. *Scribe*, State Secretary. *Ver. 17. Ben.*, a mighty warrior of Kabzeel (2 Sam. xxiii. 20-23). *Cher.* and the *Pel.*, the royal body-guard attached to the king's court and person. *Chief, heads or princes, officers in the palace.*

HOMILETICS.

DAVID'S WARS.—Verses 1-8.

A short time elapsed between events of last chapter and events of this, but David ready for active service. Wonderful promises stirred up to brave deeds. **I. The Philistines are subdued** (ver. 1). Ancient inveterate enemies, finally smitten, bereft of their capital and their towns. "David smote the Philistines and subdued (humbled) them" (2 Sam. viii. 1). All must fall before the authority of Christ. **II. The Moabites are smitten.** Why Moab was at enmity with David not known, formerly on friendly terms (1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4). The severe punishment inflicted upon them implies some grave offence. They became servants and paid tribute for a long time. Balaam's prediction now fulfilled (*Numb. xxiv. 17*). **III. Hadarezer, king of Zobah, defeated.** A powerful king, reigned over a country central and convenient for help. 1. *Defeated when trying to enlarge his kingdom.* "He went to stablish his dominion" shaken by Saul and to confirm after regaining it. One thing lost by grasping at another. Worldly possessions uncertain. Wealth, power, and empire often taken when possessors seek to stablish them. 2. *Defeated when allied with Syrians.* Allies in vain when God is opposed. Hand may join hand, enemies of God's people may contribute their men and their stores, but they often combine to ruin themselves. Their wealth aid up for the just, and the spoils of nations help to adorn the house and kingdom of God. **IV. The Edomites are conquered** (ver. 13). David's splendour increased by another victory. Edomites fancied that David's wars in north would give them quiet possession of the southern part of Israelitish territory. But returning

from the conquest of Aramœans and Ammonites he engaged Edomites in Valley of Salt, slew eighteen thousand, and garrisoned the country. Thus, from north to south, Israel's enemies were overcome. David's wars were wars of God. He overcame, as we must overcome, by God's presence and help. "He causeth us to triumph."

CONGRATULATIONS OF THE KING OF HAMATH.—*Verses 9-11.*

Toi heard of the decisive victory over Hadarezer, sent an embassy to greet David and congratulate him on success. Look at this—**I. As an Eastern custom.** "Who in the East has not witnessed similar things? Has a man gained a case in a court of law; has he been blessed by the birth of a son; has he given his daughter in marriage; has he gained a situation under government; has he returned from a voyage or a journey, or finished a successful speculation; then his friends and neighbours send messengers to congratulate him—to express the joy they feel in his prosperity; so much so that had it come to themselves their pleasure could not have been greater" [*Roberts*]. **II. As a stroke of policy.** Had carried on constant war with Toi. Hence joy at deliverance from an enemy and anxiety to be friendly with the conqueror. It is our interest to be on terms with God and his people. "Kiss the son (be subject to him and reverence him), lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. ii. 12). **III. As an expression of friendship.** Toi sent his son to seek friendly alliance. The rich presents an expression of respect and submission. Friendship with God procured by dedication of heart and life to him.

CONSECRATED SPOILS.—*Verses 11.*

Need not approve of all David's actions in war, but may commend his spirit and example in the disposal of his booty. **I. As an evidence of loyalty to God.** Many princes adorned their palaces, beautified the arms of their soldiers, or preserved the spoils of the enemy for their own aggrandisement. David set them apart from profane to sacred use, put them into the treasury of the sanctuary. An instance of gratitude to God, by whose aid he had gained them, seldom imitated by victorious kings. Men not always faithful in prosperity. If we are successful in studies, business, and pursuits, let us devote our spoils, our knowledge, wealth, and influence to him from whom comes every gift. **II. As a help to the furtherance of God's cause.** David gained subjects, territories, and political alliance; received gifts of horses and chariots, gold and brass, but all consecrated to lawful use. Presents of friends and spoils of enemies devoted to the Lord, and helped to rear and adorn the temple. Many refuse gifts from worldly men for religious purposes, disparage liberality on the ground that God cares not for material wealth. But God connects the wealth with the work of men. Christ regards whatever is done to his people as done to himself, and heathens will turn and bring presents to him (Is. lx. 6).

DAVID'S ADMINISTRATION AND OFFICERS.—*Verses 13-17.*

Besides military exploits and activity, a description of internal government with its officials and their duties. **I. David's government was righteous government.** One or two qualities chronicled. "He executed judgment and justice among all the people." Right and purity not always

connected with authority. Society is maintained and its advantages consolidated by justice. Just rulers make contented and united people. Justice in the court, on the bench, and in the ranks exalts a nation, and gives it a sacred mission to the world. **II. David's officers were eminent men.** The most eminent of the age composed his cabinet. The commander-in-chief, clever, courageous, and renowned for military achievements. Faithful to the king, not always to principle. The chancellor correctly published royal decrees and registered events in the State archives. The body-guard round the king and priests before the altar, each in his place and work, gave influence to the reign, and felt honoured in the service. Thus David's rule not only associated with military prowess, but poetic genius and personal piety. Remarkable for men of rank and administrative ability, and did more for Israel than Charlemagne did for Europe or Alfred for England.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1-3. 1. How *trying the life of David!* Its wars, toils, hardships, and perils great and numerous. 2. Yet how *happy the life of David!* God preserved him, gave honour and success. He rendered true service; never separated any part from God to keep for self. This severs from divine care. If we take our lives wilfully into our hands, and devote them to our own selfish pursuits, God withdraws special grace, we fall into the enemy's hands, and fail to accomplish the work we might have done.

Ver. 13. *The Lord preserved David.* 1. From spiritual pride. In exaltation, power and success in battle. 2. From personal injury in war. Often in danger, but an unseen hand sustained him. 3. From disgraceful defeat. Many commanders lost their

lives, and kings their crowns. 4. From unjust government. He began with no fatal blunder, levied no unjust taxes, introduced no unwise policy, nor created any disloyalty. He reigned in the affections of the people, gave the glory to God, and was preserved in honour and prosperity.

Vers. 9-13. *Lessons from David's years of warfare.* 1. A pious man may have many enemies. 2. A pious man may be required to spend much of his life in war. 3. A pious man may be compelled to inflict severe punishments. 4. A pious man, even though not always prospered or preserved, is always guided and blessed. 5. A pious man will rejoice to consecrate the richest results of his struggles and toils to God [*Lange*, 2 Sam. viii.].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 4. *Houghed.* The reason of this mutilation was that, horses being forbidden by the Mosaic constitution to the Hebrews, both in war and in agriculture, it was of no use to keep them; and their neighbours placing much dependence on cavalry, but having, for want of a native breed, to procure them by purchase, the greatest damage that could be done to such enemies was to render their horses un-serviceable in war (*cf.* Gen. xlix. 6; Josh. xi. 6-9) [*Jamieson*].

Ver. 11. *Dedicate.* Eastern princes have always been accustomed to hoard up vast quantities of gold [see *Layard*, "Nineveh and its Remains," II., p. 344]. This is the first instance of a practice uniformly followed by David, of reserving, after defraying expenses and bestowing suitable rewards upon his soldiers, the remainder of the spoil taken in war, to accumulate for the grand project of his life—the erection of a national temple at Jerusalem [*Ibid.*].

CHAPTER XIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] *After this* other wars with Ammon and Aram. The chapter corresponds with 2 Sam. x.

Vers. 1-5.—Insult to David's messengers. *Nahash* (1 Sam. xi. 1; 2 Sam. x. 1). *Kindness*, N. friendly with David, and an enemy to Saul. *Comfort*, condole him. *Search* thy capital. *Shaved* half the face. The beard greatly valued in East, to violate it the greatest insult. *Tarry* in seclusion till the mark of disgrace had disappeared.

Vers. 6, 7.—Ammon and Syria war with David. *Odious*, Israel universally roused to avenge the insult. *Talents*, equal to £342,100; to procure the help of foreign mercenaries. *Chariots*, also riders, or cavalry, accustomed to fight on horseback or in chariots, and occasionally on foot. Accepting this as the true rendering, the number of hired auxiliaries mentioned in this passage agrees exactly with the statement in 2 Sam. x. 6 (*cf. Davidson's Hermeneutics*, p. 552).

Vers. 8-15.—Joab defeats Ammon. *Host*, the whole forces of Israel engaged in this war. Beset by Ammonites in front and by Syrians behind, Joab resolves to attack the latter—the more numerous and formidable host—while he directed Abishai, with a suitable force, to attack the Ammonites (vers. 12, 13). This brief address appeals to the courage, patriotism, and religion of his men. *Ver. 15.* Mercenaries defeated, the courage of the Ammonites failed, they took flight and entrenched themselves within fortified walls.

Vers. 16-19.—Second victory over Aram. *River*, Euphrates. *Shophach* (2 Sam. x. 15-19). *Seven thousand* (*cf. 2 Sam. x. 18*). "Either the text in one of the books is corrupt (*Keil, Davidson*), or the accounts must be combined (*Kennicott, Houbigant, Cabnet*)" [*Jamieson*]. *Ver. 19. Servants*, tributaries.

HOMILETICS.

THE MESSAGE OF CONDOLENCE.—*Verses 1-5.*

Nahash, a neighbourly king, friendly with David in the days of Saul, and perhaps congratulated him on accession to the throne. *Hanun*, son of *Nahash*, succeeded after his father's death. To him David sent an embassy of condolence.

I. The generous message of David. Gratitude not absorbed by death. Expressions of sympathy needful. Nothing worthier than to requite kindness with thanks. 1. *In its occasion.* A time of bereavement and sorrow when such a message is seasonable. 2. *In its form.* The customary method of sending courtiers to condole with friends in loss or suffering. But *Hanun's* loss was *David's* loss. A true friend valued by relatives and neighbours, honoured in death and memory.

II. The disgraceful treatment of David's messengers. If suspected, they might have been dismissed civilly, or kept in honourable custody till the truth was known. They were treated with the greatest indignity. Shaving their beards and shortening their garments a double insult in the East, where long beards and long garments are badges of honour. Many Orientals would rather die than lose their beards (signs of the dignity and ornament of freedom), and Turks used to regard beardless Europeans as runaway slaves.

III. The considerate kindness for the disgraced messengers. "Tarry at Jericho, &c." The first place they reached in Canaan, a private village, where they might remain until fit to appear in public. Men of that character must not be seen dishonoured and unfit for duty. Character gives influence, commands admiration, and is the real power of men. "Men of character are the conscience of society to which they belong" [*Emerson*]. If character be lost, then nothing left worth saving. Ever be concerned for good character. Preserve and keep that from dishonour and impurity.

AVENGING AN INSULT.—*Verses 6-19.*

Israel roused by the insult. The Ammonites knew that they had made themselves "odious" to David, and both sides prepared to engage in foolish war. **I. Insult springing from slight provocation.** Hanun seems bereft of wisdom, acted most foolishly, and brought ruin to himself and his nation. "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child." 1. *From a suspicious mind.* Embassy treated as spies. Wicked men measure others by themselves, and put an evil construction upon the best intention. Bp. Patrick well says, "There is nothing so well meant but it may be ill interpreted, and is wont to be so by men who love nobody but themselves." 2. *From advice of jealous princes.* "Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father?" Nothing of the kind. They are come to inspect the capital, spy the land, and prepare for its conquest. These princes were jealous of the mighty growth of David's kingdom, counselled the adoption of a hostile policy, and conveyed slight reproach in their question. The king was influenced, and the insult committed. **II. Insult leading to unjust war.** This war, like many others, commenced by a wrongdoer, and might have been avoided by an honourable apology or better understanding. One evil leads to another. When men begin a quarrel, they know not where it will end. "It is one of the mad principles of wickedness," says Bp. Hall, "that it is wickedness to relent, and rather to die than yield. Even ill causes, once undertaken, must be upheld, although with blood; whereas the gracious heart, finding his own mistaking, doth not only remit of an ungrounded displeasure, but studies to be revenged of itself, and to give satisfaction to the offended." **III. War terminating in disgraceful overthrow.** Syrians from three places hired and headed by powerful men, fought with chariots, cavalry, and infantry. A vigorous attack was made, and they fled, "as often happens," says Bp. Patrick, "with those that fight for pay alone, without respect to the cause." 1. *Defeat most humiliating.* Syrians first fled, and the Ammonites soon followed, without fighting at all. They retreated to the city, but stone walls are no defence without stout hearts. 2. *Defeat most complete.* The commander was killed, thousands were slain. Vassal princes submitted to David, and the Syrian nation forsook their allies, and became tributary to Israel. Persistence in evil-doing is sure to ruin. Strife spreads. One angry word leads to another. One look of revenge, one act of resentment, will kindle a fire that may set a neighbourhood or a nation into flame. "Therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with."

"Contention, like a horse
Full of high feeding, madly hath broke loose,
And bears all before him" [*Shakespeare*].

THE WAR CRY.—*Verses 10-13.*

The enemy appeared on the field, divided their forces, the Syrians in front and the Ammonites behind Joab. But, like an expert commander, he picked out the best soldiers to engage the Syrians, the strongest and most valiant. He gave a spirited address to his army, set a brave example, and left the issue with God.

I. The purpose for which they fought. Not for aggressive or ambitious purposes. For the cause of humanity, "for our people;" for religious freedom and the cause of God, "and for the cities of our God." **II. The**

method in which they fought. Success always depends upon certain conditions. Joab owed his victory partly to sagacious command. 1. *A wise economy of forces.* Bravest in front, and less trained for less important work. A strong reserve force, not all concentrated on a given place. Naseby lost to Charles by Rupert pursuing fugitives too far. The king on the point of overpowering Fairfax. Cromwell hastened to his chief and decided the battle. Charles cried in vain to rally his men, "One more charge and we recover the day." In the battle of life we should direct our physical and mental powers wisely—ever seek to have strength reserved for "the evil day." 2. *A determination to render mutual help.* "If Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me, &c." Unity and hearty co-operation essential. The strong should ever be ready to help the weak. Solitude is selfishness and death in moral warfare. "Two are better than one. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falleth." **III. The spirit in which they fought.** Joab's advice admirable, though not always practised by himself. He shared David's powers, but not David's piety. 1. *A spirit of exalted courage.* "Let us behave ourselves valiantly" (ver. 13). Brave words from a brave heart. "A good leader must, out of his own abundance, put life and spirits into all others; if a lion lead sheep into the field, there is hope of victory" [*Bishop Hall*]. "Play the man," Latimer's motto; let it be ours in all conflicts and departments of life. Idlers, dreamers, and irresolute never win anything. "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people" (2 Sam. x. 12). 2. *A spirit of true patriotism.* Personal glory and family reputation powerful motives. But when a country must be defended and a people delivered, then a true spirit required. "Remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." 3. *A spirit of submission to God.* "Let the Lord do that which is good in his sight" (ver. 13). An element of uncertainty in all events. Here an expression of confidence, not despair, nor fatalism. The heraldic motto on a broken helmet in Battle Abbey most suitable, "L'espoir est ma force." Diligently prepare, bravely enter the battle, and humbly submit to God. "The fortune of war" not in our hands, but God's. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. David said. Let Hanun be as graceless as he will, David will show himself gracious by being grateful. The same Greek word (*charis*) signifieth both grace and gratitude. Neither doth the ill success he had argue that he did amiss, as Pellican will have it, for duty is to be done, however it speed or take with wicked persons. What if Hanun were a heathen king? Might not his friendship be therefore sought? might not his father's courtesy be requited? If a very dog fawn upon us we stroke him on the head, and clap him on the side; much less is the common band of humanity untied by grace [*Trapp*].

Vers. 4-7. One false step leadeth

to another. "One injustice produces another, and drags men on irretardably to destruction by the resulting chain of sins and injustices. The King of Ammon, with sinful levity, lends his ear to the liars and calumniators that surround him; thence comes the most outrageous insolence towards David's ambassadors, and the most abusive insult to the whole people of Israel; on this follows the hasty preparation and provocation of a wholly unjust, wicked war; therein the princes are forced to take part, and so to stake their land and people. The end is complete destruction" [*Lange*].

Vers. 8-15. Joab's word to Abishai is a prelude to the Lord's word to

Peter: "Strengthen thy brethren." Heroic bravery in the war is to be combined—1. With the *recognition* of those most sacred *possessions and ends* for which the struggle is to be made; thereby it is consecrated; and 2. With humble, trustful *submission* to the *will of the Lord*; thereby it is preserved from temerity and presumptuousness. The war is a just and holy one, undertaken for the defence of the possessions received from God, to guard the honour of God, and in the name of God [*Ibid.*]. Ver. 13.

Bravery in battling for the highest object. 1. It is *rooted* in *fidelity* to God and to our brethren the *people* of God. 2. It is *proven* by *devotion* of body and soul and the whole life to the aims of the *kingdom* of God. 3. It is *sanctified* by unconditional *submission* to the purposes and doings of the *will* of God [*Ibid.*]. "Let us behave ourselves, &c." United help by advice, sympathy, and hearty co-operation in contending for truth and Christ in the world. "United we stand, divided we fall."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 2. *Kindness.* How unsuitable is it for us, who live only by kindness (Tit. iii. 4-7), to be unkind! [*Edwards*].

Ver. 3. *Thinkest thou.* To think well is the way to act rightly [*Paley*]. It is an easy thing to pick a quarrel where we intend a mischief [*Bishop Hall*]. Upright simplicity is the deepest wisdom, and perverse craft the merest shallowness [*Barrow*].

Ver. 12. *Unity and unanimous movement.* The strength of the Church is, not as an army of irregular soldiers, regiments in loose disorder, unconnected with each other, but when she *goeth forth by bands* (Prov. xxx. 27) united, concentrated, well disciplined, every officer at his post, every soldier

in his ranks, each under rule, helpful to each other, and to their great cause! When shall it once be? Lord, heal our unhappy divisions. Unite our energies "in one holy bond of Truth and Peace, of Faith and Charity" [*Bridges*].

Vers. 16-18. *Syrians defeated a second time.* So incurable is the folly and wickedness of some men that, though to reproofs and chidings you should add stripes and blows, they would not grow wiser and better. "An obstinate man does not hold opinions, they hold him" [*Pope*]. "Stiff in opinion, always in the wrong" [*Dryden*].

"You may as well
Forbid the sea for to obey the moon,
As, by oath remove, or counsel shake
The fabric of his folly" [*Shakespeare*].

CHAPTER XX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This extract from the ancient records tells of Rabbah taken (vers. 1-3); and three sons of the giant of Gath slain (vers. 4-8). It covers 2 Sam. xi.-xxi. [*Murphy*].

Vers. 1-3.—*Rabbah taken.* Year, at the return or beginning of the year, setting in of spring. Time, when kings of Israel were accustomed, after winter season, to go out to war. Rabbah besieged to complete chastisement of Ammon for insult to David's messengers. Tarried, his presence not required in the war, more needful in seat of government (cf. 2 Sam. xii. 26-31). Crown. When citadel was taken, the king captured or killed; David took the crown from his head and set it upon his own, to represent himself lord of the Ammonite territory. Cut (ver. 3, cf. margin, made them sawers of stone, diggers of iron, and cutters of wood, i.e., condemned them to forced labour; cf. 2 Sam. xii. 30, 31).

Vers. 4-8.—*Giants slain.* Gezer, Gob (2 Sam. xxi. 19). Sibb. (chap. xi. 29). Sippai, Saph. They, the Philistines. E/h. (2 Sam. xxi. 19; 1 Chr. xi. 26). Gath (ver. 6; Josh. xi. 22). Man (2 Sam. xx. 6, 7). Fell (ver. 8, cf. 2 Sam. xx. 22, where an account of a conflict between David and a son of Rapha is given).

HOMILETICS.

THE CAPTURE OF RABBAH.—*Verses 1–3.*

Punishment of Ammon for treatment of embassy of condolence, hindered by inclement season, now to be completed. The chief city taken, and its fall the crowning act of David's conquests. From the manner of its capture and the punishment of its people we learn—**I. That in spiritual warfare there must be no cessation.** Rest gives advantage to the enemy, and may delay or frustrate the end in view. "Forwards, children, forwards!" urged Blucher, in meeting Wellington at Waterloo. 1. *Make needful preparation.* Count cost, and fail not through lack of forethought and preparation. Enterprises break down, plans wrecked in every department of labour, through neglect of this principle. "What king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" 2. *Be ready for every advantage.* "The time to go out" must be discovered and seized. Many such seasons given to a watchful Christian. "Take the instant by the forward step." "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." **II. That in conducting spiritual warfare opportunity is given for the display of virtuous qualities.** Joab had besieged the capital, taken lower part of town, or "city of waters," and knowing that it would soon fall, sent for the king to come in person and have the honour of taking it himself (*cf.* 2 Sam. xii. 26). Taking this act as that of an adroit courtier, unwilling to run the risk of exciting the king's envy by his success, it was wise. But the act of a devoted servant, denying himself, honouring his master, and shielding him from popular disfavour (through his conduct with Bathsheba). Room for us to help the weak, admire the successful, and, above all, to transfer the glory of our conquests to our gracious "Commander and Leader." **III. That all things in spiritual warfare will be subdued under God's power.** The city was taken, and the people subdued. In Christian warfare, every evil thought in heart, every besetting sin, and every vicious principle in life, overcome by grace; every stronghold of Satan, and every enemy to Christ eventually subdued. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Great the punishment of those who resist. Ammonites suffered severely, but "woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him."

THE HEROES AND THE GIANTS.—*Verses 4–8.*

Individual exploits here given marvellous. Sibbechai, Elhan, and Jonathan slew their men, sons of Rapha, descendants of the race of Raphaim at Gath, remains of pre-Canaanitish inhabitants, distinguished by their gigantic size (*cf.* 2 Sam. xxi 15–22). Learn—**I. The enemies of God's people are most powerful** Giants in appearance and reality. 1. *Splendid in equipment.* Armed with shields and spears, mighty in stature, and conspicuous among their fellows. Our enemies often powerful in material advantages, learning, and all appliances of modern science. 2. *Defiant in attitude.* "He defied Israel" (*ver.* 7). Thinking much of themselves, highly esteemed, perhaps, by contemporaries; men of "a high look and a proud heart." "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled," &c. **II. God's people are ever victorious in God's strength.** Inferior in number and unequal in outward equipment, yet a match for giants of ignorance, vice, and sin. Shepherd boys have overthrown kingdoms, and striplings slain giants of evil. Men of faith, with "lamps and pitchers," with "the jawbone of an ass," with the meanest instru-

ments, have overcome men of might and stature. "Never let the church's friends be disheartened by the power and pride of the church's enemies. We need not fear great men against us while we have the great God for us. What will a finger more on each hand do, or a toe more on each foot, in contest with Omnipotence?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *David tarried at Jerusalem.* Out of the way of temptation if he had gone with the army in active duty. Temporary rest from work and fight leads often to (a) moral indolence or spiritual sloth; (b) carelessness in office, or unfaithfulness in calling; (c) temptation and disgrace. "Idle hours bring forth idle thoughts, and idle thoughts are nothing but dry, kindling wood, that waits only for a spark to be suddenly a blaze. All have had painful experience that our sins often have their roots in indolence and unfaithfulness in our calling. As long as we walk and work in our office, we are encompassed with a wall; as soon as we fall out of our office, we fall away from our fortunes, and become a prey to the enemy" [*Disselhoff*].

Ver. 2. *Crown from off his head.*
1. Earthly crowns and kingdoms may be lost and transferred to others. By war, wickedness, and death. When Richard II. was deposed, he was

brought forth, says the historian, in a royal robe, and a crown upon his head. Never was a prince so gorgeous with less glory and more grief. 2. Heavenly crowns may be gained. David set store on this crown from the King of Ammon. Better far the crown of God's favour, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory. These untarnished by blood and severities, real ornaments to character, and unfading with time, &c.

Vers. 4-8. *The conflict of the world-power against God's kingdom* is (1) a continual conflict ever again renewed (*There was war again*, ver. 5); (2) a conflict carried on with malicious cunning, frightful power, and mighty weapons (ver. 5); (3) a conflict perilous to the people of God, demanding all the power given them by the Lord, and their utmost bravery; (4) a conflict that by God's help at last ends in the victory of his kingdom [*Lange*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 2. *An incorruptible crown.* A French officer, a prisoner on parol at Reading, met with a Bible; he read it, was so impressed with its contents that he was convinced of the folly of sceptical principles and of the truth of Christianity, and resolved to become a Protestant. When rallied by gay associates for taking so serious a turn, he said in vindication, "I have done no more than my old schoolfellow Bernadotte, who has become a Lutheran." "Yes, but he became so," said his associates, "to obtain a crown." "My motive," said the Christian officer, "is the same; we only differ as to the place. The object of Bernadotte is to obtain a crown in Sweden; mine is to obtain a crown in heaven" [*Bib. Museum*].

Ver. 3. *A lesson to conquerors.* When Edward the Confessor had entered England from Normandy to recover the kingdom, and was ready to give the Danes battle, one of his captains assured him of victory, adding, "We will not leave one Dane alive." To which Edward replied, "God forbid that the kingdom should be recovered for me, who am but one man, by the death of thousands. No; I will rather lead a private life, unstained by the blood of my fellow-men, than be a king by such a sacrifice." Upon which he broke up his camp, and again retired to Normandy, until he was restored to his throne without bloodshed [*Percy Anecdotes*].

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The events here given appear in 2 Sam. xxiv., where the manner in which the census was taken is fully described, which took Joab nine months and twenty days. This narrative is condensed.

Vers. 1-6.—Numbering of people. Satan, the Lord in Sam. "Both had their hand in the work—God by permission, Satan by suggestion" [*Bp. Hall*]. *Provoked*, stirred up. *Trespass* (ver. 3), the results of trespass—*i.e.*, punishment. Ver. 4. A summary of five verses of 2 Sam. xxiv. 4-8, which give route taken by Joab and assistants, and time occupied to their return. Ver. 5. *Number* of all lists added together. Discrepancy not easy to explain. "It seems far better to explain, with most commentators, that the numbers have, in one passage or the other (or possibly in both), suffered corruption" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 6. *Levi*, following precedent in Num. i. 47-49; *Benj.*, because Joab desired to frustrate king's intention, or because taken on former occasion (ch. vii. 6-11), and register preserved in archives of the tribe.

Vers. 7, 8.—God's displeasure. These words an anticipation of verses 14 and 15; are placed here, interrupting the narrative, to show that Joab's artifice was not successful—it did not avert God's wrath. David was punished for his intention, though that intention was not completely carried out by his subordinate [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 9-13.—God's message. *Seer*, prophet elsewhere; perhaps a pupil of David (2 Sam. xxii. 8), and successor of Samuel in office. *Offer*, stretch out to thee. *Choose*, take to thee. *Three things*, famine, sword, or pestilence, which often recur in Scripture (Deut. xxviii. 21-25; Rev. vi. 4-8). "This beautiful agreement in the numbers is completely destroyed by the reading *seven*" [*Keil*]. *Strait*, one form of the evil must be taken, cannot be avoided. Experience taught him which to choose.

Vers. 14-17.—God sends pestilence. Its form not given; results most sweeping. At length reached the capital. *Angel* to destroy it. Ornan and his sons hid themselves on the apparition of the angel, but came out to welcome David. The king saw the vision, appeared with the elders in the garb and assumed the attitude of penitence, confessed their sins, and deprecated the wrath of God.

Vers. 18-22.—David builds an altar. Command to build and choice of site directly from God, through an angel, to Gad. *Altar* marked the site for the future temple. *Threshing-floor*, the level summit of elevated ground on eastern ridge on which Jerusalem was situated.

Vers. 23-26.—David buys the threshing-floor. In Eastern style of politeness, Ornan offers the whole to David, as Ephron to Abraham (Gen. xxiii.). Ver. 25. *Gave* value of the *place* here; that of threshing-floor and oxen in Sam. "The one writer states the matter of present interest, the other records the matter of permanent moment" [*Murphy*].

Vers. 27-30.—David sacrifices on the altar. *Sacrificed*. The whole code of regulations for offerings given in Lev. i.-vii. *By fire*, answer given on critical occasions (Lev. ix. 24; 1 Kings xviii. 24-38). Sacrifice accompanied with cessation of plague. *There* (ver. 28), regarding that spot as sacred. The altar of burnt-offering still at Gibeon, where he could not go in present emergency, for fear of the angel. After this divine institution Mount Moriah (2 Chron. iii. 1) became a place of lawful sacrifice [cf. *Murphy*]. David knowing that by sacrifice on this altar he had caused the angel to stay his hand, was afraid to transfer his offerings elsewhere, lest the angel should resume his task, and pestilence again break out [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE WICKED CENSUS.—Verses 1-6.

What wrong in numbering the people? A shepherd likes to know the number of his sheep. A census had been commanded and taken in the wilderness (Num. i. 1, 2). It was customary with other kings, that they might know what an army to muster for war. Judging from Scripture accounts, we learn the following truths—**I. It was an act instigated by mysterious influence.** Supernatural influence. Satan the adver-

sary was permitted in some way to move David. God is said in Scripture to do what he suffers or permits. Man's free will not forced nor destroyed by the Divine will. "The web of human actions is very complex. The great Mover rules over all, but many undermovers intervene in the drama of life; so that it is not more difficult to foretell the course of the weather than of the will." Yet sin is man's own act, and the punishment of a righteous God presupposes its guilt. **II. It was an act of sinful pride.** Enemies subdued, his rule undisputed, yet not content. Wanted to ascertain and boast in the military strength of the people, "that I may know the number of the people" (2 Sam. xxiv. 2; cf. 1 Chr. xxvii. 23). "This clear also from the fact that Joab delayed as long as possible carrying it into Benjamin, in order not to arouse the insurrectionary spirit of this tribe, which could not forget the leadership it had possessed under Saul" [*Hengs.*]. Kings proud, prosperous, and ambitious, often vain, confident in their own greatness, boastful of the number of their soldiers and the resources of their subjects. David remarkably successful, and thought himself invincible. **III. It was an act of treason against God.** Israel were God's people, not David's to count and number as *he* thought fit. Disobedient to take a census without God's command; perversion of God's favours to turn them into schemes of self-aggrandizement, and the purposes of God, according to the laws of justice and moral order, cannot be obscured or hindered without impunity by proud acts and ambitious plans of kings. David's sin akin to that of Nebuchadnezzar, whom Jehovah taught by bitter experience "to know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." **IV. It was an act of peril to the nation.** Joab saw this and remonstrated, "Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?" It might endanger the liberty of the people, become a State device for heavy taxation, and would be sure to bring divine displeasure. "The apprehension of a Nemesis on an overweening display of prosperity," says Dean Stanley, "if not inconsistent with the highest revelations of the Divine nature in the gospel, pervades all ancient, especially all Oriental religions." Presentiments often forebode evil. "Be sure your sin will find you out." **V. It was an act of obstinate persistence.** Joab's rebuke had no effect upon David. Foolish pride puffed up, and he neither took the counsel of God nor the advice of friends. With stubborn selfwill he would have his own way—"the king's word prevailed against Joab." Advice may demand hard and unpleasant things, involve humiliation and confession of mistake, and be very different from the words we expected. Hence disregard to warnings, persistence in evil, and ultimately inevitable sufferings. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."

THE PROGRESS OF TRUE PENITENCE.—*Verses 7-13.*

In these words a beautiful picture of David's repentance—successive steps of restoration to God, and the conduct of a real penitent under the chastening hand of God. **I. In signs of God's displeasure.** "God was displeased" (ver. 7). Displeasure revealed to vindicate God, aid us in apprehending our responsibility to him, and to secure right mind for due restoration. **II. In the power of an awakened conscience.** "David's heart smote him" (Sam.). "The bitter thoughts of conscience born." Suggestions from God; proofs that we are not left alone, nor hardened beyond hope. **III. In the penitent confession of sin.** Accuses himself, and is deeply grieved that others are involved in his sin (ver. 17). *I am guilty; these sheep, what have they done?* He is so penetrated with sense of guilt, and with sympathy for his innocent people, that he desires God to send judgments

“on him and his house” alone, and spare the people as his flock (these sheep). IV. *In earnest prayer for pardon.* “Take away the iniquity of thy servant” (Sam.). This only his resource. Acknowledgment of guilt, and entreaty for divine forgiveness, a proof of true state of heart. V. *In the revelation of God’s will.* The inner cry met by outer word. God announced punitive righteousness (ver. 9). This without human means or occasion. God ever ready to give light and guidance, but in his way and time. VI. *In humble submission to God’s will when known.* He bows under divine judgments, yet with hope of delivering mercy.

THE AWFUL JUDGMENTS.—*Verses 11-15.*

The judgment descended in the form of a tremendous pestilence—“a death,” as it is expressly termed in the original, like “the Black Death” of the Middle Ages. Appearing in the heat of the summer months, aggravated by the greatness of the population which had occasioned the census, spreading with the rapidity of an Oriental disorder in crowded habitations, it flew from end to end of the country in three days, and at last approached Jerusalem. The new capital, the very heart of the nation, the peculiar glory of David’s reign, seemed to be doomed to destruction [*Dean Stanley*].

I. Judgments entailed by one man’s sin. David responsible chiefly for its results. Man’s power to entail tremendous evils or greatest blessings upon others. Seventy thousand human beings cut off by judgment. What deaths lie at our door! **II. Judgments easily prepared for execution.** God has agents ever ready to do his will. Famine, sword, and pestilence, set in order, waiting the command to attack, and fearful in results. “The terrors of God do set themselves in (military) array against me” (Job vi. 4). **III. Judgments sent according to human preference.** “Choose thee.” Wonderful, mysterious offer! Not often done; would not always be consistent with God’s justice. We are not always able, enlightened enough to choose. This a special case, only a temporary fall from loyalty, and the design was the restoration to full trust. God wise and merciful. **IV. Judgments arrested by earnest prayer.** Room in the purposes of God and in the operations of nature for prayer. “Natural law” interferes not with prayer and human freedom. Who knows what judgments may be averted, mitigated, or turned into blessings, by earnest petition? Scripture and ecclesiastical history full of illustrations. “More things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of” [*Tennyson*].

DAVID’S CHOICE.—*Verses 11-13.*

David offered three things. To show him and the world that the evils denounced were no casual calamities, nor effects of any natural cause, he was permitted to choose which should be immediately inflicted. Regard the choice—

I. As the result of an awakened conscience. “I am in a great strait.” The natural feeling of one under the terrors of God; the voice of conscience in anguish and torture. “What must I do to be saved?” **II. As the revelation of the principle of Christian life.** *Famine* would leave Israel dependent upon others for food; *defeat*, on the mercy of the heathen; in *pestilence*, they would have God only to deal with. God the only refuge; no human power could defend. He left himself confidently with God. Thus gave a public testimony that it is vain to trust in man; that God only is supreme, gracious, and wise. **III. As a picture of future doom to**

all. A choice for us to make. We must fall into God's hands by voluntary submission now, or by compulsion at last. Decide to-day, before choice is taken away. "Now, therefore, advise thyself" (ver. 12).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Know it.* But what needs that, now that there was a general peace or truce with all nations? Curiosity, it was at least; yea, it was pride and creature confidence that pricked David on to this numbering of the people, and made him so peremptory. This Augustus Cæsar might do for his pleasure, and carry it away without punishment (Luke ii. 1). Not so David. God will take that from others what he will not bear with in his own (Amos iii. 2). The Philistines might cart the ark, but David smarted for so doing [*Trapp*].

Ver. 6. *The interrupted survey.* 1. *Joab from policy* did not number all the people. The work grew tedious, and Joab did not relish it, "for the king's word was abominable to Joab." 2. *But God's providence seen in result.* Other agency beside man's recognised. Two tribes not numbered, "partly because Levi was devoted to His service, and Benjamin had become the least of all tribes (Judges xxi.); and partly because God foresaw that they would remain faithful to the house of David in the division of the tribes, and therefore would not have them diminished" [*Jamieson*].

"There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

Vers. 9, 10. *Gad an emblem of a true minister.* His message was—I. Divine. So is the gospel message, of which there is evidence drawn from—1. The facts of history. 2. Its congruity with the spiritual constitution of man. 3. Experience of those who feel its power. II. An appeal to choice: "Advise thyself." 1. You can reject it. 2. You can accept it. III. Was to be accounted for: "What word, &c." 1. Gad was responsible for its delivery. 2. David was responsible for its results [*Bib. Mus.*].

Ver. 8. *Foolishly.* He thought at first he had done very wisely; now he seeth his error, and disclaimeth it. We had before his contrition, confession, and supplication, all which make up his repentance for sin; here we have his conversion or reformation, which is his repentance from sin, his amendment of life [*Trapp*].

Ver. 13. *Into the hand of the Lord.* The reason for this choice was partly his confidence in God's great goodness; partly because the other judgments, especially the sword, would have been more dishonourable, not only to David, but also to God and his people; and partly because he, having sinned himself, thought it just to choose a plague, to which he was as obnoxious as his people; whereas he had better defences for himself against the sword and famine than they had. True, *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!* Fearful indeed for those who have, by their impenitence, shut themselves from his mercy. But a penitent dares cast himself into God's hand, knowing that *his mercies are great* [*Benson*]. The compelled choice of punitive infliction, and the dread alternatives. The Divine mercy amid calamity. There is here a *Contrast between Divine and Human Chastisements.* Strange that men, who are so near us, should be less trustworthy than God, who is unseen. Men treat us worse, God better, than we have deserved. David's preference is justified when we consider—1. The harsh judgments men pronounce on each other. 2. The harsh treatment of the guilty who are in men's power. 3. The absence of sympathetic kindness in human warfare. 4. That when God punishes he does so in righteousness. 5. That in the treatment of the guilty God always shows mercy. The lessons are—1. Submission to God. 2. Hope

ful trust. *David's choice.* 1. The option declined. Had too much of his own will already. Refers it back to God and resigns himself into *his* hands. 2. What are the reasons for this? (1) "*Great are his mercies.*" The declara-

tion of a truth, the ground of hope, and the testimony of experience. (2) *Not into the hand of man.* The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Trust in man destroys freedom, dishonours character, and disappoints hope.

HOMILETICS.

DAVID AND ISRAEL.—Verses 17-27.

The sad circumstances of David and Israel. David's wisdom in giving himself into the hands of God. God's hand is safest to hold the rod—the hand of a king, master, father. **I. The progressive course of sin.** 1. *Temptation* (ver. 1). Satan the black fountain of all transgress. David not conscious that Satan was so near. Insidiousness of Satanic influence. 2. *Transgression* (ver. 2). In face of warning (ver. 3). Its desperate folly seen by others (ver. 6). The deadening, hardening power of any lust. 3. *Punishment* (vers. 10-12). As soon will the magnet escape the influence of the pole, the sea the influence of the moon, an atom the binding force of gravitation, as the sinner escape punishment. "Be sure thy sin." **II. The progressive course of reconciliation with God.** 1. *The messenger.* God's afflictive stroke (ver. 7). The prophet Gad (ver. 9). Every person or circumstance that reproves is God's messenger. "God smote." "The Lord spake to Gad, Go, &c." 2. *Conviction* (ver. 8). The true convict always confesses, never excuses. Not only owns the sin, but acknowledges its *greatness*. Text. "It is I, &c." 3. *Penitence* (ver. 16). "Sackcloth," emblem of deepest grief; "fell upon their faces;" evidence of profound humiliation and utter prostration before God. 4. *Acceptance.* Expressly permitted to worship (ver. 18). Consciously and visibly accepted in worship (ver. 26). Delivered from the dread visitation. 5. *Grateful acknowledgment* (ver. 24). Would not offer *costless* worship. Would not offer cheap worship—"full price." We are to be living sacrifices. **III. Underlying truths.** 1. *Though man be tempted, sin is his own act.* Satan suggested, "provoked" David, yet the sin was David's. He might have had resisting strength. 2. *Our sins affect others.* How many widows and orphans! How much anguish and unutterable misery through David's sin! Any man's sins are a widespread and far-reaching curse. Text. David sinned: "these sheep" were terribly smitten. 3. *Though sin be pardoned, it leaves terrible scars behind.* In David's memory. Gaps in the families and homes of the people. Avoidance of sin infinitely better than pardon. Christ the great and only sin-healer. O Holy Ghost, draw, &c. [*R. Berry*].

THE ANGEL ARRESTED.—Verses 15-17.

The infliction of pestilence briefly noticed, without account of duration or ravages; but minute description of visible appearance and menacing attitude of the angel. Notice—**I. The errand of the angel** "to destroy it." Even angels ready executioners of God's judgments. Sodom and Jerusalem; destruction of firstborn in Egypt and of Sennacherib's army. Unseen agents often sent within sphere of things seen, to impress the heart through the senses and convince of God's ways. But Christ came not to destroy men's lives, &c. **II. The destiny of the angel.** Pestilence had swept the country, now sur-

rounded the capital. The centre of glory and empire, seat of the palace and the ark apparently doomed! God strikes at our dearest objects to chastise our sins and bring us to himself. **III. The attitude of the angel.** "A drawn sword in his hand." Indicative of wrong and determination to punish it. Giving opportunity to intercede for the city. God ready to punish, yet waits to be gracious. This attitude warns, yet encourages. **IV. The command to the angel.** "Enough." God knows exactly how far to go, how much is required to bring us to submission. "Stay now thine hand." Prayer has been offered and the design accomplished. "The Lord repented him of the evil," changed his method of procedure and stayed the plague. In this very spot Abraham countermanded from slaying his son. For the sake of the great Sacrifice and Intercessor our lives are preserved from destruction.

THE ALTAR BUILT AND THE PLAGUE STAYED.—Verses 14–26.

Here a national calamity traceable to David's sin, and that sin apparently of minor magnitude. But what evil in it? It was the result of pride and vain-glory, to see the army he could raise, and to which he trusted instead of God. It was ingratitude for past deliverances, &c., hence the wrath of God kindled. David soon became conscious of guilt. A prophet sent to announce God's will, and choice had to be made. Observe—**I. A fearful evil.** The evil—1. *Was the plague.* Some fearful disease, swiftly mortal; for in nine hours, at most, some think 70,000 died. How awful! and beyond the power of human skill to deliver. Sudden, terrible, fatal! 2. *An angel was the messenger employed.* Now ready to fulfil his commission in Jerusalem, but God stayed him. 3. *David beheld the angel and interceded for the people.* A beautiful instance of lofty, conscientious feeling. Generous and magnanimous. **II. The divine remedy.** An altar must be built, sacrifice offered, &c. 1. *Human guilt was acknowledged.* 2. *God was glorified.* Both his justice and wrath in punishing, and his great mercy in staying his judgments. 3. *No doubt the typical end of sacrifices would be realised.* Looking on to the coming of the Lamb of God. For both sin, evil, and remedy may direct us to the great subject of atonement for a perishing world. Besides, this *altar* finely symbolizes the erection of houses for the worship of God. For, through the divine agency of gospel truth, by these the plague of the world is removed. Ignorance displaced by knowledge, profligacy by moral order, irreligion by godliness, unbelief and death by bestowment of salvation and eternal life. **III. A generous proposal.** Altar to be erected at a *given spot.* Nothing in religion left to fancy. David states the case clearly to Ornan. Then came the proposal. 1. This offer was beyond what David stated. "I give thee oxen, &c." 2. It was prompt, the result of generous and pious resolution. 3. It was pressed on David. 4. It was followed with prayer (2 Sam. xxiv. 23). How pious and noble! A finer specimen of godly liberality never was exhibited—the act, the manner, the spirit, the prayer! **IV. A noble and self-sacrificing spirit.** Ornan did well. David did better. Selfishness or formality would have accepted it. David desired the offering. 1. *To be his own.* The guilt had been his; so the repentance, so the fruit. 2. *He valued his religion more than his wealth.* So he paid full worth for the place. This act of David's the opposite of two classes in our day—(1) Those who wish others to pay for their religion; (2) those who wish to have religion without cost. Learn—1. The frailty of good men. David numbered the people. 2. The necessary results of sin—misery and ruin. 3. The only way of averting it. By repentance, coming to the one sacrifice on the only perpetual altar reared for the world's guilt. 4. The fruit of a sanctified heart. Holy zeal and liberality in the cause of God [*J. Burns, D.D.*].

THE PROPITIATION.—*Verses 18–27.*

Taking the altar and sacrifice as means of propitiation to reconcile, to restore man to God, we have an illustration of the atonement of Christ in its design, method, and results. **I. The moral condition which it is designed to meet.** 1. *Outward difficulties.* Offence committed and punishment due. God's anger must be taken away; his justice displayed. Man cannot remove penalty, dissolve law, nor deliver himself. In the work of Christ claims of justice satisfied, obstacles to pardon removed, demands of moral government met. Jehovah "a just God and a Saviour." 2. *Inward feelings.* Man's guilt creates fear and distance. "I was afraid and I hid myself." "He was afraid because of the sword." God's love in Christ represents him unrevengeful, near and ready to forgive. The Holy Spirit renews the disposition, enlightens the mind, and takes away fear. Thus distance is destroyed, guilt overcome, and God and man reconciled. **II. The provision made for this condition.** With the distinct understanding that we simply glance at one aspect of this profound subject, we assert that to make atonement for sin required great cost. Not "by the blood of goats and calves," not "by gold and silver" are we redeemed, but by the precious blood of Christ. Christ himself was the sacrifice. Scripture and history rich in examples of benevolence and self-sacrifice; none like this. The gift of God's beloved Son more costly than worlds upon worlds; inestimable, incomprehensible. "Thanks be unto God for his *unspeakable* gift." **III. The results which it accomplished.** 1. *Danger warded off.* When David repented of sin, God repented of judgment; plague arrested; destroying angel commanded to stay his hand (ver. 15) and sheath his sword (ver. 27). 2. *Sacrifices accepted.* "God answered from heaven by fire" (ver. 26), to signify that anger was turned away and God propitious. "So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel." This typical of the sinner's reconciliation and acceptance with God through Christ. "He (himself) is the propitiation (propitiatory sacrifice) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jno ii. 2).

THE COST AND SELF-SACRIFICE OF RELIGION.—*Verses 22–26.*

Sacrifice was to be presented; specific directions were given. David promptly obeyed. A generous scene of altercation takes place. A pious and self-sacrificing decision expressed by David. Acceptable religion is a religion of self-sacrifice—a religion of cost; and the cost must be personally paid. In illustration of this, contemplate the subject. **I. In reference to the spiritual expansion of the intellectual powers.** Theology, the divine science of religion, one of boundless extent. The greatness, number, variety, and importance of the subjects. God—his works, his government, his will. The Lord Jesus Christ—the gospel, eternal life. To understand there must be reading, study, reflection. A course of divine training—religious education. We may be Christians without much knowledge, but our honour, glory, felicity, to abound in knowledge. The cost must be paid, in the attainment. The astronomer pays it, the man of literature, so the Christian. **II. Apply the subject to the spiritual cultivation of the moral nature.** The soul before conversion like a barren heath, or desert, arid, &c. It must be cultivated, ploughed, sown, tilled. Much labour needful. Evil habits to be abandoned. Holy habits to be formed. Virtues to be grafted in; graces to be cherished. Hence duties, toils, and spiritual efforts necessary. Hence the exhortations, "Be diligent, &c.," "Work out your salvation, &c." Apply the subject—

III. To the influence of self-denial in adorning the Christian profession. Self-denial not the abandonment of sin, &c., but surrendering even of what might be lawfully retained. Hence the case of eating flesh, &c., as given by the apostle (Rom. xiv. 1). Now our habits, costume, conversation, spirit, must all be sacrificed, if God's glory and the good of others demand it. Our will sacrificed that God's may be done. Apply the subject—

IV. To the importance of usefulness in the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. This one great end of conversion. "I will bless thee and make thee a blessing, &c." *First*, the heart must be given to Christ; then life, talents, influence, time, wealth. If we will be useful, the cost must be paid; the law of self-sacrifice must rule us; ease, sordidness, &c., must be cast off. "Brethren, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, &c." These cases illustrate the subject. But I give additional thoughts. Not only must the cost be paid, but paid (1) In the right spirit. Not the spirit of ostentation for display; of self-righteousness for merit; of backwardness and grudgingly; but in humble, cheerful love to Christ. Felt to be a privilege as well as a duty. Need no force nor threatening. Not the whip, but the curb. As David in the text. "Freely we have received, &c." In the language of the poet—

"Had I a thousand hearts to give,
Lord, they should all be thine."

(2) Observe, this cost paid in religion, is not equal to the demands of sin. Look at the sacrifice, the worldly, the proud, the sensual make. What money! what time! what energies! What peace! The way of transgressors is hard, and the end ruin. (3) To pay this cost in the service of Christ, grace is both necessary and provided. "Without Me ye can do nothing." "My grace is sufficient, &c." Grace must inspire the desire, purpose, and motive—give the ability and elasticity. The grace of God is provided abundantly. It was found so by Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Paul. Our subject, then, should—

1. *Lead to examination.* What has religion done for us? What have we done for it? What has it cost us? Have you the inward sense of God's full favour? Have you the testimony that you please God?
2. *It condemns two classes of persons.* Those who wish others to pay for their religion, and those who wish to have a costless religion. Not so David. Forget not—
3. *That true religion is its own present reward.* Peace, hope, and joy, now; hereafter, the glories of a blissful eternity. Let the spirit of the text ever dwell in you.
4. *Address the sinner.* Who is indifferent to religion altogether. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, &c." [J. Burns, D.D.].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 14–17. I. Judgments following sin. This a necessary, natural, and certain sequence. II. Judgments mixed with mercy. 1. Shortened in duration. 2. Ending in correction. "*Mercy rejoices over judgment.* (1) The penitent man casts himself into the arms of God's mercy; (2) Mercy falls into the arms of justice, in order to stay its blows; punitive justice must yield to mercy at the command of the Lord. 'It is enough: stay now thy hand'" [Lange].

Vers. 16–20. 1. David's ready obedi-

ence. 2. David's willingness to suffer alone. 3. David's intercession for the people. "Most people, when judgments are abroad, charge others with being the cause of them, so they can escape; but David's penitent and public spirit was otherwise affected. As became a penitent he is severe upon his own faults, while he extenuates those of the people and intercedes for them."

Ver. 24. *Full price.* Apply to ministers and Sunday-school teachers in preparation for pulpit and class.

Vers. 22–27. I. *The altar purchased.*

(1) By divine instructions. Concerning place, person, and purpose. (2) By honourable transaction. In spirit of courtesy, generosity, and self-sacrifice. II. *The altar accepted.* Acceptance by fire, and hallowed by tokens of God's presence. III. *The altar perpetuated.* Partly to meet David's fears, also to fulfil God's purpose. Reverence for Divine Being led him to stay at the place, to make additional offerings and seek favour by earnest prayer. God was gracious, approved and sanctioned. Mount Moriah became a place of lawful and continual sacrifice. "*Rear an altar unto the Lord!*" (1) In obedience to the Lord's command; (2) With dedication of thyself, and what is thine, to the Lord's honour; (3) For the con-

tinual preservation of spiritual offerings, which are acceptable to the Lord; and (4) For the reception of the highest gift of grace, peace with the propitiated God" [*Lange*]. Chap. xxi. 1. David's sin. 2. David's self-reproach, penitence, and confession. 3. David's punishment. 4. David's supplication and expiatory offering. 5. David's forgiveness and restoration. *How God meets the presumptuousness of his favoured ones.* (1) He comes upon them with the edge of the sword; (2) His sword is not to kill, but to loose the chains of pride; (3) Where the sword of the Lord has done its work, there he builds his temple of peace [*J. Disselhoff*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 2. *The number.* This attempt to take the census was not unnaturally suggested by the increase of his power, but it implied a confidence and pride akin to the spirit inculcated on the kings of the chosen people [*Dean Stanley*].

Ver. 4. *King's word prevailed.* Wisdom is gotten by hearkening to good counsel, for none are born so naturally (Job xi. 12). "Many had proved wise if they had not thought themselves so" [*Bp. Hall*]. There cannot be a more worthy improvement of friendship than in a fervent opposition to the sins of those we love [*Ibid.*].

Vers. 9-15. *Punishment.* He that would be safe from the acts of evil must wisely avoid the occasions [*Bp. Hall*]. How hard a master he serves where the devil gives the employment, and shame is his entertainment, and sin is his work, and hell is his wages [*Bp. J. Taylor*]. "Sinners labour in the very fire."

Ver. 7. *God was displeased.*

"But Providence will intervene
To throw His dark displeasure o'er the
scene" [*Cowper*].

Ver. 17. *Plagued.* The great design, both in judgment and mercies, is to convince us that there is none like

the Lord our God; none so wise, so mighty, so good; no enemy so formidable, no friend so desirable, so valuable [*Mt. Henry*]. O God, I have made an ill use of thy mercies, if I have not learnt to be content with thy corrections [*Bp. Hall*]. How sweetly doth God dispose of all second causes, that while they do their own will they do his [*Ibid.*].

Vers. 24-27. *Full price.* A bargain is sometimes as unmerciful as a robbery [*Nicholls*]. Kindness will dictate much in carrying on business which law cannot take cognizance of. It will preserve from the wretched practice of exclusive dealing, of punishing a man for his religion or politics by withholding custom; of making commerce the instrument of bigotry and exclusiveness, a practice which all condemn when they suffer from it, and all approve when they are advantaged by it. It will teach us to give a tender consideration to the cases of others, to treat inferiors with courtesy and gentleness, to pay respect to those whose circumstances make them apt to suspect unkindness, not to make a vigorous exaction of mere rights, to allow for unavoidable causes, and by studious care smooth the path of honest poverty [*A. J. Morris*].

CHAPTER XXII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The remaining chapters of this book are peculiar to the chronist. They narrate the arrangements of David for the building of the temple, his religious and political regulations, and his last will and death [*Murphy*]. This chapter, which consists entirely of new matter, helps to fill up the gap which had been left by the earlier authors between 2 Sam. xxiv. and 1 Kings i. [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-5.—Preparations for the Temple. This, the spot on which the altar was built, he regards as the site of the temple. Ver. 2. *Strangers*, non-Israelites, descendants of old Canaanites, war captives from whom exacted a tribute of bond-service (2 Chron. viii. 7-10), and war captives (2 Chron. ii. 7) reserved for the great work contemplated [*Jamieson*]. *Masons, stone-cutters.* Ver. 3. *Joinings*, braces or brackets for binding wood or stone. Ver. 4. *Zidon*, abounded in timber merchants and navigators (cf. 1 Kings v. 1, 15-18; 2 Chron. ii. 16). Ver. 5. *Tender*, exact age unknown. "It cannot have been more than 24 or 25. It may have been as little as 14 or 15" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 6-16.—Charge to Solomon. Ver. 6. *Called*, a short time before his death to give him special instructions. Ver. 7. *Mind, heart* (2 Sam. vii. 1-17). Ver. 8. *Blood*. This referred to in ch. xxviii. 3 and 1 Kings v. 17, though not in same terms. Nathan's message (ch. xvii. 4-14) assigned no ground for prohibition. In form of command here and the first intimation of reason why David must not build. On character of David's wars, cf. 2 Sam. viii. 2, x. 18, xii. 31; 1 Kings xi. 16. *Sol.*, "had two names—viz., Solomon, 'peaceful,' and Jedidiah, 'beloved of Jehovah' (2 Sam. xii. 25). The former name prevailed on account of this prophecy, which attached to the name the promise of a blessing" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Give peace* (1 Kings iv. 20-23, v. 4). Ver. 10. *Son* in peculiar and special manner. Ver. 11. *Prosper*, literally "The Lord shall be with thee, and thou shalt prosper. But future may have an imperative sense" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 12. *Wisdom* (cf. Ps. lxxii. 1; Sol.'s prayer, 1 Kings iii. 5-15). Ver. 13. *Strong*, words which are found in Deut. iv. 1, v. 1, vii. 4, xi. 32, xxxi. 6; Josh. i. 7. Ver. 14. *Trouble*, poverty. "By my strenuous labour, according to Gen. xxxi. 42; see the precisely similar expression (ch. xxix. 2), I have prepared with all my might" [*Keil*]. *Talents*, taking usual idea of talent, this would be more than eighty millions sterling. Either the talent of smaller value or text corrupted. "The latter is certainly the more probable supposition" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 15. *Cunning, i.e.*, skilful, serfs of ancient kingdoms very numerous (cf. 2 Chron. ii. 17).

Vers. 17-19.—Charge to Princes. Members of court, including other sons of David. Ver. 18. Reasons for liberality in giving. Ver. 19. *Set, make this your purpose and effort; holy vessels used in tabernacle service.*

HOMILETICS.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.—Verses 1-5.

This chapter and the seven which follow are supplementary to the Second Book of Samuel, and fill up the space between the end of that Book and the beginning of the First Book of Kings. Preparations for building going on for twenty-five or thirty years. In times of war and domestic affliction, David accumulated treasure and materials to be handed over to his successor.

I. The work for which he prepared. "This is house of the Lord God." Its building "exceeding magnificent." 1. *In the costliness of its materials.* Iron and brass, timber and stone, gold and silver. In the spiritual temple the materials are human beings, intellectual and immortal spirits. The preparation and forming of these materials into a temple for God includes the calling, regeneration, and consecration of men in Christ, "in whom all the building, fitly framed (exactly fitted) together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. ii. 20). 2. *In the grandeur of its design.* Not for earthly and inferior

objects. (1) For the honour of the great God, Lord of heaven and earth. "Build an house for the Lord God." (2) For the benefit of men. "Of fame and of glory throughout all countries." Reminding men of God's existence and claims; the centre of light and purity, bringing heaven down to earth, and securing the triumphs and praise of redeeming grace. **II. The incentives to the performance of this work.** There are many. 1. *Consider the greatness of the work.* More than the erection of a palace, the building of a city, the founding of an empire. A work agreeing with youth and age; affords scope for ambition, enthusiasm, and skill. 2. *Divine instructions are given to its performance.* God revealed the site, the plan, the ornaments, and all the arrangements for service. When way is known, walk in it. Knowledge given to practice. 3. *Good example inspires.* "Precepts teach, but examples draw." Man a creature of imitation by education and habit. A noble example interests, rouses attention, and stimulates to action. Illustrates the possibility and the manner of doing what is enjoined. David set a noble example. 4. *The circumstances of others should influence us.* "Solomon is young and tender." Others may not be situated, prepared, blessed as we are, may be weak, aged, and helpless. Consider the wants of the Church—men, money, and materials; the wants of the rising generation—good examples, education, and sympathy; the wants of the world—temples, Bibles, and missionaries. Care for the future, and if you cannot build, gather materials.

PREPARATION FOR THE WORK OF GOD.—*Verses 1-5.*

This needful, urgent, and within the reach of all. I. *By personal effort.* David earnest, patient, and persevering; getting ready in prosperity and adversity. Warned by shortness of time, infirmity, and approaching end, "prepared abundantly before his death." II. *By initiation of the work.* Gather materials, begin or enter some work for God. Forethought is the best security against waste, idleness, and failure. An unfurnished minister, scholar, or church member cannot be "a wise master-builder." "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field, and afterwards build thine house." III. *By employment of willing helpers.* "Strangers" gathered together and enlisted in the service. Aliens (the non-Israelite population) hewed wood, carried burdens, &c. Often questioned whether help for building sanctuaries, supporting and maintaining religious institutions and worship, should be received from ungodly. But God urges every one to surrender to him. All our possessions are God's, and should be consecrated to him. Some are willing, others may be induced. Only cherish a liberal, kindly feeling, and they "shall be his servants, that they may know his service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries."

"All the means of action—
The shapeless masses, the materials,
Lie everywhere about us. What we need
Is the celestial fire to change the flint
Into transparent crystal, bright and clear" [*Longfellow*].

DAVID'S CHARGE TO SOLOMON.—*Verses 6-16.*

Something more than dead materials required. Gold and silver nothing without willing hearts and active hands. David would gladly have done the work, but forbidden. Gives a touching and direct charge to incite Solomon to build. Learn—I. **That some originate a good work, but are not permitted to execute it.** David himself gives a special reason

(ver. 8). Hands stained with blood not fit to build a house of worship, the abode of love and peace. What a lesson! Sin may be forgiven, but a stain left behind. Present acts may influence future character, hinder holy work, decide the lot that should fall to us, or be lost by us. Cruelty and inconsistency will ever deprive of noble work and honour. **II. That others may be called to execute work which they never originated.** David prepared, and Solomon used the materials. "One soweth and another reapeth," and thus the work is carried on under a divine plan. A work for us, and a sphere appointed to do it. What matter middle, beginning, or end? No Christian effort, no man's life isolated. In our surroundings and duties our life's purpose is unfolded. 1. *They are specially designated for the work.* "He shall build an house." Cyrus called by name to do God's pleasure, and set captives free (Is. xlv. 28; xlv. 1). 2. *Opportunities are given them to work.* Solomon had rest from enemies, and Israel enjoyed "peace and quietness" in his days. Where God gives opportunity, leisure, and talent he expects work. If not done in time and place, may be left undone, or given to another. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" **III. That, when called, they should finish the work given them to do.** "Arise, therefore, and be doing" (ver. 16). 1. *The work is urgent.* "Arise, &c." We are apt to fall into apathy, formalism, and forgetfulness—to be absorbed by earthly cares, or overcome by temptation. Awake to holy zeal, intense concern for the Redeemer's work. 2. *God has promised help.* Need of men and money, sanctified intellects and eloquent tongues, broad shoulders and active hands; but with all, and more than all, the Lord's presence. Do we rely upon this? Are we earnestly desiring and praying for this? "The Lord be with thee, and prosper thee, &c." (ver. 11).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Gather the strangers.* A notable type of the calling of the Gentiles; and the like we may say of the temples being built on the ground of a Jebusite, and by the help of Tyrians and Zidonians, and adorned with the spoils of divers nations (chap. xviii.) [Trapp].

Ver. 3. *Prepared.* Many parents prepare guilt in abundance, hoards and heaps of evil-gotten goods—and therewithal God's curse—to spend on their lusts, &c. As for pious and charitable uses, they cry out with Judas, Whereto is this waste? [Ibid.].

Ver. 5. *Magnifical.* The second temple was nothing like it, though the glory of it was greater (Hag. ii.), by the presence and preaching of Jesus Christ in it [Ibid.].

Ver. 9. *A son predicted.* I. Son of David; so was Christ. II. A man of rest; so was Christ. III. The giver of peace; so was Christ. IV. He had a significant name; so has Jesus Christ. V. He was a glorious king; so is

Christ. VI. His great work was the building of the temple; so is the work of Christ [Bib. Museum].

Vers. 11-13. *A father's prayer for his son.* I. *For the possession of moral qualities.* 1. "Wisdom and understanding." Parents should be anxious for the education and religious welfare of children. Inheritance, wealth, and position nothing without this. Wisdom needed to turn all to good account. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding." 2. *Strength and moral courage.* "Be strong and of good courage." Ver. 13. Enemies and dangers cause "dread." In possession of sound wisdom and in vital alliance with God we are perfectly safe. Men without understanding and courage, out of place, weak and useless.

"Let not the world see fear and sad mistrust Govern the motion of a kingly eye" [Shakespeare].

II. *For the presence of God.* "The Lord be with thee." A petition often repeated, too little understood; needful and appropriate to all times, undertakings, and places; the wish of every good father, and the prayer of every true Christian for an earnest worker. "Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." III. *For successful undertaking.* "Prosper thou and build." All parents wish success to

children in every pursuit, possession of influence and authority, "charge over Israel." This often selfish, without reverent regard for the Lord's will. Be anxious for moral integrity and loyal obedience of youth. No prosperity without obedience to "the law of the Lord" and regard for his will. "Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes, &c."

"'Tis not in mortals to command success,
But we'll do more, Sempronius; we'll
deserve it."

HOMILETICS.

CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL EFFORT.—Verses 11–13.

Time procured by our labours or help of others most profitably spent in God's service, utilising the preparations, improving the advantages, and carrying on the work of predecessors. But success only on certain conditions. **I. Personal fitness.** There must be ability, power, capacity, physical, intellectual, and moral. 1. *Wisdom to direct.* "Wisdom and understanding." Not worldly policy, human education, "earthly wisdom;" but "wisdom from above" (Jas. iii. 15–17), that "wisdom profitable to direct" (Ecc. x. 10). 2. *Strength to work.* Weakness, distrust, and hesitancy certain to fail. "Fortune favours the brave." "Woe unto him that is faint-hearted," says the son of Sirach. There must be no unfitness in act, heart, or capacity. **II. God's presence to help in its prosecution.** The word *only* (ver. 12) most suggestive, indicates entire failure without this. Skilful workmen, wise diplomatists, useful materials for work, may be needful, but divine help can never be dispensed with. The wisdom, the royal influence, and the powerful rule of Solomon not sufficient. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." **III. Loyal obedience to God.** "Keep the law of the Lord." Success in departments of nature gained by submission to matter and co-operation with its laws. Our strength lies in "keeping the law." The throne of kings, the business of merchants, the prosperity of churches, established by obedience. "Observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

THE EARNEST APPEAL.—Verses 17–19.

Princes urged to help, to consecrate themselves first, for this the foundation of zeal; then reasons given for liberality in the work. This earnest appeal suggests—**I. That God has a temple to build among men.** "Build ye the sanctuary." 1. *A sanctuary to be built.* Not by earthly materials, but by "lively (*living*) stones" (1 Pet. ii. 5). A spiritual temple, a Christian church, as well as a material palace. 2. *A sanctuary to be furnished.* "Bring the ark and the holy vessels." Furnished not with pompous ceremonies and burning tapers, but with moral beauty, appropriate rites, spiritual songs, devout attendants, and the presence of God. This the work of Solomon on the throne, courtiers in the palace, and people in the cottage. Gather your materials, and

offer your gold and silver; give yourselves, and resolve "to help." **II. That to this work the Christian Church is called.** Not privileged to help in rearing the first or second temple, but earnestly called to this work. 1. *Called by favourable circumstances.* Land taken, inhabitants overcome, and rest given. Hindrances moved, and opportunities many. 2. *Called by the will of God.* Expressed in his word, by his servants, and by everything around us. 3. *Called by the urgency of the work.* "Arise, therefore, and be doing." Now is the time. Delay risky to yourselves and others. It is sinful in itself, and an evil example to others. **III. That a spirit of active zeal should characterise the prosecution of this work.** This designed by God in bestowment of gifts and arrangements of providence. "Now," because this done for you, "arise, therefore." 1. *The heart should be fixed on it.* Not the work of accident nor compulsion. Must be your choice and purpose. Energy, aim, and sympathy must be roused and fixed. Everything within us "set." 2. *Active excitement must be associated with constant labour.* Apt to fall into a state of apathy and formalism. Nothing can overcome indolence, temptation, and neglect but holy love, heavenly excitement, and burning zeal. The Church must awake to a lively, intense concern, to adopt, carry out every plan, and become a diligent, faithful, and working Church. Listen to the call, and remember the promise of God. Answer every foe with Nehemiah: "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 12. *The qualifications needed.* The source from whence they come. The design for which they are given. *Keep the law of the Lord thy God.* 1. God's will is a law. Not an opinion, creed, or counsel. Something laid down, revealed, with authority and publicity. 2. This law should be kept. "That thou mayest keep the law." Not given for mere study, information, or speculation, but for practice in life. 3. Obedience to this law is wisdom. It secures physical health, "length of days and long life." It improves the powers of mind, and enlarges the sphere of usefulness. It is "a crown of glory," and the highest possible good, the *summum bonum* to men. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding."

Ver. 19. *Seeking after God.* I. The occasion on which this injunction was given. II. The injunction itself.

1. The great object of our life. 2. In what way we are to prosecute it. And now (1) Avail yourselves of the opportunities afforded for public usefulness; (2) Begin with a surrender of your whole souls to God [*C. Simeon, M.A.*]. *The Important Search.* I. The object searched. "The Lord your God." An object supremely great and glorious, the perfection of all beings, the fountain of life and glory. Seek his favour, grace, and presence. II. The method of search. Naturally without God, yet our duty and privilege to seek, find, and serve him. 1. *Earnestly.* "Heart and soul engaged." No fits and starts, not half-heartedness. 2. *Resolutely.* "Set your heart." Nothing accomplished without fixed purpose. God the sublimest object on which we can fix our hearts. He is merciful and lovable. "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye search for me with all your heart."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXII.

Vers. 1-5 and 14-16. *David prepared.* "Let those things," says an author, "which are obviously most

important and necessary be done *first*, and the less urgent afterwards. Let not a man *begin business* by building

and expensively furnishing a fine house. Let the land be first cultivated. Let your business, whatever its nature, be faithfully and diligently minded and well-established, as far as human industry can effect, or human foresight calculate. Be content, in the meantime, with inferior accommodation. A man should have property well realised and secured before he enters on schemes of expensive building. He must not, with sanguine infatuation, appropriate the very first proceeds of his trade to the erection of a *palace to live in.*"

"When we mean to build,
We first survey the plot; then draw the model;
And when we see the figure of the house,
Then must we rate the cost of the erection;
Which, if we find outweighs ability,
What do we then but draw anew the model
In fewer offices, or at least desist
To build at all? &c." [*Shakespeare*].

Vers. 6-10. *A son.* If we would "mend the world we should mend ourselves,

and teach our children to be not what we are, but what they should be" [*W. Penn.*].

Vers. 12, 13. *Prosper.* "Man's wisdom consists in observing God's unalterable appointments and suiting himself to them" [*Scott*]. *Then* the way of God's precepts leads to the enjoyment of his promises. Thou meetest him that worketh righteousness.

Ver. 18. *Be doing.* A pious Scotch lady, Mrs. Duncan, remarked, "I feel that my heart is apt to grow to weeds, it needs the safeguard of steady employment." "Doing nothing is doing ill." "Life accordingly is a delight, just in the degree that it is consecrated to action, or the conscious, volitional exercise of our noblest capabilities. Action and enjoyment are contingent upon each other; when we are unfit for work we are always incapable of pleasure; work is the wooing by which happiness is won" [*L. Grindon*].

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This and following three chapters contain an account of Levites and distribution of their services. Here their number, classification, and work (vers. 1-6). But vers. 6-32 give heads of houses composing the four Levite families and their offices.

Ver. 1.—King. For full particulars cf. 1 Kings i. "The author of Chronicles, who does not concern himself with the domestic history of David, naturally omits the circumstances, and merely states the fact" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 2-5.—Number and distribution of the Levites. Princes. David made arrangements with Levites in their assembly (cf. xxv. 1). *Thirty*, Mosaic census followed (Num. iv. 3). None counted who exceeded 50 years by *man, i.e.*, reckoning men only. *Judges*, local magistrate (chap. xxvi. 29). "This office resembled that of the modern Mahometan *Cadi*" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Porters* (ver. 5), door-keepers by night and day. "Ps. cxxxiv. is the chant of the night sentries" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 6-23.—Houses or families of Levites. Enumeration of all Levites, afterwards distributed into their classes. *Courses*, divisions definitely numbered and arranged by David. *Vers. 7-11. The Gershonites* (Ex. vi. 6). *Laadan*, called *Libni* (chap. vi. 17, cf. use in Ex. vi. 17; Num. iii. 18). *Shimei*, not that of ver. 7, but another, cf. ver. 10. *Ver. 10. Zina*, marg. *Zizah*. *Ver. 11. Not many* and did not make separate houses. *Vers. 12-20. The Kohathites* (Ex. vi. 16). *Separated*, therefore not counted in the number (ver. 3). *Burn incense* (cf. Ex. xxx. 7, 8; Num. vi. 23-27). *Named* (ver. 14) not like those of Aaron (ver. 13). *Ver. 15. Moses* (cf. Ex. xviii. 3, 4). *Ver. 16. Shebuel* (cf. xxiv. 20). *Ver. 18. Shel.*, the founder or head. *Vers. 21-23. Sons of Merari*, two chiefly given (Num. iii. 20; 1 Chr. vi. 19), but 1 Chr. xxiv. 26 seems to give a third son.

Vers. 24-27.—Sons of Levi. Polls (ver. 3). *Twenty*, thirty previously fixed. Certain lighter duties imposed at 25 (Num. viii. 24), but only liable for full service at 30 years. David made a change. The temple would require a more numerous ministry since the ark ceased to be carried from place to place. This limit continued in after times as David fixed it. *Ver. 27. Last orders or arrangements* Some understand a historical work, drawn up by Gad or Nathan, or a work of directions for the service of the sanctuary.

Vers. 28-30.—*Purifying, i.e.*, washing holy things; *shewbread* (Lev. xxiv. 5-9); *fine flour*, materials for all chief kinds of meat offerings (*cf.* Lev. ii. 1-5; vi. 14, 15; xxiii. 13); *cakes*, must be rightly made, &c.; *measure* of liquids and things dry fixed by law (Ex. xxix. 40; Lev. vi. 20; Num. xv. 4-10).

Ver. 31.—*By number*, exact number of cattle to be offered at various festivals fixed by law (Num. xxviii. 9-11; xxix. 8-13).

Ver. 32.—*Keep*, duties of Levites here summed up in words from Num. xviii. 3-6. "This passage (verses 8 to 32) gives the most complete account to be found in Scripture of the nature of the Levitical office" [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE SACRED TRIBE: ITS CALLING AND ITS DUTIES.—Verses 2-5.

In view of death, David called a representative assembly. Solomon succeeds him, and he wishes to arrange for the service of the temple. The Levites called to officiate; here classified in order and houses, with distribution and general regulations for work. **I. The sacred calling of the tribe.** "To set forward the work of the house of the Lord." "Their office to wait on the sons of Aaron" (vers. 28, 29), and "to offer"—to help in the offering of "burnt sacrifices" (vers. 31, 32). This a noble, "a high calling." Notice—1. *The legal age of entering the work.* "From thirty years old and upward, even until fifty years old" (Num. iv. 3); then reduced to twenty-five years (Num. viii. 24), and now fixed "from the age of twenty years and upward" (ver. 24). 2. *The numbers engaged in the work.* Thirty-eight thousand, an increase of more than fourfold since the time of Moses (Num. iv. 47, 48). What a proof of God's power and grace, who can make his servants "a thousandfold more." Considered a privilege to belong to the retinue of an earthly monarch. What must it be to be numbered with the household of God on earth, and with the innumerable company in heaven! **II. The special duties of the tribe.** We have four classes given (vers. 4 and 5), which are afterwards described in detail. 1. *The overseers.* Twenty-four thousand, including priests and attendants, to (set forward) superintend (ver. 4). They had under their charge the younger Levites and servants of the sanctuary, devoted to menial duties (ix. 2). 2. *The judges.* Administrators of civil affairs "for the outward business of Israel" (2 Chr. xix. 5-11). *Officers* mentioned early (Ex. v. 6), generally foremen; *judges* concerned with religious matters chiefly. 3. *The musicians*, who praised on instruments—"cymbals, psalteries, harps, trumpets" (2 Chr. v. 12)—which David might approve or appoint, but not invent for service. He was given to music, and desired, in his latter days, to give example of its use. Handel declared, when he finally resolved to consecrate himself to sacred music, "that it was better suited to a man descending in the vale of years." 4. *The porters.* At gates, guarding entrance of improper persons, and keeping from profanation and divine displeasure. In such service we may engage, leading in the song, and perfecting the praise of the sanctuary; administering law and government; creating, preserving, and perpetuating reverence and truth in all things.

THE SACRED TRIBE: ITS HEADS AND ARRANGEMENTS.—Verses 6-24.

After giving number and divisions of Levi according to duties, we have next an enumeration of heads of houses into which the four families branched, with a brief account of their work. **I. The houses of Gershon** (vers. 6-11). This branches into two—six families for *Laadan*, and three for *Shimei*; nine houses altogether. **II. The houses of Kohath** (vers. 11-20). Aaron

not reckoned because specially set apart. His sons form subject of ch. xxv. 1-19. Hence such descendants of Amram noticed which belonged to Moses, whose sons were numbered among Levites generally, and did not belong to that part to whom priestly duties were assigned. Kohath, the founder of nine fathers' houses (mentioned ch. xxiv. 20-25). To these must be added the priests through Aaron and his sons, two houses, making eleven in all.

III. The houses of Merari (vers. 21-23). Two sons as two leading branches, *Machli* and *Mushi* (Ex. vi. 19; Num. iii. 33). Merari is third son of Levi (Gen. xlvi. 11). As there are four houses for him, nine for Gershon, and eleven for Kohath, we have twenty-four in all of the sons of Levi. Some give Merari six, and the others nine each, which makes the same number.

IV. The arrangements of the Levites (vers. 24-32). By the last words of David, at the end of his life, new arrangements were made. He thought it would contribute to the glory of God to have as many officers as possible in divine service. 1. *The enrolment of office was changed.* The rule was to begin at 30 years; for two reasons he relaxed this. *First*, Jerusalem was the chosen city, and there would be no more moving from place to place. *Second*, the carrying of the tabernacle was not needed any longer. 2. *The duties of office are arranged.* Detailed in a few items. Aaron's sons had higher office in the service of the house of the Lord. Service in the courts (Ex. xxvii. 9); the chambers as judges; and in religious work generally. Levites helped in this service, had "to wait on the sons of Aaron." Several things mentioned—(1) *Keeping things clean.* "Purifying, i.e., cleansing of all holy things" (ver. 28). Holy places, garments, vessels, and sacrifices. (2) *Getting things ready.* The *shewbread* for priests to arrange on the table; *fine flour* morning and evening in just quantity for meat-offering; *unleavened cakes* rightly made. (3) *Adjusting weights and measures.* Standards of which were considered sacred, kept in the sanctuary, and not to be altered in liquids (wine, oil, &c.) or dry goods. (4) *Blowing with their instruments.* Every morning and night "to praise the Lord" in sounding their trumpets (Num. x. 10). (5) *Offering sacrifices.* "To offer all burnt sacrifices" (ver. 31). Priests alone sprinkled the blood, trimmed the fire on the altar, and lay the parts of the victim on it. Levites did everything preparatory and needful to these priestly acts. Sacrifices offered in right number (2 Sam. ii. 15; Num. xxviii. 1-31), and at *set feasts*: Passover (Lev. xxiii. 4, 5); Pentecost (Lev. xxiii. 15-17); and Tabernacles (Lev. xxiii. 33-37). (6) *Guarding the tabernacle.* "Keep the charge of the tabernacle" (ver. 32). Charge of the tent of meeting, of holy apparatus, to have everything fit, orderly, and ready for special functions of priests. (7) *Attendance on priests.* "The charge of the sons of Aaron, their brethren." Thus service honourable and menial, orderly and regular. Nothing a *drudgery*, but pleasant, joyful, and devout.

"Who sweeps a room as for God's laws
Makes that and the action fine" [Herbert].

THE THREEFOLD FUNCTIONS.—Verse 13.

The posterity of Aaron advanced to dignity and the priest's office to "sanctify the most holy things." Their office here described as threefold. 1. *To make atonement.* Offer burnt incense upon the golden altar in the holy place. For a "stranger to come near" and do this would incur prompt punishment (Num. xvi. 40). Incense-burning a preliminary to morning and accompaniment of evening sacrifice (Ex. xxx. 7, 9; Lu. i. 9, 10), and a special part of ceremony on Day of Atonement (Lev. xvi. 11-13). Amid sudden danger and impending wrath, the priest took the censer of incense "to make atonement" (Num. xvi. 46, 47). No

priesthood, no office like this now; but regarding this as typical of diffusive influence and specific intercession, the minister of the gospel may be an intercessor for his people, render acceptable service and point to *the* atonement for sin and *the* Mediator between God and man. 2. *To minister to God for man.* "To minister unto him." This a privilege and within the power of every one. The Christian minister specially called, and set apart for this work. In prayer, preaching, and daily work, he should minister to God. 3. *To bless man for God.* "To bless in his name." None have power to bless and bestow grace in themselves. But first receiving light and life they give—speak of God's favour to men, offer pardon and assure of acceptance. They represent God in their ministry; bring down the influence of Heaven in their walk; and seek to recover fallen men from sin and death. "Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying *on this wise* ye shall bless the children of Israel" (Num. vi. 23).

THE REST OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.—Verse 25.

I. In the mysterious polity of the people of Israel, spiritual and temporal blessings were so closely allied that the same language might naturally be employed to signify either. II. Hence David hinted at profounder truths than lie on the surface of his words. III. It becomes us to secure the great blessing—the rest that remaineth—as the chief object of existence. IV. Rest and peace must fall on a Christian spirit—(1) From the imitation of Christ; (2) The singleness of its object; (3) The nature of the Christian affections; (4) To support and exalt us, heaven must mingle with earth [A. Butler].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. 1. *An instructive view of life.* "Old and full of days." Life made up of *days*, not years. Day by day given until the numbers appointed (Job xiv. 5) are filled up, finished. "There is no elixir of life," says one, "that can prolong our days beyond that period. Soon we shall come to the outer limit; then we must die." Isaac died, being "old and full of days." 2. *A touching picture of old age.* As a portrait made up of minute touches, so old age in character, habits, hopes, and condition. It has peculiar comeliness and attractiveness of its own when crowned with piety. Pitiable to see an old man who has missed the object of life and spent his days in folly. "The sinner, being an hundred years old, shall be accursed." But "the hoary head is a crown of gold, if it be found in the way of righteousness." 3. *A solemn warning to all.* The end sure in youthful days or "full of days." "Old age is near neighbour to death." Understand life before you leave it.

If ready to depart we can say cheerfully, *Nunc dimittis.*

Ver. 14. *Moses the man of God; the honourable appellation.* Given to Moses five times in the whole of Scripture—once in the Pentateuch (Deut. xxxi. 1), once in Joshua (xiv. 6), twice in Chronicles (here and in 2 Chr. xxx. 16), and once in Ezra (iii. 2). It is also assigned thrice to David (2 Chr. viii. 14; Neh. xii. 24, 36), and once to the prophet Shemaiah (1 Kings xii. 22). "Man of God," without the article, is common [*Speak. Com.*]. 1. Specially called and qualified for God's work. 2. Privileged with close and familiar intercourse with God. Face to face with God and "the similitude of the Lord shall he behold." 3. Divinely taught to declare the will of God. "With him will I speak mouth to mouth." "The law was given by Moses." 4. Faithfully carried on the work of God. "My servant Moses who is faithful in all my house." God gave orders. Moses verily was faithful as

a servant (Heb. iii. 5), and obedient in carrying them out. 5. Wonderfully honoured by God at the end. God buried him. "There arose not a prophet in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." "We must think and speak honourably of saints departed" [*Trapp*].

Vers. 28-32. *Waiting in service.*
1. In active work. 2. In orderly worship. 3. In devout supplication. 4. In watching attitude.

"God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who
best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best;
his state

Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait"
[*Milton*].

Rest an argument for service. 1. Rest affording opportunity. 2. Specially designed for service. 3. Service, individual, orderly, and varied. Service entered upon early, and patiently conducted. *Morning and evening thanks.* Needful, demanded, and should be willingly given. "Every day will I praise thee." "Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud" (Psalm lv. 17). "Pray without ceasing."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1. *Old.* I venerate old age, and I love not the man who can look without emotion upon the sunset of life, when the dusk of evening begins to gather over the watery eye, and the shadows of twilight grow broader and deeper upon the understanding [*Longfellow*].

Ver. 6. *Courses.* If there be any beauty and comeliness in order, where should we most expect to find it than in the divine government, and in the conduct and management of the affairs of the supreme and the celestial kingdom, wherein only the remoteness of those things from our sense makes everything seem little and inconsiderable [*J. Howe*].

"All things are infinite in parts, and the moral is as the material.

Neither is anything vast, but it is compacted of atoms" [*Martin Tupper*].

Vers. 6 and 30. *Instruments and praise.* In order to the high result intended, the music of religion must be religious. There must be a distinction of sounds. As this language is given for the heart, it becomes a first principle that it must be of the heart, else it is an unknown tongue. And so true is this, that nothing really can fulfil the idea of religious music which is not the breathing of true love and worship. Even *instruments* without life will not speak the true notes of power unless the touch of faith is on them, and the breath of holy feeling is in them; how much less the *voice* itself, whose very qualities of sound are inevitably toned by the secret feeling of the spirit [*Dr. H. Bushnell*].

CHAPTER XXIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] In this chapter we have divisions of the 24 orders of priests (vers. 1-19), and the classes of Levites who attended them in discharge of their sacred functions.

Vers. 1-6.—*The sons of Aaron.* The divisions supply from ver. 6 of chap. xxiii. The author had there stated that "to the sons of Levi David assigned their courses." He now adds, "To the sons of A. also (David assigned) their courses. The sons of A. (were) Nadab, &c." [*Speak. Com.*]. Both, i.e., Zad. and Ahim., assisted David. Ver. 4.

Chief, more heads of houses. Ver. 5. *Lot*, that is, the assignment of their order in the courses made by lot to the families belonging to both E. and Ith. *Governors* or *princes of the sanctuary*. Ver. 6. *Wrote*, as lots were drawn forth. *Taken* alternately.

Vers. 7-19.—*The allotted order*. Some names in this list found elsewhere and others not. Ver. 10. *Abijah*, Abia (Lu. i. 5; Neh. x. 7). Ver. 11. *Jeshuah*, whose descendants returned from captivity (Ez. ii. 6; Neh. vii. 39). Ver. 12. *Eliashib*, not progenitor of the one in Neh. iii. 1, 20, 21. Ver. 15. *Hezir*, as a layman (cf. Neh. x. 20). Ver. 16. *Peth.*, one of those who separated themselves from alliances contracted in captivity (Ez. x. 23; Neh. ix. 5). Ver. 17. *Jachin* (cf. chap. ix. 10; Neh. xi. 10), probably the Achim of Matt. i. 14. Ver. 19. *Orderings*, the charge as ver. 3. *Under*, by the hand of Aaron. *Commanded*, a constant expression in the law of Moses (Ex. xxxix. 42; Lev. xxvii. 34; Num. xxxvi. 13; Deut. xxxiv. 9).

Vers. 20-31.—*Distribution of other Levites*. *The rest*. Object of this second enumeration of the Levitical families (cf. xxiii. 7-23) seems to be the designation of the *heads* of the families in David's time. The omission of the Gershonites is curious, and can only be accounted for by supposing that the author did not find any account of their heads in his authorities. The addition to the Merarites (vers. 26, 27) is also curious. It brings the number of families up to 25, which is one more than we should have expected [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 21. *Rehabi.* (cf. chap. xxiii. 17). Ver. 22. *Shel.*, Shelomith in chap. xxiii. 18, a different person from Amramite Shel. (cf. chap. xxvi. 25, 26). He was probably not a contemporary of David, as the head of the family in David's time was Jahath [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 26. *Ben.*, not really a name; *Heb.* for *his son*, and to be attached to Jaaziah. The meaning of the whole passage (vers. 26-30) seems to be that there were three branches of the Merarites—the Beni-Mahli, the Beni-Mushi, and the Beni-Jaaziah—of whom the first formed a mighty house in David's time, viz., the Beni-Kish, their head being Jerahmeel, while each of the other branches comprised three families, the heads of which were respectively in David's time Shoham, Zaccur, Ibri, and Mahli, Eder, Jerimoth [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 31. *Principal*, "all the Levitical houses enumerated drew lots in their courses on equal terms, the elder families having no advantage over the younger ones," as there were 24 courses of the priests, so we must suppose that there were 24 of the Levites, though the number of the families as given in the text (chap. xxiii. 7-23; xxiv. 20-30) is 25 [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE DIVISIONS OF PRIESTS (SONS OF AARON).—Verses 1-19.

The word "divisions" means courses, as ver. 6 in chap. xxiii.; and evidently continues the subject and construction of that verse. Two sons of A. died, and the other two supply "the chief men of the house," viz., 16 from Eleazar and 8 from Ithamar, 24 in all. **I. Divisions to facilitate work.** Divided more easily performed. "Many hands make light work." Burdens equalised carried better. Jealousies are prevented and a true spirit created. "Be not *solitary*, be not *idle*," a saying of Burton. **II. Divisions by lot** (ver. 5). No ground of choice between the two families, who differed only in number, and as the highest places had already been filled by both of them, the impartiality of lot to settle the order of service. 1. *Lot appointing to dignified work*. "For the governors (or princes) of the sanctuary" (ver. 5). High priests who exclusively could enter into the most holy place before God [*Keil*]. 2. *Lot publicly taken*. "Shem., the scribe, wrote them before the king" (ver. 6). Openly before witnesses and a clerk acting as secretary to scrutinise. Before king, princes, and priests the act most solemn. Fraud and suspicion impossible. "The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty." **III. Divisions in specific order** (vers. 7-19). Order essential to existence and efficiency. Men who seek pre-eminence and power create disorder, anarchy, and ruin. Well-ordered words make good logic; well-ordered regulations preserve the social constitution; and well-set stones make architecture. Order in God's house and service secures regularity, beauty, and efficiency; excludes what is called "good fortune," happy "hits," and points to the divine side of life on its appointment. No "chance" work; all appears to be settled by law. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

THE DEATH OF NADAB AND ABIHU.—*Verse 2.*

The story strange, and understood only by intimate acquaintance with the Jewish system and the prevailing sentiments of the time. Nadab and Abihu had been honoured with special privileges, but unduly exalted themselves, became proud, negligent, and presumptuous. Learn from their death—I. **That sin inverts the natural order of things.** “They died before their father.” “Sin,” as “transgression of law,” creates confusion and disorder. It overturns and inverts. What more natural than a son to outlive his father; but wickedness shortens life, and brings untimely death. II. **That sin deprives of blessings which God can bestow.** They “had no children.” Children great blessings, “a heritage from the Lord.” To be childless, under Jewish dispensation, considered calamity. Profane the name of God, and you may be cut off from high honour, just lineage, and blessed memory. The righteous alone can secure posthumous fame. “The memory of the just is blessed.” III. **That sin often overwhelms with fearful ruin.** They died not a natural death. “There went out fire from the Lord and devoured them.” A punishment sudden and severe, awful and retributive (Lev. x. 1-4). Indicative of their heinous guilt, and God’s jealousy in punishing it. IV. **That sin is often mentioned in history to warn of its consequences.** This special sin frequently mentioned in Scripture. “By this awful judgment the wisdom of God observed the same course, in repressing the first instance of contempt for sacred things, as he did at the commencement of the Christian dispensation (Acts v. 1-11).” “The temple mouse fears not the temple idol,” is a proverb. Those who minister in holy things need be careful not to arrogate to themselves the glory which belongs to God, but ever keep before them the solemnity and responsibility of that service in which they are engaged.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE LEVITES.—*Verses 20-31.*

The *rest* refers to those not of the sons of Aaron, and does not exhaust non-priestly class, for we find in following two chapters others who were singers, doorkeepers, and treasurers. Two families given chiefly. Gershonites found among officers and judges. 1. *The family of Kohath* (vers. 20-25). 2. *The family of Merari* (vers. 26-29). 3. *The three sons of Mushi* (vers. 30, 31). These all content with an inferior “lot,” anxious to do their best, and joyfully contributing to the whole. “They were arranged by lot to match the courses of their brethren, the sons of Aaron, in the presence of the same superiors.” “The principal fathers,” or the chief over against his lesser brother. Each, great and small, his place and his work, and acting under “the great Taskmaster’s eye.” “Let every man be *occupied*, and occupied in the highest employment of which he is capable, and die with the consciousness that he has done his best” [Sidney].

“A wise man scorneth nothing, be it never so small or homely,
For he knoweth not the secret laws that may bind it to great effects”
[Martin Tupper].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Sad deaths.* I. *The sins which caused them.* 1. Disobedience to divine injunction. “They offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.” 2. Gross inconsistency. Perhaps they were drunk, hence the law (Lev. x. 8). “They drink and forget the law” (Prov. xxxi. 5).

3. Rashness in approaching God. They "took," *snatched* (some read ver. 1), their censers without reverence and consideration; rushed into God's presence in haste. 4. Presumptuous in act. Not only did they take "strange incense," but went both together when one only should have officiated; intruded into the holy of holies, to which access denied to all but high priest, and thus set a precedent most dangerous, and which called for divine displeasure. II. *The punishment which followed the sins.* "They died." 1. A dishonourable death. "Without children." 2. A sudden death. "Fire came out" suddenly. 3. An overwhelming death. Instantly died as if struck by a lightning-flash. 4. A retributive death. "Before the Lord." Before the veil that covered the mercy-seat. "Without mercy," and without divine interference. A foretaste of torment "in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. xiv. 10). "God will be sanctified either actively or passively, either in us or upon us; sure it is that he will be no loser by us. Sanctified he will be, either in the sincerity of men's conversation or else in the severity of their condemnation. Singular things are expected of all that draw nigh to God in any duty, but especially in the office of the ministry. Those that stand in the presence of princes must be exact in their carriages. God appointed both the weights and measures of the sanctuary to be twice

as large as those of the commonwealth, to show that he expects much more of those that serve him there than he doth of others. The souls of priests must be purer than sunbeams, saith Chrysostom" [*Trapp*].

Vers. 5-30. *Remarkable persons.* Ver. 5. *Governors (Heb.), Princes of the house of God.* Chief priests rulers over others of their own order, and subject to the high priest. Submission and diligence give distinction in calling. "C'est par le travail qu'on regne" [*Louis XIV.*]. If translation be *Princes of Holiness*, then holiness gives influence and power; distinction of character and approbation of God. Good men are kings of society. Ver. 7. *Jehoiarib*, the father of the Maccabees (1 Macc. ii. 1). Ver. 10. From *Abijah* came Zacharias, father of John the Baptist (Lu. i. 5). "Old he was, yet not free from taking his turn. Dumb also for a time; yet he went on to do his office in the ministrations. The evangelist's word of *the course* (Grk. *epi* and *ēmerias*, a daily service) importeth a daily attendance upon the work while the course continueth" [*Trapp*].

Ver. 23. *Sons of Hebron.* The four persons named appear to have been contemporaries of David, the heads of the Hebronite houses in his time (*cf.* ch. xxvi. 31) [*Speak. Com.*]. "What shall I do to be for ever known?" asked Schiller. Scripture will give the answer.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 2. *Died.* It is a dangerous thing in the service of God to decline from his own institutions; we have to do with a God who is wise to prescribe his own worship, just to require what he has prescribed, and powerful to revenge what he has not prescribed [*Bp. Hall*].

Vers. 5 and 31. *Lot.* Methods are the masters of masters [*Tallerand*].

Method is essential, and enables a larger amount of work to be got through with satisfaction. "Method," said the Rev. R. Cecil, "is like packing things in a box: a good packer will get in half as much again as a bad one." Cecil's despatch of business was extraordinary, his motto being, "The shortest way to do many things is to do one thing at once" [*Smiles*].

CHAPTER XXV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter relates to the number and offices of the singers (vers. 1-8); a list of the choirs divided by lot into 24 orders (vers. 9-31).

Vers. 1-8.—The families of singers. Captains, chiefs who preside over the order of service; those mentioned, xxiii. 2; xxiv. 6. *Separated*, divided or distributed for the service. *Prophesy*, publicly recite the sacred service, sing psalms; a reference to the praising element. Ver. 2. *Hands*, direction of A., who prophesied as an inspired poet, composed psalms (Ps. l. 73-83). Ver. 3. *Six*, only 5 names given; entire list only 23, which should be 24 according to the account of lots (vers. 8-31); supply a name (as Sept.), Shimei, which appears in ver. 17. Vers. 4, 5. *Uz*. (cf. ver. 18); *Sheb*. (ver. 20). *King's seer*, not to distinguish H. above his brethren (cf. 2 Chr. xxix. 30; xxxv. 15). All three possessed prophetic gifts. *Words*, matters (*marg.*). *Lift up horn*. Blow with horn or trumpet loudly, a fig. expression for honour and dignity (1 Sam. ii. 1, 10; Ps lxxv. 10; lxxxix. 17). Ver. 6. *These* refers to Heman. *According*, the reading should be, "At the king's hands were Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman," or under the direction of the king, of A., of Jed., and of H. Ver. 8. *Ward* formerly signified a class or division; the term is still used in hospitals: trans. "for the ward (charge) for as well the small as the great, the teacher with the scholar" [*Murphy*].

Vers. 9-31.—The list of choir leaders. Asaph was given the precedence over his brethren, and his four courses were assigned the first, and then each alternate place. Jeduthun took rank next, and received alternate places, first with Asaph, and then with Heman, until his courses were exhausted. After this, all the later places fell necessarily to Heman, whose courses continue without interruption from the 15th to the 24th. This scheme for the apportioning of the courses among the three families must have been a matter of formal arrangement. What the lot decided was simply, on each occasion, which course of the family, whose term it was, should fill the place [*Speak. Com.*]. "The series is so determined by the lot, that the four sons of Asaph hold the first, third, fifth, and seventh places; the six sons of Jeduthun the second, fourth, eighth, tenth, twelfth, and fourteenth places" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF SINGERS AND MUSICIANS.—Verses 1-8.

David had settled the courses of Levites who attended to the priests in their ministrations; now he arranges those appointed to sing and play. Three families of choristers. **I. Their solemn consecration.** "Separated to the service." No disputing, nor taking by force; no self-electing, nor promotion by favour; each carefully appointed to his place and work. No small honour to be separated from the world and called into the family and service of God. Greater honour and responsibility to be further "separated from the congregation of Israel," to be brought nearer to God, and "to stand before the congregation and minister unto them" (Num. xvi. 9). **II. Their sacred employments.** These manifold and necessary. 1. *Prophets with harps.* To reveal the will of God in song; sing psalms indited by the spirit of God. Musical instruments to rouse and quicken the prophetic spirit. This often the method to soothe the mind, to prepare for the work of praise and prayer. Room for instruments yet in service of God; above all, be filled with the spirit, sing with the spirit, and make melody with the heart (Eph. v. 18, 19). 2. *Players of instruments.* Heman presided over the wind instruments, and Jeduthun over the harp, to keep time and observe order. *Music* may help *song*; refine and educate the worshippers of the sanctuary. "As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there." 3. *Superintendents of order.* "Captains of the host" (ver. 1), those who helped David to arrange and superintend the order of worship; leaders of

the courses of priests and Levites, before whom lots were cast; chiefs of the sacred order. Captains of armies held responsible positions; to be leaders in God's house a more distinguished privilege and honour. 4. *All this designed to honour God.* Music, instrumental and vocal; choirs and leaders "instructed" (ver. 7) and employed "to give thanks and praise the Lord" (ver. 3). This delightful and "comely to the upright." Fresh cause for praise every time we enter God's house. If no other theme than the love of Christ, which employs the tongues of heaven, this enough to stir up and perpetuate grateful emotion on earth.

III. Their astonishing number. Every choir, with its leader, consisted of 12, and the 24 choirs contained 288 choristers ($288 = 12 \times 24$), who served a week in rotation. "These, half of whom officiated every week with a proportionate number of assistants, were skilful and experienced musicians, capable of leading and instructing the general musical corps, which comprised no less than 4,000 (ch. xxiii. 5)" [*Jamieson*].

THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF SERVICE.—*Verses 1-31.*

Many special elements of worship set forth. I. *Pleasing variety.* Male and female (ver. 5), small and great, teacher and scholar" (ver. 8), prophesying with harps, psalteries, and cymbals (ver. 1). Variety helps to discriminate and recognise persons, to classify into systems and impersonate with names. "Variety is charming," attractive and beneficial in natural scenery and Christian worship.

II. *Heartly thanksgiving.* Most solemn and delightful to hear a large assembly sing and praise the Lord. May be "like a little heaven below," or the sweet earnest of the "song of Moses and the Lamb." III. *Cultured song.* "They were instructed in the songs of the Lord" (ver. 7). If a regular trained or cultured choir is impossible, there is no excuse for the slovenly songs which dishonour many sanctuaries. If spirituality of subjects and proper frame of heart be an apology, on the same principle may we tolerate bad reading and wretched delivery. Why should harmonious themes of devotion be rendered unpleasant to the outward ears, when a little care and culture, spirit and energy might correct many defects in religious assemblies? IV. *Orderly performance.* This observed and insisted upon. All classes and ages co-operated; instruction imparted and music regulated for desired end. Order is economy of time and work, for without it both are lost. The world began and is ruled with order. Method should characterise our studies, habits, and worship.

V. *Kindly feeling.* Some dutiful and obedient as *sons*; others acted and loved as *brethren*. No partiality, dissatisfaction, nor uncharitableness. All united in feeling, purpose, and effort "for the service of the house of God." "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Let us learn to adapt these ancient rules to modern requirements. Worship should not be stereotyped, lawless, nor irreverent, but room for improvement in psalmody, arrangement, and spirituality.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Workmen according to their service.* 1. Each a part in worship. None silent, none idle. 2. Work no drudgery, no slavery, no reluctance to perform it. 3. "It intimates that it is our duty to make a business of it, and stir up all that is within us to it;

and that in our present state of corruption and infirmity it will not be done as it should be done, without labour and struggle. We must take pains with our hearts to bring them and keep them to this work, and to engage all that is within us." *The*

workmen. The use of this noble word in association with the choral service of the sanctuary is a warning against regarding such service as a dilettante employment. It is a *work* and *labour* in the honourable service of the Lord, and one that was anciently dignified with the name of prophecy. The use of the word for His ministers was adopted by our Lord when He said, "The workman is worthy of his meat" (Matt. x. 10); and was among the last injunctions that fell from the one who "laboured more abundantly than you all," when he exhorted the young bishop Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. ii. 15) [*Blunt*]. *Psalteries. Psalmody in God's house.* Spiritual in its nature, metrical (musical) in its form, cultured in its development. The bearing of these subjects on selection of hymns and tunes, training of choirs, and irreverent singing.

Vers. 5, 6. *A family choir.* The fathers Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman

presided, and their children *were under the hands of their father* (vers. 2, 3, 6). This (1) an example of parental training, (2) of obedience in children, (3) of younger submitting to elder in judgment and conduct. This gives order and honour to families, churches, and communities. *In the words of God* (ver. 5). "I wish the time were come," says Andrew Fuller, "when we could lay aside all men's compositions and sing only the words of Scripture in the praises of God." When shall we find the poet and "the chief musician"?

Ver. 7. *Number.* A number competent, skilful, orderly, and devout. What a pattern choir! All may imbibe their spirit and follow their example. "As it is commanded of God that all should sing, so all should make a conscience of *learning* to sing, as it is a thing that cannot be done decently without learning. Those, therefore, who neglect to learn to sing live in sin, as they neglect what is necessary to their attending one of the ordinances of God's worship" [*President Edwards*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXV.

Ver. 1. *Harps, &c.* History reminds us that great religious reformations have been associated with revived interest "in the service of song in the house of the Lord." Owing to worldliness in the Jewish Church, the beautiful musical service of the Temple declined; but at the revival in the reign of Hezekiah, "the kings and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord, with the words of David and Asaph the seer." Concerning the great American revival in his day, President Edwards writes: "Our public praises were greatly enlivened. In our psalmody God was served in the beauty of holiness. There has been no part of divine worship in which good men have had grace so drawn forth and their hearts so lifted up in the ways of God as in singing his

praise. The people sang with unusual elevation of heart and voice" [*J. S. Pearsall*].

Ver. 3. *To praise the Lord.* He praiseth God best that serveth and obeyeth him most; the life of thankfulness consists in the thankfulness of life [*Burkitt*].

Ver. 7. *Number.* "Nothing promoted the Reformation more," says Bp. Jewel, "than inviting the common people to sing psalms, and that sometimes there would be six thousand persons at St. Paul's Cross singing together, which was very grievous to the Papists."

"From every place below the skies,
The grateful song, the fervent prayer,
The incense of the heart may rise
To heaven, and find acceptance there."
[*J. Pierpont*].

CHAPTER XXVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The courses of the porters (vers. 1-12); lots cast for gate-keepers (vers. 13-19); keepers of treasures (vers. 20-28); the officers and the judges (vers. 29-32).

Vers. 1-12.—Divisions of the porters. On the importance of the office *cf.* chap. ix. 17-27; xxiii. 5. There were 4,000 (chap. xxiii. 6), all from the families of Kohathites and Merarites (ver. 14), divided into twenty-four courses, as the priests and musicians. *Mesh*. Seven sons of whom mentioned (ver. 2); eighteen given in ver. 9, which includes relatives. Another name given (ver. 14); probably alluded to in chap. ix. 19. *Asaph*. Not of preceding chap. A Gershonite, probably the same as Ab. in Ex. vi. 24; and Ebi, 1 Chr. vi. 37, an actual son of Korah. Ver. 4. *Obed*, a porter for time of fixing of ark in Jer. xv. 24; xvi. 38. *Bessed* (*cf.* chap. xxv. 5; 2 Sam. vi. 11, 12). Ver. 6. *Mighty*. Ver. 7. *Strong*. The office of porters required physical strength to open and close ponderous gates, act as guard against theft and insurrection. Ver. 12. *Chief men*, overseers of the watch. Translate "to these divisions of the porters, principal men (use assigned) the watches, together with their brethren, for service in the house of the Lord," *i.e.*, the "chief men," enumerated in vers. 1-11, and amounting to no more than ninety-three, kept the watch and ward of the house, together with a further number of their brethren (4,000 are mentioned in chap. xxiii. 5), who assisted them from time to time [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 13-19.—Arrangements of porters. *Lots*, by which duties assigned to them as to the other Levites, and names of chiefs or captains given, with respective gates allotted to them. Ver. 15. *Assupim*, literally the house of collections (*cf.* Neh. xii. 25); probably a storehouse for grain, wine, and offerings for sustenance of priests. Ver. 16. *Shall*, literally "the gate of projection," the gate, *i.e.*, through which were "thrown out" the sweepings of the temple, the ashes, the offal of the victims, and the like [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 16. *Against ward*. Watch opposite to watch. Hosah had two watches, western and the gate Shallecheth, hence kept one watch over against the other. Ver. 17. *Six*, because eastward gate most frequented. Ver. 18. *Parbar* must designate the space between the western wall of the temple building and the wall of the court, which would be a sort of "precinct" or "purlieu" of the temple. Here were two gates, at one of which two guards were stationed; while at the other, called Shallecheth, which gave upon the causeway, there were four. It is noticeable that in this whole account the Temple is spoken of as if it were existing, when it was not as yet built. We must suppose that David formed the whole plan of the Temple, and fixed the stations and numbers of the porters, though it was left for Solomon to carry his instructions out [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 20-28.—Levites in charge of treasures. *Ahijah*, doubtful reading. The Scriptures give *Aheyhem*, "their brethren," which is preferable, especially as there is no other mention of this A. [*Speak. Com.*]. *Treasures*, gifts and payments (Ex. xxx. 12; Num. xviii. 16). *Laad*. (chap. vi. 17). *Jehi*. (ver. 22), the Jehielite. Jehiel gives name to the family, which accordingly includes his two brothers (xxiii. 8). Two of this family were the grand treasurers, under whom many of the Gershonites may have been employed [*cf. Murphy*]. Ver. 23. *Of or for* the four houses of Kohathites, a kind of preface to rest of the chapter. *Ruler* (ver. 24), chief custodian. Ver. 26. *Dedicated*, for service. Ver. 28. *Hand*, in the care of Shel.

Vers. 29-32.—The officers and judges. *Officers*, scribes or secretaries; magistrates who, attended by their clerks, exercised judicial functions. *Outward*, the people's private and public affairs, contrasted with functions of sacred worship. "There were 6,000 (chap. ii. 3-4) of them, who probably acted like their brethren on the principle of rotation, and these were divided into three classes—one (ver. 29) for the outward business over Israel; one (ver. 30), consisting of 1,700, for the rest of Jordan, 'in all the business and in the service of the king'; and the third (vers. 31, 32), consisting of 2,700, were rulers 'for every matter pertaining to God, and affairs of the king'" [*Jamieson*], *i.e.*, superintended religious matters and the interests of the king.

HOMILETICS.

PORTERS AT THE DOORS.—Verses 1-19.

Porters not like burden-bearers of modern times, but gate-keepers with special duties and responsibilities (Latin *portarius*, the man who attends the

porta). **I. Their special qualifications.** An office of considerable dignity, and only conferred upon men of first rank. More desirable than a courtier's position in a worldly palace. "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, &c." (Ps. lxxxiv. 10). 1. *Physical strength.* "Strong men" (ver. 7); "able men" (ver. 8). To open and shut heavy gates, ward off attacks, and quell insurrection, to exclude intruders and unclean, and to guard against thieves and robbers. In some respects the office military. They were the *soldiers* of Jehovah and *guards* of the temple. 2. *Patient in spirit.* To direct the worshippers, to instruct, to encourage the timid, and continue watch night and day (Deut. x. 10; Lev. viii. 35; Ps. cxxxiv. 2). "A man called 'The Man of the Mountain of the House' went round every night to see that all were in their places, and that none of them slept. If he found any one asleep he struck him, and had liberty to burn his clothes. To this Lightfoot thinks there is a reference in Rev. xv. 16: 'Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.'" 3. *Fixed in number.* No less than 4,000 mentioned, a given number at each door, relieved by others at a certain time. How the number of porters were distributed under 25 chiefs or the 93 captains not informed. **II. Their peculiar mode of appointment.** "They cast lots" as usual. The lot for sacred purposes sanctioned by divine authority (Lev. xvi. 8; Num. xxvi. 55; 1 Sam. xiv. 41; Prov. xvi. 33), and continued until the time of our Lord (Luke i. 9). Among the heathen often used in choice of a champion or priority in combat; in the decision of fate in war; and in the appointment of magistrates, jurymen, and other functionaries. It appears to be a solemn appeal to an omniscient God, and teaches that things apparently accidental are under his control. "What is chance to man, is the appointment of God," says one. "He hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line."

THE BLESSING OF OBEDEDOM.—Verse 5.

"God blessed him," a short, suggestive phrase connecting past history with present condition, and giving an insight into Obededom's history and God's providence. Learn—**I. That God will honour signal service.** Everything in *material* creation is made to serve; no insect, element, or atom created for itself. Man is made to serve. Wealth, social elevation, and privilege put him under greater obligation. Our aim should be to do our duty, that God may lead us to higher and nobler work. Caleb, Phineas, and Obededom distinguished for service and honour. 1. *Honour is given naturally for service.* In war, commerce, and legislation, men are promoted, knighted, and made peers of the realm. "Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof (by natural law, through diligent cultivation); so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured" (Prov. xxvii. 18). 2. *Honour is given providentially.* "He that waiteth faithfully on his *Divine* master shall be honoured." Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel "stood before kings and not mean men." "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour;" honour with his friendship and presence on earth, and at length approved before an assembled universe, "Well done, good and faithful servant." **II. That signal service thus rewarded is commended to our notice.** "Honourable mention" often found in Scripture. 1. *That we may discern the goodness of God.* The smallest service, even a cup of cold water, not overlooked. He is gracious, accepts and crowns our service for him. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." 2. *That we may imitate the example.* We may not be in the same circumstances and able to do the same things, but we may cherish the same spirit and copy their example. "Nobleness of condition," says Dr. Chalmers, "is not essential as a school for

nobleness of character. It is delightful to think that humble life may be just as rich in moral grace and moral grandeur as the loftiest places in society; that as true dignity of principle may be earned by him who in homeliest drudgery plies his conscientious task, as by him who stands entrusted with the fortunes of an empire."

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good;
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood" [*Tennyson*].

GUARDS OF THE STORES TYPES OF CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS.—*Verses 20–28.*

Temple watch a warfare. Two grand keepers of stores—one to maintain officers and services, the other for things consecrated to the building, "in the house of God." Many assisted, as a kind of brotherhood, in the use and defence of treasures. This service a type of Christian warfare. I. *In the acquisition of the treasure.* Much of it "spoils won in battles," taken from the enemy, therefore gained by courage, strength, and conflict. The treasures of Christian experience, the privileges of the Christian Church, and the advance of Christian missions only acquired through conflict. II. *In the defence of the treasure.* Religion in the soul, God's kingdom in the world must be kept or maintained by fighting. Warfare is constant, enemies attack, temptations surround. The battle not yet over, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and *having done all*, to stand." III. *In the use of the treasure.* Ancient trophies were hung up in heathen temples. Plunder was divided, and priests had influence to procure the gods certain offerings and acceptable presents. Our "spoils" gained through God, and must be dedicated to him. Samuel, Saul, Abner, and Joab had collected treasures which David now consecrated to the highest purpose, "to maintain the house of the Lord." Our gold and silver, time and strength, trophies gained over sin, Satan, and the world, all laid at the Saviour's feet. Abraham gave Melchisedec the spoils, and the victorious officers presented their "oblation to the Lord" (Num. xxxi. 50).

THE OFFICERS AND JUDGES.—*Verses 29–32.*

Three separate lists presented doorkeepers, treasure-keepers, and rulers of civil affairs, or "outward business over Israel." Doorkeepers were Korahites and Merarites, to whom belonged Obededom and his descendants. The treasures of God's house under the charge of Gershonite branches; the dedicated things under a branch of Kohathites. The service "of scribes and judges" was committed to the Izarites, along with Chenaniah (ver. 29). Notice—I. **The character of their office.** There are two departments. 1. *The judges administered the law.* Singers, porters, and Levites employed in the service of the sanctuary were not concerned in this business. One department enough to fill and understand. Pray not for enlargement of your sphere, but for ability to fill it. 2. *The officers collected the revenue.* Managed "God's tithes and the king's taxes." Thus city and country, Jehovah and the king were cared for, idolatry and injustice avoided, civil and sacred interests interwoven and advanced. II. **The period in which they held office.** "In the fortieth year of the reign of David" (ver. 31), the last year of his reign. He felt the end approaching, and arranged the orders of the sanctuary. We should diligently improve our time, and if *we do not reap the fruit of our labours, let us not grudge it to our successors.*

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 5. *Blessing of Obed.* I. *What it consists of.* 1. Family increase. A large family of eight sons, descendants of whom he might be proud. 2. Family honour. His sons exalted to places of trust in the sanctuary. A great blessing to have children eminent in the service of God. 3. Family reputation. Held in great repute for conduct and character. "The memory of the just is blessed." II. *How it is gained.* Not by wealth and worldly influence. 1. By a right mind. Obed. was willing, very ready to take the ark when all others were afraid. When the heart is right before God, we shall be eager to render any help. 2. By right action. This springs from genuine affection. The mind has its own thoughts and actings. These anterior to all outward acts. Hence the saying, "Think before you act." "For as he thinketh in his heart so is he."

Ver. 10. *A father's favourite.* Simri made *chief*, not by right of primogeniture, but in office. If the *firstborn*, that is, the issue of the first-born had failed: we learn "the vicissitudes of families," the uncertain tenure of earthly fame and fortune. But very likely he was better qualified for office than his elder brother. His father saw in him eminent qualifications. What differences in the same family! How anxious parents are to possess and promote clever children!

Ver. 14. *A wise counsellor.* Lit. a giver of counsel with wisdom—a high commendation. Many have counsel, but no wisdom. Many give counsel, but not wisely. Zechariah, a wise man, equal to his father and held a chief place. 1. The service of God requires wise men. 2. God in his providence raises up wise men. Hence, 3. This service is wisely and efficiently carried on in all ages.

Vers. 20–28. *Ministers stewards in God's house.* "Allowed to be put in

trust." Hence responsibility and honour; requiring piety, administrative ability, and faithfulness. "*Stewards of the mysteries of God.*" Not depositories, nor owners, but dispensers ("rightly dividing" or dispensing) the word to others. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (*cf.* 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2). *The treasury of God's house.* 1. Its origin. As far back as the time of Samuel its foundations laid (ver. 28); such had been once established under Joshua (vi. 24); but soon exhausted and not heard of under later judges until Samuel. 2. Its object. "To maintain the house of the Lord" (ver. 27) in its services and its officials. The Heb. means to *strengthen*, not the outward building merely, but to help its servants, encourage its efforts, and build up its worshippers. 3. The necessity of its replenishment. The more God gives to us the more we should devote to him. Great success in business, great "spoils" in war, call for proportionate returns. Church revenues ever needed. "The Lord's position" should never be forgotten.

Vers. 29–32. *The two spheres of Christian service.* 1. They are *distinguished* from one another. Civil and religious affairs, Church and State not opposed to one another, but entirely distinct. One concerns earthly, and the other heavenly affairs in nature and purpose. "My kingdom is not of this world." 2. They are *intimately related* one to another. The Church may help and intone the State, but the State should never control nor oppose the Church. "It would certainly be ruinous to true religion," says A. Clarke, "to make the State dependent on the Church; nor should the Church be dependent on the State. Let them mutually support each other; and let the State rule by the *laws*, and the Church live by the *Bible*."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXVI.

Vers. 1-19. *Porters*. Five things are requisite to a good officer—ability, clean hands, despatch, patience, and impartiality [*W. Penn.*]. *Divisions*. One man perhaps proves miserable in the study of the law, who might have flourished in that of physic or divinity; another runs his head against the pulpit, who might have been serviceable to his country at the plough; and the third proves a very dull and heavy philosopher, who possibly would have made a good mechanic, and have done well enough at the useful philosophy of the spade or anvil [*South*].

Ver. 27. *Spoils*. There was a dispute in the army of Mohammed between young men who had fought and old who had stayed under the ensigns. Mohammed pretended to have received orders from heaven to divide the booty. This the origin of ch. viii. in *The Koran*, “entitled the Spoils, revealed

at Medina,” beginning thus, “They will ask thee concerning the spoils. Answer, The division of the spoils belongeth unto God and the apostle” [*cf. Ed. by Geo. Sale*]. It was customary among the Romans, when entering upon war, to promise some part of their prey to their *deities*. There was a temple at Rome dedicated to *Jupiter Prædator*, because a part of the prey was due to him [*cf. A. Clarke in loco*].

Ver. 29. *Officers*. The curious fact comes out in all the arrangements that office was hereditary. The heads of the different departments are named after the heads of the families employed in them. All that David seems to have done was to restore and regulate a system that had been organised at the first settlement of the nation. In this respect it presents a striking contrast to our modern customs [*Murphy*].

CHAPTER XXVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] We have captains of monthly divisions of the army (vers. 1-15), princes of tribes (vers. 16-24), stewards of treasures and possessions of the king (vers. 25-29), and David's counsellors (vers. 30-34).

Vers. 1-15.—*Captains of divisions*. Arrangements for army similar to those for priests and Levites. Military force consisted of 12 companies of 24,000 each, a company serving a month at a time (2 Sam. xxiii. 8; 1 Chr. xi. 11). *Chief fathers*, princes of tribes and chief officers of state. *Captains*, subordinate to commanders of monthly divisions. *Officers*, scribes who performed duty of commissariat, and kept muster-roll in army. This verse heads the chapter. “It may be safely assumed that the heading originally referred to a more elaborate description of the classes and their different officers, for which we have here only a shorter extract” [*Keil*]. Ver. 2. *Jash.*, son of Hachmoni (ch. xi. 11; 2 Sam. xxiii. 8); *Zab.*, one of his ancestors, or these may be different names of the same person. Ver. 3. *Perez*, Pharez. Ver. 4. *Dod.*, read Eleazar, son of Dodo (ch. xi. 12; 2 Sam. xxiii. 9). Ver. 5. *Ben.* (2 Sam. xxiii. 20-23). *Chief priest*, i.e., chief prince. Abiathar chief priest, but Jehoiada head of Aaronite family. Ver. 7. *Asahel*, slain by Abner (2 Sam. ii. 18-23; xxiii. 24); his name given in honour of his memory. Ver. 8. *Sham.* (*cf.* 2 Sam. xxiii. 11; 1 Chr. xi. 27). Ver. 11. *Sibb*, for different spelling see ch. xx. 4; 2 Sam. xxi. 18. Ver. 15. *Oth.*, a descendant of the judge in succession to Joshua (Judg. iii. 9-11).

Vers. 16-24.—*Princes of the tribes*. This a civil institution, in contrast to the military ruler. “Rulers” or “princes” of the tribes appear to have been the eldest lineal descendants of the patriarchs, according to the law of primogeniture [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 18. *Elihu*, for “Eliab,” eldest son of Jesse (1 Sam. xvi. 6). Ver. 21. *Abner*, Saul's general. Ver. 22. *These*, princes of most of the tribes, for “Gad and Asher omitted.

Similarly, Dan and Zebulun omitted from the genealogical survey of the tribes in chs. iv.-vii. We can only suppose that the lists, as they came down to the writer of Chronicles, were incomplete" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 23. Took not, but only those above twenty years, or of those that drew sword (1 Chr. xxi. 5). Said, therefore to number all above and under twenty years old would have been immense trouble and offensive to God. Ver. 24. Finished not (cf. 1 Chr. xxi. 6). *Chronicles*. The census was not completed; full details not reported to David by enumerators, and therefore not registered in public archives or daily records.

Vers. 25-31.—Stewards of royal possessions. Treasures, those in royal palace, private accumulations. Storehouses, scattered in country, for taxes paid in kind, not in money. Castles, watch-towers in border districts exposed to raids from plundering tribes in the desert (cf. 2 Chr. xxvi. 10; xxvii. 4). Ver. 31. Substance, consisting of money, fruits, labourers, flocks, and land. "David had become, by some means or other, a large landed proprietor, as well as a capitalist, possessed of much moveable wealth" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 32-34.—David's ministers. Compare in contents and style with its counterpart in 2 Sam. viii. 15-18; 1 Chr. xviii. 15-17; 2 Sam. xx. 23-26. "The list is chiefly supplemental, the officers mentioned being, in the main, such as have not been noticed before—e.g., king's counsellor, king's friend, companion of the king's sons. The list cannot belong to a very late part of David's reign, since it contains the name of Ahithophel, who slew himself during Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. xvii. 23)" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 32. Uncle, David's "nephew," as word often used (cf. ch. xx. 7 and 2 Sam. xxi. 21). Ver. 33. Ahith., only mention made by writer of Chronicles. Companion, "king's friend" (1 Ki. iv. 5). Ver. 34. Jehoiada, son of Ben., named probably after his grandfather.

HOMILETICS.

THE MILITARY FORCE OF DAVID.—Verses 1-15.

Here an account of the army, the militia, with its officers and regulations. The organisation in part inherited from Saul, but greatly developed by David.

I. The strength of its numbers. Twelve legions, each 24,000 men; divided into regiments of 1,000, and these again into companies of 100 men, under the command of their respective subalterns, there being 24 captains of thousands and 240 centurions. This a sufficient force for ordinary purposes of State; for putting down sudden attacks or popular tumults, and repelling invasion. "When extraordinary emergencies demanded a larger force, the whole standing army could easily be called to arms, amounting to 288,000 or 300,000 including the 12,000 officers that naturally attended on the twelve princes" (vers. 16-24). "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host (by the greatness of his warlike might). A mighty man (a warrior) is not delivered by much strength" (Ps. xxxiv. 16).

II. The limited period of its service. "Month by month." This monthly course would not be burdensome to the country nor royal exchequer; would be a training and discipline; and would permit every soldier to return to the pursuits and duties of private life for eleven months in the year. None compelled to serve, nor at expenses for more than a month, which could easily be borne. Every wise king will contribute for public safety, with as little expense as possible to the people. "The prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression."

III. The officers by which it was commanded. These termed "the chief fathers," the hereditary "heads of tribes, who, like chieftains of clans, possessed great power and influence."

1. *Men of great experience.* Not ignorant and unaccustomed to warfare. They are mentioned among David's worthies in 2 Sam. xxiii. and 1 Chr. xi. "At the head of his army were officers of consummate experience, and what was more highly esteemed in the warfare of the time, extraordinary personal activity, strength, and valour. His heroes remind us of those of Arthur or Charlemagne, excepting that the *armour* of the feudal chieftains constituted their superiority; here main strength of body and dauntless fortitude of mind" [*Hist. of Jews,* Milman].

2. *Men promoted by merit.* Tried and distinguished

by great actions, then advanced to great preferments. Favoritism had no influence. Each appointed to office for which best qualified. Men of worth thus encouraged, and public efficiency promoted. "Many seek the ruler's favour" in social servility; to whom a smile from superiors is like a sunbeam. But princes find it good policy to promote men of truth and incorruptible honesty rather than sycophants and time-servers. "The king's favour is towards a wise servant." The great King will finally promote "the faithful and wise servant" who has improved his talents, been diligent in his work, and is ready for his account.

THE CIVIL OFFICERS OF DAVID.—*Verses 16–22.*

Here a list of hereditary chiefs or rulers of tribes—tribal princes—at the time of David's census. Gad and Ashar for some reason excluded. Take the record—**I. As illustrating the optimist style of the writer.** David pictured in his struggles, elevation, and grandeur. His wars and conquests, the extension of his kingdom, and the list of his officers. Arrangements sacred and civil, and the use of symbolic numbers illustrate the same tendency. A preference for brilliant scenes. Parts omitted chiefly dark. "Such as would disturb and in some points obscure the lustre of the picture. He collects all that is fitted to represent the hero-king in his greatness, and the activity of his reign as an uninterrupted chain of splendid theocratic events. To finish a picture that presents David in the meridian height of his glory and mighty achievements is the obvious aim of all that our author adds in the way of supplement on the ground of his resources to the life-picture of the great king as given in the Books of Samuel" [*Lange*]. **II. As upholding ancient institutions.** Moses gave to every tribe its chief. Many references to the Pentateuch, Levitical rites, and prescriptions of the law. A few changes are made to meet the exigencies of the time; but constant regard is paid to "the command of the Lord God of Israel" in ancient days. Institutions educational and industrial, social and religious, have a wonderful energy, re-duplicate human strength, embody and perpetuate the acquisitions of society in sacred forms. There is much to conserve as well as create. The spirit of reverence must ever be joined with the spirit of invention; the old and the new must be inseparably linked together in the work of the legislator and social reformer. "Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it."

THE RESTRAINTS OF GOD ON THE WILL OF MAN.—*Verses 23, 24.*

God restrained David from completing the census, and often controls men's actions for the accomplishment of his will. His sway most absolute and indisputable. He could not fulfil his designs without this. But no interference with human volition and responsibility. Divine restraint over the human will difficult to understand, but involves no absurdity. How does God restrain man's will? **I. By revealing his own will.** "The Lord had said, &c." We are apt to do what *we* think is right; hence need for a clear, distinct revelation from God. This is given. 1. *God's will should be our law.* It is best, the safest and only guide. 2. *To disobey his law is rebellion.* David knew God had promised that his people should be innumerable, yet was determined to number them, though regarding the custom not to include those under twenty. A full and unmistakable revelation of duty should induce to its performance and check, as intended, in disobedience. **II. By restraining man's will.** David, unchecked by Joab, determined to carry out his own wish and make arrangements for political and military purposes. God restrained him and kept him

in bounds. 1. *By inward conviction of wrong-doing.* "I have sinned." Wounded to the quick, as if struck by an arrow. Conscience roused, accused, and checked. We cannot fly in the face of God without moral rebuke and self-accusation. 2. *By outward restraints.* When Joab's reluctance and natural delay produced no impression, God sent the plague. This answered the end. Thus God controls the human heart. (Abimelech, Pharaoh, and Babylonish monarchs.) "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, &c."

DAVID'S POSSESSIONS.—Verses 25–31.

I. What they consisted of. "The king's treasures," royal possessions in palace, and stores in other places. 1. Treasures, gold, silver, &c., in Jerusalem. 2. Goods in the provinces, grain and stores in castles, cities, villages, and in the fields (ver. 25). 3. Cultivators of the ground (ver. 26). 4. Vineyards and their produce (ver. 27). 5. Olive-trees and their produce, and sycamore plantations (ver. 28). 6. Flocks and herds in different districts. 7. Camels and asses (ver. 30). As younger son, David had not much private property (1 Sam. xvi. 11–20). Now a large landed proprietor, and a capitalist owning moveable wealth. **II. How they were gained.** By successful wars. During Saul's lifetime he had made raids and gained wealth (1 Sam. xxvii. 8, 9; xxx. 20). He received much spoil, and acquired newly conquered countries (2 Sam. viii. 4). "His olive grounds and sycamore plantations were in the 'low plain,' which was the country of the Philistines (ver. 28); camels and flocks were pastured by Arabs (vers. 30, 31); probably on lands formerly belonging to Arabs. No doubt he derived considerable revenue from subject kings (1 Sam. viii. 2; x. 19), as Solomon did (1 Kings iv. 21), and he may have bought or rented lands in different places. There may possibly have been a certain quantity of public unassigned land in Palestine at the time when he became king, which would naturally fall into his hands to be dealt with as he chose. Further, he enjoyed, of course, the usual rights of a Jewish king over the landed property of his subjects, and was thus entitled to receive a tithe of the produce (1 Sam. viii. 15–17). He would also from time to time obtain those 'benevolences' which were expected from all on certain occasions" [*Speak. Com.*]. **III. How they were guarded.** "All these were rulers of the substance" (ver. 31). The king divided his private possessions into twelve departments, like his public affairs. In these departments were choice men, able to manage and guard his treasure. No officers for state and display, none for sport, but all for service. Men loyal and obedient, in whom the king could put confidence. "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule."

THE MINISTERS OF DAVID'S COURT.—Verses 32–34.

In this list David's counsellors, seven men of high position, worthy apparently of special mention. Four or five known in other capacity (*cf.* lists ch. xviii. 14–17; 2 Sam. viii. 16–18; xx. 23–26). 1. *The counsellors of the king.* First *Jonathan*, kinsman of David, a politician, scribe, and eminent for wisdom. Then *Ahithophel*, cunning; held in great estimation, and generally followed in counsel. After death of Ahith., *Jehoiada* and *Abiathar* succeeded in the privy council. 2. *The companion of the king.* "*Hushai* was the king's companion," the friend whom he entrusted with secrets, and whose conversation was acceptable (2 Sam. xvi. 37). H. an opponent of Ahithophel, but honest and faithful. 3. *The tutor of the king's sons.* *Jehiel*, the Hachmonite, filled this position; an office mentioned only here. 4. *The commander-in-chief to the king.* *Joab*, as generalissimo,

would be in some sense minister of war, and belong to rank of counsellor. As such he appears to act in taking the census of the people (ch. xxi.). Such men eminent for wisdom and integrity, most honourable and trusty advisers, but David preferred his Bible above all, says one. "Thy testimonies also are my delight and *my counsellors*" (men of counsel) (Ps. cxix. 24). A privilege to be counsellor to such a king; but Jehovah has friends whom he admits to his audience. "The secret (privy council met for deliberation) of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant" (Ps. xxv. 14).

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1-22. 1. *David as a powerful prince, a type of Christ.* Thousands trained as regular militia for his service. His kingdom well defended, and secure against all assault. Christ's kingdom and Church well guarded—never wants champions; legions of angels at his command. 2. *David's soldiers a type of Christ's subjects.* They are bound to fight, should never desert, and will be sure to win if faithful.

Vers. 23, 24. "The Lord said he would increase Israel." *The wonderful promise.* 1. Embodied in the tradition of the nation. 2. The ground of hope for the people. 3. Fulfilled by the providence of God. Or, *An innumerable people* (cf. Gen. xv. 5; xxii. 17; xxvi. 4). 1. In actual existence. 2. In future calculations. The actual number of the people living at a given time is not the sum of the Lord's people. In the Divine estimate those gone before and those coming after are taken into account. Can we count the stars?

then may we number God's children! They are perpetually increasing!

Ver. 27. *A remembered name. Asahel,* captain of the fourth course, died early in David's reign (2 Sam. ii. 12-23). But greatly respected, and gave name to family or regiment. *The value of a good name.* A good reputation inseparable from man, outlasts every worldly blessing. "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

Ver. 33. *The King's companion.* Heb., friend or companion. A great privilege and distinction. "Hushai's is not obscurely indicated in the questions which Absalom addressed to him, "Is this thy kindness to *thy friend*?" Why wentest thou not with *thy friend*?" (2 Sam. xvi. 17). On his devotion to David, see 2 Sam. xv. 32-37; xvii. 5-16" [*Speak. Com.*]. Abraham "a *friend of God.*" "Ye are *my friends,*" says Christ, "if ye do what I command you."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXVII.

Vers. 1-15. *Captains.* An English captain in the year 1759, who was beating up for recruits in the vicinity of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, met one day a Moravian Indian, and asked him whether he had a mind to be a soldier. "No," answered he, "I am already engaged." "Who is your captain?" asked the officer. "I have a very brave and excellent captain," replied the Indian. "His name is Jesus Christ. Him will I serve as long as I live. My life is at his disposal." Reproved

by the Indian's answer, the officer left him unmolested [*Baxendale*].

Vers. 25-29. *Our treasures.* If every man works at that which nature fitted him for, the cows (ver. 26) will be well attended [*La Fontaine*]. Not what I have, but what I do, is my kingdom [*Carlyle*].

Vers. 32-34. *Counsellor.* The best friends are those who stimulate us to that which is good (Heb. x. 24) [*Nicholls*]. Every friend is to the other a sun and a sunflower also; he

attracts and follows [*Richter*]. "A faithful friend is a strong defence, and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure" (Ecclus. vi. 14).

"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by *hearty counsel*" (Prov. xxvii. 9).

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter and following comprise last words of David, special directions to Solomon in building the temple and succeeding to the throne.

Vers. 1-4.—*The assembly of princes.* All various officials, of whom account formerly given; really the whole court. *Princes*, the term one under which all persons of importance might be included not comprised in any other of the six classes [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 2. *Stood.* An effort in his age and weakness. *Brethren*, modest and affectionate. *House of rest.* Contrast with movable tabernacle. *Ready.* Gathered materials. Ver. 3. *War* (2 Sam. vii. 5-13; 1 Kings v. 5). Ver. 4. *Judah* (Gen. xlix. 8-10). *Like me* (cf. 1 Sam. xvi.).

Vers. 5-8.—*Solomon declared successor.* Succession indefinite at first through Nathan, then a distinct revelation that Solomon was chosen. Ver. 6. *Courts*—*i.e.*, temple courts (2 Chron. iv. 9). *Constant* (1 Kings iii. 14; ix. 4). Ver. 8. *Now.* Appeal to congregation first, then to Solomon in their presence. *Keep and seek.* Exhortation similar to that of Moses (Deut. xxx. 15-20).

Vers. 9, 10.—*Charge to Solomon.* *Know*, experimentally. *Search.* Least failure observed (cf. Ps. cxxxix. 1-3). *Seek him* (cf. Ps. ix. 10). *Strong* (ch. xxii. 13; cf. Ps. xxvii. 14; Ps. xxxi. 24). Ver. 10. Special duty urged.

Vers. 11-21.—*The plan of the temple.* *Pattern*, working plan, as Ex. xxv. 10. Set of directions in writing. *Porch* before the sanctuary (2 Chron. iii. 4). *Houses.* Holy and most holy places. *Treas.* Chambers built round the wall (1 Kings vi. 5). *Upper chambers.* Over most holy place (2 Chron. iii. 9). *Inner parlours.* Lower rooms of side buildings of holy place, and perhaps also of porch. Ver. 12. *By the spirit.* Literally the pattern of all that was with him in the spirit or the form of all that floated before his mind. David's spirit, not God's spirit spoken of [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 13. *Courses.* Explained chaps. xxiii.-xxv. Ver. 14. *Weight.* Fixing proportionate weights in things of gold. *Candlesticks* in temple were ten (2 Chron. iv. 7); silver ones for uses not specified. *Tables.* Ten connected with shewbread (1 Kings vii. 48); silver tables for minor purposes. *Bowls* for sprinkling (2 Chron. iv. 11). *Cups* for libations (Ex. xxv. 29). *Basons*, covered vessels, tankards. *Chariot.* Two cherubs on mercy-seat constituted the chariot on which Jehovah rides (cf. Ps. xviii. 10; xcix. 1). Ver. 19. *Hand.* Pattern given by one of the prophets in writing; or by divine revelation, for which hand of Jehovah is equivalent (2 Chron. xxix. 15). *Vers. 20, 21.* Resume address broken off in ver. 10. For former part, cf. chap. xxii. 13. *Command.* Literally, for all thy words.

HOMILETICS.

DAVID'S ADDRESS TO THE PRINCES.—Verses 1-8.

An assembly convened, consisting of princes of tribes, captains, and subordinate officers of the army, stewards of the royal household, and nobles of the land. The *nation* represented. The occasion solemn and important. David the centre and chief actor of the scene, about to abdicate in a different way from Charles V., before his grand audience, after a life spent in military pursuits and ambitious projects. The scene portrayed worth attention. Notice—**I. The attitude which David assumed.** "The king stood up upon his feet." Probably had been sitting before; very likely recovered from sickness mentioned

(1 Kings i. 1). He receives strength in age and infirmity to stand up to improve the opportunity, and to inspire his audience with his own earnestness and enthusiasm. A reverent, dignified attitude that he felt due to the occasion, indicative of the influence of a great thought over the mind of man, and the power of that influence even in old age to rouse to duty. "Forsake me not, O God, in mine old age, when I am grey-headed, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to all them that are yet for to come" (Ps. lxxi. 16). **II. The spirit which David manifested.** "My brethren and my people." 1. *A humble spirit.* "My people" whom I rule, with whom I rank myself in this great work. He is their superior, but does not forget the command "that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren." 2. *An affectionate spirit.* "My brethren" whom I love, not *servants* whom I command. Affection and condescension to inferiors becoming in monarchs. Not less honoured, but more beloved. "Love levels all," said Cervantes. 3. *A spirit of authority.* "Hear me." The king's circumstances, history, and experience gave weight to his authority. His message solemn, required attention, and must be obeyed, if the nation prospered. "Where the word of a king is there is power." Court and people are bound in faithfulness to their sovereign, and to the interests of their country. Hence "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing" (Ecc. viii. 4, 5). **III. The ambition which David cherished.** "I had it in mine heart to build, &c." (ver. 2). His cherished resolve not to be great, to build a family and extend a kingdom, &c., but "to build an house" for God, a purpose which filled his heart, occupied his time, and to accomplish which he gave his gold and gathered his materials. A noble purpose of immense value in life in giving strength and direction. To have one great aim, constantly present and made the habit of mind, to make every thought and every pursuit to centre upon this aim, will secure the happiness and improvement of life. **IV. The confession which David makes.** God denied him the pleasure of building. In his heart, not executed by his hand, "because thou hast been a man of war," a confession candid and unreserved. Many things veiled in forgetfulness, passed by in silence, and never made prominent and public. This a warning to all, that sins stain character, hinder from noblest work, and give unsuitableness to its accomplishment. "The Lord hath purposed; who shall disannul it?"

"A greater power than we can contradict
Hath thwarted our intents" [*Shaks.*].

THE TESTIMONY OF A NOBLE LIFE.—Verses 4-6.

David here reviews his life, and at its close testifies to the goodness and grace of God. **I. In his choice to the throne God displays his sovereignty.** The different steps mentioned. The tribe of Judah, then his father's house, and among the sons of his father he alone chosen. Tribe, family, individual. The choice not according to man's judgment. One after another set aside. "The Lord hath not chosen *these*;" right one found at length. "*This* is he." **II. In his acquisition of the kingdom God manifests his providence.** "To be king over Israel for ever." Trained in shepherd life under a sense of duty, dependence upon God and self-control, disciplined by Divine providence to wait and prepare for the throne, gifted by God's grace with special characteristics of prudence, wisdom, generosity, and courage, he was elevated to be king. The recollection of this sudden exaltation from humble station deeply impressed him through life. His last words a declaration of God's providence and mercy. **III. In his son's succession to the throne God fulfils his promise.** "He said unto me, Solomon, thy son shall build, &c." God seen through his own life down to succession of

his son—who should build the temple, be established on the throne, and be taken into special covenant with God (*cf.* 2 Sam. vii. 12–16). Blessings entailed upon family and posterity—“the promise to you and your children.” What we do, or sincerely design to do for God, though prevented, we shall in no wise lose reward. Satisfaction to parents while they live, to have signs and assurance through Divine promise of family piety and prosperity when they are dead.

THE CHOICE OF SOLOMON.—Verses 5–8.

David addressing the assembly traces his election to the sovereignty of God. Solomon presented in the same set speech as successor; chosen on the same principle as himself, therefore worthy of reception and obedience. Notice—**I. The method by which Solomon came to reign.** “He hath chosen Solomon to sit upon the throne of the kingdom.” Divine selection all through history of father and son. Human events to David not fortuitous occurrences, but Divine acts. Hence design, goodness, power, and providence in individual life. **II. The conditions on which his government will be established.** Not by his policy, armies, and fleets; but by loyal obedience to God. This the rule for nations, leaders, and king. God purposes and arranges not in disregard to our response to his commands. 1. *The constant obedience of the sovereign.* “I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments.” The security and perpetuity of Solomon’s reign depended upon this condition. 2. *The intelligent obedience of the people.* “Keep and seek for all the commandments” (ver. 8). *Seek*, inquire to know; then *keep*, practise what you know; *all* commandments. Obedience intelligent, obedience impartial, and obedience uniform, the triple conditions of temporal prosperity, of real *establishment* of families and nations—the only way to enjoy our inheritance and to transmit it safely to our successors. “That ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.”

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *David assembled.* 1. In a critical time of national history—the king’s departure, and choice of successor. 2. To hear parting counsel of the dying monarch. Advice to Solomon, princes, and all; advice concerning present and future.

Vers. 5–8. *Solomon, my son.* Scarce any of the Roman emperors had a son to succeed him; all, or most of them, till Constantine, died unnatural deaths [*Trapp*]. *Shall build* a material temple; Christ, a mystical, that is the Church, which is the house of God (1 Tim. iii. 15). For this and the following promises are, some peculiar to Solomon, some to Christ, and some to both as the types and antitypes [*Ibid.*]. *I will be his father* (ver. 6). Solomon’s by adoption and regeneration. See 2 Cor. vi. 18. Christ’s, by eternal generation and personal union. God

saith the same to all Christian princes, but then they must make it their case to build him a spiritual temple [*Ibid.*]. *Be constant* (ver. 7). Hebrew, strong; for he will be hard put to it. God’s promises are conditional. See 2 Sam. vii. *As at this day.* Solomon had been well instructed in the ways of God, both by father (Prov. iv. 4) and mother (Prov. xxxi. 1), and while young he did God’s commandments and judgments, as hinted in these words, but he was not so constant. Ver. 8. *Keep and seek.* Keep what you know already, and seek to be yet further instructed. By this latter word “seek” *tollit ignorantiam illam crassam*, saith Vatablus, he striketh at affected ignorance [*Ibid.*].

Ver. 8, grounded on this promise is a *double* charge; first, to the people, and then to Solomon. *Keep-*

ing and seeking the commandments of the Lord, is at once *the test* and *the security* of his people [*Murphy*].

A religious training. I. *Given with great affection.* Many sons. Solomon chosen, &c. (ver. 5). II. *Practical in its tendency.* "Keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord." A training that deadens; this quickening

intellectually and morally. III. *Solemn in its sanctions.* "In the sight of all Israel, the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God." IV. *Benevolent in its design.* To be established in our position, and to preserve and hand down our trust to others. "That ye may possess this good land, &c."

HOMILETICS.

DAVID'S CHARGE TO SOLOMON.—Verses 9, 10, and 20, 21.

Very touching and important is this charge; everything to give solemnity and perpetual interest to the scene. Solomon urged to—**I. A personal acquaintance with God.** "Know thou the God of thy father"—not theoretic knowledge, Solomon plenty of that; but practical and experimental. David concerned that his son should be religious; not great, popular, and wise. Knowledge of God the foundation of all religion and usefulness. This knowledge includes—1. *An intelligent view of his nature.* Impossible to know God perfectly, but belief in his existence, holiness, omniscience, and truth. The science of God, the central, the vital science—that which gives life, unity, and beauty to every branch of knowledge. 2. *This knowledge obtained by obedience.* Loving and serving God the way to know him. "If any man will do his will, he shall know."
II. A practical regard to God's service. Knowledge that is *life* first, and then service. Much excitement, effort, and service without personal acquaintance with God. 1. *A willing service.* "With a willing mind." The hand may act without the will. Service mechanical, drudgery, unless willingly given. God requires consent—does not force nor constrain. Taskmasters force (Pharaoh). God's service free and voluntary. "Who is *willing* to consecrate his service?" 2. *A steadfast service.* "Serve him with a perfect heart"—with an undivided mind; with the whole heart. Not "*a double heart*" (Heb., a heart and a heart), Ps. xii. 2. No duplicity nor deception; no wavering, halting between two opinions, nor compromise (Matt. vi. 24). "Ungodly professors have two hearts, two lords, two ends, two ways" (*Cocceius*). "Come not unto the Lord with a double heart" (Eccles. i. 28). **III. The importance of the work bequeathed him to finish.** "Thou art to build a house for the sanctuary." Solomon's whole life should be active and holy service. The temple special and inherited work. 1. *Undertake cautiously.* "Take heed now." Work difficult, requiring prudence and care. Solomon young and inexperienced, and possibly might meet with indifference, if not opposition. 2. *Finish it courageously.* "Be strong and do it." Do it without delay and reluctance. "Blessed is the man that findeth his work," says Carlyle. Many find, but neglect it. The blessedness in doing it. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them."
IV. The powerful inducements to the performance of this work. Solomon's circumstances most eventful and inspiring. Ever surrounded by influences and motives to performance of duty. 1. *He is chosen to the work.* "The Lord hath chosen thee to build." Not every man is a builder. Some gather materials, and others plan and lay the foundation. God chooses and qualifies his architects in Church and State. "I have raised him up . . . he shall build my city" (Isa. xlv. 13). 2. *The people are ready to co-operate with him in the work.* "The courses of the priests and the Levites shall be with thee" (verse 21). Advice and help—workmen "willing and skilful" of great

service. When none oppose, when "the princes and all the people are wholly at command," then work is likely to succeed, and we should be eager to carry it on. 3. *God will help him.* "The Lord God, even my God, will be with thee" (verse 20). God, who strengthens and prospers the father, will "not fail nor forsake the son." These motives fit to stir up, animate true-hearted workers, and admonish to action. Avoid *fear*; "fear not, nor be dismayed. Cherish *courage*;" be strong and of good courage. Begin thy work at once, "do it." "Arise, therefore, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee."

"Do what thou dost, as if the earth were heaven,
And that thy last day were the judgment day:
When all's done, nothing's done" [*Kingsley*].

GOD'S RELATION TO HUMAN LIFE.—Verse 9.

This description of God introduced as an argument for sincerity of life. He sees, knows, our hearts and actions; therefore serve him perfectly, &c. Learn —**I. That our life is exposed to God's inspection.** "The Lord searcheth all hearts." This implies that all our deportment is open to God's inspection. Some imagine that God is too great to regard such a creature as man. But what he created is not beneath him to notice. To Him great and small are equal. He is cognisant of an atom as of a globe; of an insect as an angel. From Him nothing hid. "Hell is naked before Him, and destruction hath no covering." "He looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven." **II. That our service to God should spring from sincere motives.** "And understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." God's attention not limited to actions and words—his province and prerogative to read and understand "*imaginations*" (phantases, *imaged* deeds) "of the thoughts." Hence no deceiving Him by falsehood and form. He desires "truth in the inward parts," as opposed to hypocrisy and self-deceit (Ps. li. 6). Hearts must be sincere and thoughts of God pure. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked" with heartless, outward service. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts," &c. **III. That our welfare depends upon our conduct towards God.** He is to be known and served. Our interest to obey. 1. *True service will be rewarded.* "If thou seek him he will be found of thee." The smallest service no trifle to God. David's desire to build well-pleasing to God. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." The will accepted for the deed. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath." 2. *Opportunity neglected will be disastrous.* "If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." *Forsake*, after knowing, obeying, and working for him. *Cast off*, as worthless and lost. Solomon's interest, duty, and danger are put before him in true and impressive light by a pious and dying father. If youth give no heed to parental requests and heavenly calls, they forsake their highest interests; enter a path of folly, which leads to failure; to death without recovery; to a future without hope.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE.—Verses 11–20.

Evidently David wished to make a solemn and formal business, in giving instructions and handing over the plans for the Temple with elevations, measurements, apartments, and chief articles of furniture. **I. The plan of the Temple.** "David gave to Solomon the pattern." 1. *Divine in its origin.* He claims the divine sanction and inspiration which Moses claimed for the tabernacle of old (Ex. xxv. 40). From porch at one end to sanctuary at the other, nothing left to arbitrary choice, to man's act and invention; all given by

inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Models given in Christian life and Christian character; the Spirit will help to carry them out and guide in every detail. 2. *Written in form.* "The Lord made me understand in writing" (ver. 19). Visions and dreams pass away. Written instructions abide; often consulted and meet our necessities. The word of God is "written for our instruction" in building up Christian life and the spiritual temple. But "*the hand*" must be upon us to make the word effectual and the work successful. **II. The materials of the Temple.** Gold and silver, "wrought stones and brass in abundance without weight." Gathered, as we have seen, from all quarters and in different times. David's work was difficult and thorough; lasting and worthy of imitation. He gave time and trouble, his substance, and his heart to accomplish it. **III. The furniture of the Temple.** Vessels of gold and silver, candlesticks and lamps, tables and altars, &c. The porch, the holy and most holy place to be appropriately furnished. In these directions David guided by Divine will, not by his own taste. God only knows what is fit for his own house. Put nothing into it that ought not to be there; take nothing out which ought to be there. "Look that thou make them after the pattern which was shewed thee in the mount."

DAVID'S ADDRESS TO SOLOMON.

Observe—1. It was an address of a dying father to a son. May all our children read it with a feeling heart! 2. It embraces the sum total of real religion. This has two distinct parts—(1) The first includes a knowledge of God: "Know thou the God of thy fathers." 1st. Know him as a sin-pardoning God (Jer. xxiv. 7). 2nd. Know him so as to be at peace with him (Job xxii. 21). 3rd. Know him so as to love and live to him. 4th. This true saving knowledge of God may be known by its peculiar properties. It is, first, experimental (Ps. xxxiv. 8; 1 Pet. ii. 3); second, soul-abasing (Job xlii. 5, 6; Ep. iii. 8); third, growing (Job i. 10; 2 Pet. iii. 18); fourth, pure (Jas. iii. 17; 1 Mi. iii. 6); fifth, practical (1 Mi. ii. 3; Mi. x. 4). (2) True piety includes the serving of God "with a perfect heart, a willing mind." 1st. God must be served; that is, worshipped and obeyed. 2nd. He must be served "with a perfect heart;" that is, with an entire and undivided heart; with a heart inflamed with love and burning with zeal for God's glory. 3rd. "With a willing mind;" that is, with alacrity, delight, and joy. (3) David urged this exhortation upon the attention of his son by a threefold consideration: 1. By the consideration that God is the searcher of hearts: "The Lord searcheth all hearts." The heathens had no such exalted ideas of any of their gods. 2. That he is the rewarder of piety: "If thou seek him," in the way he hath appointed, "he will be found of thee;" will make himself known to thee as thy Friend, and Father and God in covenant. 3. That he is the punisher of apostasy: "If thou forsake him," desert his love and service and turn from following him, "he will cast thee off;" will withdraw his gracious and powerful presence from thee, and change his countenance and course towards thee [*Rev. J. Wilson*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 9. *The God of thy father.* 1. The rich experience behind these words. 2. The force of parental affection in giving that experience. 3. The susceptibility of youth to profit by the teaching. Home instruction needed, may be repeated from one generation

to another. Home influence never lost.

"The fond attachment to the well-known place,
Whence first we started into life's long race,
Retains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day" [*Cowper*].

If thou seek God, &c. 1. *The object of search.* God lost through sin ; must be sought ; worthy of seeking. His friendship and favour, the best of all blessings. 2. *The promise of success.* "He will be found of thee." This proved from Scripture and experience. A declaration of David's experience. 3. *The threatened displeasure.* "If thou forsake him, &c." This caution to guard and stimulate. Forsaking God to be alienated in thought and affection. The unregenerate turn their backs and wander like the prodigal. Unconverted world without God, in dark region of atheism. Those who remain in this state will be cast away. But "God," says one, "never cast man off until they first cast Him off."

Vers. 9, 10. *Fathers and Children.* In this earnest and affectionate charge we see one generation — 1. Transmitting the knowledge of God to its successor. 2. Enjoining the service of God upon its successor. 3. Indicating God's method of dealing with its successor. 4. Bequeathing its unfulfilled intentions to its successor [*Mt. Braithwaite*].

Ver. 10. *For the sanctuary* or for sanctification—*i.e.*, where God may sanctify his people in holy ordinances,

and be sanctified by them in holy duties [*Trapp*].

Ver. 11. *Place of the mercy seat*, lit. the house of the mercy seat. Seat of mercy in Holy of Holies, Jesus Christ, the Christian Church and the human heart.

Ver. 14. *Gold by weight.* The vessels for the holy place were of gold, as those for the priests' court were of silver. Now, like as in the temple there were some vessels of gold, and some of silver, and all had their weight and their use ; so in the Church of Christ there are diversity of vessels, and of gifts (2 Tim. ii.) [*Trapp*].

Ver. 18. *Chariot* a fit comparison, because God is said to *sit* and to *dwell* within them. Because a *chariot* is made to carry a person from place to place, an intimation that God was not fixed to them by the building of the temple, but that he would remove from them if they forsook him [*Benson*].

Vers. 20, 21. Learn—1. The dignity and lustre of David's dying hour. 2. The usefulness of David's death, as well as life. 3. The great privilege of those interested and blessed with the dying counsels and prayers of the godly [*J. Burns, D.D.*].

ILLUSTRATION TO CHAPTER XXVIII.

Ver. 2. *Hear me.* The death-bed of a saint oft times resembles the setting sun, whose rays are the brightest when it is nearest the horizon. "The tongues of dying men enforce attention, like deep harmony" [*Shaks.*].

"The chamber where the good man meets his fate,
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life, quite in the verge of heaven" [*Young*].

Ver. 10. *Take heed.* The substance of a child's duty and the foundation of his happiness lie in these two rules laid down in Prov. i. 7-9, namely, to fear God and to honour his parents [*Nicholls*].

Ver. 20. *My God.* How few like David have God and gold together [*G. Villiers*]. "There is much religion in the possessive pronouns" [*Luther*].

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] We have in this chapter contributions of the princes to the temple (vers. 1-9); the public thanksgiving of David (vers. 10-13); David's prayer for Solomon (vers. 14-19); Solomon's succession to the throne (vers. 20-25); the close of David's reign and life (vers. 26-30).

Vers. 1-9.—Contributions to the temple. Palace, a Persian word (*cf.* Esther i. 2-5; Neh. i. 1; Dan. viii. 2) applied to the temple (ver. 19). Ver. 2. *Onyx* (Gen. ii. 12); *glistering*, "coloured stones;" some *dark stones*, of a hue like that of the antimony by which women painted their eyes [*Speak. Com.*]. *Marble*, white stones or alabaster, found near Damascus. Ver. 3. *Proper good* from private sources, not from spoils in war, &c. Ver. 4. *Ophir*, brought by Arabian traders; *overlay* with veneer. Ver. 5. *Consecrate*, literally "fill his hands." Ver. 6. *Rulers*, probably stewards of the king's substance (ch. xxviii. 1; xxvii. 25-31). Ver. 7. *Drams*, Heb. *adurcon* (Ezra viii. 27), known as Persian *daric*, the same as the *darkemon* (Ezra ii. 69; Neh. vii. 70), variously valued at 12s. 6d. and 25s. The writer does not intend to say that the Jews possessed darics in David's time, but to express in language what would be intelligible to his readers, the value of gold subscribed, and to translate the terms of his document, whatever they were, into terms in use in his own day [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 8. *Jehiel*, one of the temple treasurers (xxvi. 21, 22).

Vers. 10-19.—David's thanksgiving. Father, Israel (ver. 18). Ver. 11, *cf.* Rev. v. 12. Ver. 12. *Power*, physical and moral. Ver. 15. *Strangers* (*cf.* Ps. xxix. 12). *Abiding*, literally, "there is no hope"—*i.e.*, of abiding or continuing here. Ver. 17. *Triest* (*cf.* Ps. vii. 9; Ps. xvii. 3; 1 Sam. xvi. 7). Ver. 18. *This, i.e.*, "preserve for ever this spirit of liberal and spontaneous giving in the hearts of thy people" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Prepare*, establish their hearts.

Vers. 20-25.—Solomon enthroned king. Worshipped, prostrated themselves to the ground; same outward reverence to God and king, with the respect due to each. Ver. 21. *I.e.*, with drink offerings appropriate to each kind of burnt offering, and required by law to accompany them (*cf.* Num. xv. 5, 7, 10). Ver. 22. *Second*, for first see 1 Kings i. 35-39. This a more formal and representative. Ver. 23. *Sat.* Solomon actually reigned during some short time of his father's life (1 Kings i.). Ver. 24. *All sons*, even Adonijah (1 Kings i. 53). Ver. 25. *Magnified* (1 Kings iii. 13), Solomon's grandeur traced to God.

Vers. 26-30.—Close of David's reign and life. Ver. 27. Time (*cf.* 1 Kings ii. 11). For more exact account of duration of reign, 2 Sam. v. 5. Ver. 28. *Age*, in his seventy-first year. Ver. 29. *Book* used by author; of this and book of Gad no account. *Seer*, a commoner title than that of Samuel. Ver. 30. *Went*, a singular expression. "No other instance of this in Scripture. 'The times that went over David' were the events that happened to him. Compare his own words in Ps. xxxi. 15: 'My times are in thy hand'" [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE.—Verses 1-10.

David addresses all the congregation respecting his son's tender age, his personal gifts, and efforts towards building the temple. He makes an earnest appeal, and meets with a ready response. **I. David's example in giving.** "I have prepared with all my might." 1. *Giving from his own resources.* *Public resources*, such as spoils of war, numerous and most valuable. *Private resources*; his own "proper good" or private property; additional gifts; selected with great care "the gold of Ophir," the purest and finest in the world (Job xxii. 24; Is. xiii. 12); bestowed for a specific purpose; the overlaying of the walls of the temple. 2. *Giving in right order.* The heart first, and then the substance. True religion touches the heart and conscience, and regulates the gifts. "I have set my affection to the house of my God" (ver. 3). 3. *Giving in true spirit.* "I have prepared with all my might." Might, intelligence, and ardour must be thrown into God's work, or nothing will be done. **David casts not the burden**

upon princes and people, though the temple for them, but contributes to the utmost of his power, and sets them a noble example. **II. David's appeal to others to give.** "Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service?" (ver. 5). He levies no tax, but asks for free-will offerings of the people. This the right way to build, support, and establish the house of God. This appeal founded on many things. 1. *He reminds them of Solomon's necessities.* Young and tender, without much wisdom and experience, but under great responsibilities. Yet God had chosen him for the undertaking. Hence no reproach to David for partiality and preference of Solomon. Young people should ever be encouraged in good works. 2. *He sets before them the greatness of the work.* "The work is great." Great not in outward appearance, but great in purpose. "The palace not for man, but for the Lord God." 3. *He stimulates them by his own example.* "Now I have prepared." Exhortation and appeal must be backed by personal effort and example to be efficient. **III. The response to David's appeal** (vers. 6-9). They "offered willingly." The response was: 1. *Hearty response* not only filled their hands, but offered "with perfect heart" (ver. 9). "Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering" (Ex. xxv. 2). 2. *Immediate response.* No hesitation, no consultation nor delay. This damps ardour, and makes all work difficult. 3. *Liberal response.* Influenced by the persuasive address and powerful example of the King, they gave according to their abilities. Their united contributions amounted to the gross sum—of gold 5,000 talents and 10,000 drams, of silver 10,000 talents, besides brass and iron. **IV. The results of this response.** "They rejoiced"—"were glad with great gladness." David rejoiced to see the work on which his heart was set so earnestly carried on. Princes rejoiced under a sense of duty rightly performed, and God's acceptance of it. People rejoiced in the generosity of their rulers. The selfish and niggardly are miserable; the sympathetic and self-denying are happy and cheerful. "The liberal soul shall be made fat"—

"The truly generous is the truly wise;
And he who loves not others lives unblest."

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE.—Verses 1-10.

The life of David fitted to encourage faith in God, and proves that a good man may begin a work which shall continue after his death. Learn from these verses—**I. The nearer a good man approaches his end, the more spiritually minded he becomes.** David intensely anxious about the work of God. Past experience of divine favour and anticipations of future good—consciousness of God's presence and of God's guidance give hope and assurance. The powers of the world to come influence and prepare for the end. **II. The more spiritually minded a good man becomes, the greater his influence upon others.** The force of his example, the authority of his teaching, backed by a consistent consecrated life, have more influence than the sceptre. Exalted in place and dignity, David shone in spiritual character, drew because he led, stimulated others because earnest himself. **III. The greater influence a good man has upon others, the more certain will God's work be accomplished.** David died before the temple was built, but his influence lived. His persuasion, not enactment, won the hearts and prompted the efforts of the people. He rejoiced in the succession of his son to the throne, and in the offerings of the nation for the work of God.

A CALL TO EARLY DEVOTEDNESS.—Verse 5.

I. We shall explain what we regard as the consecration of service to God.
1. There must be correct views of the Divine character and claims; **2. A practical obedience to the will of God;** **3. Active exertion to promote the Divine glory.**

II. We shall present the considerations which ought to urge to an engagement in the service of God. 1. We are placed under universal and imperative obligation to do so; 2. The influence his service has in preventing the degradation and promoting the dignity of our nature; 3. The true and solid pleasure his service communicates to the soul; 4. The glorious recompense by which the engagements of his service are consummated. III. We shall impress the question by which, to an engagement in the service of God, you are emphatically challenged [*J. Parsons*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 3. *I have set my affection.* The force of religious affection for one thing. 1. In its *possession* and *government* of the mind. To build *the* thought of his mind, *the* object of his life. "This one thing I do." 2. In its command over the resources of our life. He prepared and gave with all his might gold and silver; the spoils of his enemies, and the treasures of his palace, devoted to the chosen work, not to transient pleasure, nor temporal interests. Such thought and pains, such concentration of purpose and affection rebuke the loiterers and half-hearted.

Ver. 5. *Consecration.* 1. *Service.* Every child of God is a servant, a worker, a commissioned officer. In performance of life's duties are demanded—First: *A settled purpose*, a purpose arising from a survey of our being, relationships, and surroundings. Life's great question, "What must I do?" Secondly: *An active resolve.* Will the motive power within. The energies of life in the will—rightly directed, obstacles like chaff before it. But religious service specified. Many receive but give not, unprofitable servants, &c. 2. *A willing service.* "Who is willing?" This is the principal quality in Christian service. Gigantic intellect, profusion of gifts, untiring activity, a great moral force, and all these put together without the heart, God will reject; but two mites and the heart He will accept. First: *A willing service is the only efficient service.* Things unwillingly done, badly done. Workers that need not be ashamed of their work, put their heart into it. Secondly: *The willingness of our service is the*

only part of it which is absolutely required. What God wants is nowhere to be found except within the human breast. It is the only treasure God covets. "My son, give me thine heart." 3. *An immediate service.* "This day." Every Jew's attention was fixed on the cherished object of David's life. We are instructed to build a temple for God, have our work planned and we can begin "this day." Look generally at the subject. First: *Seasons for service are never absent.* A farmer is busy summer and winter. Christians need lose no time, nor wait for opportunities. Some wait for special occasions which they never find. Ignorant to be taught, erring to lead home and poor always with us. Secondly: *Efficiency and pleasure ensue when service is performed in its own time.* Service of Jesus like a meal, must be taken at its proper time to produce enjoyment and strength. If morning prayer be said at night its unction is lost. *Now* is the gospel's great time, "the accepted time." 4. *The highest service.* "Unto the Lord." Noble motives produce highest service. Some serve Satan, themselves, and the world; as the object, so the nature of the service. Every service receives its inspiration from the Master. The service of the Lord implies, First: *That the mind is perpetually under the influence of divine truth.* Holy thoughts produce holy living. As we think, so we live; he who thinks Christ lives Christ. "Let this mind be also in you, &c." Secondly: *That holy thoughts are actuated by the presence of the Spirit in them.* This communion is maintained by prayer. Best thoughts sent up to heaven to

receive the Master's living touch. The fire must be fanned into a flame by his breath. The praying heart has working hands. Thirdly: *Entire consecration*. We cannot serve two masters. God's service enough to absorb our whole being. These are the steps—a Saviour from sin, an example to follow, efforts put forth, and a reward in expectation. "Not with eye service as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, &c." [*Thos. Davies, D.D.*].

Ver. 9. *Liberality and joy*. Liberality often brings *temporal* wealth, invariably in *spiritual* matters does it bring wealth and joy of soul. Every effort has reaction, and reaction the law of material and spiritual worlds. The

soul of the miser is always miserable, and sinks lower into spiritual destitution. The good man lives like the sun, and shines to bless in the influence of ideas, wealth, and effort. "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to joy, &c."

Vers. 1-9. *The principles of Christian work*. 1. Personal consecration and example. 2. Willing co-operation by all. 3. Appropriateness of service and gifts. 4. Animated by a true spirit of enthusiasm and joy.

"Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house where gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean"
[*Longfellow*].

HOMILETICS.

THE LAST THANKSGIVING.—Verses 10-20.

Every sentence weighed and measured for the occasion. The scene grand and impressive. "David's Psalms, towards the latter end of the book, are most of them Psalms of praise. The nearer we come to the world of everlasting praise the more we should speak the language and do the work of that world."

I. The infinite perfections of God. Adores God and ascribes glory to him. 1. *God in his unspeakable grandeur*. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness." "Thou art great, and greatly to be feared;" *the power*, "in thine hand is power and might" (ver. 12); *the victory*, "the victory (strength) of Israel" (1 Sam. xv. 29); *the majesty*, "honour and majesty are before him (his inseparable attendants)" (Ps. xcvi. 6). 2. *God in his universal dominion*. "Thine is the kingdom, O Lord." Exalted over all, ruling without rival. 3. *God in his absolute ownership*. "All that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine." Proprietor, not Trustee, of all the universe. A title underived and not shared by another. His inheritance infinite and secure. He had no predecessor, will have no successor, and nothing will ever pass from him. 4. *God in his covenant relation*. "Lord God of Israel, our Father." The expression more full in ver. 18. He was the tutelary God and fountain of blessing to the patriarchs, with whom he made special covenants. 5. *God in his goodness to men* (ver. 12). "Riches and honour" come from him. He gives strength and makes great. The princes merited nothing by their generosity. All through the influence of his grace; therefore, no ground for boasting. "Let no flesh glory in his presence; for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

II. The peculiar relations of man to the infinite God. The Psalm not only filled with devout reverence to God, in language of beauty and filial piety; but a description of man as unworthy, dependent, and short-lived. 1. *Man is a dependent creature*. The more we think of God's greatness, the more we feel this, "Who am I?"—(a) Dependent for *substance to give*. "Of thine own have we given thee." (b) Dependent for *the disposition to give it*. He works in us to will and to do, &c. (c) Therefore, *indebted* to God for all things. Thanks due to him for heart and mind, substance and success. 2. *Man is a short-lived creature*. The earth abides, its inhabitants die. Life a *pilgrimage*; we are strangers and sojourners, not at rest, not at home. Life a *shadow*,

transient, dark, and vain; ending in perfect darkness or perfect light. *Life uncertain*: "there is none abiding." We can neither expect to stay long, nor work much while we do stay on earth. If, then, uncertain, what are the services of a poor short life? God favours us by their acceptance. 3. *Man's conduct is observed by God*. "Thou triest the heart." Seest the motives, as well as the gifts for thy cause. Takest pleasure in uprightness of heart. An act, a life may be misinterpreted or despised, but the good man is conscious of integrity ("I know") and may appeal to God, who is acquainted with all our way. We can neither rejoice nor work without a sense of spiritual rectitude. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

GOD'S PROPRIETORSHIP AND MAN'S OBLIGATION TO HIM.—*Verses 13-16.*

I. God owns all things. 1. Absolutely. "Thine." 2. Universally. "All that is in the heavens, &c." (ver. 11). 3. Perpetually. He will eternally keep his own. **II. Man's obligation to God.** 1. To render thanks to God. Every gift from thee, therefore thank the Giver. "What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits?" 2. To use rightly the gifts of God. Health, time, and money not to be abused—should be used carefully. Stewards should be found faithful. "Will a man rob God?" All essentially God's, and should be willingly given to him.

"Lord, what my talents are I cannot tell,
Till thou shalt give me grace to use them well:
That grace impart; the bliss will then be mine,
But all the power and all the glory thine."

THE SOJOURNERS AND THE SHADOW; OR, DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LIFE.—*Verse 15.*

Those epithets do not apply to all men indiscriminately. Human life has varied aspects according to moral condition and future expectation. **I. All men are sojourners on earth.** David uses language of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who lived as men without permanent home. All *sojourners* or *pilgrims* on earth, because all passing through it to a future beyond it. Stern law compels advance. We live and we must die. Not naturalised, no rights of inheritance, foreigners here; we should seek home, rest, and bliss in heaven. **II. All men sojourn in shadows on earth.** "Our days on earth are as a shadow." 1. *Life itself is a shadow*. In swiftness and uncertainty; darkness and perplexing changes. "Shadows in career," says Geo. Herbert. We flee as a shadow and continue not (Job xiv. 2). 2. *Men walk in shadows*. "Every man *walketh* in a vain show (an image)" (Ps. xxxix. 6). "All shadows and pursuing shadows," says Burke. Deluded by sense, refusing to see the only lasting substance; men live in lies, dream of false pleasure, and find everything fleeting and unsubstantial. After all discussions concerning the supreme good, some pointing to pleasure, some to virtue, and others to apathy, who can give a definite and decisive answer? Life without God is vain, and not worth living. "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow" (*Heb.* "the number of the days of the life of his vanity") (*Ecc.* vi. 12). **III. Only some men are strangers on earth.** Christians are strangers. They feel, dress, and act as such. "Confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth." But a large class of men to whom the world is perfectly congenial; who feel nothing strange, nothing unnatural. They are in their element; find their place and satisfaction in its pursuits and enjoyments. They desire no better country, but seem to fix their

hearts and homes in this, through which they rapidly pass. What a foolish exchange; shadows for substance; trifles or eternity!

“ All on earth is shadow,
All beyond is substance. How solid all
Where change is known no more ! ” [Young].

THE LAST PRAYER.—Verses 18, 19.

After solemn recognition of God's sovereign and universal proprietorship, an unqualified disclaimer of all merit, we have earnest and appropriate prayer for people and prince. **I. Prayer for the people.** Praise should ever end in prayer for ourselves and others. 1. *That they may be kept in the right mind.* “Keep this for ever,” &c. This disposition of joyful, willing consecration of heart and gifts to thee. Let it not be transient and forgotten. 2. *That the perpetuity of this right mind may be properly based.* Promises are broken; appearances change and hopeful beginnings may fall through. The heart, the deepest source, must be fixed, framed, and established. “Prepare their heart unto thee.” **II. Prayer for Solomon.** Blessings fit and most needful. 1. *That he may obey God.* “Give to Solomon, my son,” first of all sincerity, a perfect heart. Then help him “to keep thy commandments,” binding on conscience; “thy testimonies,” evidences of God's character; “and thy statutes,” enactments for instruction of the people. 2. *That he may build the temple of God.* “And to build the palace.” Mark the order—right in heart first, then engagement in work. True to God, faithful in service. This prayer required now. We build temples, fortunes, and families—make “provision” for grand enterprises, but forget that materials, strength, and stability come from God. “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 10–20. *David's thanksgiving.*
1. Its adoration of God. 2. Its acknowledgment of dependence upon him. 3. Its recognition of the influence of his grace. 4. Its solemn appeal to conscious integrity. 5. Its earnest prayer for king and people.

Vers. 12–14. *The right value and right use of divine gifts.* 1. We only give what has been given to us. 2. We only give what we must leave. 3. We have but a short time to give at all.

Ver. 14. *Of thine own have we given thee.* 1. Apply to temporal things. Money, time, &c. 2. Apply to spiritual things. Repentance, faith, and works, bestowed by God and due to him. “When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.”

Ver. 15. *Apply to the Christian.*
Be vigilant in duty while here. Improve the world as much as possible while in it. Seek to persuade others to go with you to “a better country, even a heavenly one.” *Our days on earth, &c.* 1. The *brevity* of life. “Thou hast made my days as a handbreadth.” 2. The *vanity* of life. “Every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” 3. The *emptiness* of life. “Every man walketh in a vain show.” 4. The *end* of life. “Make me to know mine end.” “Days are one of the shortest measures of time; but long enough to decipher man's life by” [Trapp].

Ver. 19. *To keep thy commandments.* Not for wealth, power, nor learning. “Learn here,” says Trapp, “what to pray for in the behalf of our children. A child of many such prayers cannot easily miscarry.”

HOMILETICS.

SOLOMON'S ELEVATION TO THE THRONE.—*Verses 20-25.*

The second time. The first done hastily, on account of Adonijah's conspiracy (cf. 1 Ki. i. 35-39). This anointment deliberate, most solemn, and by a representative assembly. **I. The Divine choice of Solomon to the throne.** "S. sat on the throne of the Lord." Not David's throne, nor Israel's to give away. The *Lord's* in a special sense. Hence the government called a *Theocracy*, God's government, by Josephus. All thrones belong to him. He sets up, deposes, and determines the destiny of rulers. "By me kings rule and decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." **II. The loyal obedience to Solomon on the throne.** This most joyful and universal. 1. *The people submitted.* Represented by "all the princes and the mighty men," they put the hand under Solomon's thigh and bound themselves by oath to allegiance. "All Israel obeyed him." 2. *The royal family submitted.* "All the sons likewise of King David." Some of them were elder and of nobler birth or of nobler mothers. But now convinced by the national act and God's choice that Solomon was to be king. Adonijah failed and died. God's will done notwithstanding man's claims and ambitious designs. **III. The prosperity of Solomon on the throne.** "The Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly." Notice—1. *The source of prosperity.* Ascribed to the source of all greatness. A majesty "bestowed," not humanly created. 2. *The peace which attended the prosperity.* No rival to disquiet, no foreign power to oppose. "All Israel obeyed him." 3. *A prosperity unequalled.* "Such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel." A fit type of Christ. "He was a king blessed of the King of kings" [*Shakes.*]. "I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem."

DAVID'S LATTER END.—*Verses 26-30.*

The writer now finishes a picture which presents the great king in meridian splendour. The brilliant life is closing and the evening is calm and peaceable. **I. The length of David's reign.** "The time that he reigned over Israel was forty years." This divided into two eventful periods. About "seven years in Hebron" (2 Sam. v. 5), and "three and thirty in Jerusalem." A reign of glory, yet falling short of the divine ideal; signalled by services which contributed to the exaltation of the kingdom and the glory of God; but darkened by crimes and calamities, and which gradually prepared for the reign of his successor. **II. The end of David's life.** "He died." Then the mightiest men are mortal; the most useful withdrawn from ministry; and the world can get on without its greatest and best men. "The thing is not to leave a name behind us—a mere name. It is to leave behind influences that hearts will feel, memories that will be cherished at home, and that will be blessed by those whom we have served and helped in life" [*Dr. Parker.*]. He died. 1. *Rich in circumstances.* "Full of riches and honour." Enough of this world's wealth by which he adorned the capital and prepared for the building of God. 2. *In a good old age.* Not so old as many predecessors, not exceeding seventy years. But his life not cut short, lasted the appointed term and filled with opportunities and work. In expressive Hebrew, "full of days." Many days empty and many lives like a blank! Nothing done, everything lost! 3. *Satisfied in mind.* "Full (*i.e.*, satisfied) of days" (cf. Gen. xxv. 8; Job xlii. 17). Satisfied with days given both in number and character; filled with gratitude and submission. 4. *Ready to depart.* He had "served his generation by the will of God," now ready to fall asleep. Having seen God's salvation, he

was wishful to depart in peace. A tranquil sunset! **III. The records of David's kingdom.** Not given in full. "The times" indicate—1. *His private life.* "Times that went over him," of joy and sorrow, of conflict and rest, &c. (*cf.* Job xxiv. 1; Ps. xxxi. 16). 2. *His civil career.* "And over Israel." National changes in political and ecclesiastical affairs. 3. *His military enterprises.* "Over all the kingdoms of the countries," hostile or friendly. A sovereign who raised his country to power and dominion, beloved in life and honoured in death. His "royal majesty," was not in the splendour of his palace and retinue; but in the unity and moral worth of his people, the excellency of his life and the legacy of his reign.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 20. *Bless the Lord.* David was excellent at this—viz., stirring up others to join with him in praising God (see Ps. xxxiv. 3 and ciii. 20) [*Trapp*]. *Worship*, its true nature: "*Bless the Lord.*" Its solemn expression: "*Bowed down their heads.*" Its sublime object: "*Worshipped the Lord.*" Its connection with civil reverence: "*Worshipped the Lord and the king.*"

Ver. 23. *Solomon sat on the throne.* The fulfilment of promise, the display of power and providence, and the type of the Lord Jesus. *David died and Solomon reigned in his stead.* Compare them—1. As kings of Israel. 2. As servants of God. 3. As authors of inspired songs and literature.

Vers. 29, 30. These words indicate—1. The fragmentary record. The books mentioned are lost, except a few particulars in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. They were sources used by the author. 2. The order in which events are given. In accordance with his design the writer signalises the religious aspect of the nation,

has omitted many events from David's history, and enlarged in details of arrangements of worship and preparations for the building of the temple. He writes partly as an excerpter and partly a supplementer.

Ver. 29. Three eminent men, personally acquainted with David through the principal part of his life—*Samuel, Nathan, and Gad.* "The three (Heb.) words, *Roch, Nabi, and Chozeh,* are here brought together and apparently contrasted" (*cf.* 1 Sam. ix. 9) [*Dr. Jamieson*].

Life's changing current. 1. Times make a deep mark upon the body, the least important portion of our complex nature. 2. Equally marked is the effect of "the times" as they pass over us upon our intellectual nature. 3. Not less striking or important is the stamp of time upon the history of our sensibilities. 4. The most important change is the one that refers to our moral and spiritual state. 5. Our social and relative condition is subject to the constant variations of time [*Dr. S. T. Spear*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXIX.

Ver. 6. *Offered willingly.* Rich men's presents are gold and silver, or other costly things. Mine must be recommended by the affectionate pleasure with which I give them [*The Ven. Bede when dying*]. It is the comfort of poverty that our affections are valued, not our presents [*Bp. Hall*].

Ver. 14. *Who am I? What I have done is worthy of nothing but*

silence and forgetfulness; but what God hath done for me is worthy of everlasting and thankful memory [*Ibid.*].

Ver. 15. *Shadow.* In this I see that we, all we that live, are but vain shadows, unsubstantial dreams [*Sophocles*].

Ver. 19. *Give unto Solomon.* No good man is jealous of his son, but desires to see his children more famous than himself [*Theodoret*].

Vers. 20-22. Worshipped. Devotion, when it does not lie under the check of reason, is apt to degenerate into enthusiasm [*Addison*]. All is holy where devotion kneels [*Holmes*].

Vers. 26-28. Died. The death-bed of saints often resembles the setting sun, whose rays are the brightest when it is nearest the horizon. "The tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony" [*Shakes.*].

Ver. 30. Times. Amongst rational beings that life is longest, whether brief or protracted its outward turn,

into which the largest amount of mind, of mental and moral activity, is condensed. It is possible for the longest life to be really briefer than the shortest, and the child or youth may die older, with more of life crowded into his brief existence, than he whose dull and stagnant being drags on to an inglorious old age [*Caird*].

"We must need weep the chance and change of life,
And mortal sorrows touch a mortal's heart" [*Virg. Æn. i. 462*].

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY
ON THE
SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

INTRODUCTION.

SEE the general introduction of the first book for analysis and date. "The most remarkable feature in the historical books of Scripture, and especially of Kings and Chronicles, is their religious, theocratic character. Secular history gives the public changes which nations have undergone, with their causes and results. Church history traces the progress of sentiment, and of various influences in relation to the Church. But here, king, church, state are all represented as under God. The character of each king is decided by his fidelity to the religious obligations of his office. Of each it is said, 'He walked in the ways of David his father,' and so prospered, or of Jeroboam, who 'made Israel to sin,' and so failed. These books are valuable as the history of God and His law in the nation, and that nation a monarchy; as the Books of Joshua and Judges are the history of God and His law in an aristocracy or democracy, or as the earlier books are the history of God and His law in the family. In the Prophets and in the Acts of the Apostles we have glimpses of what is to be the history of God and His law in the world. Mark, therefore, the prominence given to the erection of the temple; the numerous references to the ancient law, especially when the two kingdoms were drawing near to their end, as if to account for their decay and approaching fall; the frequent interposition of prophets, now rebuking the people and now braving the sovereign; the deposition and succession of kings; and the connection everywhere traced between what seem to be mere political incidents and the fidelity or idolatry of the age. Were nations wise, these records would prove their best instructors. They are adapted to teach alike the world and the Church. The genealogical tables, though to us comparatively uninteresting, were highly important among the Jews, who were made by prophetic promises extremely observant in these particulars. These tables give the sacred line through which the promise was transmitted for nearly 3,500 years, a fact itself unexampled in the history of the human race" [*Angus*]. "This history of the Jewish monarchy, as it is more authentic, so it is more interesting and instructive than the histories of other monarchies. We had the story of the house of David before, in the first and second books of Kings, intermixed with that of the kings of Israel, which there

took more room than that of Judah; but here we have it entire. Much is repeated here which we had before, yet many of the passages of the story are enlarged upon, and divers added which we had not before, especially relating to the affairs of religion; for it is a church history, and it is written for our learning, to let nations and families know that then, and then only, they can expect to prosper, when they keep in the way of their duty to God; for all along the good kings prospered and the wicked kings suffered. The truth of the word of God appears, '*Those that honour me I will honour, but those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*'"

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The reign of Solomon is comprised in nine chapters of this book, corresponding to 1 Kings i.-xi., and forms the third part of the whole work. This chapter contains the sacrifice at Gibeon, the vision and the wealth of Solomon.

Vers. 1-6.—*Solomon's offering at Gibeon. Strengthened*, a favourite word (*cf.* xii. 13; xiii. 21; xxi. 4), meaning established, firmly settled in government. *Magnified* (1 Chr. xxix. 25). *Ver. 2. All Israel*, by their representatives. *Captains* (1 Chr. xxvii. 1; xxviii. 1). *Judges* desirable on all occasions like this (1 Chr. xxiii. 4). *Chief of fathers*. Heads of families still recognised, though having no special function (*cf. Speak. Com.*). *Ver. 3. Gibeon*. Through inroads of Philistines, tabernacle removed from Shiloh to Nob (1 Sam. xxi. 1); after destruction of Nob by Saul to Gibeon (1 Sam. xxii. 9). *Ver. 4. Ark* separated from tabernacle, consequently two centres of worship (*cf.* account in 1 Chr. xiii. and xv.). *Ver. 5. Altar* (*marg.*) "was there;" this, therefore, the legitimate place of worship. *Sought*, *i.e.*, frequented it, in the habit of making use of it [*Speak. Com.*]. Some give "sought Him, the Lord."

Vers. 7-12.—*Solomon's vision at Gibeon. Night*, after sacrifice, through dream (1 Kings iii. 5-15). *Ver. 8. Me to reign*. First case of son succeeding father. *Ver. 9. Promise*, special, made to David, that his successor should be wise and able to judge. Though no express record, Ps. lxxii. amounts to nearly the same; a Psalm undoubtedly Messianic, yet its primary subject is Solomon. May we not understand Solomon here as calling upon God to make good this prophecy, to "establish" this implied "promise"? [*Speak. Com.*] *Ver. 10. Knowledge*, insight (*cf.* Dan. i. 4-17; Ecc. x. 20). *Wisdom*, the power of applying knowledge rightly. *Go out*, do all parts of the kingly office; reminding of Deut. xxxi. 2; 1 Sam. xviii. 13-16; 1 Kings iii. 7. *Vers. 11 and 12. God's answer*. Long life omitted here, given in 1 Kings iii. 14, conditionally. *Riches and wealth*, stores of commodities ready for use.

Vers. 13-17.—*Solomon's riches came* "from the high place that was at Gibeon to Jerusalem" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Ver. 14-17*. This passage is very nearly identical with 1 Kings x. 26-29. The only difference of any importance is the addition here (*ver. 15*) of the words "and gold," which do not occur in 1 Kings x. 27. The touch thus added is characteristic of the writer of Chronicles, who is more rhetorical and more bold in his use of *hyperbole* than the author of Kings [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE SPLENDID BEGINNING.—*Verses 1-12.*

Solomon *magnified* in character, accession, and choice. Many princes have had good fathers, wise training, and great privileges, but lacked wisdom and turned out badly. Solomon crowned while David lived, surrounded by a loyal people and blessed by Divine Providence. His beginning wise, most promising and glorious. **I. Solomon's accession to the throne was providentially secured.** "The Lord his God was with him." Chosen, he was enthroned, not deprived of the kingdom. Endangered by sedition, he was "strengthened," established. The feast of conspirators broken up. Adonijah fled to the altar for refuge. God's providence opened up the way, and God's promise was fulfilled. In allusion to the rapid suppression of resistance, and to this signal entrance on his new reign, without rival or rebel, Solomon declares, "As the Lord liveth, which hath *established* me and *set me* on the throne of David my father," &c. **II. Solomon's claims to the throne were sanctioned by a representative assembly.** He was confirmed by recognition and allegiance of all the tribes in representatives. Captains, judges, and heads of families, princes, and people—all received him. Those in authority should side with right and use their influence to promote true religion

and God's glory. Weakness in kings, selfishness in rulers, and disaffection in people, outrage liberty, destroy the peace, and endanger the throne of kingdoms.

“Let not the world see fear and sad mistrust
Govern the motion of a kingly eye” [*Shakes.*].

III. Solomon's accession to the throne was signalled by solemn acts of worship. “All the congregation with him,” a vast concourse of dignitaries in solemn procession on its way up the hill to Gibeon, six miles north of Jerusalem, to offer royal sacrifices! 1. *In obedience to divine law.* The brazen altar was there (ver. 6); that is, the Gibeonite sanctuary was still the legal, the official and historically rightful place for burnt offerings. 2. *In appropriate magnificence.* The holocaust became the rank and attests the splendour of the sovereign on this occasion. Sacrifices abundant. Zadok the officiating high priest (1 Chr. xvi. 39). The time-honoured altar prepared by the skill of Bezaleel in the wilderness (Ex. xxxviii. 1). **IV. Solomon's accession to the throne was in a spirit of devout supplication.**

How many kings begin their reigns; how many youths in critical moments, turning-points in life, begin their course altogether differently! Alas! many gain distinctions, enter life fully equipped, for awhile out-distance others; but with the turn of fortune fall behind and end in ruin. Solomon remembered the position of his predecessor, his own youth and weakness, the responsibility under which he was placed, and made request for gifts and grace to help him. When Victoria learned that she was about to become Queen of England, her first words to the Archbishop of Canterbury were, “I beg your Grace to pray for me.” Together they knelt, and the new reign began with prayer.

V. Solomon's accession to the throne was unequalled in splendour. None before him, nor after him, had the like (ver. 12).

1. *Outward splendour.* “Riches and wealth and honour.” Good in themselves and good as a means of usefulness. The good which the world seeks; but this honour decays. All worldly greatness is fleeting in character and worthless at last. “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” 2. *Moral splendour.* “Wisdom and knowledge” higher than material wealth. The riches of Cræsus would not add a fraction of value to a man. “The gold is but the guinea stamp.” “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver.” Better, for it enriches its possessor, creates higher enjoyments, invests with greater dignity, and is destined to longer existence. “King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.”

SOLOMON'S CHOICE.—Verses 7-12.

Probably at the close of festivities on Gibeon, when the mind of Solomon had been elevated, and his heart touched, that God appeared to him in a dream; gave him the option of everything good in the world. He felt intense desire, and offered earnest prayer for wisdom. Whether the dream was imaginary or not, the choice was made, and God's grant of it real. Learn—**I. That ability to discharge the duties of our calling is most desirable.** Some time since a paper appeared in a popular *Review* under the title, “What knowledge is of most worth?” the object of which was to show the sufficiency of what is generally called *science* to guide in life. “The universal reply is *science*. This is the verdict on all counts.” But what is meant by *science*? If mere *education* without religion, knowledge without wisdom, we cannot agree with it. There is a difference between *science* and *wisdom*. *Wisdom* is the right use of knowledge. *Science* seeks truth for its own sake, *wisdom* for practical uses. **Science**

exercises the intellect, wisdom affects the heart. A man cannot be wise and able to fulfil his mission who does not use what he knows. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, to govern as kings "in righteousness and judgment," to rule as masters "in the fear of the Lord," to win souls as ministers, for "he that winneth souls is wise." **II. That this ability can only come from God.** Solomon's surroundings favourable, education good, friends numerous, and wealth enormous, but he lacked wisdom, and looked to God for it. True wisdom is needed as much to build up the Christian Church, to govern a kingdom and rule a house, as to rear the tabernacle. If there be capacity, culture and application may make a scholar, a philosopher, or an orator. But "the wisdom which is profitable to direct" is "the wisdom from above." We must look to the source from whence Bezaleel and Aholiab gained their skill and ability (Ex. xxxv. 30-35). "Give me wisdom and knowledge." **III. That where the desire for this ability is supreme, God will honour and bless it.** "I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked" (1 Kings iii. 13). Great pretension to wisdom often covers the want of it. Shallow streams make greatest noise. There must be—1. *Intense desire.* A feeling of deep want. "This was in thine heart." Opinionated, self-sufficient men will never get it. A craving for its possession, growing out of sense of need, a cry of the soul, "Where shall wisdom be found?" 2. *Earnest search.* Mere want or desire not enough. There must be *effort*, honest, strenuous, and persevering. A search as for silver and gold. "If thou seekest her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures, &c." 3. *There must be prayer.* "Give me now wisdom and knowledge." God will honour our petitions when sincere; will give inferior when we ask for superior blessings. God gave the wisdom asked, and the wealth unasked. If we value and pray for understanding, God will do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."

THE BLESSEDNESS OF WISDOM.—Verses 10-12.

I. It helps to govern life. "Who can judge this thy people?" 1. *By giving insight.* "Knowledge of men and things," understanding of the times in which we live, and their demands upon us. 2. *By imparting activity.* "That I may go out and come in before this people." Public activity unceasing and unchecked. 3. *By teaching us to avoid evil and do good.* "Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee." "When thou goest thy steps shall not be straitened" (freedom in the great highway of life); "and when thou runnest thou shalt not stumble" (safety in activity) (Prov. iv. 12). **II. It endows with best wealth.** Wealth of soul. "For the soul to be without knowledge it is not good." Wealth of the character. "She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." An ornament better than kings' robes, a crown not of fading laurels or rusting metal. Adornments of holiness preparing for the crown of glory which fadeth not away. Character better than cash, the only wealth that will go into the other world, and determine condition there. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivereth from death." **III. It ensures permanent good.** It is excellent in itself, described as "the fear of the Lord," and "the knowledge of God," blessing the intellect and the heart. In this life often brings riches, honour, length of days, and unequalled privileges. But these things may all end. Heavenly wisdom is supereminent, an eternal possession, a treasure we can lay up in heaven. It sets before us the way of life, and secures our salvation. Worldly good pertains to earth only; here is limitless

blessing helping to escape the miseries of false choice, and giving endless possession of perfect bliss.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *God with him.* 1. God is often against the kings of the earth. This seen in the disasters which he brings on their armies, &c., and may be illustrated by the histories of many kings mentioned in the Bible. 2. God is with some kings for the punishment of others. The wicked are the sword of God. 3. God was with Solomon for the good of Israel; with him in answer to prayer. 4. God was not with Solomon unconditionally [*Bib. Museum*].

Ver. 7. *How to get rich.* "Ask what I shall give thee, &c." Observe, for the acquirement of the highest wealth that "asking"—1. Is the simplest method. Only a word. 2. Is the divinely appointed method (Matt. vii. 7; Mark xiv. 38). 3. Is the only method. Purchase is impossible. Deserts? We have none. 4. Is the certain method. It never has failed yet. 5. Is the abundantly enforced method. Enforced by the whole Bible, by the story of God's acts, the promises and exhortations, the life and death of Jesus. 6. Has ever been the abundantly successful method [*R. A. Griffin*].

Vers. 7-10. *Solomon's Choice.* I. The address which God made to Solomon when He said, "Ask, &c.," He does in effect make to each of us,

especially to the young. II. Though we need not the qualification which Solomon required for his kingly office, yet we all need spiritual wisdom and understanding, and may therefore imitate his example. III. God is pleased with those who make the choice and offer up the prayer of Solomon. Because—1. It is the effect of His grace; 2. It indicates opinions and feelings similar to his own; 3. It indicates humility; 4. It shows a benevolent concern for his glory, and for the happiness of their fellow-creatures; 5. It actually tends to promote his glory. IV. All who make this choice and adopt this prayer shall certainly be favoured with a wise and understanding heart [*Dr. Payson*].

The Prayer for Wisdom. I. Come and see a youth who at a critical moment is found in prayer. II. Come and see a king's son who prays exclusively for wisdom. III. Come and see a humble one who prays not in vain. IV. Come and see here a favoured one who receives much more than he asks for. V. Come and see an unhappy one who by his own fault has forfeited the blessings of his prayer [*Dr. J. Van Oosterzee*].

"To know
That which before us lies in daily life
Is the prime wisdom" [*Milton*].

HOMILETICS.

SOLOMON'S WEALTH.—Verses 13-17.

This passage refers to commerce with Egypt in exports and imports, and is like 1 Kings x. 26-29. The road from Egypt to Syria not always under the control of the Israelites. Solomon gained complete possession of the country and took the trade in horses between Egypt and northern nations into his own hands. **I. Wealth derived from trading speculations.** In addition to large treasures collected and bequeathed by his father, Solomon's wealth derived from commerce with other nations. His fleets brought gold and silver from Ophir and Tharshish, and made them plenteous as stones in Jerusalem. His chariots and chariot horses or chargers were of the best kind of Egyptian breed and highly valued. Kings of the Hittites and Syria welcomed Jerusalem as the opening of an emporium for trade. Inland cities founded for special

markets, and lofty towers on the coast pointed to commerce with distant countries.

II. Wealth acquired in opposition to God's commands. The King forbidden to multiply horses and gold under the Theocracy (Deut. xvii. 16, 17). He must trust in the Lord God, not in chariots and horses (Ps. xx. 7). Besides, in a hilly country like Judea, cavalry of no essential service; and going to Egypt might open up the way to idolatry and corruption again. But Solomon must equal other nations, hence his passion for horses, a prohibited luxury, led to risk and excess. Wealth gained unjustly is held insecurely. "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness than he that is perverse in his ways though he be rich." **III. Wealth therefore risky in its possession.** Prosperity of Solomon his great misfortune. Indulgence outran want. Abundant leisure to gratify desires. Prosperous enterprises, rank, riches, and power were his. His fame spread and raised to the pinnacle of glory among nations. But ambition mastered him. Wealth the first step downwards. His wisdom availed little and his end ruin. Sad that a beginning so promising should end in consequences so fearful. The smallest departure from rectitude may lead to grievous errors and fearful miseries. Neither wealth nor worldly wisdom can check a downward course. "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us."

THE KING'S MERCHANTS.—Verse 16.

Linen yarn means influx (*mikre*), and thence import (*mabo*), contrast of export (Sept. 1 Kings x. 28); in which case the verse would run thus: "And the export of horses for Solomon was from Egypt; and the import which the king's merchants took was an import in price"—that is, in money. It was more convenient for Solomon to send cash than commodities in exchange for the chariots and horses [*Murphy*]. **I. The advantages of commerce.** In softening manners and breaking down prejudices. In helping industry, promoting peace, and stimulating into Nature's resources. **II. The blessings of the nation whose sovereign takes an interest in commerce.** Kings may aid in developing commerce, reviving depressed industries, and in adopting enlightened policy. Our own country privileged. "As soon as the commercial spirit acquires vigour," says Robertson, "and begins to gain an ascendant in any society, we discern a new genius in its policy, its alliances, its wars, and its negotiations."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Vers. 3, 6. The national worship was still in the unsettled state in which it had been since the first entrance into Palestine. "The people sacrificed in high places." The chief local sanctity still adhered to the spot where "the Tabernacle of the congregation" stood, on what was called "the great high-place of Gibeon." Hither as on a solemn pilgrimage, with a vast concourse of dignitaries, the young King came to offer royal sacrifices on his accession. A thousand victims were consumed on the ancient altar. The night was spent within the sacred city

of Gibeon. And now occurred one of those prophetic dreams which had already been the means of Divine communication in the time of Samuel. Thrice in Solomon's life—at the three epochs of his rise, of his climax, of his fall—is such a warning recorded [*Dean Stanley*].

Ver. 10. *Wisdom* consists chiefly in three things—1. Knowledge to discern. 2. Skill to judge. 3. Activity to prosecute [*T. Watson*]. He showed his wisdom by asking for wisdom. He became wise because he had set his heart upon it [*Stanley*]. *Who can?*

Wisdom is preferred to riches, to long life, and to victory over enemies—the common ambition of kings. Honourable to any man, but especially to one so young as Solomon; the dictate of early piety and of the purest patriotism; expressing the most profound humility in circumstances favourable to the growth of pride; so moderate and so modest; breathing sentiments of the deepest gratitude to God, and of entire devotion to the public welfare [Dr. T. Guthrie].

“Wisdom is oftentimes nearer when we stoop
Than when we soar” [Wordsworth].

Ver. 11. *In thine heart.* Without a rich heart wealth is an ugly beggar [Emerson].

Ver. 12. *I will give.* God is a light that is never darkened, an unwearied life that cannot die, a fountain always flowing, a garden of life, a seminary of wisdom, a radical beginning of all goodness [Quarles].

Vers. 14–17. *Prosperity.* Many are not able to suffer and endure prosperity; it is like the light of the sun to a weak eye—glorious indeed in itself, but not proportioned to such an instrument [Jeremy Taylor].

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter corresponds with 1 Kings v. It comprises preparations for building the temple (vers. 1, 2); Solomon's message to Hiram (vers. 3–10); Hiram's reply (vers. 11–16); and the census of the strangers (vers. 17, 18).

Vers. 1, 2.—*Preparations for building.* *Determined, i.e.,* commanded, gave orders to build. *Name* (1 Chr. xxii. 10; cf. 1 Kings v. 5). *Kingdom,* royal palace. Ver. 2. The substance of this verse given in ver. 18, here indicative of magnitude of the undertaking.

Vers. 3–10.—*Solomon's message to Hiram.* H. had congratulated Sol. (1 Kings v. 1). *Deal* (cf. 1 Chr. xiv. 1 and 2 Sam. v. 11). *Cedars* (1 Chr. xiv. 1). Ver. 4. *Incense,* lit. incense of spices (marg.); the regular incense burned every morning and every evening (Ex. xxx. 7); for symbolic meaning, see Rev. viii. 3, 4. *Shewbread* (cf. Ex. xxv. 30; Lev. xxiv. 5–9; Num. iv. 7). *Moons* (Num. xxviii. 11–15). *Feasts,* three great annual. Ver. 5. *Great,* exceeding in size any separate building in Palestine and any temple of the gods of surrounding nations. See Stanley's *Jewish Ch.,* vol. ii., p. 224. Ver. 6. *Able* (cf. 1 Kings viii. 27; 2 Chr. vi. 18). “In the question, ‘Who am I?’ (cf. 1 Chr. xxix. 14) there is implied: a house for him to dwell in I cannot build; and with this is connected the antithesis; but only for the purpose of burning incense before him, *i.e.,* only to maintain a place in which God may be honoured by sacrifice, can I venture to build him a house” [Keil]. Ver. 7. *Cunning, i.e.,* skilful to work in gold (1 Chr. xxii. 15) and with knowledge of sculpture in metal and wood; a man to design and superintend all work in metals and other materials (Ex. xxv. 4). Ver. 8. *Send.* “The cedar and cypress were valued as being both rare and durable; the algum or almug trees (likewise a foreign wood), though not got on Lebanon, is mentioned as being procured through Hiram” [Jamieson]. Ver. 9. *Wonderful,* lit. great and wonderful. Ver. 10. *Give.* “According to Kings, Solomon's original proposal was simply to pay Hiram's workmen for their labour, and it was at Hiram's suggestion that he commuted his proposed ‘hire’ into an annual payment in kind (see 1 Kings v. 6, 9, 11). It would seem, therefore, that the author of Chronicles here throws into one at least two distinct messages sent by Solomon to Hiram” [Speak. Com.].

Vers. 11–16.—*Hiram's reply* (cf. 1 Kings v. 8, 9). *Loved.* “It would seem that neighbouring sovereigns, in communications with Jewish monarchs, adopted the Jewish name for the Supreme Being (Jehovah, ‘the Lord’ of our version), either identifying him with their own chief god or (sometimes) meaning merely to acknowledge him as the special god of the Jewish nation and country. In Hiram's case the acknowledgment seems to be of the former kind” [Speak. Com.]. Ver. 12. *The Lord,* a formula designating the Supreme God with several Asiatic nations. In Persian inscriptions Ormazd is constantly called “the great god, who gave (or made) heaven and earth” [Speak. Com.]. Ver. 13. *Hiram,* the king's own father's name appears to have been Abibaal. *Father* is used in the honourable sense of master, and the trans. should be as generally admitted. “I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, one Hiram, my master-workman.”

Ver. 14. A Tyrian by race, whose mother was of the daughter of Dan, though her father was of Naphtali (1 Kings vii. 14), skilled in all things specified, and in wood, stone, and fine linen. Ver. 16. *Joppa*, now *Jaffa*, the natural port of Jerusalem, distant about 35 miles.

Vers. 17, 18.—*The census of strangers.* *Strangers*, descendants of Canaanites not driven out of the land at the invasion (Judg. i. 21–36; 1 Kings ix. 20), and non-Israelite population influx from surrounding nations. *Numbered*, reimposition of bond-service had been discontinued between Joshua and Saul. David numbered the strangers (*cf.* 1 Chr. xxii. 2), and Solomon imitated his father.

HOMILETICS.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.—Verses 1–16.

Solomon's wisdom given not for self-adornment and speculation, but for practical purposes; to build, govern, and do the work of God. David talked about the work, gathered materials; Solomon executed. **I. The magnitude of the work.** Wonderfully great (ver. 9). Great not so much in outward structure as in style and design. 1. *Great because God, for whom it is built, is great.* "For great is our God above all gods" (ver. 5). Infinite, self-existent, and supreme. Our ideas of God determine our plans in building up character, family, business, and places of worship. "Our theology determines our architecture," says Dr. Parker. Defective views of God will influence expenditure and worship. God is great, and should have nothing mean. 2. *Great because its worship is becoming.* "To burn sacrifice before him" (ver. 6). The spiritual always greater than the material. However magnificent the place, God is greater than the temple. A great God indicates great worship. A ritual not to please the eye and gratify the taste, but holy, sincere, and devout. 3. *Great because it satisfies great needs.* "To burn before him sweet incense, &c." (ver. 4). "Solomon seems to mean that to build a temple can only be justified on the human—not on the divine—side. 'God dwelleth not in temples made with hands,' cannot be confined to them, does in no sort need them. The sole reason for building a temple lies in the needs of man. Man is finite; his worship must be local; the sacrifices commanded in the law had, of necessity, to be offered somewhere. Only in view of these necessities did Solomon venture to think of building God a 'house'" [*Speak. Com.*]. Man will ever need incense, which sets forth prayer; the continual shew-bread, or communion with God; and the burnt-offering, or propitiation for sin (Ex. xxx. 7; Num. xxviii.; Lev. xxiii.). **II. The spirit in which the work was undertaken.** Solomon felt the necessity, urgency, and responsibility of the work. 1. *A spirit of determination.* "I purpose to build a house" (1 Kings v. 5). Energy, settled and fixed resolution in himself. Gave orders to others also to help; stirred up the nation to take an interest in work. Prayer should show itself in action and enthusiasm for God. "The truest wisdom is a resolute determination," says Napoleon. 2. *A spirit of humility.* "But who is able to build, &c.?" (ver. 6). Feeling that he was undertaking an impossible work almost. Not as a conceited king or wealthy prince, but as unworthy of the work, did he regard himself. A due sense of insufficiency becoming in the wisest and strongest; the only way to secure strength and success; will never lead to despair, but to do what can be done. "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do." **III. The help which was secured in the execution of the work.** Solomon great, wise, and rich but required help from Hiram. Kings want men! Everything worthy done by co-operation, reciprocity of labour. 1. *Help readily given.* No excuse, no delay, no mere promise. Willingness combined with respect, congratulations, and gladness of the opportunity. "When Hiram heard the words of Solomon

he rejoiced greatly." 2. *Help most skilful.* Cut timber, "costly stones and hewed stones," the best that could be given. We should *contrive* more for God. Give more intelligence, more value in our service; put more cunning in the fingers, more penetration in the mind, and more polish in the brass; more beauty in every sacrifice. 3. *Help most suitable.* One thing not substituted for another; cedar-trees for gold, and silver for brass. Timber, stones, and fine linen in exact quantity and quality. Cunning men "filled with wisdom and understanding," "able to grave," to superintend and direct. Give what is suitable and required, and you will help in building the temple.

HIRAM AND SOLOMON.—*Verses 2-16.*

Hiram had been a friend of David, now a faster friend of Solomon, with whom he formed treaties and alliance, by which commerce was extended and peace maintained. We learn from this intercourse—I. *That friendship in life is helpful.* Hiram served both father and son; gratitude and filial loyalty bound Solomon to him. An old family friend revives touching memories; should never be forsaken, though you may rise and he may sink in the world, nor undervalued in counsels and offices of love. "Thine own friend and thy father's friend, forsake not." II. *That co-operation among men is desirable.* True friendship leads to common courtesy and co-operation. Kings not independent, need men, and cannot build without others. Tyre may help Jerusalem, Gentile the Jew. In the cause of humanity, skilled and unskilled, overseer and common labourer, may work together. "Every man has his own kingship. Every man has something that no other man has. A recognition of this fact, and a proper use of its suggestions, would create for us a democracy hard to distinguish from a theocracy." III. *That men may know God, yet not serve him.* Hiram acknowledged the God of the Jewish people, now known among the nations, but no reason to think that he was a proselyte to the Jewish religion. The doxology ("Blessed, &c.") may spring from courtesies of style, community of language, and religious tradition which existed between Phœnicians and Hebrews. Men may know much of God, speak well of him, yet withhold homage from him and give it to idols. IV. *That when God's people are consistent in their life, their influence upon others is for good.* Hiram felt more than respect for Solomon; was well-disposed, through the honour and worship rendered to God. When Israel were idolatrous, they were weakened; when holy, they influenced and instructed surrounding nations; lent, but borrowed not. Let your life be pure, and the worship of your God sincere, then you overcome opposition, touch the heart, and secure the help of strangers. "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee."

NATURALISATION OF FOREIGNERS.—*Verses 17, 18.*

I. A good Government will tend to make a country attractive to foreigners. II. Foreigners thus attracted are amenable to the laws of the State. III. Thus protected, they may contribute materially to the enrichment of a State by the importation of foreign industries. IV. The kind treatment of exiles often repays those who so regard them. Illus.: The silk-weavers of Spitalfields. V. Be kind to strangers [*Bib. Museum*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 3-7. In opening the business temple he proposed to build must be a solid and permanent building, because the worship was to be continued in

perpetuity, and therefore the building materials required to be of the most durable quality. 2. It must be a magnificent structure, because it was to be dedicated to the God who was greater than all gods; and, therefore, as it might seem a presumptuous idea to erect an edifice for a Being "whom the heaven and the heaven of heavens do not contain," it was explained that Solomon's object was not to build a house for him to dwell in, but a temple in which his worshippers might offer sacrifices to his honour. No language could be more humble and appropriate than this. The pious strain of sentiment was such as became a King of Israel [*Jamieson*].

Vers. 6, 7. By the sentence "the heaven and heaven of heavens," that is, the heaven in its most extended compass, "cannot contain God," Solomon strikes down all rationalistic assertions that the Israelites imagined Jehovah to be only a finite national god. The infinitude and supramundane exaltation of God cannot be more clearly and strongly expressed than it is in these words. That, however, Solomon was addicted to no abstract idealism is sufficiently apparent from this, that he unites this consciousness of the infinite exaltation of God with the firm belief of his real presence in the temple. The true God is not merely infinitely exalted above the world, has not only his throne in heaven (1 Ki. viii. 34, 36; Ps. ii. 4; xi. 4; ciii. 19; Is. lxvi. 1; Amos ix. 6), he is also present on the earth (Deut. iv. 39), has chosen the temple for the dwelling-place of his name in Israel, from which he hears the prayers of his people [*Keil*].

Ver. 7. *Send a man.* Men wanted to consecrate their skill to God and lead in Christian work, &c. *A famous son.* Hiram, the first sculptor and engraver

of Israel, was half a foreigner. His father was a Tyrian and was dead; but his mother was a Danite who lived in Naphtali (1 Ki. vii. 13, 14). He thus sprung on the Israelite side from the same tribe, and (according to Jewish tradition) from the same family as Aholiab, the Danite artist in the wilderness. So wide was his fame, and so profound the reverence entertained for him by the two sovereigns to whom he belonged, that he is called "the father," both of Solomon and of Hiram [*Stanley*]. I. A widow's son trained in his father's workshop, helping his mother, and striving to do his duty. II. This son, by diligence, faithfulness, and skill, became famous, excelled, and was promoted. III. This promotion a reward for his diligence, and a joy to his widowed mother. Industry, filial love, and perseverance sure to bring eminence. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings: he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. xxii. 29). (Henry Martin, known in his college as "the man who had not lost an hour." Joseph, Nehemiah, Daniel.)

Vers. 17, 18. *Solomon's workmen.* Builders, Israelites and heathen (Ps. xxii. 29). A prophetic anticipation of Ep. ii. 14, 19-22; iii. 4-6. *Solomon's treatment of his workmen.* Not arbitrary like Pharaoh, who would have raised discontent, if not opposition, but considerate. A wise arrangement to give rest at home and relief in labour. Hence no murmuring in work. This an example to modern builders. Learn—The temple a house of prayer for all nations. Many help in the material work of the church, who do not enjoy its worship and privileges. "We, his servants, will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Vers. 3, 4. *Friendship.*
Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul!
Sweet'ner of life! and solder of society!"
[*Blair*].

Vers. 5, 6. *God above all gods.* As the human mind is finite and conceives by defining the limits of its thought, and as God is known to us to be

infinite, it is evident that the human mind can never be capable of conceiving God adequately as He is, or of defining His being [*Hodge*].

Ver. 7. *A man*. The most important point in any affair is to know what is to be done [*Columella*].

Ver. 14. *Skilful*. The mechanical genius of the Phœnicians generally, and of the Sidonians in particular, is noticed by many ancient writers [*Speak. Com.*].

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] In two chapters is narrated the building of the temple, which correspond with 1 Kings vi. and vii. Here greater fulness of description, and more precise introduction and different arrangement of things described.

Vers. 1, 2.—Place and time of building. *Moriah* (Gen. xxii. 2), from which was named the land of Moriah—"land of the appearing of the Lord." *Appeared*, "which was shown to David," as future site (1 Chr. xxi. 15). *Prepared*, fixed (1 Chr. xxii. 5). *O nan*, see 2 Sam. xxiv. 18; 1 Chr. xxi. 18. Ver. 2. *Second day* not in original. Translation should be "He began to build in the second month in the fourth year of his reign" [*Speak. Com.*], about 1012 B.C.

Vers. 3-7.—The holy house and porch. These measures afterwards given. *Instructed*, founded (marg.), and translation should be, "Now this is the ground-plan of Solomon for the building of the house of God." *Cubits*, i.e., cubits after the old Mosaic standard. *Threescore*, only length and width given here, not height, as 1 Ki. vi. 2. Ver. 4. *Porch*, in length as breadth of the house. *Height* a difficulty. *Speak. Com.* proposes to read 20 for 120. *Overlaid* (1 Ki. vi. 22). Ver. 5. *Greater house*, i.e., the holy place or chief room of the house, double in area the holy of holies. *Ceiled*. The walls were lined with cedar, and the floor with fir, the ceiling only to be covered with fir and overlaid with gold (1 Ki. vi. 15). *Palm*, for ornaments (1 Ki. vi. 29). *Chains*, probably garlands or festoons. Ver. 6. *Garnished*, covered, or "paved the house with precious and beautiful marble" [*Kitto*]. *Stones*, gems for "its beautification" (cf. 1 Chr. xxix. 2). *Parvaim*, not found elsewhere, generally taken for a place, but uncertain what place. Ver. 7. *House*, the holy place still spoken of, the whole of whose beams, posts, &c., had the same decorations.

Vers. 8-14.—The most holy house, i.e., sanctuary or holy of holies. For its dimensions, see 1 Ki. vi. 20. *Six hundred talents*, an addition to narrative in Kings. Ver. 9. *Nails*, to fasten the gold plate on the wooden lining of the walls. *Upper chambers*, given 1 Chr. xxviii. 11; their position uncertain. Ver. 10. *Cherubims* (cf. image), moveable work; sculptured work. Original word only found here. *Vers. 11-13.* Their position described. They stood on floor, occupying each a space ten cubits in height and in width (1 Ki. vi. 23). *Wings* touched each other over the ark, and stretched across from wall to wall. *Faces* not looking at each other, like the cherubs of Moses (Ex. xxxvii. 9), but looking outward from the most holy to the holy place. Ver. 14. *Vail*, an important addition to Kings. *Blue*, exactly the same colours as that of tabernacle (Ex. xxvi. 31).

Vers. 15-17.—The pillars and their ornaments. *High* (marg.). Long refers to distance of one from the other; height given 1 Ki. vii. 15; 2 Ki. xxv. 17; confirmed by Jer. lii. 21, 22. They appear to have stood on a line with the front of the porch; their position defined obscurely. Ver. 16. *Chains*, chaplets or festoons in the manner of the oracle, which must have had similar chain work (cf. 1 Ki. vi. 21). *Bertheau* reads "in a ring," so as to go all round the neck as a necklace. Ver. 17. *Reared* before the temple, conspicuous to beholders. *Jachin*, he will establish. *Boaz*, strength. Possibly proper names, and may belong to supposed younger sons of Solomon [*Ewald*]. The LXX. trans. *direction and strength*. "Lit., Jachin would seem to be, as rendered in the margin, 'He will establish,' while Boaz may either be 'in strength,' or 'in him is strength,' or 'in it is strength.' The meaning was probably, 'God will establish in strength' (i.e., firmly) the temple and the religion connected with it" [*Speak. Com.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.—*Verses 1-14.*

This first work that Solomon undertook was long in preparation but lasting in effect. "Of all monuments of the internal administration of Solomon, none is to be compared in itself or in its effect on the future character of the people with the building of the temple. It was far more than a mere architectural display. It supplied the framework of the history of the kingdom of Judah. There is hardly any reign which is not in some way connected with its construction or its changes" [*Stanley*]. **I. The site chosen.** Consecrated by the offering of Isaac and the gracious appearance of the angel to David. The place selected by David, bought with his money, and prepared by his labours—pulling down buildings, levelling rocks, marking out dimensions—revealed by the Spirit of God (1 Chr. xxii. 1, 18, 26). Solomon not at liberty to fix nor at a loss to find a place. Wisdom to submit to God's appointment and to be guided by his providence. **II. The specifications given.** "These are the ground plans, &c." (ver. 3). There must be foundation or ground plan—many build "in the air," build from the top, build without principles, plan, or good materials. We have need to be "instructed," not born natural architects like the bee and the beaver. In life-building keep to the "first measure," the divine rule. This the only guide, the only foundation. No other can be laid. **III. The time the work commenced.** In the second month and fourth year of his reign. Time more specific in 1 Kings vi. 1. Memorable day. Many such in Christian life; not monotonous and commonplace—"red-letter days" crises in life to remind and help. The *day* when born again, when school was entered, when home was left. The *month* when business started or the Christian church entered. "The *year* after" some great event. The deliverance from Egypt, from sickness or spiritual bondage. "Days should speak" of plans formed and work commenced, of special providences and significant events. **IV. The form of the building erected.** *First*, the Porch and its Pillars (vers. 15-17). "The most startling novelty of the building in which foreign architects had freest play. In materials it was probably suggested by Assyrian, in elevation by Egyptian architecture, while Tyrian sculptors displayed their art to the full in the two elaborate pillars. They stood immediately under the porch, within, but not supporting it, and were called, either from the workmen or from their own firmness and solidity, Jachin and Boaz. Their golden pedestals, bright brazen shafts, rich capitals, light festoons, were thought prodigies of art so remarkable that the Israelites were never wearied of recounting their glories" [*Stanley*]. *Second*, the Holy Place, "the greater house" (ver. 5), double the area of the Holy of Holies. "The whole interior was lined with boards richly decorated with carved work, clusters of foliage and flowers, among which the pomegranate and lily, or water-lily, were conspicuous, and overlaid, excepting the floor, with gold, either by gilding or in plates" (1 Ki. vi.) [*Jamieson*]. *Third*, the Most Holy Place. Its upper chambers (ver. 9); sculptured cherubim of colossal size, their faces inwards conformably to their use, which was to veil the ark (vers. 10-13). The veil between the Holy and the Most Holy Place (ver. 14) displayed the beauty of colour, embossed with cherubims, and made of four materials. This pattern given to Solomon (1 Chr. xxix. 11, 12), not the invention of human architects. Destitute of invention, we may gather materials and work according to pattern. But remember the builder depends upon the architect. "Except the Lord build the house, &c."

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TEMPLE.

I. Solid in its form. Stones and pillars indicate strength and duration. Whatever God builds is strong and solid. The earth is "established"; the hills are "everlasting"; the church is built on a rock. "The foundation of the Lord standeth sure." **II. Costly in its materials.** Not only grand and massive in style, but costly. Best cedars, best gold, and "costly stones" (1 Ki. vii. 10). The porch, the holy place, and "the most holy house overlaid with gold." To the artistic use of precious metals was added the glory of coloured gems. "Garnished the house with precious stones for beauty" (ver. 6). **III. Beautiful in its appearance.** The temple of nature is beautiful. The sky spread out as curtains, and the stars shine as lamps. The decorations of the Temple were not a form of mere "barbaric splendour" as thought by some writers. The skill of the smith, the sculptor, and the engraver lavished upon substances and in a place rarely seen by the eye of man. In its symmetry, order, and design, the work was an offering to Jehovah, whose presence filled the temple. The house of the earthly Jerusalem was a type of the glorified Church, "the city of pure gold, like unto clear glass."

"And it is a joy that in every age
The greatest works of mind or hand have been
Done unto God" [Bailey's *Festus*].

THE SURPASSING BEAUTY OF THE TEMPLE.—Verse 6.

Observe—I. That God did not need this lavish expenditure of gold and gems and rich ornaments. They were all perishable things. II. Yet divine condescension accepted this offering of human gratitude. III. The beauty and costliness of the temple not without their uses. The temple so adorned served to impress the mind of surrounding nations with the feelings of the people of Israel towards their great God. IV. The adornment of the temple a rebuke of the utilitarian views of those who are advocates of a Judas-like economy, and who regard as waste all that is given to God beyond the bare necessities of the case [*Bib. Mus.*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 4. *Within with pure gold.* Such was Christ's inside (Col. ii. 9); in his outside was no such desirable beauty (Is. liii. 2); so the church's glory is inward (Ps. xlv. 13), in the hidden man of the heart (1 Peter iii. 4) [*Trapp*].

Ver. 5. *Gold and fir.* 1. The best things employed for God. 2. The best employed with no niggard spirit and empty hand. 3. The best applied to secure harmony, beauty, and strength.

The lofty buildings set forth "the germs of all Christian architecture and the principle of national worship in fixed places for ever."

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness."

Vers. 10-13. *Cherubims.* 1. *Image work*, painted to impress mind and life. Symbols of spiritual truths. "The eye may help the fancy and the soul; but if our creed be only painted, it is as a painted wing: you will always find it where you left it—a wing that cannot flutter, much less fly, a wing that is useless in every respect" [*Dr. Parker*]. 2. *Stood*, denoting attendance and service. "They serve who also stand and wait" (*cf.* Ps. ciii. 20). 3. *Wings extended*, to teach alacrity in service, "swift as an angel." 4. *Faces inward*, not fixed on a throne and faced towards worshippers. God only must be worshipped, not angels who merely attend and veil their faces before him.

“Whatever the cherubim were, it is certain that they were in no sense representations or emblems of deity, like the winged figures of Assyria and Egypt, with which they have been often compared . . . the representation simply expresses the claim of Jehovah, the God of Israel, of such lordship over all creation as is hymned in the seraphic song of *Is. vi. 3*” [Ellicott, *O. T. Com.*].

Ver. 17. *Jachin and Boaz establishment and strength* in temple work (*cf. 1 Ki. vii. 21*). “The pillars were richly decorated and placed in a very conspicuous position in front of, and detached from, the temple. The one on the dexter side was named ‘Jachin,’ that is, ‘He shall establish,’ and that on the sinister side ‘Boaz,’ that is, ‘In it is strength.’ These names seem to show that they were memorial columns, such as have often been erected in one form or another in all

ages, and that they commemorated the Lord’s work in establishing his kingdom and presence in Jerusalem. They thus expressed to future ages the thanksgiving words of David: ‘Lord, by thy favour thou hast settled strength for my mountain’ (*Ps. xx. 7*, marg.); ‘Honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary’ (*Ps. xcvi. 6*)” [J. H. Blunt]. Showing not only by the matter—brass—but by the names of these pillars, what steadfastness the elect stand in before God, both for present and future. For present they have strength in themselves—Boaz, *i.e.*, in it is strength; for future God will so direct and establish them with his grace—Jachin, *i.e.*, he shall direct or establish, that they shall never wholly depart from him. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out” (*Rev. iii. 12*) [Trapp].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 6. *Stones for beauty*. The lavish use of the precious metals in ornamentation was a peculiar feature of early Oriental architecture [*Speak. Com.*]. ‘Tis the eternal law that first in beauty should be first in might [Keats]. *Precious stones*. They who are not made saints in a state of grace shall never be saints in glory. The stones which are appointed for that glorious temple above are hewn and polished and prepared for it here, as the stones were wrought and prepared in mountains for the building of the temple at Jerusalem [Leighton].

Vers. 7–10. *The mission of art*. Art is on a mission for the great common

people. It is to educate them. It is to elevate them. It is to refine them. It is to do its work now, no longer for the palace, no longer for the temple, but for that which has something of both the palace and the temple in it—for the family. Art is aiming at the household, and when it shall have done its work there, it will be with such resplendent and wondrous fruits as shall make all the past as nothing in the comparison. We are just on the eve of this great development. The wealth of the world is increasing, so that men are beginning to be able to make their houses richer than Grecian temples used to be [Beecher].

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter describes the holy furniture of the temple and the court (vers. 1-10); the brass works of Hiram (vers. 11-18); and the golden vessels of the sanctuary (ver. 19; ch. v. 1; cf. 1 Ki. vii. 48-51).

Vers. 1-10.—The furniture of the temple court. Ver. 1. *Altar*, of burnt offering, dimensions not given in Kings. Vers. 2-5. Brazen sea (cf. 1 Ki. vii. 23-26). *Oxen*, true reading appears to be knobs, colocyths, or flower buds, as in 1 Ki. vii. 24. The word seems to have come in by mistake from the next verse [*Murphy*]. Vers. 4, 5. The exact words of Kings used until last clause of ver. 5. *Lilies* (ver. 5), like a lily flower (marg.). Ver. 6. *Ten lavers* placed in the court, five on south and five on north side; used for washing utensils; sea for bathing of the priests. Ver. 7. *Candlesticks* made after the pattern of that by Moses (Ex. xxv. 31). *Form*, no allusion to shape, but to express what more fully given ver. 20. Ver. 8. *Ten tables*, one in tabernacle. Ver. 9. *Court*, inner court (2 Ki. vi. 36). *Great court* for the congregation. Ver. 10. *Sea*, great brazen sea, placed between the brazen altar and the porch, a little south (1 Ki. vii. 39), where the laver before the tabernacle formerly stood (Ex. xxx. 18).

Vers. 11-18.—The brass works of Hiram. *Pots*, buckets for carrying ashes from altar. *Shovels* to lift them from altar. *Basins* to receive and pour blood upon altar. Vers. 12-16. Various things (1 Ki. vii. 40-47). *Pommels*, balls on top of *chapiter*, upper parts, or capital of column. *Pomegran.* (1 Ki. vii. 20). Ver. 14. *Bases* mentioned first time, ornamental stands for lavers. Ver. 16. *Father—i.e.*, his master-workman, as ii. 13. Ver. 17. *Thick clay* of the ground. *Suc.* lay beyond Jordan, south of the Jabbok. *Zared.*, Zarthan. (1 Ki. vii. 46), probably name of place in time of writer. Ver. 18. *Found out*, so freely used that weight was not taken.

Vers. 19-22.—Golden vessels of the sanctuary (1 Ki. vii. 48-51). *Tables*, the table in Kings, perhaps the shew-bread never put on more than one of the ten at a time [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 20. *Candlesticks*, law of burning, Ex. xxvii. 20, 21; Lev. xxiv. 2, 3. Ver. 21. *Flowers*, lamps, &c. (cf. Ex. xxv. 31-39; 1 Ki. vii. 49). Ver. 22. *Entry*, the door frame; *the doors*, the door leaves. These were overlaid with gold.

HOMILETICS.

THE FURNITURE OF THE HOLY COURT.—Verses 1-10.

A continued account of the furniture, things made of brass and of gold. Without and within types of good things to come. Here furniture in open court, in view of all the people, of great significance. 1. *The altar of brass.* Twenty cubits (30ft.) square, by ten cubits (15ft.) high. Larger than that in Tabernacle. Israel more numerous and richer, should be more devout. When God enlarges our borders and business we should increase our gifts. The burnt offerings an impressive, instructive sight, before the people in the court. 2. *The sea of brass.* For the same purpose as the Laver in Tabernacle, washing hands and feet of priests while ministering at the altar. Ten cubits (15ft.) in diameter, by five cubits (7½ft.) in height, and raised higher by standing upon 12 brazen oxen. Reminding that God requires sanctity in all that approach him. Those that draw nigh must cleanse their hands and purify their hearts (Jas. iv. 8). 3. *The ten lavers* (ver. 6). They were set upon wheels to move about, and used for the ablution of sacrifices. Not only the priests, but the sacrifices must be washed. We must purify our persons and performances. Iniquity cleaves to our holy things. 4. *The ten golden candlesticks* (ver. 7). Only one in Tabernacle. Light increases. Divine direction was given to increase the number of tables for shew-bread and candlesticks for light. 5. *The ten tables.* "Five on right side and

five on the left ;” to which belonged 100 basins or dishes of gold (ver. 7). 6. *The golden altar*, on which incense was burnt (ver. 19) ; probably enlarged in proportion to the brazen altar. Christ makes atonement and intercedes for ever in virtue of that atonement. But *what use* all this splendid furniture ? Not for mere display, but utility. Talents, education, the furniture of mind not given for mere polish, but practical use. Outward adornment, material grandeur only of service when leading to spiritual results.

THE MOLTEN SEA.—*Verses 2–5.*

I. Its use suggests purification for God’s service. Priests and people unfit without this. Holiness becomes God’s house and God’s servants. “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.” **II. Its size** suggests abundant provision for purification. Not a laver, but a sea ; kept full and overflowing for constant use. A type of that “fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness.” **III. Its construction.** 1. The material precious and durable. 2. The oxen, sacrifices of priests, emblems of strength and patience—looking all ways. The blessings procured by a holy priesthood would be universally diffused [*Adapted*].

THE BRASS WORKS OF HIRAM.—*Verses 11–18.*

A detailed enumeration of principal articles executed for sacred edifice (*cf.* 1 Ki. vii. 14–46). **I. The articles which Hiram made.** Hiram skilled in work in gold, silver, and iron ; in wood and stone ; in purple, blue, fine linen and in crimson (2 Chr. ii. 14) ; but chiefly metal work or works in brass contributed. Works splendid in material, “bright brass” (1 Ki. vii. 45) ; numerous in quantity, “in great abundance” (ver. 18), and suitable in style. **II. The foundry at which they were prepared.** In neighbourhood of Succoth and Zarthan, in valley of Jordan, where the soil is marl. What natural abundant provision for man in the earth ! If brass or bronze was not smelted and alloyed by Hiram, but received from Syria as a tribute in manufactured form, yet he would melt it down for casting (1 Chr. xviii. 8). Furnaces would be required and filled with metal. Moulds made in the ground and national foundry erected far from the capital, which would not be annoyed by smoke and noxious vapours. Thus we have civilisation in its beginning, progress, and end.

AN ANCIENT CONTRACT.—*Verses 11–18.*

“Hiram finished the work that he was to make for King Solomon” (ver. 11). The agreement in 2 Chr. xi. **I. The contractor.** An eminent Tyrian artizan, skilled in great variety of departments ; appointed for his great natural ability to superintend the execution of all works of art in the temple ; and a faithful, diligent man, worthy of all confidence. **II. The articles for which he contracted.** Numerous and most valuable, well-finished and most suitable. The best material and the best workmanship. **III. The completion of the contract.** “He made an end of doing all the work” (1 Ki. vii. 41). Finished the work and *all* the work. No breach of contract ; no delay. Everything completed in time ; gave satisfaction ; and becomes a model transaction.

“THE ENTRY OF THE HOUSE.”—*Verse 22.*

This central, conspicuous, and attractive, suggesting—**I. Access to God in Christian worship.** God great and man sinful. The door might have been for ever closed ; but, in love, Jehovah directs in building a house, promises

to dwell in it, and invites men to meet him there. "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." **II. Access to symbolic beauty in Christian worship.** Perfection of *gold*, or material prosperity given to God. *Palms* indicating growth and fruitfulness in Christian life; *flowers*, emblems of beauty and fragrance in Christian character; *cherubims*, suggestive of alacrity in God's service. Thought is expressed in forms of art. Beauty pleases the senses, originates in the mind the ideal, calls imagination into play, and exercises wonderful fascination over man. Delight, love, and reverence touch the heart, emotions arise and action result.

"We live by admiration, hope, and love;
And even as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 6. *Ten lavers.* Ten symbol of completeness. Their *position* in court, five on the north, and five on south side. Their *use* for washing parts of offering. Furniture of splendid skill, labour, and expense.

Ver. 5. *With flowers of lilies*, lit. like a *lily flower*. Consider—1. That there is an acceptableness in a good and true work in itself, but much more by relation; that is, when it is rendered as to God. We must come to do our best, because we are doing it for the Lord. 2. The soundness and honesty of service in God's spiritual temple. 3. As some of Hiram's work was "lily work" (cf. 1 Ki. vii. 22), so, majesty crowned

with gracefulness will be found in all the Divinest thoughts. 1. The pillars must be before the florid ornamentation; 2. But beauty is also in God's sanctuary, and "upon the top of the pillars was lily work" [*G. J. Proctor*]. In reviewing the whole chapter, we learn—1. The beautiful in Christian architecture; the temple an example and stimulus. 2. Art in Christian service; subservient to man's highest needs and God's glory. 3. The symbolic in Christian worship. The O. T. dispensation a picture adapted to infant minds and first stages of divine instruction, "a shadow (dim sketch) of things to come" (Col. ii. 17; Heb. x. 1).

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 14. *Bases and lavers.* No heathen parallel to these bases and lavers; the whole arrangement, so full of meaning, appears quite peculiar to the Israelitish temple, for nothing of the kind is found anywhere else, either on Egyptian or Assyrian monuments [*Thenius*].

Vers. 19-22. *Gold. Symbolic art.* It is an incarnation of fancy, and is a sort of petrified poetry, or concrete rhetoric. It is the blossom of the art-tree, whose root is thought, and whose trunk is imagination. It is inventive, imitative, and composite. . . . Let our students follow nature boldly and

lovingly, but not servilely—learning to compose as she does—not following her laws without laying down his own. Above all, let him remember that ornamentation is to art what words are to thought, and that if design and architecture are dead, no ornamentation, however beautiful, can give them life. It will be, at the best, but a wreath of flowers round the pale brow of the corpse.

"O powers
Illimitable! 'tis but the outer hem
Of God's great mantle our poor stars do
gem"

[*Ruskin*].

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Removal of the ark (vers. 1-10) is followed by visible token of God's favour (vers. 11-14) (*cf.* 1 Ki. viii. 1-11), an addition to narrative in Kings, is the account of the circumstances under which the manifestation took place.

Vers. 1-10.—The ark removed. Dedicated (1 Chr. xxii. 14; xxvi. 26). *Ver. 2. Assembled*, the elders in the *feast* of tabernacles, which began on 15th of Ethanim, the seventh month (1 Ki. viii. 2). The closing festival of the sacred year. *Ver. 4. Levites*, such as were priests, whose office in particular to bear ark (1 Ki. viii. 3). *Ver. 5. Tabernacle* brought from Gibeon (2 Chr. i. 3). *Ver. 6. Sacrificed* through the priests. *Told*, counted (1 Ki. viii. 5). *Ver. 7. Wings*, those which met in the middle of the room. *Ver. 8. Covered*, shaded. *Ver. 9. Drew out*, intimating that the ark was not to be moved again. They rested in the outer wings, so made a barrier. *This day, i.e.*, the time this history was written. After Babylonish captivity, no trace of ark or staves. *Ver. 10. Nothing.* Hence tables of the law put into the ark by Moses (Deut. x. 5) existed in time of Solomon.

Vers. 11-14.—God's glory manifested. Priests without regard to courses; all priests at hand took part in ceremony. *Ver. 12. Singers*, full choir required on solemn occasions like this; all twenty-four choirs combined in *white linen* (*cf.* 1 Chr. xv. 27), with instruments proper for the Levites, and *trumpets* for priests (*cf.* Num. x. 8; 1 Chr. xv. 24; xvi. 6; 2 Chr. vii. 6; xiii. 12-14). *Ver. 13. One.* The performance arranged as one whole. The song of praise usual refrain (1 Chr. xvi. 34; Ps. cxxxvi.). *Cloud* as in erection of tabernacle (Ex. xl. 34), the symbol of Divine presence, too dazzling for them to officiate.

HOMILETICS.

DEDICATED THINGS.—*Verse 1.*

This incident worthy of note, something to be commended, thought the writer. The treasures of David carefully stored into the chambers of the temple.

I. David before his death dedicated certain treasures to God. With toil, self-sacrifice, and entire devotedness, David collected materials. "In my trouble I have prepared, &c." (1 Chr. xxii. 14). His spoils and property consecrated to the highest uses. The gold of the heathen may enrich the coffers of the Son of God.

II. Solomon most scrupulous in carrying out his father's wish. He might have taken them for the expenses of his house and government. As executor he willingly appropriated all to its lawful use. Nothing was alienated. The will was felt to bind and fulfilled. Frequently the wishes of pious parents are evaded by worldly-minded relatives. The manner important and specific. *Thus* (ver. 1; *cf.* 1 Ki. viii. 51, so ended, &c.)—

1. Resolving to secure the blessing by fulfilling the conditions.
2. Anxious to bestow upon the people the best blessings.
3. Continuing the work until completely finished.

III. Solomon's example worthy of our imitation. Treasures we can give—*hearts*, personal efforts, contributions and attendance, obedience to the Divine will, and prayer for the Divine presence.

THE REMOVAL OF THE ARK.—*Verses 2-10.*

Along with holy vessels, needful to bring in the ark, the most precious furniture. The occasion one of great interest and solemnity.

I. The time of its removal. 1. *Remarkable in itself.* The building finished in the month Bul (November), eighth of the year, eleventh of Solomon's reign (B.C. 1005-4), having

occupied workmen seven years and a half (1 Ki. vi. 1, 37, 38). Dedication began in seventh month of the year Ethanim (October), not the same year in which completed. Intervening eleven months spent in getting ready; delay to choose fit time when Jerusalem would be filled with people. Feast of Tabernacles most suitable season to dedicate temple.

2. *Remarkable in its influence.* "The magnitude of the event is marked by the fact that now, for the first time since the exodus, we have the years and months recorded" [Stanley]. Events often fix dates in life. "I have shewed thee new things from this time."

II. The method of its removal. Similar to the ceremony of removing from house of Obedom to Zion (2 Sam. vi. 12; 1 Chr. xv. 25).

1. *Representatives of the nation summoned to take part.* Heads of tribes, chiefs of the fathers, senators, judges, and rulers.

2. *Vast spectators met together.* "All the men of Israel assembled themselves" (ver. 3). Not only chief men, those invited, but vast numbers of common people to watch the ceremony.

3. *An orderly procession was formed.* The king, preceded by his royal guard (1 Ki. xiv. 27, 28), took the lead; elders of the people followed; then came the Levites bearing the ark. This procession was joined by another on Mount Zion from lofty height of Gibeon, "bearing with it the relics of the old pastoral worship, now to be disused for ever" (ver. 5). Levite choirs sang joyous psalms (the Psalms of Degrees cxx.—cxxiv.), in solemn steps, accompanied with cymbals, psalteries, harps, and trumpets. Up the hill the procession went, and in nearing Moriah they would sing, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of Thy strength."

III. The ceremonies which accompanied its removal. Everything fit for a great and solemn event like this.

1. *Innumerable sacrifices offered.* Stationed in different places, priests offered "sheep and oxen which could not be numbered for multitude" (ver. 6). "The ground was moist with drink-offerings and sacrifices," says Josephus.

2. *Priests attended in a body.* This an extraordinary occasion, more than wanted solemnity. All priests came up from all parts of Judæa to take part. "All the priests that were present (found) were sanctified and did not then wait by course" (ver. 11).

3. *Musicians orderly arranged.* The station of priests with instruments at marble table on the south-west of the altar apart from others. Levite singers occupied an orchestra east of the altar. Both stood with their faces to the altar. The new and gentler notes of David's music blended with the loud trumpet blast of earlier days in praising God, "for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever."

IV. The solemn deposit in its resting-place. Brought into its place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims (1 Ki. viii. 6). "There it is unto this day" (ver. 9).

1. *Its public inspection.* "Before the ark disappeared for the last time from the eyes of the people, the awful reverence which had kept any inquisitive eyes from prying into the secrets of that sacred chest gave way before the united feelings of necessity and of irresistible curiosity. The ancient lid formed by the cherubs was to be removed; and a new one without them was to be substituted, to fit it for its new abode. It was taken off, and in so doing the interior of the ark was seen by Israelite eyes for the first time for more than four centuries, perhaps the last time for ever" [Stanley].

2. *Its careful seclusion.* Put into "the place of its rest" (Ps. cxxxii. 8-14), in token that its wanderings were over—that God had given rest to the Levites and privilege to minister in fixed service; a final pledge of God's presence with his people in their new capital. God present in religious assemblies. "Lo, I am with you always."

THE JOY OF FINISHED WORK.

I. The accomplishment of a good work is the cause of joy. The building of the first and second temple, the establishment of national

government and the acquisition of national liberty, the rearing of great monuments and the opening of places of worship, &c. 1. *Joy to the builder.* Solomon rejoiced that no accident delayed, that no providence prevented the erection of the temple. 2. *Joy to the nation.* The people rejoiced; all classes represented, and shared in the consecration. Sacrifice and cymbal; king, princes, and people united in praise to God, "who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him." **II. The power to accomplish this work should be ascribed to God.** Not to the skill of the architect, the labour of the builders, the wealth of the contributors, but to God. Genius to invent, material, gold, and silver, to give all from him. We return simply what we receive. "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." **III. Hence, in every great undertaking we should ask for God's direction.** In building ask for a site, materials, and workmen, for time to finish, and privilege to consecrate. "All the works of this pattern," only from the Divine Architect. If enterprises, social and national, succeed, wisdom from above must guide. In building a family and a business, if the foundations be laid in oppression (Hab. ii. 11, 12), and the materials be gathered and put together in pride and forgetfulness of God, the erection may fall, and great may be the fall. The best-laid project fails unless God crown it with success. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."

THE TEMPLE CHOIR.—*Verses 12, 13.*

A full choir on this occasion. *Levites*, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, their proper instruments; and *priests* with trumpets. **I. Music a revelation from God.** Music of a certain kind in nature—"the notes of birds," "the music of the spheres," &c. But sounds not music until reduced to scale; not a hymn of praise until formed by the mind of man, taught by the help of God, to awaken emotions. "There is no fuller revelation of God in nature than is found in these laws of sound, by which he comes into the very heart of man, even to its inmost recesses of love and adoration; and it requires only a sensitive, child-like heart to interpret this speechless music locked within nature as the voice of God pleading to be let out into music, and praise through the heart of man, for so only can his works praise him" [*Munger*]. **II. Music as a science to cultivate.** Materials and laws of music in nature must be reduced to harmony, and made the vehicle of thought and feeling. Musicians described as workmen, a guild of sacred minstrels who labour and study to perfect their art (1 Chr. xxv. 1). 1. *Some may lead.* Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthem "set over service of song." Leaders required to train and conduct. 2. *All may learn.* Voice given to cultivate. Members of the choir and the congregation may practise singing. All should feel that sacred music pleads for better use and nobler exercise. **III. Music consecrated to its highest use in the worship of God.** The temple the great school of music, which was consecrated to worship of Jehovah, hence "songs of the temple" (Amos viii. 3). Nothing calls for music like religion. It may be left out of other departments of life, but religious worship would suffer without music. Where praise is repressed for the sake of the sermon the service will become dull and unprofitable. Cease to sing, and men will forget to assemble. Music takes to itself the noblest instruments, attunes and inspires the greatest composers, and becomes the expression of the greatest reverence, adoration, and praise in the house of God. The heart has lost its sadness, atheists have wept, and men been brought to God under the influence of song. "Both young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord."

THE CLOUD FILLING THE TEMPLE.—Verses 11-14.

I. As a confirmation of acceptance. By this God approved of Solomon's work, honoured the ark and accepted the temple. Priests drew back in holy dread. Sinful man cannot approach the glory of God, who is like a consuming fire. But God condescends to meet him, to hear prayer and restore to friendship. **II. As a distinguishing feature of the Jewish from other nations.** Heathen nations had temples, but gods without glory. No manifestation like that of Jehovah ever seen by them. This cloud a striking testimony that God took the nation under His care and protection. The glory, stability, and attractive force of any people is to have God with them. "For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" **III. As a symbol of permanent habitation.** After the dedication the visible sign withdrawn, but God constantly dwelt in the temple. Only driven out when polluted by manifold idolatry (Ezek. x. 4-18). His return in the Messiah greater than in the magnificence of temple. **IV. A consecrating element in all sacred buildings.** Not until the glory fills the Christian church, the human heart, and the plans of life, will they become fit for God. "Let this be a lesson to all church builders. Your painted windows, and gilded columns, and majestic roofs are nothing until the living Spirit comes into the sanctuary, fills it with an illuminating presence. The house is built for God, and until God comes it is but a structure of calculated matter; when he comes every stone glows and every corner of the house becomes a sacred refuge, and the whole temple becomes as it were a part of heaven" [Dr. Parker].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Bring up the ark.* Why this display and ceremony? 1. The ark the chief thing in the temple. The temple without the ark like the Church without a Bible, the universe without a sun. 2. The ark in the temple significant of God's desire to be reconciled to man, to dwell with his people and not be separated from them. 3. The temple, therefore, nothing until consecrated by the ark. The same with aspects and departments of human life. Men, places, and abilities nothing until utilised for good. How many empty places and unfulfilled plans and prophecies of life!

Ver. 9. *There it is.* Things that remain. 1. Sin and misery remain—cannot be ignored or explained away. 2. Redemption in Christ remains—may be enjoyed and offered to all. 3. Religious ordinances remain—the Bible, the Sabbath, and privileges of God's house. There they are, lodged with us, tokens of God's favour and presence committed unto us to enjoy

and commend to others (2 Tim. i. 13, 14).

Vers. 12, 13. *Singers.* 1. *In beautiful attire.* "Arrayed in white linen"—the symbol of purity, beauty, and splendour. "White is everywhere," says one, "the livery and colour of heaven." 2. *With various instruments.* Stringed and unstringed, all forms and all ministries, may be employed in God's service. 3. *With marvellous unison.* All the twenty-four choirs combined into one grand choir. Singing and playing arranged to form one whole, "to make one sound" in praising the Lord. Such strains fit type of heaven and of the everlasting life of glorified spirits. A life of melody, love, and order in themselves. A life in harmony with each other and with God. 4. *The theme of their song.* The goodness and mercy of the Lord. "He is good, for his mercy endureth for ever." The song of the redeemed in heaven.

Ver. 13. *The cloud.* 1. *A type of Old Testament dispensation.* Rites and

ceremonies, types and shadows. "He made darkness his secret place." 2. *The present mode of viewing God.* Can only know and see God through a cloud "darkly." The clearest conceptions dark; the greatest capacity limited. None can find out God by searching. "The symbol clearly implies a revelation of divine glory, as it is seen, not

in the unveiled brightness of heaven, but in the glorious cloud of mystery, through which it must always be seen on earth, and which indeed is all that the eye of man can bear to contemplate. Out of that glory comes the only revelation which can be destined to man—the voice or word of the Lord (Deut. iv. 12)" [*Ellicott's O. T. Com.*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1. *Finished.* There are some buildings that are never finished. We never finish our life building; the life temple goes up evermore. Let every man take heed how he buildeth. Do not suppose that you finish your education. In the higher education you only finish that you may begin; you close one book as a pledge of your qualification to open another. There is always a higher aspect of things to apprehend and apply [*Dr. Parker*].

Vers. 12, 13. *Singers and harps.* Theology and music unite and move on, hand in hand, through time, and will continue eternally to illustrate,

embellish, enforce, impress, and fix in the attentive mind the grand and important truths of Christianity [*Andrew Law, "Essay on Music"*]. Man did not make the laws of music; he has only found them out, and if he be self-willed and break them, there is an end of music instantly; all he brings out is discord and ugly sounds [*Chas. Kingsley*].

"God is its author and not man; he laid
The key-note of all harmonies; he
plann'd
All perfect combinations; and he made
Us so that we could hear and understand."

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Close parallelism of this chapter and 1 Kings viii. 12-50; ver. 13 only important variation.

Ver. 1 (cf. Lev. xvi. 1), *darkness, not cloud, but of holy of holies, into which cloud entered.*

Vers. 3-11.—*Solomon's address to people.* *Face*, from looking towards the temple. *Congregation*, men, women, and children. *Blessed*, offered blessings probably in form of Num. vi. 23-25. Ver. 4. *Spake* (2 Sam. vii.). Ver. 5. *Chose* until David's time. Vers. 10, 11. The promise is fulfilled.

Vers. 12-42.—*Solomon's prayer.* *Before*, eastward of it, with face towards temple, as speaking for the people. Ver. 13. *Scaffold*, brazen platform. *Kneeled*, in solemn posture. The prayer sublime and orderly in arrangements. Ver. 15. Preface; then three petitions. *First*, perpetuate the line of David. Ver. 16. *Keep* good the promise. *Second*, regard the house where name is put. *Thy word* (1 Chr. xvii. 9-12). Ver. 18. A conception of God's condescension not limited to the temple. Ver. 19. *Prayer*, next verse. Ver. 21. *Third petition.* *Forgive* in general, not limited sense.

We have now *seven* different cases in which Israel turns to the temple in prayer. *1st case.* A man wronged by his neighbour (vers. 22, 23). *Oath* of self-purgation usual when no witnesses. *Requitting*, returning equivalent. Do justice to the innocent. *2nd case.* When worsted by the enemy (vers. 24, 25). *Worse* in defensive war (Josh. vii. 5). Defeated on account of sin. *Hear* when they repent. *3rd case.* Suffering from drought (vers. 26, 27). *Rain, heavens like a storehouse, may be shut up* (1 Ki. viii. 35) when

good way forsaken. *4th case.* Visitation by death or any other calamity (vers. 28–31). Seven kinds of affliction. *Dearth*, scarcity from other causes than rain. *Pestilence*, which often sweeps over Eastern lands. *Blasting*, various forms of danger in crops (Deut. xxviii. 22). *Locusts* (Deut. xxviii. 38). *Enemies* in gates, none therefore able to go in or come out. *Plagues*, sore or sickness of every kind, recognised as Divine chastisement. *5th case.* The stranger coming to pray (vers. 32, 33). *As thy people* (ver. 33). Rights and privileges of Israel thrown open to all. *May know*, godly fear in O.T. the foundation of piety; the temple the only place where God is worshipped. *6th case.* Aggressive war undertaken by Divine permission (vers. 34, 35). Prayer for God to maintain their cause. *7th case.* If in captivity (vers. 36–39). If captives in war, on account of sin. *Bethink*, reflect, “bring back their heart” (marg.). Consider seriously exact words of Deut. xxx. 1–3, then hear and forgive. *Conclusion.*—Vers. 40–42 wanting in Kings. *Arise*, words spoken probably when ark was brought into Jerusalem (cf. Ps. cxxxii. 8–10). *Resting-place*, Holy of Holies. *Turn not, i.e.*, reject his prayer and cause him to be ashamed. *Mercies* towards David (Ps. lxxxix. 2).

HOMILETICS.

THE TEMPLE THE FIXED DWELLING-PLACE OF GOD.—Verses 1–10.

To reassure priests and people, Solomon reminded them that the cloud, instead of being a sign of evil, was the fulfilment of promise. “The Lord hath said,” if not in express words yet by continual course of action, “that he would dwell, &c.” Hence a token of approval, a method of taking possession of the house, and this prayer a petition that God would for ever keep possession. **I. The temple now a fixed residence for God.** “A settled place for thee.” 1. *In opposition to the tabernacle.* Which was temporary and provisional. *A tent*, a mutable and fragile dwelling; but *a house* of stone and cedar, durable and solid. 2. *As required by the circumstances of God’s people.* The dispensation made a fixed place needful. Man required locality, visible signs, and special adaptations. Now not a question of *place*, but of being; not in Jerusalem nor Mount Gerizim. God is *spirit* and worshipped not by material representation, nor ritual, but by the heart, *the spirit* of man. Not hands, not wood and stone, but living souls must become God’s abode. **II. The temple as a fixed residence built in fulfilment of God’s promise.** “God hath fulfilled that which he spake” (ver. 4). 1. *A promise made to David.* Reference to 2 Sam. vii. 11–14, where is promised that David’s dynasty should continue for ever, and David’s son should build a house. Thus the promise established the royal house by its connection with the royal seed. “I will set up thy seed after thee.” 2. *A promise fulfilled in Solomon.* “I am risen up in the room of my father” (ver. 20). Not in pride, as Ahasuerus made his feast and Nebuchadnezzar built his city; but in a spirit of gratitude Solomon built the temple and finished his father’s work. Traced the providence of God, and urged the people to praise him. **III. The design of this fixed residence to perpetuate the presence of God.** The temple a permanent centre of worship to Jehovah. Neither city for worship, nor king to govern chosen before David’s time. Now God has chosen a residence and purposed to abide in it for ever. “This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever” (Ps. lxxxviii. 16). Hence God accessible, Zion secure and communion attractive and blessed. “God is known in her palaces for a refuge” (literally a high place for shelter and defence, Ps. xlvi. 7–11; Prov. xviii. 10) (Ps. xlvi. 3).

THE PERFORMANCE OF GOD’S PROMISE.—Verses 4–11.

God had made good one part of his promise, Solomon prays that he would perform the other. Concludes, as he began, with thankful acknowledgment of

Divine goodness in performance of promise. **I. That God deals with his people in all ages by way of promise.** With Adam, Abraham, and David. Throughout the O. and N. T. dispensation, with individuals and nations we have promise after promise. "Exceeding great and precious promises," to encourage and help. Here we have—1. *Promise to build a house.* 2. *Promise to raise up a king.* **II. That the performance of this promise is a source of joy to God's people.** 1. *In revealing God to them.* God never compelled to act; enters into engagements and covenants with perfect freedom; and never reluctant to bestow what is promised. Hence the goodness and grace in giving the word, and the veracity, power, and providence in its fulfilment. God may be trusted, for "He cannot deny himself." In this the true God stands contrasted with the "lying vanities" of heathen deities and weak, sinful man. "He is not man that he should lie, &c." 2. *In the actual bestowment of good to them.* Providence on their behalf; power exercised for their deliverance, and actual fulfilment in their history and experience. The covenant kept and mercy bestowed (ver. 14). "There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." **III. That there are special seasons to testify to God's goodness in the performance of his promise.** "As it is this day" (ver. 15). In conversion, restoration from sickness and danger; in dedication of places of worship and in times of special favour, we may testify to God's mercy and truth. Numerous are the occasions in which we may "abundantly utter (lit. bubble forth as from a fountain) the memory of his great goodness and sing (lit. with loud eulogies) of his righteousness" (Ps. cxlv. 7).

INVOCATION OF DIVINE FAVOURS.—*Verses 11–24.*

Solomon had dedicated the temple, now offered the consecration prayer to God. "He stretched forth his hands in the gesture of Oriental prayer, as if to receive the blessings for which he sought, and at the same time exchanged the usual standing posture of prayer for the extraordinary one of kneeling, now first mentioned in the sacred history, and only used in Eastern worship at the present day in moments of deep humiliation. The prayer itself is one of unprecedented length, and is remarkable as combining the conception of the infinity of the Divine Presence with the hope that the Divine mercies will be drawn down on the nation by the concentration of the national devotions, and even of the devotion of foreign nations, towards this fixed locality" [*Stanley*]. Learn—**I. That God is infinitely great.** "Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (ver. 18). To be infinite is literally to be unbounded, unlimited. This includes omnipresence and incomprehensibility. His immensity extends infinitely beyond the boundaries of space. God fills heaven, earth, and hell. No place, no temple contains him as a house is built for man. He was not confined to the Jewish people, nor "chiefly to the narrow bounds of the Jewish land," as some think; not a mere "God of the hills," a patial or Gentile Deity. His settled abode is eternity, "*inhabiteth eternity.*" "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxiii. 24). "Where is the house that ye built unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" **II. That God is infinitely faithful.** "Kept that thou promisedst" (ver. 15). The truth of God makes it impossible for him not to fulfil whatever he hath spoken. He is "the faithful God" (Deut. vii. 9). "It is impossible for God to lie." Performance of threatening and promise not impracticable. God not liable to forget nor to change. We may be persuaded that "there shall not fail one good word of all that the Lord our God hath spoken." **III. That God is infinitely good.** This attribute may be termed the *glory* of God. Moses desired to see the *glory* of

Jehovah; the answer was, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee." In this narrative goodness is distinguished by different names, and exercised in different ways. "Goodness is the *genus* that comprehends mercy, grace, long-suffering, kindness, and truth in it; these are branches from that as the root" [*Goodwin* on Ex. xxxiii. 19]. 1. *In answering prayer*. Heathen gods had eyes, but could see not; ears, but could hear not. God is accessible, has not hid himself from men, nor retired into the bosom of eternity. "O thou that hearest prayer," "Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place." 2. *In dwelling with men*. In the hearts of those who love him, and walk before him in daily life. In the temple with those who worship him in sincerity and truth. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly." "I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." 3. *In the bestowment of mercy*. "And shewest mercy" (ver. 14). *Mercy* suggests *misery* (Latin *miseria*), wretchedness. God relieves in distress, confers favours on undeserving, forbears to punish, and bestows innumerable favours. "Thou art good, and doest good."

THE SOLEMN QUESTION.—Verse 18.

Will God dwell with man? The question of all ages, the dream, the desire of humanity. Irrepressible anticipations in the deification of heroic men, the incarnations of Hindoo gods, and in the Messianic hope of the Jews. **I. Where the answer?** Not in *ancient philosophy*, even with its moral teachings and intense longings. No God for the poor and illiterate, only for noble and learned if for any class. God was thought too great to regard man. Not in *modern philosophy*. Ungodly science substitutes some abstract principle, "Infinite Wisdom," "the Ruling Principle of the Universe," or talks of "law" and "omnipotent power." God is not a living personal God, accessible to man, and willing to dwell with him. **II. What saith the Scripture?** Manifestations of God in O.T. symbols in tabernacle and temple. Promises in abundance, not merely to *sojourn* as a stranger, to tarry for a night (Jer. xiv. 8), but to *settle* in fixed residence among men. "There shall be a place which the Lord God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there" (Deut. xii. 11). "The hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever" (Ps. lxxviii. 16). "I will dwell in the midst of them for ever" (Ezek. xliii. 9). God with men in Christian worship; in the incarnation of Christ, "God manifest in the flesh;" in the human heart by his Holy Spirit; in heaven by special presence.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 6–8. David's intention to build the temple. 1. Man's purposes are sometimes greater than his power. Limitations of—1. Character. 2. Body. 3. Culture. 4. Circumstances—want of means or liberty. 5. Destiny. 6. Life. II. The importance and value of these gracious but unfulfilled intentions. Earnest purposes, sincere desires, are facts, and as facts will be recompensed. 1. They are facts to God. 2. They are facts to those who cherish them. 3. Unfulfilled intentions are not without their practical influence upon society.

III. The comfort which these considerations are calculated to afford. This theme is full of comfort to—1. The poor and uneducated. 2. The suffering. 3. Those who are called to premature death. 4. All good men in the presence of their imperfect lives [*W. L. Watkinson*].

Ver. 10. In the room of my father. 1. A succession of *men*. Joshua after Moses; Solomon after David. 2. A succession of *office*. To some high responsibility—priesthood, government—by election, by hereditary descent.

No mere form to fill the same place and be surrounded by the very circumstances and associations which inspired our predecessors. "He took up the mantle of Elijah." 3. A succession of work. Work should be carried on and finished, if possible, by those called to it. Thus ideas, liberties, and institutions are handed down from generation to generation. Thus have we the true continuity of the Christian church, the true communion of saints, and the true identity of man's life with God's work.

Vers. 15, 16. The stability and perpetuity of the Davidic throne, the sonship of the Davidic King, and the consequent heirship of all nations (*cf.* 2 Sam. vii. 13, 14).

Vers. 14, 15. "Lord God of Israel." This was a worthy precedent for princes, who, if they would imitate Solomon in devotion, might likewise share with him in blessing. This is a long prayer and full of affection to the end. So to pray is hard and happy. It is a precedential prayer, as one calleth it. *Kept with thy servant David.* We may pray to good purpose though in the self-same words as before. Christ himself did so in his agony, when he prayed most earnestly. Let this comfort those who complain that they cannot vary their petitions" [*Trapp*]. *Be verified*, v. 17. He reiterateth and reinforceth his former request; this evinceth his holy importunity. This he learned of his father (*cf.* Prov. iv. 4) [*Ibid.*].

Ver. 18. *Will God, &c.?* The great contrast—1. Between the heaven of heavens and the material temple. 2. Between the infinite grandeur of God

and the unworthiness of man (creature and sinful creature). 3. The deep humility which this contrast should create in our approach to God.

"The more thy glories strike mine eye
The humbler I shall lie," &c.

Vers. 18–21. *The Sanctity of God's House.* 1. As the residence of a great God. 2. As the house of prayer. 3. As the place consecrated to worship. God's name there. The centre and core of all fellowship,

Vers. 12–21. *Solomon's Prayer.* 1. Position from whence offered. *Stood* on scaffold where he could be seen and heard. 2. Solomon's attitude. Reverent, *kneeled*; expectant, "*spread forth his hands.*" Looked up to heaven in dependence; *kneeled* in humility. "*Kneeling never spoiled silk stockings*" [*Herbert*]. 3. Its length. Longest recorded in Scripture. 4. Its spirit. Hopeful on the ground of fulfilled promise; humble on account of unworthiness. 5. Its language. Beautiful and scriptural. 6. Its purpose. That God would fulfil the remainder of his promise. That God would regard and honour the temple, by watching over its interests, dwelling in its courts, answering prayers and pardoning sins. "*Hear thou to thy dwelling-place in heaven*"—a pregnant expression for, hear the prayer which ascends or is sent to thy dwelling place, to heaven. The last words, "hear and forgive," are to be left in their generality, and not to be limited by any complement. Forgiveness of sins alone can remove the curse which transgression draws after it" [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

JUSTICE EXECUTED.—Verses 22, 23.

The first specific case of petition is doubtful. A man has sustained injury and charges a suspected person, though not able to prove the fact. Petition that false oath may not be taken; but that the innocent may be discovered, and the guilty punished. **I. The injury charged.** A "trespass against his neighbour." If goods or money to be kept be lost; cattle to have died, driven away, or injured (Ex. xxii. 7–9); if any one over-reached another (Lev. v. 21–25), be suspected of theft, fraud, and wilful damage, he might be sued at

law to make oath of integrity. **II. The solemn appeal made.** Punishment could only be made after discovery of guilty person. 1. *An oath was made by accused.* Witnesses could not be found. Dispute or difference to be settled by oath of accused. Hence party brought before the altar to swear in all due solemnity. 2. *God appealed to.* "Hear thou from heaven." Many false oaths might be taken and guilty escape, who then could justify the innocent? God above sees all, hears all, and never errs. This appeal accords with our instinct of justice and revelations of Scripture. "The works of his hands are verity and judgment."

NATIONAL DISASTER.—Verses 24, 25.

Worsted by enemy making inroads upon them, defeating them as predicted (Lev. xxvi. 3-7; Deut. xxviii. 15-25). **I. Sin is the cause of national reverses.** "Because they have sinned against thee." Forgetting, forsaking, denying God, creating displeasure by neglecting his worship and becoming idolatrous. **II. Forsaking sin may ward off national reverses.** Judgments bring to penitence, and those that slight God often solicit his mercy. "In their affliction they will seek me early." 1. *With earnest prayer.* "Pray and make supplication." Afflictions remind of neglected duties, and kill corruptions bred by prosperity. 2. *With humble confession.* "And confess thy name." This opposed to forgetting, extenuating, or denying sins. They must be acknowledged, not in cold, formal expression; but with deep, humble, and sincere penitence. 3. *With practical amendment.* "Shall turn again to thee." There is utter renunciation, abandonment. The wicked man "forsakes his way." Then comes mercy, restoration, and new life. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth them and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

PERILS TO AGRICULTURE.—Verses 26-31.

Various plagues dangerous to growing crops. Grain blasted, cities besieged, and sickness of every kind upon transgressors themselves. Hence we have—**I. A rebuke to rationalism in natural evils.** Mildew and caterpillars, with their terrible ravages, traceable by modern science to natural causes. But who originated the causes, laws, or conditions? All meteorological phenomena, all providential dispensations ascribed to God and under his control. This the only adequate and satisfactory reply to the question, "Is there not a cause?" The heavens are store-rooms to shut up or open at God's pleasure. He commands locusts to devour, and smites the land with pestilence (2 Chr. vii. 13). In all afflictive events God speaks to cities and nations. "The *Lord's voice* crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name." **II. A moral design in the infliction of natural evils.** "When thou hast taught them the good way." Sufferings to nations, as to individuals, disciplinary, sent to humble, correct, and restore to God. 1. *To requite justice.* Retributions inevitable; nations corrupt and idolatrous cannot escape. God will not reverse his law. 2. *To lead to God.* "That they may fear thee." God must be acknowledged, to believe in whom is not superstition. The progress of art and the applications of science must not thrust him out from events. God smites to deliver, that we may pray to him, stand in awe of his justice, and adore his goodness. **III. A place for prayer in removing natural evils.** This denied by many. Prayer may be necessary for man's highest culture. "But no good can come of giving it a delusive value, by claiming for it a power in physical nature," says Prof. Tyndall. We do not classify it with powers in physical nature. It is not a *natural* but a *moral* power, and may have influence over the will of One above nature, viz., "Nature's God." God's

laws do not interfere with human will and human choice. The ordination of God leaves room for prayer. Prayer may be one of the laws of the universe as certain in its sphere as the laws of heat or of gravitation in their peculiar realms. Neither history, scripture, nor experience forbid us to pray in times of national distress. "Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, &c."

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than the world dreams of" [*Tennyson*].

PRAYER FOR THE STRANGER.—*Verses 32, 33.*

Prayers in the temple to be answered in such a striking manner that unbelievers were to see proof of Jehovah's mercy. Probably many resident foreigners amongst the Jews. The number would increase by the attractions of Solomon's reign. This prayer indicates growing liberality to those "not of the people of Israel." **I. The benevolence of O. T. spirit.** This prayer larger and more comprehensive than that for the Israelites, a proof of benevolent and public spirit. Kindness to strangers argued—1. *From Israel's own experience.* Springing from humble origin; delivered from a strange land and great oppression, they were to love, pity, and relieve the stranger. Events in their history which might lead to feelings of rancour and revenge, such as in later periods brought upon them the stigma of being *hostes humani generis*, were the very ground on which the Mosaic law taught them benevolence to the wretched and defenceless of every nation. "The stranger that dwelleth with thee shall be unto thee even as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thine own self. For ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord" (Lev. xix. 33). 2. *From the known character of Israel's God.* For special purposes in the interests of humanity the covenant God of Israel. Yet no mere local, national divinity. "The Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords." "*He loveth the stranger.*" Every nation teaches hospitality and kindness to strangers, not as a civil and social, but sacred duty. In a higher sense than Zeus, God is "the stranger's God." Homer's touching language almost the sentiment of scripture. "Love ye therefore the stranger: for the Lord loveth the stranger."

"Love's special care
Are strangers poor and friendless."

II. The catholicity of O. T. spirit. The spirit of the petition beyond Jewish exclusiveness. Often said Jewish religion taught that benevolence should be confined to the narrow circle of families, tribes, or the nation; while the Gospel expands into wider fields and sets forth a brotherhood, a "religion of humanity." But, says one, "Little as we may have heeded the fact, yet certain it is, that expressions of the most expansive philanthropy echoed in the anthems of the Jewish temple." In the Pentateuch and in the Psalms the feelings often overleap the ritual and challenge all nations to partake of Jewish privileges. A striking contrast to exclusiveness of after times, when Samaritans were indignantly excluded from sharing in the rebuilding of the temple (Ez. iv. 2, 3); and when Jews persecuted Paul for speaking of his mission to the strangers for whom Solomon prayed (Acts xxii. 22). **III. The prophetic element of O. T. spirit.** Great anticipations expressed in the prayer. 1. *When strangers would be led to believe in God.* They would hear of the marvellous deeds of Jehovah for his people, be drawn to the temple, worship and join in the devotions of the chosen people. "When he shall come and pray toward this house." 2. *When strangers would enjoy equal rights with the Jews.* In religious matters, when all surrounding nations were exclusive, Israel were commanded to admit

strangers to equal privileges, in the offerings of the tabernacle (Num. xv. 14-16); and at the solemn reading of the law once in seven years (Deut. xxxi. 12). In the spirit of this law Solomon anticipates, if not predicts, the time when from the remotest nations strangers shall come to pray and hope for acceptance before God on equal conditions with His people, without becoming citizens of the Jewish state, without submission to civil law or Mosaic ritual. "And fear thee, as doth thy people Israel." "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 26. *Heaven shut up.* 1. *All things controlled by God.* Atheism, Pantheism, and Materialism, all philosophy which sees nothing but law, nothing distinct from and above matter, reprobated. 2. *All things controlled by God in the interests of men.* "All things work together," work in harmony, and subserve the ends for which they were made for the good of his people. 3. *These interests are secured by prayer and submission to God.* Not by science, education, or human industry without God. A regular system of agency connects results with the sovereign will of God. An unbroken link between the natural and moral world, between the conduct of men and the conditions of nature. The principle of mediation seen in all departments of God's government. "I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel."

Vers. 26, 27. 1. *The path forsaken.* "The good way." Good in itself, end, and consequences to travellers. 2. *The method of return to it.* Discovery of wandering, confession of sin, and return to God. "Confess thy name, and turn from sin." 3. *The cause of this return.* "When thou dost afflict them." Some like metals, which nothing but fierce fire can purify (Mal. iii. 2, 3). Severe corrections reclaim. Manasseh (2 Chr. xxxiii. 12, 13), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 34-37). "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." "The order of Solomon's prayer is very observable here. First and chiefly, he prays for their repent-

ance and forgiveness, which is the chief blessing and the only foundation of all other mercies, and then he prays for temporal mercies, thereby teaching us what to desire principally in our prayers, which also Christ hath taught us in his perfect prayer, wherein there is but one petition for outward, and all the rest are for spiritual blessings" [*Benson*].

Vers. 29-31. *Heart Disease.* Special instances not given. Grievances innumerable. "Every man the plague of his own heart" (1 Ki. viii. 38). 1. *The diagnosis of the disease.* The heart the seat of sin; fountain from which issue sinful thoughts, words, and actions; "deceitful above all things," restless and dissatisfied. "Who can know it?" Many acknowledge it; few really feel, discover, and confess it. 2. *The cure of the disease by the great Physician.* Incurable by man. "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?" When we enter the sanctuary, lament and seek deliverance, the sore will be healed. Bodily sufferings may be endured, but remorse of conscience, convictions of sin, wound of spirit, God alone can remove. "The spirit of man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" 1. God's omniscience discerns. "Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men." 2. God's justice rectifies. "Render unto every man according to his ways." 3. God's mercy encourages. "Hear thou and forgive."

Vers. 32, 33. *The stranger.* 1. *The attractive force of God's house.* Not beauty of architecture or furniture, not members nor ritual, but God's presence revealed to devout worshippers. 2. *The*

wonderful provision made for those who come. Prayer and praise, the reading and exposition of Scripture. Every ordinance helpful and needful. "I will abundantly (surely) bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread" (Ps. cxxxii. 15). 3. *The missionary*

spirit in which we should return. What we hear of God should be told to others. His mighty deeds should be proclaimed to all nations. "That all people of the earth may know thy name and fear thee."

HOMILETICS.

DIVINE COMMISSION IN WAR.—*Verses 34–39.*

Israel not permitted to war for self-gratification, unlawful or ambitious ends; only in just cause, and by divine warrant. "Thou shalt send them." **I. Israel engaged in wars for God may be delivered into the power of the enemy.** Commission alone would not preserve from sin, might lead to pride and self-reliance. Then foreign armies would enter the land, take them captives, and lead them into countries far away. God may send us, but through apostasy may withdraw and leave us to war alone. **II. Earnest prayer would restore them to liberty.** Captivity would lead to reflection, repentance, and prayer. 1. *Prayer offered in great distress.* "Carried captives," "in the land of their enemies," &c. "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses." 2. *Prayer offered in deep reflection.* "Bethink themselves." Consider their ways, and reflect on the cause of their distress. Men thoughtless, and receive no correction from affliction. "In the day of adversity consider." 3. *Prayer offered with humble confession.* "We have sinned, we have done amiss." Confession should be full and free. Forgiveness only promised upon confession. "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." 4. *Prayer offered with earnest spirit.* "With all their heart and all their soul." With understanding, affections, and will; without delay, with zealous and undivided hearts. "With my whole heart have I sought thee." 5. *Prayer offered in given direction.* "Toward the city chosen, and toward the house." Thus originated the favourite custom of ancient and modern Jews of turning towards Jerusalem in devotions. Prayer should ever be upwards, direct to the presence of God. Not to man, not without aim, but straight as an arrow to its centre. Not at random, but with orderly words and definite purpose. "In the morning will I direct (*set in order* as wood upon the altar, and shew-bread upon the table) my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Ps. v. 3). Only by this kind of prayer could they be delivered. Continuance in sin would increase their misery, prolong their captivity, and add to their griefs. By repenting and turning to God, restoration and peace would follow. "I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive."

THE ARK AND THE RESTING-PLACE.—*Verses 40–42.*

These words not found in Kings. There seems to be a return to the third great petition in expressions borrowed from the Psalms, and from the ancient song in the Wilderness (*cf.* Num. x. 35). **I. The ark the symbol of divine strength.** The sign and pledge of power exerted on behalf of his people; the symbol of his glory (*cf.* Ps. lxxviii. 61); for when the ark was taken "the glory" was departed. God's presence to awe, help, and overcome.

“For the ark was not a dead ghost, but really showed that God was nigh to his church” [*Calvin*]. God present now in his word—“the rod of his strength” out of Zion, the centre of government from whence the word to overcome ignorance, prejudice, and opposition; to subdue rebels and win to Christ.

II. An earnest prayer to locate this divine strength. “Arise, O Lord, into thy rest.” God desires an abode, a resting-place with men; should not be absent, nor driven away. Power everywhere displayed; but power of divine truth concentrated in God’s house and in spiritual worship. Here should be “the resting-place,” the fixed, permanent habitation of God. In the Christian Church and in human hearts the power of God should be felt and displayed. For this we should pray. Without God the ark even of no avail.

“*Thou and the ark.*” **III. When this divine strength is exhibited in localities great blessings result.** Miraculous deeds and brilliant victories distinguished the Jews when God was with them; so now revivals and abundant signs of divine presence. “The name of the city from that day shall be, the Lord is there.” 1. *In the full equipment of ministers.* “Priests,” all officials “clothed with salvation.” Not merely adorned with outward garments of sacerdotal beauty, but with spiritual gifts, righteous character and life, acceptable in persons and services before God and the people. 2. *In the exultant joy of saints.* “Let thy saints rejoice in goodness.” Joy pure and holy, springing from God’s presence and successful work. Not that trivial, fleeting, superficial thing which often bears the name; runs out in noise like the crackling of thorns. But serious, solid feeling which fills the soul as God fills the universe; satisfactory, inspiring, and exultant. “And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.”

THE MERCIES OF DAVID.—*Verse 42.*

I. Remembrance most sacred. “Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David” (Ps. lxxxix. 35). God is holy, infinitely above falsehood and deceit. To break his promise would profane his essential attribute. “He demands, on the part of his people, truth and fidelity towards himself, only on the ground of his own truth and fidelity towards them” [*Hengstenberg*].

II. Remembrance most unalterable. The unfaithfulness of man cannot alter the faithfulness of God. “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” “The *sure* mercies of David.”

III. Remembrance most powerful. For David’s sake God raised up Solomon and spared the kings of Judah. For the sake of David’s greater Son and seed he will bless the world. Blessings shall abound on earth, the influence of his covenant shall last to the end of time. “His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.”

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 36–39. *Sin.* 1. A description of human nature. “No man which sinneth not.” 2. A moral difficulty between God and man. “Thou be angry with them.” 3. A cause of great trouble in man’s experience. 4. A bitter experience in man’s history. Sin in the universality of its existence, in the moral consciousness of men, in its prejudicial influence to human interests. *Pray toward the land.*

1. Conditions of its enjoyment. 2. Cause of its loss. 3. Method of its restoration. *Hear and forgive.* 1. Forgiveness the great need of man. No happiness and rest, no heaven and fellowship with God without. 2. Forgiveness the prerogative of God alone. Nature, conscience, and law know nothing of forgiveness. 3. Forgiveness bestowed through prayer and confession of sin. This answers God’s character

and man's need, upholds moral order, and argues infinite risk in refusing to seek it in Christ. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Ver. 39. *Maintain their cause. The rights, interests, and cause of God's people at stake.* Require defending, clearing up, and preserving. 2. *This only done by God's help.* Human swords and hands grow weak and get broken. Standard-bearers faint and die. Impossible for holiest and mightiest to equal God's "mighty hand and stretched out arm." "With me," said Luther,

"moral effort is an alternation of rising and sinking, of advancing and retreating." 3. *This help must be enlisted by prayer.* "Hear and maintain." Prayer and contest combined. The bravest commanders men of prayer. Prayer a means of divine fellowship and training, imparts strength, courage, and victory in conflict.

"In all thou dost, first let thy prayers ascend,
And to the gods thy labours first commend;
From them implore success, and hope a prosperous end" [*W. Fleming*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 7, 8. *Wishing and willing.* To wish and to will are very different things. There are a thousand men who wish, where there is one man that wills. Wishing is but a faint state of desire. Willing is a state of the reason, and of the affections, and of the will in activity, to secure what one desires. A man may wish and yet reject all the steps and instruments by which that wish can be carried into effect. No man wills until he has not only made up his mind to have the end, but to have all the steps intermediately by which that end is to be secured [*Beecher*].

Vers. 19, 20. *The greatness of God.* Will he indeed, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, take up his abode with men? What heart among us but glows with gratitude and love at these joyful tidings! Let us, at the head of our several families in a transport of devout affection, welcome this kind and generous Guest into our houses. Let us give him the entertainment he demands, even that of a cordial love and obedience. Let us present him the sacrifices he requires, even those of daily prayer and praise. And let us tremble at the thought of so demeaning ourselves in the habitations he has thus honoured, as ever

to provoke him to depart thence [*S. Stennett*].

Solomon's Prayer. He prayed for wisdom at the outset, and he has verified the answer to prayer by the wonderful structure he put up. But the blessing did not end in architectural skill; that great proof of the blessing given to Solomon is to be found in the prayer which he prayed at the dedication of the temple. No man could have prayed that prayer without help. This we should have said about it in all honesty if we had found it in Sanscrit; if we had exhumed it out of Indian libraries, it would have been due to the author to have said, "You never dreamed that dream; it was a vision of God." Read the prayer from beginning to end, and say if this be not so. How majestic in conception! how beautifully eloquent in expression! how wise, how tender, how patriotic, how philanthropic! How it grows and swells, and abounds in all elements of spiritual sympathy! Probably there is no such prayer in all literary records. If ever that prayer be excelled it will be by the Son of God alone, and his excelling of it will be by contrast rather than by comparison [*Dr. Parker*].

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter, parallel with 1 Kings viii. 62; ix. 9, records acceptance of consecrated temple by fire (vers. 1-10); and answer given by the Lord to Solomon (vers. 11-22).

Vers. 1-10.—Acceptance of temple by fire. This not mentioned in Kings, which creates difficulty. "What it is important to bear in mind is—1. That omissions are not contradictions; and 2. That they occur constantly in all historical writers, and are frequently quite unaccountable" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Fire* as in tabernacle (Lev. ix. 24); *glory*, chapter v. 13, 14. Ver. 3. *Bowed* in adoration and reverence. Ver. 4. *All people* did not offer, but gave them to be offered on altar. *Sacrifices* enormous and difficult to realise. Ver. 6. *Waited* in their stations to receive, kill sacrifices, &c. *Instruments*, cymbals, harps, and psalteries (1 Chr. xv. 16; compare chap. v. 12). Ver. 7. *Middle court* on account of blood of sacrifices and burning of fat. Ver. 8. *Feast*, not feast of dedication only, but feast of tabernacles also (Lev. xxiii. 34). *Hamath* to river Sihor, which separated Egypt from Palestine. "The territory of Israel, according to its whole extent from north to south" (2 Chr. vii. 8) [*Keil*]. Ver. 9. *Solemn* assembly closed the festival. Kept dedication seven days and feast of tabernacle next seven days (1 Ki. viii. 65). Festival closed on 22nd of the month, on 23rd people sent home rejoicing.

Vers. 11-22.—God's answer to Solomon's prayer. "The narrative now runs parallel with 1 Ki. ix. 1-9, but is fuller and presents less of verbal agreement. Vers. 13-15 are additional to the earlier record" [*Speak. Com.*]. *King's house*, i.e., his own palace (*cf.* 1 Ki. vii. 1-12). Vers. 12-22. Explicit answer to Solomon. *Appeared* as at Gibeon (1 Ki. iii. 5; ix. 2). Ver. 13. *If, &c.*, answer to third petition (vi. 26). Ver. 14 recalls chief points in Solomon's prayer. Ver. 15. *Attent*, promise accords with very words of petition (*cf.* vi. 40). *Prayer of this place* (*marg.*) "chosen to include the two cases of prayers offered *in* (vi. 24) and *towards* (vi. 34-38) the sanctuary" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 16. *Sanctified*. "Here additions to 1 Ki. ix., end and remainder of chapter adds nothing to the earlier record." Ver. 17. *Walk* refers to first petition; conditions which Solomon failed to meet. Ver. 19. The other alternative put before Solomon. Ver. 21. *This house* high, conspicuous in glory. *Astonishment* in ruin. Ver. 22. *All this* the fearful consequences of apostasy (*cf.* Ezekiel's wailing over the city and temple, xiv. 23; xxxvi. 17-20).

HOMILETICS.

THE FIRE AND THE GLORY.—Verses 1-3.

Two elements prominent in O. T. symbolism which made the dedication solemn, impressive, and real. **I. As confirmation of acceptance.** Sacrifice accompanied every act of worship. Miraculous fire a sign of acceptance, as Moses (Lev. ix. 24), Gideon (Judg. vi. 21), David (1 Chron. xxi. 26), Elijah (1 Ki. xviii. 38). Generally to accept burnt sacrifice in Hebrew was to turn to ashes. "Remember all thy offerings, and accept (turn to ashes or make fat) thy burnt sacrifice" (Ps. xx. 3). The surest evidence of acceptance in prayer is the descent of the holy fire upon us. This fills the heart with reverence and awe, as the glory filled the temple. This leads to humble submission to divine authority, and a true sense of unworthiness. "They bowed themselves," with profound reverence and humility. **II. As symbols of spiritual truths.** The *fire* indicative of God's nature. "Our God is a consuming fire," terrible in Zion, before whom sinners have reason to fear. But God consumed the sacrifices, not the offerers; turned away his anger, and showed mercy in their acceptance. Christ a great sacrifice for sin, through whom Holy Spirit given to apply the

word, consume sin, and convert the soul. The *glory* fills earthly temples, when his presence dwells in the sanctuary, and the heart is made a living temple—when Israelites rise from their prostrate attitude, regain their confidence, and offer themselves as sacrifices upon the altar of God—when hearts are tuned, and songs abound to God. “For he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.”

THE DEDICATED TEMPLE.—*Verses 1-10.*

Dean Milman's description most truthful and graphic (“History of the Jews,” vol. i., pp. 315-318). Here two glances at the scene, showing its outward grandeur and inward importance. **I. The eternal grandeur of the event.** The vast assembly, “all Israel” present. The enormous sacrifices, on a scale suitable to the extraordinary occasion, requiring the open court, in which the assembly only could take part. The preparation and offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings in festive joy. All—king, priests, and people—performing their part. The fall of the sacred fire, and the dazzling glory of the cloud resting on and then entering into the courts. The music and the oft-recurring chorus (Ps. cxxxvi.). The awe-struck priests and the nation on their knees would be an impressive sight. But notice—**II. The moral significance of the event.** This ceremonial was not commanded by the law, but the expression of devout sentiment and reverence in the people. The symbolic presence led the innumerable multitudes to prostrate themselves on the ground, the instinctive and natural expression of loving reverence. The *prostrate person* and the *bended knee* tokens of humility, unreserved surrender, and dutiful obedience. “O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” The consuming fire fills with dread. “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?” Judgments alarm, glory without mercy leads to despair, but God accepts the sacrifice, and spares the offerer. “Which was the greater, the external magnificence or the moral sublimity of the scene?” asks Milman. “Was it the temple situated on its commanding eminence, with all its courts, the dazzling splendour of its materials, the innumerable multitudes, the priests in their gorgeous attire, the king with all the insignia of royalty on his throne of burnished brass, the music, the radiant cloud filling the temple, the sudden fire flashing upon the altar, the whole nation upon their knees? Was it not rather the religious grandeur of the hymns and of the prayer; the exalted and rational views of the Divine Nature; the union of a whole people in the adoration of the one Great. Incomprehensible, Almighty, Everlasting Creator?”

SOLOMON'S SACRIFICES.—*Verses 4-7.*

I. Sacrifice in its symbolic meaning. Refined nations of modern times esteem animal sacrifices a cruel and uncultured mode of expressing religious sentiments. But remembering the genius, habits, and moral instincts of ancient nations, and the special circumstances of the Jewish people, we see their fitness and propriety. Use of letters unknown, signs and symbols needful and beneficial. God instructs, helps, and encourages in this rite. Its value, therefore, partly actual, and partly typical, but in all respects derived from the one true sacrifice typified. **II. Sacrifice a form of true religion.** Opposed to heathen will-worship in place, method, and in the invention of costly and monstrous offerings. An evidence of obedience to God; a symbol of self-dedication, and an expression of thanksgiving. Some form of sacrifice always required in religion. He who offers nothing accounted irreligious (Ecc. ix. 2, *cf.* Is. xliii. 23). We must not forget the higher affections of the heart in over-

valuing the symbol, and turn our offerings into an *opus operatum*. "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." **III. Sacrifice a method of national festivity.** Festivals held in all ancient nations. Sacrificial meals common and under special direction in Israel. Sometimes in private houses, other times in the temple. Held weekly, monthly, and yearly. These methods not only commemorations of great national events, but occasions for reunion of friends, enjoyment of hospitality, and interchange of sentiment. Families would be filled with joy. Strangers, fatherless and widows received with religious warmth. The nation bound in unity, commerce, and brotherhood.

NATIONAL REJOICING.—*Verses 8-11.*

The time of dedication immediately before the feast of tabernacles. The festival prolonged, and afforded opportunity for large number of peace offerings, which were the means of national enjoyment. **I. Joy in its purest sources.** 1. *In Divine works.* "Solomon finished the house." Joy from contemplation of the order, beauty, splendour, and completion of temple. Its vast extent, manifold adaptations, practical use, and symbolic teaching. "I will triumph in the works of Thy hands." 2. *In the Divine presence.* Infinite and supreme, yet will dwell with man! In the vision and service of God we find the bliss of heaven. "We joy in God." 3. *In acceptance in the Divine presence.* God with man, not to judge, condemn, and destroy. "We shall surely die, because we have seen God," was the impression of Manoah. A popular belief that the revelation of God's terrible majesty would cause death, not joy. But the acceptance of the offerings a pledge of gracious disposition (Judges xiii. 23). The cloud and the fire at dedication of temple tokens of condescension and mercy. **II. Joy in its vast extent.** 1. *In all classes.* Universal joy. King, priests, and people partook of it. "All Israel with him, a very great congregation" (ver. 8). 2. *In all places.* In the palace of the king, and the tents of the people. In the temple of Jehovah, and the homes of the land, "from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt," the usual and known bounds, the utmost length of the land. "He sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart," thanking God for his goodness to David, to Solomon, a wise and religious son, and "to Israel his people." In this spirit we should go home from God's house; rejoice in the grace, advancement, and enthronement of the Redeemer, and in the sanctification and spiritual welfare of all believers.

GOD'S ANSWERS TO SOLOMON'S PRAYER.—*Verses 12-22.*

Acceptance of prayer seen in fire from heaven, and second appearance by night. **I. Answers to special prayers.** Solomon not aimless and indefinite, but specific. To prayer suggested by Holy Spirit, and offered according to God's will, answers are definite and explicit. Vers. 12-15 contain answer to third petition, ver. 16 to second, and vers. 17-22 to first. **II. Answers exceeding the prayer itself.** Solomon desired that God's eyes might be directed to the temple continually (ch. viii. 29). The answer is, "Not mine eyes only, but mine eyes and mine heart." Not only to Solomon's, but to prayer made toward that place in future from any person; not to the thoughts merely, but in the very words of the petitioner. We are straitened in ourselves, not in God, "who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." **III. Answers conditionally promised.** Suspended on conduct. This a test of faith, a motive to obedience, and a rule of

discipline. "If ye walk in my statutes . . . then I will give you, &c. But if ye will not hearken unto me . . . I will set my face against you" (Lev. xxvi. 1-20).

SOLEMN WARNINGS.—*Verses 19-22.*

"The record of this second vision, in which were rehearsed the conditions of God's covenant with Solomon, and the consequences of breaking them, is inserted as a proper introduction to the narrative about to be given of the king's commercial enterprises, and ambitious desire for worldly glory. For this king, by encouraging an influx of foreign people, and a taste for foreign luxuries, rapidly corrupted his own mind and those of his subjects, that they turned from following God, they and their children" [Jamieson]. **I. God's goodness in warning before punishment.** God not revengeful and unjust. Judgment strange to Him. He gives space for repentance, opportunity to avoid danger; thus declares reluctance to punish, and goodness to warn. Longsuffering of God signally displayed. "Because sentence is not executed speedily," men should not resolve on sinful courses, and run to ruin. **II. Disobedience to warning exposes to punishment.** Sentence is gone forth, judgment only suspended, and seems to loiter, hence the sinner thinks there is *chance* of escape. "I shall have peace, though I walk in the way of my own heart." But warnings unheeded, calls neglected, hasten the stroke, and render the judgments heavier. Abuse of mercy only ripens for judgment. "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." **III. Punishment which follows abused warning is merited and most severe.** A limit to discipline and patience. The time ends and the day of retribution comes. Ruin often sudden and without remedy. 1. *The temple cursed.* The house conspicuous for its sanctity, glory and usefulness, would become a desolation, a byword, and disgrace. 2. *The nation cursed.* "Plucked up," carried away, and exposed to mockery, insult, and despair in a foreign land. The temple of God no protection to those who forsake him. Their sins will be read in the judgments they suffer. Seek to be a monument of grace, not of judgment.

"Heaven gives the needful but neglected call.
What day, what hour, but knocks at human hearts,
To wake the soul to a sense of future scenes" [Young].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1 and 15, 16. *The Consecrated House.* Solomon builder, God consecrated, sanctified it. 1. By the symbolic cloud and sacred fire. 2. By his special care. "My eyes shall be open, &c." (v. 15). 3. By his constant affection. "Mine heart shall be there perpetually."

Ver. 11. The sum, the greatness, and the completion of Solomon's works—sacred, voluntary, and successful works. "The house of the Lord was seven years in building. But the court, the pillars, and all the external and internal fittings began to be con-

structed probably after the building was finished. The builders who were released from the work of the Lord's house were free to betake themselves to the erection of the royal palace and other public buildings. At the end of thirteen years (1 Kings vii. 1) the temple finishings and requisites were all completed, and everything was ready for the consecration" [Murphy].

"In the early days of art,
Builders wrought with greatest care,
Each minute and unseen part;
For the gods see everywhere.

“Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house, where God may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean”
[Longfellow].

Ver. 12. *An house of sacrifice.* 1. In contrast with the synagogue, in which no sacrifice. 2. Descriptive of worship of O. T. with its symbolic rites, social feasts, and moral teaching. “This expression does not elsewhere occur. Its meaning, however, is clear. God declares that Solomon’s temple is the place which he had promised to ‘choose’ from among the tribes of Israel, whereto all Israelites were commanded to bring their burnt offerings and sacrifices” (see Deut. xii. 5, 6) [Speak. Com.]. *The Lord appeared.* This vision presents a remarkable contrast with that recorded (1 Kings vi. 11-13) while the temple was in building. Then all was promise and encouragement; now, not only is warning mingled with promise, but as in Solomon’s own prayer, the sadder alternative seems in prophetic anticipation to overpower the brighter. In this there is (as often remarked) a striking exemplification of the austere and lofty candour of the inspired narrative, sternly contradicting that natural hopefulness in the hour of unexampled prosperity, which would have shrunk from even entertaining the idea that the blessing of God on the temple should be frustrated, and the glory of Israel pass away [Ellicott, O. T. Com.].

Vers. 15, 16. *Biblical Anthropomorphism.* Human organs. The eyes and ears of God. This language is used for two purposes. I. To express His cognisance of man. He knows us. 1. Directly. 2. Thoroughly. II. To express His interest in man. 1. In the various capacities of enjoyment with which He has endowed us, and the provision He made for them. 2. In the preservation of our existence, notwithstanding our sinfulness. 3. In our redemption by Christ Jesus. Conclusion: Thou God seest me, we unite with the blessed fact, “Thou God lovest me” [Bib. Mus.]. *My name*

there for ever. God’s gifts are “without repentance.” When he puts his name in the temple he does it, in intention, *for ever.* He will not arbitrarily withdraw it after so many years, or so many centuries. Once placed there, it will remain there *for ever*, so far as God is concerned. But the people may by unfaithfulness drive it away [Speak. Com.].

Vers. 19, 20. *Turn away.* 1. Possibility of wrong course. “If ye *turn away.*” 2. Rapid progress when this course is adopted. “*Forsake my statutes,*” easily understood and profitable to them, “set before you.” Wholly forsake God for idols, then— 3. Fearful consequences. Entire deflection would cut Israel off from the land. “This whole passage stands out in bold relief, when illuminated by the light of history” [Murphy].

Ver. 20. *Plucked up.* 1. The soil in which they were planted, chosen and prepared by the Great Husbandman. 2. The source of their growth and fruit. “From me is thy fruit found.” 3. The danger to which they were exposed. “Plucked up.” No growth independent of God. Plants require rain, light, and warmth. We can only live as we live and are rooted in God. “There would be men who are twice dead, plucked up by the roots, and the roots are only fit for burning. We do not know what God’s burning means. Let us take care how we exclude the penal element from our theology and from our contemplation of the future” [Dr. Parker]. Learn—1. The evil of apostasy. 2. The reality of God’s government. 3. The terrible effects of Divine displeasure.

Ver. 22. *Why thus?* A Problem. 1. The actual fact in history, that the Jews, the anciently favoured people of God, found to this day a byword and a proverb. 2. The question is, why hath the Lord done this? Has God changed his purpose, or been unfaithful to his word? The problem solved by the conduct of the people who forsook God and rejected the Saviour. “It is notable, that in its reference to the two parts of the promise of David

there is a subtle and instructive distinction. As for the temple now just built in fulfilment of that promise, it is declared without reserve that in the case of unfaithfulness in Israel, it shall be utterly destroyed, and become an astonishment and a proverb of reproach before the world. But, in respect of the promise of the perpetuity of David's kingdom, the true Messianic prediction, which struck the key-note of all future prophecies, it is only said that Israel shall be 'cut off from the land,' and so 'become a proverb and a byword' in captivity. Nothing is said to contradict the original declara-

tion that even in case of sin the mercy of God would chastise and not forsake the house of David (2 Sam. vii. 13, 14; Ps. lxxix. 30-37). So again and again in prophecy captivity is denounced as a penalty of Israel's sin, but the hope of restoration is always held out, and thus the belief in God's unchanging promise remains unshaken. The true idea is strikingly illustrated by the prophet Amos (ix. 9-11): I will sift the house of Israel among all nations. . . . Yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. . . . I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, &c." [*Ellicott, O. T. Com.*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 4, 5. *Sacrifices.* Profusion the usual feature of ancient sacrifices: 300 oxen formed a common sacrifice at Athens. But all sacrifices offered by men to God are inadequate. "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering." "Jehovah being so much greater than man, how can any sacrificial rites be worthy of Him?" [*Cheyne.*] "What real propitiation could be effected, though the whole region of Lebanon were made an altar, its pines and cedars piled up on it for firing, and its thousands of beasts offered as victims? Very different was the offering which was to procure man's redemption" [*Kay.*] That offering which alone avails before God is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, a sacrifice of infinite value because He is God. All our offerings, our acts of worship, our self-denial, our good deeds cannot *in themselves* avail with God. But they are accepted when offered upon "the altar which sanctifieth the gift," the altar of Christ's merits.

Vers. 8-10. *Feasts.* All bodily appetites should be attended to for purposes of *relief*, not *gratification*. The very moment we seek gratification in any organ or appetite of the body,

we degrade our nature, and dishonour our Creator. Our happiness is not in the body, but in the soul; not without, but within; and ought never to be sought for as an end, it comes only in self-consecration to duty and to God [*Dr. Thomas.*] If I see a dish to please my appetite I see a serpent in that apple, and will please myself in a wilful denial [*Bishop Hall.*].

Ver. 12. *Heard thy prayer.* If I cared for nothing I would pray for nothing [*Melancthon.*].

"That work which is begun well is half-done;
And without prayer no work is well begun" [*Fanshawe.*].

Vers. 17-21. *Turn away.* Those who forsake God to return to the world, do it because they find more gratification in earthly pleasures than in those arising from communion with God; and because this overpowering charm, carrying them away, causes them to relinquish their first choice, and renders them, as Tertullian says, the penitents of the devil [*Blaise Pascal.*]. "God never leaves any till they first leave Him."

Vers. 21, 22. *Why?* Nothing but grace can teach us to make a right use of others' judgments [*Bishop Hall.*].

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Solomon's buildings (vers. 1-6); the tributaries (vers. 7-11); the festival worship (vers. 12-16); and the fleet of Solomon (vers. 17, 18) (1 Ki. ix. 10-28).

Solomon's buildings.—Vers. 1-6. *Twenty years* (cf. 1 Ki. vi. 38; vii. 1; ix. 10). *Cities* north-west of Galilee, the occupation of which was granted to Hiram, who seems, after consideration, to have refused them as unsuitable to the commercial habits of his people and returned them to Solomon, who *built* (Heb. *repaired*) and filled them with a colony of Hebrews. *Ham*, a territory bordering on *Zobah*, identified in Jewish tradition with *Helbon* (Aleppo). *Tadmor*, the famous Palmyra (palm-city), which became capital of a province (sent 80,000 men to join the Assyrian army), the splendid ruins of which remain to this day (a wall 11 miles in circumference). *Store cities* for provisions, situated on great trade roads to relieve travellers and beasts of burden. Ver. 5. *Beth-horon*s, two cities in Ephraim, very ancient (Josh. xvi. 3-5; 1 Ki. ix. 27; 1 Chr. vii. 24). Ver. 6. *Baal* belonged to Dan (1 Ki. ix. 18, 19).

Solomon's tributaries.—Vers. 7-10. *Left*, descendants of Canaanites in the country treated as war-prisoners, employed in vast building operations, and had to pay tribute. Ver. 9. Sons of Israelites not serfs, but soldiers and officers. Ver. 10. *Chiefs* of Israelites only given, 250 in number. Ver. 11. *Daughter*, writer assumes points of narrative in 1 Ki. iii. 1 and 7, 8, and further assigns motive for change of residence. *Holy*, sanctified by presence of the ark, and as she was an idolator, therefore could not permanently dwell in the city.

Solomon's regulations of worship.—Vers. 12-16. An expansion and amplification of 1 Ki. ix. 23. They add several important particulars. No departure from the ordinances established by Divine authority by Moses or David in offering of sacrifices—arrangements of priests and Levites (1 Chr. xxiv. 26)—and in provision and management of all sacred things. Ver. 16. This verse sums up in brief the whole previous narrative on the subject of the temple, which began with ch. ii. Solomon's work "unto the day of foundation" was the subject of that chapter; his work subsequently has been related in chapters iii.-viii. [*Speak. Com.*].

Solomon's fleet and gold.—Vers. 17, 18. *Eloth* (*Elath*) Eland of Greeks, north-east of the Gulf of Akaba. "The writer of Kings tells us that the fleet of Solomon was built at *Ezion-geber* (the *giant's backbone*, Num. xxxiii. 35, 36), "which is beside Eloth" (1 Ki. ix. 26); and *Ebon-geber* alone is mentioned as the place where Jehoshaphat built his ships (2 Chr. xx. 36). Solomon, it appears by the present passage, visited both ports before determining at which he should establish his docks [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 18. Solomon made his navy by receiving ships as models, materials for building, carpenters, and seamen from Hiram, who probably had ships lying in the ports of the Red Sea. His own servants went with the Phœnicians on the voyage. *Ophir*, son of Jokton (Gen. x. 29), gave name to the land of Ophir, which was at least originally in the south of Arabia, though some look for it in India or Ceylon. The 450 talents of gold (in Kings, 420) may have been the result of many voyages to this land [*Murphy*].

HOMILETICS.

SOLOMON'S MILITARY ENTERPRISES.—Verses 1-6.

Chiefly in acquiring cities rebuilt and taken from the enemy. Solomon not satisfied to build God's house, ambitious to gain cities and enlarge his kingdom. Lawful ambition desirable—all interested in the welfare of the Christian Church will scheme for the good of the country. **I. Cities for stores** (cf. 1 Ki. ix. 19). Centres, *i.e.*, cities in which provisions for beasts, travellers, and troops (2 Chr. xxxii. 28). Chiefly north, in Hamath (ver. 4), and Naphtali (ch. xvi. 4). Solomon prudent in action and kind in planning for the necessities

of his people. **II. Cities for colonisation.** "Solomon built (rebuilt) them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there" (ver. 2). Cities out of repair, quitted by population, or never occupied by Israelites. Anxious to locate trade, promote industry, and for all to dwell in right place. **III. Cities for pleasure.** "Cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen;" dwellings for pleasure as distinguished from fortresses and store-cities. "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure." But pleasure is expensive, and demands costly sacrifices. "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." **IV. Cities for defence.** The cities of Bethhoron and Baalath were fortified. His kingdom exposed required defence. Surrounding enemies dangerous, especially in north; strong garrisons required, and a levy of men and money to support a gigantic military system. Hence danger from wars, taxation, and oppression. *Suggested Lessons from Solomon's Military Enterprises.*—1. That those who attend to the spiritual will not neglect the temporal interests of a nation. Solomon built the temple, but patriotic enough to build cities. True religion ends not in ceremony, but in philanthropy. Those who build churches build hospitals. A libel to say that Christians who support missionary agencies neglect home. 2. That amidst the temporal enterprises of a nation great risks exist. Fortified cities needful, but indicate evils to be checked; incursions, insurrections, and subjugation. Hence—(1) *Lessons of Prudence.* Why "fenced cities with walls, gates, and bars?" "Silent witnesses against the honesty of the society in which we live. Every bolt upon the door is a moral accusation; every time we turn the lock we mean that there is an enemy outside who may endeavour to violate the sanctity of the house" [*Dr. Parker*]. (2) *The Danger of Prosperity.* "Commercial intercourse with foreign nations, the assimilation of the Israelitish monarchy to corresponding institutions of surrounding kingdoms, though indispensable to certain elements of the Church and State of Judea, yet was fraught with danger to a people whose chief safeguard had hitherto been their exclusiveness, and whose highest mission was to keep their faith and manners distinct from the contagion of the world around them. The gigantic experiment of Solomon, though partially and prospectively successful, yet in a greater part and for the moment failed. As he is the representative of the splendours of the monarchy, so is he also the type and cause of its ruin" [*Stanley*].

SOLOMON'S STATESMANSHIP.—Verses 7-10.

Civil government a divine institution. Cannot exist without laws and adjustments. These require wisdom to express and enforce. The people have instinct to obey, but lack power to govern. Hence need of statesmen and rulers. Solomon a wise ruler. **I. In the tributary services rendered by the people.** 1. *Foreigners non-Israelites employed as serfs.* Treated as prisoners of war, compelled to drudgery, hard labour, and to pay tribute (ver. 8). This a matter of policy and borrowed from Egyptian customs of employing lowest caste on public works. 2. *Native Jews employed in superior labour.* "Not bondmen, but men of war, servants, princes, captains, rulers of chariots and of horsemen" (1 Ki. ix. 22). Positions of honour and influence. **II. In the choice of officers to rule the people.** Officers divided into two bodies. The lesser consisted of twelve chiefs corresponding to the twelve princes of the twelve tribes, who administered the kingdom under David. Hence their wisdom and experience would be profitable to direct. The larger body were officers chosen from Israelites to control task work, exacted from Canaanites. No way of accounting for discrepancies in number (*cf.* 1 Ki. v. 16; 2 Chr. ii. 18, and

ver. 10 of this ch.) except by error of copyist, or to imagine with many, that 250 were on duty at once. Solomon desired the ablest men for the best work. Some fitted, born to rule, and others to serve. **III. In the appointment of all classes of the people to their proper sphere.** Work for all and every one at work for which best adapted. Some to labour, others to think and direct. Not great men to do small work and weak men to fail in responsible work. Canaanites and Israelites all useful. This law of adaptation essential to success in family circles, church government, and national legislation. "Thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do."

SOLOMON'S MARRIAGE.—Verse 1

At beginning of his reign he married an Egyptian princess, assigned her a temporary abode in Jerusalem until a suitable place could be found. **I. As a matter of worldly policy.** A startling act, for since Exodus no intercourse between two countries. Sprang from desire to counteract influence of Hadad, who was received with royal honours and formed alliances with king of Egypt (1 Ki. xi. 14–20); from wish to obtain support for his new dynasty and recognition from one of older fame and greater power; from anxiety to strengthen himself by foreign alliances. Besides the new queen brought with her a frontier city as a dowry. Gezer still possessed by remnant of Canaanites. Pharaoh had led his armies against it, and tranquillity of Israel threatened. But this worldly policy. Many marriages for inferior motives. Better look to bonds that unite families and thrones to God. **II. As a source of moral perplexity.** What must be done with her? If she conformed with the Hebrew faith, yet as a foreigner she must dwell in a separate place, not near the ark, the symbol of Divine presence. The house of God, holy, must be free from personal and official pollution. This a matter of conscience to Solomon, who felt that God's presence sanctified all localities; that a broad distinction must be made between Judaism and heathenism, between idolatry and the worship of Jehovah. When this distinction is ignored and worldly policy adopted, men plunge into temptations and find it difficult to rectify errors by punctilious morality and zealous care about trifles. **III. As the beginning of trouble.** The policy advantageous at first, but ultimately proved hollow and impolitic. A revolution in Egypt changed its dynasty or its policy, and the court welcomed the fugitive Jeroboam in his efforts to secure kingly power. By seeking fresh alliances, giving way to lust for "strange women," Solomon involved in worship of strange gods, &c. The reign which began so gloriously ended in gross darkness and fetish worship.

SOLOMON'S RELIGIOUS SERVICE.—Verses 12

Solomon not only built the temple, but worshipped in it. What use a temple without worship? The duty of high and low to meet for worship. **I. Remarkable for its conformity to Divine Law.** "According to the command of Moses." God the supreme object and his revealed will the rule of worship. 1. *In its appointed seasons.* Daily sacrifices. "A certain rate every day." "Every day will I bless thee." "On the sabbaths." *Weekly* sacrifices; *monthly* "on the new moons;" and *yearly* at the three solemn feasts. "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose." 2. *In its customary method.* As Moses commanded and David observed (ver. 14), care should be taken to observe divine order, but custom

should never fetter spirit. Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly, we should be free, thankful, and devout. "The heart will observe its own order." **II. Remarkable for its systematic arrangements.** "Order is heaven's first law." 1. *Arrangements divinely appointed.* Priests in their courses; Levites in their charges; porters at the gates, and persons to manage the treasures (*cf.* 1 Chr. xxvi. 20-23). 2. *Arrangements scrupulously observed.* By every person and in every particular. "They departed not from the command of the king concerning any matter" (v. 15). 3. *Arrangements completing the work.* "So the house of the Lord was perfected." This the finishing touch to erection and consecration. Something incomplete without real worship, reverent order and self-surrender. *Sacrifice* the essence and result of worship. "I will freely sacrifice to thee."

"One act that from a thankful heart proceeds,
Excels ten thousand mercenary deeds" [*Cowper*].

SOLOMON'S GREATEST WORK.—Verse 16.

This verse a brief summary, describing method and completion of Solomon's greatest work. Temple work was prepared, *i.e.*, contemplated and fixed, before built and completed. **I. It was wisely planned.** Prudence displayed in collection and preparation of materials. The cost counted—1. *Suggesting wise forethought.* Every part of an undertaking should be well considered and weighed. "Prepare thy work without and make it fit for thyself." 2. *Providing against failure.* What wrecks in all departments of human labour through want of forethought and preparation! "This man began to build and was not able to finish." **II. It was nicely furnished.** Not half done, nor slovenly done. Finished in furniture, style, and ceremonies. *Perfected* in harmony with God's will. "A thing of beauty and a joy for ever." Choose your life's work. Collect materials and build for God. Begin well and in God's strength finish. Never be

"Like one who draws a model of a house,
Beyond his power to build it; who, half through,
Gives o'er, and leaves his part-created cost
A naked subject to the weeping clouds,
And waste for churlish winter's tyranny."

SOLOMON'S FLEET.—Verses 17, 18.

I. The method of its construction. Hiram *sent*, supplied him, *i.e.*, *built* him ships, *viz.*, in docks at Eloth (*cf.* 1 Ki. ix. 26, 27) [*Jamieson*]. Or Solomon made his fleet, by receiving model ships, materials, and carpenters from Hiram. "The probability is either that the Tyrians maintained at this period a fleet in the Red Sea, or that Hiram's shipwrights constructed, at their master's expense, some ships on that sea, and then presented them to the Jewish monarch" [*Speak. Com.*]. **II. The voyages it undertook.** Solomon monarch and merchant. Egyptians might have been rivals in southern maritime traffic, but their religion and exclusive principles unfavourable to sea voyages. They probably abstained from sending their own people abroad for commerce. Solomon's fleet opened the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean, the far east and the far west. The extraordinary influence of these voyages on their own and on all future times was remarkable [see Stanley's *Jew. Ch.*, vol. ii., p. 155]. **III. The cargo it brought.** Articles of commerce most abundant; *almug*, *ivory*, *aloes*, *cassia*, *cinnamon*, *apes* and *peacocks*, strange

plants and animals, fragrant woods and brilliant metals, silver and gold. "Gold of Ophir" the most famous in the world. Men more precious than gold; wisdom more precious "than the merchandise of silver." "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."

IV. The sailors who manned it. Hebrews had none capable of performing distant expeditions; were only fishermen, whose boats coasted on the shores of the Mediterranean, or plied on inward lakes. Tyrians manned the navy of Solomon, who excelled in nautical science (*cf.* 1 Ki. v. 6; ix. 27) "When we consider that in the case of Solomon the commercial wealth of the entire community was concentrated in the hands of the government, that much of the trade was a monopoly, and that all was assisted or directed by the experience and energy of the Tyrians, the overwhelming riches of this eminent merchant-sovereign are, perhaps, not surprising."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Caused Israel to dwell there.*

Principles of colonisation—1. A matter of necessity often. To provide for employment, surplus population; and 2. Should always be in the interests of humanity. Not for national glory, material prosperity, or destruction of uncivilised races. What remains of the colonies founded by ancient nations? Prosperity and duration only when God plants a people (America and the Pilgrim Fathers).

Vers. 4–6. If some of the public works had *the plea of utility*, the fortifications of some cities for purposes of defence (Millo the suburb of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, the two Beth-horons); the foundation of others (Tadmor and Tiphseh) for purposes of commerce. These were simply the *pomps of a selfish luxury*; and the people, after the first dazzle was over, felt that they were so. Forty thousand horsemen made up the measure of his magnificence (1 Ki. iv. 26). As the treasury became empty taxes multiplied, and monopolies became more irksome. If, on the one hand, the division of

the kingdom came as a penalty for Solomon's apostasy from Jehovah, on the other, it was the Nemesis of a selfish passion for glory, itself the most terrible of all idolatries [*Bib. Dict.*].

Ver. 14. *David the man of God.* A wonderful title. Only applied to Moses and a nameless prophet, besides David. 1. How gained; 2. What it implies in character and life.

Vers. 12–18. Here we find—1. Solomon "diligent in business." Building and fortifying cities; engaging ships and trading to Ophir. Thus occupied usefully for his country, and employed many that would, perhaps, have otherwise been idle. 2. Solomon "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Carefully guarding the sanctity of God's house, duly offering sacrifices at all appointed times, and seeing that priests and Levites performed the sacred duties devolving upon them. Here Solomon exhibited religion as it should be; the concerns of life not unfitting him for religion, nor religion unfitting him for the concerns of life [*Ingram Cobbin's Com.*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 2. *Cities.* Some of these fortified places may have been necessary to keep in check the Canaanitish population, who were likely to fret under the forced labour which he exacted from

them [*Tuck*]. *Dwell there.* The increase of a great number of citizens in prosperity is a necessary element to the security and even to the existence of a civilised people [*Buret*].

Vers. 7, 8. *Pay tribute.* A mercantile democracy may govern long and widely; a mercantile aristocracy cannot stand [*Landor*].

“Curs'd merchandise! where life is sold,
And avarice consents to starve for gold”
[*Howe*].

Vers. 12–15. *Burnt offerings.* Before we ask what a man worships, we have to ask whether he worships at all [*Ruskin*]. Solomon was great in burnt offerings. Do not men sometimes make up in burnt offerings what they lack in moral consistency? Is not an ostentatious religion sometimes the best proof of internal decay? It ought not to be so. The hand and the heart should be one, the outward and the inward should correspond, the action should be the incarnation of the thought. We are not always to look upon the ceremonial action of the church as indicative of its real spirituality. Sometimes men make a great noise in order to conceal a courage that is giving way [*Dr. Parker*].

Ver. 16. *Prepared.* When Bishop Heber read his beautiful poem, “*Palestine*,” in manuscript to Sir Walter Scott, his friend remarked that in speaking of the temple of Solomon he had for-

gotten to refer to the silence which prevailed during its erection. The poet immediately retired for a few minutes, and introduced the following beautiful lines:—

“No workman's steel, no ponderous axes
wring;
Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric
sprung.”

This circumstance is remarkable as an indication of the method of preparation and of the deep sense which Solomon had of the sacredness of his work.

Vers. 17, 18. *Ships.* I am wonderfully delighted to see a body of men thriving in their own fortunes, and at the same time promoting the public stock; or, in other words, raising estates for their own families, by bringing into their country whatever is wanting, and carrying out of it whatever is superfluous. Nature seems to have taken a particular care to disseminate her blessings among the different regions of the world, with an eye to their mutual intercourse and traffic among mankind, that the nations of the several parts of the globe might have a kind of dependence upon one another, and be united together by their common interest [*Addison*].

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] *Vers. 1–12.* This narrative is parallel with 1 Ki. x. 1–13, from which it varies little; Solomon's glory (vers. 13–28); and the close of his reign (vers. 29–31) corresponding with 1 Ki. xi. 41–43.

Vers. 1–12.—The Queen of Sheba's visit. Two Shebas, Ethiopian and Arabian. Both countries have traditions on the visit; in both government by queens was common. Sheba, in Arabia, was the great spice country and an important kingdom. Sheba in Ethiopia a mere town and furnished no spices. The expression “Queen of the South” (Matt. xii. 42) corresponds with Hebrew *Teman* (Arabic *Yemen*), and Jewish and Christian traditions in favour of Arabian Sheba. *Fame*, by the Ophir fleet. *Name*, Solomon's great knowledge of God, or great things which God had done for him. *Questions*, lit. riddles (enigmas, Judge xiv. 12; Ps. xlix. 4; Prov. i. 6; Ezek. xvii. 2). In East natural acuteness, united with idle life, still make these exercises of understanding a favourite amusement. Ver. 1. *Camels, &c.*, a common method of travelling by these beasts of burden in Arabia, a country most famous also for spices. *In her heart*, in her mind. Ver. 3. *Told, i.e.*, answered all her questions without any exception. She could not puzzle him. Vers. 4, 5. *Seen*, wisdom, natural endowments. *House*, the palace; the variety and luxury of table. *Sitting, i.e.*, the seats, the place assigned to each according to gradation, or collective body

and orderly manner of domestic arrangements. *Standing* posts of ministers; apparel of (cup-bearers) butlers; *ascent* (Heb.), burnt offerings which he offered, by Luther, LXX, and others. Generally thought to be a superb way for the king's use alone, as Emperors of China ascend the throne by steps consecrated to their use alone. "A stair by which he went up to the house of God," "a private way from the palace on the western, across the ravine up the eastern hill to the temple area" [*Keil*]. *Spirit in her*, an expression for highest degree of admiration and astonishment. Ver. 5. *True report*, word of *acts*, sayings. Ver. 6. *Exceedest*, thou hast added to report. Ver. 8. *Blessed*, a frank acknowledgment of Solomon's God, but no reason to think she adopted Him as her God. Ver. 9. *Gave*, not as tribute, but in token of friendship (about £720,000, Jamieson). Vers. 10, 11. *Mercantile transactions*. *Algum trees*, sandal wood. *Terraces*, high ways (margin), stairs, steps. *Psalteries* (1 Samuel x. 5). Ver. 12. *Desire*, in the way of bounty. *Asked*, Oriental custom to *ask*, specify what is agreeable. Solomon gave ample remuneration for presents in exchange with him, *i.e.*, besides his presents for hers, he made a free donation of whatever she liked.

Vers. 13-23.—*Solomon's wealth*. *Weight* (*cf.* 1 Kings x. 14-29). *Chapmen*, who buy and sell, probably smaller retail merchants. *Governors* in outlying dominions. Heb. *pechah*. "If connected with *pashah*, the history of the word would be curious" [*Max Müller*]. Ver. 15. *Targets*, large shields, covering the whole man, made usually of wood or wicker-work covered with leather. *These* made for ornamentation and plated with gold. Ver. 16. *House*, a part of the royal palace (1 Kings vii. 2-5), resembling a forest in structure; used for state purposes and an armoury for targets and shields. Vers. 17-19. The throne of *ivory*, not all solid, but parts veneered with it. *Footstool*, the throne raised. *Stays*, arms on each side of seat. *Lions*, symbols of royal power. Ver. 19. Number alludes to twelve tribes of Israel. Ver. 20. *Accounted*, because of abundance; scarcity a value. Ver. 21. *Tarshish*, prob. Tartessus in Spain. *Peacocks*, thought to have come from India. Some give "parrots." Ver. 22. *Passed*, outrivalled (1 Kings iii. 13). Kings of neighbouring nations. *Sought* (1 Kings iv. 34). *Present* tribute of respect year by year. Ver. 25. *Four thousand*, not forty thousand, considered an error in copyist (1 Kings iv. 26). Ver. 26. *River Euphrates*. Ver. 27. *Stones*, fig. for abundance and comparative worthlessness. Ver. 28. *Horses* from lands famous for good breeds.

Vers. 29-31.—*Solomon's death*. *Book*, words. Three sources given, only in 1 Kings xi. 29. *Nathan* (2 Sam. vii. 1-17). *Abijah* (1 Kings xi. 11-13, 29-39), in earlier part of Solomon's life. *Iddo* (2 Chr. xii. 15; xiii. 22), in later years of reigns of Saul and David. "The Chronist omits the blemishes that marked the character and administration of Solomon, and leaves the impression that notwithstanding these he continued to be a follower of the Lord unto the end of his career. This is in harmony with his design to note the progress of the kingdom of God in its religious aspect" [*Murphy*].

HOMILETICS

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S VISIT TO SOLOMON—Verses 1-12.

Solomon's influence upon surrounding nations very great. Legends abound in Jewish and Arabic traditions, like those concerning Nimrod and Alexander. Visit of the queen conspicuous instance and given as a sign to us (Matt. xii. 42).

I. The spirit which prompted the visit. Its method, long train of camels, in striking harmony with Eastern imagination. What its spirit? 1. *A spirit of curiosity*. She heard of Solomon's wisdom and glory, co-extensive and manifold in forms. "The countries marvelled at thee, for thy interpretations, songs, and proverbs and parables" (Ecclus. xlvi. 14-17). Solomon's fame like Christ's, could not be hid. Curiosity excited and she desired to know, to ascertain truth. 2. *A spirit of inquiry*. She came to hear his wisdom and enlarge her own; to ask as well as answer questions. "The spirit of this asking of questions and solving of dark riddles is of the very nature of true philosophy. 'To ask questions rightly,' says Lord Bacon, 'is the half of knowledge.' 'Life without cross-examination is no life at all,' said Socrates. When we inquire, when we restlessly question in our search after truth, when we seek it from unexpected quarters, we are but following in the steps of the wise King of Judah and the wise Queen of Sheba" [*Stanley*]. 3. *A spirit of restlessness*. Rank, wealth, and position could not satisfy. Something beyond herself and her wise men, to know and feel. No trifling questions, questions merely to puzzle.

Hard questions concerning "the name of the Lord" whom Solomon worshipped. Problems ever new and ever old, found in the book of Job and stirring the hearts of men to-day. "How shall man be just with God?" "Where shall wisdom be found?" &c. Only "an interpreter, one among a thousand," can answer these questions. 4. *A spirit of self-sacrifice.* Curiosity prompted to action, anxiety led her to start on a long and risky journey. A reproof, says Christ, to indifference and stupidity concerning himself. True wisdom is of great price. Those who know and seek its worth will not begrudge the cost.

II. The mutual intercourse during the visit. Solomon did not blame her for her trouble and weakness; gave her every encouragement and permitted her "to commune with him of all that was in her heart," freely and fully. 1. *He answered her questions.* "Solomon told her all her questions" (ver. 3). Natural, political, intellectual, or religious. He was equal to the test and could not be puzzled (see traditions). Taught of God, he could teach others. "A divine sentence in the lips" of this king satisfied every inquiry. Jesus can remove doubt and perplexity, ease the mind, and teach all we desire to know. 2. *He received her gifts.* Not content with words, she gave practical expression to gratitude. Useless are verbal thanks if life be void of lovely deeds. These rich presents show the extent of her commerce, and the appreciation of her intercourse with the Hebrew monarch. Solomon accepted her gifts, and gave, in addition to customary exchanges, "of his royal bounty." Neither cared for gold. Both valued wisdom, cultivated and confirmed their friendship by mutual kindness and conversation. "She communed with him." **III. The impressions received from the visit.** Welcomed sincerely, valuing her privileges, she was intent on learning and observant of all she could. 1. *She was astonished at the magnificence of Solomon.* High culture and magnificence exceeded anything she had ever seen. Meals served with great state. Tables at which king, guests, and ministers sat down displayed variety, luxury, and splendour. The order of domestic arrangements, varied costumes and attire of ministers, choice vessels of cup-bearers, all impressed her acute mind. The houses, streets, and buildings of Jerusalem, the temple and the king's private entrance into it, like a scene of enchantment to her. She was overwhelmed. "There was no more spirit in her," almost fainted with astonishment. 2. *She was surprised at the wisdom of Solomon.* This chiefly impressed her mind. "When she had seen the wisdom of Solomon" (ver. 3). A word which, in Hebrew, comprehends not only natural endowments and useful qualities, but practical knowledge. The economy of his government, the schemes of industry and the works of art displayed familiarity with natural science and deep insight into the principles of human nature. This wisdom was superhuman. She acknowledged it to be from Solomon's God, "by whom kings reign and princes decree justice" (ver. 8, cf. Prov. viii. 15). 3. *She was confirmed in her belief concerning Solomon.* "It was a true report which I heard, &c." (ver. 5). Faith exercised will be strengthened, really tested will give greater certainty. "The one-half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me." This just the result of honest search after truth, of personal intercourse with Christ and of engagement in God's service. This is the way "to verify your beliefs." Hear, see, and feel. Wonders of grace, depths of experience to be discovered beyond all comprehension! "That ye may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

HEART COMMUNING.—Verse 1.

Not generally wise to tell all our heart. Samson reached the climax of folly when he did this to Delilah. Yet if we could meet with a Solomon who could solve all our difficulties we might wisely do so. A greater than Solomon in

Jesus, who is incarnate wisdom. With him too silent, with worldly friends too communicative. **I. We ought to communicate with him of all that is in our heart.** 1. Neglect of intercourse with Jesus is very unkind. "Let me see thy countenance, &c." (Cant. ii. 14.) 2. To conceal anything from so true a friend betrays the sad fact of something wrong. 3. Shows a want of confidence in his love, sympathy, and wisdom, if we cannot tell Jesus all in our hearts. 4. Will be the cause of uneasiness in ourselves if we withhold anything from him. Responsibility will rest and weigh heavily with us. 5. Will involve the loss of counsel and help. He meets our case when we unbosom ourselves. 6. Reticence towards Jesus is greatly aggravated by eagerness to tell our troubles to others. Will you make a confidant of man and hide the matter from God? **II. We need not cease communing for want of topics.** 1. Our sorrows. He knows what they are, will comfort us under them, help to profit by them, &c. 2. Our joys. He will sober and salt them. Joy without Jesus, sun without light, the essence gone. 3. Our service. He a servant knows our heart, can sympathise with our difficulties. 4. Our plans. He has zeal, ardour, quick of understanding, and will gladly commune with us concerning all in our hearts to do for God. 5. Our success and failures should be reported at head-quarters. The disciples of the martyred John (Matt. xiv. 12), the evangelists of our Lord, returned to him (Lu. ix. 10). 6. Our desires. Holiness, usefulness, heaven, awaken the sympathy of Jesus, who prays for us about these things. 7. Our fears. Fears of falling, needing, failing, dying. 8. Our loves. Of earth and heaven, towards others and himself. 9. Our mysteries. Incomprehensible feelings, uneasiness, emotions, will be better for ventilation in presence of Jesus. **III. Nor shall we cease communing for want of reasons.** 1. How ennobling and elevating is intercourse with Him! 2. How consoling and encouraging with Him who has overcome the world! 3. How sanctifying and refining union with the Perfect One! 4. How safe and healthy is a daily walk with ever-blessed Son of Man! How proper and natural for disciples to talk with their Teacher, and saints with their Saviour! 6. How delightful and heavenly is rapturous converse with the Beloved! Warning to those who never speak with Jesus—"I never knew you." Complaint of those who seldom commune—"Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" Hint to those usually in communion with him—Keep up the holy intercourse; to this end be thorough; unlock every room in the house and let Jesus enter. Congratulation to those who have long enjoyed his fellowship [Spurgeon].

SOLOMON'S HOUSEHOLD AND CHRIST'S HOUSEHOLD.

Compare them—I. In the splendour of appearance. *Solomon himself*, inferior to Christ in person, wisdom, and dominion. The *glory* of court artificial, product of labour, and liable to decay; Christ's inward, spiritual, and lasting. II. In the servants engaged. 1. Their *position*: Near the king, standing, sitting, waiting and watching attitude. 2. Their *attire*: Beautiful, costly, fit, and free. 3. Their *felicity*: "Happy are thy servants." Apply the eulogy to Christians, happy now and hereafter. III. In the provision made for members. Costly, abundant, satisfactory, and free. Wisdom hath prepared a feast; come in and partake. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. *The Queen a Type of Truth-seekers.* 1. *In her spirit.* Reverence for God, sincerity of desire for light and knowledge. 2. *In her self-sacrifice.* Allured from groves of palm to hear and know wisdom, she

undertook a journey not much less than a thousand miles from "uttermost parts of the earth," *i.e.*, from the extremities of the world then known. 3. *In her reception by Solomon.* Illustrates welcome to inquirers by God "that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not," with past ingratitude or future abuse (as Solomon abused his wisdom at length). Man "giveth little and upbraideth much" (*cf.* Eccles. xx. 15 ; xli. 23). Or—1. She sought in the right disposition. 2. She sought from the right source. 3. She sought in belief of its reality. 4. She sought to possess it and render homage to it. The rule "he who seeks shall find."

Vers. 3-8. 1. *Experimental evidence.* "I came, and mine eyes had seen it" (ver. 6). Many hear and admit, but gospel for trial its power must be felt; arguments, evidence insufficient without experience. To sceptics and doubting our appeal is, "Come and see." To all who come the surprise will be great.

"Now, we believe not for thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." 2. *Express testimony.* Open confession follows experimental evidence. Christ tells all in our hearts and discloses secrets of life and conscience, reveals himself to earnest inquiry, excites wonder, admiration, and love. Grateful acknowledgments.

Ver. 8. 1. *The source of Solomon's greatness.* Queen reminds him that God must be praised for the greatness of the nation, and for the wisdom of its ruler. 2. *The design for which the greatness bestowed.* Not for his own, but for the sake of his people, God chose him to occupy the throne. He permits and appoints. Government in all ministrations. Kings, princes, nobles, judges, a Divinely constituted power, to be held in subordination to "King of kings" and administered for the good of people, "to do judgment and justice."

HOMILETICS.

WISDOM SOUGHT.—Verses 1, 23 and 24.

"All the earth sought to Solomon to hear his wisdom" (1 Kings x. 24). Sought the face of Solomon, who had unveiled wisdom and given to the world its beauty and use. **I. The indigence of human greatness.** A *queen* and *kings* seeking! Rank and wealth of no avail. Monarchs in their palaces, and peers in their mansions, happy only in loyal obedience, under the dominion of truth (*wise-dom*). "Where shall wisdom be found?" Facts in matter and mind require a solution, problems in moral life press heavily and fearfully upon the heart. The richest, most learned cry for an interpreting principle. We may get pearls from the ocean, treasures from the earth, but "where is the place of understanding?" "God understandeth the way thereof, &c." **II. The Divine source of supply.** God "the only wise God." "The wisdom of Egypt" proverbial in geometry, astronomy, and medicine, but "Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country and all the wisdom of Egypt." God gives sufficiency to the most indigent and most exalted. 1. It cannot be bought with money. "Man knoweth not the price thereof." 2. It cannot be found by investigation. Search in realms of nature useless. "The depth saith it is not in me, and the sea saith it is not in me." The domains of life and of departed spirits reveal it not. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." **III. The need of personal effort to secure this supply.** They heard and *came* to see. The attainment depends upon the spirit and effort of the seeker. A scorner is proud, irreverent, "seeketh wisdom and findeth it not." The slothful excuse—the distance is great, the price is too much, "there is a lion in the way."

Diligence and activity the conditions of getting and enjoying the blessing. True and earnest inquirers, like Queen of Sheba, Nicodemus, Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, and the Ethiopian eunuch travelling hundreds of miles, seek and secure knowledge, the highest knowledge, the knowledge of God, the centre and soul of all science. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels."

"Truths on which depend our main concern,
That 'tis our shame and misery not to learn,
Shine by the side of every path we tread
With such a lustre, he that runs may read" [Cowper].

SOLOMON'S GLORY AND DEATH.—Verses 13–31.

Solomon pre-eminent, surpassed all kings of the earth, &c. **I. Solomon's glory.** Of two kinds, material and moral. 1. *Material glory.* None with greater splendour, which glittered in the eyes of his people like the sun. Gold and silver, large treasures untold. Empire and power unique. Tributary princes and presents from all parts of the known world. Household extensive, exchequer unlimited, and fame universal. 2. *Moral glory.* Moral and mental qualities equal to his surroundings, and preserved harmony between himself and kingly state. Scripture specially dwells on *wisdom*. Men of noted intelligence in his own country: Ethan in charge of temple music, Heman "the king's seer in the words of God," Chalcol and Darda; but Solomon "wiser than all men" (1 Ki. iv. 29–31). Sage, poet, and naturalist—an intellect stored with vast information; active, shrewd, and penetrating; a heart kind, sympathies wide, rising to high and noble thoughts of God. These more becoming and better than material grandeur. Wisdom better than wealth. "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." **II. Solomon's death.** Reign not long, though glorious. End certain. Glory and death strange association! A common end to great and small. "Solomon *slept* (lit., lay down) with his fathers." The crown, the robes of office, and the sceptre of power must be laid down. "To leave these things," said a nobleman crowned with honours, "makes one miserable." Kings extraordinary and brilliant level with the meanest in the grave. They come, reign, and sleep, and so history rolls on. "Where will you leave your glory?"—in fragrant names, righteous deeds, and holy life? or in grief, disgrace, and oblivion? "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom." "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 17–19. *Solomon's throne.* The symbol of a throne of grace. The seat of judgment and dominion; of public audience to nobles, strangers, and all who resorted to him. For beauty and strength, workmanship and design, "there was not the like made in any kingdom."

Ver. 23. *Wisdom.* Knowledge of God's works, skill in physic and state-policy, rules of prudence for human life and principles of true religion. *God*

put in his heart. Supernatural gifts in answer to prayer. 1. The lesson. 2. The learners. 3. The method of teaching. 4. The warning to us. Application made in eagerness, to hear Solomon aggravates, shames and condemns general contempt for Christ, in whom are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." 5. A prophecy that "all they from Sheba shall come, they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1, 2. Philosophy was born a Pagan; but she may become a Christian, and should be christened "Mary." She may be proud to sit at Jesus' feet. Hellas coming to Judea's Messiah is a rarely beautiful sight [Dr. Duncan].

Questions. Do not suppose that wisdom is so much flattered at having you for a pupil that she will set you easy lessons, and yet give you the gold medal [T. T. Lynch]. Questioners must be teachable. When Haydn was in London, a nobleman came to him for lessons in music, but found fault with all that Haydn said. At last, out of patience, the musician exclaimed, "I see, my lord, that it is you who is so good as to give lessons to me, and I am obliged to confess that I do not merit the honour of having such a master" [Spurgeon]. Communed. Do you want anything of which you cannot tell your Lord? It argues either no real need or else little faith. Strong faith hath free communion with heaven, and conceals nothing, but tells all. Ep. iii. 12. "In whom we have boldness." The word boldness is "telling all" [Thos. Boston].

Vers. 9 and 24. Presents. There is no grace in a benefit that sticks to the

fingers [Seneca]. We like the gift when we the giver prize [Ovid].

Vers. 20-23. Gold. Greatness stands upon a precipice, and if prosperity carries a man ever so little beyond his poise, it overbears and dashes him to pieces [Seneca]. Prosperity seems to be scarcely safe unless it be mixed with a little adversity [Hosea Ballow].

Ver. 29. First and last. His first were best; of his last this historian saith nothing, but layeth his finger on the scar [Trapp]. Solomon did not live to a very great age, since he was not more than twenty years old when he ascended the throne. Whether Solomon turned to the Lord again with all his heart, a question widely discussed by the older commentators, cannot be ascertained from Scripture. If the Preacher (Kohleth) is traceable to Solomon, so far as the leading thoughts are concerned, we should find in this fact an evidence of his conversion, or at least a proof that at the close of his life he discovered the vanity of all earthly possessions and aims and declared the fear of God to be the only abiding good, with which a man can stand before the judgment of God [Keil].

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Here begins the fourth part of the book of Chronicles, extending from the division of the kingdom to the decree of Cyrus, authorising the return of the exiles and confining itself to the affairs of the kingdom of Judah. The present chapter includes the proposal of the people to Rehoboam (vers. 1-5); the counsel given to him (vers. 6-11); and the answer that provokes the revolt (vers. 12-19). This corresponds to 1 Ki. xii. 1-19 [Murphy].

Vers. 1-5.—Proposal to the people. Shechem, a judicious step, meeting there not simply because central and convenient, but honouring the capital of Ephraimites and removing disaffection. King assembled to receive Rehoboam as lawful king and join in usual acclamations (1 Sam. x. 24; 1 Ki. i. 39) [cf. Speak. Com.]. Ver. 2. Jer. an Ephraimite appointed by Solomon to civil administration of house of Joseph (1 Ki. xi. 28), of which Ephraim a branch. Cause of flight to Egypt given (1 Ki. xi. 29-40). He returned to be leader and spokesman of people. Ver. 4. Yoke, pomp and style of Solomon made taxation heavy. Vast building operations required forced labour, &c. Ease, grant relief, make concessions, most reasonable request.

Vers. 6-11.—Counsel given to the king. Old men who served under Solomon and well

able to advise. Ver. 7. *Spake*, yield to will of people, for once be *servant*, be ruled by them and attach to thyself *servants for ever*. Ver. 8. *Forsook*, refused good words, consulted younger advisers, who gave counsel more flattering and agreeable to king's temper.

Vers. 12-19.—*Little finger*. Proverbial for increasing rather than diminishing burdens. "Finger not in original; but may be safely implied. The meaning is, 'You shall find my hand heavier on you than my father's; as much heavier as if my little finger were thicker than his loins'" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Whips*, often with sharp bones or pieces of lead tied to end. *Scorpions*, *i.e.*, scourges with sharp points (Latin *scorpio*), "iron thorns" inflicting exquisite pain. Harsh and foolish answer. Ver. 15. *Cause*, *i.e.*, the turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfil his word (1 Ki. ii. 29-31). Ver. 16. *What portion?* Words of sedition by Sheba (2 Sam. xx. 1), expressing deep-rooted aversion to royal house and resulting in open rebellion. Ver. 18. *Adoram*, identified by some with Ad. of 1 Ki. iv. 6; v. 14; and Adoram of 2 Sam. xx. 24. "The three names mark three distinct persons, perhaps of same family, who were respectively contemporary with David, Solomon, and Rehoboam" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Sent* to alleviate burdens. *Stoned*, usual mode of mob vengeance. Ver. 18. King himself narrowly escaped the same fate. From that time *Israel* and *Judah* separated and distinguished one from another.

HOMILETICS.

THE REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY.—Verses 1-5.

I. The place of meeting. "Shechem" wisely chosen by Rehoboam, to remove dissatisfaction; at the advice of judicious men, whose counsels he afterwards rejected. A place of great antiquity, noted for conventions (Jos. xxiv. 1) and royalty (Judg. ix.). **II. The purpose in view.** The future government of the nation. 1. *To make Rehoboam king.* King with officers of state around; tribes drawn up under their leaders ready to receive him. How proclaimed? Not with hearty shouts of "God save the king." A pause and solemn silence. Jeroboam steps forward! 2. *To represent the people.* "Make our yoke lighter and we will serve thee." This unexpected; surprised and annoyed Rehoboam; not what he came for, not what he liked! Not bold enough to deny, not grace enough to concede. Delay dangerous, may breed suspicion and intensify ill-feeling. **III. The conclusion arrived at.** "Come again unto me after three days." King did not commit himself to rash impromptu reply. Adjournment might seem wise, but demands just, prompt redress would have been better than prudent caution. "There is a gift whose recompense is double" (Ecclus. xx. 10).

THE FOOLISH RULER AND THE REVOLTING TRIBES.—Verses 6-19.

The four scenes may be treated separately or in one sketch. **I. The grievance stated.** Real, not imaginary; outspoken and not kept back. "The grievous servitude of thy father and his heavy yoke that he put upon us." 1. *A reasonable demand.* Couched in a spirit of fairness and loyalty. Reason and justice will ever triumph. Violence and storms spend themselves for nothing. (a.) *Heavy taxes.* Splendour of Solomon's court, the magnitude of his undertakings, such that neither tribute of dependent states, presents of foreign princes, nor profits of commercial enterprises could support. He was obliged to levy taxes for necessary revenue. (b.) *Forced service.* This chief ground of complaint (*cf.* 1 Ki. iv. 6; v. 13, 14; xi. 28). Each tribe called upon to render without payment. "Forced labour has been among the causes leading to insurrection in many ages and countries. It alienated the people of Rome from the last Tarquin (Liv. i. 56); it helped to bring about the French revolution, and it was for many years one of the principal grievances of the Russian serfs" [*Speak. Com.*]. (c.) *Long endured.* "Put upon us by thy

father." Complaint of past reign. Solomon wise, but oppressive in government. "No man can always be wise," says Pliny. We are more apt to copy the defects of our ancestors than imitate their virtues; to remember the evil of their lives, not their benefits. 2. *A national demand.* It was the voice of "all Israel." The people unanimous; not a few merely turbulent and dissatisfied. Thus was prophecy fulfilled. "This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you; he will take your sons, &c." (1 Sam. viii. 11-18). **II. The consultation held.** If impolitic to delay, it was prudent to seek advice. 1. *With aged counsellors.* Wise, experienced, and suitable. "How do ye advise?" "With the ancient is wisdom, and in length of days understanding." Be kind, concede, speak good words, and they will be thy servants for ever. Advice—(a), just; (b), timely; (c), far-seeing; and (d), wise. Happy the ruler with such statesmen! No sentimentalists, but true patriots and philosophers! Kindness wins and overcomes. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." 2. *With young counsellors.* Conceited, proud, and inexperienced. They recommend oppression and defiance. Yield nothing, put more on, afflict with scorpions. This considered spirited and kingly! but (a), unreasonable; (b), foolish; (c), cruel; and (d), destructive. "Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." **III. The decision given.** "The king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave" (ver. 13). This—1. *Unexpected.* Demands reasonable; ease and make yoke "lighter." Delay gave time to think, and this course resolved upon! 2. *Foolish.* Rough words unbecoming; display weakness, ignorance, and pride. A grain of wisdom would have taught that such conduct would widen the breach between him and his people. 3. *Presumptuous.* Kings made to serve, not to tyrannise; should rule for the good of the people and not for selfish purposes. The way to govern is to serve. Those kings safest who stoop lowest. "I would rather be king of *the French* than king of France," said Louis XIV., *i.e.*, rule in the hearts of the people than over the territories of the kingdom. "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be chiefest, shall be servant of all." 4. *Mischievous.* This tone like that of the nobility of France before the great revolution, calculated to irritate (*cf.* the Ephraimites, Judg. xii. 1-4; men of Israel and Judah, 2 Sam. xix. 41-43; and the harsh words of Eliphaz, Job xxii. 5), to add fuel to the fire. Mischievous in themselves and in results. "How many thousand souls are hurt every day by the words of others!" [*Baxter*]. How sad the result here! "The beginning of the words of the mouth is foolishness: and the end of talk is mischievous" (Ecclus. xi. 13). **IV. The results which followed** (ver. 16). Whatever ground for resisting before, they now receive provocation, which accounts for strong words and firm resolve. 1. *Revolt.* Threatened, insulted, they raised a shout expressive and well understood. "To your tents, O Israel!" 2. *Resistance.* Hadoram sent, the man who was "*over the levy*" (Rev. Vers.) of forced labourers, whose presence would rouse Israel to anger, exasperate, and outrage. A foolish and imprudent act. "Israel stoned him with stones, that he died." 3. *Final separation* (ver. 19). God prevented the king from filling the land with blood. "It was with one exception (Hadoram) a bloodless revolt" [*Stanley*]. The attempt to recover lost tribes forbidden. The determination of king, the loyalty and number of Judah and Benjamin of no avail. The thing was done and could not be altered. The army disbanded and submitted to the God of battles. "For the cause was of God, that the Lord might perform his word." Even if right appear on our side, better sit still than fight in disobedience to God. When God's will is known ever submit, whatever loss may be involved.

THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE WORKING.—Verse 15.

The cause, the Hebrew circuit, or turning about, was of God; for here was a "wheel within a wheel, as Ezek. i." [*Trapp*]. The original idea of the disruption was that it was a divine dispensation. "The thing was from the Lord." "It was as much a part of the divine economy of the national destinies, as the erection of the monarchy itself, or as the substitution of the House of David for the House of Saul" [*Stanley*]. **I. Events of history controlled and directed to accomplish divine purposes.** God's will supreme and ultimate. "The turn of events" not aimless and independent. The current directed, *turned*, according to God's pleasure and word. **II. In the accomplishment of divine purposes men act as free agents.** Neither the folly of the king, nor rebellion of people pre-ordained. Events from natural order. Men not *fated*, but *free* to act; are under moral, not physical government. "But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." **III. Men thus acting as free agents are responsible for their actions.** We are not subjects of accidents, bereft of power to do good or evil, but morally responsible for our actions. The hands of the Jews were *wicked* in crucifying Christ, though he was delivered up to them "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts ii. 23). Those who rebel against God and lose heaven will have to blame themselves for wilfulness and folly.

TWO METHODS OF TREATING MEN.—Verses 6-11.

I. The conciliatory. **II. The unconciliatory.** Social positions are graduated. Yet no elevation of social rank gives one man the right to tyrannise over another. Pass in rapid review a few of the cases in which the two methods of treating men come into constant operation. The maintenance of a conciliatory policy is quite consistent with a headship. 1. Firmness; 2. Justice. What is the cure for all false relations among men? The gospel of reconciliation [*Beecher*].

GOVERNMENTS AND SUBJECTS.

From the whole narrative learn—**I. That governments create dissatisfaction among their subjects by injustice.** Order, contentment, and affection essential to prosperity in government. Severe laws, over-taxation, curtailment of liberties, and coercive measures create uneasiness and opposition. "The government of a prudent man is well ordered" (Eclus. x. 1). **II. That it is right for subjects to agitate for the removal of injustice.** Within right to get redress in just and legal methods. History abounds, in critical and stirring times, in witnesses against oppression and tyranny. Wrong to submit to despotisms. "I know how to add sovereign to the king's person, but not to his power," said Pym. **III. That it is wise for rulers to listen to the complaints of injustice.** Concessions more becoming than extravagant assertions of "divine right." Mild and merciful procedure quickens the spirit of freedom; destroys jealousy towards a ruler's actions and character, and the best safeguard of thrones and constitutions. "When a king speaks 'good words,' they seem to be better than if spoken by other lips; when a king is kind, he seems to add to his kindness by his very kingliness; the stoop of his condescension redoubles the value of his benefaction. If when the people returned after three days Rehoboam had spoken so, the welkin would have rung with the resonant cheers of a delighted, thankful, because emancipated, people" [*Dr. Parker*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1-12. Rehoboam the headstrong. Only son of Solomon, but did not profit by his father's wisdom. 1. *His training.* Not like that of his father. (a) His mother an idolatress (2 Chr. xii. 13), not the wise, good mother which Solomon seems to have had (Prov. iv. 3). Hence the mother's influence over the young prince. (b) He had not the good example which Solomon had in David. Solomon's later years degenerate, what wonder if his son was far behind! 2. *His accession.* Without difficulty (cf. 1 Ki. xi. 43) at the death of his father, when about 41 years old. (a) By promise of perpetual sovereignty to David's posterity; (b) By public assembly of representatives. "Met not to exercise right of election (1 Sam. x. 19-21); for after God's promise, their duty was submission to the authority of rightful heir; but their object was to renew the conditions to which their constitutional kings were subject (1 Sam. x. 25), and to the omission of rehearsing which, under the peculiar circumstances in which Solomon was made king, they were disposed to ascribe the absolutism of his government" [Jamieson]. 3. *His trouble.* Kings not without. "Uneasy is the head that wears the crown." (a) A corrupt empire; (b) A dissatisfied people; (c) A dark future. 4. *His folly.* Wisdom not inherited as wealth. Some infatuated, nothing can teach them. Men have no right to tyrannise in social, political, or religious affairs. The rough answer was a fearful mistake. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Vers. 2, 3, and 12-15. Jeroboam the first king of Israel. 1. *His early life.* Jeroboam (whose people is many) "son of Nebat," an Ephrathite, *i.e.*, belonging to territory of Ephraim; of Zereda (2 Chr. iv. 17; cf. Judg. v. 22), a town near Scythopolis. Mother Zeruah, a widow, reduced by the execution of her husband at beginning of Solomon's reign, if Jeroboam be identical with Shemei (cf. 2 Sam. xvi. 5;

cf. 1 Ki. ii. 46). 2. *His natural ability.* "A mighty man of valour" (1 Ki. xi. 27); mighty in power as Nimrod (Gen. x. 8); in wealth, as Boaz, Kish, and other Israelites (Ruth ii. 1; 1 Sam. ix. 1; 2 Ki. xv. 20). But clever, of strong natural capacity; active and enterprising (*Sept.* a man of works). 3. *His rapid promotion.* Solomon discerning his talents, "seeing the young man that he was industrious, that he did the king's business (Dan. viii. 27), made him ruler; set him over all the charge, the burden;" superintendent of taxes and public works (1 Ki. xi. 27, 28). "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule" (Prov. xii. 24; xxii. 29). 4. *His prophetic designation.* By prophet Ahijah in symbolic action (1 Ki. xi. 29-39). From which time he became a marked man by Solomon. 5. *His seditious conduct.* Ambitious, impatient for the death of Solomon, he was led to plot and conspire, and in consequence driven to Egypt. Chosen of God, yet could not wait for Providence. Incurred penalty of death by rebellion. 6. *His accession to the throne.* Chosen at length by people and permitted to become first king of Israel.

Ver. 7. Be kind. The power of kindness in winning affection and service. Lenity and moderation in a prince is very prevalent with the people, as to win their affections at first, so to hold them in obedience ever after. The advice of an ancient French counsellor to his sovereign at his departure from court was good. Being wished to lay down some general rules for government, he took a paper, and wrote on the top of it "moderation," in the middle of the leaf "moderation," and at the bottom "moderation" [Trapp].

Vers. 6-11. I. The national council. 1. Assembled and consulted by the king; 2. Composed of old and young, wise and foolish men. II. *The resolution adopted.* 1. From whom it came; 2. What its nature; 3. What its results. *Forsook old men*, whom he consulted for fashion's sake, as Xerxes did when he invaded Greece. Resolved

beforehand to stand upon his *pantoufles* and not at all to stoop to the people. He had those about him, doubtless, that would tell him, as some Court parasites did our King John, when he had yielded to the requests of his barons for the subjects' liberty, that now he was "a king without a kingdom, a lord without a dominion, and a subject to his subjects" [Trapp]. *Consulted young men.* So did our king Richard II., to his utter ruin. So Xerxes despised the grave counsel of his uncle Artabanus, and was led wholly by young Mardonius to the loss of all. The like is reported of Dionysius, king of Sicily; Cræsus, king of Lydia; Nero, emperor of Rome; James that reigned in Scotland in Edward IV.'s time; and Lantrer, of whom it is reported that he lost the kingdom of Naples from the French king, his master, and all that he had in Italy, because he would not ask nor follow the advice of those who were wiser than himself [Ibid.].

Vers. 12-15. *The adjourned meeting.*
1. The decision given. Haughty and imperious. 2. The effect produced. (a) On the aged counsellors; (b) On

deputies; (c) On the nation [adapted from *Bib. Mus.*].

Ver. 16. *To your tents, O Israel.* "It was a national watchword, and not the war-cry of a single tribe which led the revolt" [Stanley]. 1. Its antiquity. Raised in time of David, now with fatal effect (2 Sam. xx. 1). 2. Its ingratitude. What have we to do with David? 3. Its selfishness. Cut themselves off from their brethren and their sovereign. To your tents, let us have a king of our own!

Vers. 16-19. *The great secession.* 1. Its strange beginning. 2. Its remarkable progress. 3. Its fatal consequences. Two kingdoms; rival worship. Weakness, jealousy, and political decline of Jewish nation. Terrible is progress of strife. One angry word, one look of revenge, one act of resentment, will kindle a fire which may set a neighbourhood or a nation into flame. A drop of revenge soon becomes a river, and the river a torrent, which sweeps everything before it. "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water. Therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER X.

Vers. 6-10. *Counsel.* Judge Buller, when in the company of a young gentleman of sixteen, cautioned him against being led astray by the example or persuasion of others, and said: "If I had listened to the advice of some of those who called themselves my friends when I was young, instead of being a judge of the King's Bench, I should have died long ago a prisoner at the King's Bench."

Vers. 12-15. *Answered.* Who knows what he is till he is tried, and until he meets his own trial? for every one is not discovered in the same way; he

may be firm in one peril and fail in another [Jay]. His friends were summoned on a point so nice, to pass their judgment and to give advice; but fixed before, and well resolved was he, as those who ask advice are wont to be [Pope].

Vers. 16-19. When any one person or body of men seize into their hands the power in the last resort, there is properly no longer a government, but what Aristotle and his followers call the abuse and corruption of one [Swift].

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Rehoboam forbidden to war (vers. 1-4). This section a repetition in abbreviated form of 1 Ki. xii. 21-24. Remainder of chapter new matter. Rehoboam fortifies many towns (vers. 5-12); receives accessions from Israel (vers. 13-17); and takes many wives and concubines (vers. 18-23).

Vers. 1-4.—The forbidden war. Fight to crush the rebellion. *Fourscore thousand* about one-third of Judah's number under Joab's levy (2 Sam. xxiv. 9). *Shem.* (1 Ki. xii. 22-24); all Israel in Judah and Benjamin now united together.

Vers. 5-12.—Defensive measures. Jerusalem, a judicious step, unlike northern kings, who shifted their capital. Built, repaired and fortified; fifteen given. Beth., Et., and Tek. near together, a little south of Jericho, on way to Hebron. Ver. 7. Beth-zur, a strong position about five miles north of Hebron, on route between that place and Jerusalem. It played an important part in the wars of the Maccabees (1 Mac. iv. 29-61; vi. 7-26, &c.) [*Speak. Com.*]. Shoca, now Sumeikeh, three-and-a-half hours south-west of Jerusalem. Adul (Josh. xv. 35). Ver. 8. Gath. Exact site not known. Mares. (Josh. xv. 44). Its importance appears in the invasion of Zerah (ch. xiv. 9); and from 1 Mac. v. 66; 2 Mac. xii. 35. Modern name Marash. Ziph. Two of this name in Judah (Josh. xv. 24-55). This famous in David's history (1 Sam. xxiii. 14-24; xxvi. 2-25). Exact site appears to be the modern Til Zif, about three miles south of Hebron [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 9. Ador., Adora or Dora, now Dura, west of Hebron (Josh. xv. 24). Lackish, now Um-Lakish. Azekah (Josh. x. 10). Ver. 10. Zor. (1 Chr. ii. 53), now Surah; and Aij., now Yalo, further north than other cities here mentioned. Both in territory originally assigned to Dan (Josh. xix. 41, 42), but afterwards absorbed into Judah [*Speak. Com.*]. Judah and Benjamin, now the designation of southern kingdom (cf. vers. 12 and 23). Ver. 11. Oil, odoriferous; wine, sweet, used by ancient Jews and modern Arabs; healthy and useful in hot climates (cf. Ps. civ. 15).

Vers. 13-17.—Accessions. Left, ejected from their office because they would not minister to Jeroboam's calves, who appointed priests not Levites. Suburbs (cf. Num. xxxv. 1-8). High places, i.e., Dan and Bethel (cf. 1 Ki. xii. 28-33); a kind of contemptuous description as not equal to temple at Jerusalem, only on a level with those in other parts. Ver. 15. Devils, a term sometimes used for idols in general (Lev. xvii. 7); here applied distinctively to the goat-deities, which were probably worshipped chiefly in the northern parts of the kingdom, where the heathen Canaanites still abounded [*Jamieson*]. Ver. 17. Strengthened by numbers and moral tone of excellent subjects; but sad change noted in king next chapter.

Vers. 18-23. Rehoboam's wives and children. Jerimoth not given among legitimate sons of David, hence son of concubine. Read David and of Abihail. Mother as well as father of Mah. is given. Daughter of E., probably "grand-daughter," since an actual daughter of E. must have been too old to be a fit wife for Rehoboam. Ver. 20. Daughter, grand-daughter of Abs. (cf. ch. xiii. 2). Ver. 21. Threescore (cf. Cant. vi. 8 and 2 Chr. xiii. 21). Ver. 22. Chief, though not eldest of his sons. Affection for M. led him to violate the law. Wisely, prudently with calculation (Ex. i. 10). Many wives. Rehoboam careful to please his sons by making them governors of fortresses, and "sought for them a multitude of wives" (marg.); perhaps from cities over which they were set. In Persia and Turkey, younger princes, until lately, were shut up in the harem during their father's lifetime; and to prevent competition, were blinded or killed when their brother ascended the throne. In former country the old practice of dispersion through the country, like Rehoboam, has been again revived [*Jamieson*].

HOMILETICS.

THE RESTRAINTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.—Verses 1-4.

Events concerning kingdom of Judah chiefly given after revolt of ten tribes. Rehoboam determined to enter disaffected provinces; but divine decree gone forth, the army overawed, dispersed, and the king obliged to submit.

I. Restraints unmistakably clear. "The word *came* to Shem.," and was *spoken* "unto Rehoboam." Prophets gave no uncertain sound in either kingdom. Divine interposition most clear. No visions, no voices now; but around and in us as we fight in life, a power above the wiles and schemes of men, secret, invisible influences, deep impressions, and mysterious thoughts, amounting almost to divine revelations, to check or prompt. "Thou shalt not go up." **II. Restraints merciful in design.** "Nor fight against your brethren." Nations and tribes bound by natural ties; *man-kinned* (mankind) should help each other. "Quarrel with your faults and not with our fellow-men," was the motto of Otho II., Emperor of Germany. "Man's inhumanity to man" is great. If Alexanders, Casars, and Napoleons were not restrained, the world would become a pandemonium. God careful of human life and human weal, prevents disgrace, mischief, and bloodshed. Men seek to destroy peace, injure reputation and property. "Revenge is wild justice," says Bacon. "Say not thou I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord and he shall save thee." **III. Restraints timely made.** God times events and interpositions; permits much show and great progress, as in Jeroboam's preparations. Why restrained when army assembled, everything ready and about to march with every prospect of success? Has God been consulted? Education, preparations, and enterprises of no avail, if not for him. A thousand forces may be enlisted, simply to be sent home again! We may form our programme, set an object in view, adapt our means and arrange time to attain it. Just when attainment near, lo! deprivation, disappointment. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." **IV. Restraints implicitly heeded.** The prophet represented God. The event could not be changed. "They hearkened," disbanded, and went home. Another power beside Judah and Israel must be recognised. Folly to resist, to fight against God! Motives, arguments, to acquiesce in arrangements of Providence are unanswerable. "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth," but "woe unto him that striveth with his Maker."

DEFENSIVE MEASURES.—Verses 5-12.

Rehoboam forbidden to aggress, undertakes to defend the frontiers of his kingdom. "He *built* cities for defence." The verb denotes fortification of cities; "partly," says Hengstenberg, "because in the case of a city already in existence, the building must necessarily have been restricted to the fortification of it, and partly because the term city, in its fullest extent, involves the idea of fortification." **I. He protected against great dangers.** 1. *From the attack of Israel.* Disruption of tribal unity brought danger and enemies within. Israel restless and allied with Egypt. 2. *From Egyptian bondage.* From this quarter greatest danger. Out of fifteen cities all but three, on southern or western frontier. "And now, for the first time since the Exodus, Judah was once more threatened with an Egyptian bondage" [Stanley]. **II. He displayed great wisdom.** 1. *In retaining the capital.* "Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem" (ver. 5). Unlike kings of Israel, who shifted their capital from place to place for convenience and policy, he perceived importance of retaining hold on the city of David. This central fortress surrounded by a chain of fortresses, in part to carry out the designs of his father, in part to increase his strength. 2. *In fortifying the kingdom.* Reduced by secession, he sought to keep what he possessed. He rebuilt, garrisoned, and provided with arms and stores to stand a siege. If we cannot attack, we can perhaps build; if not recover lost privileges, we may defend what we have. "That good thing (goodly deposit) which was committed unto thee, keep (*guard*, cf. 1 Tim. vi. 20) by the

Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. i. 14). **III. He illustrated great principles.** Under these measures are hidden powerful principles in human life. 1. *The power of conscience.* Accused of doing wrong, he now fears further mischief. A guilty conscience gives timidity, creates a panic, and expects retaliation when "no man pursueth." "Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind." 2. *The tendency to aggressive war.* Jeroboam took similar precautions to Rehoboam (1 Ki. xii. 25). Kings ambitious and plunge into war. "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife." Who can tell the strifes and wars thus created?

" Towns turned to ashes, fanes involved in fire!
These deeds the guilt of rash ambition tell."

2. *Lack of faith in God.* This leads to self-sufficiency, mischievous enterprises and failure. In personal salvation and national deliverances, weak is an arm of flesh. "Some remember (trust, glory in remembrance of) chariots, and some remember horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. xx. 7).

CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES.—*Verses 13-17.*

Jeroboam, afraid of reunion of the tribes, took measures to make separation final. He introduced calf-worship in Bethel and Dan, two distinct places at opposite ends of his kingdom. He selected priests from the lowest of the people, thus weakened his kingdom and caused many worthy men to migrate to Judah, who, faithfully attached to the worship of Jehovah, could not conscientiously bow to idols. **I. In refusing to worship idols.** They remembered the injunction, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor worship them." Daniel's companions were steadfast. **II. In braving the results of their conduct.** The wrath of the king, and the ridicule of the tribes; ejection from their office, persecution and exile. "The emperor commands thee to do sacrifice," said the Proconsul to Cyprian; "therefore consult for thy welfare." "I am a Christian," was the heroic reply; "and I cannot sacrifice to your gods; do, therefore, what you are commanded; as for me, in so just a cause there needs no consultation." **III. In seeking to worship God according to conscience.** They desired a purer worship and sought a more convenient place; left their suburbs and their possessions, and came to Judah and Jerusalem. (Pilgrim Fathers.) In the conduct of these priests and people we have—1. *A conscience to acknowledge.* Some in authority do not recognise it. Conscience the vicegerent of God, omnipotent, can never be crushed. Kings may control movements of body, but never alter convictions of soul. Neither fraud nor force can make good men disobey behests of conscience. 2. *A precedent to follow.* Men may urge customs of the people and fashions of the nation; expediency and personal obligations to superiors; the dangers of singularity and terrible penalty of our choice, but we must be faithful: "Dare to do right." "We ought to obey God rather than men."

THE STRENGTH AND ATTRACTION OF A KINGDOM.—*Verses 3 and 13-17.*

I. In the unity of its subjects. By blood Benjamin more closely related to Ephraim than Judah. All traditions of Benjamin antagonistic to Judah. Now estrangement and feud ceased. Religious and political capital established on border line. Two tribes unite, and prepare for defence. Danger unites all ranks together. (Elizabeth and Spanish Armada.) **II. In the purity of its worship.** Benjamin attached to temple worship. Priests and Levites migrated in large numbers to the southern kingdom for purer worship and

safety. Recognition of God greater security than armies and fleets; moral vigour more attractive than extensive trade. **III. In the righteousness of its rule.** Wise to strengthen cities and defend forts; better to consolidate the throne in rectitude. Numbers give physical strength, but just concessions and righteous laws support and safeguard the nation. Jeroboam's kingdom weakened, Rehoboam's strengthened.

THE FAMILY AND DOMESTIC POLICY OF REHOBAM.—Verses 18–23.

Danger past, indulgence began. The domestic policy of Rehoboam might be worldly wise, but it was sinful. **I. The family was founded in disobedience to God.** The royal harem inferior to his father's, equally in violation of the law. 1. *In multiplying wives.* (a) For himself; (b) For his sons. Wives not strangers, but daughters of Israel, and of family of David, yet forbidden. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself." 2. *In choice of a favourite son.* He set aside eldest son, preferred Abijah in fondness for his mother. Solomon had divine warrant, but in destining youngest for kingdom the king violated the law (Deut. xxi. 15, 16). "They have set up kings, but not by me; they have made princes, and I knew it not." **II. The family was governed by worldly policy.** "He dealt wisely"—*i.e.*, with deep and calculating policy (Ex. i. 10). "Rehoboam's wisdom was shown— 1. In dispersing his other sons instead of allowing them to remain together in Jerusalem, where they might have joined in a plot against Abijah, as Adonijah and his brothers did against Solomon (1 Ki. i. 5–10). 2. In giving his sons positions which might well content them, and prevent them from being jealous of Abijah" [*Speak. Com.*]. Rivalry prevented, public peace and safety secured, not by worldly sagacity and bestowment of patronage. Trust in God and loyalty to his commands the best policy.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 13–16. *The duty of Protestants.* This will lead me to set before you—I. The conduct of Protestants in that day. 1. In it they bore testimony against the reigning abominations; 2. They steadfastly adhered to the service of their God; 3. They renounced all for conscience sake. **II. Our duty as Protestants at the present day.** 1. We should realise our own religious principles; 2. We should show their superior efficacy to sanctify the heart and life. Address those (1) Who are conforming to this world; and (2) Those who are like the Israelites, setting their hearts fully to seek the Lord their God [*C. Simeon*].

Ver. 16. 1. God the object of search. The sublimest and most needful in creation. The foundation of all religion and strength. 2. The search sincere. Heart, all the heart thrown

into it. 3. The search steadfast. The heart fixed, determined, purposed. No hesitancy, wandering, and half-heartedness. "*Qui tradiderunt cor suum*, who delivered up their hearts to seek the Lord; to run any hazard rather than violate conscience. Such were the English exiles in Queen Mary's days, from whom Stephen Gardiner vowed so to stop sending of all supplies that for very hunger they should eat their own nails, and then feed on their fingers' ends; but 'threatened folk live long,' and before these banished men were brought to that bill of fare, the Bishop was eaten up of worms" [*Trapp*].

These verses describe the condition of the northern kingdom in Jeroboam's time. 1. Disgraced by calf-worship. 2. Lacking the principal thing. Seats of worship, no true sanctuaries, for the ark, the symbol of God's presence

wanting. Not "the house of God," but "a house of high places." 3. Weakened by emigration. Innovations drove the best from the country. The king went from bad to worse.

Ver. 17. *Three years, &c. Temporary Religion.* This a brief description of the spirit of his reign. I. *Period of profession.* By apostasy of ten tribes, and the belief that the thing proceeded from God as a punishment for Solomon's idolatry, the king brought to reflection and obedience. This only temporary. When kingdom sufficiently fortified, and he thought himself secure, he forsook the law of Jehovah, and all Israel with him (ch. xii. 1). Many fall away, some before, and others after three years of profession. "Ye did run well, who did hinder?" II. *The period of apostasy.* In prosperity or security. When no dangers nigh. In heart unfaithful, though external worship un-

disturbed (ch. xii. 28). High places, monumental stones and idols, disfigured the land. Apostasy more grievous than before. The first three years walked in the way of David; in the fourth year, decline which neutralised all advantages of immigration, and in the fifth year punishment by invasion and success of Shishak (xii. 2). Such the course of life!

Vers. 18-22. *A Family Record.* In which we find—1. Kindred mixed together. All three wives of David's family, and his own kindred. 2. Partiality displayed. "Rehoboam loved Maachah" (ver. 22) for beauty or conformity to his wicked practices. 3. Numbers in abundance. "Eighteen wives and threescore concubines, and begat twenty-and-eight sons and threescore daughters." The family a divine institution, should be the best of kingdoms and a type of heaven.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XI.

Vers. 1-5. *Ye shall not go.* Little can we at the beginning of an action guess at God's intention at the conclusion [*Bishop Hall*]. It is one of the greatest praises of God's wisdom that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory [*Ibid.*].

Vers. 13-15. *Worship cast off.* Whatever is morally wrong cannot be politically right [*Burke*]. We never do evil so thoroughly and cordially as when we are led to it by a false principle of conscience [*Pascal*].

"Not thou, O Lord, from us, but we
Withdraw ourselves from thee"

[*French*].

Vers. 14-16. *Left, &c.* The good men in a kingdom counteract the tendency to anarchy and disruption. "Righteousness exalteth a nation." The guarantee of a nation's progress and stability is to be found, not in the invincibility of its armies, not in the vastness of its commerce, not in the genius, the learning, or the wealth of its citizens, but in the sound morality and religious sentiment of the people [*Dr. Thomas*].

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter parallel with 1 Ki. xiv. 21-31, but considerably enlarges the narrative contained in that passage. The account of Shishak's chariots and horse-men, the composition of his army, the warning and the promise of Shemaiah are wholly new features [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-12.—*The invasion of Shishak.* Forsook, details in Kings. *All Is.*, i.e., all Judah and Benjamin—all Israelites of these tribes. *Shishak* (Shishonk), first king of 22nd or Bubastic dynasty, which, after the fall of Thebes from proud position of capital, 990 B.C., succeeded to the sovereignty of the whole country [*Jam.*]. Came to resent provocation or carry out ambitious design, with great number of foreign auxiliaries. *Ver. 3. Lubim*, Libyans west of Egypt (*cf.* ch. xvi. 8; Neh. iii. 9). *Suk.*, called *Troglodytes*, cave-dwellers, by Sept. Some think they are Semitic Arabs, dwellers in tents. *Ethiop.*, Heb. *Cushim*, from south of Egypt. *Ver. 4. Fenced* (ch. xi. 5-12), fortified with so much trouble. *Shem.* (ch. xi. 2). The message not in Kings; addressed to Rehoboam and princes while Shishak before Jerusalem. *Ver. 6. Humbled*, bowed themselves (chs. vii. 14; xiii. 18; xxxii. 26). *Jehovah is just* (Ezra ix. 15; Neh. ix. 33). *Ver. 7. Some deliverance*, i.e., deliverance in a little or short time (*cf.* Ezra ix. 8); respite from total destruction, yet tributary to Egypt. *Ver. 8. Know* the difference between God's rule and foreign yoke. *Vers. 9-11. Came up, &c.*, resumes description of attack upon Jerusalem. *Took* everything valuable. *Shields* borne like maces by owners or guard of the palace when they attended the King in public procession. *Ver. 12.* Instead of destruction, lit., *these were good words*; signs of national repentance and amendment; good things, purposes, and practices to which God had regard. "Ver. 12. Concludes the narrative, is additional to Kings and characteristic. It aptly terminates the writer's history of the invasion, which he has presented to us throughout in a strictly moral and didactic aspect" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 13-16.—*Rehoboam's reign and death.* *Strengthened*, new life and vigour after invasion; revival of religion and long reign. *Years*, on age of Rehoboam (*cf.* 1 Ki. xii. 8; xiv. 21). *Naamah*, probably a daughter of Nahash (1 Chr. xix. 1). *Evil*, through unhappy influence of his mother, a heathen foreigner, he received a bias towards idolatry. *Prepared not*, fixed not; lacked earnestness and consistency. *Book*, refers to authorities of the reign of which he gives account. *Wars*, not open war, but incursions and skirmishes on borders for plunder.

HOMILETICS.

NATIONAL IDOLATRY AND NATIONAL PUNISHMENT.—*Verses 1-3 and 9-12.*

Rehoboam did not check introduction of heathen abominations. The lascivious worship of Ashtoreth allowed to exist by side of true religion. "Images" of Baal and fellow-divinities set up, and the worst corruptions tolerated. For fuller account see 1 Ki. xiv. 22-24. These evils punished and put down by terrible calamity of Egyptian invasion. **I. The national sins.** "They had transgressed against the Lord." 1. *In provoking him to jealousy.* God announced Himself to be "a jealous God" (Ex. xx. 5); a God "whose name is jealous." A figure of marriage, in which God, like a husband of his people, is provoked to jealousy by the unfaithfulness of his wife. A strong, suggestive term. 2. *In public worship of idols.* Altars and high places built, woods planted, gods and graven images publicly patronised in utter disobedience to God's command. 3. *In rapid spread of immorality.* "There were also Sodomites in the land." They did according to all the abominations of the nations, &c. (1 Ki. xiv. 24). Paramours consecrated to the gods, a degraded class who practised immorality, traded in wickedness under the sanction of religion. Judah's

abominations worse than former days. The splendour of the temple and the pomp of the priesthood ; secular privileges and religious teachers restrained not. Their sins were grievous and universal ; sins “above all that their fathers had done.” **II. The national punishment.** Shishak, king of Egypt, incited by Jeroboam, or ambitious of conquest, invaded the land and humbled the nation in a successful campaign. 1. *The capital was disgraced.* Jerusalem entered and pillaged by a heathen army! A national disgrace for a city to be broken down, without walls or defence (Prov. xxv. 28 ; Neh. ii. 17). 2. *The cities were taken.* Places on which he spent such time and treasure to repair and defend. Great Canaanite towns and Levitical cities east and west of Jordan fell without a struggle. High towers and fortified places no defence against wickedness. “A man shall not be established by wickedness.” 3. *The treasures carried away.* The palace and the temple robbed. The shields of gold and everything valuable taken away. Deep humiliation, grievous bondage the price of ignominious peace and the retribution of a watchful providence! “I also left you in the hand of Shishak.”

THE BELEAGURED COURT.—*Verses 5-8.*

While Shishak was before the city, Rehoboam and the princes were deliberating in solemn assembly. Warned of sin and punishment, and spared on account of repentance. Notice—**I. The sins committed.** “Ye have forsaken me.” This the *gravamen* of offence. Though possessing the temple and the priesthood, yet idolatry mixed with worship of Jehovah. Impure rites and unchecked licence. **II. The danger threatened.** 1. *Forsaken of God.* “Therefore have I also left you.” Many would think this through negligence in preparations, impolicy in government. Bereft of strength and defence because God had forsaken them. 2. *Besieged by Shishak.* “In the hand of Shishak.” A hand strong and oppressive. This a natural result. When God forsakes, we are unable to resist, and the enemy conquers. **III. The humiliation produced.** Calamity traced to national sins, repentance and contrition followed. When rebuked we should be humbled, justify God, and judge ourselves. “Even kings and princes must bend or brake before God, either be humbled or be ruined.” **IV. The deliverance granted.** “I will grant them some deliverance.” A short space was given for amendment, wrath was not poured out like a flood upon the city, yet suzerainty of Egypt had to be accepted. Punishment delayed, not escaped. Destruction of Jerusalem reserved for Nebuchadnezzar. Escape only through Christ and righteous conduct.

SHEMAIAH'S PREACHING.—*Verses 7-12.*

I. It was divinely taught in its matter. “The word of the Lord came to Shemaiah.” Not truth from second-hand or traditional forms. The message not argument nor speculation ; but simple, entire word of God. “The preaching that I bid thee” was the command to Jonah. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” **II. It was direct in its aim.** A simple, clear utterance, direct as an arrow to its end. Preaching toned down, lacks point, goes not from the heart to the heart. The end missed for want of vitality and definite aim. We must not merely arouse emotion to find vent in action ; but preach to save sinners. Chrysostom's hearers admired and applauded ; he rebuked and desired amendment of life. “Show your approbation by obedience ; that is the only praise I seek.” Massillon's hearers felt the word to “strike and stick.” Peter's audience “were pricked to the heart” by his earnest appeal. **III. It was practical in its results.** Very

great and encouraging; illustrating the power of the Divine word faithfully preached. 1. *In the minds of the people.* Why not? Are there not laws in the moral, like chemical affinities in the natural world; between religious truth and the deepest feelings of the human heart? Where one is spoken, why should not the other respond? (a) *In acknowledgment of guilt.* "They said, The Lord is righteous." (b) *In contrition of spirit.* "They have humbled themselves." 2. *In the procedure of God.* (a) Divine decree revoked. "The wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy altogether." (b) Certain deliverance given. "I will grant them some deliverance." (c) Measure of prosperity restored. "Also in Judah things went well" (ver. 12). With results like these pulpit power will never decay. The revivals of Pentecost, of Whitfield and Wesley, may be accomplished again by right men. "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet."

BRASS FOR GOLD, OR COUNTERFEIT PRINCIPLES.—Verses 9-11.

In the plunder of Egyptian king were "golden shields," splendid insignia of Solomon. Old court etiquette kept up notwithstanding its loss, on public and solemn occasions. Inferior metal replaced the gold. This typical of counterfeits in personal conduct, Christian worship, and Christian organisations. **I. Worthless profession instead of real piety in personal life.** Form of godliness without power. Profession "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal," hollow, vain, and useless. Professors degenerate in character, influence, and solid worth. "Thy silver is become dross." Worse even than this, for baser and harder metals express debased and degenerate life. "They are brass and iron" (Jer. vi. 28). **II. Idolatrous practices instead of pure worship of God.** Men exchange the glory of God for idols of gold and silver. The ritual takes the place of the spiritual. God is forgotten, and images and saints are adored; Mammon and the world worshipped. "They changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man" (Rom. i. 23)—(The infinite, spiritual, and divine changed into something finite, material, and human). **III. False representations by which institutions hide their decline.** What folly for Rehoboam to carry shields of brass in customary procession! Vain and proud, he was anxious not to appear degraded by absence of gold shields! In churches deadness and divisions cannot be hidden by noise, numbers, and display. In kingdoms rottenness and decay will not be healed by bribery, court splendour, and successful war. "How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!"

REHOBAM THE UNREADY.—Verse 12.

This is the summing-up of Rehoboam's life. He was not so bad as some, but did evil in various ways, not from design as from neglect. Evil effects of the father's sin and mother's idolatry seen in their son; yet another cause, viz., a want of heart. He was not thoroughly consecrated to worship of Jehovah. **I. He did not begin life with seeking the Lord.** 1. He was young, should have sought wisdom; but went to Shechem without prayer or sacrifice. That which commences without God will end in failure. 2. He leaned on counsellors, saying, "What advice give ye?" Of those counsellors, he chose worst, younger and prouder nobles. Those who reject divine wisdom generally refuse all other wisdom. 3. He committed great folly by threatening the people and refusing just demands; and that before he was accepted as their king. None of his father's wisdom. How can they act prudently and prosperously who are not guided of the Lord? **II. He showed no heart in**

seeking the Lord afterwards. 1. He obeyed the voice when the man of God forbade him to fight with Israel; yet afterward forsook the law (2 Chr. xii. 1). He is said to have been "young and tender-hearted," which means *soft* (2 Chr. xiii. 7). 2. He winked at most horrible crimes among people whom he ought to have judged (1 Ki. xiv. 24). 3. He fell into his father's sins. 4. He busied himself more for the world than for God. We hear nothing of his worship, but much of his building; nothing of his faith, but much of his fickleness (2 Chr. xi. 5-12). **III. He was not fixed and persevering in seeking the Lord.** 1. For three years loyalty to God made him prosper, by bringing better sort from calf worship into Judah (2 Chr. xi. 13-17), yet he forsook the Lord who prospered him. 2. He grew proud; and God handed him over to Shishak. 3. Humbled himself, was pardoned, yet stripped the Lord's house to buy off King of Egypt. 4. Wrought no great reforms, celebrated no great passover, yet owned "the Lord is righteous" (ver. 6). **IV. He had no care to seek the Lord thoroughly.** Yet no man good by accident; no one goes right without intention to do so. Without heart religion must die. 1. Human nature departs from the right way, especially in kings tolerated in more sin than others. 2. Courtiers usually run the wrong way, especially young, proud, and frivolous. Rehoboam lived gay and proud, and gave himself up to their lead. 3. Underlings apt to follow us and applaud if we go in an evil path, even as Judah followed Rehoboam. Thus those who should lead are led.

The kind of preparation required in diligent and acceptable seeking of the Lord. To feel and confess need in whole of life. Cry unto him for help and wisdom. Yield to his guidance and not follow counsel of vain persons. Be anxious to be right in everything, searching the Scriptures and seeking by prayer to know what to do. Serve the Lord carefully and earnestly, leaving nothing to chance, fashion, or whim. Are there any professors like Rehoboam? Any hopeful young men who lack whole-hearted devotion to the Lord? Any older men who have suffered for vacillation, hesitation, or double-mindedness? Any just escaped from such trouble, but are not firm and ready even now? Oh, for a clear sense of the evil and folly of such a condition! Oh, for the confirming power of the Holy Ghost! Oh, for vital reunion with the Lord Jesus [*Spurgeon*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Strong, and forsook the law.* No danger, no watchfulness. Prosperity leading to apostasy. In poverty men pray, in weakness and affliction attend God's house, &c. "Established" and "strengthened" leads to say, "Depart from us." "The prosperity of fools destroys them." *All Israel with him.* 1. The force of bad example. 2. The readiness of men to follow it. 3. The guilt of those who follow, when they should reprove. Example contagious; beneficially or perniciously men influence others; raise them up or bring them down. "Be not partaker of other men's sins."

Ver. 5. *Forsaken me.* Conditions of enjoyment, prosperity and success.

Awful results of abandonment by God. Prevalent corruption, deeper disgrace, and national disaster.

Ver. 7. *Humiliation the means of deliverance.* From the message which was sent them from the Lord we properly observe—I. That sin will surely bring the judgment of God upon us. Nor is there any possibility of escape but by repentance, since God has ordained—II. That sin, in order to its being forgiven, must be repented of. It is, however, no little consolation to know—III. That sin, truly repented of, shall assuredly be forgiven. Application—1. Have you repented? 2. Are you pardoned? [*C. Simeon, M.A.*]. *Wrath of God.* 1. Its reality. 2. Its

cause. 3. Its agencies. 4. Its suspense. In the midst of judgment God remembers mercy.

Ver. 8. *Know*. The discipline of punishment, or great contrasts. 1. Between the Theocracy, or rule of God, and foreign rule or "servants" of Shishak. 2. Between the freedom of Christ and the bondage of sin. 3. Between correction of providence and left alone in folly.

Ver. 12. *Went well*. 1. Many *good men* in general defection in whom good things were found (1 Ki. xiv. 13). 2. Many *good things*, in prevalent corruption. Temple, priesthood, sacrifices and ordinances. A few may be "the holy seed, the substance thereof," the preserving principle. Few in Sardis (Rev. iii. 4).

Ver. 14. *Prepared not*. Learn— 1. That serving God will prevent from evil. 2. That for God's service the heart should be prepared and fixed. 3. That when the heart is not fixed or prepared men are easily drawn away. 4. That when men are drawn away from

God into evil, consequences are fearful. Weakness ensues, corruptions spread, temptations increase, enemies prevail, and ruin inevitable!

"And he that *will* be cheated to the last,
Delusions strong as hell shall bind him
fast."

Ver. 15. *Book of Shem*. Not now extant, though God, if he had pleased, could as well have preserved those books for the use of the church, as he did the holy vessels of the temple from the spoil of Shishak [*Trapp*]. Providence and goodness of God in preserving and handing down Scriptures to our times. Why not lost, like many classic authors, amid the ruins of the barbarians? From the whole chapter we see—1. Rehoboam forsaking the law. 2. Rehoboam punished for his defection. 3. Rehoboam spared on repenting. 4. Rehoboam ruined at last for want of decision in religion [*Ing. Cobbin*].

"But evil is wrought for want of thought
As well as want of heart" [*Hood*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1. *Forsook*. A man cannot have been three years wise and then have returned to old courses without his return being marked by aggravations of evil. The last state of the man is worse than the first. "The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." To have been halfway to heaven, and then to have been thrown down—what agonies of recollection! [*Dr. Parker*].

Vers. 5-8. *Shemaiah the prophet*. Ministers of the gospel should be gentle, tender, and affectionate. They should be kind in feeling and courteous in manner, like a father or mother. Nothing is ever gained by a sour, harsh, crabbed, dissatisfied manner. Sinners are never scolded either into duty or into heaven [*A. Barnes*]. I never was fit to say a word to a sinner except when I had a broken heart myself; when I was melted into penitency, and

felt as though I had just received pardon to my soul, when my heart was full of tenderness and pity [*Payson*].

Ver. 6. *Humbled themselves*.

"If hearty sorrow
Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
I tender it here; I do as truly suffer
As e'er I did commit" [*Shaks.*].

Ver. 8. *Servants*. It is not in man's nature to be out of all service, and to be self-dependent. We may choose our master, but God or mammon we must serve. We cannot possibly be in a neutral or intermediate state. Such a state does not exist. If we will not be Christ's servants we are forthwith Satan's, and Christ set us free from Satan only by making us His servants [*J. H. Newman*].

Ver. 10. *Shields of brass*.

"Thus men go wrong with an ingenious
skill,
Bend the straight rule to their own
crooked will,

And with a clear and shining lamp
supplied,
First put it out, then take it for a guide”
[Cowper].

Ver. 12. *Things went well.* We are called upon to observe the relation and progress of events and to inquire into the moral reasons which explain either their ill-going or their happy advancement. We often speak of things going well in too narrow a sense, simply meaning that property increases, that health is continued, and that the whole outward environment is

comfortable and satisfactory. That is not a proper estimate of the whole question. Things can only go well when the heart goes well. When things do not go well we should inquire into moral reasons; why this affliction, why this loss, why this discontent? Out of such faithful self-dealing will come the humbleness, the penitence which are always followed by pardon, restoration, and spiritual harmony [Dr. Parker].

Ver. 15. *Wars.*

“Then time turns torment when man
turns a fool” [Young].

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter parallel to 1 Ki. xv. 1-8. Abijah succeeds and wars against Jeroboam (vers. 1-4); declares the right of his cause (vers. 4-12); his victory and end (vers. 13-22).

Vers. 1-3.—The opening war of Abijah. Abijah, Abijam in Kings. Ver. 2. *Michaiah*, variation of Maachah (xi. 10; 1 Ki. xv. 2); daughter of Uriel and Tamar, daughter of Absalom. Hence called daughter, *i.e.*, granddaughter of Absalom. Ver. 3. *War.* Probably Jeroboam sought to wrest whole country from Abijah. *Array*, *i.e.*, took the field and began war. “The numbers are doubtless large, considering the smallness of the two kingdoms. It must be borne in mind, however, that Oriental armies are mere mobs, vast numbers accompanying the camp in hope of plunder; so that the gross numbers described as going upon the Asiatic expedition are often far from denoting the exact number of the fighting men. But in accounting for the large number of soldiers enlisted in the respective armies of Abijah and Jeroboam, there is no need of resorting to this mode of explanation; for we know, by the census of David, the immense amount of the population that was capable of bearing arms (2 Chr. xxi. 5; cf. ch. xiv. 8; xvii. 14) [Jamieson].

Vers. 4-12.—Abijah’s address to Jeroboam. Ver. 4. *Zemaraim*, a mount not identified, amid the great range of Central Palestine; upon borders of the two kingdoms. Ver. 5. *Gave.* Divine right claimed, but conditions omitted (Ps. cxxxii. 12; lxxxix. 30-32). *Salt*, *i.e.*, a covenant inviolable, irrevocable (Lev. ii. 13; Num. xviii. 19). Salt emblem of perpetuity. Ver. 6. *Rebelled.* Jeroboam upbraided as a usurper, and his subjects as rebels. Ver. 7. *Vain men*, *i.e.*, “low fellows,” “persons of the baser sort” (cf. Judg. ix. 4; 2 Sam. vi. 20). *Belial*, profitless and evil (Deut. xiii. 13). *Young*, *i.e.*, new to his work, inexperienced. *Tender-hearted*, wanting in resolution and spirit. Ver. 8. Religious condition of two kingdoms now contrasted. Enemy proud of a *great multitude*, and with them *golden calves*, proofs of apostasy. Ver. 9. *Cast out* (ch. xi. 14). *Seven*, “a bullock and two rams” the offering required at original consecration of sons of Aaron (Ex. xxix. 1; Lev. viii. 2). It appears that Jeroboam, for reasons of his own, enlarged the sacrifice and required it at the consecration of every priest [Speak. Com.]. Ver. 10. Judah had pure and regular observance of ordinances of Moses. *Not forsaken.* God with them (only in a certain degree). They had daily sacrifice with all its accompaniments. Ver. 11. God himself their captain. Priests with their *trumpets* brought to war in remembrance of God’s command (Num. x. 9), and example of Moses (Num. xxxi. 6). The war, therefore, sacred war.

Vers. 13-20.—Abijah’s victory. *Ambush.* To surprise in front and rear; made while Abijah was haranguing. Ver. 14. *Cried.* A panic might have ensued if leaders had not looked to God and “sounded trumpets,” which was a pledge of victory and help to the men (Num. x. 9; xxxi. 6). Judah responded, and the rush was resistless. Ver. 17. *Great slaughter.* Nothing in original to indicate this was all in one day. The writer is probably compressing into a few words the circumstances of the whole war [Speak. Com.].

Ver. 18. *Under*. Humbled, defeated, not made tributary. Ver. 19. *Bethel*. Frontier town in which one of calves placed. *Towns*, villages or suburbs. Ver. 20. Defeat so great that Jeroboam did not recover in Abijah's time. He died in second year of Asa (1 Ki. xv. 25). *Struck*. Probably the message of the prophet Ahijah (1 Ki. xiv. 10; xii. 15).

Vers. 21, 22.—*Abijah's end*. *Mighty*. "Took courage, grew bold," after security; like his father and grandfather, gave himself to indulgence and multiplied wives. Ver. 22. *Story*, commentary, "the midrash or memoir, which was extant in the time of the chronicler, or the original form from which he drew his information" [Murphy].

HOMILETICS.

ATTEMPT TO REVERSE DIVINE ARRANGEMENTS.—Verses 3-19.

God permitted revolt of ten tribes and Rehoboam forbidden to regain them (ch. x. 15). Frequent skirmishes between kings of Judah and Israel (ch. xii. 15). Jeroboam now takes advantage of Abijah's youth, and judging from the speech, claims the crown and invades the territory of Judah. No prophet forbade the war, Jeroboam had forfeited all claims to protection, his effort in vain, the Divine arrangements could not be upset. **I. An attempt most daring in its design.** "Now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord" (ver. 8). A kingdom not set up by men, but established and perpetuated by Divine decree in the house of David. The design indicates pride, presumption, and impiety. Might as well withstand, resist the rolling planet or the rising tide. "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought (be overthrown); but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, &c." (Acts v. 39). **II. An attempt depending upon numbers for its success.** "Ye be a great multitude" (ver. 8). "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." "Behold the multitude melted away" in the armies of Xerxes, Sennacherib, and Napoleon, before the presence and purpose of God. "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces." **III. The numbers employed in the attempt were men of worthless character.** The best soldiers, men of courage and character, generally selected for daring enterprises (Cromwell's Ironsides, Havelock's Saints). But the army of Jeroboam composed of worthless men. 1. *The king himself stained with ungodly actions.* Jeroboam an idolater and innovator in past. Now found rebelling against God and taking advantage of Abijah's youth, as he did of Rehoboam's weakness (ver. 8). 2. *The men employed were a mixed mob.* (a) "*Vain men*," loose in character and useless in war (Cataline's comrades). Plenty such now, "empty fellows," ready to join any cause, follow any leader who pays best. "I have not sat with vain persons." (b) *The children of Belial*, wicked men, hating all control and setting up any that would carry out their wishes. Abimelech hired "vain and light persons, which followed him" (Judges ix. 4). **IV. Hence the utter failure of the attempt.** "God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah" (ver. 15). "When omnipotence goes forth to war, what can be the issue of the battle? When God takes the glittering sword, and his hand lays heavy in judgment, can grasshoppers stand before him?" "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." Julian the Apostate could not falsify prediction. The word was uttered and the secession a fact. The powers of earth and hell could not change that. "For he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast." Hence beware "lest haply ye be found," in daily life and moral conduct, "even to fight against God."

A GREAT SPEECH.—Verses 4-13.

Abijah had entered the enemies' territory—stood upon eminence. Jeroboam's army at foot of the hill, and according to ancient custom Abijah harangued,

poured out invective and abuse upon the enemy and extolled his own merits. **I. Its claims concerning Judah.** God recognised in the gift of the kingdom; in the worship of the temple, with its legal priesthood and regular sacrifices; in the warfare of life. "The Lord is our God and we have not forsaken him." He claims the right position and obeys the true commands. Conceptions of God affect doctrine and practice. Custom, law, and outward restraints may keep right in some things; but only feeling of dependence upon God, sense of responsibility to him and constant acknowledgment of him, will give security, strength, and dignity to inheritance. **II. Its accusations against Israel.** Jeroboam a rebel and usurper, and must be put down. He was leading a revolutionary party, "sons of Belial." *He* had not the beauty and established order of worship, the legal priesthood; but golden calves, illegal and heathen priests, desecrated altars, and a hopeless cause. Abijah no usurper nor idolator! Whatever the corruptions of his kingdom, it was better than Israel, &c. Thus men may deny the power of religion and boast of its form—view themselves not in their defects and infirmities, but in their good qualities and virtues. In lofty and contemptuous tones recite their merits and condemn their adversaries. Trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others. **III. Its passionate appeal to the people.** "O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers" (ver. 12). *Religion* is appealed to. God is concerned; the war sacred and religious. *History* appealed to. Abijah in historic line, *they* were cutting themselves off from its unity, currents, and privileges, and setting the God of their fathers at nought. *Humanity* appealed to; why engage in a fruitless war? "For ye shall not prosper." What folly, base ingratitude to fight against God!

A GREAT BATTLE.—Verses 13–20.

Jeroboam planning while Abijah speaking. Address unheeded. A detachment sent quietly round foot of the hill. Abijah and his men found themselves surrounded. Leaders "cried unto the Lord," Judah rallied, responded with a war-shout, which preserved from panic and led to victory. **I. Fought with unequal forces.** 1. *Human aid* on one side. A proud king, immense multitudes, skill and generalship. 2. *God's presence* on the other side. Presence in temple, on field of battle, and with symbols of victory (Num. x. 9; xxxi. 6). No wise king enters upon war without due preparation to stand his ground, despite formidable odds. "What king going to make war against another king sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" Common sense should teach us not to *begin* any costly work without materials to *finish* it; not to undertake what we have neither strength nor will to achieve, nor that in which we are not prepared, if need be, to sacrifice life itself. **II. Fought for an impossible end.** "For the cause was of God" (ch. x. 15). If the decree of Darius and the superscription of Pilate could not be altered, neither could the established fact, the fixed arrangements of God. All opposition abortive, can never set aside the plans and processes of Divine government, and will re-act upon the rebel himself. The Great Maker and Ruler of the universe does not act by necessity nor by caprice, but by intelligent plan. Man may change his purpose, because defective or impracticable. God is absolutely perfect. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" **III. Hence utter failure in the attempt.** "The children of Judah prevailed" (ver. 18). Terrible slaughter, towns and cities captured. "The children of Israel were brought under at that time," utterly defeated in their purpose. "Ambushment," stratagems cannot thwart God. "Eight hundred thousand chosen men" no more

avail than one thousand. Folly to resist God and harden ourselves in sin, by disobeying his commands, by rebelling against his providential dealings, and by refusing the offers of mercy. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?" "Ye shall not prosper" (ver. 12).

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE AND PRACTICAL APOSTASY.

Abijah here at his best; eloquent in speech, religious in appearance, and victorious in conflict. Read account in Kings to form a true estimate. He walked in the sins of Rehoboam, and his heart "was not perfect before God." He boasted of religious observances, yet guilty of idolatry and its attendant immoralities (1 Ki. xiv. 23, 24). Learn—I. **The folly of judging men by outward forms or special occasions.** Forms may be assumed, put on like clothes for the occasion. Circumstances may call forth the best of the man. Religious for the occasion. II. **Men may hide their sins under the garb of religious practices.** Domestic evils and personal inconsistency hidden by outward worship, liberal giving, &c. The dark side covered with the bright side, truth defended and its claims resisted. III. **Men may reproach others for sins of which they are guilty themselves.** Abijah blamed Jeroboam for casting off God, when he was not right with God himself. His own character not better than that of his enemy. The Jews condemned the Gentiles for doing the same things which they virtually did themselves. Greville, in his memoirs, exhibits the very faults, critics say, which he freely condemns in kings, queens, and nobles. "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest: for wherein (the matter in which) thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest (substantially) the same things" (Rom. ii. 1).

"Be not too rigidly censorious:
A string may jar in the best master's hand,
And the most skilful archer miss his aim" [Roscommon].

ABIJAH'S RELIGION.

1. *Defective in its source.* Springing from a divided heart. "His heart was not perfect" and "he walked in the sins of his father." 2. *Occasional in its appearance.* Called into vigour by special exigency, fitful in operation, a religion for special seasons. Much loud and spurious religion now; demonstrative on extraordinary occasions, at ordinary times lukewarm and languid. In times of war many awake, put on armour; in time of quietness at home and early life they are found in enemy's camp. 3. *Prominent in its display.* Great in reform, eloquent in speech, prominent in actions. Circumstances brought him to the front. But only a religion of place and occasional service. 4. *Uncertain in its duration.* David before the giant, Judas Maccabæus before the host of Epiphanes could not have been more prominent and more ready, but piety no vital, lasting hold upon him. A heart weakened and dissipated by double allegiance, became alienated; service a vicious compromise; religion a mere episode, an interlude in a life of flagrant idolatry!

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 5. *Covenant of salt.* 1. A and mutual attachment," friendship bond of intimate friendship. "To eat inviolable, incorruptible. 2. A pledge salt together an act of sure friendship of perpetuity. Salt consolidates and

preserves. The "lamp" or "torch" of David was always to burn (1 Ki. ii. 36; 2 Ki. viii. 19). Often on verge of extinction through sins within and darkness without, but house of David never perished. "It is the struggle between these contending elements to which, after the shock of the disruption, the kingdom and church of Judah was exposed, that gives the main interest to the period of the seven first successors of Solomon. Both kingdom and church were menaced with destruction at its commencement. At its close both were established on a basis sufficiently solid to withstand the dangers of the later period for two more centuries" [Stanley].

Vers. 6-12. *Abijah's remonstrance with Jeroboam.* I. We shall consider the words of our text—1. In reference to the contest then pending between Judah and Israel; 2. Abijah's address was certainly striking and judicious; 3. The event justified his expectations. II. In reference to the contest now existing between God and sinners. 1. There is a contest now pending; 2. Suffer the word of exhortation; 3. From the former view of this subject we may learn how to obtain the blessing of God upon our aims; 4. From the latter view of this subject we may learn how to escape the destruction to which we are exposed [C. Simeon, M.A.].

Vers. 13-17. *Man's extremity and God's power to help.* Judah in very great danger inveigled by ambushment. I. *God's people often brought into extremities.* 1. By their own foolish enterprises. 2. By the temptations of their enemies. 3. By the providence of God leading them to test and train them. "Their defence (*Heb.* shadow.

God a shadow from heat and tempest) departed from them (Num. xiv. 9). II. *God's people delivered by him in extremities.* Jeroboam had two to one against Abijah, but lost the day. *Sense* sees no deliverance, *reason* declares it unlikely, but *faith* assures it will come. "The Lord is with us." 1. By prayer. "They cried unto the Lord." 2. By supernatural power. "God delivered them into their hand." Israel at Red Sea against the Ethiopians (2 Chron. xiv. 11). In the day of great distress and great danger to God's people in Germany, Luther cried in his closet, and came out, declaring to friends "*Vicimus, vicimus,*" we have overcome, we have overcome. From that day Charles the Fifth issued a proclamation that none should be further molested for religion. "Thou art my deliverer: God is the Lord of Hosts, with him alone is strength and power to deliver Israel."

Vers. 20-22. *Death a common lot.* 1. It is *inevitable.* Knocks with impartial step at the door of the cottage and the palace of the prince, says Horace. It is *appointed* unto all men. Cannot be bribed by prosperity ("Abijah waxed mighty"), nor postponed by adversity ("neither did Jeroboam recover strength"). 2. It is *peculiar in method.* Abijah's a natural death, "slept with his fathers." Jeroboam "*struck.*" He never survived defeat; stung by accusing conscience, or inflicted by lingering, incurable disease (like Jehoram, 2 Chron. xxi. 19) which at last killed him. Death terminates all earthly glory.

"Death hath ten thousand several doors
For men to take their exits"
[John Webster].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 5. *Salt.* The Orientals were accustomed to ratify their federal engagements by salt. This substance has, among the ancients, the emblem of friendship and fidelity, and therefore used in all their sacrifices and cove-

nants. It is a sacred pledge of hospitality which they never venture to violate. Numerous instances occur of travellers in Arabia, after being plundered and stripped by the wandering tribes of the desert, claiming the pro-

tection of some civilised Arab, who, after receiving him into his tent and giving him salt, instantly relieves his distress, and never forsakes him till he has placed him in safety. An agreement thus ratified is called in Scripture "a covenant of salt" [*Paxton*].

Vers. 6-12. *Religion*. When some people talk of religion they mean they have heard so many sermons and performed so many devotions, and thus mistake the *means* for the *end*. But true religion is an habitual recollection of God, and intention to serve Him, and thus turns everything into gold [*John Newton*]. For in religion as in friendship, they who profess most are ever the least sincere [*Sheridan*]. The dispute about religion and the practice of it seldom go together [*Young*].

Vers. 13-17. *God delivered*. The craft of the Church's enemies is never but accompanied with cruelty, and

their cruelty is seldom without craft. But in things wherein they deal proudly, God is above them, and by his presence with his people he brings all their plots, counsels, and enterprises to nought. The enemies of the Jews in Nehemiah's time made great brags at first what they would do, but when they saw their plots discovered, and their purposes defeated, they are presently crestfallen, and have no mind nor courage to advance at all. To plotters may be applied what is said of Charles VIII., King of France, in his expedition against Naples: "That he came into the field like thunder and lightning, but went out like a snuff; more than a man at first, and less than a woman at last." In all ages of the world, God's signal presence with his people hath delivered them and frustrated the designs and counsels of the wicked [*Thomas Brooks*].

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Asa succeeds, suppresses idols, and defends his kingdom (vers. 1-8; cf. 1 Kings xv. 8-12, 14, 15). Gains victory over Zerah and spoils Ethiopians.

Vers. 1-5.—*Asa destroys idol*. *Reigned*, mounted the throne very young. *Quiet*, continued effect of the great battle of Zemaraim (cf. 1 Ki. xv. 11-14). *Good* (ch. xxxi. 20). *Strange*, gods of foreign origin. Idolatry of Judah now detailed for first time. *High places* first mentioned (Num. xxiii. 3). *Images*, statues in stone of Baal. *Groves*, trunks or stocks of trees, dedicated to Ashtoreth, the Venus of Phœnicians. Ver. 5. *Images*, *sun-images* of Baal, different from images in ver. 3 (cf. xxxiv. 4; Lev. xxvi. 30).

Vers. 6-8.—*Asa's military defences*. *Built*, fortresses dismantled when Shishak made successful invasion. Judæa had been a dependency upon Egypt (ch. xii. 8), and dared not to erect fresh fortifications. Now Egypt weak, Asa grew bold, strengthened himself against his southern and northern neighbours. Among cities restored, probably most of those fortified by Rehoboam (ch. xi. 6-10) [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 7. *Land*, *i.e.*, unoccupied by the foe; free and open to go where we please. Ver. 8. *Targets*, Judah heavy armed; Benjamin, a warlike tribe, light armed, using sling and bow (Judg. xx. 16; 1 Ch. viii. 40). The number embraced all capable of carrying arms and liable to service.

Vers. 8-15.—*Asa defeats the Ethiopians or Cushites*. So called by Greeks, because their faces were burned or blackened by sun. *Zerah*, supposed to be Osorken (Usarken) II., third King of Egypt after Shishak, second king of twenty-second dynasty. Object of invasion to chastise Asa and bring Judah under yoke again. Ver. 9. *Mar.*, one of cities fortified by Rehoboam (ch. xi. 8), in line of march from Egypt. Ver. 10. *Went out*, *lit. before him*, sensible of inferiority but confident in God. *Nothing with thee*, "it is alike to thee to help the powerful or the weak, thou canst as easily, *i.e.*, help the weak as the strong" [*Speak. Com.*]. There is none beside thee to help between the mighty and the

powerless, *i.e.*, no other than thou can help in an unequal conflict; meaning, of course, give help to the weaker side [*Keil*]. Ver. 12. *Smote*, gave strength to smite. Ver. 13. *Destroyed*, broken before his camp. Enemy unable to rally, pursued to *Gerar*, south, twenty miles at least from scene of battle. *Cities of Philistines* spoiled, because they likely accompanied *Zerah* in his expedition. Ver. 15. *Tents*, nomadic tribes in neighbourhood of *Gerar* conquered, and camels and sheep taken as prey. *Besor* flows through this region, hence fertility and food for man and beast. All terrified at *Asa's* victory and unable to resist.

HOMILETICS.

ASA THE REFORMER.—Verses 1-5.

Asa as a constitutional monarch acted like *David*, endeavoured to abolish the traces and polluting customs of idolatry. Pursued his purpose with earnestness and impartiality. **I. The reforms which he introduced.** Regarding God himself, he took advantage of his authority and tranquillity, tried to undo the evil left by his father (1 Ki. xv. 3), and by his grandfather (1 Ki. xiv. 22). 1. *He destroyed idolatry.* Altars and high places pulled down; broke images of *Baal*; destroyed public objects and relics of idolatry in *Jerusalem* and other cities. "When God lets loose upon the world a *thinker*, let men beware," says one. When God raises up a true *Reformer*, he will secure attention and accomplish a great work. 2. *He revived religious worship.* Useless to put down evil without setting up good. Outward reformation defective. A revived religion. (1.) *By personal example.* He "did that which was good and right, &c." (2.) *By the use of his authority.* "He commanded *Judah*, &c." (ver. 4). Religion requires no human edicts and decrees to support it. But those in authority may recommend it. **II. The spirit in which he carried out the reforms.** 1. *A spirit of self-consecration.* Self first. He did not engage in work to which he had not devoted himself. Many work for God who are not consecrated unto God. Reform self before you reform others. 2. *A spirit of zeal.* He began early, executed boldly and spared no dignity. The "king's mother" deposed from her position, her idol destroyed, and its ashes thrown into the brook *Kidron* (1 Ki. xv. 13). "See, I have set thee over (appointed thee to the oversight of) the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, &c." (Jer. i. 10). **III. The rule by which he was guided in the reforms.** "Asa did good and right in the eyes of the Lord." Not what was expedient, pleasing to himself, or to his courtiers. He sought to please God. God discerns conduct; dishonoured by the zeal of some; susceptibility to be influenced by him should be cultivated. Act ever under "the Great Taskmaster's eye." "Thou God seest me." Thus *Asa* the reformer an example to us in purpose, spirit, and conduct—in pulling down *Popery*, *Ritualism*, and *idolatry*, in setting forth true religion by personal life and public teaching

ASA THE PRUDENT.—Verses 6-8.

At a time of peace he strengthened his kingdom with fortifications and armies. **I. Prudent in tracing peace to the right source.** "The Lord had given him rest." Not gained by his valour and success over *Abijah*. No foes at hand, progress undisputed because God protected. "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble" in the land? When God bestows comfort and peace in the home and in the heart, who can take away? But when he hideth the face (condemns), who then can behold him (enjoy his power or remove the sentence of death)? Whether it be done against (towards) a nation, or against a man only? (Job xxxiv. 29). **II. Prudent in making the best use of peace.** Like a wise king he observed "the land before him" free and needing

improvements. 1. *Mindful of danger, he prepared for defensive war.* "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace," said Washington. 2. *Conscious of weakness, he raised an army.* Not perhaps a standing army, but militia, trained-bands of the country. Judah mustered a share. Benjamin, formerly *little Benjamin* (Ps. lxxviii. 27), had greatly increased. The little one by God's blessing had become a thousand. These tribes, armed offensively and defensively, were ready for action. 3. *Depending upon his people, he enlisted their efforts.* "Therefore he said, **Let us build**" (ver. 7). Many rulers raise an army, levy taxes, and govern without consent of the people. This arbitrary conduct will create tumult and endanger the throne (Chas. 1.). Self-willed monarchs have destroyed kingdoms and ruined themselves. "For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of councillors there is safety."

"But war's a game which, were their subjects wise,
Kings would not play at" [Cowper].

ASA THE CONQUEROR.—Verses 9–15.

"Zerah the Ethiopian mistook quietness for languor, and made the vulgar mistake of supposing that silence was indifference. He did not know that repose is the very highest expression of power" [Dr. Parker]. An expedition prepared, a million soldiers gathered to subjugate Asa and bring Judæa under Egyptian yoke. Asa shrank not from war, met and conquered the foe. **I. The source to which he looked for help.** "Asa cried unto the Lord his God." 1. *To God's strength.* He knew God in peace and looked to him in war—believed in God's power to help with few or many, to weak or strong. Man, mortal man, could not prevail against him. God omnipotent, works how he likes, and depends not upon numbers. "For there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." 2. *To God's strength gained by prayer.* Help ever ready, only available by seeking. Prayer before battle short, earnest, and intense. Notice ground of confidence, "Thou art our God," well tried and ever sufficient; active reliance, "We rest on thee." Thus can we only overcome in temptations and spiritual conflicts. **II. The spirit in which he entered the fight.** Not cowardly and fearful. God gives not the spirit of fear, but of courage. "Be thou strong and courageous." The war not aggressive, but sacred; for God's glory, not his own, "In thy name." "Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord my banner," the standard or ensign around which we must rally to indicate our party, define our cause, and march to victory. He is the captain of our salvation, fights our battles, and wins our victories. He bids us to fight, not his will that we should be timorous and weak, "In the name of our God we will set up our banner." **III. The victory by which it was distinguished.** "The Lord smote the Egyptians before Asa." The foe driven like straw before the wind; pursued and overcome. Cities smitten, cattle taken, and booty enormous. "The defeat of Zerah is one of the most remarkable events in the history of the Jews. On no other occasion did they meet in the field or overcome the forces of either of the two great monarchies between which they were placed. Under Asa they appear to have gained a complete and most glorious victory, over the entire force of Egypt, or of Ethiopia wielding the power of Egypt" [Speak. Com.].

WARFARE AND PRAYER.—Verses 9–12.

Notice in the prayer—**I. A devout acknowledgment of the Divine government.** From God alone he received the kingdom, and by him alone could he defend it. He was supreme, and could help against "a great

multitude." "He breaketh down" kingdoms and cities—Sodom, Babylon, Petra, and Pompeii—and "they cannot be built again;" He builds up and none can "pull down"—God's agency is traced over man and nations, in nature and religion. **II. The obedient method in which he conducted the war.** The spirit of dependence upon God; the spirit of hope and prayer. The spirit of Moses, Samuel, and David. In prayer he may expect courage and help, such reinforcements "the gift of the knees."

"Hast thou not learned what thou art often told,
A truth still sacred, and believed of old,
That no success attends on spears and swords
Unblest, and that the battle is the Lord's?" [Cowper].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. *Right.* 1. Right is good (acceptable) to God, when the heart is put into it. 2. Right is good to man, helpful to temporal and spiritual interests. But right implies *rule*, law of rectitude. The *rule* followed, constantly obeyed, to be acceptable. God's law must be path of duty and this path pursued firmly, without pause or retrograde step.

Ver. 6. *Given him rest.* 1. God the sovereign dispenser of quietness or comfort to *individuals*. Gives peace to awakened sinners in Christ. Peace and rest the fruit of faith in him. 2. God the sovereign dispenser of quietness and comfort to *nations* and *churches*. To nations (1 Chr. xxii. 9-18). To churches (Acts ix. 31). He makes peace in our borders (Ps. xiv. 7-14); causes wars to cease to the ends of the earth (Ps. xlv. 9). Ver. 7. *Rest.* It did his heart good to think how piously they had purchased their present peace; and therefore he repeateth it (Zech. viii. 19) [Trapp].

Vers. 9-11. *The Holy War.* Un-

dertaken for a sacred purpose—with confidence of divine help, to maintain the honour and service of God. The parties most unequally matched. The Lord Jehovah and mortal, feeble man. How can man prevail against his Maker! The folly of opposing God. *The war-cry* most stimulating. Assurance in God's name gives comfort in trouble, triumph in conflict. It is strength impregnable and sufficient for greatest dangers. Only under this one ensign, lifted above all other banners of the sacramental host, bearing this one name, can we ascribe the words: *In hoc vinces.*

Ver. 13. *Before his host.* *Before his camp;* the army of Asa, the camp of Jehovah, who resided in it, defended it, and led it to victory. "Earlier expositors fancied that the reference was to a heavenly, a host of angels, according to Gen. xxxii. 2 *seq.*" [Keil].

Ver. 14. *Fear of the Lord.* Its effect upon men now renders them fearful and helpless, what hereafter! Who can stand before him? Resist not, but humbly submit and be saved.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XIV.

Vers. 2-5. *High places.* No sooner is a temple built for God, but the Devil builds a chapel hard by [Geo. Herbert]. Man is a born idol-worshipper, *sight-worshipper*, so sensual, imaginative is he; and also partakes much of the nature of an ape [Carlyle].

"'Tis to make idols, and to find them clay"
[Mrs. Hemans].

Vers. 6-8. *Built.* Prudence is an ability of judging what is best in the choice both of the end and of the means [Groves]. No evil can surprise us if we watch, no evil can hurt us if we pray [Bp. Hall].

Ver. 9. This is the largest collected army of which we hear in Scripture; but it does not exceed the known numbers of Oriental armies in ancient times.

Darius Codomannus brought into the field at Arbela a force one million and forty thousand. Xerxes crossed into Greece with certainly above a million of combatants. Artaxerxes Mnemon collected one million two hundred and sixty thousand men, to meet the attack of the younger Cyrus [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 12-15. *Fled.* The results which follow are most striking. The southern power cannot rally from the blow, but rapidly declines, and for above three centuries makes no further

effort in this direction. Assyria grows in strength, continually pushes her arms further, and finally under Sargon and Sennacherib, penetrates to Egypt itself. All fear of Egypt as an aggressive power ceases; and the Israelites learn instead to lean upon the Pharaohs for support (2 Ki. xvii. 4; xviii. 21; Is. xxx. 2-4). Friendly ties alone connect the two countries; and it is not till B.C. 609 that an Egyptian force again enters Palestine with a hostile intention [*Ibid.*]

CHAPTER XV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] A prophetic warning (vers. 1-7). Asa's reforms (vers. 8-11); renewal of covenant (vers. 12-19), and deposes Maachah.

Vers. 1-7.—*Azariah warns Asa.* Spirit upon A. (cf. Num. xxiv. 2). *Oded*, by some Iddo, prophet and historian of two preceding reigns. Names differ very slightly in Heb. *Seek him* (cf. 1 Chr. xxviii. 9; Jer. xxix. 13), as they had done in battle (vers. 3-6). A future condition predicted according to some. "Israel here is used generally for the whole people of God; and the reference is especially to the many apostasies in the days of the Judges (Jud. iii. 7-12; vi. 1; viii. 33; x. 6), which were followed by repentance and deliverance" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Priest*, succession unbroken, but occasions when none taught true religion. Ver. 5. *Peace*, free communications interrupted; commotions, great vexations (Amos iii. 9; Deut. xxviii. 20). Ver. 6. *Destroyed*, different provinces crushed one another by contentions among themselves. Ver. 7. *Strong, i.e.*, be firm, continue faithful to Jehovah. *Reward* will follow, as in conquest of Zerah.

Vers. 8-11.—*Asa's religious reforms.* Earlier reforms only partial success. Animated by Azariah, he became more zealous, extirpated abominations in his own kingdom, in cities which his father had taken from Jeroboam, and renewed altar of burnt offering before porch. Ver. 9. *Gathered.* Pious Israelites drawn into the territory of Judah by reformed worship, for solemn renewal of national covenant. Ver. 10. *Third month*, Sivan, corresponding with June. Ver. 11. *Same time*, Heb. in that day; the day on which the festival was celebrated, sixth of third month, the Feast of Weeks. *Offered* peace-offerings, in communion with Jehovah and with one another (Lev. vii. 11-21). *Spoil*, brought by them as thank-offerings (cf. ch. xiv. 13).

Vers. 12-19.—*Renewal of national covenant.* *Seek* the Lord and to execute with vigour laws which make idolatry punishable with death (Ex. xxii. 20; Deut. xvii. 2-5; Heb. x. 28). Ver. 15. *Oath* taken in solemn and joyful emotion. God was found, because sincerely sought, and gave them rest (ver. 15). Ver. 16. *Maachah* (cf. 1 Ki. xv. 13) "held honoured place of queen-mother, like Sultana Walide of East," withdrawn from rank and her idol destroyed. Ver. 17. *High places*, hills on which sacrifices were offered, were not entirely destroyed by people, though intended by the King. Ver. 18. *Things*, for ornament and repairs. Ver. 19. *War.* As B. died in the 26th year of Asa (1 Ki. xvi. 8), it appears, from ver. 10 and from ch. xvi. 1-9, that the date here ought to be, not the 35th, but the 25th year of Asa. This allows a period of repose after the reform of Asa [*Murphy*].

HOMILETICS.

RECIPROCAL FELLOWSHIP.—*Verse 2.*

The prophet met Asa in returning from victorious pursuit. Signal success a proof of God's presence; victory the reward of implicit trust in him. Keep close to God and he will bless you; forsake him and you reap the fruits of apostasy. As you deal with him he will deal with you. **I. A distinguished privilege.** God's presence with them. In the ordinances of his house, in special providence, and covenant engagements. God owns them as his people, protects them from enemies, and prospers them in all things. This a glory and happiness beyond description. Not in good things common to them with the world, but the distinguished privilege of God's people, to possess his favour and enjoy his presence. "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord." **II. The conditions on which this privilege is enjoyed.** "While ye be with Him." Nothing bestowed arbitrarily nor kept without care. The duration and degree of happiness on certain conditions. 1. *Reasonable conditions.* If we do not seek, nor care for God, is it likely that he will be with us? "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" 2. *Scriptural conditions.* A doctrine of Scripture that God's continual favour depends upon obedience and perseverance, "continuance in well-doing." "Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you." "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." 3. *Wise conditions.* To put us on guard and caution against danger. To comfort in sorrow and encourage in effort. Seek and ye shall find. Serve and you shall succeed. Forsake God and present triumphs, present enjoyments are not secure.

DARK SHADOWS ON A BRIGHT DAY.—*Verses 1-7.*

Azariah did not congratulate Asa on splendid victory, nor indulge in flattery to court princely favour. The speech appears unsuitable for the occasion. Whether it unfolds future apostasy or describes past history, it is a prophetic warning, a gloomy picture on a bright day. It proves necessary connection between God's service and human weal, and dwells on apostasy with its fearful consequences. **I. The awful apostasy.** Turning away. 1. *Practical atheism.* "Without the true God." A God of truth (Jer. x. 10), "the God of Amen" (Is. lxxv. 16). Idols not true, nonentities. "An idol is nothing in the world." Hence true here not only opposed to error and idolatry, but to emptiness, deceit, and God's character. Everything else a lie, and idolatry the greatest lie. Practically to be without God, to be in darkness, error, and uncertainty. 2. *Deprived of priestly function.* No instruction and guidance for ministers, or no reverence and regard for their office. Sad when the light of ministry is darkened. "Without a teaching priest" descriptive of spiritual destitution. For duty of a priest is to "keep" (store up and distribute) "knowledge, and they (people) shall seek the law (God's will) at his mouth, &c." (Mal. ii. 7, 8). 3. *Prevalence of moral disorder.* "Without law." Where no direction is, no law can govern. God's law forgotten, and every one a law to himself. Right neither taught nor practised. Rectitude perverted, and whatever straight made crooked. Natural conscience and God's command defied, and as in age of Nero nothing unlawful. **II. The terrible judgments which followed apostasy.** Consequences of forsaking God set forth in expressive terms. 1. *Widespread anarchy.* "No peace to him that went out" (ver. 5). No free intercourse nor safe abode in any village. "The highways were unoccupied," i.e., rested from noise of chariots, and the feet of the travellers walked (for safety) through by-ways

(winding, unfrequented ways) (Judg. v. 6). In times of public panic resort to subterranean hiding-places (ch. vi. 2). 2. *Civil dissensions*. Vexations in various regions of the land. "Nation was *destroyed* of nation," beaten in pieces by oppression and war. Gilead against Ephraim, and Benjamin against other tribes, until almost exterminated (*cf.* Judg. xii. 4; xx. 33-48; *illus.* by Wars of the Roses, the Commonwealth, and American Civil War). 3. *General calamity*. "For God did vex them with all adversity, confounded them with all kinds of oppressions," social and national. Depth of corruption brought severity of chastisement. Idolatry and evil-doing most provoking; judgment most crushing and bitter, retribution like a consuming fire. "Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened (with smoke, ver. 18), and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire" (Is. ix. 19).

"Take heed: for God holds vengeance in His hand
To hurl upon their heads that break His law" [*Shakes.*].

III. The way of escape from these judgments. "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him, &c." 1. *This a fact in Divine procedure*. Proved in days of Judges, division of the two kingdoms, recent victory, and in all periods of national history. "Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath forsaken you." 2. *This a warning for the future*. Victory over Zerah should teach something. God's blessing upon all who steadfastly adhere to him, but abandon him and he will abandon you. Hence be quickened in your work (ver. 7). Resolve with energy to carry it on amid opposition. The most blessed results to yourself and others will follow. "If thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever."

ASA'S CONTINUED REFORMS.—Verses 8-19.

The warning had influence. Asa obeyed, took courage, and entered upon measures judicious, decisive, and extensive. **I. The character of the reforms upon which he entered.** Destructive of evil and establishment of good. 1. *He sought to extirpate idolatry*. "Put away the abominable idols. (a) *Idolatry most prevalent*. In his own territory, "the land of Judah and Benjamin;" in cities taken by his father (ver. 8). (b) *Idolatry most abominable*. Idol of king's mother horrible, of some monstrous kind; so obscene that it was publicly burned under the walls of Jerusalem (verse 16). We should purify our hearts and land; destroy gods material, literary and moral, worshipped in our days. 2. *He engaged in needful repairs*. "Renewed the altar, &c." (verse 8). Reconstructed a temporary altar like that of Solomon (vii. 7), for extraordinary sacrifices on special occasions; or renewed, embellished the one desecrated in reigns of Rehoboam and Abijah. All reforms began here. Prophets and reformers of O.T. especially concerned for the altar and restoration of Divine worship. Decayed altars signify neglected sacrifices, perverted religion, and practical apostasy. In revivals, offerings, and thanksgiving restored. 3. *He pledged the nation to solemn covenant*. "They entered into a covenant." Humble for sin, they renewed their obligations; joined together in pledges to keep the law and punish disobedience. (a) *To seek the Lord*. Seek the laws, favour, and help of their father's God, whom they had forsaken. Seek with heart and soul, with diligence and energy. Naturally without God, he must seek in faith, penitence, and under guidance of Holy Spirit. (b) *To punish idolators*. Punishment severe, "put to death;" impartial, "small or great, man or woman;" universal, "whosoever, &c." Must not go too far in penalty and severity. Christianity advances by charity, not by persecution. "We do not find this engagement expressly made in other renewals of the covenant. It would, how-

ever, be implied in them, since it was one of the commandments (see Ex. xxii. 20; Deut. xiii. 9-15; xvii. 2-7) [*Speak. Com.*]. **II. The spirit in which he carried out these reforms.** 1. *A spirit of vigour.* No trifling with the occasion. His foundation broad, and the policy built upon it gracious, energetic, and complete. 2. *A spirit of impartiality.* Gods of high places and gods of groves; images from the city and of the palace. He would not allow even his mother to keep an idol. Many are great reformers in national, not in private matters. Earnest before the public, too lenient at home. Asa knew nothing about father or mother, partiality or concession. The royal grove cut down, the favourite god stamped upon, consumed in the flame, and its ashes thrown into the brook. 3. *A spirit of gratitude.* He presented votive offerings in the temple. "The things that his father had dedicated," spoils from Abijam's victory over Jeroboam; spoils of his own from Zerah, the Ethiopian, were presented as thank-offerings to him by whose power they had been gained, and to whom all silver and gold belong. Things dedicated to holy use should not be desecrated nor withheld. Our vows should be performed and our first-fruits offered to God. Gratitude helped by the vow of it. "Vow and pay to the Lord your God; let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared."

"THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT."—Verses 10-15.

"Entered into the covenant." It is evident that a covenant existed before this; they renew it with gladness and enthusiasm. "Solemn renewals of original covenant made in the wilderness (Ex. xxiv. 3-8) occur from time to time in Jewish history after intervals of apostasy. This renewal in reign of Asa is the first on record. The next falls 300 years later, in reign of Josiah (2 Ki. xxiii. 3). There is a third in the time of Jeremiah (Neh. x. 28, 29). On such occasions the people bound themselves by solemn oath to observe all directions of the law, and call down God's curse upon them if they forsook it" [*Speak. Com.*]. **I. The assembly by which it was ratified.** Representatives from Judah and Benjamin, strangers from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon. The king's own subjects and those who had transferred allegiance to him from Israel. Outsiders invited, welcomed, and encouraged to acquaint themselves with God and walk in his commands. **II. The solemnities by which it was accompanied.** Besides rededications of themselves and stern but wholesome league against idolatry—1. *Innumerable sacrifices.* "They offered unto the Lord seven hundred oxen and seven hundred sheep." 2. *Exultant joy.* "With shouting, with trumpets, and with cornets." People testified unbounded satisfaction with loud voice and instruments. The revival of religion, the manifestation of God's presence, a source of pure and permanent joy. "When his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. *Inspiration and duty.* 1. An inspired man is qualified to give a message. Suitable, intelligent, and timely. 2. An inspired man will give his message fearlessly and successfully. 3. Inspired men, men taught of God, not time-servers, required now.

Ver. 2. *If ye seek him.* 1. A fact in national history; 2. A truth in Christian

experience; 3. A correction in general tendencies. Neither to presume nor to despair.

Ver. 3. *A picture of utter destitution in spiritual life.* "Without the true God." Then Israel had false gods? Yes, innumerable gods even Israel acquired, notwithstanding the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other

gods before me." "It is not a commandment that can keep a man at home. No bill of stipulations can convert your children and make them filial. We may have a time-bill for the action of the whole day, but the world was never yet saved by commandments. Israel trampled ten of them under foot, and we have trampled ten thousand. We can do despite unto the spirit of grace; we can insult God. 'Without a teaching priest,'—not an ornament, nor a ceremonialist, but a teaching priest. A man whose business it was to expound the law and make the people understand it. So they preached in olden time; they took the law syllable by syllable, explained it word by word, and sentence by sentence; they analysed it, took it member from member. They put it together again and hurled it upon the people like a thunderbolt from heaven. They had naught else to expound, because they thought nothing else worthy of exposition. We are lost in details. Any man may get up a lecture, if he has great quoting power. It is almost impossible not to get up a lecture; the temptations are innumerable, and in many cases irresistible. Only one speech is worth listening to, that is the speech which begins in eternity, sweeps down through time, leaves behind it immortal lessons, and ascends to the fountain of origin. Demand the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Be in earnest. 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, &c.'" [Dr. Parker].

Vers. 8-10. *The influence of a great example.* When Asa entered earnestly upon reform—I. *He drew others to his side.* The halting decide, the half-hearted kindle, before a zealous man. "They fell to him out of Israel in abundance." Armies often perish, churches decay for want of leaders. II. *He succeeded in his efforts.* Success not given to hesitancy and idleness. Asa positive, determined, rallied others round him and accomplished great things. III. *He gained freedom from attachment.* "And the Lord gave them rest round about." A bold, defiant attitude frightens the foe. Numbers and God's help will overcome them and ensure peace.

"Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful."

Ver. 15. *Heart service.* 1. God will not accept a *divided* heart. This useless. The whole or none. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." 2. God requires the *whole* heart. "With *all* their heart." 3. This requirement eminently *reasonable* and *fit*. 4. The heart must be *willingly given*. Devotion only true when free. When King William (Rufus) tried to force Anselm to a certain course, he replied, "Treat me as a free man, and I devote myself and all I have to your service. Treat me as a slave, and you shall have neither me nor mine." "The servant (bondslave) of Jesus Christ" (Rom. i. 1). 5. When thus sought and served he will be found. "Search me, O God, and prove me."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XV.

Vers. 1-7. *God's presence.* Walking together is a very common action of human fellowship; much interchange of thought and opinion takes place in the long daily walks of two friends, but this implies a certain evenness and similarity of gait; for "how can two walk together except they be agreed?" In common parlance this is spoken of as "keeping step;" and that this very

thing is required of us, we see in a very striking and reiterated warning in Lev. xxvi 12, 21-28, where God promises to "walk among His people," ready, as it were, for this steady, even step. "But if ye walk contrary unto me," or as in margin, "If ye walk at all adventures with me;" or by another reading, "If ye walk at haphazard with me," in a jerking, spasmodic, con-

trary fashion, such as, alas! we know too well, *then* "will I also walk contrary unto you" [*Mrs. Gordon*].

"My business now is with my God to walk,
And guided by His holy eye to go;
Sweet fellowship with Him to cultivate,
And His unclouded countenance to know"
[*J. F. Elwin*].

Ver. 12. Covenant. Charles Kingsley wrote, on entering his 22nd year: "My birth-night. I have been for the last hour on the seashore; not dreaming, but thinking deeply and strongly, and forming determinations which are to affect my destiny through time and eternity. Before the sleeping earth,

and the sleepless sea and stars, I have devoted myself to God—a vow never (if He gives me the faith I pray for) to be recalled."

Ver. 15. *The Lord gave rest.* In 1815, when the British Parliament were voting honours and emoluments to Wellington, and considering "the measures necessary towards forming a peace establishment," suddenly all their plans were interrupted and their peace prospects dissipated by the intelligence that Napoleon had escaped from Elba. Nothing like this will occur during the rest which God gives. His enemies once subdued will be subdued for ever.

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Asa prevents Baasha from invading Judah (vers. 1-6); Asa reproved by Hanani (vers. 7-10); Asa's sickness and end (vers. 11-14; cf. parallel in 1 Ki. xv. 16-24).

Vers. 1-6.—Baasha invades Judah. Six and thirtieth. Baasha died before this date (1 Ki. xv. 33). Critics consider the date calculated from the separation of the kingdoms, and coincident with 16th year of Asa's reign. A mode of reckoning generally followed in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel, the public annals of the time (ver. 11), the source from which the inspired historian drew his account (cf. *Jamieson and Keil*). *Built*, i.e., fortified. *Go out*, to prevent all communication between the countries. "The fortification of Ramah by Baasha presupposes his recovery of the cities, which had been taken by Abijah from the northern kingdom, and which, according to ch. xv. 8, were still in Asa's possession" [*Keil*]. *Benhadah*, Benhidri in Assyrian monuments; Ader in Sept., to whom smaller provinces round Damascus (*Heb.* Darmesck) were subject. **Ver. 3. *There is***, let there be a league, &c. **Ver. 4. *Ijon***, city of Naphtali (1 Ki. xv. 20). *Dan* colonised (Judg. xviii.; Jos. xix. 47). *Abel-maim*, "meadow of waters," supposed to be situated on marshy plain near uppermost lake of Jordan. *Store* or "all Cinneroth and all the land of Naphtali" in 1 Ki. xv. 20. Both statements true and supplementary. **Ver. 5. *Cease***. Baasha might intend to reside in Ramah. Unexpected hostilities from his son and ally prevented further progress, and Baasha's death soon after interrupted work of fortifying. **Ver. 6.** No actual engagement mentioned. *Geba* (Jos. xviii. 24). *Mizpah* (Gen. xxxi. 45-55).

Vers. 7-10. *Asa reproved by prophet Hanani.* Hanani, father of Jehu the prophet (xix. 2) *Relied* not on God, from whom prosperity and former victory, but on man. *Escaped*. That is, if he had trusted in God he would not only have defeated the army of Baasha, but that of Benhadad. His conduct in parting with temple treasures and bribing an ally of the King of Israel most foolish and lost him a splendid victory. **Ver. 8.** The huge host of the Ethiopians overcome by God's help. Assyria would have been, had Asa trusted in God. **Ver. 9. *For***, a striking description of divine providence over the man whose heart is perfect with God. **Ver. 10.** This address vexed Asa, and spread discontent among his people, whom he *oppressed*, tried to crush in some form or other. He maltreated the prophet. *Prison*, house of stocks, a sort of torture for crime—*Heb.*, house of distortion, because limbs were so set and fixed as to be twisted and distorted in it.

Vers. 11-14.—Asa's sickness and end. Book of Kings, a public record of civil events. *Diseased*, a kind of gout, but uncertain, began two years before death (ver. 13), became greatly "moved upwards" in body and proved violent in nature. *Yet*, as in war, so in sickness, he put undue confidence in man. *Physicians*, Egyptians in high repute at foreign

courts, who pretended to expel disease by charms and mystic rites. *Buried* him in a rock tomb; *made*, digged by himself, in his lifetime, as often done by Oriental kings, with special funeral magnificence; *odours* to neutralise offensive smells of corpse exposed on "the bed" to public view, or to embalm with aromatic spices in great profusion. *Great burning*. According to some, consuming spices customary at funerals of kings; according to others, for cremation of the body, "a usage which was at that time, and long after, prevalent among the Hebrews, and the omission of which in the case of royal personages was reckoned a great indignity (ch. xxi. 19; 1 Sam. xxxi. 12; Jer. xxxiv. 5; Amos vi. 10)" [Jam.].

HOMILETICS.

THE FOLLY OF BRIBERY.—Verses 1-10.

Asa hired the help of a heathen neighbour, the powerful King of Syria, to defend himself against the attack of Baasha. This considered prudent, a good stroke of policy, but trust in man, not in God, and met with condemnation from Hanani the seer. **I. It led to sacrilege in religious things.** Treasures of the temple were diverted from sacred to worldly use. The sanctuary and the palace robbed to bribe an earthly king to help! Religious ordinances desecrated, justice sold, and men bribed often by "silver and gold"; gifts bestowed or promised with a view to prevent judgment or corrupt morals abominable. Bribery a canker in constitutional governments, a disgrace in all departments of life. He who presents a bribe perpetuates moral evil, sacrifices both truth and right to selfish interests. Absalom bribed the people to become the king. Judas bribed by high priests to effect the death of Christ.

"Judges and senates have been bought for gold:
Esteem and love were never to be sold" [Poire].

II. It brought down Divine reproof. God not bribed, comes on the scene in the person of the prophet, "At that time Hanani the seer came" (ver. 7). Wrong must be condemned, right declared, and severe reproof administered to evil-doers. **1. Asa acted unworthy of God's representative.** Kings, priests, and judges God's vicegerents, must be free from corruption and bribery. "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift." **2. Asa sought not God's help.** "Because thou hast relied on the King of Syria and not relied on the Lord thy God." When God is forsaken he will assert his supremacy and claims in conscience, in providence, in affliction. Wicked men not allowed to indulge in excuses and selfish pleas; nor to plead the power of circumstances, the force of reason, and the probability of success. Never put money before duty, man before God! **II. It defeated its own ends.** "Herein thou hast done foolishly." Man's foresight not always wise. **1. Asa missed the opportunity of a double victory.** "Therefore is the host of the King of Syria escaped out of thine hand." A victory over the combined forces of Baasha and Benhadad more splendid than that over the Ethiopians lost by his conduct. Possible by unnecessary and improper alliances to hinder our good and prevent God from granting deliverance. **2. Asa exposed himself to greater danger.** "Therefore from henceforth thou shalt have war" (ver. 9). The cupidity of the one increased the hostility of the other (1 Kings xv. 32). Those who bribe and those bribed not to be depended upon. Money will dissolve the most solemn league. For gold men will sell their votes, their conscience, and themselves. Cato complained that M. Cœlius the Tribune "might be hired for a piece of bread to speak or to hold his peace." Never rule conduct by the fear of man instead of trust in God. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe (may set on high above danger, &c.)" (Prov. xxix. 25).

THE INFLUENCE OF MONEY.—*Verses 2-4.*

There seems much to excuse Asa's conduct. In his days it was often thought right to buy oneself out of danger. But the bribery of Benhadad condemned and cannot be justified. Learn the influence of money. **I. There is a lawful use of money.** Used for educational and philanthropic purposes, to encourage industry, arts, and sciences, to relieve distress and advance the cause of God, it is better than fleets and armies. Rightly used, "money answereth all things." **II. There is an unlawful use of money.** Used for selfish ends, to frustrate right and bribe men to wrong. It may buy men in limbs, intellect, and conscience; make peace and create war. It is one of the mightiest rulers, one of the most popular gods in the world! "A man furnished with the arguments from the mint will convince his antagonist much sooner than one who draws them from reason and philosophy. Gold is a wonderful clearer of the understanding, it dissipates every doubt and scruple in an instant; accommodates itself to the meanest capacities; silences the loud and clamorous, and brings over the most obstinate and inflexible" [*Addison*]. **III. The unlawful use of money becomes a curse.** Put against duty, *vi* tue, and God, its power is pernicious. It breaks up alliances, prepares for temptations, corrupts human nature, and influences to injustice. "Benhadad hearkened unto King Asa" and was a striking contrast to Hanani. True religion only begets love for truth, upholds commercial honesty, social order, and just government. God rewards the man who resists bribes and acts uprightly. "He that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure."

ASA'S VAIN HELP.—*Verses 2-4 and 12.*

Years of prosperity did not make Asa a better man. "In all time of our wealth, &c." He forgot need of help, and in times of danger resorted to worldly policy and trusted not to God. **I. In time of war he relied upon human help.** In northern kingdom, Baasha exterminated posterity of Jeroboam, ruled upon the throne, and menaced Jerusalem. Ramah, on the dividing lines of the two kingdoms, built and held in defence. Baasha strengthened himself in his bold designs by league with King of Syria, but was bought off, bribed to help Asa. This political wisdom, but spiritual folly; prospered for a time, but costly in its triumph. It might be prevalent custom, but not the path of duty. Is our code of honour any purer? Do we seek to get out of difficulties by questionable means? Give money for leagues, covenants, and deliverance? Such reliance is vain help, entails mischiefs in social and spiritual matters which outweigh all apparent gains. Better confide in God than in our own schemes. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." **II. In time of sickness he relied upon foreign physicians.** No harm in physicians, but physicians without scientific training, physicians with only charms and mystic arts, are "physicians of no value." (Heathen doctors and witchcraft.) **1. This foolish conduct.** "Sought not to the Lord," after his former experience of God's faithfulness and truth, after his stern reproof by the prophet. What avails physicians of greatest skill and kindness without God? Entire confidence in creature, misplaced and dishonours God. **2. This useless conduct.** Physicians could not cure; the disease spread, and recovery impossible. Physicians, ministers, and friends but men, not to be despised, only used as *servants* of God,

and not as sum-totals. In all extremities, sickness, and death, call upon the Lord for help. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help (salvation)" (Ps. cxlvi. 3). "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

THE MINISTRY OF TRUTH.—Verses 7-10.

I. Exercised by a Divine messenger. "Hanani the seer came to Asa, King of Judah"—specially qualified and commissioned by God. "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place." **II. Revealing the true source of help.** Asa overcame Ethiopians with very many chariots and horsemen. "Because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand." Men could not be reprov'd for doing wrong if they knew no right—for not trusting God, if God was not revealed to them. **III. Treated with injustice.** "Asa was wroth with the seer and put him in a prison, &c." Rejection of Divine reproof sadly common and self-ruinous. Message despised and messenger persecuted. "He that refuseth instruction (correction) despiseth his own soul." **IV. Justified by its results.** Truth may be kept down, but never crushed; prophets imprisoned or put to death, but right prevails. Divine reproofs attested by conscience, vindicated by providence. Revenge is impotent. God's purpose cannot be frustrated.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN THE WORLD.—Verse 9.

God would have helped Asa if he had called upon him; for he is everywhere present in time of need—specially ready to help those who trust Him. **I. Providence benevolent in its design.** "To show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." He not only sees danger, but delivers from it, keeps and defends his people. If King Philip could sleep safely because his friend Antipater watched over him, how much more kind and efficient the providence of God! **II. Providence personal in its exercise.** "We learn from observation of others. God inspects and rules of himself—not by abstract laws and principles merely, not by secondary causes, not by the eyes and agencies of inferior creatures. "He shews himself strong" in purpose and proceedings. **III. Providence minute in its inspection.** "To and fro," publicly and privately, in thought and act. His vigilance ever active and never worn out. Nothing escapes his notice nor eludes his grasp. "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings." **IV. Providence universal in its extent.** "Through the whole earth." Diana's temple was burnt down when she was busied at Alexander's birth. "I cannot be everywhere present," cried Napoleon when he lost one battle in trying to gain another. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place"—on sea and land, in society and solitude. We cannot go from his spirit nor flee from his presence. In heaven above and hell beneath (Psa. cxxxix.).

"What can 'scape the eye
Of God, all-seeing, or deceive his heart
Omniscient?" [Milton].

V. Providence swift in its operation. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro." Implying celerity, swiftness in giving relief. Delay only when needful and good for us. In promise and fulfilment, "his word runneth very swiftly." Lessons—Encouragement for the believer, a warning to the wicked, a reason for circumspection to all.

THE EYES OF THE LORD.—Verse 9.

I. The description of providence. “Eyes of the Lord” in Scripture signify—1. His knowledge. 2. His providence. (1) The immediateness of providence—His own eyes. (2) Its celerity and speed. (3) Its extent. (4) Its diligence. (5). Its efficacy. **II. The design of providence.** “To show himself strong, &c.” 1. He has strong understanding, and wisdom to contrive. 2. Strong affection to love. 3. Strong words to cheer and fortify. 4. A strong arm to exert almighty power. The persons for whom those who are truly gracious and sincere [*J. Ryland, sen., 1750*].

ASA'S PERTINACITY IN WRONG-DOING.

I. When reproved for sin he did not confess it. In consequence he committed one evil after another. David reproved by Nathan was conscience-stricken, melted to penitence and confessed, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Not so Asa. **II. He added greater guilt by trying to hide his sin.** He denied it, got into a rage with the seer, and persecuted him. Reproved, probably in the presence of courtiers; he was haughty, took advantage of his circumstances, and adopted severe measures in apparent refutation of his sin. “To hide a sin with a lie is like a crust of leprosy over an ulcer,” says Jeremy Taylor. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” **III. When he would neither confess nor forsake his sin God sent affliction, which did not at first humble him.** Man could not lodge Asa from his hiding-place, but God's resources are never exhausted. What the final issue was appears uncertain. From Scripture references the last expedient might humble the king and bring him to God. But at beginning of sickness not in right state of mind, and applied to wrong source for help. “This is a striking example of pertinacity in sin, which carries with it a solemn warning. Who would have expected this of the once pious Asa! What an urgent enforcement does this example furnish of the exhortation of the apostle: ‘Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, &c.’ That, indeed, must be a most treacherous and deceitful thing which could lead a rational and religious being so far away from the truth and piety as thus to persist in his iniquity, and attempt to justify himself before God—yea, more than that, virtually to engage in an unequal warfare with Heaven, and to accomplish, by unblest means, what God had pronounced impracticable” [*Rev. W. Sparrow*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 5, 6. *He built Geba. Fortifications demolished.* 1. Men prostrated in their wicked design. 2. The materials by which they carried out that design captured and used for opposite purposes. Ramah taken, “the stones and timber” used to build other defences. Voltaire's printing press, by which he sought to deluge France with infidelity, fell into the hands of the Bible Society, and em-

ployed to spread the word of God. *The strongholds of the world become the defences of the Church.* I. This illustrated by the case of Ramah. II. It has been often observed since—1. The world's stronghold of science has been rifled by the Church for its defence, and the world defeated with its own weapons. 2. By the grace of God, men who were as Ramah—Saul of Tarsus for example—have been made as the outworks of

Christianity [*Bib. Museum*]. It is a fine use to which Bossuet has turned this military incident as illustrating the duty, not of rejecting the materials or the arguments collected by unbelievers or by heretics, but of employing them to build up the truth, "Bâtissons les forteresses de Juda des débris et des ruines de celles de Samarie" [*Stanley*].

Ver. 9. *Whatever is done in the world falls under the notice of God.* Not that he needs move from place to place, or run up and down from country to country to see what is done, for by one infinite, indivisible act, he beholdeth all things in all places; but the Scripture thus teaches the infallibility and particularity of his knowledge; even as we are said to know those things infallibly which we have viewed upon the place; for otherwise there is neither high nor low, far nor near, first nor last, to God all things being at once before him for ever (Jer. xxiii. 23). If the Lord is everywhere, let us everywhere see the Lord. Moses *saw him that was invisible*. Did we but keep this common principle warm upon our spirits, *The Lord seeth under the whole heaven*, how heavenly would our lives be! And seeing the Lord seeth as under the whole heaven, so into the hearts of all men, how should it deter us, even from heart sins, and the closest hypocrisy! Again, the Lord seeing in all things, disposeth all things. As his hand set up all in order at first, so his eye hath kept all in order ever

since, and will do for ever. Take these conclusions concerning the sight of God: *First*, the Lord beholdeth all things distinctly, not in gross only—the least as well as the greatest. He looks upon every parcel and opens the whole pack of human affairs. *Secondly*, he beholds every thing and person perfectly, fully, quite through. His is an intentive and most attentive view. *Thirdly*, in seeing he governs everything effectually and works it to his own ends. *Fourthly*, he seeth all things together, not successively, or one thing after another. He that is all eye seeth all at once, all is one. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Hence, take two inferences: the first serving for the instruction and consolation of all who know and fear God; and the second for conviction and terror to the wicked [*Caryl*].

Vers. 12–14. *Asa's End.* 1. Asa's sickness and death. At first affliction unimproved, grew more severe. Death sad, certain, and hopeful. 2. Asa's burial, magnificent, honoured, and admonitory. "The eminent piety and usefulness of good men," says one, "ought to be remembered to their praise, though they have had their blemishes. Let their faults be buried in their graves, while their services are remembered over their graves. He that said, 'There is not a just man that doeth good and sinneth not,' yet said also, 'The memory of the just is blessed,' and let it be so."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XVI.

Vers. 3–6. *Silver.* "A bribe is a price; reward, gift, or favour bestowed or promised, with a view to pervert the judgment or corrupt the conduct of a judge, witness, or other person" [*Webster*]. "Philip of Macedon was a man of most invincible reason this way," says Addison. "He refuted by it all the wisdom of Athens—confounded their statesmen, struck their orators dumb, and at length argued them out of their liberties" [*quoted by Dr. Thomas*].

Ver. 9. *Strong.* Cæsar was accused to write short letters. One of his generals, Quintus Cicero, was in great extremity, being besieged by fierce hordes of Gauls, when he received from him the following message: "Cæsar to Cicero: Keep up your spirits. Expect help." Let us expect help from God, trust to him instead of relying on man in times of extremity and danger.

Ver. 10. *Wroth with the seer.* The most difficult province in friendship is

letting a man see his faults and errors, which should, if possible, be so contrived that he may perceive our advice is given him not so much to please ourselves as for his own advantage. The reproaches therefore of a friend should

always be strictly just and not too frequent [*Bacon*].

Vers. 13, 14. *Asa slept*.

“Kings then at last have but the lot of all, By their own conduct they must stand or fall” [*Cowper*].

CHAPTER XVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter is peculiar to the writer of Chronicles. Jehoshaphat becoming king takes measures for defence of his kingdom (vers. 1-9); in consequence grows in power (vers. 10-19).

Vers. 1-6.—Jehoshaphat's measures for defence. *Strengthened*, prepared to resist, to defend against attack from northern kingdom. Ver. 2. *Garrisons* or governors (*cf.* 1 Ki. iv. 7-19), all fortresses filled with troops, military stations established in various parts of the country and in cities of Mount Ephraim which belonged to Jehoshaphat (ch. xv. 8). Ver. 3. *First*, ancient imitated piety of his great ancestor in early part of his reign. *Baalim* in contrast with the *God of his father*, idol deities generally (Judg. ii. 11). Ver. 4. *Doings of Israel*. Special idolatrous customs of northern kingdom at the time and the worship of the calves. Ver. 5. *Presents*, freewill offerings, not ordinary taxes paid to royal treasury. “Some reason to believe that a ‘benevolence’ of this kind was expected as a matter of course at the accession of a new sovereign” [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 6. *Lifted up*, not proud (chs. xxvi. 16; xxxii. 25); *exalted by the ways of Jeh-va-h* (*marg.*), was encouraged, emboldened by a sense of Divine favour and ventured on reforms.

Vers. 7-11.—Moral measures. *Princes*, extraordinary commissioners and *priests* along with them. A deputation of five princes, nine Levites assisted by two priests, took a copy of the law with them, sent on tour in towns of Judah to give religious instruction to the people. Vers. 9-11. *Presents*, Philistines tributaries or wishing to become such; *Arabians*, nomad tribes on south of Dead Sea, sought protection and paid tribute in cattle.

Vers. 12-19.—Jehoshaphat's greatness and prosperity. *Castles*, places of defence situated for protection of roads, or valleys opening into the country (ch. xxvii. 4). *Store*, cities for keeping ammunition and provisions in preparation of siege. *Business*, much labour also expended on old “cities of Judah,” besides building and fortifying other places. Vers. 14-19. “Whenever a census was taken among Israelites, the numbering was by tribes and families. Hence the expression in text, which occurs thirteen times in first chapter of Numbers” [*Speak. Com.*]. *Captains*, princes of thousands, highest officers in command. Three of them, *Adnah* the highest post. By the side of him who commanded largest division, Jehohanan and Amaziah had command of 280,000 and 200,000 men. Ver. 16. *Amaz.* a volunteer, or by an act of his own devoted himself to the service of Jehovah. Light-armed and heavy-armed troops waited on the king. “These numbers have been with good reason regarded as corrupt by most critics. They cannot be successfully defended either as probable in themselves or as in harmony with the other statements of the military force, or of the population, contained in our author” [*Speak. Com.*]. Others account for the numbers by including every one fit to bear arms in time of peace pursuing their daily callings; auxiliaries from tributary Philistines and Arabs; and all who on religious grounds attached themselves to the kingdom of Judah [*cf. Murphy*].

HOMILETICS.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S GOOD BEGINNING.—Verses 1-19.

Natural for Jehoshaphat to succeed his father, but in defending his kingdom he indicated a policy; in rising above his surroundings, resisting prevalent customs, and introducing reforms he made a good beginning. Taking the

chapter as a sketch—**I. Jehoshaphat's natural defences.** Jehoshaphat "strengthened himself against Israel." During Asa's decay Ahab acted with vigour. Israel getting a formidable kingdom, needful for Jehoshaphat to bestir himself and maintain his own. This done not by league and bribe, but in natural, just, and quiet method against possible attack. A prudent man foresees the evil and prepares for it. The tempers of men must be watched, the threatenings of the times met, and weak places should be strengthened and guarded. To ignore inevitable tendencies, to act without foresight and preparation, most ruinous. **II. Jehoshaphat's moral reforms.** He cared for the spiritual welfare as well as for the outward security of the kingdom. Anxious to restore the worship of Jehovah, to instruct the people, and to administer justice (xix. 5). 1. *Reforms springing from personal piety.* He himself upright and sincere in serving God. A man of foresight and reverence, of deep conviction and uncompromising principle. One who felt God's presence more needful than garrisons in cities and forces on land. 2. *Reforms displaying zeal against idolatry.* He walked "not after the doings of Israel" (verse 4), was dead against calf worship, strictly adhered to Divine enactments, removed monuments, and destroyed groves which disgraced the land, and almost entirely cleansed it from idolatry (xx. 33). 3. *Reforms connected with the instruction of the people.* A commission of education was formed, equipped, and sent "about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people" (ver. 9). Kings and princes help a nation, not by stifling inquiry, attempting to force opinion and punishing heterodoxy; but by spreading education, encouraging virtue, and exalting God's word. Nations who receive this word most tolerant and intelligent, most philanthropic and exalted. **III. Jehoshaphat's consequent prosperity and honour.** In personal conduct separated alike from gross idolatry and Israelitish apostasy; in government ruling in the fear of God, and for the good of his subjects, "the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand." 1. *At home peace and plenty.* His people loyal and submissive, voluntary offerings abundant—"riches and honour" without stint. 2. *Abroad security and honour.* None disturbed his peaceful reign, hostile peoples bowed before him, the tributes of nations poured into his treasury, and the fear of God "fell upon all the kingdoms" with its restraining influence.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S UPRIGHTNESS.—Verses 3, 4.

Jehoshaphat expressly commended for integrity, even when condemned for his sin (xix. 3). This corresponds with his conduct at beginning of his reign, and the continuance of his uprightness after sad and untoward events. **I. A man's character is determined by his relation to God.** He acknowledged and "sought the Lord God of his father." In some relation all stand to God, and according to conduct, not creed, profession nor opinion, moral character and condition determined. **II. A man's character and course of life are specially observed by God.** David's life described in parts, each part under God's inspection. Youth, manhood, and old age; relapses and restorations known to him. Scripture lives detected, impartially given in temptations, failings, and virtues. "Thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me and tried mine heart toward (with) thee" (Jer. xii. 3). **III. The latter part of a man's life may be worse than the first part.** "The first ways of his father David." A contrast between the earlier and the latter days of David, who relapsed and dishonoured in character. Age should bring wisdom, honour, and meetness for eternity. The seed ripens for the crop. Youth grows into maturity, and the student should give the accomplished scholar. Sad to deteriorate in life (Solomon, Jehoshaphat, &c.). "Sad when

you have to go back to a man's youth to find his virtues, or his most conspicuous excellences; but most beautiful when a man's earlier mistakes are lost in the richness and wisdom of his later conduct" [*Parker*]. **IV. The good only and not the evil in a man's life should be imitated.** Jehoshaphat walked in the godly ways of David; customary and easier to follow the evil. Multitudes and fashions influence; men naturally prone to the inferior and to forget the lofty and spiritual. The universal influence of bad examples presupposes a universal readiness to yield to it. "Be ye therefore followers (Greek, imitators) of God as dear children" (Eph. v. 1).

"Presume not that I am the thing I was,
For I have turned away my former self,
So will I those that keep me company" [*Shakes.*].

THE TEACHING COMMISSION.—*Verses 6-9.*

This a counterpoise to influences which had degraded Judah, and a continuation of Asa's reaction. These men employed eminently useful, though otherwise unknown. **I. The persons which composed the commission.** Officers of court and camp, of civil and religious authority. 1. *The princes.* A deputation of five to represent civil and constitutional government. 2. *The Levites.* Nine in number to instruct in ritual and temple service. 3. *The priests.* Two to explain the nature and enforce the duties of religion. The commission not warriors nor revolutionists, but reformers and revivalists. To educate the people in their duty to God, the king, and to each other. **II. The work which the commission had to perform.** Educational and religious. 1. *To teach the people.* "They taught in Judah" (ver. 9). Education required to chase away superstition, ensure just legislation, develop the energies, and alleviate the condition of the people. 2. *To expound the word.* "The book of the law" with them. God's law their text-book and authority. The command of the prince, the creed of the priest, and the ritual of the Levite not to displace God's word. A law above man, a book more than human to appeal to: a written statute, an authoritative declaration, a final revelation to which to call men's attention. "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." **III. The effects which followed the work of the commission.** The nation improved, reformed, and greatly blessed. 1. *In outward prosperity.* Peace and prosperity enjoyed; insurrections and wars prevented; unbroken opportunities for pursuit of education and commerce. 2. *In moral character.* People taught the law of God, returned to religious ways and worship. God's presence their defence and dignity (ver. 10). Such the effect of the Bible at all times. Its principles tend to civilise and elevate, reform and refine. It is the foe of oppression, the protector of the weak, and the Magna Charta of true liberty. What the boasted civilisation of ancient or modern nations without the Bible! Judge Bible teaching by its fruits! Everywhere it justifies its existence and claims. Its itinerant ministry and popular teaching in the providence of God has preserved this country from revolutions and wars amid the ruins and dissolutions of European nations!

JEHOSHAPHAT'S GREATNESS.—*Verses 12-19.*

I. In the extent of his possessions. "Castles and cities of store," places for victuals and arms. "He had much business," undertakings of religion, preparations for peace and war. A great kingdom and great responsibilities committed to his care. **II. In the vastness of his army.** The warriors

arranged in the army according to their father's houses. Consisted of five unequal divisions, comprised 1,160,000 men, without including those who garrisoned the fortresses. No monarch, since the time of Solomon, equalled Jehoshaphat in the extent of his revenue, in the strength of his fortifications, and the number of his troops [*Jamieson*]. **III. In the skill of his captains.** Five great generals, loyal in spirit, mighty in valour, and ready for any undertaking. "These waited on the king" (ver. 19).

"There is not a sovereign in Europe or in the world, but might read this chapter with advantage. 1. It shows most forcibly that true religion is the basis of the state; and that wherever it prospers, there the state prospers. 2. It shows also, that it is the wisdom of kings to encourage religion with all their power and influence; for if the hearts of the subjects be not bound and influenced by true religion, vain is the application of laws, fines, imprisonments, or corporal punishment of any kind. 3. A religious nation is ever a great nation; it is loved by its friends, it is dreaded by its enemies. 4. It is ever a peaceful and united nation: the blessings of religion, and a wholesome and paternal government, are so fully felt and prized, that all find it their interest to preserve and defend them. Harmony, peace, piety, and strength are the stability of such times. May Britain know and value them!" [*A. Clarke*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 4-6. *Jehoshaphat's religion.* 1. *Practical in its possession.* Not formal, complimentary, nor expedient for the times. A man of deep conviction, courage, and generous patriotism. If the end had only been as beginning, almost a complete character! 2. *Earnest in its nature.* He "sought" earnestly and constantly "the Lord God of his father." 3. *Prominent in its testimony.* For eighteen years—contemporary with Ahab and Jezebel, the period of Baalism in Israel—firm and faithful, "sought not unto Baalim." 4. *Self-denying in its example.* "Not after the doings of Israel," fashionable and prevalent; but "lifted up" in conformity to God and delight in God's service.

The working hand and the happy heart. The chief things for a traveller on such a pilgrimage as ours is a right goal before him, the right road before him, the right impulse within him. The chief thoughts of which we are here reminded are: 1. Religion pervading our life—the Lord. 2. Activity pervading our religion—the ways. 3. Cheerfulness pervading our activity [*Christian Treasury*, 1859].

Vers. 7-11. *The royal edict.* I. We notice the edict of king Jehoshaphat: 1. Mark the benevolence displayed in

it; 2. Its policy was not inferior to its benevolence; 3. The benefits arising from it were incalculable. II. The manner in which it was carried into execution. This suggests—1. That loyalty to the king demands our concurrence with him in his good work; 2. That gratitude to the Jewish nation demands it at our hands; 3. A love to the rising generation should lead us to avail ourselves of the present opportunity to promote their welfare; 4. That a concern for the honour of our holy religion should operate to unite us all in executing the royal edict [*C. Simeon, M.A.*].

Ver. 13. *Business, which he performed diligently, personally, and thoroughly.* "Many works (LXX.) going forward at once; a negotious man was he. His business, say some, lay in beautifying and fortifying those cities. Augustus gloried at his death, that whereas he had found Rome built with brick, he had left it made of marble [*Trapp*].

Ver. 16. *Willingly offered himself.* The volunteer—1. Religious in spirit. Recognition of "the Lord." 2. Resolute in arms. The vows of God upon him. 3. Valiant in service. Like ancient votaries in Mohammedan armies, never

known to return home without victory. "The people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem."

"He always wins who sides with Thee,
To him no chance is lost;
Thy will is sweetest to him, when
It triumphs at his cost" [F. W. Faber].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XVII.

Vers. 3-5. *The Lord with him, stablished the kingdom, &c.* God is the only source of stability as infinite, absolute, and changeless. He gives stability to his word, church, and people. "In the great hand of God I stand" [Shakespeare].

Vers. 7-9. *The book of the law.* The influence of the Bible has been very efficient towards the introduction of a better and more enlightened sense of right and justice among the several governments of Europe. It taught the duty of benevolence to strangers, of humanity to the vanquished, of the obligation of good faith, of the sin of murder, revenge, and rapacity. The history of Europe, during the earlier periods of modern history, abounds with interesting and strong cases to show the authority of revelation over tur-

bulent princes and fierce warriors, and the effect of that authority in meliorating manners, checking violence, and introducing a system of morals which inculcate peace, moderation, and justice [Chancellor Kent].

Ver. 13. *Much business.* Nothing is denied to well-directed labour; nothing is ever to be attained without it [Sir Joshua Reynolds]. All sorts of mischiefs happen to unoccupied professors of religion; there is no evil from which they are secure. Better would it be for them to accept the lowest occupation for the Lord Jesus than remain the victims of inaction [Spurgeon].

"Troubles spring from idleness,
And grievous toils from needless ease"
[Franklin].

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter relates Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab (vers. 1-3); induced to go to Ram-gil. (vers. 4-11); Micaiah's adverse prediction (vers. 12-17); continued reproof (vers. 18-22); and sufferings (vers. 23-28); the two kings enter battle with sad results (vers. 28-34). With this chapter corresponds 1 Ki. xxii. 1-35.

Vers. 1-3.—*Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab. Affinity.* Joram, his son, married Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (xxi. 6). *Years,* in Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year, eight after marriage. *Killed,* gave magnificent feast to influence him in favour of enterprise. *Ramoth,* heights of Gilead, in territory of Gad, to wrest from King of Syria. Ver. 3. Jehoshaphat easily consents, without consulting God.

Vers. 4-11.—*The consultations.* Previous to declaration of war customary to consult prophets (1 Sam. xxviii.). Ahab complied. 400 prophets, creatures of Ahab connected with calf-worship, encouraged the king. Ver. 6. Jehoshaphat, dissatisfied, inquired for a true prophet; besides, in addition, or yet more. Ver. 7. Micaiah, known only from this incident, sent for. *Always evil,* lit., all his days, wanting in Kings. Ver. 8. *Officers,* eunuch or chamberlain. Ver. 9. Graphic scene, *void place (open space,* Rev. Vers.). A large area for markets, courts, and business. Each king on his portable throne, clothed in royal garments, and spectators all around. Ver. 10. *Zed.,* more prominent than rest. *Had made* previously, in anticipation of some such occasion as now given [Speak. Com.].

Horns, like candle extinguishers (often worn as military ornaments); *iron*, symbol of military power. *Push*, a common metaphor for attacking and overcoming enemies. Thus two heroes impersonated; Kings of Israel and Judah would triumph (Deut. xxxiii. 17; Ps. xlv. 5; Dan. viii. 4).

Vers. 12-17.—Micaiah's adverse prediction. The well-intentioned messenger tries to persuade Micaiah to agree with majority, predict success, and be released from prison and severer punishment. He rejects counsel, remains fearless and firm. Ver. 14. *Go up*, the ironical answer of the 400, well understood by Ahab. *Adjure*, put on oath, he changes tone and becomes very serious. Ver. 16. *Saw*, purport of this vision that Israel would be defeated, dispersed, and king destroyed.

Vers. 18-28.—Micaiah's reproof and sufferings. *Saw* in providence of God events in fuller detail. Therefore *hear* the Divine will. *Sitting*, in splendour and supremacy (Ps. ix. 7; xi. 4; xlv. 6, &c.). *Standing*, about him on both sides. Ver. 19. *Entice*, persuade or deceive (1 Ki. xxii. 20). Ver. 20. *A spirit, the spirit, i.e.* "the evil spirit," Satan some; others, "the spirit of prophecy" in the 400, under the control and command of the Governor of the universe, at his direction and permission. Ver. 21. *Lying spirit*, to mislead when consulted. "The details of a vision cannot safely be pressed any more than the details of a parable" [cf. *Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 23. *Zed.*, by this fearful disclosure, is vexed, presumed upon his favour with Ahab, smote Micaiah in contempt and scorn (Job xvi. 10; Jer. xx. 2; Lam. iii. 30; Mk. xiv. 65); and insinuates that the spirit did not speak by him. Ver. 24. The event would be a reply, when he would go from chamber to chamber, in some secret place. *To hide* himself in shame and fear of punishment for his false predictions. Ver. 25. Micaiah sent back to prison, with scanty prison fare; submitted, courageously reproves the king; predicts his death, and appeals to the people, who should witness the result.

Vers. 29-34.—War undertaken. Ahab afraid, disguises himself, ungenerously advises Jehosh. to fight in royal attire. Ver. 30. Command of King of Syria proves the prudence of Ahab's conduct. Ver. 31. Jehosh. only king in field. *Cried out*, whether to followers or to enemy, not stated. *Perceived*, probably from his cry, and pursuit ceased. Ver. 33. *Venture, i.e.*, in his simplicity, without special aim or intention. *Joints*, parts where pieces of armour fitted together. *Ahab wounded*, notwithstanding his precaution; kept standing in his chariot during the day the battle raged, at sunset all over. The war-cry went through the host, every man returned to his city and to his country. But Ahab was carried dead to Samaria, and there buried.

HOMILETICS.

THE DANGER OF WORLDLY FRIENDSHIP.—Verses 1-3.

Jehoshaphat displeased God by his choice of friends, and began a downward course, marked by gradual steps. **I. Friendship beginning with family affinity.** Jehoshaphat "joined affinity with Ahab" by uniting his son with Ahab's daughter. Perhaps proud, for he "had riches and honour in abundance," and did not want Jehoram "to marry beneath him." Nothing but marriage with a royal house would satisfy—perhaps to conciliate Israel and bring them back to Jehovah. Evil cannot be conciliated. This might be considered good policy, but morally wrong; disobedient to God's command, and brought the kingdom and royal house to verge of destruction. Unsuitable marriages to preserve name, property in family circle. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." **II. Friendship leading to social visits.** "After certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria." What more natural and needful to improve acquaintance and inquire about welfare! Received in royal style, but corrupted in moral character. Joins in converse with ungodly, can bear their company, and dwell in their house (Lot in Sodom). He becomes weaker, more complaisant, and exposed to risk. "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people." "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? &c." **III. Friendship ending in alliance for war.** "He persuaded him to go up." Feasted so splendidly, friendship so close, extrication difficult. The height of incivility, most unreasonable to refuse! Evil wrought on his mind, spiritual constitution not proof against bad atmosphere. He lost power to testify; censure lost its energy; his presence no longer a restraint on

folly, and impossible to assume high tone and faithful attitude. "Let not the king say so," the only mild rebuke. Difficult to walk wisely, faithfully, and surely in these days of compromise and fashion. But God looks for entire separation from the world in character, purpose, and conduct. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?"

THE IMPORTANT QUESTION: WAR OR NO WAR?—*Verses 4–22.*

Ahab, tired of waiting for peaceful restoration of Ram-gil, determined to recover it from the Syrians by force. Aware of the military strength of the Syrian king (1 Ki. xxii. 3, 4), he takes advantage of visit and friendship of Jehoshaphat, whose resources are great, and who suggests an immediate inquiry of the Lord before expedition. **I. The tribunal before which to decide.** Picture the open space (ver. 9). The kings robed in splendour; the prophets in their imposing ranks and display, confident and insolent in their lying message; the one true prophet, hated by Ahab, uncared for by spectators, yet calm, brave, and true! Luther before the Diet of Worms. **II. The judgments given.** Two kinds from two parties. 1. *From false prophets.* "Ahab gathered his prophets together, about 400 men." Every great enterprise seeks the sanction of God and to clothe itself with Divine authority. Right and wrong of actions felt to be determined by One higher than man. If Heaven's signature not gained often forged. Ahab multiplied pagan prophets as Julian multiplied pagan sacrifices. A band ready to interpret divine decrees in favour of the king they serve. Think of their *number, office, and unanimity!* With one consent they say, Go! 2. *From the true prophet.* Jehoshaphat not satisfied; saw from their manner they were not truthful, not Jehovah-prophets; asks for "a prophet of the Lord, that he might inquire of him." The *vox populi* not always the *vox Dei*. Micaiah sent for, appears, determines to speak the truth fearless of consequences. "Athanasius against the world." In terms of irony, in visions of splendour, when adjured by the king and in appealing to the people. Smitten by the priests and threatened with the prison, the same answer given. **III. War foolishly undertaken.** Ahab bent on war, Jehoshaphat unable to check him. "And they went to the battle" (ver. 29). 1. *Reluctantly by Jehoshaphat.* Ventured too much and gone too far; ensnared and drawn along. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men." 2. *Timidly by Ahab.* Desired to falsify prediction, and disguised himself. What a cowardly act! What friendship to preserve your own life at the expense of another! "A good cause makes a stout heart." A soldier conscious of right, accompanied by God, will stand fearless and victorious on the field of battle. **IV. War ending in disasters.** Death to Ahab. To Jehoshaphat danger in the field, deserved rebuke from God's servant (xix. 2), invasion of the kingdom, and almost total extinction of the family (xxii. 10). Ever dangerous to fight against God. Enterprises opposed to his will can never prosper. Inquire, Shall I go or shall I not? When decision known, submit, and escape the ruin.

"We leap at stars, and fasten in the mud,
At glory grasp, and sink in infamy" [Young].

THE FAITHFUL PROPHET.—Verses 7-27.

I. The estimation in which he was held. "I hate him." Counted like Elijah as an enemy by Ahab. Micaiah consistent in veracity, courage, and reproof. The king offended, and imputed all to evil disposition, personal grudge. Hatred, inveterate and strong, often the reward of fidelity. "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"

II. The stand which he takes. "What my God saith, that will I speak" (ver. 13). 1. *Dependence upon God.* In God's hands, not Ahab's. "So help me God," cried Luther. "Fear him who can destroy both body and soul." 2. *Expectation of God's help.* Assured that God would say something, teach him, and reveal light. Disciples before councils (Mat. x. 18-19). 3. *Determination to utter God's word.* "That will I speak." Balaam could make no compromise. Reverent attention to divine truth, and determination to die rather than withhold or betray it, the mark of a true prophet. **III. The pleas urged to move him from this stand.** The messenger in kindness warned and advised. 1. *The opinion of the majority.* 400 prophets unanimous in decision! Think of their power and position! Why be singular and foolish in opposing? Agree with the multitude. Unity built on *truth*, better than unity built on men. 2. *The difficulty of judging who is right.* "Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me to thee?" Zedekiah assumed to possess the spirit alone, ridiculed in scorn the idea of Micaiah having it. Circumstances make it difficult to judge who is right among many claimants. But there is a divine word; man can understand and receive it, must judge and decide for himself. Know by results. False prophets assume authority, take fulfilment of truth in their own hands, despise and persecute others. True prophets receive and utter the word, leave it with God to verify and vindicate it. 3. *The employment of physical force.* This is a tyrant's weapon. The screw, the prison, and the stake, bonds, persecution, and martyrdom in vain. Micaiah calm in suffering, as bold in action, immovable as a rock, honoured and exalted in Israel as independent and true, when prophets of Ahab are confounded and scattered in shame and disgrace.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Ver. 2. *Went down. The royal visit.*
 1. The object for which made. 2. Results to which led. "The bond between the two families dates, therefore, at least from this time, but apparently it had not hitherto led to any very close intimacy, much less to any joint military expeditions. Jehoshaphat seems to have taken no part in the former Syrian wars of Ahab, nor did he join with the great league against the Assyrians. From this time till the displacement of Ahab's dynasty by Jehu, very intimate relations subsisted between the two kingdoms (cf. 1 Ki. xxii. 49; 2 Ki. iii. 7; viii. 28; 2 Chr. xx. 36) [*Speak. Com.*].

Ver. 4. *Enquire.* God, forgotten in men's undertakings, should always be

sought, and sought without delay. "Enquire to-day." Ahab never thought of this. God not in his thoughts (Ps. x. 4). If Scipio went first to the capital, and then to the senate; if the Romans consulted gods and offered sacrifices before war, should we not enquire, &c.?

Vers. 5-7. *I hate him.* A picture of present time. 1. *Men love to be flattered.* Ahab, satisfied with his prophets, thought they were inspired and would listen to no one else. 2. *Men speak lies to flatter their superiors, servants their masters, courtiers their sovereigns.* Thus the very fountains of life corrupt. Prophets, priests, and judges encourage falsehood. "A wonderful and horrible thing (astonish-

ment and filthiness) is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means (lit., according to their hands, *i.e.*, under their guidance and power), and my people love to have it so" (Jer. v. 30, 31). (*Populus vult decipi, et decipiatur*). 3. *In speaking lies they are influenced by supernatural powers.* Such powers exist and mysteriously influence the minds of men. Lying spirits are subtle, wise, and numerous; have easy access to men and deceive. Seek to hear not what is palatable to our corrupt hearts, but what is true, needful, and profitable to our souls.

"Hear the just law, the judgment of the skies!

He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies.
And he that *will* be cheated to the last,
Delusions, strong as hell, shall bind him fast" [Cowper].

Vers. 8-11. *A performance at court.* Picture place, kings on their separate thrones, spectators and performance. Zed. in employing a symbolic action was following the example of a former Israelite prophet, whose "acted parable" could never be forgotten in Israel (*cf.* 1 Ki. xi. 30) [*Speak. Com.*].

Ver. 13. *A faithful ministry.* 1. The necessity imposed on faithful ministers to speak the truth. God requires it, needful to the welfare of the people, and consequences of neglect fearful. 2. The results of speaking truth. Hated by those in authority, ridiculed and opposed by rivals, treated with indifference, cruelty, and death.

"So spake the seraph Abdiel, faithful found
Among the faithless, faithful only he"
[Milton].

HOMILETICS.

THE PROPHETIC VISIONS.—Verse 16.

Solemnly urged to give a serious answer, Micaiah declared the visions revealed to him by the spirit of God. **I. The shepherdless people.** "I did see all Israel scattered," &c. (ver. 16). 1. *The death of the king.* Ministers and kings shepherds of the people to feed, govern, and protect. Ahab fell in battle, and Israel deprived of ruler. "These have no master." 2. *The defeat of the army.* "All Israel scattered," in broken ranks and helpless condition. A picture of society away from God and divided from one another; inadequately supplied with helpers, and needing a compassionate Saviour (Mat. ix. 36-38). **II. The parabolic Providence.** "It may be doubted whether we ought to take literally, and interpret exactly, each statement of the narrative. Visions of the invisible can only be a sort of parables: revelations not of truth as it actually is, but of so much of truth as can be shown through such a medium. The details of a vision, therefore, cannot safely be pressed, any more than the details of a parable. Portions of each must be accommodations to human modes of thought, and may very inadequately express the realities which they are employed to shadow forth to us" [*Speak. Com.*]. 1. *A picture of God's supremacy.* "The Lord sitting upon his throne," supreme in authority, wisdom, and splendour (Is. vi. 1). 2. *An insight into supernatural ministry.* "All the host of heaven" ready to serve. "Satan walks to and fro in the earth" in restless activity to do mischief to God's people (Job i. 7). Other spirits sent on divine errands (Zech. i. 10; Dan. vii. 10). 3. *An interpretation of the events of history.* Why does this happen? God orders or permits it. Sometimes heaven is opened to shadow forth events on earth. God's seers only can interpret and apply the vision—a privilege to them and a warning to us.

LYING SPIRITS IN THE PROPHETS.—Verses 18-22.

This chapter gives an insight into the meaning of the awful word "temptation." Yet comforting, for it shows how God is long-suffering and merciful to

the most hardened sinner ; how to the last he puts before him good and evil, and warns him of his choice and the ruin to which it leads. I. What warning more awful, yet more plain, than that of the text? Ahab, told that he was listening to a lie, had free choice to follow that lie or not, and did follow it. After imprisonment of Micaiah for speaking the truth to him, he went to Ram-gilead ; yet felt that he was not safe. He went into battle disguised, hoping to escape from evil by these means. But God's vengeance not checked by paltry cunning. II. This chapter tells us not merely how Ahab was tempted, but how *we* are tempted in these very days. By every wilful sin we commit we give room to the devil. By every wrong step we take knowingly, we give a handle to some evil spirit to lead us seven steps further wrong. Yet in every temptation God gives us a fair chance, sends his prophets, as he sent Micaiah to Ahab, to tell us that the wages of sin is death, to set before us good and evil at every turn, that we may choose between them and live and die according to choice. The Bible is a prophet to us. Every man a prophet to himself. The still small voice in the heart, the voice of God within us ; the spirit of God striving with our spirits, whether we will hear or forbear, setting before us what is righteous, noble, pure, and godlike, to see whether we will obey that voice, or obey our own selfish lusts, which tempt us to please ourselves [*C. Kingsley*, "Village Sermons"].

DIVINE TRUTH AND ITS TYPICAL RECEPTION.

Bible full of human nature. Humanity in varied aspects its excellence and chief feature. A book for the world. Its biographies. "Representative men." Here four types of human conduct in relation to divine truth. **I. Those who seek the truth.** Micaiah believed in its existence, prayed for its teaching, and determined to follow its leading. Sought truth under impression of its reality, from the right source, in order to render homage to it. "Lead me by thy truth and teach me." **II. Those who are opposed to the truth.** The priests assumed to be its only depositories, denied the claims of others, ridiculed and opposed its representative. None so slow to believe in a Divine spirit as those accustomed to speak Divine words, but in whose hearts is no Divine life. A lifeless church always bitterest enemy to inquiry, reform, and independency. "Ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth." **III. Those who believe yet disobey the truth.** J. believed the prophet Micaiah, mildly defended his character, yet would not withdraw from Ahab. He sinned against light and better judgment. Risky thus to act. "Holding (*i.e.*, keeping down, obscuring, overbearing) the truth in (a course of) unrighteousness" is the way to bring down the judgment of God (Rom. i. 18), to lose the ability to perceive it, and the power to embrace and practise it.

" Thus men go wrong with an ingenious skill,
Bend the straight rule to their own crooked will ;
And with a clear and shining lamp supplied,
First put it out, then take it for a guide " [*Cowper*].

IV. Those who are alarmed at truth. Ahab roused in conscience, afraid of results, and tried to escape by stratagem. The dupe of his own fears. The child whom Herod sought to destroy lived, grew, and rose to sovereignty of the universe. The prediction of Micaiah fulfilled, terror struck into hearts of soldiers, and the king died in blood-stained chariot.

GOSPEL ARCHERY.—Verse 33.

I. The hearts of the unsaved are encased in harness. The harness of (1) Indifference, (2) pleasure, (3) worldliness, (4) religious formality. **II.** Having

these harnessed hearts for a mark, the gospel bow must be drawn. At some must be shot the arrows of (1) Divine goodness, (2) Divine threatenings, (3) Divine love [R. Berry]

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 18-22. *Lying spirits.* 1. *A doctrine of Scripture* (Jud. ix. 23; Job i. 6; ii. 1; Ez. xiv. 9; Jno. viii. 44; Rev. xii. 9). 2. *A fact in experience.* Eve seduced. Many now under strong delusion (error energising and effectual) that they should believe a lie (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12). 3. *A mystery of providence.* The problem of human character, of human life and destiny insolvable on any other hypothesis. Inscrutable providence!

Ver. 31. *Jehoshaphat's cry.* 1. Danger the result of warning unheeded. 2. God interfering to deliver. God may be displeased, never deserts when we cry unto him. Ahab cared not to succour. God moved them to depart from him. 3. Lesson, associate with evil-doers, then in danger of sharing their calamities. "A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good."

Learn from the whole—1. That the contrivances of the wicked are cruel (Prov. xii. 5, 10). 2. That in carrying out these contrivances they are greatly alarmed. Conscience makes them

cowards (Prov. xxviii. 1). 3. That in the end their fears are realised. In attempt to ensnare others ensnared themselves (Prov. xii. 13; xxiv. 15, 16; xxvi. 27); expectations of good disappointed (Prov. x. 2-28; xxiv. 19, 20), and their iniquity becomes their punishment (Prov. v. 22; xi. 3; xiv. 32).

Ver. 33. *Accidents of Providence.* I. The end certain. Bow did its work. Darts of judgment, designs of Providence, never miss the mark. II. The method of accomplishing the end apparently accidental. At a venture, casual shot. The hand strengthened, shaft levelled with unerring eye. What we term chance, casualty, really Providence accomplishing deliberate designs, but interposition concealed. 1. A comfort to godly in trouble, sorrow, and peril. 2. A warning to ungodly, who are not safe, exposed everywhere. Most common occurrences, those from which we suspect no harm, may prove destructive to life.

"The all-surrounding heav'n, the vital air,
Is big with death."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XVIII.

Vers. 1-3. *Friendship.* It is good discretion not to make too much of any man at the first, because one cannot hold out that proportion [Bacon].

Vers. 7-22. *Lying spirits.* Compare Elijah's tone (1 Ki. xviii. 27). "In the vision which he describes we feel that we are gradually drawing nearer to the times of the later prophets. It is a vision which might rank with those of Isaiah or Ezekiel" [Stanley]. Not by any stroke of vengeance, but by the very network of evil counsel which he has woven for himself, is the King of Israel to be led to his ruin [Ibid.].

Ver. 29. *Disguised.* As knowledge

without justice ought to be called cunning rather than wisdom, so a mind prepared to meet danger, if excited by its own eagerness and not the public good, deserves the name of audacity rather than of courage [Plato].

Ver. 33. *Bow at a venture.* It is marvellous to note on what small contingencies depends our life. An accidental blow, an unexpected fall, a mistake in drinking out of the wrong cup, a misstep in the dark, a fly, a fishbone, the smallest things often occasion its termination. This fact is serious enough to cool ambition, make us thoughtful in merriest moods, and watchful against any surprise that death may

have in reserve for us. *Died*—"The truth cannot be burned, beheaded, or crucified. A lie on the throne is a lie still, and truth in a dungeon is still truth; and the lie on the throne is on the way to defeat, and the truth in the dungeon is on the way to victory."

CHAPTER XIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter is entirely additional to Kings, and of great interest. It deals with three matters only, the rebuke addressed to Jehosh. by the prophet Jehu (vers. 1-3); the personal efforts of Jehosh. to effect a religious reformation (ver. 4); and his reform of the judicial system (vers. 5-11) [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-3.—The Rebuke of Jehosh. In peace, without capture or pursuit; a fulfilment of prophecy (ch. xviii. 16). *Jehu*, son of Hanani (xx. 34), of Northern Kingdom in time of Baasha (1 Ki. xvi. 1). *Went out* (xv. 2). *Help*, make common cause with Ahab. *Wrath*, God angry, and caused expedition to fail, or may be in the invasion of kingdom about to happen. Ver. 4. Rebuke mild, "good things" (cf. xii. 12; 1 Ki. xiv. 13). *Groves*, stocks of trees representing Ashtoreth (xiv. 3; xvii. 4-6).

Vers. 4-11.—The Reforms of Jehosh. *Went*, turned and went out. *Again*, efforts for instruction resumed, and secured full complement of teachers from the tribe of Levi now fixed in Judah. Vers. 5-7. *Instructions to judges.* Jehosh. appointed fresh judges, enlarged their staff and number; limited to *fenced cities*, by concentrating power in the hands of a few, or creating superior courts. Ver. 6. *Judge* not at dictation or in compliance with wishes of men, but for *Jehovah* (Deut. i. 17; xvi. 18-20). *In judgment—i.e.*, in your decisions. Ver. 7. *Iniquity* of inequality or undue leaning to one side (cf. Deut. x. 17; xvi. 19). Vers. 8-11.—*Instructions to the priests and Levites.* Ver. 8. *Chief*, great patriarchal chiefs, heads of great houses or clans. "It is interesting to find that such persons were now admitted to share in the judicial office, which seems in David's time to have been confined to the Levites" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Judgment of the Lord.* Disputes in religious matters, payments to temple, offerings for firstborn, &c. *Controversies*, ordinary civil cases. *Jerusalem*, seat of supreme tribunal (Ex. xviii. 19; Deut. xvii. 8-13), which was composed of three classes, to review appellate cases from inferior courts in two divisions, ecclesiastical and civil affairs. Decisions of provincial judges might be carried to Jerusalem as a court of appeal [cf. *Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 10. *Blood*, case of murder or homicide as to degree of blood-guiltiness (Ex. xxi. 12-23). *Law and command*, when a conflict of laws, clashing one with another. *Warn*, admonish them to abstain from wrong, and avoid God's vengeance on the nation. Ver. 11. *A chief*, high priest, president of court in religious concerns. *Zeb.*, in civil or criminal affairs. *Levites*, superintending managers, assistants, and servants about court. *The good*, God with upright judges (cf. v. 6; xv. 2-6). *Deal*, take courage and act.

HOMILETICS.

THE STERN REBUKE.—Verses 1-3.

Alliance between two kingdoms against a common enemy, substitution of friendship for hatred and distrust, wise steps to worldly politicians. But one thing against it. Ahab, an idolator, had introduced a new religion of most degraded type. Jehosh. did not reject this alliance. As Hanani rebuked Asa for league with Ben. (ch. xvi. 7), so his son instructed to rebuke Jehosh. for league with wicked Ahab. Military success from Jehovah; unlawful alliance, if

persisted in, will forfeit this blessing. **I. In a timely season.** "J. went out to meet him," at earliest possible moment, when king had been preserved, and returning in peace. Hence in fit mind to listen. Rebuke should be timely, in "due season," then it comes down upon the heart like rain upon the new-mown grass. **II. In faithful words.** Jehu direct and faithful. "Thou hast helped the ungodly, and loved them that hate the Lord." No toning down, nor mincing matters. Man's reproofs sometimes undeserved, implying guilt which exists not. Divine reproofs truthful, needful, and attested by conscience. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." **III. In mitigating circumstances.** "Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee" (ver. 3). God displeased, but overlooks not "good things"; in wrath remembers mercy; withholds judgments, and waits to see how Jehosh. will act in future. In the Church at Ephesus all that God can find to approve put foremost, and only afterwards notes shortcomings (Rev. ii. 2-4). Then (ver. 6) returns to praise and console. We should have more pleasure in commending than in fault-finding.

I. The friendship of wicked men one of the most dangerous temptations to which Christians are subjected. Modern life in cities illustrates this with special force. 1. The wealth of the world is largely in the hands of men who are not friends of Christ. 2. In many communities intelligence and culture are possessed mainly by the irreligious. 3. Interests of business sometimes create similar peril. 4. In a higher circle of life professional success often tempts young men of aspiring mind to seek to ally themselves with those who love not God. **II.** Of this trial of Christian principle, it may be said that the Christian religion requires no narrow or ascetic seclusion from the world. The thing which Christian principle forbids is seeking worldly friendships and alliances for selfish ends and to the peril of religious usefulness and religious character. **III.** The irreligious friendships of religious men violate the ruling spirit of the Scriptures. It is a policy of life which starts wrong; therefore threatens catastrophe in the end. **IV.** Entangling alliances with the world often involve immense sacrifice of Christian usefulness. **V.** Christian alliances with the wicked do not command the respect of the very men for whose favour they are formed. **VI.** Loving those that hate God inflicts a wound of great severity on the feelings of Jesus Christ. It is from Calvary that the voice comes to each in our solitude, "Shouldest thou love them that hate the Lord?" [*A. Phelps, O.T. a Living Bk.*].

THE REFORMING TOUR.—Verses 4-7.

While Jehosh. sought to maintain alliance, he was careful to show that he had no sympathy with idolatry, and determined to keep his people from it. Hence a second tour to reform what had gone wrong and complete what was wanting. **I. The noble design of the tour.** Not to strengthen defences, revive trade, or relieve distress. 1. *To administer justice.* "He set judges in the land," in centres convenient and accessible. 2. *To bring the people back to God.* Many perhaps revolted to idolatry when they saw the king familiar with idolators. Hence to counteract our bad influence and restore the fallen. **II. The vast extent of the tour.** Personal inspection through the whole kingdom from the extreme south to extreme north, from Beer-sheba to Mount Ephraim. No place should be overlooked, no enemy spared in religious reforms. **III. The beneficent results of the tour.** Personal and thorough, results encouraging. 1. *Local courts established.* Existed before; Jehosh. the first king to modify them according to requirements of kingdom. Fixed in

fortified cities the provincial capitals of the districts (*cf.* Deut. xvi. 18–20). 2. *Judicial administration purified.* Special instruction to judges, high and lofty motives put before them. Soldiers must not abuse their power by violence and wrong; magistrates must not degrade their character by injustice and partiality. All duties to be performed to God, not to man (*ver.* 6).

THE SUPREME TRIBUNAL.—*Verses 8–11.*

This institution or Metropolitan Court founded on Ex. xviii. 19–26; Deut. vii. 8–13. Notice—**I. Its representative character.** Three classes—Levites, priests, and chief of fathers; persons learned in law, eminent for wisdom, and of mature age and experience. “Peers of the realm.” **II. Its presiding officers.** Amariah, high priest over religious causes. “In all matters of the Lord.” Zebadiah supreme in civil court. To assist both, the Levites were a kind of counsellors. **III. Its executive powers.** Appeal made from inferior courts to this. Pleas for the crown and for religious observances in one division. In other division common pleas. *Controversies* between party and party; differences of *blood*, manslaughter or accidental murders, or *consanguinity*, settlement of inheritance and family claims. Civil affairs *between law and commandments*. Conflicts between moral rites and precepts of law, &c. “Without good and wholesome *laws* no nation can be prosperous, and vain are the best laws if they be not *judiciously* and *conscientiously* administered. The things of *God* and the things of the *king* should never be confounded in the administration of justice. Amariah the priest, and Zebadiah the ruler, should ever have their distinct places of jurisdiction” [*A. Clarke*].

A TONIC PROMISE.—*Verse 11.*

Explain what is meant by “good.” The melancholy fact that *all men* are not good. The promise of the text justifies three inquiries: (1) Why should the good be *fearful*? “They that be with us,” &c. (2) How can *bad designs* finally prevail? (3) How are men to know that God is *surely with them*? The answer involves *character*. It is not the Lord shall be with the great, the rich, the old, &c., but with the *good*. God identifies himself with all that is good in *thought* as well as in *act*; in *purpose* as well as in *service*. This is the security of the world. Even when the godly *man* ceaseth, God will maintain the cause that is *good*.

This promise, like all the promises of God, is designated *not as a sedative, but a stimulant*. *Deal courageously!* See how the text might have read: The Lord shall be with the good, therefore *sit still*; the Lord shall be with the good, therefore let *wickedness have all its own way in the world*; the Lord shall be with the good, therefore *pay no attention to self-discipline*. The text reads contrariwise. The Lord shall be with the good, therefore *deal courageously*. Goodness is not to be merely passive, it is to be active, aggressive, defiant of all evil, sublime in patience [*Dr. Parker, City Temple*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1–3. *Jehoshaphat's connection with Ahab.* I. What is that intimacy with the ungodly which God forbids? 1. An alliance with them. 2. A conformity with them. 3. An unnecessary association with them. II.

Why is it so displeasing to God? 1. On account of the state of mind it implies. 2. On account of its pernicious tendency. 3. On account of its opposition to his revealed will [*Dr. Chapin*]. *Ver. 7. God's Justice.* 1. God just

and righteous in himself. On justice all his proceedings are based and regulated. He is "the Just One," "Most just," "Just and right is he" (*cf.* Deut. x. 17; xvi. 19; xxxii. 4). 2. Just and righteous in the gift of just laws to mankind. Laws adapted to their natures, powers, and condition. The moral code so right and benevolent as to require no proof. Supreme love to God and true regard to our neighbour. 3. Just and righteous in the administration of these laws—strictly and impartially here. No favouritism, conniving at guilt, or overlooking sin. In Christ justice and holiness displayed, and God the justifier of him that believeth. At last no iniquity nor respect in the bestowment of rewards and punishments.

Vers. 6, 7. *Address to Judges.* 1. In *office* they represent God, act worthy of God, represent not his law, express not his will as crooked and corrupt. "Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord." 2. In *spirit* the must fear God. Fear to offend One who sees and knows all. 3. In *decisions* be impartial and just. Give sentence deliberately in conformity with truth. Judges, ministers, all in high position should be remarkable for integrity, and free from bribery and corruption.

"Be just and fear not.
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy
country's,
Thy God's, and truth's" [*Shakes.*]

CHAPTER XX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Narrative to ver. 30 entirely additional to Kings. Invasion of Moabites (vers. 1-3); fast and supplication of king and people (vers. 3-13); the message of Jahaziel (vers. 14-19); exhortation and victory of Jehoshaphat (vers. 20-30); close of his reign (vers. 31-37), which runs parallel with 1 Ki. xxii. 41-49.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Invasion of Moabites.* Ammonites, Sept., some of the Mincœi, inhabitants of Maon (Mehunins), a town near Petra. Ver. 2. *Sea,* Dead Sea. *Syria,* probably Edom. *Haz.-tam.,* having come round southern extremity of Dead Sea and entered Judæa from Edom.

Vers. 3-13.—*Fast and supplication.* Set himself, his face (resolved, *cf.* 2 Ki. xii. 18; Jer. xlii. 15). *Seek, i.e.,* to turn to Jehovah to implore help (xv. 12, 13). *Fast,* national, the first "proclaimed" by authority. *New,* one of the two courts in Solomon's temple, renovated by Jehoshaphat or by Asa (xv. 8), known now as "the new court." Vers. 6-12. The supplication. Ver. 6. An appeal to God, omnipotent, supreme, and irresistible. Ver. 7. To God's covenant, who gave them possession of land. *Friend,* first historic use of this title, though repeated Is. xli. 8; Jas. ii. 23. Ver. 8. To God as owner of temple. Ver. 9. A brief summary of cases described in Solomon's prayer (ch. vi. 22-39). Vers. 10, 11. Invaders whom Israel were not permitted to touch (Edom, Deut. ii. 5; Moab, ii. 9; Ammon, ii. 19), have now entered the land to cast us out. Ver. 12. In despair God sought. *Eyes, i.e.,* we look to thee for succour (*cf.* Ps. xxv. 15; cxli. 8).

Vers. 14-19.—*The Message of Jahaziel.* A prophet not elsewhere mentioned, but his claim verified by message and results. Ver. 15. Words familiar to people and connected with great deliverances (Deut. i. 21; Josh. i. 9, &c.) [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 16. *Cliff,* ascent of Ziz (Hazziz) at end of brook, gully, or dry torrent course. Ver. 17. *Stand still,* directed to do nothing, watch the Lord's course (Ex. xiv. 13, 14; Num. xiv. 9). Ver. 18. Reverent obedience in confidence and gratitude. Ver. 19. Praise from Kohathites in general, from Korhites, a branch of them, in particular.

Vers. 20, 21.—*The March and Exhortation.* Went forth early. *Tekoa,* ten or eleven miles from Jerusalem, southerly direction. *Stood,* exhorted them to be firm and confident. *Singers,* line of procession arranged, signal to move forward; Levites led van with musical

instruments and song (Ps. cxxxvi.). Vers. 22-30. Overthrow of the enemy. *Ambush, liers in wait.* Edomites intending to attack Jews, but through panic fell upon Moabites, and rest of enemy or *angels* employed by God to confuse the host and destroy it. Ver. 24. Work completed before Israel on the field, which was strewn with dead bodies. They had not to fight, but to collect and carry away spoil. Ver. 26. Set out on fourth day to return in same joyful mood as they came. Ver. 29. Fear salutary fell on surrounding kingdoms and brought blessings at home.

Vers. 30-33.—*Close of Jehoshaphat's reign* (1 Ki. xxii. 41-50). Steadfast and consistently religious (xv. 18), yet people not wholly diverted from idolatry. In deference to popular prejudice all high places not taken away. *Words* of Jehoshaphat not elsewhere noticed, entered into the book of Kings of Judah, same apparently as the Chronicles of Kings of Judah, mentioned in Kings [*Murphy*].

Vers. 35-37.—*Alliance with Ahaziah*, closely on death of Ahab, whom A. survived little more than a year (1 Ki. xxii. 51; 2 Ki. iii. 1). *Ships*, combined fleet destined for Tartessus, but wrecked. *Eliezer* denounced the unholy alliance. Ahaziah attributed the disaster to unskilfulness of Jehoshaphat's sailors; proposed to fit out another joint fleet with his own subjects. Jehoshaphat accepted the wreck as a judgment and declined the offer (cf. 1 Ki. xxii.).

HOMILETICS.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S WAR WITH MOABITES AND THEIR ALLIES.—Verses 1-30.

Defeated in a great battle by Joram and Jehoshaphat, the Moabites sought to retaliate (2 Ki. iii.). Combined with their kinsmen, they entered Judah and defied its king. **I. The invading enemy.** Formidable, near, and brought surprise. 1. *In a spirit of boldness.* Great in number of auxiliaries, far advanced, and most eager for the fight. 2. *In a spirit of ingratitude.* "Behold how they reward us" (ver. 11). Israel not permitted to touch them nor disturb them in the least in the march through wilderness (Deut. ii. 5; ix. 19). Jehoshaphat had lately helped them, now they seek to get the land for themselves. Cast Israel out, and thus to requite them evil for good! "O our God, wilt thou not judge them?" (ver. 12). **II. Jehoshaphat's preparations to meet this army.** Alarmed at the intelligence, the danger brings out his religious feeling. He is equal to the occasion, does not call his forces, but determines to seek God. 1. *He proclaims a national fast.* The people of Judah hasten to Jerusalem. The nation bowed before God and confessed their sins as one man. The scene touching and solemn, emergency great. 2. *He implores God's help.* Prayer embraces every argument which king and people could urge; concluding with earnest appeal for God to protect them. (a) *They are helpless.* No power, "we have no might;" no plan, "neither know we what to do;" no allies, their wives and little ones only increased their anxiety (ver. 13). (b) *God could help them.* "In thine hand is there not power and might?" (ver. 6). God supreme and omnipotent, checks the enemy and defends his people. (c) *They rely upon God.* "Our eyes are up unto thee" in hope and earnest expectation. **III. The encouragement given.** Help is promised. Words familiar and inspiring fell from the mouth of the prophet, given by inspiration. 1. *Fears are calmed.* "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude" (ver. 15). Cowardice shall flee, and courage shall keep the field. 2. *Assurance is renewed.* "The Lord will be with you" (ver. 17). That should be sufficient for any contest! 3. *Implicit trust is required.* "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established" (ver. 20). 4. *Specific directions are given.* "To-morrow go ye down against them, ye shall find them at the end of the brook" (ver. 16). **IV. The method of attack.** Great joy and relief at the prophet's message. With humble confidence they prepared for assault. 1. *They engaged in reverent worship.* The king bowed to the ground, the people "fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord" (ver. 18).

2. *They united in joyful praise.* Singers were appointed to praise the Lord for his mercy (ver. 21). 3. *They formed orderly procession.* Officials and people united in ranks, and preceded by "singers," marched till they came "to the watch-tower in the wilderness" (ver. 24). 4. *They fought in confidence of victory.* God had helped them in past (ver. 7); promised at dedication of temple that he would help them again (ver. 9). None trust him in vain. **V. The victory achieved.** Easy, most signal, and wrought for them, not by them. 1. *By divine agency.* Whether by hosts of angels or ambushments of their own, we cannot eliminate divine agency. 2. *By self-extermination.* In confusion they fell upon their friends, whom they mistook for enemies. God turned them against themselves, and the army that came to fight Jehoshaphat destroyed itself. God can touch the reason of the king, rob the general of command, and blind the soldiers. A thousand ways at his disposal of which we know nothing. But victory sure to those who have him as leader. "The battle is not yours, but God's." **VI. The impression of the event on Jews and neighbours.** Report spread in surrounding people; influence remarkable. 1. *In giving security and peace to Judah.* Nations feared to molest a people who worshipped a God who did such wonders. Idolators felt that he had justified claims to their homage. They were still satisfied among themselves. "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet" (ver. 30). 2. *In exercising salutary influence upon others.* God's victory ended wars; the fear of God fell on all kingdoms, restrained them from invading Judah. Probably now tribute was brought to Jehoshaphat from Philistines and Arabians (*cf.* ch. xvii. 11). "For his God gave him rest round about."

MAN'S EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.—Verses 5-13.

Learn—**I. That in the discipline of life we should expect dangers and extremities.** These needful to touch and develop our powers. History in Old and New Testament full of instances. To know other resources we must learn the weakness of our own. "We have no might against this." **II. That in these dangers and extremities God has many ways of deliverance.** Human agency but a small part of holy ministry. Birds and beasts, insects, elements of nature, and hosts of angels under his command. Hence the folly of proscribing, measuring, or limiting in God's work. **III. That in all dangers and extremities of life we should look to God for help.** Depend not upon numbers, generalship, and human might; but spiritual force, prayer, and presence of God. Then war easy, loses character of conflict, and becomes a matter of spoil.

THE BATTLE IS NOT YOURS, BUT GOD'S.—Verse 15.

The text addresses a word—1. To all who are bearing Christian protest against evil. 2. To all who are undergoing severe temptation. 3. To all who are labouring for the good of the world. 4. To all who are engaged in controversy on behalf of Christian doctrine. If we had to defend everything and fight everything in our own strength, and for our own ends, the case would be perfectly different; but when God says to us, "Ye have this treasure in earthen vessels; the excellency of the power is of God, and not of man," when he teaches us that we are servants and not masters, creatures and not creators, with no grasp of eternity, it becomes us patiently to wait, to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord [*Dr. Parker, City Temple*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 5-9. *Invocation of God as—*
I. The Ruler of the universe. 1. Seated in heaven. "God in heaven." 2. Governing all nations. "Rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen?" 3. Secure in his dominions. "None is able to withstand thee." **II. The covenant God of Judah.** 1. The friend of Abraham, the nation's founder. "Ahab thy friend for ever" (ver. 7). 2. The guardian of the nation's interests. "Thou didst drive out the inhabitants, &c." 3. The centre of the nation's worship. "A sanctuary therein for thy name." "Jehoshaphat's appeal is threefold—1. 'Art thou not the God omnipotent, and so able to help us?' 2. 'Art thou not our God, who hast given us this land, and so art bound to help us against invaders?' And 3. 'Art thou not the God of this place, the temple, and so bound to help those who pray to thee here?'" [*Speak. Com.*].

Ver. 7. *Ab. thy friend.* 1. By familiarity in devotion (*cf.* Gen. xviii. 23-33). 2. By promptitude in obedience. 3. By uprightness of life (*cf.* Gen. xvii. 1-22; xxii. 1-18).

Ver. 17. *Salvation of the Lord.* 1. The deliverance, *salvation*. Reference

always to evil, *i.e.*, dangers in Old Testament, sins under the gospel. 2. Its greatness. "Of the Lord," not by human power. So great "salvation" that every other is nothing; not only from evils, but to privileges. 3. Method of securing it. Stand still. Picture Israel at Red Sea. "Set yourselves" in hope and firm alliance; "stand still," not in your power to do anything; "see," wait in faith, watch God's work for you. Wholly from him, not from you. "In thee, O God, do we put our trust; our souls wait on thee."

Ver. 20. *Believe and be established.* Faith in God's presence, and God's promise, confirms experience in God's mercy, gives courage in conflict, and establishes peace and prosperity. Unbelief brings fear, frustrates God's promise, and turns victory into defeat. Faith in God alone will overcome conflicts in heart and convulsions in the world.

Ver. 21. *Beauty of Holiness.* Rich apparel and ornaments of old, typical of moral character and holy life. "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

HOMILETICS.

SONGS BEFORE VICTORY.—Verse 21.

Anybody can sing the "Te Deum" when the battle is over. The difference between an ordinary man-of-war and a Christian is this: a Christian shouts before the victory, because he knows it is sure to come.

I. We learn here, first, a lesson of patriotism. The foreign policy of Ammon and Moab seemed very brilliant for a time. They carried everything before them, but in due time were overthrown. We must not trust in the numbers of our soldiers, in the boundless resources of our country, but in the beauty of holiness, in the justice of our cause, in the purity of our motive; in one word, in the blessing of our God. II. The special object of the lesson is to illustrate the history of the Christian Church, for the Christian Church is engaged in holy war. If we go forth to war we must do as Jehoshaphat; we must be clothed with the spirit of holiness. God came down to fill the hearts of his children; then they were ready for the great work. The Pentecostal blessing delivered the early Christians from the three hindrances to the progress of the Gospel—cowardice, selfishness, and ignorance. Catch the spirit of the Apostles, and you will save the whole world [*H. P. Hughes*].

JEHOSHAPHAT'S CHARACTER AND REIGN.—*Verses 31-34.*

I. His general uprightness of character. "He walked in the way of Asa, his father," earnestly and constantly. Regarded God's approval and will, "doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord." A prosperous and successful ruler, his kingdom flourished, and he died in peace. **II. His besetting sins.** Leaned to his own understanding in momentous concerns; put policy before principle, and sowed seeds of evil which lived and fructified long after death. 1. In his *son's marriage* with Ahab's daughter. 2. In his *guilty alliances* with kings of Israel. Alliances in war, in commerce. The subtlety of worldly wisdom, and the spurious kindness of worldly liberality interfered with the simplicity of faith in God and love toward man. "As the *dead fly*, though only a little creature, gives *ill-savour* to most costly *ointment*; so even a small degree of *folly* mars a fair *reputation for wisdom and honour*" (Ecc. x. 1).

THE WRECKED FLEET.—*Verses 35-37.*

I. Notice first the disaster to Jehoshaphat's shipping. The eastern arm of Red Sea, Gulf of Akabah, is much deeper than the western; a narrow, deep ravine, with steep and rocky sides, the valley of which it forms part stretching far away to the north, till where it holds in its trough the waters of the Dead Sea. Down through the mountain gorge swept the mad hurricane with resistless might, shattering the ships of Jehoshaphat to pieces, and leaving the grey morning to look upon only pitiful wreckage all along the shore. **II. Notice the cause of this disaster.** A judgment from Heaven. The grand mistake and sin of Jehoshaphat lay in associating himself with the enemies of God. This the signal error of his life. If he had been an openly wicked man, a mere man of the world, probably this disaster would not have occurred, but God would not allow one of his own servants to prosper in such an undertaking. **III. The lesson which the disaster teaches is this—**Do not choose your associates amongst those who do not fear the Lord. Always safest to keep under Christian influences. A man is rarely better than the company he keeps. Jehoshaphat may hope to bring Ahaziah up to his own level; but Ahaziah is much more likely to bring Jehoshaphat down. The lesson of the text bears also, and with peculiar point, upon all business alliances. You will do well even to sacrifice a measure of financial interest and worldly prospect rather than be associated in business with a man who is out of all sympathy with you in religion [*J. Thain Davidson*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 20, 21. **I. The march to battle.** With musical strains. In confidence of victory. Under divine command (vers. 26, 27). **II. The joyous return.** In solemn order. In grateful spirit. In triumphant victory.

Vers. 26-30. *The valley of blessing.* Wady Bereikut, two miles west of Tekoa. Jews assembled here after three days' plunder, to arrange themselves, and return to worship in temple.

1. The place of terrible conflict. 2. Of

awful defeat. 3. Of enthusiastic joy. *Jehoshaphat* means Jehovah judges, hence this valley the type of final conflict and final judgment, in which *Jehovah* will *judge* and overthrow (*cf.* Joel iii. 2-12).

Vers. 35-37. *The wrecked fleet.* 1. The cause from God, who reigns over elements of nature and minds of men (Spanish Armada). 2. The design to instruct. Jehoshaphat had formed worldly alliances; could not be weaned

from them, nor see their folly. Disaster predicted (see history), yet refused good advice. Hence must

teach that his blessing rests not upon men and ways which are contrary to his will.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 4. *Seek*. Seek God upon thy way, and he will come to thee [*Schiller*].

Vers. 17, 18. *Stand ye*. Prayer without watching is hypocrisy, and watching without prayer is presumption [*Jay*].

“Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for the appointed hour;
And fit us by thy grace to share
The triumphs of thy conquering power.”

Vers. 35-37. *Gold*. Midas longed for gold, and insulted the Olympians. He got gold, so that whatever he touched became gold, and he with his long ears was little the better for it. Midas had insulted Apollo and the gods; the gods gave him his wish, and a pair of long ears, which also were a good appendage to it. What a truth in these old fables! [*Carlyle*].

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter corresponds with 2 Ki. viii. 16-24; contains Jehoshaphat's family arrangements (vers. 1-4); beginning and character of Jehoram's reign (vers. 5-11); the writing of Elijah to Jehoram (vers. 12-15); the end of Jehoram's reign (vers. 16-20).

Vers. 1-4.—*Family arrangements of J.* Six sons, towards whom he pursued the same policy as Rehoboam (ch. xi. 23). This probably provoked the jealousy of Jehoram and induced him to put them to death. *J. firstborn* (ver. 3), whose natural right to succeed was carried out (Deut. xxi. 15). *Divers*, Jehoram's brothers, supported by some chief men in country; or suspected of disloyalty.

Vers. 5-11.—*Character of J.'s reign.* Ver. 5. *Eight years*. According to 2 Ki. viii. 16, began in fifth year of Joram, K. of Is., therefore in twenty-second year of Jehoshaphat. Four of his eight years coincided nearly with the last four years of his father's reign, and after his father's death he reigned four years [cf. *Murphy*]. Ver. 6. *Daughter*, i.e., the grand-daughter of Omri (2 Ki. viii. 26). Ver. 7. The promise to David and an explanation of God's patience to Jehoram. Ver. 8. *Edom*. Flourishing kingdom of Jehoshaphat dwindling away. Edomites governed since time of David (1 Ki. xxii. 47; 2 Ki. iii. 9) revolted. Defeated in first, they made another attempt, succeeded, and *Libnah*, on south frontier towards Edom, followed example. Ver. 11. *Fornication*, signifying unfaithfulness in following other gods (cf. 2 Ki. ix. 22).

Vers. 12-15.—*Elijah's writing to J.* The document in question is not called a letter (*iggereth* or *sepher*), but a writing (*micetab*), *Words*. The only notice of E. in Chronicles. As prophet of northern kingdom, natural that he should engage but slightly the historian of southern one. Notice one of considerable interest. Shows that E. did not confine attention to affairs of his own state, but looked beyond its borders, to check progress of idolatry in Judah. It proves that the prophet was upon earth after the death of Jehoshaphat (ver. 13), whence it follows (1) that the account of his translation occurs in Kings out of its chronological order, and that (2) Elisha, who prophesied in the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Ki. iii. 11-19), commenced his public ministry before his master's translation [*Speak. Com.*]. Some think this was not E. the *Tishbite*, but one distinct from him; others that this should be *Elisha*. Ver. 13. *Way*, extreme measures which dishonoured God; *better*, not idolators, as thou art. Ver. 14. *Plague*, stroke, invasion of Philistines (vers. 16 and 17). Ver. 15. *Disease*, a chronic and incurable dysentery. Ver. 17. *Brake*, i.e.,

"wasted it" (Vulg., *vastaverunt*), applied to cities (*cf.* ch. xxii. 1; Jer. xxix. 2; Ezek. xxx. 16).

Vers. 18-20. — *End of Jehoram's reign.* Cut off by his malady in two years. *No burning*, not honoured by his subjects; *desired*, unregretted. Custom of giving or withholding funeral honours introduced from Egypt into Judæa.

HOMILETICS.

THE SUCCESSION OF JEHORAM.—*Verses* 1-20.

I. The cruelty by which he entered upon his reign. "Slew all his brethren." In covetousness for their positions, or jealous at their authority. Pretending he was not secure, or under false accusation. Grievous sin to cut off kindred because better than ourselves (*ver.* 13). Fratricide common. Kings filled with "maliciousness, envy, murder" (*Rom.* i. 29).

"Base envy withers at another's joy,
And hates the excellence it cannot reach" [*Thomson*].

II. The wickedness which dishonoured his reign. He began wrong and went on to worse. 1. *He walked in idolatrous ways.* "Like as did the house of Ahab" (*ver.* 6). The husband of a wicked woman, he became corrupt, idolatrous, and vile. 2. *He drew his people into the same snare.* He encouraged whoredom in high places. By counsel and example, by force and penalties, "compelled Judah thereto" (*ver.* 11). In a land where the true God resided, the sad spectacle beheld of king and people forsaking his service and giving themselves to excesses and abominations of heathen gods! **III. The calamities to which wickedness exposed his reign.** God forsaken, subjects withdrew allegiance, no defence. 1. *Tributary provinces rebelled.* Edom revolted and made themselves a king (*ver.* 8). Lebnah, a city in his own kingdom, threw off his yoke (*ver.* 10). Arabians encouraged to rebellion (*ver.* 16). Thus, 2. *The kingdom almost politically extinguished.* By destruction of his army, capture of Jerusalem, and plunder of royal palace; by devastation of the country and deportation of royal family (*ver.* 17). Wicked men insecure in business, position, and prospects. "A man shall not be established by wickedness."

IV. The sad events which terminated his reign through wickedness. Sins great and retribution grievous, "a great stroke" (*ver.* 14). 1. *Loathsome disease in his person.* 2. *Unregretted in his life.* 3. *Dishonoured in death.* At the early age of 40 smitten with disease, a nuisance to himself and others. The palace turned into a hospital and a tomb. Not loved in life, not lamented in death. Denied a royal sepulchre, and only out of respect allowed interment in the city of David! Sad picture, awful moral!

JEHOSHAPHAT'S FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS.—*Verses* 1-4.

I. Prudent in plan. The eldest son appointed to succeed, the others governors of cities and enriched with "gifts of silver and of gold." This very arrangement might provoke jealousy. Look further than time and higher than worldly prudence. **II. Difficult in execution.** Jehoram not established without struggle; slew his brothers, with princes attached to their interest or ready to avenge their deaths. Thus he disappointed the good intentions of his father, and, like many, founded his kingdom in blood (*Hab.* ii. 12). **III. Frustrated in purpose.** We arrange, others upset. "Things excellently designed," says Cicero, "have often a very ill event." Often special trial to leave the fruits of labour, the treasures of home and empire, "unto the man that shall be after us." Will they be devoted to perpetuate a godly name or desecrated to the world? "And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?" (*Ecc.* ii. 18, 19; *cf.* *Pss.* xlix. 10, xxxix. 6).

THE LAMP OF DAVID'S HOUSE.—Verse 7.

Apostasy would have led to entire extinction of royal family, but for the divine promise to David "to give alway a light (candle or lamp) to his children" (2 Ki. viii. 24). **I. How the lamp was kindled.** A divine "gift." All rights from God. None can create a family, build a kingdom without him. "I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed." **II. How the lamp was preserved from extinction.** The same power that lit, kept the light burning. Wickedness of the king, abominations of the people and surrounding darkness of idolatry almost destroyed it. God remembered and fulfilled his promise. "For thou wilt light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (Ps. xviii. 29). **III. How the lamp will permanently shine.** The dynasty of David the source of light to all generations—raised from degradation and persecution to honour and prosperity. The past a pledge for future. In Christ the light shall shine for ever, can never be darkened nor extinguished. "Unto his (Solomon's) son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a *light* (lamp) *alway* before me in Jerusalem?" (1 Ki. xi. 36).

JEHORAM A WARNING HISTORY.

I. In marriage neutralising effect of religious education. Good influences and pious training of early days neutralised. Association with wicked made him an idolator, worldling, and profligate. A wedding-day may be a wrong start and turn the joy of life into mourning. **II. In conduct entailing sufferings upon himself and descendants.** His example pernicious, transmitted poison to successive generations, brought terrible retribution upon himself and his kingdom. Achan "perished not alone in his iniquity." **III. In life a fearful warning to all.** To *parents* not to marry their children for policy or profit; to guard their associations, friendships, and alliances; above all, to set a good example, lest folly in them becomes sin in their offspring. To *young people* to shun evil companions and never forget the claims of truth and God. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 6-11. *The unfaithful king.* Calamities which befel Jehoram appended "because he had forsaken the Lord God of his father." 1. *Seduced by his wife.* Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, a worshipper of Baal. "There needs no more than a bad wife to undo a family" (Bp. Patrick). 2. *Encouraged idolatrous practice.* Established altars in high places; set up groves, images, and pillars, and filled the country with heathen abominations. 3. *Forced the people to follow his example.* "Compelled Judah" (ver. 11). "This was the worse, because in Jerusalem, the holy city; and because he caused them to do it, partly by his

allurements and partly by affrightments, as did Julian also the apostate, *qui persuadendo persecutus est*" [Trapp].

Vers. 12-15. *Elijah's writing.* When written? how sent? for what purpose? Learn the word of God sent to correct, if despised may become our worst enemy. This letter foretold the doom of the king, but unheeded and sad prediction fulfilled. "Why is he not then better believed? If some astrologer had once or twice prognosticated, and it proved true, he should be much carried up and credited. And shall not God's prophets be so? 'Believe the prophets and ye shall prosper.' But many believe them no

otherwise than they do the predictions of an almanack, if so much" [*Trapp*].

Vers. 19, 20. *No burning.* Dishonoured by his subjects. On account of (1) sins he committed, (2) cala-

mities of his reign, (3) humiliating nature of his death. J. died in bloom of manhood, but lived long enough to teach that "he that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity."

CHAPTER XXII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] In this chapter the reign of Ahaziah (vers. 1-6); his end (vers. 7-9); and usurpation of Athaliah (vers. 10-12). Parallel in 2 Ki. viii. 24-29; ix. 27; and xi. 1-3.

Vers. 1-4.—*Succession and beginning of A.* Ah. (called Jehoahaz, xxi. 17) chosen by the people, elder brothers slain by Arabs and could not be ransomed. *Forty and two*, an error of transcription for 22 (2 Ki. viii. 26), for J., his father, not more than 40 at death (xxi. 20); *daughter, i.e.*, grand-daughter of Omri, founder of family (2 Ki. viii. 18-26). Ver. 3. *He also* as well as his father walked, &c. Ver. 4. *They*, Athaliah and Jehoram of Israel, her brother (*cf.* vers. 1, 3, 5).

Vers. 5-9.—*Visit of A. to Jehoram.* This ver. and next have come from a source used also by writer of Kings, and are nearly identical with 2 Ki. viii. 28, 29 [*Speak. Com.*]. War of two kings against Hazael, aggressive to recover Ramoth-Gil., which Ahab and Jehoshaphat had failed to do fourteen years earlier (1 Ki. xxii. 3-36). J. wounded by Syrians withdrew from siege of Jezreel, leaving his army under Jehu within the walls of town. Ahaz. went to visit Joram, and met with death. Ver. 8. *Sons*, princes of royal house, on a visit met with Jehu, and 42 of them slain (2 Ki. x. 14). Ver. 9. *Hide*, about to hide in Samaria, where friends (2 Ki. x. 12-15) were, but turned aside by pursuers, brought to Jehu, was wounded mortally, fled and died at Megiddo. None left of royal house to assume rule.

Vers. 10-12.—*Athaliah's usurpation* (*cf.* 2 Ki. xi. 1-3). *Seed royal*, who aspired to govern. *Bed-chamber*, in a chamber of mattresses, a repository for beds, not a lodging chamber. *Jeh.*, as priest, had a right to occupy buildings in outer wall, and resided in one of these apartments.

HOMILETICS.

AHAZIAH'S WICKED REIGN.—Verses 1-9.

I. Its beginning through home influence. Here all start life in right or wrong direction. Foundations then laid, habits then formed, are permanent factors in future years. To begin life without godly training and virtuous principles will ensure failure, often early and final. Home influence affects societies, churches, and nations. "They that rock the cradle rule the world," said Napoleon. **II. Its continuance by evil counsellors.** A. and her brother counselled A. (ver. 4). Bad training, bad advice. Formed in childhood, directed as a man, how could his reign be otherwise? "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," and the larger the number the greater the safety. To one such Pharaoh owed the security of his kingdom from desolating famine. But "where no counsel is," or only evil counsel, "the people must fall" (Prov. xi. 14). A nation with evil legislators like a ship directed in the midst of rocks in imminent peril. "The counsels of the wicked are deceit."

III. Its end in judgment which it entailed. A. survived to be the ruin of her son, as she had been the bane of her husband (ver. 10). Under her influence he began a career of ungodliness and licentiousness which ended in his destruction. Certain and irretrievable ruin results from wicked counsel and wicked life. "How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger."

THE POWER OF A MOTHER'S INFLUENCE.—Verse 3.

For is a kind of explanation, the reason assigned for results which are given. "For his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly." **I. It begins early in life.** Education begins sooner than parents imagine; long enough before they are responsible; even when they begin to see, feel, and observe. Hence great importance to have first teaching of a child. Early impressions are elementary principles out of which mature life is organised. "When should I begin the education of my children now four years old?" asked a mother from a clergyman, who replied, "Madam, if you have not begun already you have lost those four years. From the first smile that gleams upon an infant's cheek your opportunity begins." **II. It moulds through life.** A living power, forming character and directing conduct. The child becomes a man, the subject becomes a sovereign; influence is thus repeated and transmitted. Home the most powerful school in the world. Mother's influence for good or evil mightier than pulpits and thrones. "My opinion is," said Napoleon, "that the future good or bad conduct of a child depends entirely on the mother." **III. It leaves permanent impress upon life.** Alexander the Great could never correct the faults of gait and manners learned in childhood from Leonidas, his master. The face, words, and example of mothers leave permanent influence. "Every first thing continues for ever with the child; the first colour, the first music, the first flower, paint the foreground of life. Every new educator effects less than his predecessor; until, at last, if we regard all life as an educational institute, a circumnavigator of the world is less influenced by all the nations he has seen than by his nurse" [*Richter*].

"The fond attachment to the well-known place,
Whence first we started into life's long race,
Retains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day" [*Comper*].

THE DEATH OF AHAZIAH.—Verses 6-9.

I. Untimely in its method. Neither advanced in life, nor delicate in health. On a friendly visit to see a sick relative! Surely this errand of pity the occasion of gladness, not grief? Death everywhere at home and abroad, in our own families and those of friends. From the desk, the pulpit, and the throne we may be suddenly carried to the grave. **II. Brought about by companionship with evil men.** Intimacy with Joram involved him in the common ruin of Ahab's house. "Tell me with whom thou goest, and I will tell thee what thou art," is the Spanish proverb; rendered into English, "A man is known by the company he keeps." To be seen with the frivolous is to be known as frivolous; to have friendship with the wise is to enjoy reputation for wisdom; but "a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

"Heaven with a secret principle endued
Mankind to seek their own similitude."

III. Arranged by the providence of God. "And the destruction of A. was of God by coming to J." (ver. 7). Remarkable that threatened

vengeance was brought on house of Ahab at the very time King of Judah was visiting Joram, that he might partake of punishment as a descendant of wicked Ahab. No evidence that Jehu fixed on this time from wish to include Ahaziah in punishment; nor was he aware of his presence at Jezreel. Unexpected concurrence of circumstances. All result of immutable purpose, and accomplished by a wonderful arrangement of Providence in time and place. May escape for a time, but no concealment from divine retribution.

WOMEN GOOD AND BAD.—*Verses 10-12.*

What a contrast in these verses! Two females acting very different parts. **I. A bad woman engaged in wicked designs.** Athaliah endeavours to destroy seed royal after death of her son. To this wickedness impelled in rage at destruction of Ahab's family, hence David's family must share the same fate; in zeal for idolatry and worship of Baal, which she was determined to uphold amid opposition; in regard to her own defence and in ambitious desire to usurp the throne and transmit the crown to her own family. "Athaliah had inherited the spirit of Jezebel, her mother. As wife of Joram and mother of Ahaziah, she had guided both the internal and the external policy of the Jewish kingdom; she had procured the establishment of the worship of Baal in Judæa (2 Ki. viii. 18-27), and had maintained a close alliance with the sister kingdom. The revolution effected by Jehu touched her nearly. It struck away from her the entire support which she derived from the power and grandeur of her relatives and their readiness to help her at need. It isolated her religious system, severing the communication with Phœnicia. Moreover, the death of Ahaziah deprived her of her legal status in Judæa, which was that of *Gebirah*, or queen-mother, and transferred that position to the chief wife of her deceased son. Under these circumstances, which might well have daunted even a woman of more than ordinary courage, Athaliah's hereditary spirit and energy asserted itself. Instead of yielding to the storm, or merely standing on the defensive, she resolved to become the assailant, and, before any plans could be formed against her, to strike" [*Speak. Com.*]. **II. A good woman engaged in benevolent designs.** The family of David not entirely destroyed. J., daughter of Joram (not of Athaliah, *Josephus*), wife of Jehoiada, the high priest, took Joash, her nephew, to conceal and save him (ver. 11). The lineage of David and the human descent of Messiah suspended on the life of a child one year old! This loyal act a benevolent work, the means of fulfilling prophetic words and blessing the world! Women may be devils or ministering angels. "If once she falls, it is the fall of Lucifer" [*Colton*]. But "in great crises it is woman's special lot to soften our misfortunes" [*Napoleon*].

"Her office there to rear, to teach,
Becoming, as is meet and fit,
A link among the days, to knit
The generations each with each" [*Tennyson*].

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter parallel with 2 Ki. xi. 4-20, evidently from same source, although presenting certain points of difference. In Ki. narrative related from civil point of view, in Chronicles writer concerns himself mainly with the ecclesiastical aspect of the transaction [*Speak. Com.*]. Joash is made king (vers. 1-11); Athaliah slain (vers. 12-15); and worship restored (vers. 16-21).

Vers. 1-11.—Joash made King. J. strengthened, braced himself to the effort from which he had previously shrunk [*Speak. Com.*]. *Captains,* centurions of royal guards loyal to legitimate heir of crown. *Covenant* for overthrow of Athaliah's tyranny. *Ver. 2. Gathered,* probably at time of festivals, to disarm suspicion. *Israel, i.e.,* Judah. *Ver. 3. Congregation,* select Levites and trusty persons, collected by captains from various cities. *Said,* Jehoiada said, pointing to Joash. *Lord* (2 Sam. viii. 12, 13). *Ver. 4. Ye.* Levites received orders, in Ki. orders to royal guard given. *Entering,* Levites released each other every Sabbath day (1 Chron. ix. 25). *Porters,* watchmen. *Doors,* Hebrew thresholds. *Ver. 5. Courts,* people not admitted ordinarily, on this occasion allowed to witness proceedings. Remember Athaliah had completely desecrated the entire enclosure [*Speak. Com.*]. *Ver. 6. Watch,* see that no worshippers of Baal forced their way in. *Ver. 7. Compass,* Levites not engaged as indicated to surround king at entrance and exit. *Ver. 8. Dismissed,* not to keep a sufficient force for the occasion; armed them within temple courts to avoid suspicion (ver. 9), and equipped "all the people," *i.e.,* combined princes, guards, and Levites, who surrounded the king. *Ver. 11. Testimony.* The law according to which he was to rule (Deut. xvii. 18).

Vers. 12-15.—Athaliah is slain. She is permitted to enter outer court without a guard. *Ver. 13. Pillar,* platform on which king elevated to be seen. *Treason,* conspiracy. She was taken out of temple grounds to *horse gate* (for king's mules), and there slain (2 Ki. xi. 16-18; xxiii. 2, 6, 12).

Vers. 16-21.—Jehoiada's reforms. J. represented the Lord (2 Ki. xi. 17); ratified the covenant to be the Lord's people (ver. 16); destroyed temple of Baal (ver. 17); and arranged for restoration of priests and Levites, singers and porters. *Ver. 20. Brought down,* escorted king to palace, through *high gate,* chief gate of outer court (gate of guard, 2 Ki. xi. 19). *Quiet,* a bloodless revolution (except Athaliah's death) and free from tyranny and idolatry.

HOMILETICS.

JOASH MADE KING.—Verses 1-11.

Six years of Athaliah's tyranny had ripened the people for revolution. They were weary and ready for change. Agents and managers at hand, and the revolution was successful. **I. The measures adopted.** "Every step was taken in accordance with the usages which had been gradually gaining head during the previous reigns, and all the means which his office placed at the disposal of Jehoiada were freely employed" [Stanley]. 1. *He concerted with the leaders of the army.* Indirect communication with the five officers of loyal guard, whom he bound by solemn oath. 2. *He enlisted the co-operation of the Levites.* These divided into three bands: one to guard the king, the other two posted at doors and gates. Captains and military officers entered the temple unarmed to lull suspicion, and furnished with sacred armoury. All courts of temple filled with those favourable to the cause, and secret kept wonderfully. "The words of the wise are heard in quiet" (Ecclus. ix. 17). **II. The leading man to arrange them.** Jehoiada chief in this conspiracy. A man of prudence, piety, and commanding position. United by marriage with the royal family, he sought to overturn the usurper, and restore lawful sovereignty. As high priest it was his duty officially to watch over the temple and execute the laws of God. In his signal services to God, his king, and country he was

supported by chief authorities civil and religious, counselled by the prophets of his time, and directed by divine guidance. He earned a foremost name in Israel, and was buried with honour in the city of David. **III. The time in which the measures were carried out.** Success depends upon time, the exact moment as well as method. The Sabbath was the day fixed. Needful to have as large a force as possible. Those detained who under other circumstances would have gone home. But the excitement of the moment did not make J. forget the sanctity of God's house. None but priests and ministering Levites permitted to enter, and strict orders given to take Athaliah out of its precincts. **IV. The success which attended the execution of the measures.** At the given signal the king was exhibited and crowned. Bystanders clapped hands together and raised the national shout, "Long live the king." Trumpeters announced the royal inauguration. Athaliah entered the temple, saw the fatal hour was come, rent her royal robes, and cried out, "Conspiracy, conspiracy!" but the temple was kept from pollution; the throne of David was preserved, and the worship of God restored. A revolution carried out with tact, unanimity, and with little bloodshed. "All the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet."

THE REFORMS OF JEHOIADA.—Verses 15-21.

Only part of work done by overthrow of tyranny and death of Athaliah, to complete revolution government must be settled and interests of religion secured. **I. The national covenant was renewed.** A covenant with Israel "to be unto him a people for inheritance" (Deut. iv. 6; xxvii. 9; Ex. xix.). A threefold covenant by which the king bound himself to rule according to divine rule, and the people pledged themselves to be loyal to him as God's representative—by which the king and people agreed to "be the Lord's people." Sensible of obligation to God, we are bound closer to one another. Men first give themselves to the Lord and then to us (2 Cor. viii. 5). Starting in this spirit they are more likely to prosper in families, churches, and kingdoms. **II. The idolatry of Baal was destroyed.** This immediate fruit of the renewal of covenant. Baal's temples, altars, and images shattered to pieces by popular fury. Beside the altar fell the priest of Baal, for God commanded that seducers to idolatry should be put to death (Deut. xiii. 5, 6). Sins must be forsaken and overcome; every usurper in heart and life dethroned, and God's reign supreme over all. **III. The worship of Jehovah was restored.** Priests were appointed to their courses, and sacrifices duly offered. Singers and porters arranged according to former custom. Praise and thanksgiving filled the courts of God's house, and worship restored in its ancient purity. **IV. The throne of Judah was established.** The young king wonderfully preserved, was brought down from the temple to the palace, seated on the throne—"the throne of the kings of Judah" (2 Kings xi. 19)—and crowned as lawful sovereign. "Through the priesthood the lineage of David had been saved and the worship of Jehovah restored in Judah, even more successfully than it had been in Samaria through the prophets" [Stanley]. **V. The priesthood was elevated to highest honour.** "During minority of Joash, Jehoiada virtually reigned. The very office in some sense created by him. He raised the priesthood to an importance which (with single exception of Eli) it had never before attained in history of the Jewish nation, and which it never afterwards altogether lost. The name of 'High Priest,' which had not been given to Aaron, or Eli, or Zadok, was given to him, and afterwards continued to his successors. He was regarded as a second founder of the order, so that in after days he, rather than Aaron, is described as the chief" [Stanley].

TEMPLE WORSHIP RESTORED AND ESTABLISHED.—Verses 15–21.

Reparation of this venerable fabric first object, and one of the great events of his reign. From Joash seemed to come the impulse. "Joash was minded to restore the house of the Lord." It had suffered from neglect, been spoiled of its treasures, and only a faded remnant of former splendour. **I. In its structure and worship.** Its outward form, its foundations had been injured, "broken up" (ch. xxiv. 7) by Athaliah's workmen taking away stones for her own temple. Priests had not taken care to repair the breaches, but the king zealous. Sad to see ministers dilatory in sacred duties, professors with mere form becoming careless and hypocritical! *Spiritually* its worship was restored in purity and attraction. Officers appointed for departments, lawful sacrifices offered, and true service revived. **II. In its method of support.** An account of measures adopted (2 Kings xii.). Three sorts of money levied—redemption money, estimation money, and freewill offerings. This method seemed to have failed for some reason, and the plan adopted in chapter xxiv. (*cf.* outline). **III. In its principles and design.** Its purpose to remind of God and his claims, to afford the privilege of meeting and praising God. In teaching it set moral before ritual, intoned the minds of kings, the lives of the people, and the traditions of the nation. From God came restoration from danger, elevation to honour, and prosperity to all ranks. Hence needful to have a fixed place to cultivate reverence and social fellowship; to embody order and devotional life. Common worship is the necessity of our nature and the command of Scripture; the indestructive principle of Sabbatic law and temple ritual. The recognition of God—the formal recognition of him by the people as Ruler, Saviour, and Portion—is the germinal moral principle of duty and religion.

"One place there is—beneath the burial sod,
Where all mankind are equalised by death;
Another place there is—the fane of God,
Where all are equal who draw living breath."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 10–13. Joash made King. 1. Presented in the temple. 2. Crowned with the diadem and testimony. "It is the first direct example of a *coronation*. The diadem, probably a band studded with jewels, was placed on his head by the high priest, and upon it the sacred 'testimony,' which, in the reign of Jehoshaphat, had been raised into new importance. It seemed like the intimation of a limitation to the king's despotic power—an indication that he was not to be, like David, above, but beneath the law of his country" [*Stanley*]. 3. Anointed with sacred oil. According to Hebrew text, 2 Ki. xi. 12, by people; to LXX. (of same), by Jehoiada; to 2 Chr. xxiii. 11, by Jehoiada and his sons. 4. Accepted by the nation. Trumpets and shouting, "God save, lit. Long live the king"

(*ver. 11*). A form used among Continental nations, as the French "Vive le Roi." "Our own form of loyal acclamation comes from the ritual of daily responses and of the ancient coronation service, 'Domine, salvum fac Regem,' which is taken from Ps. xix. 9, as in Sept. and Vulgate Versions. Coverdale translation (1537) gives 'God save the new kynge'; Geneva (1560) 'God save the kynge.' The Authorised Versions of 1539 and 1572 had 'God send the kynge life'" [*J. H. Blunt*].

Ver. 11. The crown and the testimony. Two important symbols. The crown the sign of power, and the law the sign of theocratic wisdom. "Finely are both the crown and the book presented to the king, that he might be not only mighty, but also wise, or (as

we may say) know God's word and right. Thus even now we make kings with a sword and book" [*Luther*].

Vers. 12-15. *Death of Athaliah*. 1. By secret plot. 2. By agency of high priest. 3. By co-operation of the people. 4. As a righteous judgment. "This woman ruled viciously, selfishly, without regard to patriotic instinct or

patriotic right, and having filled the cup of her iniquity, the people arose, and Athaliah was slain with the sword" [*Parker*]. Athaliah might well have written, as Mary Queen of Scots did in a window at Fotheringay Castle:—

"From the top of all my trust
Mishap hath laid me in the dust" [*Trapp*].

CHAPTER XXIV

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter parallel with 2 Ki. xii.; gives same order of events with fresh matter and in different style. Joash's interest in religion under guidance of Jehoiada (vers. 1-14); forsakes the God of his fathers after death of Jehoiada (vers. 15-22); distressed by Syrians and put to death by his servants (vers. 23-27).

Vers. 1-14.—*Zeal of Joash under influence of Jehoiada*. Days, Jehoiada lived after accession of Joash twenty-three years (2 Ki. xii. 6). Idolatry of king confined to last ten or fifteen years. Ver. 3. *Two wives*, anxious to secure succession to throne, and limit licence which kings permitted themselves (1 Ki. xi. 3; 2 Chr. xi. 21; xiii. 21). Ver. 4. *Repair*, renew, strengthen. Levites hastened not, through limited funds or indifference (ver. 5). Ver. 6. *Collection*, tax assigned by law for tabernacle; half a shekel from every one (Ex. xxx. 12-16; xxxviii. 25). Ver. 7. *Sons*, **Ahaziah** and elder brothers (xxi. 17), devoted to idolatry, and who carried out their mother's designs against temple. Ver. 8. *Chest*, full particulars 2 Ki. xii. 9. Ver. 9. *Collection*, contributions flowed in after proclamation. Ver. 10. *End*, until enough to complete restoration. Ver. 12. *Did work*, overseers of work (2 Ki. xii. 11). Ver. 13. *Perfected*, lit. the healing (binding, cf. Neh. iv. 1; Jer. xxx. 17) went up (was laid, Jer. viii. 22). *State*, lit. on its measure, original proportions Ex. xxx. 32. Ver. 14. *To minister*, refurnishing temple with utensils, &c.

Vers. 15-22.—*Joash declines after the death of Jehoiada*. This paragraph not in Kings. *Full of days*, not applied to many. Years unparalleled from Exodus downwards. Many dispute this age, others see no reason to do so. Ver. 17. *Obeisance*, flattered the king, requested toleration for idolatry. *Hearkened*, yielded to them. Ver. 19. *Prophets*, names not mentioned, except Zech., who warned of danger. Ver. 20. *Spirit came clothed*. Ver. 21. *Conspired*, they would inflame the king, urge him to extreme measures. *Stones*, the punishment for idolators (Lev. xx. 2). *Court*, between temple and altar (Mt. xxiii. 35). Ver. 22. *Said*, dying words of Zech. utterance of prophetic doom.

Vers. 23-27.—*Syrian invasion and death of J*. *End*, turn of the year; time of such expeditions. *Came*, led by Hazael, whom Joash bribed to withdraw from siege (2 Ki. xii. 18). *Destroyed*, a mere handful of men inflicted humiliating defeat upon collected force of Israel (ver. 24). Ver. 25. *Departed*, pressed on against Jerusalem after defeat of Joash's army, but retreated because enriched by gold of temple (2 Ki. xii. 18). *Diseases*, plural of intensity, sore distress. *Bed*, where he lay sick. Ver. 26. *Zabad*, Zachar perhaps originally, as letters are of like form; in Kings, Jozachar. *Shim.*, Ki. Shomer. Mothers only given. Ver. 27. *Burdens*, according to common usage in prophetic writings (2 Ki. ix. 25; Is. xiii. 1; Lam. ii. 14) are denunciations of coming evils [*Keil*] (ver. 19). *Story* (marg.), commentary, the memoir contained in state annals.

HOMILETICS.

REGARD FOR GOD'S HOUSE.—Verses 4-14.

Remarkable that first movement should come from the king and not the priest to restore temple. Jehoiada had permitted it to remain unrepaired during the

whole period of his regency. Now Joash, not regardless of the place which had given him shelter, displays zeal. **I. In repairing its physical structure.** "Mindful to *repair* (renew) the house," which was in decay. No right to permit dilapidations in God's house than in private property. We should keep it in repair, make it attractive and durable outside as well as inside. Many more concerned for their own than for God's house; build and adorn for themselves, but neglect God. "Is it time for you, O you, to dwell (at ease) in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. i. 4). **II. In urging others to interest themselves in this work.** J. consulted officers, advised them to collect expenses from the cities, reproved the high priest, and urged all to diligence. "See that ye hasten the matter" (ver. 5). Too long had they been negligent. The honour of God and the interests of the nation demanded exertion. Shamefully remiss are many who ought to be awake and first. Let us be alive ourselves, and excite others to the work. "Nothing of worth or weight can be achieved with half a mind, with a faint heart, with a lame endeavour," says South. **III. In creating a fund to keep it in repair.** 1. *A tax was levied upon the people* (ver. 5). Priests ordered to collect the three kinds of money (*cf.* 2 Ki. xii.), but were careless, and did not call upon the people, or people had little confidence in management of priests that they were reluctant to pay dues. What money was collected not applied to proper use. "The breeches of the house were not repaired." 2. *A freewill offering box was provided.* The general levy failed. A chest made, hole bored into lid, and placed at door to receive voluntary offerings of people. A separation thus made between money for repairs, "incidentals," and money for support of priests. This novel, touched the hearts of the people. Cheerfulness and sufficiency the result (ver. 11). Need of reform in management of Church finances. Great deficiency in serious consideration, conscientious liberality, enlightened system and Christian patriotism. **IV. In the lawful use of the fund thus created.** Formerly money sadly misappropriated. 1. *Duly audited by prop. r persons.* The Levites took the box to "the king's scribe, and the high priest's officer came and emptied it," counted it, put it into bags, labelled and sealed as customary, and delivered them to overseers of building to pay workmen and buy necessary materials. 2. *Thus nothing misappropriated.* Nothing lost. Confidence in financial business. No account exacted, overseers honest, and surplus, after repairs, appropriated to purchase of temple furniture (ver. 14). This a type of apostolic method, an example to the Christian Church. **V. In the completion of the work begun.** Many hindrances. Prevalence of idolatrous customs, official dilatoriness, failure of first plan, and lethargy of people. But work went on, priests ashamed, and consented to measures adopted. All difficulties finally overcome. "The work was *perfected* (healed), restored to beauty, *set in its measure and proportion, and strengthened in durability and structure*" (ver. 13).

The foregoing outline may suggest other thoughts. **I. It is natural for the believing heart to regard the house of God.** Its interests ever dear to the Christian. To him the temple is the house of bread—his Bethlehem; the centre of attraction, fellowship, and joy. It is instinctive for him to mind it, as it is natural for the hart to pant after the waterbrook, or doves to fly to their windows. **II. When men pay due regard to God's house, they will provide for its interests.** They build, and keep the fabric in repair; provide for sustenance of its agencies, and perpetuation of its worship; always and everywhere revere the place in which God is publicly worshipped. **III. In thus providing for the interests of God's house, they promote the welfare of the nation.** Both intimately connected. Associations of worship affect the education, culture, and morals of

the community. Public worship is the secret power of the Church, the nurse of virtue in the nation.

NATIONAL RELAPSE INTO IDOLATRY.—*Verses 17-24.*

A great change after death of Jehoiada. Many took part in revolution which dethroned Athaliah and placed Joash on the throne, on political not religious grounds. Dislike to rule of a woman, a foreigner, without zeal for pure religion, hence relapse. **I. Beginning with the demands of the princes.** "The princes of Judah" came to king (ver. 17). Worldly-minded, hating priestly power, and tired with thirty years' pure and simple worship, yearned for seductive rites of heathenism. They requested permission to worship in high places, not to be put to expensive and frequent journeys to Jerusalem. Advised the king to be more tolerant and less under priestly dominion. By unusual humility, framed a plausible and inoffensive petition, which was granted. **II. Encouraged by the concessions of the king.** Flattered by their "obeisance to the king," he hearkened to them. Pleased and weak-minded, their requests were more agreeable than the dictates of Jehoiada used to be. Princes often flattered and drawn into ruin by those who promised liberty. George III., after his accession, reprov'd a high dignitary for fulsome adulation, and issued an order prohibiting any clergyman called to preach before him from paying compliments to him. **III. Protested against by the warnings of the prophet.** Z., son of J., urged people from a prominent place not to transgress the commandments of the Lord. This would never prosper, but bring national disaster. Prompted by irresistible influence, he boldly protested against prevailing tendencies. But denunciations unpalatable to the king, roused fierce passions of multitude, and a band of miscreants, instigated by Joash, put him to death (*cf.* Mt. xxiii. 35). But the death of the prophet not the destruction of his message. **IV. Punished in awful judgments upon the nation.** The dying words, a prophetic doom of Z., fulfilled at end of the year. Syrians invaded the land, princes of people destroyed, and immense spoil sent to Damascus. How suggestive the words, "a *small* company of men" overcame "a *very great* host"! To men who estimate everything by great numbers and dazzling splendour, this would be a striking calamity. "Wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass."

THE DEATH OF JOASH.—*Verses 25-27.*

I. An end embittered by painful malady. "They left him in great diseases," which long confined him in bed. Plural of intensity, a severe malady. Charles IX. of France, author of Parisian massacre, died in great distress. Kingly dignity wards not off loathsome disease. **II. An end brought about by conspiracy.** Not even permitted to die peaceably in his own bed. Perhaps in hope of recovery or escape, his own servants conspired against him. A punishment degrading, depriving death of mitigations and friendships. **III. An end considered as divine judgment.** God smites wicked men in everything; end of one trouble beginning of another. The winds of divine judgments rise from every quarter, bend and break, and no escape from tempest. J. plagued with the Syrians and smitten with terrible disease, met with untimely death, and refused official honour in burial. The memory of the wicked doomed to perish. "Let him not be written with the righteous."

LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOASH.

The beginning well in outward actions and national government. But evident from the history that the rectitude of administration was owing to his preserver and tutor, not to his enlightened principles and sincere convictions.

I. The instability of his religion. 1. He was zealous for God under restraint. "Was minded to repair the house," in excitement and prosperity, but zeal died out. "When the sun went down the reflected brightness went with it." 2. He degenerated when that restraint was taken away. He depended upon wise counsel and piety of Jehoiada; when prop removed he fell. Had no root in himself, and left to his own resources, could not stand. Circumstances not principles made him what he was. When these changed he changed. His religion was temporary and superficial. He only "did right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (ver. 2).

II. The honour and disgrace of his reign. A mixed reign, marked with singular honour and stained with remarkable disgrace. 1. Honourable reforms. He rebuilt and restored temple. Established its order and worship, and thus removed national scandal. He reprovved officers in their languid work, adopted efficient means to finish it, and at length the temple stood in grandeur and dignity in which it was left by ancestors, the glory of his own reign and administration of Jehoiada. 2. Disgraceful crimes. Like Nero, after death of his teacher Seneca, the philosopher, he was stained with crimes. He not only made shipwreck of faith, but in a period of ten years, the restorer of the temple became an idolator; the ward of Jehoiada was the murderer of his son. A reign under excellent guardians (like many in the middle ages and modern times, German Emperors Otto III. and Henry IV., in many respects Louis XIV. of France) at first, ended in humiliation and war. The memory of a king hopeful in beginnings stands marked with blood and the ways of Cain.

III. The disastrous end of his life. Complicated in deeds of violence. Horrid outrage on a prophet of God—base ingratitude to a family who had preserved his life—atrocious treatment of a true Hebrew prophet—illegal exercise of power and authority as king—some of his acts. Invasion and defeat, severe disease, and smitten while languishing on his bed, by his own servants. "But they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings." The murderer of the son not permitted to sleep with that father whose memory he outrageously dishonoured. From this review learn—

1. The responsibility of those to whom care of young persons is entrusted.
2. Caution those yet under guardianship of friends and tutors.
3. The awful end of those who turn aside from hopeful beginnings.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. *Under minority of Joash.*

1. The king well trained and prepared for duty.
2. High priesthood increased in dignity. "Name 'High Priest' not given to Aaron, Eli, or Zadok, given to him and his successors; regarded as second founder, and in after days described as chief" [*Stanley*].
3. Morality lax. National religion mixed with worship "in high places." Temple neglected, and money misappropriated.

Vers. 8–11. *The alms chest.* "It is a curiously circumstantial record of a church restoration fund belonging to a period 2,730 years distant from our own time, and perhaps in the lifetime of Homer" [*Blunt*].

Vers. 15, 16. *Jehoiada.* As guardian-priest and patriot. Honoured in age, burial, and reputation, yet lacking in zeal and energy. Melancthon orthodox and learned, but accomplished no great reformation. Luther inferior in some

respects, a man for his times and work, bold and zealous, and, under God, effected deliverance from Popery, and the Reformation.

Vers. 18–23. *Murder of Zechariah.*

1. Horrid outrage on a prophet of the Lord. A sacred person, a Hebrew patriot. 2. An instance of base ingratitude. To a family who had preserved his life. 3. A deed of violence involving great criminality. Illegal and unjust exercise of power, bringing retribution upon king and nation. The last words, "*The Lord require it,*" not vindictive (then a great contrast to those of Stephen, Acts vii. 60), but a prophetic warning to Jews (Mt. xxiii. 35) in time of Jesus and to us. "The act produced a profound impression. It was a later Jewish tradition, but one which marks the popular feeling, that

this crowning crime of the House of Judah took place on the Sabbath day, on the great Day of Atonement, and that its marks were never to be effaced. The sacredness of the person and of the place, the concurrent guilt of the whole nation—king, nobles, and people—the ingratitude of the chief instigator, the culmination of long tragedy of the House of Omri, the position which the story held in the Jewish canon, as the last great murder of the last Book of the Old Testament, all conspired to give it the peculiar significance with which it is recorded in the Gospels as closing the catalogue of unrighteous deaths, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah . . . who was slain between the temple and the altar" [*Stanley*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 5. *Hasten.* "That I may be of the number of those that spend themselves with labour, and not of those who waste in rust and laziness. Lord! let me rather wear out in the work, than consume (like a garment laid by with moths) for want of use" [*Swinnoek's* "Christian Man's Calling"]. "I like to be at my post, doing my duty; indifferent whether one set or another govern, provided they govern well" [*Sir J. Moore*].

Vers. 11, 12. *Money.* We see here a distinct indication of a practice still followed in the East where large sums of money are concerned, as in the disbursements of the Government, and in the taxes and tributes paid to the Crown. The money in such cases is deposited in long narrow bags, each containing a certain sum, and carefully sealed with the official seal [*Kitto*]. In East in present time a bag of money passes (for some time at least) currently from hand to hand, under the authority

of a banker's seal, without any examination of its contents [*Burder*].

Ver. 18. *Left the house of the Lord.* A man's conception of worship really reaches his life. Let him lose his reverence for the Bible, for God, for man, however much he may boast of it, will in that measure go down. The victory of the enemy will be easy and complete. It cannot be a fatal offence, it may be thought, to neglect the assembly of ourselves together at least occasionally, to regard other occasions of coming together as of equal importance with meetings in the Church. It cannot be wrong surely to elevate certain kinds of intellectual inquiry into a species of worship on the Lord's day; all these thoughts are most insidious, full of temptation, and when perverted, it is in innumerable cases not the lower that is lifted up, but the higher that is degraded or impoverished [*Dr. Parker*].

CHAPTER XXV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] We have succession of A. (vers. 1-4), his expedition against Moab (5-13), his idolatry (14-16), his war with Joash (17-24), and his death and burial (25-28). Parallel 2 Ki. xiv. 1-20.

Vers. 1-4.—A.'s succession (cf. 2 Ki. xiv. 2-6). *Perfect*, single heart; not like ancestor David, but like Joash, father. Ver. 3. *Slew*, executed justice; an instance of right-doing. Ver. 4. *Not*, as Deut. xxiv. 16. Families of traitors often destroyed.

Vers. 5-13.—Expedition against Moab. Ver. 5. Old method of organisation by families (Num. ii. 34), under captains of hundreds, &c. *Hired*, paid for others, his own army too reduced to protect country. Ver. 8. *If, &c.*, some suppose *not* dropped out, and would read, "Go alone, and God will *not* make thee fall." Generally thought to be ironical. "Go (if thou wilt be self-willed) thou, act, be strong, it will be of no avail." Ver. 10. *Anger*, caused through sudden and apparently unreasonable dismissal. Ver. 11. *Salt*. South of Dead Sea, where dwelt Seirites, associated with Edom (Gen. xxxvi. 18). Ver. 12. *Rock*, unto the height of Selah. "Battle probably fought not far from Selah (Petra); the captains marched to Petra itself, and precipitated from the steep cliffs in its neighbourhood" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 13. *Soldiers*, mercenaries sent by Joash to ravage Jewish cities from Sam. to Beth., in revenge for considered insult.

Vers. 14-16.—A.'s idolatry. Not in Kings. *Gods*, common practice to carry gods of conquered places as trophies of victory, not generally to be worshipped. Ver. 16. *Talked*, prophets entitled to counsel kings. *Art thou, &c.?* lit., "Have we made thee a king's counsellor?" *Forbare*, ceased remonstrance, asserted his right, and consequences of disobedience.

Vers. 17-24.—A.'s war with Joash (cf. 2 Ki. xiv. 8-14). *Advice*, counsel not from God. *Face*, a challenge to combat (2 Sam. ii. 13). Ver. 18. *Thistle*. Parabolic forms employed in East to carry unwelcome truths, or express contemptuous sneers. This designed here. A *thistle*, low shrub; represents A. a petty prince; *cedar*, the potentate of Israel. The wild beast, the overwhelming army of Israel, would destroy the strength of Judah. The moral of fable in ver. 19. Ver. 20. *Not*, sarcastic tone incited more. Asa in a judicial state of blindness. *From God*, characteristic of the author. Joash overcame A., plundered palace and temple, and took hostages to prevent further war.

Vers. 25-28.—A.'s end. *Turn away*, apostasy followed by maladministration. King lost respect, fled to *Lachish*, frontier town of Philistines, there traced and murdered. Body brought without pomp in a chariot to Jerusalem, and interred among ancestors.

HOMILETICS.

AMAZIAH'S BEGINNING.—Verses 1-4.

Son and successor of Joash, ninth king on throne of Judah; 25 years old at accession, reigned 29 years, B.C. 837-808 (2 Ki. xiv. 1, 2). **I. In ordinary circumstances of succession.** A privilege to inherit a crown, great natural rights and positions. Better to become kings and priests, aristocracy of God, to rule over the hearts and affections of men, than on thrones of empires. **II. With considerable zeal for Jehovah.** Did right, "but not with a perfect heart," not like David his father. Half-hearted, zealous for God, but "high places not taken away." Obeying God and making sacrifices, but honouring the idols of Edom. Double-minded, his good beginning as that of Joash unlike his later conduct. **III. By an act of justice and mercy.** Punished traitors who murdered his father, as an act of justice; but was moderate. "With a mercy shown apparently for the first time in Hebrew annals, their children were spared" [*Stanley*]. Generally families of traitors

were destroyed. This act, therefore, had regard for law of God more than customs of nations ; displayed kindly feeling, and became a king.

“ No ceremony that to great ones 'longs—
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does ” [Shakes.].

EXPEDITION AGAINST EDMOM.—Verses 5-24.

This chief event in reign, an attempt to impose upon Edomites the yoke cast off in time of Jehoram (2 Ki. viii. 20 ; 1 Ki. xxii. 48). **I. An expedition ambitious in design.** Might be *natural* and prudent to assemble army, class according to respective families, and appoint officers from among brethren, that all might be an army of brothers, relatives, and friends. Might be *patriotic* to reduce insurgents to former subjection. But A. the slave of reckless ambition ; adventurous, fond of conquest and military renown, prone to “meddle to his hurt.” Real wisdom to cultivate peace, develop internal resources of kingdom ; real “strength to sit still” at home.

“ Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
And falls on the other side.”

II. An expedition in which alien forces were hired for the accomplishment of the design. Edom strong. A. considered his 300,000 troops unequal, hired 160,000 men from Israel, and sets first example of employing mercenary forces. Such help useless, dangerous, and opposed to God's will. He should go alone, in dependence upon God, “who hath power to help and to cast down.” Any other plan would displease God and result in defeat. With God's presence our own resources sufficient ; without, numbers only ruin, and “make thee fall before the enemy.” **III. An expedition the success of which was turned into a curse.** A. heeded not prophet, went, conquered, and captured cities. 1. *In the cruelty exercised.* Savage cruelty dealt out in revenge for barbarities inflicted on Hebrews, or to strike terror into a rebellious people. “Man's inhumanity to man.” 2. *In the spirit which it begot.* Not a spirit of gratitude and caution. Flattered probably by those from whom he “took advice” (ver. 17), he became proud and presumptuous. Burning with revenge for Israel's insult, not satisfied without defiant challenge, he undertakes aggressive war. The fruits of victory misappropriated. Unsanctified successes often turned into curses.

DUTY AND SELF-INTEREST.—Verse 9.

A. made every preparation for expedition, ready to start, but suddenly “there came a man of God” and forbids. But what must he do for the money ? Lose it and go to war in right way. Learn—**I. That we often invest our resources without prudence or security.** Money, friends, position, and life pledged for wrong purposes. Enterprises without divine guidance, gifts used sinfully. Men morally going astray, poor and insecure, though strong and sufficient in their own estimation. The “man of God,” the ministry of the word ever meets in the ways of life, condemning our treaties and alliances, reproving our plans and investments, and calling us back to God. **II. That we are often called upon to sacrifice our resources thus invested.** Reluctant to give up besetting sins, worldly pleasure, and to forsake evil ways. Often much at stake in worldly friendships, Sunday trading, and unlawful compacts. “What must we do with our money risked upon it ?”

“Why forfeit the deposit?” But why strike the bargain if wrong? Why make the deposit without prudence and security, &c.? The answer to all questions, God demands. Before divine authority objections ridiculous. In divine promise compensation for any loss. “The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.” **III. That when called to duty obedience guarantees success and brings abundant reward.** Impossible to induce obedience without offer of superior good. Motive power needful. Think not that nature or some law of mind breaks the chains of desire confirmed by habit and long years of life! Calculate not too confidently on moral powers wasted in sinful pursuits! It is never easy for a selfish man to renounce himself even with help of gospel! But God imparts disposition and strength. In sin “the first loss is the best.” In duty we find compensation and gain. “The Lord is able to give thee much more than this”—abundant reward for leaving all and following him. “Manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.”

AMAZIAH'S FALL INTO IDOLATRY.—*Verses 14–16.*

A. took the gods of Edom as tokens of victory, but deserted God who gave victory, and worshipped the idols he captured, like the Romans subduing nations and paying tribute to their gods. **I. Idolatry most gratuitous.** This not asked of him. Probably he sought to disarm spite of Edomites for harsh treatment, or attracted by pomp and splendour of worship of idols. Idolatry, sin fascinates unholy men. But what humility and disgrace voluntarily and slavishly to bow down! **II. Idolatry most unreasonable.** The gods could neither protect themselves nor worshippers, senseless and most absurd to lean upon them or put them in place of Jehovah! The sinner, a criminal and a fool, can give no reason for his choice. “Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, &c.?” **III. Idolatry most dangerous.** It estranges further from God, confirms self-will, and binds us faster to the false and debasing. It brings down rebuke from God, and leads to destruction. “Wherefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Amaziah.”

THE DANGERS OF SUCCESS AND AMBITION.—*Verses 17–28.*

Dangerous to succeed without God. Amaziah's false step at beginning, and the spirit in which it was originated turned the end into misfortune. **I. Success begetting pride and ambition.** The victory of Edom made A. proud; its issue unblest; kindled boldness and a spirit of revenge. He glories in strength. Success led him on to fresh undertakings which involved defeat. “Pride cometh before destruction, &c.” **II. Pride leading into presumption.** Thought himself more than a match for King of Israel. He cannot sit still, must punish him for wrong-doing, and sends the challenge, “Come, let us look one another in the face.” The bitter and contemptuous language of the parable only enraged him to repeat the challenge. Nothing checks. “He is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied.” **III. Presumption ending in destruction.** Exultation often the prelude to downfall, downfall more dismal and complete on account of previous eminence. Prosperity of fools destroys them. 1. *Warning unheeded.* Edom conquered. Be content. Stay at home. Why meddle to thy hurt? 2. *Blinded by self-security.* He could not be defeated, could see no danger, and knew not that God had forsaken him. 3. *Miserable failure.* Joash surprised him before ready for war; defeated him in a pitched battle; routed his army, and took him prisoner. The disasters of

his conduct created opposition and conspiracy, and he was slain. No real, permanent success to ungodly man. If no reverses in life, death makes him a wreck. His honours and achievements buried in the dust, and he stands naked in the presence of God!

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 2. *Right, but not with perfect heart.* Many good things in A., had respect for ordinances of religion, knew Scriptures, and had desire to do right. But failed because not thoroughgoing in principle and piety. 1. Much half-heartedness, levity, and superficial goodness. 2. A perfect heart required. Earnest, consecrated feeling and energy. "He had a good name; it imported 'one strong in the Lord and in the power of his might;' but he was far enough from that" [*Trapp*].

Vers. 3, 4. *Two practices.* Revenge and forbearance. One natural to man and prevalent in the East. "Revenge is sweet to man." Difficult to stop with one life, without taking another. But God controls and educates men by law. The other practice of divine authority. "It is strange at first sight, that when the law contained so very plain a prohibition, the contrary practice should have established itself. But we must remember *first*; that the custom was that of the East generally (see Dan. vi. 24; Herod. III. 119, &c.); and *secondly*, that it had the sanction of one who might be thought to know thoroughly the mind of the legislator, viz., Joshua (*cf.* Josh. vii. 24, 25)" [*Speak. Com.*]. Always better to forbear than revenge.

"Revenge at first, though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils"
[*Milton*].

Ver. 16. 1. *The question of the king.* "Art thou of the king's counsel?" Who authorises, entitles thee to give advice? 2. *The prophet's reply.* Consists of two parts—(a) He "forbare" to dispute. Silence best answer to some; contention makes them worse. (b) He predicts. "The prophet ceased his remonstrances and retired, but aimed a Parthian shaft on quitting the royal presence, 'If I am not of thy

counsel, I am of God's counsel, and know what is determined there. God has counselled to destroy thee.' For fulfilment of prophecy, see verses 12-24 and 27" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Not hearkened.* 1. A sign of hardness, judicial blindness and obduracy. 2. A ground of desertion by God. Ignored and forsaken, the result natural. 3. A prelude to destruction.

Vers. 18, 19. *The parable of Cedar and Thistle.* 1. The inequalities of character and condition of men. Great and little, contented and restless, &c. 2. The ridiculous conduct and ambition of some men. The less, the more unsettled and ambitious, the more meddlesome, &c. 3. The need to be satisfied with present possessions. Grasping after more may lose what you have. The miseries of discontent. Quench that fire which

"Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever
bore" [*Byron*].

Tarry at home. 1. Better for individuals, than meddle, create mischief with neighbours, seek home comforts and decencies. Officious interference creates discord. Meddling the parent of strife. "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife; but every fool will be meddling." 2. Better for nations to look to themselves, stay at home and cultivate arts of peace than engage in aggressive wars. Kings dethroned, governments upset, and empires rent asunder through hasty war.

Ver. 27. *Providential consequences.* "After the time from following the Lord. The writer means to observe that the violent death of A. followed on his apostasy not closely in point of time—for it must have been at least fifteen years after (ver. 25)—nor was, humanly speaking, caused by it; but

in the way of a divine judgment—a complete fulfilment of the prophecy, ver. 16” [*Speak. Com.*]. Sequences in the natural as well as moral world. Forsake God and duty, violate law,

then risk and disaster. “For it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom.”

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXV.

Ver. 4. Law. When the Lord laid down that law he taxed human forbearance to the uttermost. It may not seem to be so in reality, but test the matter by human consciousness and by human action. Have we not wronged whole families? Have we not often thrown in the child as if he were part of the father, and let both be crushed by the mill of revenge? [*Dr. Parker*].

Vers. 7–9. What of hundred talents? Do your duty and leave the rest with God [*R. Cecil*]. This is the first of rights, the only absolute duty. No right more sacred [*Vinet*]. There is little or nothing in this life worth living for, but we can all of us go straight forward and do our duty [*Wellington*].

Vers. 11–13. Success. There is a glare about worldly success which is very apt to dazzle men’s eyes [*Hare*]. Watch lest prosperity destroy generosity [*Beecher*]. Success at first, doth many times undo men at last [*Venning*].

Vers. 14–16. The gods of the people. Idolatry is one of the most uncon-

querable of all the corrupt propensities of the human soul. Miracles under the new dispensation had scarcely ceased, apostolic fathers were scarcely cold in their graves, before idolatrous forms were again superinduced upon the pure spirituality of the Holy Gospel [*Walker*].

Vers. 17–24. See one another in face. Every presumption is properly an encroachment, and all encroachment carries in it a still further and a further invasion upon the person encroached upon. Presumption never stops in its first attempt. If Cæsar comes once to pass the Rubicon, he will be sure to march further on, even till he enters the very bowels of Rome, and break open the Capitol itself. He that presumes steps into the throne of God [*Dr. South*].

Vers. 27, 28. Buried.

“Death lays his icy hand on kings;
Sceptre and crown must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and
spade” [*Shirley*].

CHAPTER XXVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Uzziah’s character (vers. 1–6). “It is not too much to say that we are indebted to Chronicles for our whole conception of the character of Uz., and for nearly our whole knowledge of the events of his reign” [*Speak. Com.*]. U.’s fame and achievements (vers. 6–15); U.’s sin (vers. 16–21); U.’s end (vers. 22, 23). Parallel to this in 2 Ki. xiv. 21, 22; xv. 1–7.

Vers. 1–5.—Uz.’s character. Azariah (help from Jehovah) in Kings. Uz. usual form (strength from Jehovah). Eloth, an important port (2 Ki. xiv. 22). Ver. 5. Days of Z., who sustained relation Uz., as Jehoiada to Joash, exercising salutary influence and guiding.

Vers. 6–15.—Uz.’s fame and achievements. Not in Kings. Jab., Jabneal (Josh. xv. 11). Dismantling of these, and building of other cities among the Philistines, is a restoration of things in time of Jehoshaphat (xvii. 11). Ver. 8. Ammonites. Countries east of

Jordan became tributaries, and by rapid success of victories his kingdom advanced to Egyptian frontier (cf. Is. xvi. 1-5 with 2 Ki. iii. 4). Vers. 9, 10. *Buildings, towers* in the wilderness—i.e., held pasturage on borders of Holy Land as refuges for flocks and herdsmen. *Wells* (out out many cisterns) from rock. *Low country* between hills of Judæa and sea. *Plains* east of Jordan. *Carmel*, not the mountain, but cultivated portions of hill tract. *Husb.*, cultivated agriculture and arts of peace. Vers. 11-15. Army and engines of war. Ver. 11. *Men*, a body of militia divided into companies or regiments, which served in rotation. Ver. 12. *Number* of chiefs, heads of families, occupying positions over the army. Ver. 13. The number of troops does not exceed that in time of Amaziah (xxv. 5). Ver. 14. Different weapons for different classes of men. Ver. 15. *Engines*, machines for discharging missiles; the balista for stones, and catapult for arrows or darts.

Vers. 16-21.—*U.'s sin and punishment.* Lift up to do wickedly, in pride. Priests only permitted to enter holy place (Num. xviii. 7). U. presumed to act as neighbouring princes. High priest remonstrated, and intended to expel or hinder by force. Ver. 19. U. angry was struck suddenly with leprosy. Ver. 20. *Hasted*, in fear of death denounced upon those who invaded priest's office. Ver. 21. *Several*, separate, lit., *the house of liberation*, an infirmary; he was excluded from communion.

Vers. 22, 23. *U.'s end.* Isaiah took part in composing the records of the kingdom (chap. i. 1; vi. 6). "He cannot have been contemporary with Uz. as an adult for more than a very small portion of his long reign. Most critics regard him as about twenty when Uz. died. He must then have written his history of Uz.'s reign rather from documents and accounts of others, than from his own knowledge" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 23. *Field*, i.e., in the burial ground, but in a separate sepulchre, as the corpse of a leper would have polluted it.

HOMILETICS.

UZZIAH'S CHARACTER AND SUCCESSFUL REIGN.—Verses 1-15.

The reign of U. was vigorous, and signally blessed. He was successful as a king, though he failed as a man. **I. Uzziah's character is promising.** Signs of ability and usefulness. Acts well as a ruler, and fills high office with credit to himself, and benefit to the nation. 1. *He was active in promoting the interests of his kingdom.* He overcame its enemies in south and west, strengthened its fortifications and commercial relations, was a patron of agriculture, cultivated vineyards, and protected flocks. He administered internal affairs with peace and prosperity. 2. *For the greater part of his reign he lived in the fear of God.* "Did right in the sight of the Lord" (ver. 4). Never deserted the worship of the true God, and was much influenced by the prophet Zachariah. Happy in his guardian, "He sought God," who made him to prosper. **II. Uzziah's reign is successful.** Success crowned all efforts and enterprises until fatal error blasted his life. 1. *In its financial resources.* Flocks, wells, husbandmen, vine-dressers, and foreign commerce. 2. *In the extent of his dominion.* He overcame the Philistines, and demolished their cities. "God helped him against the Arabians." The Ammonites rendered tribute to him, and his conquest extended to the Egyptian frontier (ver. 8). 3. *In the strength of his defences.* Cities well fortified, military forces well organised, equipped, and commanded. 4. *In the splendour of his fame.* His name spread far and wide. Palmy days of David and Solomon seemed to return; failures of preceding reign wiped away. Judah possessed an active, enlightened, and prosperous king, who conducted himself as became viceroy of Jehovah, and prospered in all things. "His name spread far abroad, for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong" (ver. 15).

UZZIAH'S SIN AND PUNISHMENT.—Verses 16-21.

Long and uniform prosperity a severe trial for any prince. Uzziah's goodness gave way. "His heart was lifted up," and he committed grievous sins, for which

he suffered severe punishment. **I. Uzziah's sins.** 1. *He was lifted up with pride.* Elated with a splendid career, he forgot his position and was changed in spirit. "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up." It is strength, not weakness, that makes proud and arrogant. Affliction and reverses humble. In Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar see fearful evils of pride. "By that sin fell the angels." 2. *He usurped the priestly function.* He can do anything in his kingdom; perhaps thought priestly qualities were natural to royalty, and that in exercising them he revived suspended rights, and restored primitive custom. The intrusion a sin of great magnitude, "for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense," &c. 3. *He showed daring presumption.* The act involved a claim to abrogate the priestly office, a defiance of ancient decree originating in rebellion of Korah: it was rebuked solemnly and signally, but U. defied and resisted opposition, was determined to minister, "took the censer and was wroth with the priests."

"Pride is still aiming at the blessed abodes,
Men would be angels, angels would be gods" [*Pope*].

II. Uzziah's punishment. "The Lord had smitten him." 1. *Retributive and severe.* A leper—"a leper until the day of his death." The crown lost, and his forehead stained with marks of guilt. 2. *Deprived of his own function by invading the province of others.* U. was obliged to recognise the authority which he despised; compelled to leave the palace by venturing into the priesthood, and had to dwell in a separate house, "like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more; and they are cut off from Thy hand." Be content with your own place. Discharge your own duties without seeking to intrude into others. The leprous king is a warning to all that we are not to "minister to men in things pertaining to God" without permission. Step out of your lawful calling, you create disorder, play the fool, and bring destruction upon yourselves and others.

"God gives to every man
The virtue, temper, understanding, taste,
That lifts him into life, and lets him fall
Just in the niche he was ordain'd to fill."

UZZIAH'S SIN.

Rightly to understand it remember what barriers he had to break before he could resolve to do it. He had to disregard the direct command of Jehovah, that priests alone could burn incense upon His altar; to despise the history of his people, to defy the holy name by which he himself was called. Therefore because his rebellion was so great, his defiance of correction and of God so flagrant, the Lord smote him, and he bore till death the mark of the curse that fell upon him. **I. We see here prosperity and pride.** Mere worldly prosperity often the prelude to daring impiety. U., a good king, but a bad priest: not the priest whom God had chosen. Statecraft and policy have no claims to spiritual direction. Spirit of the gospel not that of a successful worldling, but that of a little child of the kingdom. **II. We see here pride and punishment.** It is a part of God's order of nature that bodily pains should often rebuke and reveal the workings of an ungodly soul. The solemn truth that pride and passion are destroyers of men, the remembrance of those destroyed by them, are admonitions to us. "Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." **III. Punishment and shame.** Hope of Uzziah given in record of his hastening to go out of the temple. His proud heart broken; he was

smitten with shame. A man not altogether lost while he can feel shame. God quickens "the sorrow of the world, which worketh death," into "godly sorrow working repentance to salvation not to be repented of [*Dr. A. Mackenmal*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. In this and the next ten chapters we have the histories of Uzziah and ten more kings of Judah, in whose days prophesied the most of the prophets, both major and minor; to whose writings these eleven chapters lend not a little light, and are therefore diligently to be read and heeded [*Trapp*].

Ver. 15. *Marvellously helped till strong*. Two kinds of help, natural and supernatural. 1. A time when we cannot help ourselves. Infancy. 2. A time of growth when we can help ourselves. Youth, manhood. 3. When thus strong the supernatural help ceases. Not less provision made on that account. There is joy and co-operation with God. As an earthly father requires to be obeyed and served, beholds strength and disposition to co-operate, so the Heavenly Father, &c. [*Dr. Matheson*].

Ver. 16. *Lifted up*. 1. By pride of money. 2. By pride of intellect. 3. By pride of wit [*Thain Davidson*]. Learn— I. The abominable nature of pride. A rivalry and robbery of God. The sin of Satan and unregenerate men generally. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, &c. II. The awful transgression to which it leads. Transgressed and went into the temple. "Men would be angels, angels would be gods." III. The power of God to abase and punish the proud. Honour and dominion, mind and body under God's control. Reason dethroned, the countenance stamped with idiocy, when he pleases. Madness, leprosy, and death at his bidding. "Come, and it cometh." Most exalted insignificant atoms before Him. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXVI.

Ver. 8. *His name spread abroad*.

"Unblemished let me live, or die unknown;
O grant an honest fame, or grant me none"
[*Pope*].

Ver. 16. *Went into temple*. We do not believe that the Christian ministry is any less Divine than the Levitical priesthood, or that the commission it bears is less clear and definite. The conclusion is, that the intrusion into it, an usurpation of its powers, or a violation of its order, be it by prince or peasant, by scholar or unlearned, by good men ignorantly, or by evil men presumptuously, cannot be anything else but offensive to God, and fruitful of mischief to mankind [*R. Hallam, D.D.*].

Ver. 18. *They withstood*. When Theodosius, the Emperor, was at Thessalonica, in revenge for certain of his judges slain there, made a great

slaughter among the people by his soldiers, who destroyed 7,000 citizens. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, heard to his great grief, and when the Emperor, afterwards returning to Milan, would have come, as his manner had been, to the holy assembly, he stoutly withstood him, saying, "With what face canst thou look upon Him who is Lord of all? With what feet canst thou enter His house, whom thou hast so deeply displeased? How canst thou receive His body with those hands so drenched in Christian blood? or drink His blood with that mouth that commanded such inhuman slaughter? Depart, therefore, and go not about to add one wickedness to another, but stand thou excommunicate, till by repentance thou hast obtained pardon of God, and given satisfaction to his offended people." The good Emperor—religiously bred, knew well what was fit for a king to

do and what for a bishop—returned to his palace, acknowledged the greatness of his sin, and spent eight months in weeping and lamentation; then coming to Ambrose, begged pardon and abso-

lution, which, after many rebukes, he obtained [*Trapp*].

“This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remem-
bering happier things” [*Tennyson*].

CHAPTER XXVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter is par. with 2 Ki. xv. 32-38, and taken mainly from the same source or sources. Ampler than narrative in Kings, and given with certain religious reflections after manner of writer (cf. *Speak. Com.*). Jotham’s character (vers. 1, 2), Jotham’s buildings and wars (vers. 3-6), Jotham’s death and successor (vers. 7-9).

Vers. 1, 2.—J.’s character. Right, better than his father, as he did not intrude into temple. Ver. 2. *Corruptly*, which frustrated his efforts to reform (cf. 2 Ki. xv. 35). For general character of corruption, see Is. i.-v.

Vers. 3-6.—J.’s conduct. Built, i.e., repaired. High gate, the north hill of temple. Ophel, i.e., the mound or eminence on south-eastern slope of temple hill. Much to defend Jerusalem in every direction. Ver. 4. Mountains, hill tract of Judah. Castles (xviii. 12), forts to check invaders. Ammon, restless under the yoke of Uzziah (xxvi. 8), revolted against Jotham. Revolt repressed, and higher tribute exacted. Ver. 6. Prepared, marg. established; directed, disposed his ways aright (cf. Prov. xxi. 29).

Vers. 7-9.—J.’s death. Wars besides with Ammon, in later years with Rezin and Pekah (cf. 2 Ki. xv. 37). City, i.e., “with his fathers” (2 Ki. xv. 38), in the sepulchre of the kings.

HOMILETICS.

JOTHAM’S PROSPEROUS REIGN.—Verses 1-8.

I. He began by imitating his father in good, not evil ways. Amaziah considered a good king in the greater portion of his reign, though guilty of two great sins (cf. 2 Ki. xiv. 3 and 2 Chr. xxv. 2, 14, 16). J. imitated his father in all respects, except impious usurpation of priestly office. Far more easy to copy bad than good deeds. But J. took warning from his father’s folly and punishment, acted a wise part, and displayed a piety singular and conspicuous among “the people” who “did corruptly.” **II. He became powerful by the adoption of right measures.** He detected the dangers, and desired the welfare of his kingdom. 1. *His military measures.* He strengthened Jerusalem, fortified country places, and repressed revolting nations. Wise to fortify against attack and guard weak places in character, churches, and kingdoms. 2. *In religious measures.* “He prepared his ways before the Lord his God” (ver. 6). Earnest and whole-hearted in piety. Thoughts fixed on God, and desired to please him in life. “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” This leads to power and prosperity, for both come from God. The more steadfast in religion, the more able to resist evil, perform good, and influence others.

PREPARATION AND STRENGTH.—Verse 6.

Here we get an insight into Jotham’s purpose and ways. He prepared his ways, exercised forethought, arrangement, and prayer. **I. All strength is gained by preparation.** Not the result of accident or negligence.

Strength of body and mind, strength of character and position, result from exercise, discipline, and growth. The virtue of the soil, the events of Providence, the creation of the world, and the incarnation of Christ after long and silent preparation. **II. All preparation must be in recognition of God.** This invests all acts with influence, and gives them religious character. "Prepare thy work without and make it fit for thyself in the field." 1. *In recognition of God's supremacy.* "Before the Lord." God sovereign and supreme Ruler. All power in his hands, all events under his control. 2. *In covenant with His mercy.* "Before the Lord thy God." Conscious of God's presence and love; a sense of interest and sonship. Loving appropriation and humble dependence. **III. When a person thus prepares his ways before God, he will become mighty.** "J. became mighty because he prepared his way." Preparations never vain; rashness and haste lead to failure and misfortune. Strength and success gained by fixed resolve, entire consecration, and devout preparation. Mighty in prayer, influence for good given "before God"; required in Christian effort and in a sinful world. "Mighty through God."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 2. "According to all that his father Uzziah did." One single act of impiety destroys not general good character of his reign [*Speak. Com.*]. *People did corruptly*, civil injustice and social cruelty; laborious service and empty ritual; foreign oppression and providential misery (*cf.* Is. i.-v.). Jotham a witness for God in prevalent corruption and national faithlessness.

Vers. 1-9. *Jotham's life.* His mother's name and relations. His age at succession (ver. 1). His great achievements: built cities, conquered enemies, and became mighty in fame, wealth, and power. His death a lamentation, and his son an unworthy successor. "Wrought a woeful change, being *optimi patris pessimus filius*" [*Trapp*].

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter corresponds with 2 Ki. xvi., and gives chief events in same order. Narrative fuller in military affairs, yet an omission of two or three facts. Idolatry of A. and its consequences (vers. 1-8); release of captives (vers. 9-15); Assyrian help sought (vers. 16-21); continued trespass and distress (vers. 22-25); end of A. (ver. 26, 27).

Vers. 1-8.—Idolatry of A. and its consequences. Ver. 2. *Molten*, i.e., representatives of different forms or characters of the chief Phœnician deity. Return to superstition of Northern kingdom, from which Judah had been clear since days of Joash. Ver. 3. *Burnt*, restored worship of Moloch, savage god of Ammon. *Heathen*, Canaanites. Ver. 4. *Tree*, great extremes (*cf.* 2 Ki. xvi. 4). Ver. 5. Two battles with Rezin and Pekah not in Kings.

Ver. 7. *Azrik.*, governor, chief officer of royal palace (*cf.* 1 Ki. iv. 6; xviii. 3; 2 Ki. xviii. 18). *Vers. 9-15.—Release of captives.* *Oded*, possibly same as *Iddo*. *Samaria*, where Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets exercised their vocation. *Rage*, great, violent, and displeasing to God; *reacheth*, where God hears. Ver. 10. *Purpose*, in heart. *Sins*, with you greater than in Judah, therefore oppress not erring brothers. Ver. 11. *Deliver*, send back. *Fierce*, law forbade Israel to make bondmen (Lev. xxv. 39-46). Ver. 12. *Heads*, patriarchal chiefs who formed king's counsel. Ver. 13. Forbade captives to be brought into Samaria. *Offended*, remembered, confessed their own sins, and felt ashamed. Ver. 14. Remonstrance successful. Ver. 15. *Name*, the four in ver. 12, acting with general consent of whole body of princes and people. Ver. 15. Prisoners released, fed with spoil, and conveyed to Jericho on their way home. *Palm* (Deut. xxxiv. 3).

Vers. 16-21.—*Assyrian help sought. Time, after disastrous war with Ephraim and Aram. Kings, more than one in succession or in conjunction; other versions give singular instead of plural. Vers. 17, 18. Assign reason for seeking help. Invasion (ver. 18) and refractoriness of Judah (ver. 19). Naked, lit., "had caused licentiousness in Judah." Had allowed Judah to break loose from religious restraint. Ver. 20. Distressed by heavy tribute, and no help rendered.*

Vers. 22-25.—*Continued trespass and affliction. Yet more, "trespassed still more." Spoliation (ver. 21) of no avail. Ver. 23. Sacrificed, superstition led him to believe that he might receive aid from the gods of D., Hadad, Rimmon, &c. (2 Ki. xvi. 10-16). Ver. 24. Cut, demolished; shut up, suspended worship, and made altars after models at Damascus. Several, separate.*

Vers. 26, 27.—*End and burial of A. Written, &c. (2 Ki. xvi.). Ver. 27. Brought not, buried with his fathers (2 Ki. xvi. 20), but not in sepulchres of the kings. Not an honourable burial.*

HOMILETICS.

THE EVIL REIGN OF AHAZ.—Verses 1-7.

A. forgot principles and example of his father. Soon apparent by what unhappy influences he was surrounded, and to what degeneracy the people had fallen. Increase of worldly wealth and luxury in reigns of Azariah and Jotham introduced corruptions which, by the example of Ahaz, prevailed in idolatrous practices of every kind (ver. 24). **I. The unmitigated wickedness of Ahaz.** A. one of the stupendous examples of Israel, one of the few men in history of whom not one good thing is recorded. His wickedness uniform, unmitigated and extraordinary development. 1. *He patronised symbolic worship of Israel.* "Walked in the ways of Israel" (2 Ki. xvi. 3) at beginning of reign. All forms and practices of heathenism among Israelites he adopted. 2. *He practised gross idolatry of Canaan.* Not content with paganism, he imported fresh modes of worship. He restored idolatry of Moloch, and fixed it under the very walls of the city, "the valley of Hinnom." He gave personal sanction to cruel rites, by causing his sons to pass through fire, to burn them to death, or purify them and dedicate them to heathen gods. A custom in Persia for the king to send his son, seated on a black horse, to ride through the flames, to prove sacredness of character and to show the people fire will not hurt. This practice forbidden by law (Lev. xviii. 21; xx. 2; Deut. xviii. 10). **II. The fearful consequences of this wickedness.** Having left God, God forsook him, and a series of calamities happen. 1. *Deliverance unto the Syrians.* This the issue of a confederate invasion. False dependence, heathen gods could not protect. 2. *Fearful slaughter.* Smitten by kings of Assyria and of Israel "with a great slaughter," a complete panic and rout result. Defeat bereft them of defence, and they allowed themselves to be slaughtered like sheep. 3. *Disgraceful captivity.* "A great multitude of them captives" (ver. 5). Made prisoners, they were divided between allies, sent off under military escort to capitals of Syria and Israel. 4. *National calamity.* Persons of distinction among captured or slain (ver. 7). The king's (probably Jotham's) son, governor of Royal Palace and Prime Minister. Loss of these chief officers a national calamity. "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle?" Thus blood shed, country wasted, and families ruined through sin. A good king may shelter a corrupt people; a bad king may bring judgments like a flood. The happiness of one reign may be valued by miseries of another.

THE RELEASE OF CAPTIVES.—Verses 8-15.

Report of "brethren" led captive excited indignation in better disposed. Oded, a prophet, went out, accompanied with princes, to meet the escort and to prevent disgrace of introducing such prisoners into the city. **I. Released**

through stern rebuke of the prophet. O. did not applaud their valour and congratulate them on their victory—in God's name declared their faults and warned them of judgment. 1. *Rebuked pride of victory.* Not by superiority in numbers, arms, and valour had they overcome; but in consequence of Divine judgments against Israel. Not for *the righteousness* of victors (Deut. ix. 5), but for *the wickedness* of the vanquished; therefore boast not, "be not high-minded, but fear" (Rom. xi. 20, 21). 2. *Rebuked abuse of power.* Victory gave no authority for cruelty. Offensive to keep "brethren" as slaves in war. Might not always right. They had "slain them in a rage," and they further "purposed to keep them under" and sell them as "bondmen and bondwomen." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." 3. *Rebuked forgetfulness of personal guilt.* "Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?" (ver. 10). Ten tribes not innocent, fallen away more completely, more hopelessly, than the two. Severity would add to their guilt and aggravate their punishment. "Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" II. **Released through the humanity of the people.** Spirited remonstrance not in vain—chiefs, soldiers, and people touched. 1. *Displayed in the opposition of chiefs* (ver. 12). Conscience-stricken when reminded of their own sins. Men of character and high position, remarkable for benevolent feeling, forbade entrance of captives into Samaria—took lead in difficult task of restoring them, and gained themselves a name. 2. *Displayed in compliance of soldiers.* Soldiers only obeying orders, might have defended what they gained by sword; but yielded, left captives and spoil at disposal of "the princes" (ver. 14). Right to give up what is wrong to retain—more generous to yield to reason and religion than to stick at self-interest. 3. *Displayed in the kindness of the people.* Under benevolent superintendence the captives clothed and fed from the spoils; assisted in their weakness and conveyed on their way home (ver. 15). A beautiful incident, and full of interest. A proof of loyalty to law amid national decline, of generosity in scenes of cruelty, and a type of a greater deliverance in the Gospel.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1-5. *Like son, like father.* In A. we have—I. A son who rebelled against the maxims of his father. Instead of carrying on improvements inaugurated by his father, we find that he initiated altogether a new state of things. II. A father who was devoid of natural affection towards his children. "He burnt his children in the fire." III. The wicked sons of good fathers may sometimes be fathers themselves, and the evil they have done will be repaid to them again [*Bib. Mus.*].

Vers. 9-11. *Oded went out*—1. In courageous spirit. Defying risk to meet face to face. 2. In faithfulness to God, for whom he acted, and from whom received help. 3. In benevolent design. *Hear me.* Here we have the

picture of a good preacher. Oded teacheth, reproveth, exhorteth, turneth himself into all shapes, of spirit and of speech, that he may work upon his hearers; and he had his desire. See Timothy's task (2 Tim. iv. 2, 3) [*Trapp*]. *Reacheth up to heaven.* Sins of violence—1. Seen by God; 2. Provoke God; 3. Will be punished by God. "Our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass (guiltiness) is grown up unto the heavens" (Ez. ix. 6).

Ver. 10. Personal guilt, a sense of our own sins should check—1. In the pride of triumph. 2. In the control of passion. 3. In the neglect of charity. Know self, moderate resentment, and imitate God's compassion. Or learn—1. Man's readi-

ness to judge others. 2. By judging, treating others harshly, we condemn ourselves. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

"We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to
render
The deeds of mercy" [*Shakes.*]

Ver. 15. *Primitive charity.* Clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, helping the weak, &c. "We can scarcely find a parallel to this in the

universal history of the wars which savage man has carried on against his fellows from the foundation of the world" [*A. Clarke*]. That which happened in the time of Ahaz, was to occur again, as Is. xliii. 5, 6, and lx. 3, and other similar passages show on a much larger, more glorious scale at the time of the great redemption. We see at once from the words themselves with what pleasure the historian dwells upon this event [*Keil*].

HOMILETICS.

APPEAL FOR ASSYRIAN HELP.—Verses 16–21.

Invasion of Judah by Rezin and Pekah not mere predatory expedition, but designed to reduce the country, upset the royal family, and establish another tributary prince. Extirpation of dynasties common in East. The older and more venerated the dynasty, the more needful to destroy it. The unconditional promise to David prevented change, and occasioned defeat of allies. **I. Appeal in imminent danger.** Kingdom reduced to great distress—1. By *Invasions of the enemy.* After succession of defeats, retreated within walls of Jerusalem, and besieged. Country infested north and south, and cities captured. 2. By *Providential disaster.* "For the Lord brought Judah low." Bereft of wealth and power, humbled and helpless for defence. As despicable as they had been formidable. 3. By *Internal disorder.* "For he made Judah naked," caused licentiousness in Judah. Bonds of government loosened, restraints of religion thrown off, and idolatry of every degree practised. **II. Appeal which cost immense sacrifice.** "A. took away a portion of the house of the Lord, &c." (ver. 21). 1. *Self independence.* "I am thy servant and thy son" (2 Ki. xvi. 7). A plain acknowledgment of his dependent position, and the submission of a vassal. 2. *Enormous treasure.* To procure adequate sum for protection the palace and the temple ransacked. Costly is the price of sin and departure from God. **III. Appeal which ended in disappointment.** Relief only temporary. Assyria prepared for the advantage. The end worse than the beginning. "The King of Assyria came unto him and distressed him, but strengthened him not." Distressed—1. *By occupying the land.* Hostile inroads of the enemy devastated the kingdom. Invaders, like Saxons invited by Britons against Picts and Scots, remained masters of the land. 2. *By exacting heavy tribute.* Payments exhausting, impoverished and weakened. The submission of Judah, proffered by Ahaz, pleasing and of utmost importance to projects of conquest. Money demanded in return for help. 3. *By withholding help desired.* Nothing but disappointment at last: "But he helped him not" (ver. 21). Ahaz not placed in a safe and independent position; an *actual* for a *threatened* subjection resulted. It led to further idolatry and risk, which provoked God's anger and tended to ruin the nation. Sin no "help" nor "strength," but a cause of "distress." Confidence in men, the world, and false ways, create disappointment and pierce the hand like a broken reed. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Be *firm in faith*, or ye will not be *made firm* in fact [*Speak. Com., Is. vii. 9*].

AHAZ'S DEEPER SINS AND MISERIES.—Verses 22–25.

The infatuated king unchastened by distress, surrendered himself to slavish fear and pursued his course “yet more against the Lord.” Notice—**I. The wilful obstinacy displayed in his evil course.** He exerted royal authority to extend idolatry; suspended the worship of Jehovah in the temple; committed gross sacrilege, and superseded the altar of God by one from Damascus. He discarded the doctrine of one true God and affected polytheism. His religion was a kind of diplomacy. The Temple, the residence of Jehovah, by the help of the priesthood, was turned into a shelter for idols, and in the streets of Jerusalem were erected altars to foreign gods. **II. The fearful consequences of this obstinacy.** “He sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him.” 1. *God provoked to anger* (ver. 25). “The wrath of a king is as messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it,” by proofs of penitence and amendment of life. 2. *Ruin brought upon himself and kingdom.* “They were the ruin of him and of all Israel.” The gods of Syria befriended him no more than the kings of Assyria. He was cut off in the midst of his days. Pernicious influence of idolatry lasted through the reforms of next reign, and only destroyed after Babylonian captivity. **III. The awful stigma which rested upon him through this obstinate course.** “This is that king Ahaz.” Like “Jeroboam who made Israel to sin,” and Judas who betrayed the Saviour, he is branded by the spirit of God. If ever a man is to be held up as a warning, *this* is the man. Mark him, shun his ways. Not one good thing in his life and no hope in his death!

ABUSE OF JUDGMENT.—Verse 22.

“Trespassed more and more” in utterly forsaking God and selling himself to sin. **I. Judgment abused by mistaking it.** He thought because Syrian gods helped them, they would be of service to him. Jehovah had smitten him and helped his enemies, but he could or would not see it. He therefore sacrificed to idols. This a vulgar conception of God, and leads to abuse of devotion and into greater risk. **II. Judgment abused by defying it.** There is still a lofty imperial spirit in Ahaz. Neither judgment nor mercy opens his eyes. When overthrown he must still fight against God, be master of his own condition and destiny. He abused the house of God, the altar of God, and the judgments of God. His heart was more fully set to do evil, and he “provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.”

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING AHAZ.

I. That a course of sin is continually downward. This is a fundamental law of character, the natural working of sin. It propagates itself, but is not self-reformatory. One kind of sin produces another kind, and the law of habit applies to physical, mental, and moral actions. Character becomes fixed. “His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin.” **II. That God is faithful in checking men in this downward course.** “The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz, King of Israel” (ver. 19). Disappointed in alliances, overcome in war, captives taken by thousands, and nothing going well. God contended with him, but was despised by him; persevered in efforts to check him, but was defied and resisted. God ever seeks by his providence and spirit to turn men from an evil course which will end in ruin. “That he may withdraw man from his purpose (marg., work) and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from

the pit and his life from perishing by the sword." **III. That if men will not be checked in a downward course they may become notable examples of punishment.** "This is that king Ahaz" (ver. 22). The end is come, but not the end of life. Chastised, but not corrected, given to idols and let alone, "he did trespass yet more." What possibilities of human guilt! What distinctions in human shame! "Is not destruction to the wicked and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?"

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 16. *Send* in spite of promise given by Isaiah (vii. 14; viii. 4), the one immediate and the other remote, that confederate kings should not prevail over him. This—1. *A forgetfulness, wilful rejection of divine assurance.* Ahaz by his unbelief had not only disestablished himself (ver. 9), he mortgaged the hope of Israel. He had a policy of his own, and was determined to pursue it. He betrayed the Messiah and deliverer of his people. The assurance of this betrayal is the sign of his obduracy, a signal and terrible proof of his irretrievable sin in calling upon the Assyrians. The king has been found wanting" (cf. Smith's Bk. of Is., p. 118). 2. *An unworthy acknowledgment of human dependence.* God would have been his help, but he foolishly turned to those who ruined him. This proved by Scripture and by Assyrian monuments, which record payment of tribute by tribes of Israel. "His heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind," in craven fear (Is. vii. 2).

Ver. 19. *Israel low.* The influence of the ruler upon the nation's welfare and condition. Nakedness or abundance, internal anarchy or prevalent order. The higher the rank the more aggravated the sin. A corrupt king a corrupt court (like that of Charles II.). "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child."

Ver. 21 (cf. 2 Ki. xvi. 8). *Sacrilege upon the House of God.* 1. The king's self-willed assault on established institutions. II. The high priest's concessions. See in this a clear picture of the lack of Christian spirit in the two highest ranks. The State desires to

see everything arranged according to its whims: the Church yields for the sake of temporal advantage [*Bib. Mus.*].

Ver. 22. *This king Ahaz.* The stigma fixed. 1. An expression of the writer's feelings. 2. An example of the force of sin. 3. A providential warning to all. "Learn wisdom by the folly of others."

Ver. 23. I. The true God forsaken. 1. From wrong views of his character. 2. From false confidence in his rivals. II. The certain ruin which results from this course. "The ruin of him." Ruin personal and national, physical and moral, present and future. Gods of heathen, gods of sectarianism, gods of gold, or gods of learning will bring ruin. Mistake to seek inspiration, to covet relief, and implore deliverance from wrong sources. "Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted."

Vers. 26, 27. *Acts of Ahaz,* which may be thus summed up: 1. His proud and faithless refusal of a sign by the mouth of Isaiah (vii. 10-13); 2. His discontinuance of temple worship by closing the temple itself; 3. His desecration of the sacred vessels; 4. His erection of altars to the false gods in every corner of Jerusalem, and in every several city of Judah; 5. His sacrificing to the gods of Damascus that they might help him. The first and last of these offences belonged to the early part of his reign, the others were among the latest practices, and to be reversed by his successor in the kingdom (2 Ki. xviii. 4; 2 Chr. xxix. 3, 19) [*Speak. Com.*].

I. *The Character of Ahaz.* 1. He was one of those whose iniquity is

enhanced by the contempt of spiritual privileges; 2. His downward career was rapidly progressive; 3. He reached the lowest point of human obduracy. II. The illustration he affords of the appalling power of sin. 1. Evil habits strengthen by indulgence; 2. The

world increases its power over its votaries as they advance in life; 3. Sinners in mature years lose the perception of religious truth; 4. There is a limit to divine endurance, and hardened transgressors are often left to perish in their sin [*Bib. Mus.*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXVIII

Vers. 1-5 *Did not right.* How many a son of godly parents is destroyed by evil communications. Companions first known at school, by near residence, or picked up casually at a friend's house, often blight the most promising young life. It would be mere affectation to suppose that the history of Ahaz is unconnected with the prevalent corruption in Judah during his father's reign. Pharaoh himself was not a more signal instance of forbearance of judgment than he. He had a godly example and godly counsel in his father. But other mercies were given to him, and though some were *severe* chastisements, yet were they mercies nevertheless, and should have been for his good [*Ed. Walker, Ser. O. T. Subjects*].

Vers. 3-5. *Children in fire.* The king seems to have had a mania for foreign religions. The worship of Moloch was now established in the valley of Hinnom, in a spot known by the name of

Tophet, close under the walls of Jerusalem. There the brazen statue of the god was erected, with the furnace within, or at its feet, into which the children were thrown. To this dreadful form of human sacrifice Ahaz gave the highest sanction by the devotion of one or more of his sons [*Stanley*].

Vers. 9-15. *Clemency.* The record of this act of compassion of these Israelites towards the captives of Judah is to be noted as affording a refutation of the allegation of some modern critics that the writer of Chronicles was swayed by partiality for Judah and by prejudice against Israel [*Wordsworth*].

Vers. 22-25. *Continued sin.* The way of sin is down hill, a man cannot stop where he would, and he that will be tampering with dangerous occasions in confidence of his resolution, shall often find himself carried beyond his purpose [*Abp. Leighton*].

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Hezekiah's reign commenced and carried through four chapters in marked contrast with corresponding portion (2 Ki. xviii.-xx.). The writer of Kings fixes on civil affairs—the two invasions of Sennacherib and on the embassy of Merodach-baladan, related at length, passing lightly and hastily over Hezekiah's reformation (ch. xviii. 4-7), the author of Chron. gives a full account of this latter in three chapters (xxix.-xxxi.), compressing into one (xxxi.) the whole that he has to say of the civil history of the reign. Thus chs. xxix. to xxxi. of 2 Chron. contain matter which is almost wholly new; while ch. xxxii. is little more than a brief summary of what the writer of Kings has related fully in the three chapters which he has devoted to this reign [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-11.—*H.'s good beginning and restoration of worship.* *Zech.*, possibly the person given Is. viii. 2. *Right*, his father's idolatry revolting to him; he began restoration at once. Ver. 3. *Opened doors* closed by his father (ch. xxviii. 24); *repaired*, lit. made them strong, damaged by Ahaz (cf. 2 Ki. xviii. 16). Ver. 4. *East street*, probably open space before

eastern gate. *Sanctify*, Levitical purity (1 Chr. xv. 12, 13). *Filth*, stains of idolatry. Ver. 6. *Fathers*, Ahaz and his contemporaries. *Turned back*, not looking towards rising sun, as Ezek. viii. 16, with their faces from the Temple; but, figuratively, for neglecting and despising God. Ver. 7. Acts of Ahaz. Ver. 8. Punishment for these acts in expressions which are new and have no parallel in the rest of Chron., one which Hez. might naturally use, for it had occurred in a prophecy of Micah (vi. 16), his contemporary and monitor (Jer. xxvi. 18), which was probably uttered towards the close of Ahaz's reign. In Jeremiah phrase becomes common (Jer. xviii. 16; xix. 8; xxv. 9, &c.) [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 9. Cf. ch. xxviii. 6-8. Ver. 10. Purpose of H. Ver. 11. *Sons*, affectionate, hearty appeal to priests and Levites. *Negligent*, remiss; *burn*, make any fire offering generally.

Vers. 12-19.—The Temple cleansed. Fourteen chiefs undertake to collect and prepare their brethren. Ver. 15. *At commandment of king*, "in the business (matters) of the Lord," prescribed by law (Ex. xix. 22; Lev. xi. 44). Ver. 16. Priests only entered the house of the Lord. Whatever found there unclean they brought into the outer court, where Levites took it from them to carry beyond boundary of Temple. *Kidron* (ch. xxx. 14; 2 Ki. xxiii. 12). Ver. 17. Work began first day with purification of courts and reached porch eighth day. Then eight days more to cleanse Temple; sixteen altogether. Ver. 18. *Altar*, great brazen, before porch. Ver. 19. *Cast away* (ch. xxviii. 24; 2 Ki. xvi. 14).

Vers. 20-26.—Hez.'s sin-offering. Early next day H. went with princes, without waiting to assemble representatives of the nation. Ver. 21. *Seven*, number of covenant. *Kingdom*, i.e., for sins of kings and predecessors; *sanctuary*, for sins of priests; *Judah*, for sins of the nation. Ver. 22. Blood expiates, and Levitical rites duly observed in shedding it. Ver. 23. Sin-offering; *hands* (Lev. i. 4; iv. 15, 24). Ver. 24. *All Israel* repeated twice, for sanctuary belonged to all Israel, and invitation given for northern tribes to take part in passover (ch. xxx. 1). "Northern kingdom in a state of anarchy. Four Assyrian invasions had swept over it within thirty-five years. Hoshea, contemporary of Hez., not an independent ruler. Hence Hez. invited revolted tribes to return, if not to their old temporal, to their old spiritual allegiance. To prepare the way for this return, he included 'all Israel' in expiatory sacrifice" [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 25. Cf. 1 Chr. xvi. 4; xxiii. 5; xxix. 29. *Trumpets*, cf. Num. x. 8; 1 Chr. xv. 24; 2 Chr. v. 12.

Vers. 27-31.—Hez.'s burnt-offering. Consumed on altar, only fat for sin-offering (Lev. iv. 19). A sound of instruments heard when old worship recommenced. *Sang*, some anthem for the occasion. All *bowed* (ver. 29) in solemn worship. At invitation of king a great number of thank-offerings presented.

Vers. 31-36.—Order of service completed. Flaying of victims not a priestly function, but a work of the offerer (Lev. i. 6) at first, afterwards on public occasions by Levites, as here. Ver. 34. *Upright*, i.e., displayed more alacrity than priests; perhaps tainted by idolatry, and looked coldly on reforms of Hez. Ver. 35. Another reason which prevented priests from flaying to completion, was the great demand upon their time by the work to be done. Ver. 36. No small joy at opening of newly consecrated Temple. *Prepared* the people's minds, or it could not have been done so heartily and immediately.

HOMILETICS.

HEZEKIAH'S REFORMS IN THE TEMPLE.—Verses 1-11.

The reign of H. (726-697) culminating point of interest in history of kings of Judah. Whether or not contemporary prophecies foretelling the birth of a Divine Heir to the throne, contained any reference to the son of Ahaz, then a mere child, it is certain that no other Prince since the death of David could so well have answered to them (*Hezekiah*, Jehovah strengthens). In point of fact, he was the centre of the highest prophetic influence which had appeared since Elijah [*Stanley*]. **I. The work itself was well chosen.** Methods for extirpating idolatry and accomplishing thorough reformation given in detail. 1. *God's work chosen first.* Temple, sacred work. Needful to strengthen and defend his empire, but no work for God can prosper without friendship with God. H. might have done many useful works, become a benefactor to his people, but saw re-opening of fellowship with God most required for nations and individuals. "Seek first the kingdom of God, &c." (a) *This in opposition to past example.* He did not follow the example of a wicked father, nor listen to the voice of a corrupt court, &c., but did "that which was good and right and

truth before the Lord his God." (b) *This as a promise of future usefulness.* Chose out a work of his own, opened doors, repaired and cleansed the Temple. He pursues work in perplexity, difficulty, and peril. 2. *God's work deliberately chosen.* "It is in mine heart" (ver. 10). He begins in right way, and at right end; shows in what consists true wisdom and wise government. A happy opening, an encouraging pledge of his whole course. A course which *begins* with God, will be one of usefulness and triumph. **II. The spirit in which the work was performed was commendable.** No compromise; no half-measures; no delay. "In the first year of his reign" he began and delayed not. 1. *In personal consecration* (ver. 10). All reformation begins here. Outward work done from life within. Everything depends upon our relation to God, that is, there is a strong moral link between our estimate of God and success. 2. *In tracing historical relationship.* He looks back, reads providence, and finds his work. We cannot work efficiently without a survey of the field, and an insight into present requirements. We have incentives to work when we see need of its performance, and feel called to perform it. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" 3. *In the strength of deep conviction.* Convinced of sin and bitter fruits of idolatry, he determines to reverse policy of his father; announced his resolution at beginning of his reign, and waited not for consolidation of his rule. Courage and determination characterise all earnest reformers. 4. *In seeking co-operation from others.* Desired help from the ministry (ver. 5). "Sanctify yourselves." By legal rites, specially by penitence, faith and fresh obedience. We should be sensible of our own, and the sins of our fathers; earnestly cleanse ourselves, and co-operate for reformation of others. Let each man, therefore, do what he can, but remember that the secret of social development is combination—that the best social system is that in which organisation for the common good is made most complete and most efficient.

THE LEVITES ENLISTED TO HELP.—*Verses 11–19.*

The response to H.'s appeal given by Levites in united, hearty service. "Then the Levites arose." Notice—**I. The method in which they rendered help.** 1. They were united. "They gathered their brethren and worked altogether." 2. They worked in orderly arrangement. Began with outer courts—those of priests and people; they proceeded to inner. But as Levites could not enter the Temple, sweepings were brought by priests to porch, and then carried to Kidron. No hurry; no disorder. "All things done decently and in order." **II. The rule by which they were guided.** As "commandment of the king," but with a desire to obey God's word. "Let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them" (Ex. xix. 22; cf. 1 Chron. xxv. 5; 2 Chron. xxx. 12). **III. The report which they made.** The house, the altar, and the vessels all cleansed and ready for use. Glad themselves, they came to gladden the king, not to seek reward, nor boast of care and trouble. Happy those who can report successful work. But never failure! To open and repair the door, to light the lamps and sweep the floor acceptable to God. Let each resolve, "It is in mine heart" (ver. 10).

"Do not, for one repulse, forego the purpose
That you resolved to effect" [*Shakes.*].

PRAISE AND WORSHIP.—*Verse 30.*

In sixteen days the burnt-offering began; songs were heard, the trumpet rent the place, and all hearts quivered with joy. Observe two points—**I. They**

were old words that the people sang. Moreover H. the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord, with the words of David and Asaph the seer. What do we want with new words, new hymns, new forms of praise? The time is coming—would it could hasten its longed-for advent—when there will be only one book in the Church. At present the number has been reduced in many instances to two, and one of them we do not want. The time will come when the Bible will be the only hymn book in the house of God. What hymns like the hymns of the Bible? What devotional language like the devotional language of the Psalms? What finer teachers could we have than David, Asaph, and Isaiah, and the mighty minstrels and prophets of Israel? The people had the words all ready. If we want to sing we need not wait for some man to make words for us; so long as the Psalms are before us we may begin our song at once. **II. Not only were the words old, the enthusiasm was new.** “And they sang praises with gladness,” literally with exultation, with rapture. Religion is nothing if not enthusiastic. Praise without exultation is but a skeleton form. The whole place in which Christians are assembled for worship should vibrate, tingle again because of the mighty, gracious, holy song. Here we have the changeable and the permanent—the permanent in “the words of David and of Asaph the seer;” and the changeable or capable of increase and variation is the gladness, the enthusiasm, the transport, the holy rapture. Nor was it merely vocal in the sense of displaying musical gymnastic skill, for the people having sung with rapture as if they had not space enough to sing in, as if they would split the overarching heaven with their cry, “they bowed their heads and worshipped.” The look was upward, downward; wild with an infinite rationalistic joy, and subdued because of a sense of the majesty of heaven [Dr. Parker].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 1, 2. Notice—I. *A mother's influence in the training of Hezekiah.* “His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah.” Ver. 1. Probably the Zechariah whose influence for good was signally owned of God in the reign of Uzziah (ch. xxvi. 5). Perhaps Abijah was neglected by her husband, surrounded by greatest difficulties, for every corner of Judah full of idols; yet she attended to duty, felt the solemnity of her trust, and wonderfully succeeded. II. *The sovereign grace of God in the conversion of Hezekiah.* A wicked father, a corrupt court, and an idolatrous country, yet Hezekiah chosen and qualified in youth for the throne, and became one of the best three kings of the Jews. “All except David, Ezekias, and Josias were defective, for they forsook the law of the Most Highest; even the kings of Judah failed” (Ecclus. xlix. 4). This encouragement to parents. God delights in miracles of grace; saves children of

unchristian parents, and crowns with honour the faithfulness of godly parents. III. *The great work which God performs in the youth of Hezekiah.* Only 20 or 25 years old when he began to reign, no common character, no ordinary piety in one so young. The work begun and begun rightly, as soon as seated on the throne; accomplished splendidly by the providence of God. “The Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth.”

Vers. 6–10. I. *A description of apostasy.* Mark the order of departure. *Trespassed*, going beyond; *forsaken him*; then turning away their faces from the habitation; God forsaken, worship forsaken; finally “turned their backs” entirely and choosing idolatry, the source of all misery. II. *The fearful evils which follow* exposed to God's wrath manifest—1. In the invasion and devastation of land, “upon Judah and Jerusalem.” 2. In the fall and

mourning of families, "our fathers have fallen by the sword." 3. In the evils of foreign captivity, "our sons, daughters, and wives are in captivity." 4. In the disgrace to which they were reduced. Former prosperity and glory fled, now a byword and hissing, &c. III. *The source to which these evils are traced.* Hezekiah had discernment to ascribe national calamities to right cause. God caused them on account of their sins. Others, servants or ministers of a moral providence. Men, forces of nature no power at all except given from above. Hence (a) no ground for violence and petty reprisals. Keep down anger against mere agents; (b) The necessity of forming correct estimates of outward vicissitudes, and (c) of learning to discover and submit to God's will the great rule of the universe. As Wordsworth—

"One adequate support,
For the calamities of mortal life,
Exists—one only, an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, however
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power,
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good."

Ver. 11. *My sons. A fatherly king.* With what gentle, paternal eloquence Hezekiah addressed the men on whose co-operation he relied. A pastoral king: a most shepherdly heart was the heart of king Hezekiah. There is a fatherliness that does not depend on age. Hezekiah not an old man, spoke not from under a crown of hoary hairs; but a father because of his capacity of love, unselfish solicitude, patriotic aspiration. There are young pastors, born shepherds; in earliest conscious life they seem to be made to care for others. The pastor is a man who can carry all men. You cannot make pastors, kings, or fathers. Men may bear the nominal functions, but here an entail sanctioned by heaven. Have not some men a right to accost us as sons? Is there not a touch which means solicitude, brotherhood, unity, mutual understanding? The words come to Hezekiah as he needs them; they are his servants, wait upon him. Thus he talks with healthy frankness, tender appreciation, and majestic familiarity which cannot be trifled with [*Dr. Parker*].

HOMILETICS.

CONSECRATION AND SACRIFICES.—Verses 20–31.

I. Sacrifices expiatory. Sin-offerings to atone and make worshipper acceptable to God. Unusually comprehensive, embracing four kinds, and seven of each kind, for sins conscious and unconscious. **II. Sacrifices for all classes.** "For the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah"—*i.e.*, for king or royal house, ministers of the sanctuary, and the people of Judah generally. "Atonement for all Israel" as well as Judah (ver. 24). **III. Sacrifices dedicatory.** After sin-offering, the burnt-offering presented, an expression of self-dedication to God. This a natural order—acceptance, gratitude, and self-consecration. "Now that you have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord, come near and bring sacrifices" (ver. 31). Sacrifices abundant, generous, and appropriate. **IV. Sacrifices accompanied with symbolic rites.** 1. Laying on of hands, confessing guilt. 2. Instruments of music expressing gladness. 3. Bowing of heads denoting reverence and adoration. The solemnities of the day memorable, typical, surprising, and a proof of God's presence. "For the thing was done suddenly."

MUSIC AND CHRISTIAN SERVICE.—Verses 25–30.

This scene beautiful and suggestive. Old life forsaken; new forms of worship resumed, fresh sacrifices presented, and monarch and people working together

with gladness and rejoicing. **I. Christian service begins with fresh demands upon our life.** "Now ye have consecrated yourselves, come near." Once far off; now sin forsaken; and all dedicated to God. *Near* in faith and fellowship, in purpose and daily life. Fresh demands upon time, talents, and efforts. Sacrifices not to self and world, but to God and his cause. Self-surrender, represented by burnt-offerings, perpetually needful. Will and life given to another. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." **II. Christian service is a joyful service when these demands are satisfied.** "The congregation brought in sacrifices and thank-offerings." No joy in appropriating to self and withholding from God what is due. No happy life except in self-devotion to God and in doing good to others. To live in, and to be of no service to the world, a terrible thing. "The liberal soul (lit., the soul of blessing; *i.e.*, that blesses others) shall be made fat" (satisfied and gladdened) (Prov. xi. 25). Always a re-active influence in temporal and spiritual matters; action and reciprocal influence the law of the universe. Withhold it, will tend to poverty of spirit; "give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, &c."

"The truly generous is the truly wise,
And he who loves not others lives unblest."

III. This joyful service is the strength of Christian life. Joy from duty not mere luxury or excitement, but help, strength to more perfect work. Whatever God is *for us*—life, light, love, and strength—it is that we may be the same *for others*. This is Nehemiah's gospel. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Joy creates enthusiasm, elevates above despair and opposition, and develops all our resources. As bodies expand through heat, so the soul is enlarged, and effort prompted under the genial influence of joy.

GOD'S PREPARATION.—Verse 36.

God prepares in nature and in providence. Men gradually fitted and appointed for their work. Our duty to watch and enter upon work when discovered. **I. God seen in removing difficulties in the work.** Idolatry prevalent, and nation corrupted. The people indisposed, and officials reluctant; the work itself great and perhaps thought impossible by many. **II. God seen in helping on the work to completion.** "The service of the Lord was set in order." Not only difficulties removed, but strength given to finish. If priests could not be found, Levites were ready (ver. 34). No delay, no excuse given. Early in the king's reign the work began, expeditiously was it finished, "for the thing was done suddenly." The people seen gathered together. God gave them "a free heart" and they worked willingly. "This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 12-19. The thoroughness of the work done, the readiness and number of those who engaged in it, the method in which they proceeded (ver. 15), and the delights that spring from its completion.

Ver. 13. On triple division of musical Levites, see 1 Chr. xxv. 1-6; 2 Chr. v. 12. When God has a work to do, he raises up men to do it. But

first in rank and position not always fit for service and most willing to enter it.

Vers. 11, 30, 32-34. *Popular generosity and cold officialism.* The "free heart" of the people a contrast to the negligence of officials. A reflection seems to be cast upon their dilatoriness and negligence in sanctifying themselves (ch. xxx. 15), of which they

were afterwards ashamed "Generosity may sometimes confuse officialism, so that people may sometimes get ahead of the Levites" [Dr. Parker]. Priests should be examples to others, never be satisfied with worldly emoluments, grossed in earthly affairs, and

forget the demands of the people and the duties of their calling. The higher the position, the greater should be the readiness to work.

"In persons grafted in a serious trust, Negligence is a crime."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXIX.

Vers. 3-7. *Door opening.* To cleanse the sanctuary is to pray. When Hezekiah opened the doors, by that very act he worshipped; when Hezekiah repaired the doors of the house of the Lord, he wrought a wondrous work upon the heart that was sore by reason of its long-continued need and painful solitude. To repair the building is to worship the living God; to give a cup of cold water to a disciple for Christ's sake is to oblige herein [Dr. Parker].

Vers. 10, 11. *Energy.* Energy of character has always a power to evoke energy in others. It acts through sympathy, one of the most influential of human agencies. The zealous, energetic man unconsciously carries others along with him. His example is contagious and compels imitation. He exercises a sort of electric power through every fibre—flows into the nature of those about him and makes them give out sparks of fire [Smiles].

Vers. 14-17. *Order.* Order is the best manager of time; for unless work is properly arranged time is lost; and once lost it is gone for ever. Order

illustrates many important subjects. Thus obedience to the moral and material law is order. Regard for the rights and obligations of all is order. Virtue is order. The world began with order, chaos prevailed before the establishment of order [Smiles].

Vers. 25-28. *Instruments.* Music has a most humanising effect. The cultivation of the art has a most favourable influence upon public morals. It furnishes a source of pleasure in every family. It gives home a new attraction. It makes social intercourse more cheerful. Father Mathew followed up his temperance movement by a singing movement. He promoted the establishment of musical clubs all over Ireland, for he felt that, as he had taken the people's whisky from them, he must give them some wholesome stimulus in its stead. He gave them music. Singing classes were established, to refine the taste, soften the manners, and humanise the mass of the Irish people. But we fear that the example set by Father Mathew has already been forgotten [Smiles].

CHAPTER XXX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Preparations for Passover (vers. 1-12); the keeping of Passover (vers. 13-17); H.'s prayer for unclean persons (vers. 18-22); the solemnities of the second seven days.

Vers. 1-12.—Preparations for Passover. Sent messengers. Special letters to remote and near tribes (cf. ch. xxix. 24 for object in sending them). Ver. 2. Second month, a time

which allowed for purification of priests, proclamation to be made through all Israel and for absentees. Ver. 3. Other reasons assigned. *Pleased, i.e.*, arrangements made. Ver. 5. Order made and proclaimed from Dan to Beer., *i.e.*, the extent of Israel; "for they had not (for some time) kept the Passover in full numbers, as required (written) by law. Ver. 6. *Posts*, runners or bearers of letters (ch. xxiii. 1, 2). *Remnant*, portions of people had been removed by Assyrian invasions to Asshur (2 Ki. xv. 20), the rest now tributary (2 Ki. xvii. 1-4). Ver. 8. *Stiffnecked*, hardening neck (Deut. x. 16); gesture of disobedience (2 Ki. xvii. 14; Ezra x. 19; Ezek. xvii. 18). *Yield*, lit., give the hand, *i.e.*, submit (1 Chr. xxix. 24; Lam. v. 6). Ver. 9. *Find*, "shall be for compassion before your captors." Ver. 10. *Zeb.*, extreme north. Ver. 11. *Divers*, certain; representatives of five tribes sent. Ver. 12. *Hand*, direct ascription to God for united national response.

Vers. 13-17.—The keeping of Passover. Ver. 14. *Altars* which Ahaz had erected in city (ch. xxviii. 24) partly for victims and partly for incense—a sign of earnestness. Ver. 15. *Ashamed*, behind in zeal for worship or given to idolatry, put now to blush by forwardness of people; received burnt-offerings from offerers at doors of inner court, and took them to brazen altar in front of porch. Ver. 16. *Hand*, Levites being obliged to help in slaying numerous victims. Ver. 17. *Charge*, because unsanctified people could not do it themselves.

Vers. 18-22.—His prayer for unclean. Otherwise, i.e., contrary to Mosaic rites. Ver. 19. *Prepareth*, so is sincere. Ver. 20. *Healed*, forgave (sin) uncleanness and delivered from physical or moral consequences. Ver. 21. *Seven*, according to requirement (Ex. xii. 18; xxiii. 15); *loud*, strong instruments, ascribing might to the Lord. Ver. 22. *Comfortably*, encouragingly to heart. *Confession* of past sin and keeping feast full appointed time.

Vers. 23-27.—Solemnities of second seven days. *Took*, resolved to imitate Solomon's feast at dedication of temple (1 Ki. viii. 65). Ver. 24. *Give*, lit., gave as heave-offering (cf. ch. xxxv. 7). *Thousand*, victims liberally offered by kings and princes, *many* priests sanctified themselves to overtake this extraordinary abundance. *Strangers* responded to invitation, and not such a national feast since time of Solomon (cf. Josiah's Passover, 2 Ki. xxiii. 22, 23). Ver. 27. *Blessed*, benediction of priests, who were entitled to bless, reached to heaven itself (cf. Num. vi. 24-26).

HOMILETICS.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PASSOVER.—Verses 1-12.

Division of kingdom, disorders which followed, and prevalent idolatry prevented national observance for long time. Hezekiah desired to revive it, consulted princes and chief men, met with hearty response, and resolved to proclaim it.

I. The invitation to keep the passover. 1. *Official*, from kings and princes. 2. *Special*, by decree (ver. 5). 3. *Pressing*, by letters and proclamation. 4. *Universal*, to Israel as well as Judah. Indicating zeal, generosity, and love. 5. *Timely*, though temple, priests, and people not duly sanctified by 14th day of first month Nisan. Yet only postponed till 14th day of second month, not a whole year.

II. The motives to comply with this invitation. In passionate language he urges personal obedience and ready response. 1. *Their covenant relation urged them.* God forsaken, though "the Lord God of their fathers" and "the Lord their God." 2. *Their present condition urged them.* Trans-Jordanic region desolate. Two tribes in captivity would find compassion from their captors (Ps. cvi. 46), and God would return unto the remnant. 3. *If they complied God would be gracious.* "Gracious and merciful, &c." (ver. 9). His fierce wrath would be turned away if they sought him (Joel ii. 13). 4. *If they refused God would be angry.*

III. The response which was given to the invitation. A twofold reception. 1. Some were *ready and willing*. "Divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem." "In Judah" God's power seen in zeal and unanimity of people. 2. Others *mocked and insulted*. Not merely refused, but openly derided. "Laughed them to scorn." A type of gospel message, "a savour of life unto life or of death unto death." Which to you? Neutrality impossible. Are you refusing or yielding? "They mocked the messengers of

God and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

HEZEKIAH'S INVITATION.—*Verses 1-12.*

Hezekiah determined to keep passover not in selfish spirit within narrow limits of Judah or Jerusalem, but commanded "that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for *all Israel*." In this we learn—**I. The centre of unity for all God's people.** "The house of the Lord." The sanctuary the centre round which all Israel should gather. Through Jeroboam's act three centres, Jerusalem, Bethel, and Dan. Hezekiah pointed out one. "Turn again to the Lord God of your fathers." Not places of worship, cities of refuge, creeds or denominations, but Christ the centre and bond of unity. One Lord, one table, one object. **II. The method of securing this unity.** 1. *Cherish and cultivate a spirit of love.* Hezekiah not cold and exclusive, thought not of his own people merely, but of those in connection with him. Too much sectarianism and bigotry separate true believers one from another and repel the world. 2. *By personal effort endeavour to bring it about.* Discountenance everything that promotes separation. Encourage and incite in minds of all Christians a desire to be found together. Not the purpose of God that his people should be "scattered abroad" in bitter feelings, sectarian feuds, and selfish actions. Working to secure the unity of the body, we co-operate with God for a divine object. That "he should gather together *in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad."

THE OBSERVANCE OF THE PASSOVER.—*Verses 13-26.*

I. At an unusual though legal time. "In the second month." "At that time" (in the first month, ch. xxix. 3), they could not keep passover, because priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient numbers, nor had the people assembled. King and princes consulted not to delay another year, but to hold it second month. Zeal of people might cool down. Present benefit desired. Let circumstances give way to realities. Never neglect a greater for a smaller good. **II. By an unprecedented number of victims.** Hezekiah gave a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep. The princes gave a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep. These besides the stock of sacrificial animals brought by the people which soon were exhausted. Pious example should ever incite. Rich will never be poorer for genuine liberality. **III. By the great numbers who attended.** Some refused, but others gladly observed passover. All Judah with priests and Levites, some from Israel, the northern kingdom, and strangers—probably proselytes from both Judah and Israel. "A very great congregation" (ver. 13), to whom God's arm was revealed (Is. liii. 1), and who were made willing in the day of God's power. No passover like this since the great festival of Solomon, which lasted fourteen days, for excess of Levitical zeal, unbounded joy, and extent of duration.

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER.—*Verses 18-20.*

Passover kept, but remarkable is the description, "otherwise than it was written." Many involved in ceremonial or moral uncleanness, and unfit to slay their own lambs; needed intercession of the king, who proved himself to be a true ruler and a true priest for the people. Learn—**I. That purity of heart is required for sanctuary worship.** Outward cleansing of

Old Testament a symbol of inward. Truth in the inward parts, sincerity of heart and mind needful. Worship is not sensual, but a living fellowship with Christ; for this, preparation must be made. "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him, &c." (Job xi. 13). **II. That the best preparation in sanctuary worship is defective.** Not what law requires, not up to spiritual ideal, "according to the purification of the sanctuary." Iniquity cleaves to our holy things, and "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." Best offerings, holiest worshippers unworthy—need the intercession, the incense of the great High-Priest. **III. That when the heart is sincere God will hear prayer.** God is *Jehovah the good*, kind and merciful; proclaiming goodness in forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. Prayer to Him will be heard. "And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah." God ever condescending to the upright in shortcomings and defects. But this no excuse for negligence in preparation, for reliance upon duty performed as well as we can perform it, nor any ground for despair on account of weakness or imperfection. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

A SECOND JOYFUL MONTH.—Verses 23-26.

A voluntary service made in addition to requirements of law, a fruit and sign of abundant zeal and gladness. This illustrates—**I. The true method of deliverance from sectarianism.** No form prescribed. Law not exactly obeyed. The sweetness of unity in decided hostility to separation, idolatry, and narrow-mindedness. Hospitality warmed, the nation enthusiastic and one; numbers grow, and pardon multiplies at the feast. **II. The true principle of all reformation.** Not to pull down what is *false*, but to build up what is *true*. Assemble Israel round the altar, lead them into the presence of the God of their fathers; then a mighty power will go forth from Jerusalem to sweep the land from idols, upset the seats of superstition, and confirm righteous works. Not to resuscitate fallen religion by novel measures, to promote excitement, and raise up a denomination, but to return to appointed means, regularly, orderly, and reverently observe divine worship, and restore to freedom and efficiency old institutions by which God will raise the Church and bless the nation. **III. The only way to secure service out of worship.** "When all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces," &c. (ch. xxxi. 1). Altars not destroyed in going up to Jerusalem. They needed the experience of the feast, the blessings of worship. Hezekiah began with God in sanctuary, Israel pursued the same order. Power to reform and execute judgment derived from God's presence. Luther and Knox prayerful in closet, therefore successful in reform. "Not by might, &c."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 14-17. *Removal of altars.* 1. *Destruction after construction.* Evil taken away before good accomplished. 2. *Official lukewarmness to remove evil.* Its widespread and its future end. 3. *Personal revival to stir up others.*

Vers. 18-20. *Hez.'s prayer.* 1. Sin brings sickness. Ceremonial uncleanness exposure to danger. In conse-

quence of transgression they had cause to fear physical and moral disease (Lev. xv. 31). 2. God the physician. Will heal this moral sickness. "The Lord *healed* and restored to penitence and health." This revealed probably by a prophet (*cf.* 2 Ki. xix. 20; xx. 5).

Ver. 22. *Hez.'s encouragement to Levites.* Work holy and great. Unity

and resources of all to accomplish it. Hence "H. spake comfortably." I. *Qualifications required.* (a) *Knowledge*, good and extensive, ritual and musical. (b) *Wisdom* to execute and consecrate it to God's service. (c) *Humility* before God. "Knowledge is proud because she knows so much, wisdom humble because she knows no more." II. *The advantages of possessing these qualifications.* (a) *Ability* to encourage others. (b) *Facility* to arrange and conduct public worship.

Vers. 1-27. Reviewing whole, we have—I. *A revival of theocratic spirit.* II. *Destruction of idolatrous customs.* III. *Establishment of true unity in public worship.* IV. *A pattern Reformation*, in its benevolent design, in the spirit in which it was conducted, and in the priestly blessing it secured. Benedictions fell from lips of leaders, praises of the people ascended to heaven, the nation restored to God "and great joy."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXX.

Vers. 1-12. *Zeal* ("My sons, be not negligent") should be inspired by principles, not by circumstances. Yet the value of circumstances must not be underrated, for they are means which God employs to awaken our attention to duty. It is not difficult to trace the course of events through which the dying embers of religious zeal, and especially of zeal for Christian missions, have been kindled by the breath of God. We may not overlook the happy results from the commanding influences of leading men and the powerful impressions produced on the lethargy into which the public mind is ever sinking, by the stirring appeals of pulpit, platform, and press. By such means it has pleased God, in a degree, to conquer public opinion, and they must continue to be plied with unabating energy till the conquest is complete [*W. H. Stowel, D.D.*].

Ver. 22. *Confession.*

"What better can we do than to the place
Repairing where he judged us, prostrate
fall

Before him reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg with
tears" [*Milton*].

Vers. 23-27. *Universal joy.* I am not unmindful of the assertion that the God of the Hebrews is usually thought of as a Being of preternatural severity, overwhelming men by his majesty, begetting profound and soul-filling awe by his greatness, dwelling in the thick darkness, making clouds his chariot, and sweeping down on his foes like a cyclone. But this representation is one-sided and unfair to a religion which had more festivals than fasts, more psalms than prophecies, and more triumphs than despairs. By the side of intolerance of sin there is mercy that reacheth to the very heavens, and near to the righteousness that is like the great mountains there is a forgiveness that inspires hopeful petition, even out of depth of sufferings and misfortune [*Dr. J. Clifford*].

CHAPTER XXXI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Destruction of idolatry (ver. 1); H. appoints courses and contributions (vers. 2-10); and arranges the chambers and officers (vers. 11-21).

Ver. 1.—*Idol, destroyed* (cf. 2 Ki. xviii. 4). After festival, *all Judah and Benj., i.e.* from southern kingdom; in *Eph. and Man., i.e.*, in northern kingdom. *Images, statues of Baal; groves, stocks* representing Ashtaroth (xiv. 3); *utterly destroyed, had made an end.*

Vers. 2-10.—H. appoints courses and contributions. Courses as appointed by David (1 Chr. xxiii. 6; xxiv. 1). *The tents, i.e.,* within the gates (precincts) of the Temple. Ver. 3. *King's portion.* H. set example in giving tithes (*cf.* ch. xxxii. 27-29 for what possession consisted). Ver. 4. *Portion.* Having set example, people called to do their part. *Priests, i.e.,* first-fruits (Num. xviii. 12-18) and tithe (*ib.* 21-24); *encouraged, i.e.,* that they, priests and Levites, might devote themselves wholly to their proper work, the service of sanctuary and teaching of God's law (ch. xvii. 7-9), and not engage in secular occupations (*cf.* Neh. xiii. 10-14) [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 5. Improved state of feeling stirred up to generosity; *honey* (dates), and *tithes* brought from Israel in Jerusalem. Others (ver. 6) in country districts brought first-fruits and tithe of sheep and oxen; *heaps* upon heaps. Ver. 7. *Seventh month,* which completed the harvesting. Ver. 9. *Questioned.* Whether all he saw was sufficient to maintain priests and Levites. Ver. 10. *Azar.,* possibly A. of ch. xxvi. 17; replied that there was enough, and that the people were grateful to Jehovah for his goodness.

Vers. 11-20.—H. provides store-chambers and officers. Chambers (storehouses) always among rooms (1 Ki. vi. 5) or among outer buildings attached to courts. But disused of late years, required to be prepared afresh. *Faithfully,* acting carefully and honestly, not appropriating for common use (ch. xix. 9). *Shimei* (ch. xxix. 14). Ver. 13. *Jehiel and Mah.* (ch. xxix. 14). Ver. 14. *Doorkeeper* toward east (1 Chr. ix. 18); *freewill, i.e.,* voluntary offerings to God (Deut. xii. 17); *holy things,* portion of sin-offerings, which had to be eaten by priests in a holy place (Lev. vi. 10-22; vii. 6). Ver. 15. Six Levites situated in cities of priests to distribute to priestly families, old or young, great or small, their due share of temple offerings. Those at Jerusalem obtained their share at the temple. Ver. 17. "The writer here proceeds to state nature of lists which guided officers who made distributions. Three enumerated—one of priests made out according to families; one of Levites, including all above twenty years of age, and made out according to courses; and a third of priestly and Levitical families, containing wives, sons, and daughters of both priests and Levites indiscriminately [*Speak. Com.*]. Ver. 19. *In fields,* not even country priests and Levites neglected.

Vers. 20, 21.—Hez.'s thoroughness. Good acting as servant of Jehovah; integrity and benevolence attested. *All his heart,* a perfect heart (*cf.* ch. xix. 9; 2 Ki. xx. 3; Is. xxxviii. 3).

HOMILETICS.

A POPULAR MOVEMENT.—Verse 1.

Many indications in this history that the power of Hebrew kings over people was not so arbitrary as that of Eastern monarchs in general. Here the people began a movement, a revival, which ended in destruction of high places, and establishment of one form of worship. **I. The enthusiasm from which it sprang.** Not mere excitement, not violence and tumult, but holy fervour. Iconoclasm came from religious enthusiasm; inspiration from God (*en* and *theos*). Different from the wild fanaticism of heathen gods. All reform from deep religious conviction, from real intercourse with God. The heart must be filled before the hand can strike. **II. The extent to which it reached.** Jerusalem cleansed before Passover, and all signs of idolatry removed. Now the land had to be purged. In the northern and southern kingdoms the movement spread. Amendment must begin in the *heart* first, the centre and source of action; outward sins may be forsaken, and the heart unrenewed. "Cleanse your heart," and then "make your ways and your doings good." **III. The thoroughness with which it was finished.** They began and made a complete finish; did not give up, nor act partially, "all was finished." Destruction entire. "Statues" broken in pieces, "the groves cut down." "High places," time-honoured centres removed; "altars," and all remnants of idolatry, "utterly destroyed." Every evil must be forsaken, no sin spared through favour or affection. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" **IV. The national peace which resulted from its completion.** "Then the children of Israel returned," &c. Though long absent, they could not return and feel secure, "every man in his possession," until images were destroyed. Idols no longer their gods and defence. They

returned to Him from whom they had deeply revolted. "For in that day every man cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which his own hands had made unto him for a sin" (Is. xxxi. 7; ii. 20).

HEZEKIAH ESTABLISHES ORDERLY PERFORMANCE OF TEMPLE WORSHIP.—
Verses 2-10.

H. now turns attention to public worship, suspension of which had disarranged the courses appointed by David, which were intended to relieve each other in perpetual succession (1 Chron. xxiii. 6; xxiv. 1). **I. The arrangement of priests and Levites in courses.** The order settled afresh in which they should undertake their parts of service. Every man found his work, put into his place, and made to contribute to the whole. "Levites after their courses;" priests "for burnt-offerings and for peace-offerings," and Levites to "minister" to priests, or "give thanks and praise." But place, time, and position nothing without heart. They must represent the man himself. Allegiance to God inspires worship, and worship inspires and sanctions duty. No motives so strong and overpowering as those which worship kindles and sustains; self-approbation, self-respect, regard for esteem of others fail to take hold of conscience and life. Faith in the ever-present God, actual communion with the Father of Spirits, will create homage in worship, and faithfulness in sanctuary work. **II. The commands for payment of dues from the people.** When every one had his proper place assigned him, an edict was issued for the regular payment of dues for revenues of the temple. 1. *The king set an example.* Contributions from privy purse and royal estate to defray expenses of altar. A generous act, honouring God, and relieving his people; after the example of David and Solomon before him (ch. viii. 14; 1 Ki. ix. 25). Kings not exempt; may be noble examples of liberality and duty to their subjects. 2. *The people responded to the call.* Formerly the sacred tribute entirely neglected or withheld by the people because misappropriated by idolatrous princes; now improved state of public feeling prompts to ready compliance. First-fruits and tithes poured in from all parts of Judah and Israel, which astonished the king, proved sufficient for the priests, and expressed gratitude to God, whose law was obeyed (*cf.* Ex. xxiii. 19; Num. xviii. 21), who had crowned the year with his goodness and mercy. Loyal hearts secure liberal contributions; liberal contributions will secure God's blessing. "Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour (empty) you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

HEZEKIAH'S PROVISION OF STORE CHAMBERS.—*Verses 11-19.*

I. Chambers were prepared. Storehouses, granaries, or cellars. Old ones had fallen into decay and needed repairing or fresh ones built. Tithes and offerings not left exposed in heaps and disorder, liable to be wasted or taken away, but preserved, consecrated to right use. People encouraged when their contributions are well received and properly used. **II. Officers were appointed to distribute stores.** Officers chosen for different departments, and distribution made "by courses" according to three lists of priestly families. 1. *Impartial* distribution. "As well to the great as to the small." Those near, in actual attendance (ver. 17), and those "in the fields of the suburbs" were not overlooked (ver. 19). 2. *Conscientious* distribution. "One list of priests made out according to families; one of Levites, including all above

twenty years of age, and made out according to courses; and a third of priestly and Levitical families containing wives, sons, and daughters of both priests and Levites indiscriminately." "They sanctified themselves," conscientiously devoted themselves to their duties, "in their (trust) set office," in confidence of support, and were not disappointed. "Attend to my duties," said Queen Elizabeth to a courtier, "and I will attend to thy wants."

HEZEKIAH'S THOROUGHNESS IN GOD'S SERVICE.—*Verses 20 and 21.*

Other kings good, did right as Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, and Amaziah, but fell away from God. Hezekiah remained firm to the last, and prospered in all things. **I. The work he performed.** He displayed qualities of a constitutional sovereign, restored cities and institutions of the land, and gained renown equal to his predecessors. His work summarised—1. In temple service. 2. "In the law." 3. "In the commandments." **II. The spirit in which he performed it.** 1. A spirit of *impartiality*. Not religious merely at home and in the temple, but before his people, "throughout all Judah." 2. A spirit of *integrity*. He was faithful to God like Abraham, and could appeal to divine justice. He "wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God." 3. A *spirit of zeal*. "He did it with all his heart," a heart filled with earnestness and sincerity, and not shared or swayed with rival deities (1 Ki. xi. 4). **III. The blessing of God which followed its performance.** "And prospered." In expeditions and in all undertakings "the Lord was with him." He had enormous wealth, shared in authority over northern kingdom, and had great influence over surrounding nations (*cf.* 2 Ki. xviii. 7; 2 Chr. xxxii. 22–29). Regard to God's glory will secure honour here and reward hereafter.

The text speaks of work. Only adopt Hezekiah's plan, and "in every work that you begin to do with all your heart, you may prosper." **I.** We learn from Hezekiah a lesson of concentration of energy. He did not begin half a dozen things at once, and drivel his energy away upon them; he did not commence one thing till he had finished another. **II.** Method and punctuality, too, seem to be indirectly hinted at in the text, and they are almost indispensable to prosperity. **III.** But the great lesson we learn from the text is the value of *thoroughness* in doing whatever we undertake with our whole heart and doing it well. Do nothing as if it were trifling; if it be so, it is unworthy of you. **IV.** Emulate Hezekiah's ardent and consistent piety. He stands in the front rank among the saints of Scripture as a man of prayer. Every difficulty and trouble he took straight to God, and spread it out before Him [*J. Thain Davidson*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Religion at home.* Well to attend public worship, but "show piety at home." 1. Not in temples and cathedrals, churches and chapels, in ritual and forms. 2. Not at feasts, in excitement, numbers, and haste. 3. Not in organisations and agencies. In quietness and domestic duty; before friends and your own family. Display the good received in ordinances in the strength and example of home. "Go home to thy friends and tell them how

great things the Lord hath done for thee."

Ver. 2. Gates of the tent—lit., the camps of the Lord. *Jehovah's camp.* "Fitly compared to a camp, for the watch and ward there kept by the priests, and for the convention of the people thither, as to their rendezvous, to pray, which is the chief service of our spiritual warfare" [*Trapp*]. **I.** Its orderly arrangements. **II.** Its sure defences. **III.** Its enlisted **tribes.**

IV. Its central worship. V. Its great commander.

Vers. 2-5. *Priestly maintenance.*

1. Due from all those near the temple at Jerusalem, those in cities of Judah.
2. Due according to the law of God.
3. Due that they might devote themselves entirely to their proper work, the service of the sanctuary and the exposition of the law, and not engage

in secular occupations (*cf.* Neh. xiii. 10-14).

Ver. 8. *They blessed the Lord.* The source of all good. 1. For a bountiful year. 2. For disposition to consecrate its gifts. 3. For abundance which is left (ver. 10). Nothing should be wasted, only right use of everything brings blessings.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXXI.

Ver. 1. *Reform.* Men cannot strike finally if they only act as reformers. Reform is an active word, and is to be regarded with great favour, and is the only word that is permissible under some circumstances; but the greater word is regeneration. Reform that does not point to regeneration is a waxen flower that will melt when the sun is well up in the heavens. It is not in man to regenerate, therefore; this is the mystery of God's action in the soul. When the man is new the action will be new. The great process does not begin with the action, but with the soul. Make the tree good, then the fruit will be good [*Dr. Parker*].

Vers. 2-10. *Service maintained.* This careful and bountiful provision is painfully deficient in present church economics, *but manifestly essential to liberal and cheerful giving.* No rate of giving to God, short of sacrifice, is worthy of those who are redeemed by the priceless sacrifice of a Saviour's blood, or is adequate to the vast requirements of a ruined world [*J. Ross*].

Vers. 20, 21. *All his heart.* Let us take heed we do not sometimes call that zeal for God and his gospel which is nothing else than our own tempestuous and stormy passion. True zeal is a sweet, heavenly, and gentle flame which maketh us active for God, but always within the sphere of love [*Cudworth*]. *Prosperity.* Hezekiah "prospered." God walks with the good man. God rewards enthusiasm. We do not throw our divinely-inspired passion away to a cold, selfish world. Our passion may appear to be frenzy, enthusiasm, insanity, but the reply is before us, we can return to it, and if we can return with a sound heart, blessed are we; then we can say with moral emphasis, If we be beside ourselves it is to God. May we understand what it is to eat the passover, and having eaten it, to rise with moral dignity, that we may smite every unholy thing and go about our whole business with a united heart, expecting the blessing of God which created the enthusiasm daily to sustain its holy fury [*Dr. Parker*].

CHAPTER XXXII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] Sen. invades Israel (vers. 1-5); H.'s preparations to meet him (vers. 6-8); Sen.'s seductions (vers. 9-15); Sen.'s letter (vers. 16-20); destruction of Assyrian host (vers. 21-26); end and reign of Hez. (vers. 27-33). *Cf.* parallel account in 2 Ki. xviii. 13, xix. 37, and Is. xxxvi. and xxxvii.

Vers. 1-5.—*Sen. invades Israel.* After, i.e., 14th year of Hez. (2 Ki. xviii. 13). *Estab.,*

faithfulness or truth on part of Hez. *Sen.*, Sanherib (Sin-ahi-ir-ba of Assyrian inscriptions), son and successor of Sargon, the successor of Shalmaneser and conqueror of Samaria. *Win*, break into them. Ver. 2. *Purposed* to fight, face was for war (cf. ch. xx. 3; Lu. ix. 53). Ver. 3. *Counsel* (cf. xxx. 2). *Stop*, not wholly, but cover them over (Luther, *cover*), to hide them and to convey water underground for his own supply in siege (cf. Ecclus. xviii. 17). Ver. 4. *Brook*, Gihon, brook of valley of Ben-hinnom (cf. ver. 30; 2 Ki. xx. 22). *Kings*, mighty men. Ver. 5. *Strengthened*, made careful inspection of city defences, renewed the masonry, raised projecting machines to the towers, and specially fortified Millo, the lower portion of city.

Vers. 6-8.—*His preparations*. *Gathered* them in large open space. *Comfortably*, to their heart, inspiring courage and confidence (xxx. 22). Ver. 7. *More with us* (cf. 2 Ki. vi. 16). Ver. 8. *Arm of flesh*, designates human weakness (cf. Is. xxxi. 3; Jer. xvii. 5; Ps. lvi. 5). *Fight* (1 Sam. viii. 20; xviii. 17). *Rested*, leaned.

Vers. 9-15.—*Sen. seduces the people*. *After this*. Hez.'s submission (2 Ki. xviii. 14-16) omitted and the second expedition given. *Lachish* approached (cf. xxv. 27). *Power*, all his sovereignty with him (cf. Is. xxxiv. 1). *Judah* (2 Ki. xviii. 27, and ver. 18). Ver. 10. *In siege*, in straitness (marg., fortress) (cf. 2 Ki. xxv. 2; Ezek. iv. 7). Jer. not besieged, but in distress and straitened for supplies. Ver. 11. *Persuade*, urge you to destruction. Ver. 12. (cf. 2 Ki. xviii. 22). *One altar*. "A more distinct reference to exclusive validity of worship in temple, which had been once more established by Hez." [Keil]. Misconception of religious reforms natural to a heathen. Ver. 13. *Fathers*, ancestors. *People*, mentioned 2 Ki. xviii. 35 (cf. Is. x. 8-11; xxxvi. 20; xxxvii. 11-13). Ver. 15. *No God*, in addition to reviling God of Israel, and he adds no god of any nation and kingdom can rescue from him. Ver. 15. *Servants*, Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh the spokesman (2 Ki. xviii. 19-35).

Vers. 16-20.—*Sen.'s insulting letters*. *Letter*, in plural referring to characters in which written [Murphy], or used as often of a single document [*Speak. Com.*] (cf. 2 Ki. xix. 14). Facts co-ordinated in real sequence, not temporal. First speech, then letter, and lastly demand. Ver. 18. *Cried*, to produce panic. Ver. 19. *Against gods* (2 Ki. xix. 18), classifying Jehovah among them. Ver. 20. H.'s prayer given 2 Ki. xix. 15-19.

Vers. 21-23.—*Destruction of Assyrian host*. *Angel* (2 Ki. xix. 35). *Mighty men*, common soldiers (as xvii. 14) in distinction from leaders and princes. *Came forth*, his own sons (2 Ki. xviii. 37). Ver. 22. *From hand*, guarded, sustained (Gen. xlvii. 17), "gave them rest—round about." Ver. 23. *Presents*, precious things (xvii. 10; xx. 29).

Vers. 24-33.—*Remaining history of Hez.* *Sickness* described in full in 2 Ki. xx. 1-11; and Is. xxxviii. *Sign*, going back of shadow on dial. Ver. 25. *Lifted up in pride*, in display of treasures (2 Ki. xx. 13). Ver. 26. *Wrath*, rebuked by Is., humbled himself (2 Ki. xx. 17, 18). Ver. 27. *Riches*, personal estates in land and agricultural produce; accumulated treasures as silver and gold (cf. 2 Ki. xx. 13; Is. xxxix. 2), cattle for stalls, &c. Ver. 30. *Stopped*, upper sources of Gihon. *Down*, underground. This noticed as a great act of Hez. Ver. 31. *Business*, interpreters from Babylon, where astronomy was cultivated, greatly interested and sent on embassy. *Wonder*, i.e., going back of shadow. *Try* (cf. Deut. viii. 2). Ver. 32. *Goodness*, good deeds (Neh. xiii. 14). *Vision*, "title given by Is. to his prophecy (Is. i. 1)." *Chiefest*, highest, an excavation above all other tombs—in same repository, but at higher level—intended by some, others that no room in family sepulchres, and a private tomb constructed for him and successors. *Honour*, the burning of spices (cf. xvi. 14; xxi. 19).

HOMILETICS.

SENNACHERIB'S ATTEMPT ON JERUSALEM.—Verses 1-26.

In the spring or early summer of 701 B.C., S. marched his forces to reduce rebellious vassals to submission. Sidon and Phœnician cities were taken and reduced, and bordering kings rendered homage. He climbed the lofty heights of Lebanon (2 Ki. xix. 23), and "passed along the banks of the streams, which he drained by his armies, or over which he threw bridges for them to cross" (Is. xxxvii. 24, 25, LXX). He was renowned far and wide as the destroyer. His chief object not Palestine but Egypt, the only rival worthy of his arms. Useless to take Lachish, with the strong fortress of Jerusalem in rear. Each stage of march foreseen, all intervening obstacles swept away. Fenced cities of Judah taken, Zion alone remained. Hezekiah counselled to

submit and pay tribute, was shut up in the city, and determined to resist. The invading army reached the city, "and passed in long defile under the walls. Chariots and horses filled the ravines, scarlet dresses and scarlet shields blazed in the sun, and the veil of the city was torn away. The general, accompanied by high personages, made demands for unconditional surrender" [see *Stanley*, vol. ii. *Jew. Ch.*].

I. Sennacherib's design. "He was purposed to fight against Jerusalem." 1. *By craft he seeks to withdraw the people from allegiance to Hezekiah.* (a) He will lead them into danger. "To give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst" (ver. 11). (b) He has excited divine displeasure by removing high places. Hezekiah's reforms ridiculed. He could not expect help from Jehovah, the national Guardian or tutelary Deity, for he had forfeited favour by his sacrilegious conduct in demolition of sanctuaries. But Hezekiah designed not to exterminate, only to promote worship of God. (c) His forces will only lead you to ruin (ver. 15). If local gods of those powerful nations could not deliver people from might of Assyria, how improbable, impossible for the god of so small a state to deliver them? A contradiction to his boast in 2 Ki. xviii. 25, and a heathenish view of Jehovah. 2. *By blasphemy he misrepresents Jehovah.* He is put on a level with other gods, "the gods of the nations." He is declared impotent to deliver those who trust in him. "So shall not the God of Hez. deliver his people" (ver. 17). "The boastful and blasphemous tone of this caitiff's speech, which, in the concluding part of it, here reaches its climax. He spoke of Jehovah as a heathen, and as the representative of a despot whose head was turned by his hitherto unbroken course of conquests" (*Jam.* on 2 Ki. xviii. 33-35). 3. *By self-exaltation he becomes insulting.* A towering pride exalted him above all authority, human and divine. "Had not Asshur's deity proved himself, by the capture of Samaria, to be mightier than Israel's! Only one more evidence of this was needed—the capture of Jerusalem—and then the King of Assyria was undisputed lord of the world" [*Speak. Com.*].

II. Hezekiah's preparations to meet this design. "H. responded to the call. By a sustained effort, which gave him a peculiar renown (Ecclus. xlvi. 17) as a second founder or restorer of the city of David. 1. He stopped the two springs of Siloam, and diverted the waters of the Kedron, which, unlike its present dry state, and unusually even for that time, had been flooding its banks, and in this way the besiegers, he hoped, would be cut off from all water on the barren hills around. 2. He also fortified the walls, and rebuilt the towers, which had probably not been repaired on the north side since the assault of Joash, King of Israel, and completed the armoury and outworks of the castle or fortress of Milo. 3. He assembled the people in the great square or open place before the city gate, and there, with his officers, nobles, and guards, addressed them in a spirit which, combined with his active preparations, reminds us of the like combination in the well-known speech of Cromwell. 'And the people rested on the words of H., King of Judah.' Well might any nation repose on one to whom even now the world may turn as a signal of what is meant by faith, as distinct from fanaticism" [*Stanley*].

III. Sennacherib's failure to accomplish his design. Measures of Rab. entirely ineffectual. Troops at his disposal not sufficient to enforce submission. He was obliged to report to his royal master unsuccessful mission. His second demand unavailing. H. spread defiant letter before Jehovah, who intervened to fulfil his word and answer prayer. "The skilled strategy of the Assyrian will avail him no more; his past career has been in accordance with the purposes of Providence, but his appointed bound has at length been reached. Hope still remains for the 'remnant' of Judah. 'By the way that he come, by the same shall he return, and unto this city he shall not come, saith Jehovah.' That night the long series of Isaiah's predictions received its fulfilment—the flower of the Assyrian army was cut off and the Assyrian monarch 'heard the

rumour' which impelled his return to his own land" [*Driver on Isaiah*]. He "decamped, departed, returned, remained at Nineveh" (Is. xxxvii. 37, 38). Worshipping without attendants, the once triumphant conqueror in humiliation sought the help of his own special god, but was slain by his own sons.

"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold"
[*Byron's Heb. Melody*]

SENNACHERIB'S LETTER.—Verses 17–20.

Hez.'s letter different in form from our letters. Assyrians did not use paper or even skins, but wrote on clay. It is very likely the letter was a tablet of terra-cotta. I. "Went up into the house of the Lord" (*cf.* 2 Kings xix. 14). Where so likely to find God as in his house? Notice how he speaks of God dwelling between the cherubim. Perhaps he had heard how Sen. sat on his throne between winged bulls and lions; but he heard Isaiah tell of seeing the Lord surrounded by winged intelligences. God has only to speak to his winged messenger and the angel goes to crush the foes of his people. This was a model prayer, not going all round the world, but fastening on the thing wanted, and asking for that. If our prayers were more like telegrams we should have speedier answers. II. Was the letter ever answered? Yes, Jehovah answered it himself. We know what the result was, and how soon the bolt of vengeance struck down the proud blasphemer. III. There is a postscript to God's answer. "It came to pass that night . . . they were all dead corpses." Suppose we read in the newspaper to-morrow, "Sudden death of 185,000 soldiers!" What a stir it would make! What a sight the camp must have been next morning! There has been considerable discussion as to the cause of the destruction of so large an army, and it is generally understood now to have been the simoon. Cambyses, King of the Medes, lost fifty thousand men by one of these dreadful winds. But whether the wind was a messenger or an angel, it matters not. God willed it, and nature hastened to do his bidding [*T. Champness, "New Coins, &c."*].

ASSAULTS ON CHRISTIAN FAITH.—Verses 9–15.

The Rabshakeh's plausible speech and Jerusalem's faith, greatly distressed by him, are typical. Still as men hang moodily over the bulwarks of Zion, doubtful whether life is worth living within the narrow limits which religion prescribes, or righteousness worth fighting for with such privations and hope deferred, comes upon them some elegant and plausible temptation, loudly calling to give the whole thing up. Disregarding the official evidences and arguments that push forward to parley, it speaks home in practical tones to men's real selves—their appetites and selfishness. "You are foolish fellows," it says, "to confine yourselves to such narrowness of life and self-denial! The fall of your faith is only a matter of time; other creeds have gone, yours must follow, and why fight the world for the sake of an idea, or from the habits of discipline? Such things only starve the human spirit; and the world is so generous, so free to every one, so tolerant of each enjoying his own, unhampered by authority or religion" [*G. A. Smith, Bk. of Is.*]. Notice—I. **The unwarrantable assumption of unbelief.** Rab.'s address a type of modern criticism, the forces of culture and unbelief, with lofty pretensions, patronising airs, and deceitful promises, designed to shake confidence in religion, create confusion in Christian communities, and seduce from Christ. 1. *In displays of immense self-confidence.* Hezekiah never styled a king. Rab.'s master was destined to conquer. This an occasion for self-glorification. Jerusalem's defenders underrated. The city to

be captured by clever speeches. More in Christianity than human wisdom and power. It can never be hindered, destroyed by craft, worldly policy, or worldly wisdom 2. *It seeks to undermine religious faith.* Honouring and commending and then trampling it under foot. God only on a level with idols. Christianity only one form among many. Faith is held in risks and ignoble sacrifice. Your system has had its day, is becoming effete, and its decay only a matter of time. Predictions which have been, and may again be falsified. 3. *It offers false liberty.* "Make a treaty with me, and come out to me, and eat every one of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, &c." (Is. xxxvi. 12). "A subtle assault upon the companionship, discipline, and patriotism of the common soldiers by the promises of a selfish, sensuous equality and individualism." An independent easy life offered to men who throw off allegiance to God, and restraints of Christian faith. But no philosopher, sceptic, or unbeliever can ensure freedom from starvation in unbelief, and captivity in the tolerance of the world. **II. The defence of faith.** "If faith be held simply as the silent garrison of Jerusalem held it, faith in a Lord God of righteousness, who has given us a conscience to serve him, and has spoken to us in plain explanation of this by those whom we can see, understand, and trust, not only by an Isaiah, but by a Jesus, then neither mere cleverness nor the ability to promise comfort can avail against our faith" [*Smith, Bk. of Is.*]. 1. *Their representations are false.* Zion is not endangered. Our God is greater than all other gods, worthy of trust and service. Liberty and satisfaction not given in unbelief, enemies themselves being witness. Our religion not likely to decay, has recuperative power, and is destined to triumph over all. What faith makes such heroes and philanthropists, gives such happiness in life, such hope in death? 2. *Faith in God is reasonable.* He is omnipotent, supreme Ruler, and ever present with his people. His word is fulfilled by his providence. No home, no freedom away from him. Unbelief is exile. In his palace, obedient to his law, and standing by his people will be found our security and peace. Well might Isaiah exclaim on the morning of the night of destruction to the Assyrian army, "Jehovah is our Judge; Jehovah is our Lawgiver; Jehovah is our King: He saveth us."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Vers. 6-8. *Hez.'s Exhortation.* 1. Numbers no guarantee of success. "All the multitude with him" availed not. "Not by might, nor by power, &c." 2. Worldly policy and shrewdness will not ensure success. These combined in largest measure have failed thousands of times. 3. Unlimited resources of all kinds—men, money, or influence—will not give success against right and God. All "an arm of flesh," and what "an arm of flesh" multiplied a million times when measured with the single arm of omnipotence! 4. God alone can give victory. "With us is the Lord our God." "The import of 'Immanuel;' by which name Christ now began to be known amongst them" [*Trapp*]. God (a) greater than numbers, "more with us than with him;"

(b) pledged to help, "to help us and to fight our battles." Hence be more anxious about the justice of your cause and God's presence to help it on, than its popularity and favourable circumstances. Exercise confidence in God and speak comfortably to those in his service. He that "feareth the fury of the oppressor forgetteth the Lord his Maker."

Ver. 9. In demand of Sen. he seems—1. Unchecked by moral obligation. Would not be satisfied with payment of tribute from Hez. "He hath broken the covenant." 2. Unchecked by fear of military defences, "despised cities." 3. Unchecked by respect for human life, "regardeth not men" (Is. xxxiii. 8). "Sen., like Napoleon in that terrible Russian expedition of 1812, had essayed

a task he was unable to complete. The Assyrians had no conception of benefiting or civilising the nations which they conquered; their activity was a purely destructive one; their only motive was ambition and lust of dominion. And now in pursuing the same objectless career they were meditating the extermination of a nation whose preservation was vital to the future of humanity. The Assyrian, though he knows it not, is an instrument in the hand of Providence; he has a mission to execute by the limits of which his pretensions must be bounded" [*Driver*].

Vers. 10-15. *Wherein your trust?* A most important question for all. 1. Hez. trusted to Egypt; *a bruised reed*, slender and easily broken. Weakened by Saragon, Egypt failed to help. Resolutions of amendment, self-righteousness, and vague hopes of God's mercy broken reeds. 2. God the only ground of trust. Well when sinners are roused by this question. Wisdom to trust in God, for he can and will deliver. 3. The test of this trust, "If

ye say unto me, &c." (ver. 22). "Thus he thinks to beat them off all their holds that he may bring them to the bent of his bow. Satan doth the like, 'whom resist steadfast in the faith'" [*Trapp*].

I. What accusations here made: (1) that Hez. had forfeited their allegiance and God's protection by his reforms (ver. 12); (2) that Hez.'s God only like other gods, and could not deliver him. II. What scenes of desolation here pictured. Nations conquered, gods in captivity at Nineveh, and everywhere turned into a desert. III. What assumptions of pride, power, and profanity.

Ver. 20. *The Wonderful Prayer Meeting*. Its purpose. Its attendants (Is. and Hez., "Where two or three"). Its grand results. "The issue was as momentous as any that have been determined by the 'decisive battles of the world.' It was a crisis as grave as when Persia threatened to intercept the rising civilisation of Greece, or Vandal and Moor to destroy the Christianity of Europe" [*Driver's Is.*].

HOMILETICS.

THE WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE.—Verses 16-20.

I. Judah's helpless condition. City surrounded. Sen. determined. Egypt driven back. The crisis real. Sen.'s boast true. Resistance desperate and chances of escape hopeless. To all human appearance fate of city and inhabitants sealed. **II. The concerted prayer.** The prophet and the king bending together in prayer! In estimation of the world this a sign of weakness, the refuge of cowardice. But confidence not misplaced in this critical period. United, concerted prayer secures deliverance. "If two of you shall agree, &c." (Mt. xviii. 19). Illus. from O. T. history, life of Luther, and history of Christian Church. **III. God's signal interposition.** "Man's extremity" became "God's opportunity." In a single night miraculous deliverance came—the night in which Isaiah's predictions came to pass. "The rumour was heard" which compelled Sen.'s hasty retreat. Whether the stroke which fell upon the Assyrian army was due to natural causes (Herodotus) or supernatural interposition it was a fact, "a coincidence which no political forecast could have anticipated, no estimate of probabilities calculated." "At eventide, behold terror! before morning it is not." **IV. The marvellous effect of this interposition.** "Remember that it had been foretold by Jehovah's word, and achieved, despite all human probability, by Jehovah's own arm, we shall understand the enormous spiritual impression which it left upon Israel. 1. The religion of the one supreme God, supreme in might, because supreme in righteousness, received a most emphatic historical vindication, a signal and

glorious triumph. No other god for the present had any chance in Judah. Idolatry discredited, not by the political victory of a faction, nor by the destructive genius of a nation, but by an evident act of Providence to which no human aid had been contributory. It was nothing less than the baptism of Israel in spiritual religion, the grace of which was never wholly undone" [*Smith's Is.*]. 2. Hez. was honoured before nations (ver. 23). "From surrounding nations tribute poured in as to an awful avenger" [*Stanley*]. Precious things laid in abundance at the feet of Judah's king, who was magnified as the favourite and special care of Heaven. God's help will turn enemies into friends and gain for us honour and influence. 3. But the effect not confined to the times and country of Hezekiah. The Egyptian general, Tirhakah, advancing from the south, as well as Hez. in Jerusalem, heard the results with joy. Three centuries afterwards, the Psalmist's exulting language (Ps. lxxvi.) was repeated by Egyptian priests. The Maccabees were sustained by the recollection of Sen.'s fall in their struggle against Antiochus (1 Macc. vii. 41), and in the churches of Moscow the exultation over the event is still read on the anniversary of the retreat of the French from Russia (cf. *Stanley, Jew. Ch., vol. ii.*). "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts."

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND RECOVERY.—Verses 24 and 25.

The illness and miraculous recovery, the fall and repentance of Hezekiah, given very briefly here, more fully in 2 Ki. xx. Learn—I. **The great contrasts in the events of life.** In the palace a sick man, a dying king. By his side quietly stood the faithful prophet who had delivered the prophetic message, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live." In the public crisis, there had been excitement, intense anxiety, and great joy at deliverance. The question *personal*, "thine house," not national. *Hezekiah* needs protection as well as his *kingdom* from God. An air of deep solemnity in the sick-bed of Hezekiah striking and peculiar. "No sickness in Jewish annals so pathetically recorded," says Stanley. II. **The suddenness with which these events happen.** At one time in the midst of victory and joy, at another "at the gates of the grave." Now in the sanctuary with head "lifted up above his enemies round about," then laid prostrate and the angel of death ready to cut him down! "Man knoweth not his time" of success or failure, of life or death. "As fishes taken in an evil net, and birds caught in a snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (Ecc. ix. 12). III. **The distress with which they are often attended.** In the sickness of Asa, Jehoram, and Uzziah we see divine visitations, in that of Hezekiah national calamity. 1. *It was distressing.* Grieved to part with life because promise of a long and prosperous one would not be fulfilled if cut off. He spoke of upright deeds faithfully done as conditions to promise made to David. He wept at having no children to succeed him. The dark and silent world close at hand, in which he would no longer see and praise God. His thread of life about to be severed; from morning to night and from night to morning he wasted away. 2. *It was hopeless.* The cry of a dying lion, the plaintive murmur of a wounded doe, only sounds heard in sick-chamber. There seemed no hope whatever of recovery, "Thou shalt die and not live." IV. **The wonderful deliverance which God can grant.** The disease, of a mortal kind and malignant character, would prove fatal unless the healing power of God should interpose. 1. *Deliverance given through prayer.* Not like Ahab, Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord, "turned his face to the wall" (2 Ki. xx. 3), to conceal fervency of devotion from attendants, looking in direction of temple, or in solemn meditation. The prayer of this righteous man availed much. "Afore Isaiah was gone out into the

middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, . . . I have heard thy prayer, seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee," &c. (2 Ki. xx. 4-7). A cluster of figs, an Eastern remedy, applied to the king's tumour and instant relief ensued. 2. *Deliverance with miraculous signs.* Recovery so unlooked for that Hezekiah, like Ahaz, asked for some token to confirm belief in the prophet's word. Sign specified granted to him. Shadow of the sun went back upon the dial of Ahaz ten degrees. Fifteen years were added to his life. In three days he appeared in the temple, and "the almost funeral dirge of his sick-chamber was then blended with the praise of triumphant thanksgiving with which he returns to the living world of joyous human voices and sounding music, rejoicing in the Living Source of all life, and looking forward to the hope of transmitting the truth to children yet unborn" [Stanley].

HEZEKIAH'S TEST AND FAILURE.—Verses 25, 26 and 31.

Soon after Hezekiah's recovery an embassy from Babylon sent to Jerusalem, to ascertain the internal resources of the country, to inquire as sages into the astronomical wonder with which Hezekiah's restoration was connected, to form an alliance with him, or to join in general homage of surrounding nations. Whatever the object of the visit, it was famous in the city and a moral test to the king. **I. Hezekiah's sins.** "His heart was lifted up" in vanity and ingratitude. 1. *By vain display of his treasures.* Flattered by the honour, Hezekiah showed the ambassadors his precious things, regalia, hereditary treasures belonging to the crown; his armoury and warlike stores; and "there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." 2. *By motives of worldly policy.* All this display evidently that the deputies might be more induced to prize his friendship and treat him as an ally on equal terms. 3. *By utter forgetfulness of God.* "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done to him." Not a word said for God who had so signally blessed him to foreigners. All about his own house and kingdom. God displeased, his will opposed to all coquetting with foreign powers; the prophet predicts a darker prospect. Those treasures carefully accumulated would become the prey of a new power. Babylon had solicited friendship and would end by enforcing slavery. We can never *pay* our debt, but should ever *acknowledge* it. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" **II. Hezekiah's humiliation.** "Hezekiah humbled himself." Isaiah's searching questions and awful predictions not without effect. King and city mourned as guilty together. Respite was granted and divine judgment not executed during his lifetime. "So that the wrath of the Lord come not upon them in the days of Hezekiah."

TESTS OF MORAL CHARACTER.—Verse 31.

God looks more narrowly into our ways than the world or the church—will purify us and fit for service by trial—never rests satisfied with a well-ordered *kingdom*, or well-ordered *house*, but seeks to set up a loftier standard in a well-ordered *heart* and upright life. **I. Moral tests in their means.** Wealth and worldly prosperity; domestic happiness and numerous offspring; sickness, popularity; great victories and heavy afflictions; suspension of grace and withdrawal of comfort. Tests applied to Abraham, Job, and Peter. **II. Moral tests in their design.** "To try him that he might know all that was in his heart." "Lord, show me myself," was the prayer of one. Satan tempts to sin; God tries men to make them conscious of real self; to discover qualities of heart and character. Self-knowledge often partial, part not *all* known; always needful and always difficult to attain; only acquired in the school of God, by peculiar discipline. "God left him." **III. Moral**

tests in their results. Sometimes virtues and worth confirmed and purified; failure in Hezekiah's case. From which learn—1. *The insufficiency of man.* Hezekiah more than mortal if he could stand. Highly commended, much to encourage and rejoice in past deeds; aided by clear teaching of prophet, yet fell from simplicity of faith. When left of God the strongest falls. 2. *The need of divine interposition.* This failure the proof that the blessings which were to come to all nations could not be realised through any king, priest, or prophet, not even through the dispensation itself. Not by progressive amelioration under Mosaic law. Tendencies in man's soul which could not be thus eradicated; increasing sin, signal failures pressing on the world which could not be removed. In Judæa and in Gentile nations "all flesh grass," fading away beneath "the burning heat" (Jas. i. 11) of divine justice. 3. *The glory of God's mercy.* A "righteous servant shall justify many." God's displeasure removed in Christ. A higher order of things introduced, and God magnified for his abundant goodness!

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 20. Hez.'s prayer in 2 Kings xix. 15-19; but no distinct mention of Is. Hez. asked him to pray (ver. 4). In affliction personal prayer needed. Good to get others to join. Two better than one. Isaiah here performs the function of minister, sick visitor, and physician. Signs given to Hez. *In life* God accounted him righteous, and gave him (a) a good conscience, (b) success in work, best proofs of divine favour. *In sickness* a special sign in answer to prayer, and in which Hez. read a moral lesson.

Vers. 27-31. *Hez.'s wealth.* 1. How

he secured it. 2. What he did with it. 3. What influence it had upon him. "In all time of our wealth, good Lord deliver us."

Vers. 32, 33. *Hez.'s death and burial.*

1. His death appointed. Though life prolonged, yet its length decreed. None exempt. Death ends joys, sorrows, and probation. Preparation the solemn duty of all. 2. His burial a national honour. Funeral marked with unusual respect. Royal tribe of Judah and whole population of Jerusalem present, and a marked epoch in royal interments.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXXII.

Vers. 1, 2. *War.* We possess in duplicate, on the Taylor cylinder, found at Nineveh in 1830, and now in the British Museum, and on the Bull-inscription of Kouyunjik, Sennacherib's own account of the stages of his campaign [*Driver's Is.*].

Vers. 6-8. *Courageous.* Leonidas, at the Straits of Thermopylæ, was not afraid with 400 men to oppose Xerxes, the invader of Greece, at the head of a million. William Tell, with a handful of adherents, boldly resisted the Austrian multitude and repulsed it.

"Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful."

Ver. 10. *Trust.* The practice of

Egypt was to pretend friendship, to hold out hopes of support, and then to fail in time of need [*Speak. Com.*].

Ver. 18. *Jews' speech.* Hez.'s representatives desire Rab. to speak in Aramaic, the language of commerce, and probably of diplomacy in the East. But his aim is to produce an impression upon the multitude, and he insists on using Hebrew. His speech breathes the spirit which pervades all the representations of Assyrian power.

Ver. 21. *Cut off.* The deliverance was complete and final. The Assyrian king at once returned, and, according to Jewish tradition, wrecked his vengeance on the Israelite exiles whom he found in Mesopotamia (Tobit i. 18).

He was the last of the great Assyrian conquerors. No Assyrian host again ever crossed Jordan. Within a few years from that time the Assyrian power suddenly vanished from the earth [*Stanley*].

Ver. 25. *Rendered not*. Ingratitude is an insensibility of kindness received

without any endeavour to acknowledge or repay it. It is too base to return a kindness and too proud to regard it [*South*].

“A grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharged” [*Milton*].

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter is parallel with 2 Ki. xxi., yet differs in omitting some things and adding new matter, especially in central part. Impiety of Man. (vers. 1-10); his captivity and repentance (vers. 11-17); his end (vers. 18-20). Amon (vers. 21-25).

Vers. 1-10.—*Manasseh's revival of idolatry.* Named after a tribe of Israel, born after his father's recovery. *Evil*, through influence of those around him. Ver. 3. *Built* (2 Ki. xviii. 4); *groves*, one in 2 Ki. xxi. 3-7, that which was intruded into the temple. Ver. 4. *House*, i.e., within precincts of temple and in its courts (ver. 5). Ver. 6. *Though fire*, like Ahaz (xxviii. 3); *observed*, bewitched with an evil eye; *enchancements*, serpent charms; accustomed to all the black arts of the day. Ver. 7. *Carved*, in Ki. wooden stock of Ashtoreth. Ver. 8. *Appointed*, fixed. Ver. 9. *Err*, by example and conduct. Ver. 10. *Spake*, full account 2 Ki. xxi. 10-15.

Vers. 11-17.—*Manasseh's cap. and repentance.* *Thorns*, among which he hid himself for refuge (1 Sam. xiii. 6); some “among the living,” i.e., took him alive; others “which took M. cap. with rings.” Ver. 12. *Besought*, lit. “stroked or smoothed the face of the Lord” (cf. Ex. xxxii. 11; 1 Sam. xiii. 11; 1 Ki. xiii. 6; Dan. ix. 13). Ver. 14. *Wall*, rebuilt or repaired. *Gihon*, xxxii. 4; *fishgate*, near N.E. corner of lower city; went round to Ophel. Ver. 15. *Strange* (vers. 3-5); *idol* of ver 7. Ver. 16. *Repaired*, desecrated, or damaged altar. Ver. 17. *High places* (xxxi. 1), prohibited that there might be one national altar.

Vers. 18-20.—*Manasseh's end.* *Prayer*, preserved in some MSS. of Sept., no claim to be considered the genuine utterance of Jewish king. The composition of an Hellenistic Jew, well acquainted with the Sept., writing at a time probably not much anterior to the Christian Era [*Sp ak. Com.*]. Ver. 19. *Seers*, of Hozai (marg.), a prophet of the time. Ver. 20. *Hou e*, fuller in 2 Ki. xxi. 18. Reason not known.

Vers. 21-25.—*Amon's reign and end.* A. re-established the idolatries which his father put aside; met the fate of Joash and Amaziah from his servants, at whose death executive government was suspended.

HOMILETICS.

MANASSEH'S WICKEDNESS.—Verses 1-9.

Hezekiah's reformation not completed by successors, lost its influence upon manners of people. Corruption and vice increased and openly practised by degenerate leaders. Young king trained up in idolatry and introduced abominations when he became ruler. **I. Wickedness determined in its spirit.** “He wrought much wickedness.” A liberal patron and zealous adept in Chaldean arts and imposture. Multiplied sins privately and publicly. Determined, energetic, and violent in his career. Did wickedness “with both hands earnestly.” **II. Wickedness awful in its extent.** Upset his father's reforms, increased idolatrous customs, raised soothsayers to dignity in his court, filled the land with altars of Baal, and outraged all decency

by putting an image of Asherah in the very precincts of the temple dedicated to the true worship of God. **III. Wickedness exceptional in its nature.** He practised sorcery and necromancy, and restored the fires of Tophet. "He made Judah do worse than the heathen." He became a cruel persecutor, and his reign a reign of terror. Streets of Jerusalem ran with innocent blood. "His name became in Jewish annals the synonym of infamy" (*cf.* 2 Ki. xxi. 16). Sins terrible in themselves, inexcusable in Manasseh, and most fruitful of evil! **IV. Wickedness unchecked by Divine warnings.** "The Lord spake to M. and to his people, but they would not hearken" (*ver.* 10). God about to destroy, not build and defend the city! "Line and plummet" threatened. Destruction would be entire and unhindered by any destroying angel. People taken away as "a prey and a spoil." M. himself a captive in chains and carried to Babylon. A punishment deserved, sent in mercy, and brought repentance and restoration.

MANASSEH'S REPENTANCE.—*Verses 10-13.*

Exact time of Manasseh's confinement in dungeon of Babylon not known, but narrative one of deepest interest, one which reveals the glory of unparalleled mercy. "The hardships, the loneliness, the disgrace of captivity were good for M." **I. An exception in youthful experience.** "The remarkable distinction of his career is that he is the only case clearly recorded in the Scriptures of a youth breaking away from the restraints and example of a religious parentage, who was recovered by the grace of God, and brought to repentance" [*A. Phelps, D.D.*]. **II. It was sincere in its character.** The misery and solitude of prison led to calm reflection. 1. *His humility was great.* The iron entered his soul. He recalled the days of childhood, thought of scenes of blood and cries of the murdered. The stars of heaven, which he had sinfully worshipped, shone in the dark prison to remind him of his guilt. He saw the vileness of his actions and the evil of his heart. "He humbled himself greatly." 2. *His prayer was earnest.* He humbly besought God for pardon; implored for opportunity to evince the sincerity of his sorrow. God heard, and restored him; "was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." **III. It was permanent in its results.** On his return he exerted himself to the uttermost to correct errors of his reign, and establish the worship of God in former purity and splendour. 1. *He was concerned for the temporal welfare of the kingdom.* Repaired the old walls of the city, added a new one; surrounded and fortified the hill of Ophel; strengthened, garrisoned, and provisioned "the fenced cities of Judah." 2. *He endeavoured to practise and promote religion among the people.* In remembrance of former evils, among multitudes who had been former associates, and perhaps amid scoffs and taunts of ignominious capture and disgraceful imprisonment, he purged the land and the temple from idolatry; repaired the altar of Jehovah, and sacrificed peace-offerings upon it, and "commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." **IV. It is most encouraging to others.** A wonderful display of God's mercy. A proof "that the Divine mercy," says Stanley, "far exceeds the Divine vengeance, and that even from the darkest reprobation the free will of man and the grace of God may achieve a deliverance. If Manasseh could be restored, there was no one against whom the door of repentance and restitution was finally closed."

MANASSEH'S LIFE AND ITS LESSONS.

I. That the sins of parents arrested in one generation may appear in another. As diseases pass over some, and reappear in others,

so wickedness, thought to be extinct, assumes its virulence, and brings forth its fruit. **II. That when children of godly parents sin they often become worse than others.** M. went further, and more guilty of excess, than heathens around him. "M. seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel." **III. That God exercises providential checks to prevent these sins.** Thus far men can only go. The end often distant, but certain, when God designs to restore. 1. To fulfil his covenant. 2. To illustrate his mercy. Paul obtained mercy as a pattern to others, a form sketch to imitate, to be filled up by others (1 Tim. i. 16). 3. To reveal his nature. "Then M. knew that the Lord he was God." **IV. That in the conversion of M. we have encouragement to labour and pray for the salvation of sinners.** Give none up in despair. God's power omnipotent, and his grace sufficient. Augustine, Newton, Bunyan, &c. This should be the theme of preaching as it is the doctrine of Scripture. After teaching theology for forty years, the elder Alexander said: "The longer I live, the more I incline to sum up my theology in the single sentence, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.'"

HEZEKIAH AND MANASSEH: A CONTRAST.

We have in end of one and beginning of the other a magnificent sunset and a sunrise of quite an opposite description. A good father and king closing life in Hezekiah; a bad son and successor commencing life in Manasseh. **I. Consider Hez. and what we learn about him.** 1. That genuine goodness shall not want appropriate record and remembrance. 2. God the inspirer of goodness in the hearts of men will not forget it. 3. The beneficiaries of goodness will not be unmindful of their benefactors. 4. Sympathetic imitators will mirror forth their goodness from whom they have derived its idea and impulse. **II. Now turn to Man and what the history says about him.** 1. A youthful king. 2. A long reign. 3. A life of great wickedness. Application: 1. What may parents learn from the son of such a father? Hez. hoarded up wealth for his son. Did he undervalue the moral element in him? 2. What may subjects learn from the successor of such a king? Not to trust religion to princes who may be alternately reformers and destroyers [*J. Spencer Hill*].

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF THREE KINGS.—*Verses 21-25.*

I. Manasseh. There is no limit to the mercy of God. Sinners chief, welcome to complete forgiveness. If only great saints got into heaven great sinners would lose hope. But when we see M. and men like him going in and getting welcome, there is hope for us. If we follow their steps in repentance, we shall be permitted to join their company in rest.

II. Amon. Beware of turning the riches of God's grace into a snare. As Manasseh's case is recorded in the Bible that an aged sinner desiring to turn may not be cast into despair, Amon's case, recorded beside it, that the young may not delay an hour, lest they perish for ever.

III. None will be lost or saved in consequence of anything in our parents. Amon saw his father born again when old, but the son did not inherit his father's goodness. Josiah the child of an ungodly parent, yet he became a godly child. Two lessons plainly written in the history—one to make presumptuous humble, the other to give despairing hope: (1) a converted father cannot secure the safety of an unconverted son; (2) an unconverted father cannot drag down a child in his fall if that child follows the Lord [*W. Arnot, "Fam. Treasury"*].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 1. *Reigned fifty-and-five years.*

1. For the punishment of people's sins. 2. That he might have time enough to amend his own life. 3. That in him, as afterwards in Paul, "God might show forth all longsuffering" [Trapp].

Ver. 8. *Israel fixed in God's house and in the land.* 1. Fixed by God's appointment, not their own choice or preference. 2. Fixed conditionally. "Only if they will observe, &c." 3. Ejected by violation of conditional promise.

Ver. 9. *M. seduced.* The power of example. Ahaz abandoned worship of God, but did not seduce generality of his subjects. Manasseh's influence carried the whole nation with him into idolatry. Evil examples like pestilential diseases.

Vers. 11-13. *M.'s conversion.* 1. Affliction its occasion. This designed. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." "When the rod spoke he heard it (Mic. vi. 9) who would not hear the word (v. 10). God sent him into the dungeon to repent; as he did David into the depths, and Jonah into the whale's belly to pray. Adversity hath whipt many a soul into heaven, which otherwise prosperity had coached to hell" [Trapp]. 2. Prayer its accompaniment. "He besought the Lord." "His affections, like Ben-hadad's best counsellors, sent M. with a cord about his neck, to the merciful King of Israel" [Trapp]. 3. Amendment its fruits. Complete reversal of former policy; zeal in destruction of idols, and in worship of God; public example and encouragement to others to do right. "Fruits meet for repentance."

Ver. 17. *People did sacrifice.* The force of habit. (a) To withstand good example; (b) To resist religious influences; and (c) To despise Divine warnings. Easier to corrupt than to reform men, and difficult to break

off evil customs and forsake religious superstitions.

Vers. 17; 18. *A dark day and a bright sunset.* Here is an unostentatious, unhonoured, and unepitaphed grave. We have to trace in this case a sunrise of promise, soon obscured with clouds of guilt and crime. These clouds burst in floods of penitence and sorrow. A meridian of sudden brilliancy follows. The sky clears, and the orb of a chequered life sets cloudless and serene on the hills of Judah. Standing by his grave, let us consider—I. Manasseh's sin. Look at (1) His early training. Hezekiah would well bring him up; (2) The baneful influence his creed and example had on his subjects; (3) His repeated and obdurate rejection of Divine warning. II. His conversion. His dungeon became the gate of heaven. Note here the wonderful power of sanctified affliction. III. His new life. The grand test of the reality of conversion is the regenerated being. The tree is known by its fruits. We read that when God brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom, "then M. knew that the Lord He was God" [Dr. Macduff].

Ver. 20. *Buried in house, "in the garden of his own house" (2 Ki. xxi. 18). The sepulchre in the garden (cf. Jno. xix. 41).*

Vers. 21-25. *Amon trespassed more and more, lit., multiplied trespasses.* 1. He began early. Early in age and in reign. Only twenty-two, only two years in Jerusalem. 2. He did much in the time. To do good much effort, time, and sacrifice required. Easy to do evil, which spreads quickly and makes a harvest in short season. "How then was Manasseh dead? In what sense was Manasseh buried? Here is an active boy who has caught his mantle, and is working with redoubled industry" [Dr. Parker]. "The evil that men do lives after them."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXXIII.

Vers. 1-7. *Did evil.* It was the misfortune of Manasseh to pass the most critical period of his life, the transition from youth to manhood, in an atmosphere so fraught with moral corruption, unfavourable to the formation of manly sentiments, holy purposes, and virtuous habits—a court, the court of a youth, himself the victim of a deadly miasma; the beams of his own glory exhaled under such influences, and the better impressions of earlier teachings were speedily erased; and he emerges into notice a worldling and an idolater, a stain upon his country's annals, for fifty years a scourge and corrupter, himself at last saved, but only "in the furnace of affliction" and "so as by fire" [*Rev. R. Hallam, D.D.*].

Vers. 11-13. *When in affliction.* Methinks I hear God say, Take this medicine; it is exactly fitted to the case, prepared and weighed by my own hands. Adam's (*Priv. Thoughts*) sin the disease, Christ the physician, pain the medicine [*Cecil*]. By pain God drives me to prayer, teaches me

what prayer is, inclines me to pray [*Adams*].

"Prayer is a creature's strength, his very breath and being;
Prayer is the golden key that can open the wicket of mercy."

Vers. 21-24. *Did evil.* M. might repent and reform—ay, and be accepted by God; but could he undo the consequences—the effects upon others—of his life and wickedness? May as well expect to prevent the appearance of disease after having used every effort to spread infection. The father may turn to God in true sorrow, but the son he beget shall follow in his parent's course of evil and never turn from it. Oh, how fearful a thing is sin! If we put our hands to it, we know not what we do. The thought of the irrevocable, irremediable consequences of sin should help to keep us from sinning [*M. J.*].

"How many, all weak and withered of their force,
Wait on the verge of dark eternity,
Like stranded wrecks!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This and next chapter give history of Josiah, and parallel with 2 Ki. xxii. and xxiii. 1-30. Josiah's good beginning (vers. 1-7); cleanses temple (vers. 8-13); finds a copy of the law (vers. 14-17); which is read by Shaphan (vers. 18-22); Huldah's message (vers. 23-28); J. reads the law to the elders (vers. 29-33).

Vers. 1-7.—*J.'s good beginning.* Walked, declined neither to right hand nor left: honourable contrast to predecessors. Ver. 3. *Young*, fifteen or sixteen years old. Jewish youths in majority at thirteen. Ver. 4. *Images*, sun statues (marg.), xiv. 3. *Dust* (Ex. xxxii. 20). *Strewed*, as if graves guilty of crimes of inmates. *Burnt*, greatest infamy to disinter bones of idolatrous priests (cf. 2 Ki. xxiii. 13-20). Ver. 6. *Cities of Mana*. The power of Assyria now (B.C. 629-624) greatly weakened, if not completely broken. J., it is evident, asserted and maintained a claim to authority over the whole land of Is. [*Speak. Com.*]. *Mattocks*, "in their dry (desolate) places" (cf. Ps. cix. 10). Ver. 7. *He had*, king himself went in person and purified the land.

Vers. 8-13.—*Temple repaired.* *Purged*, first cleansed, then repaired (2 Ki. xxiii. 4). S., M., and J. sent to report progress; *repair*, carry on the work. Ver. 9. Money collected in temple and in all parts of Judah and Is. Ver. 10. *Workmen*, overseers or superintendents

(2 Ki. xxii. 5). Eastern people only work under overseers. Ver. 11. *Couplings*, beams to bind the house and support joists. *Floor*, to rafter chambers surrounding temple or out-buildings attached to courts. Ver. 12. *Faithfully*, skilfully and diligently. Ver. 13. *Scribes*, now designating a class, a distinct division of Levitical body.

Vers. 14-22.—*Discovery of a copy of the law. Found*, probably an original copy of Pentateuch. Ver. 15. *The book*, the temple copy, kept in most holy place (Deut. xxxi. 26). *Shaphan* the scribe able to read it. "If this were the very autograph of Moses or his scribe, it would not be more than 830 years old. Manuscripts exist of nearly twice this age" [*Murphy*]. Ver. 16. S. took the book to king and reported the work (2 Ki. xxii. 9). Ver. 17. *Gathered*, emptied out of a chest into a bag. Ver. 19. *Rent*, in distress of mind. Ver. 21. *Enquire*, from a prophet. Agitated feelings prompted J. to seek immediate counsel to avert curses under which his kingdom lay. *Huldah*, keeper of wardrobe, priestly or royal garments; *she dwelt in college*, second part or suburb of city (cf. Neh. xi. 9; Zeph. i. 10).

Vers. 23-28.—*Message of Huldah. Tell*, oracular response, in which justice is blended with mercy, announcing impending evil to overtake the city and its inhabitants. Very likely such places as Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii.-xxxii. were read to the king. Ver. 27. *Heard*, wrath delayed and prayer of king heard on account of penitence.

Vers. 29-33.—*Public reading of the law. King* does what he can to bring people to penitence. *Elders*, representatives of the nation. *Read*, caused to be read aloud before the whole assembly. Ver. 31. *Place*, upon his pillar, covenanted with his subjects to keep commandments and walk after the Lord. Ver. 33. *Took away*. Completes purgation of the land, is followed by the people in outward reformation during his lifetime; but the special mission of Jeremiah in earlier ministry to rebuke the error and urge real change of heart and life (cf. Jer. vii. 3, 4, 21-24).

HOMILETICS.

JOSIAH, OR EARLY PIETY.—Verses 1-13.

What Hezekiah had accomplished was soon undone by successors, Manasseh and Amon. Manasseh brought down God's judgment for present and awful threatenings for future. Destruction not averted, but delayed. God's goodness and longsuffering displayed. Josiah mounts the throne, and even in youth shows the power of true religion, and the blessings which it gives to its possessor.

I. Displayed in seeking God in youth. "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, &c." A minor till thirteen years old, he sought God, in three years after he attained majority. Probably devout and prayerful before this. No difficulty in young persons serving God. Joseph, Samuel, David, and Timothy. Boys may evince beautiful character, and give promise of virtuous life. Beza thanked God, in his last will and testament, that he became a Christian at the age of sixteen. "Those that seek me early shall find me." **II. Displayed in the administration of his kingdom.** "In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem."

1. *He purged the temple.* In the long reign of his idolatrous grandfather, and short but wicked rule of his father, the temple neglected and out of repair—dilapidated and deserted for the gods of heathenism. Concerned for God's glory and God's house—sought to make temple attractive and restore it to former beauty. 2. *He cleansed the land.* Altars of Baal overturned, images broken down and turned to dust, and groves uprooted. The shrines of idols forsaken and obliterated. The land cleansed and the worship of temple restored and performed with scrupulous obedience.

III. Displayed with undeviating consistency. "Declined neither to the right hand nor to the left." Not satisfied with first impressions, first convictions, and first feelings towards God, but reformed the wrong and "did that which was right." Surrounded by profligate courtiers, opposed by unprincipled men, he was earnest, decided, persevering, and consistent. "He began to seek," continued and spent a whole life in setting things right through length and breadth of his kingdom. One of the

first, he was one of the most zealous converts. Judah never had a more devoted and earnest prince.

JOSIAH THE YOUNG REFORMER.

I. Reform originated by personal agency. Personal efforts of king and priests, elders and officers of the court. Good laws, religious institutions, helpful, required and not to be ignored; but moral influence essentially personal. Good men, earnest reformers—originate good laws and good institutions—the means of revivals and extensive reforms. Luther, Whitfield, and Wesley. **II. The object of reform to restore the worship of God in the land.** Not commerce or education even—not to introduce any new religion, but revive the old, pure religion which God instituted at first. J. destroyed the evil and fostered the good; secured workmen and overseers to repair the temple in great numbers. We are addicted to idolatry, to love the creature more than the Creator; but God will have no rival, should have the chief place in our hearts and lives, in our temples and kingdoms. **III. Reform was regulated by the principles of God's Word.** Engaged in the work, he was stimulated by the discovery of the law. Henceforth he acted with greater intelligence and reverence for the book. Great reforms have always been preceded and accompanied by study of God's Word. In days of Isaiah and Ezra people brought to penitence and prayer by reading of Scrip. The Reformation prepared by the translations of Tyndale and Wycliffe. The germ of the great movement in days of Whitfield and Wesley, in the "Holy Club," a meeting of a few students and tutors to study the Greek Testament in Oxford University. Bible study and Christian activity now joined together. "Have a Bible always about you," was Wesley's injunction. Follow not what is fashionable, prevalent, and convenient, but what is right in the sight of the Lord.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK.—Verses 14-21.

The Book of the Law found is no other than the temple copy, which was deposited beside the ark in the holy of holies (Deut. xxxi. 25, 26), and during the ungodly reigns of Manasseh and Amon, perhaps under Ahaz, when the temple itself had been profaned by idols, and as we may infer from 2 Chr. xxxv. 3, the ark also removed from its place, was somehow lost, and was now found again during the repair of the temple [*Keil*]. **I. The Scriptures may be lost for a season.** If not actually lost, hidden away and forgotten. The Bible lost by wilful neglect to read; by mere attention to the letter and not the spirit; by criticising and dissecting it as if the production of man; by every abuse of it, though boasting of its possession. **II. When found and rightly read, the Scriptures will quicken spiritual life.** Its discovery a complete surprise to the king, who "rent his clothes," studied the book himself, and read it to others. "It is possible that it may have been a mere rediscovery, like the revival of the Pandects at Amalfi, like the revival of the Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible at the Reformation. But, in either case, this sudden appearance of the Law amounted almost to a new revelation" [*Stanley*]. 1. *It reminded of neglected duty.* Duties of prophets, priests, and kings set forth in the volume, concerning religious and political unity, the destruction of high places and obedience to Jehovah. "All that which is written concerning us." 2. *It produced a sense of guilt.* "Our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book." Curse pronounced on apostasy pierces the king's heart; he rends garments and bows down in deep sorrow

before God. 3. *It gave insight into God's service.* "Enquire of the Lord." The enquiry revealed the moral condition of the nation and urged the necessity of reform. "There was still a higher purpose which the 'Second Law' served, a still nobler spirit in which Moses might be said to have risen again in the days of Josiah, to promulgate afresh the code of Sinai. Now, for the first time, the love of God, as the chief ground of his dealing with his people—the love towards God as the ground of their service to him—the spiritual character a free choice of that service—were urged on the nation with all the force of Divine and human authority" [Stanley]. 4. *It stimulated to vigorous activity.* King active before, more so after discovery. Not deterred by stern message from Huldah. Rulers of people inspired, if not with the spirit of penitence, yet with the burning zeal that destroys the monuments of idolatry and repeats the deeds of Elijah. **III. Hence, when a right sense of duty is created by reading the Scripture, a revival of religion will ensue.** Spiritual sensibility was maintained in the king's profession and elevation. In the personal life of the leaders, the religious worship of the temple and the government of the nation. Political reforms and ameliorations beneficial when a spirit of piety pervades the people, and the nation fears God. Regard to God's will the secret of prosperous churches, happy governments, and genuine revivals. As individuals, churches, and nation, how do we treat the Bible? Is it losing or keeping its hold upon our religion, our manners and customs? "Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye that tremble (with holy awe) at His word" (Is. lxvi. 5).

THE LOSS OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Consider what we should lose if we were to part with the Christian Scriptures, and with all the institutions and blessings for which we are indebted to them. I. In the loss of the Bible and its fruits, we should lose the knowledge of the true God. History proves this beyond reasonable dispute. God must *speak*, or man does not find him. Mankind needs a book to keep alive in the earth the knowledge of a spiritual and personal God. II. By the loss of the Scriptures and their results from the knowledge of mankind, we should lose sooner or later our institutions of benevolence. Benevolence on a large scale, and in the form of permanent institutions, and for all classes of mankind, is a Biblical idea. III. In the loss of the Bible and its fruits, we should sooner or later suffer the loss of our institutions for popular education. Culture has existed without a revelation from heaven. Schools are not the product of the Bible only. But it is beyond question that popular education is of Bible origin. Other than Christian religions build themselves on the ignorance of the masses. IV. By the loss of the Scriptures and their creations, we should sooner or later part with our institutions of civil liberty. History shows that the great charter of freedom in the world is the Word of God. The great free nations of the earth are the great Christian nations [*A. Phelps, O. T. a Living Book*].

EARLY PIETY AND ITS ADVANTAGES.

I. Enlightened piety consists in seeking God. J. "while yet, young began to seek after God." God the object of all religion. To seek his favour, presence, glory, the end of rational and immortal beings. The essence of sin to deny, dishonour, and disobey God. 1. *In seeking earnestly.* Not enough to think, talk, and argue about God. Seek as after riches, "he that seeketh findeth." 2. *In seeking promptly.* J. delayed not. Jehovah had kept him from influence of corruption, from passing through the fire in his father's

reign; but this satisfied not, he sought higher knowledge, "began" early and promptly "to seek God." 3. In seeking *perseveringly*. In youthful inexperience, surrounded with temptations and hindered with disadvantages, he pursued "that which was right with decided steps," "declined neither to the right hand nor to the left." **II. Seeking God early will conduce to honour.** In temporal things it tends to health, reputation, and long life; in spiritual and eternal more advantageous. 1. *It keeps alive religious susceptibilities.* "His heart was tender," not only in the ardour and sensibility of youth, but in maturity of age, crowned with regal honours and surrounded by worldly pleasures. 2. *It saves from snares.* Temptations like wind, spring from every quarter. Exposed in company and in solitude, in God's house and in our own—always exposed. Business, pleasure, and companions may become a snare. But great risks in youth. Religion alone can preserve. 3. *It brings eminent usefulness in life.* Power in patience, love, courage, and action; influence over others in relations of life; safety in position. Self-willed monarchs have brought destruction on themselves and ruin on kingdoms. 4. *It prepares for happy death.* J. honoured in age and lamented in death. Virtues which led to prosperity cherished, and vices which tended to poverty escaped. Converted in early morning, his day bright, his work accomplished. Few sins to bewail at last, no remorse, no sins of youth to fill his bones with pain; his end, though mysterious, peaceful and triumphant. "Godliness profitable to all things, &c."

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 3. *The character of Josiah.* I. He began to serve God at a very early period of life. II. He proceeded in his career with extraordinary zeal and diligence. III. He was as zealous in promoting piety as in suppressing vice. IV. In all he did he adhered strictly to the Word of God [*Rev. C. Simeon*]. Learn—I. That a child may begin to serve God early. II. That a child may serve God when the world is most attractive. Moses, David, Josiah. III. That when a child begins to serve God early he will be likely to become honourable and useful. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." A lesson—I. *To the young.* Avoid the wrong and "do that which is right." 2. *To parents and guardians of youth.* Look well to rising generation. The welfare of families, churches, and the nation depends upon their training. "That of all men we meet with, nine parts out of ten are what they are, good or bad, useful or not, according to their education" [*Locke*]. *Began to seek.* "Sweet words are these!—to 'begin;' not only to begin,

but to begin 'to seek.' What suggestions of modesty, lowliness, and insignificance of effort! What determination expressed in simple patience! No violence, no demonstrativeness, nothing of ostentation, but inquiry, waiting, expectancy, a look that means I know not from what part of the heavens the Lord may come, but from some point he will presently descend, and it is for me to seek, to be prepared to receive him" [*Dr. Parker*]. The verse contains a description—I. Of our moral condition; without God. 2. Of essential principles of all religion; seeking God. 3. Of true prayer; earnest desire for God, not cold asking, formal seeking, &c. The words also describe the way to (1) eminent piety; (2) eminent consistency; (3) eminent usefulness.

Ver. 13. *Scribes.* Hitherto designation of a class, officers of state, who mustered troops and managed finances (*cf.* 2 Sam. viii. 17; xx. 25; 2 Ki. xii. 10; Is. xxxiii. 18). Here evidently a new state of things—an order of scribes forming a distinct division of Levitical body. The class term first found in

this passage, yet probably originated in reign of Hezekiah, who employed men to "copy out" uncollected proverbs of Solomon (Prov. xxv. 1). Probably to the rise of this class are we indebted for preservation of many prophecies belonging to Hezekiah's time, while works of previous prophets—of Ahijah, Iddo, Shemaiah, Jehu son of Hanani, and others—have perished [*Speak Com.*].

Ver. 14. *Found a Book.* 1. The profound sensation created. 2. The intense anxiety to know the truth. The inquiry, personal reading, and public exposition. 3. The need of the Book now. To preserve religion, educate the race, and advance the cause of God and humanity.

Vers. 23-28. *The faithful message.* Notice—1. The estimate of the king. "Tell the *man*." Only a man, sinful and mortal like other men. Kings need to be told this truth. "I acknowledge myself a mortal," said Charles V. Emperor. With God no respect of persons. 2. The threatened judgment. "I will bring evil upon this place." No hiding, no toning down of unpleasant truths. 3. The procuring cause of judgment. "They have forsaken me." Announcement to Manasseh repeated with terrible significance to Josiah. Repentance will not avail, now too late to save guilty people. "Wrath poured out and shall not be quenched."

Vers. 26-28. *A tender spirit.* Huldah in first outburst of prophetic spirit thinks only of the matter in hand, forgetting the person of the inquirer; but when that is past, and the stream flows more smoothly, the thought of the person occurs to her, "the King of Judah" [*Speak Com.*]. Here she giveth him his just title, whom before she had called "man." Piety is no enemy to civility [*Trapp*]. I. Give a general account of a tender heart. 1. It implies a quick and ready sense of feeling in spiritual things—quickness of appre-

hension, ready reflections of conscience, a disposition to be easily affected. 2. A pliable disposition to yield to Divine influences. II. The way in which such a temper should express itself. 1. In relation to the Word of God. 2. In relation to sin. 3. In relation to providential events. 4. In relation to the honour of God. III. What foundation is laid for such a temper in Christianity. 1. Good men in the ancient church were not strangers to it. 2. The recompenses of the life to come are more fully revealed. 3. Richer discoveries of grace are made to us. 4. Ceremonials have given way to substantial of religion. 5. The softening spirit is more plentifully communicated. IV. Inferences. 1. Discern the difference between a truly Christian temper and some things mistaken for it: it is not natural easiness of disposition, not occasional tenderness. 2. Let us all seek after and cultivate this tenderness of spirit. 3. If conscious of its possession, take the comfort of it as good evidence of a renewed and Christian state [*Dr. Evans*].

Vers. 29-33. I. The public reading of the Book. The Book exists; not to be invented; only to be found, used, understood, and obeyed. II. The making of the solemn covenant. Made with sincerity, "with all his heart and with all his soul;" made "to perform" in Kings (xxiii. 2), "to stand to the covenant." Many forget and fall away. III. The impression created upon the people. The example of the king, reforms in the temple and solemn resolution in open covenant. A restraint for a season. No open idolatry, no grove, nor Baal worship, yet superficial, not deeply seated amendment. Did not stand for personal purity and loyal obedience. The mission of Jeremiah in his early ministry to rebuke and urge a real change. "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees."

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXXIV.

Vers. 1-7. *Eight years old.* There is at the top of the Queen's staircase in Windsor Castle a statue from the studio of Baron Triqueti, of Edward VI. marking with his sceptre a passage in the Bible, which he holds in his left hand, and upon which he earnestly looks. The passage is concerning Josiah. "J. was eight years old when he began to reign . . . and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." The statue was erected by the will of the late prince, who intended it to convey to his son the Divine principles by which the future governor of England should mould his life and reign on the throne of Great Britain [*T. Hughes*].

Vers. 8-13. *Men did work faithfully* (ver. 12). What we are accustomed to decry as great social evils will, for the most part, be found to be but the outgrowth of man's own perverted life; and though we may endeavour to cut down and extirpate them by means of law, they will only spring up again with fresh luxuriance in some other form, unless the conditions of personal life and character are radically improved. If this view be correct, then it follows that the highest patriotism and philanthropy consist, not so much in altering laws and modifying institutions, as in helping and stimulating men to elevate and improve themselves by their own free and independent individual action [*Smiles*]. We put too much faith in systems and look too little to men [*B. Disraeli*].

Vers. 14-22. *The Bible the Saviour of the Church.* Men say that the Church has saved the Bible. I say that the Bible has saved the Church ten thousand times over. You shall find that when great questions come up in a community churches do not go ahead. You cannot

make them. Churches are like the baggage-waggons of an army. They carry the provisions and indispensable things; but, after all, baggage-waggons never go first in a march. And the Church is so busy taking care of the things which it carries that it has no time to devote to new things that present themselves. Reforms hardly ever originate in churches. I am not speaking against churches, I am merely putting them where they put themselves, and saying that tendencies to unusual conduct in the application of gospel principles to new questions are oftentimes ridiculed by ministers, rejected from pulpits, and refused places in conference meetings, and stigmatised by church members as being fanatical [*H. W. Beecher*]. When we find the book of the law, let us not shrink from finding its judgments as well as its gospels. The prophecies must all be fulfilled, when they indicate that the wicked shall be destroyed (ver. 25), shall be driven away in the wrath of God. The Bible is not all gospel; or where it is all gospel it involves the element of judgment and the certainty of doom [*Dr. J. Parker*].

Ver. 33. *Departed not.* The multitude "go at all adventures" (Lev. xxvi. 21, marg.), careless of their ways, reckless of their end. It is with them scarcely worth looking into—whether God is displeased or not; whether they be walking in the narrow or broad path, and what the end of that path may be. Sometimes they come into the world fresh from the influence of a religious education. For a while they yield alternately to their conscience and their corruptions. They are touched a moment under the convictions of the word, or the corrections of the rod. Yet the want of steadiness and consistency soon sweeps all away into "worse" hardness than before [*C. Bridge*].

CHAPTER XXXV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The preparations for the Passover (vers. 1-9); the actual celebration (vers. 10-19); Josiah's defeat by Necho (vers. 20-27). 2 Ki. xxiii. 21-30 corresponds to this chap.

Vers. 1-9.—The preparation. Day not irregular, but time appointed (Ex. xii. 6). *Priests* re-established in their courses and duties, as prescribed (*cf.* ch. xxix. 5; xxx. 16). *Ver. 3. Taught*, instructed people in matters pertaining to worship. *Put*, for some reason removed during repairs. *Burden*, ark once in its place, to remain; not to be carried about, as customary before Temple built. *Ver. 4. Prepare*, other duties devolved upon them; they must attend with diligence to regulations of public service (*cf.* 1 Chr. xxiii.-xxvi.). *Ver. 5.* A section of Levites to attend to every division of families of people. *Ver. 6. So*, particular direction required. Personal purity required that brethren may be prepared. *Vers. 7-9.* King and princes give animals. *J. gave* (ch. xxx. 24) lambs and kids for the meal; bullocks for burnt-offerings (Num. xxviii. 19) and thank-offerings. *Ver. 8. Willingly*, number not given, unless included in next verses. *Unto priests*, for poor families of their own order; leading priests furnished offerings; chief Levites also gave to poor Levitical families.

Vers. 10-19.—The celebration of Passover. *So*, everything ready, according to law. *Ver. 11. Sprinkled* (*cf.* xxx. 16). *Flayed*, removed skins. Priests and Levites performed their parts. *Ver. 12. Removed*, parts to be consumed on the altar, viz., fat, kidneys, &c.; parts cut off by Levites and given to offerers for burnt-offerings. *Ver. 13. Roasted* (Ex. xii. 8, 9, peace-offerings boiled and eaten on days of unleavened bread. *Ver. 14. Therefore*, because priests too much engaged to prepare food for themselves. *Ver. 15. Singers* divided like other Levites, divided into courses, took service in turn; the order determined by lot, first lot to sons of Asaph (1 Chr. xxv. 8-31). "Probably this course retained its presidency over the rest, and now commenced in the Temple the restored choral service" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Ver. 16. Same day*, at that time. *Ver. 17. Seven days*, Israel, *i.e.*, the whole people (*cf.* ver. 3 and ver. 18). Hezekiah's kept fourteen days (xxx. 26). *Ver. 18. Like*, for exact conformity to Mosaic law and legal purity. *Ver. 19. Year*, culminating point in reforms (2 Ki. xxii. 3).

Vers. 20-27.—The defeat of Josiah. *After*, thirteen years after, B.C. 608. A blank in Jewish history. *Necho*, son of Psammetichus, king of Egypt, against Babylonian forces which he expected to find near Charchemish, chief city of Northern Syria. *N.* did not wish to embarrass Josiah. *Ver. 21. House*, with which at war and against which he was commissioned by God. *Ver. 22. J. disguised*; some, *equipped himself*; others, was eager; Sept., strengthened himself to fight. *Meg.*, between Magdol and Hadadrimmon. *Ver. 23. Shot* by an arrow, *J.* ordered his servants to carry him away; put in a second chariot, reserved for flight probably, lighter than a war-chariot, and taken to Jer. *Ver. 25* His death lamented by Jeremiah in words no longer extant, but preserved and chanted by professional singers long after the event. "Some find the prophet's elegy in the entire Book of Lamentations; others in a part of it (ch. iv.); most critics of opinion that the lament is lost" [*Speak. Com.*]. *Ver. 25. Ordinance*, not minstrels, but those in authority. A certain day set apart, a standing custom to lament. *Ver. 26. Goodness*, good deeds, religious faithfulness, acts of kindness or goodwill, according to that law which he found, read, and remembered.

HOMILETICS.

A CELEBRATED PASSOVER.—Verses 1-19.

Great events and remarkable days—"red letter days"—relieve monotony of life; stand out prominently in history and create epochs in memory. Such times afford comfort, inspiration, and never forgotten. No such passover as this. Notice—**I. The devout preparation for its celebration.** "So the service was prepared." King exhorted and stimulated the indifferent

and unwilling. 1. *By rightly fixing the ark.* Put away by idolatrous Manasseh, who set a carved image in its place; or temporarily removed by Josiah during repairs; it was replaced in temple, not carried about any longer. Now the priests were discharged from this burden, they must be careful for other duties. 2. *By personal sanctification.* "Sanctify yourselves" by separation from uncleanness and consecration to God. But not to end here, "prepare their brethren," by instruction, exhortation, and example. Self first, others after. 3. *By orderly arrangement of classes.* "He set them in their charge." Not any new work nor novel method; just a return to written divine order. The written word the rule to which magistrates and ministers should appeal. "Walk by the same rule." **II. The unlimited numbers which attended.** "Neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." "If we allow thirteen persons for each lamb or kid, there were upwards of 500,000 communicants, while so far as we know, there were only 17,000 sheep presented by Hezekiah and his princes (xxx. 24), which would not supply more than half the number of partakers" [*Murphy*]. **III. The earnest spirit by which it was characterised.** Remarkable for enthusiasm, holy excitement, and unity of heart. 1. *A spirit of unbounded liberality.* Multitudes reduced to poverty, especially from Israel by Assyrian devastations; unprovided with means of commemorations. The *king* gave to the people lambs, kids, and bullocks (ver. 7). *Princes* gave to priests and Levites; and *chiefs* of these officers remembered poor families of their order. Hearts touched, a spirit of brotherhood prevailed and all "gave willingly." 2. *A spirit of thorough consecration.* "The priests stood" waiting "in their place," the singers in their station, all "busied in offering that they might not leave their place" (ver. 15). None left their posts unless relieved by brethren, and then return to duty with delight. 3. *A spirit of hearty co-operation.* They urged and helped one another, did their work "speedily." Places not long empty, viands lost not heat nor flavour through delay. "The service of the Lord was prepared the same day" (ver. 16). **IV. The loyal obedience by which it was observed.** In accordance with law in time, method, and spirit. 1. *Right time observed.* Day appointed by law (*cf.* ch. xxx. 2, 13), "fourteenth day of the month" (Ex. xii. 6). Nothing must be done untimely. 2. *Personal purity observed.* Priests and people sanctified. "So the service was prepared." Need for cleansing with more than sprinkling of blood and water with hyssop—withdrawal from more than earthly pollution. God's service *pure* and *loving*, "sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. v. 7), like God who is holy (1 Pet. i. 13) and light and love. 3. *Legal authority observed.* Not according to the will of the king, the conjecture of the court, but "according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses" (ver. 6), "the writing of David and the writing of Solomon" (ver. 5). "As many as walk according to this *rule* (lit. straight line, *e.g.* of a mason's rule or a surveyor's chain), peace be on them and mercy upon the Israel of God" (Gal. vi. 16).

THE DISTURBED REIGN.—Verses 20–25.

If Josiah thought that after restoration of divine worship and revival of religion he would have a period of settled peace and national prosperity, he was disappointed. The bright interval brief. "*Too late* is written on the pages even which describe this momentary revival," says Stanley (*Jew. Ch.*, vol. ii.), from whom we condense this outline. "It did not reach the deeply-seated, widespread corruption which tainted rich and poor alike. Large as is the space

occupied by it in the historical books, by the contemporary prophets it is never mentioned at all." The kingdom doomed, though day delayed; two calamities the immediate precursors. **I. The invasion of the Scythians** (B.C. 634-639). "The earliest recorded movement of Northern populations, hid behind the long mountain barrier, reared by nature between civilised and uncivilised races of old world. Suddenly appeared those strange, uncouth, fur-clad forms, hardly to be distinguished from their horses and waggons, fierce as their own wolves or bears, sweeping towards the southern regions which seemed to them their natural prey. No wonder that now all the ancient monarchies of the south—Assyria, Babylon, Media, Egypt, even Greece and Asia Minor—stood aghast at the spectacle of savage hordes rushing down on seats of luxury and power. About the middle of Josiah's reign one division broke into Syria, penetrated on their way to Egypt, to the southern frontier of Palestine, were bought off by Psammetichus and retired, after sacking the temple of Astarte at Ascalon. They left one permanent trace as they scoured through the plain of Esdraelon. The old Canaanitish city of Bethshan, at eastern extremity of that plain, from them received the name, which it bore throughout the Roman Empire, in the mouths of Greeks, *Scythopolis*, 'the city of the Scythians.'" **II. The invasion of Necho.** "Strengthened by influx of Northern nations, Babylon now rising into overwhelming predominance. Necho, the vigorous King of Egypt, wished to anticipate that growth by securing himself on east and north. Kingdom of Judah between these contending powers. Necho advanced through Palestine towards passes of Lebanon on his way to the great battlefield of Carchemish. In the plain of Esdraelon, the scene of so many combats in earlier history of Israel, Josiah determined, with a rashness which appeared to be against the counsels of Providence (2 Chr. xxxv. 21; 1 Esdras i. 27, 28), to stay the progress of the Egyptian army. No details given of the battle. Everything absorbed in one tragical event which closed it" [*Stanley*]. "What stability is there in earthly things? How seldom is excellency of any kind long-lived? In the very strength of his age, in the height of his strength, is Josiah withdrawn from the earth: as not without a merciful intention of His glory on God's behalf; so not without some weakness on his own. . . Sometimes both grace and wit are asleep in the warriest and holiest breasts. The best of God's saints may be sometimes miscarried by their passions to their cost" [*Bp. Hall*].

GOD'S COMMAND TO MAKE HASTE.—*Verse 21.*

Applying this to Christians, observe on what command founded. A distinction between moral and positive duties. Positive right because commanded; moral commanded because right, founded on the very nature of things. We may be satisfied, therefore, with God's revealed will, because sure that it is founded on rectitude. Here command to make haste founded on three principles—First, *because of the importance of the thing itself*. Not a trifle, but our life, cannot neglect without infinite loss, and plunging into lamentation and woe. If religion be anything, it is everything; the "one thing needful." Secondly, *because of the limitation of our opportunities*. We have only one season to regard these things, the world over. "No work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave, &c." Several circumstances to be mentioned in regard to this season of attention. It is *short*. "What is thy life? &c." It is *uncertain*. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, &c." It has also *much* in it not applicable to any serious and important service. The whole of infancy, much of childhood and youth; lawful business, allowed recreation and necessary sleep. Observe also that of this only season for action, *many favourable periods may fail before the end of it*. "The harvest may be passed and the summer ended, &c." Then of

this season *much is already gone*. Only a day and sun risen very high with some. "It is high time to awake, &c." And if this applies to all, with what force to those of sixty or seventy or more? Thirdly, because of *the advantages to be derived from ardour*. Often said, and is literally true, that "the lazy take the most pains." They make no progress, because everything a diversion or hindrance; have to begin again and again. How often have we succeeded beyond expectation when we have applied ourselves with decision and vigour! A pleasure in acting with vigour which listless, inert, lounging and yawning never know. Never so happy as in application. Slothful say, "See a lion in the way, &c." But zeal clears the way of the lion, removes impediments, or turns them into auxiliaries [*Jay*, "Evenings with Jesus"].

RASHNESS AND RISKS.—Verses 20–24.

From the time of Manasseh, Judah had been a vassal of Assyria, the rival of Egypt. In this war Josiah might feel bound as a matter of honour to support the interests of his northern liege-lord and oppose Necho. Might think it perfectly legitimate to prevent the march of the enemy through his own territories—might doubt Necho's faith in "Elohim," whom, he said, gave him commission. Warnings unheeded, attack made, and results sad! **I. Josiah rash in his conduct.** May be excused in some things, but erred in others. All not good that good men do. "Great men are not always wise." 1. *Josiah's action was unwise.* Intermeddled with strife not belonging to him. "His be t apology," says one, "perhaps would be that Necho was marching through a part of Judea. But then, first, this part did not belong to him; and, secondly, if Necho had passed through, he might have done so, as Israel formerly desired to pass through the borders of Moab, engaging to commit no injury, and to pay for all they used." 2. *Josiah acted from impulse and not conviction.* Passion worse than conviction, and never a wise counsellor. "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." 3. *Josiah sought not divine counsel.* Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Urijah, and a college of seers with him, but did not ask counsel of the Lord. "Shall I go up, or shall I forbear?" If we reject divine counsel, it betrays consciousness of wrong, and leads to risks in any enterprise. 4. *Josiah rejected urgent warnings.* Necho, calm and conciliatory, sent ambassadors. "What have I to do with thee? &c." But J. despised—(1) *Appeals to reason.* "I come not against thee." (2) *Appeals to religion.* "For God commanded me to make haste." (3) *Appeals to self-interest.* "Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not." **II. Josiah's rash conduct brought fearful results.** "J. would not turn his face from him, &c." 1. *Upon himself.* "In his chariot, but disguised, according to the practice of the royal families of Israel (2 Chron. xxxv. 22; 1 Ki. xxii. 30) in moments of extreme emergency. The Egyptian archers, such as we see on their monuments, discharged a volley of arrows against him. He fell, was placed in his second chariot of reserve, and carried to Jerusalem to die" [*Stanley*]. A death untimely, which might have been avoided, but permitted by God, a mystery and a correction. 2. *Upon the nation.* Unworthy of such a prince, he was taken away from impending calamities. A striking illustration how "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." God's decree took fatal effect, after delay, in Josiah's life. Jerusalem taken, and inhabitants carried to Babylon.

THE DEATH OF KING JOSIAH.—Verses 23–25.

I. The mystery of the event. A good man's end often strange. Steps taken which result in failure and death. One event, specially stamped

with uncertainty, but linked with God's purpose. "A time to die." "Who can tell a man when it shall be?" "In the day of death," the king impotent to resist as the beggar; depends upon God's will, not man's effort. Drawn by policy, alliance, or apparent duty; "so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." **II. The memorial of the event.** A mournful death, without precedent in annals of Judah. Commemorated—
 1. *In prophetic dirge.* "Jeremiah lamented," and minstrels, male and female, sang dirges of the event. 2. *In national mourning.* "All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah." A contrast to the unwept fates of those who depart "without being desired" (ch. xxi. 20). 3. *In appointed ordinance.* "Made them an ordinance in Israel." The elegy of prophet, chanted at stated public occasions, long perpetuated, and the lamentation became proverbial for any great and extraordinary sorrow (Zech. xii. 11). Good men valued by their loss, honoured by those who live contrary to their teaching, and survive after death. In long continuance, in holy influence, "the memory of the just is blessed."

"Unblemish'd let me live, or die unknown :
 O grant an honest fame, or grant me none" [Pope].

I. The striking feature of the story is the picture it gives of the quiet manner in which God's servants are sometimes allowed to pass away when they have finished their work. The history of Josiah's death compared with his life puts things in right order; his life active, hard-working, and zealous; death quiet, unexciting, what we call inglorious. The history fitted to check tendency to lay too much stress upon circumstances of a man's death; to be fond of exciting death-bed scenes, to delight in religious books which vividly describe last moments of departing friends. He who will stand least reprobable at last day, will be he who has worked most earnestly and vigorously in cause of holiness and of Christ when all temptations of the world and the strength of Satan have been opposed to him. **II.** The moral we draw from the text is that he who does his work in the proper time, who does not put off till old age the work of youth, nor the hour of death the labour of life, may be quiet and unconcerned for the way in which God may please to call him. If called by sudden providence when engaged in work, or summoned by speedy sickness, he may be of good cheer and of quiet mind, knowing that God will do all things well [Bp. Harvey Goodwin].

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 3. *Ark replaced.* Change of circumstances, relief of *burden*, and opportunity for more vigorous service in known duty. Pray not for a larger sphere, for more work. Do what is appointed, and fill well present sphere. *Stand in your place.*

Ver. 4. *Prepare.* Heathens saw that God was not to be served but by those who were prepared aforehand. Solon willed in his laws that the sacrificers should be chosen and selected, and the sacrificers should purify themselves some days before [Trapp]. Should not people long before prepare, when they come to the Lord's table? [Ibid.].

Ver. 15. *Singers in their place.* Song in God's house. 1. *Its nature.* Spiritual,

appropriate, and spirited. Certain Psalms cxiii.—cxviii. inclusive. Resolve, "I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation." 2. *Its leaders.* Numbered, stationed, and qualified. This needful and helpful. Organist, clerk, and choir should be early in place, devout in spirit, and orderly in all things. 3. *Its design.* Not a musical performance for gratification of the people; not to display ability, culture, and efficiency in singers: but to please God (Phil. ii. 8–10), and praise Christ. Pliny found in worship of Bithynians a hymn "to Christ as God." "Sentimental twaddle, sung by a congregation, is essentially carnalising and

paganising. What sort of a nation will our 'Songs of Zion' make? Are they of Zion? Some of them have a look of Rome, and some of Racow [*Prof. J. Macgregor, D.D.*].

Ver. 21. *Haste.* Three things concerning which God "commands to make haste"—1st, To secure *the salvation of the soul*; 2nd, To a *course of godliness*; 3rd, To *efforts in seeking the welfare of others* [*Jay*].

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER XXXV.

Vers. 7-9. *Gave willingly.* If a wealthy man promise much and perform nothing, a poor man who is unable to undertake or perform is better than he [*Bp. Hall*]. Rich men's presents are gold and silver or other costly things. Mine must be recommended by the affectionate pleasure with which I give them [*Ven. Bede when dying*].

Ver. 16. *Prepared the same day.* Life is a short day, but it is a working day. "Oh! my Father, help me to finish my work in Thine honour" [*Livingstone's Journal, Jan. 1st, 1871*].

Ver. 21. *Haste.* These are remarkable words in the mouth of a heathen; but they are not without a parallel in the remains of ancient Egypt that have come down to us. Piankhi, for

Ver. 22. *Hearkened not.* 1. Providence asserted in Necho. Individual and supreme—"Commanded me." 2. Providence contravened in Josiah. Ignorantly in some degree, yet really opposed to divine plan. "Woe then to such as hearken not to the undoubted words of God, in the mouths of his faithful ministers."

instance, King of Egypt, about B.C. 750, says in an inscription which has been translated by the Rev. Canon Cook, "Didst thou not know that the Divine shade was over me? I have not acted without his knowledge; He commanded my acts" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 23-25. *Lamented.* While the living minister is neglected, the dying one may be lamented, and lamented the more when dead because he was neglected while living. The children of Israel were always complaining of Moses, and frequently threatening him, yet they wept for him on the Plains of Moab thirty days, and we are persuaded sincerely. Want endears and increases worth [*Jay*].

"How mercies brighten as they take their flight!" [*Young*].

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] This chapter gives the reigns of Jehoahaz (vers. 1-4), of Jehoiakim (vers. 5-8), of Jehoiachin (vers. 9, 10), and of Zedekiah (vers. 11-21); the proclamation of Cyrus (vers. 22, 23). Parallel with 2 Ki. xxiii. 31-xxv. "The chapter scarcely adds anything to our knowledge of the later history of the Jewish kingdom, but it was requisite to complete the design of the work, which aimed at tracing the fortunes of the Jewish people from the death of Saul to the return under Zerubbabel" [*Speak. Com.*].

Vers. 1-4.—*Succession of Jehoahaz.* Original name Shallum (Jer. xxii. 11); third son of Josiah (1 Chron. iii. 15); took name of Jehoahaz ("the Lord possesses") on accession. Ver. 3. Necho followed up advantage gained in Judah, deposed J. *Condemned*, fined the land, and set up Eliakim as vassal on the throne. Ver. 4. *Turned*, change of Eliakim into Jehoiakim ("God sets up," into "Jehovah sets up"), in deference to the king and people, and in keeping with politic character of Necho. *Eg.*, where he died.

Vers. 5-8.—*Jehoiakim* two years older than *Jehoahaz*, and of a different mother (2 Ki. xxiii. 31-36); *evil*, followed the course of idolatrous predecessors. Ver. 6. *Nebuchad.*, first expedition against Palestine in lifetime of his father, Nabopolassar, who was old and infirm, and adopted his son *Neb.* joint sovereign, dispatched him against Egyptian invaders of the empire. *Neb.* victorious at Carchemish, drove them from Asia, reduced provinces west of Euphrates, and *Jehoiakim* became vassal of Assyrian kingdom (2 Ki. xxiv. 1). At end of three years *J.* rebelled, but vanquished, stripped of possessions, and taken prisoner. Allowed for a short time to remain in his tributary kingdom, gave fresh offence. Jerusalem besieged, and the king slain in a sally (*cf.* 2 Ki. xxiv. 2-7; Jer. xxii. 18, 19; xxxvi. 30).

Vers. 9, 10.—*Jehoiachin.* *Eight*: "As *Nebuchad.* carried away this king's wives (2 Ki. xxiv. 15), it is plain that eight here is a slip of the transcriber for eighteen, the number found in 2 Ki. xxiv. 8; and even in the Sept. *Jehoiachin* is otherwise *Jechoniah* (1 Chron. iii. 16), and even *Coniah* (Jer. xxii. 24). His reign of three months and ten days scarcely called a reign, as he merely claimed the crown until taken away by *Nebuchad.*" [*Murphy*]. *Year expired*, lit., "at the return of the year," in spring, when campaigns began. City captured, temple pillaged, king, nobles, and skilful artisans carried to Babylon (2 Ki. xxiv. 8-17).

Vers. 11-21.—*Zedekiah's reign.* Originally *Mattaniah*, appointed by *Nebuchad.*, from whom he received crown on conditions of solemn oath. Ver. 13. *Swear*, took oath of allegiance, which he broke, and was censured (Ezek. xvii. 13). Ver. 14. Further justification for God's rejection. Idolatry added to other sins. Ver. 15. *Messengers*, *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, and others. *Betimes*, continually and carefully. Ver. 16. *No remedy*, no healing; sinned beyond mercy (2 Ki. xxiv. 4). Ver. 17. *Slew*, cut and slew; reference to God, who caused disasters to fall upon them for sins. Slaughter fearful at capture of city (*cf.* Ezek. ix. 6, 7; Lam. ii. 7-10). Ver. 20. *Vessels* enumerated (2 Ki. xxv. 14, 15). The pillage more sweeping than in days of *Jehoiakim* (2 Ki. xxv. 1-10; Jer. xxxix. 1-8). Those who escaped from sword carried into exile till accession of Persian king; *servants*, slaves to *Neb.* and his sons, employed in forced labour which great works necessitated. Ver. 21. *Word* (Jer. xxv. 11; xxix. 10). *Sabbaths* (Lev. xxvi. 34, 35). The seventy years to be counted from first taking of *Jer.* by *Neb.* in fourth year of *Jehoiakim* (605 B.C.).

Vers. 22, 23.—*Proclamation of Cyrus.* Peculiar to Chron. "An interval of fifty years passed over in silence" [*Murphy*]. *First year*, as sovereign of second monarchy of *Daniel* (B.C. 538). *Stirred up*, mode not mentioned; prophecy (Is. xlv. 28; xlv. 1) may have been shown to him by *Daniel*, and exercised powerful influence over him. *God of heaven*, "similar formula at commencement of the great majority of Persian inscriptions" [*Speak. Com.*]. Intimates acquaintance with supreme God, not necessarily an intelligent adherent; *Cyrus* considered that he was *charged*, chosen agent to build God's house, and therefore invites his people to return. "Such is the finale of Chronicles. It thereby shows itself to be an introduction to the history of the returning exiles of Judah and Israel, which is contained in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and an exposition of the peculiar principles by which the restored people had to be governed" [*Murphy*].

HOMILETICS.

THE REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ.—Verses 1-4.

Alter death of *Josiah*, a deplorable period of misrule and imbecility. Unhappy sons struggled for independence, but entailed miseries of siege and capture. Kings recede into obscurity: *Jeremiah*, the prophet, the central figure around whom gather interests of a falling State. For three-and-twenty years almost alone, he endeavours to avert, delay, or mitigate the judgments, but in vain. "When he cannot give hope," says one, "or consolation, or peace, he gives his tender sympathy—is himself the sad example of exile, persecution, misery, death."

I. The method of his accession. "The people of the land made him king." Not the eldest son of *Josiah*, but popular favourite on account of his martial spirit (Ezek. xix. 3), and determined opposition to aggressive measures in Egypt. Anointed—a ceremony not deemed necessary in regular and undisputed succession—to impart greater validity to popular choice and render disturbance from *Necho* less likely, who, like all Egyptians, associated idea

of sanctity with regal anointing. "Man proposeth, but God disposeth." **II. The shortness of his reign.** "He reigned three months, and the king put him down." Necho on victorious return from the Euphrates deposed him, and deemed it expedient to have a king of his own nomination on the throne. The will of the people, the solemnity of anointing of no avail. The autocrat, good or bad, a Solomon or a Herod, is without control. (Sic volo; sic jubeo; stat pro ratione voluntas), "He doeth whatsoever pleaseth him, and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" (Ecc. viii. 3-4). **III. The taxing of the land.** "Put the land to a tribute" (a hundred talents of silver, £3,418 15s.; and a talent of gold, £5,475; total amount of tribute, £8,893 15s.). Heb., set a mulct upon the land (2 Ki. xxiii. 33). This a dishonour, a sign of subjection and dependence. What a fall from exalted position and former greatness! **IV. The end of his career.** The deposed king sent for to Riblah, in Syria, arrested in chains, taken prisoner, and carried into Egypt, where he died. "Something there had been in his character, or in the popular mode of his election, which endeared him to his country. A lamentation, as from his father, went up from the princes and prophets of the land for the lion's cub (Ezek. xix. 34), that was learning to catch his prey, caught in the pitfall, and led off in chains—by a destiny even sadder than death in battle. 'Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him, but weep sore for him who goeth away.' He was the first King of Judah who died in exile. 'He shall return no more, he shall return no more to see his native country—his native land no more' (Jer. xxii. 10-12)" [Stanley].

JEHOIAKIM, THE WICKED PRINCE.—Verses 3-8.

Jehoiakim second son of Josiah, born B.C. 634, and eighteenth king of separate throne of Judah for a period of eleven years, set up as vassal of Egyptian king. **I. The significant change of his name.** Originally Eliakim (*Eli-yakim*), changed into Jehoiakim (*Jeho-Yakim*). Heathen princes gave new names to those who entered their service usually after their gods. This an Israelitish name, bestowed probably at Eliakim's own request, whom Hengstenberg supposes to have been influenced by a desire to be connected with the promise (in 2 Sam. vii. 12), where not *El*, God, but "*Jehovah* will set up." The change signifies loss of liberty and dependence. A striking contrast between the beauty of the name and the misery of its fate. Aspire to that "new name which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." **II. The wickedness of his conduct.** A reign filled with idolatry, oppression, and misfortunes. Sketched with masterly hand in Jer. xxii. 13-23, and in Ezekiel xix. 5-9. **1. In his restoration of idolatry.** He followed the example of idolatrous predecessors, people eagerly availed themselves of vicious license of a lax government. Land filled with heathen "abominations." **2. In his tyrannical measures of government.** Jeremiah reproaches him for covetousness, cruelty, injustice, violence, and luxury (xxii. 13-17). Bloodthirsty (xxvi. 20-23), selfish, and most extravagant. Indifferent to sufferings of his people, and at a time of impoverishment of land by heavy tributes to Egypt, he squandered large sums in building luxurious palaces. **3. In his impious defiance of God.** From beginning of his reign the voice of Jeremiah predicts and prefigures danger by striking signs. Attempts to silence the prophet by princes, priests, and false prophets. Jehoiakim used the penknife to cut up the leaves of the Book and destroy the effect of the message, at a period of solemn fast. The counsel of God stood sure, but no impression made upon the mind of the king by the fresh roll. **4. In his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.** After three years' subjection, deluded by Egyptian party in court, he ventured to withhold tribute and throw off Chaldean yoke (2 Ki. xxiv. 1). Perhaps desired to spend money

in luxury and pride, not to pay the King of Babylon; perhaps sought to become independent since severance of Egypt from Syria at battle of Carchemish. But the step, contrary to earnest remonstrance of Jeremiah, in violation of oath of allegiance, and the ruin of king and country. **III. The calamities of his reign.** Scripture statements brief but graphic. 1. *The invasion of his kingdom.* Nebuchadnezzar too busy in conflict between Lydian and Median empires to march against Jerusalem and chastise his rebellious vassal, sent his governors to rouse surrounding nations, and Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites united with Chaldaean forces to harass Judah. No rest or safety out of the walled cities. At length, in seventh year of his reign (B.C. 598), Nebuchadnezzar took field in person, concentrated forces, marched first against Tyre, which had rebelled about time of Judah; then, after investment of city, went against Jerusalem. 2. *The desecration of the Temple.* "Carried the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon." A portion of sacred vessels, perhaps in lieu of tribute unpaid, and deposited in the house of Belus, his god (Dan. i. 2; v. 2). **IV. The dishonour of his end.** Though a prisoner and chained to be carried to Babylon at first, he was permitted to remain in his tributary kingdom. In siege of the city, by an engagement with the enemy, or by the hand of his own oppressed subjects, who thought to conciliate the Babylonians by the murder of their king, he came to a violent end in eleventh year of his reign. His body ignominiously treated as predicted—cast over the walls, left exposed, dragged away "with the burial of an ass beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (*cf.* Jer. xxii. 10 and xxxvi.). Warning lost upon J.; disregarded future with its clear and awful signs, held the throne in sufferance, until he fell into disgrace and ruin. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

ZEDEKIAH'S REIGN: THE EXTINCTION OF THE ROYAL LINE.—Verses 11-21.

Zed. the twentieth and last king of Judah. His proper name, Mattaniah, changed to Zedekiah at accession, may be in allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel's future as *Jehovah-tsidkenu*—Jehovah, our Righteousness (xxiii. 5, 8). Rather weak than wicked, Z. requested the prophet to pray for him, but refused his advice. Rebellion brought siege to the city, destruction to the Temple, and exile to himself and Royal family. The events of his reign summed up in brief record—**I. Reckless disregard of Divine warnings.** Jeremiah a true prophet and best friend, but unheeded; treated alternately as a traitor and a madman (Joseph. Ant. x. 7, sec. 41); and at last imprisoned. Admonished, but amended not. "He humbled not himself before Jeremiah, &c." **II. Ruinous policy pursued.** Policy of Jeremiah prevailed for a while in foreign matters. An embassy sent to Babylon to take solemn oath with Nebuchadnezzar in the sacred name of Elohim, which Israel and Babylon alike acknowledged. 1. *In throwing off yoke of allegiance.* "Rebelled against N., who had made him swear by God" that he would keep the kingdom for Nebuchad., make no innovation, enter into no alliance with Egypt (Ezek. xvii. 3; Joseph. x. 7, s. 3). He acted in contravention to this oath, perjured his character, and committed the crowning act of wickedness, according to the high standard of prophetic morality. "Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant and be delivered? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon shall he die" (Ezek. xvii. 15, 16). 2. *In persisting in rebellion.* Hananiah's prophecy had been falsified, and he himself had died according to the word of Jeremiah—the folly of a mere remnant opposing a mighty nation was exposed. Egyptian help in vain, and real alliance with surrounding nations impossible.

Yet the king infatuated, held out and was ruined. **III. Incurable idolatry into which the nation had fallen.** 1. *All classes were corrupted.* "All the chief of the priests" who should have opposed idolatry, "and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen." Into the sacred precincts of the temple idolatrous rites had crept. In the outer court women wept and wailed for Tammuz (Ezek. viii. 14); in subterranean chambers incense offered by elders to creeping things and abominable beasts (*ib.* x. 11); and at the entrance to the temple building, between porch and altar, the rising sun was worshipped, by those who turned their backs to the sanctuary and their faces to the east (ver. 16). Thus "they polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem." 2. *The prophets of God were insulted.* Mocked in words, opposed openly in acts, and ill-treated in life. This affront to God who sent them, an evidence of implacable enmity and an invincible determination to persevere in sin. But those that abuse God's messengers provoke his wrath and cannot escape. 3. *The nation beyond all hope.* "The wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (ver. 16). "No healing," no physician, for a body corrupt and already dead. Sins beyond mercy, "which the Lord would not pardon" (2 Ki. xxiv. 4). Possible to sin too long, to sin away the day of grace. "They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof, therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices." **IV. The execution of Divine judgments.** The end rapidly coming. The city besieged and reduced to extremities. Fire of besiegers aided by severe famine within. Inhabitants resorted to terrible expedience (Jer. xxxviii. 9; Lam. iv. 10). At length a breach effected and Chaldeans entered. 1. *The temple burned;* 2. *The city ruined;* and 3. *The inhabitants carried to Babylon.* Sacred vessels taken, palaces of princes levelled to the ground, fortifications demolished, and predictions fulfilled to the letter. No escape by flight. Zedekiah pursued, caught, and despatched to Riblah. Nebuchadnezzar, with cruelty characteristic of the times, ordered his sons to be killed and his own eyes to be thrust out (*cf.* Jer. xxxii. 4 and Ezek. xii. 13). "The king of Babylon bound him in chains and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." 1. Transgressors cannot escape from appointed judgments. 2. The bitterness of sin is seen in the overthrow which it creates. 3. Since we have not otherwise any guarantee against national humiliation, what need to have the Lord on our side!

"Justice, like lightning, ever should appear
To few men's ruin, but to all men's fear" [*Swenam*].

THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS.—*Verses 22, 23.*

God pitied his people in captivity. Predicted long before that he would restore them again to the land of their fathers. The promise not forgotten. "In the first year," when Cyrus gained possession of Babylon, an edict granting exiles permission to return to Jerusalem. **I. The work Cyrus was called upon to undertake.** "He hath charged me to build him an house." Jerusalem in ruins, materials and men required to rebuild. Some pull down and delight in destruction. Cyrus felt responsible for rebuilding of Temple, construction of Theocracy, and arrangements for future kingdom and welfare of God's people. The secular welfare of his government and the religious interests of his own country overlooked. Absorbed in one grand mission. Israel's disobedience to God's charge aggravated by obedience of Cyrus, a heathen king. **II. The proclamation for help in this work.** "He made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom." His dominions first confined to province of Persia, successively enlarged by addition of Media, Lydia, Asia

Minor, Babylon and Assyria, Samaria and Judea. 1. The proclamation *was inspired*. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." Not the suggestion of Magi in the city; not the instruction of Daniel, who informed Cyrus of predictions concerning him. But "the Lord God of heaven," who influences the heart of kings like rivers of water, prompted him to fulfil this duty. 2. The proclamation *was written*. Written in Jewish language to be understood by tribes in distant provinces. Written and proclaimed aloud, "caused a voice to pass," like a jubilee trumpet to sound deliverance to captives. 3. The proclamation *was gracious*. Political considerations might prompt. Egypt a formidable rival to the great world empires. Might be advantageous to have an advanced post in south of Judea to protect against invasion, or from which to make rapid descent upon lands of the Nile. But higher aim in the emancipation of Jews and liberty to return. **III. The response to the proclamation.** *Cf.* Ezra i. Leaders and chief men responded heartily. God disposed many to make sacrifices and return, others remained in Babylon. 1. The response must be *immediate*. "Let him go up without delay." 2. The response must be *voluntary*. "Who is there among you of all the people?" 3. The response must be *accepted*. May involve risk, long journey and great sacrifices; but duty urges, God promises, and privileges enjoyed if we comply. The gospel preaches deliverance to the captives, but many in love with sin, prefer to stay in the world and have no portion in Jerusalem.

HOMILETIC HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Ver. 8. *Found in him*. 1. Evil latent in every heart. 2. Circumstances only required to discover and develop it.

Ver. 13. Three steps in wickedness. Broke his engagement, stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart. *Rebelleth, &c.* 1. *The sanctity of an oath*. Though taken under compulsion, and not due on natural equity: yet must be held sacred, not binding merely till exigency should pass away. 2. *The danger of infringement*. Its violation not excused, nor passed in silence; but the filling up of the cup of the nation's guilt. Contracts and oaths not mere legal forms, to be lightly esteemed, but solemn obligations. Violations more criminal than breaking promises; sins of great deliberation, signs of lax morals, and may be precursors of national ruin.

Ver. 16. *His prophets*. 1. *Prophetic teaching a constant element in Israel's history*. Not left in darkness like heathen nations. Crises and master minds. Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, &c. 2. *The method of this teaching unique and worthy of consideration*. *Divinely* taught. Each set

apart; all pre-eminently raised above their fellow-men, "the messengers of God." *Earnestly* taught. "Rising up betimes," *i.e.*, earnestly and carefully: unwearied anxiety and solicitation. *Patiently* taught. "Sending them" constantly, though ill-treated and set at nought. What kindness and forbearance! 3. *Rejection of this teaching brings guilt and danger*. *Guilt aggravated*, "until the wrath of the Lord arose." *Escape hopeless*, "till there is no remedy." God's long-suffering and earnest entreaties by servants "rising early and protesting to them." The most awful aggravations of guilt in "refusing to hear" (*cf.* Jer. xi. 11).

"God sends his teachers with every age,
To every clime and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind" [*Lowell*].

No remedy. These words contain three facts of great importance. 1. That there was, at least at one time, a remedy. 2. That the remedy went on, and might have been used, for a very long period. 3. That there came a time when the remedy ceased. 1.

All life is a remedy. The conditions of things require it. Life a great restorative process. 1. Comes that marvellous provision of God in Jesus Christ. 2. Subordinate to this great remedy of the cross of Christ, and working with it, all providences have a curative character. 3. Every one carries within himself an antidote to himself. Conscience, till silenced, a sure antidote for evil. II. Notice the word "till." It shows how slow God is to take away the remedy. His mercy holds back the arm of justice. But we may sin ourselves into a state, not in which there is no forgiveness, but no thought or desire to seek forgiveness. "No remedy," not on God's account, but your own; not in God's want of will to save you, but in your own incapacity to will your own salvation [J. Vaughan, *Sermons*].

Ver. 21. *As long.* Seventy years'

desolation predicted by Jeremiah. "The idea that the duration of the desolation was determined in the Divine counsels by the number of the neglected sabbatical years, and that the enforced fallow was intended to compensate for previous unlawful cultivation, is not found in Jeremiah, and, indeed, appears only in Lev. xxvi. 34, 35, and in this place" [*Speak. Com.*]. Learn—1. The purpose of God in the affliction of his people. 2. The providence of God in regulating affliction for good, and as regards—*a*, method; *b*, degree; *c*, time. As the exodus from Egypt came in the exact time, so return from Babylon after seventy years. Times of deliverance correspond with minute exactness to prophetic announcements. Hence patience, submission, and hope. "Even the selfsame day it came to pass" (Ex. xii. 41).

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A

HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

E Z R A .

*WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES,
ILLUSTRATIONS, AND INDEXES.*

BY

WILLIAM JONES.

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF EZRA.

INTRODUCTION.

I. The Nature of the Book. The Book of Ezra was correctly characterised by Bishop Hilary as “a continuation of the Books of Chronicles.” The Second Book of Chronicles brings the history of the people of Israel down to the destruction of the Temple of Jehovah and of the city of Jerusalem, and the carrying captive into Babylon such of the people that remained in the land. The Book of Ezra takes up the history of the nation at the close of the seventy years of captivity, and tells of the return of some of the exiles to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel prince of Judah, and by permission of Cyrus king of Persia, of the restoration of the worship of Jehovah and the rebuilding of His Temple by them, of the return of a second company of exiles many years afterwards under Ezra, the celebrated priest and scribe, and by permission of Artaxerxes king of Persia, and of the social and religious reformation which was accomplished under Ezra. And some portion of this history is given in contemporary historical documents, which seem to have been written “from time to time by the prophets, or other authorised persons, who were eyewitnesses for the most part of what they record,” and were collected by the author and incorporated by him into his work.

II. The Design of the Book. From a survey of the contents of this book, Keil concludes “that the *object* and *plan* of its author must have been to collect only such facts and documents as might show the manner in which the Lord God, after the lapse of the seventy years of exile, fulfilled His promise announced by the prophets, by the deliverance of His people from Babylon, the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the restoration of the Temple worship according to the law, and preserved the reassembled community from fresh relapses into heathen customs and idolatrous worship by the dissolution of the marriages with Gentile women. Moreover, the restoration of the Temple and of the legal Temple worship, and the separation of the heathen from the newly-settled community, were necessary and indispensable conditions for the gathering out of the people of God from among the heathen, and for the maintenance and continued existence of the nation of Israel, to which and through which God might at His own time fulfil and realise His promises to their forefathers, to make their seed a blessing to all the families of the earth, in a manner consistent both with His dealings with this people hitherto, and with the further development of His promises made through the prophets. The significance of the Book of Ezra in sacred history lies in the fact that it enables us to perceive how the Lord, on the one hand, so disposed the hearts of the kings of Persia, the then rulers of the world, that in spite of all the

machinations of the enemies of God's people, they promoted the building of His Temple in Jerusalem, and the maintenance of His worship therein; and on the other, raised up for His people, when delivered from Babylon, men like Zerubbabel their governor, Joshua the high priest, and Ezra the scribe, who, supported by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, undertook the work to which they were called, with hearty resolution, and carried it out with a powerful hand."

III. The Authorship of the Book. The statement of Keil on this point seems to us to rest on trustworthy bases: "There can be no reasonable doubt that that author was Ezra, the priest and scribe, who in chaps. vii.-x. narrates his return from Babylon to Jerusalem, and the circumstances of his ministry there, neither its language nor contents exhibiting any traces of a later date." It is not meant by this that the whole book is the original work of Ezra, but that it was put together by him, and that the last four chapters, and probably some portions of the other chapters, were his original work. As illustrations of historical documents which were collected by Ezra and embodied in his work, we may mention the list of names in chap. ii., which is also inserted in Neh. vii. 6-73, and "which must have been composed in the earliest times of the re-establishment of the congregation" (see Neh. vii. 5), and the letters and decrees which are given in chaps. iv.-vi.

All that we know as certainly true concerning Ezra is recorded in this book (chaps. vii.-x.), and in the Book of Nehemiah (chaps. viii. and xii. 26). He was eminent for his learning, piety, patriotism, love of the Sacred Writings, and zeal for the honour of God; and was held in the highest esteem by his countrymen in ancient times, as he is also by those of modern days.

IV. The Canonicity of the Book. On this point Bishop Hervey says: "There has never been any doubt about Ezra being canonical, although there is no quotation from it in the New Testament. Augustine says of Ezra, 'magis rerum gestarum scriptor est habitus quam propheta' (*De Civ. Dei*, xviii. 36)."—*Bibl. Dict.*

V. Date of the Book. The first event recorded in this book took place in the first year of the rule of Cyrus over Babylon (chap. i. 1), which was in the year 536 B.C.; and the work of Ezra, so far as it is recorded in this book, was completed in the spring of 457 B.C. (chap. x. 17), which was the first spring after Ezra's arrival at Jerusalem, which took place in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (chap. vii. 7, 9) or 458 B.C. So that this book deals with a period of about eighty years. But of fifty-seven of these years, which intervene between the conclusion of chap. vi. and the commencement of chap. vii., nothing is recorded. From the fact that the history is carried on in this book so far as the spring of 457 B.C., we conclude that Ezra could not have compiled it before that year. And from the fact that no mention is made in it of the mission of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, which took place in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (Neh. ii. 1) or about 445 B.C., we infer that it was written before that date. The probability, therefore, is that the work of Ezra the scribe must be assigned to some time between the years 457 and 445 B.C.

VI. Analysis of the Contents of the Book.

I. THE RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM UNDER ZERUBBABEL, AND THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE (chaps. i.-vi.).

- i. *The return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel* (chaps. i. and ii.).
 1. The edict of Cyrus granting permission to the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem (chap. i. 1-4).
 2. The preparations of the Jews for returning (vers. 5 and 6).
 3. The restoration of the sacred vessels of the Temple to Zerubbabel prince of Judah (vers. 7-11).

4. The list of the names and the number of the people who returned (chap. ii. 1-64).
 5. The possessions of those who returned and their offerings for building the Temple (vers. 65-70).
 - ii. *The erection of the altar, the restoration of worship, and the commencement of the rebuilding of the Temple* (chap. iii.).
 - iii. *The hindrance of the work by the Samaritans* (chap. iv.).
 1. The request of the Samaritans to co-operate in the rebuilding of the Temple, and its refusal by the Jewish authorities (chap. iv. 1-3).
 2. The opposition of the Samaritans in consequence of this refusal (vers. 4-6).
 3. The letter of the hostile Samaritans to Artaxerxes the king (vers. 7-16).
 4. The reply of the king to this letter, in consequence of which the work was arrested (vers. 17-24).
 - iv. *The renewal and the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple* (chaps. v. and vi.).
 1. The renewal of the work in consequence of the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (chap. v. 1, 2).
 2. The inquiries of the Persian officers concerning the work, and their report to Darius the king, which includes the reply of the Jews to their inquiries (vers. 3-17).
 3. The reply of Darius to the letter of his officers, including the discovery of the edict of Cyrus, and the commands of Darius to his officers to allow and to promote the rebuilding of the Temple (chap. vi. 1-12).
 4. The completion of the Temple (vers. 13-15).
 5. The dedication of the Temple (vers. 16-18).
 6. The celebration of the feast of the Passover (vers. 19-22).
- II. THE RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON TO JERUSALEM UNDER EZRA, AND THE REFORMATION WHICH HE ACCOMPLISHED AMONGST THE PEOPLE (chaps. vii.-x.).
- i. *The return of Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem* (chaps. vii. and viii.).
 1. The genealogy of Ezra, and a statement concerning his going with others to Jerusalem (chap. vii. 1-10).
 2. The letter of Artaxerxes the king, authorising Ezra to do certain things (vers. 11-26).
 3. Ezra's praise to God for the kindness of the king (vers. 27 and 28).
 4. The list of the names and the number of those who accompanied Ezra (chap. viii. 1-14).
 5. Their encampment by "the river that runneth to Ahava," from whence Ezra sent for ministers for the Temple, and prepared for the journey by fasting and prayer, and by the delivery of the precious things of the Temple into the hands of twelve priests and an equal number of Levites (vers. 15-30).
 6. The journey "from the river Ahava" to Jerusalem (vers. 31 and 32).
 7. The giving up of the precious things to certain priests and Levites in the Temple, and the presentation of offerings unto the Lord (vers. 33-35).
 8. The deliverance of the king's decree to the Persian satraps and governors west of the Euphrates (ver. 36).
 - ii. *The social and religious reformation effected by Ezra* (chaps. ix. and x.).
 1. The evil to be remedied, viz., the marriages of the Jews with heathen women (chap. ix. 1, 2).
 2. The sorrow and prayer of Ezra in consequence of this evil (vers. 3-15).

3. The proposal of Shechaniah for the removal of the evil, and its acceptance by Ezra (chap. x. 1-5).
4. The accomplishment of the reformation (vers. 6-17).
5. The names of those who had married heathen wives and put them away (vers. 18-44).

Respecting our own work, we have very little to add to what we stated in the introduction to *The Homiletic Commentary on Numbers*, as the method of that work is followed in this also.

A considerable number of selected sermon outlines by various authors will be found in the following pages. By their introduction we have sought to secure variety in relation both to the mental view and the homiletic treatment of the texts.

We wish to acknowledge our obligations to the expositions of Professor Fr. W. Schultz (in the great work of Dr. Lange), C. F. Keil, D.D., Matthew Henry, and Thomas Scott.

CHAPTER I

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] In this chapter we have (i.) the proclamation of Cyrus (vers. 1-4); (ii.) the preparation of the Jews for availing themselves of it (vers. 5, 6) and (iii.) the restoration of the sacred vessels (vers. 7-11).

Ver. 1. Now, Heb. וְ, and] The conjunction connects the history of the restoration of the Jews with the history of the destruction of their capital and kingdom, as in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22. In the first year of Cyrus] *i.e.* the first year of his rule over Babylon, which was 536 B.C. Cyrus, שֶׁרָשָׁן is the Hebrew for the ancient Persian *Kurus*, Greek *Kūros*. "As to the meaning of the name," says Fuerst, "the ancients have already observed that it is an expression for *the sun*. The sun was called in old Persian *Khor, Khur*. שֶׁ- is the sign of the Persian nominative *s* or *ush*. In cuneiform inscriptions the name is *Khurush*." Persia] "פָּרְסָא" signifies in Biblical phraseology the Persian Empire (comp. Dan. v. 28; vi. 8, &c.)—Keil. That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah] &c. The prophecy referred to is in Jer. xxv. 11, 12; xxix. 10. The seventy years began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Nebuchadnezzar first took Jerusalem and carried Daniel and others, with part of the vessels of the house of God, to Babylon (2 Kings xxiii. 36-xxiv. 4; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 5-8; Jer. xlvi. 2; Dan. i. 1, 2). This was the year 606 B.C. And, as we have seen, the first year of the rule of Cyrus over Babylon was 536 B.C., which completes the seventy years. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus] *i.e.* God inspired within him the desire and the determination (comp. 1 Chron. v. 26; 2 Chron. xxi. 16; Hag. i. 14). Made a proclamation] Margin: "Caused a voice to pass." The expression signifies to make known by heralds (comp. Exod. xxxvi. 6; 2 Chron. xxx. 5; chap. x. 7; Neh. viii. 15). And put it also in writing] Schultz: "And also (made known) by writing." In addition to the proclamation by heralds, Cyrus issued written edicts.

Ver. 2. All the kingdoms of the earth] These words, which are not to be taken literally, "are explained, from the wide extent of the Persian Empire. When Cyrus conquered Babylon, he had already subjugated to himself almost the entire eastern Asia, even to the Indian Ocean (according to Berosus in Josephus, *c. Ap.*). Afterwards he pressed southward also, and entered even into Egypt and Ethiopia."—Schultz. He hath charged me] &c. "It is a reasonable conjecture," says Rawlinson, "that, on the capture of Babylon, Cyrus was brought into personal contact with Daniel, and that his attention was drawn by that prophet to the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. xlv. 24-28; xlv. 1 *seq.*) Cyrus probably accepted this prophecy as a 'charge' to rebuild the Temple."

Ver. 3. All His people] Not Judah only, but also the descendants of the ten tribes. He is the God which is in Jerusalem] does not mean that His presence was confined to that place, but that He had chosen it as the chief seat of His worship (comp. Neh. i. 9, last clause; Ps. xlvi. 1, 2; cxxxii. 13, 14).

Ver. 4. And whosoever remaineth] &c. Schultz: "And as for every one of the survivors" (comp. Neh. i. 2; Hag. ii. 3). The men of his place] signifies those who were not Israelites. Help him] Margin: "Heb. lift him up." Both Keil and Schultz give the meaning "to assist." Goods] Fuerst: "Movable property." Schultz: "Here perhaps clothing or tents." Beside the freewill offering] &c. *i.e.* in addition to the gifts intended for the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ver. 5. With all] &c. Keil would render this, "in short," or, "namely, all whose spirit,"

&c. He says, "the ל in לל serves to comprise the remaining persons, and may therefore be rendered by, in short, or namely." Many elected to remain in Babylon.

Ver. 6. All they that were about them] both their heathen neighbours and the Jews who preferred to remain in Babylon. Strengthened their hands] The idea is correctly expressed in the margin: "that is, helped them."

Ver. 7. The vessels of the house of the Lord] &c. Most probably those mentioned in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 7, and Dan. i. 2.

Ver. 8. Mithredath] According to Rawlinson, the Persian is *Mithradata*, and is made up of *Mithra*, "the sun-god," and *data* past part. of *da*, "to give," and signifies "given by Mithra." Sheshbazzar] is the Chaldee name of Zerubbabel. The etymology and meaning of the name are uncertain. The prince of Judah] He was of the royal family of Judah (1 Chron. iii. 19; Matt. i. 12), and was the recognised head of that tribe at this time.

Vers. 9, 10] The usual names for the sacred vessels are not used here, and consequently there is much uncertainty as to their meaning.

Ver. 11. Five thousand and four hundred] This total is more than double the numbers which are given in detail in vers. 9, 10. The statement of Keil may be correct: "The difference between the two statements has certainly arisen from errors in the numbers, for the correction of which the means are indeed wanting." But we prefer the suggestion of J. H. Michaelis, "that the author passed over many subordinate vessels in the detail, but in the sum total has taken them all into consideration."

THE FULFILMENT OF THE WORD OF THE LORD.

(Verse 1.)

Here are four things which claim our attention:—

I. The regard of God for His word.
 "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled," &c. The word referred to is in Jer. xxix. 10: "Thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." The seventy years were now accomplished, and God proceeds to perform His word to His people. He is punctual in the fulfilment of His promises. "God is not a man, that He should lie" &c. (Num. xxiii. 19). "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." "The word of the Lord endureth for ever." "He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." We have in this—

1. *An assurance that the prophecies and promises of His word will be fulfilled.*
 "As the architect progressively executes every part of the plan which he had delineated, till the whole design is completed, so God in His providence performs in due order all the prophecies of His word: a great proportion of His great scheme has already been accomplished, and revolving ages will hasten the performance of all the rest in the appointed periods."—*Scott. (a)*

2. *An encouragement to trust in Him.*
 "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be set on high." "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust." See Ps. xxii. 4, 5; xviii. 2. (b)

II. The mercy of God to His people.
 This mercy is seen—

1. *In the design and effect of the captivity.* The captivity was the punishment of their many sins, and especially their idolatry; and was designed to eradicate their apparently inveterate tendency to idolatry. And in this it was thoroughly successful. "Prone before on every occasion to adopt the idolatrous practices of the adjacent nations, the Jews now secluded themselves from the rest of the world, in proud assurance of their own religious superiority. The law, which of old was perpetually violated or almost forgotten, was now enforced by general consent to its extreme point, or even beyond it. Adversity endeared that of which in prosperity they had not perceived the value. Prone, the mass of them, all but the wiser and more enlightened, who worshipped Jehovah, to worship Him but as a national God, greater and mightier than the gods of other nations (a conception in itself polytheistic), they threw aside this lower kind of pride to assume that of the sole people of the One True God." In this way the pun-

ishment of their sins was an expression of the Divine mercy to them. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." "Thus the Divine word of chastisement," says Schultz, "ever goes hand in hand with His word of salvation. His chastening is in truth ever a helping; yea, His killing is a making alive. He puts to death only the dead."

2. *In the release from captivity.* (1.) As to its *time*. The emancipation was not delayed one moment longer than was necessary. As soon as the exile had accomplished its purpose, the Lord brought it to a conclusion. "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies." (2.) As to its *meaning*. It was an assurance of the Divine forgiveness of their sins. Isaiah clearly expresses this: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God," &c. (Isa. xl. 1, 2). Their release was also the commencement of many and great blessings. "This chapter contains," says Schultz, "nothing less than the beginning of the fulfilment of all the great and glorious prophecies with which the prophets before the exile brightened the gloomy night of the severe judgments of God—the dawning light of the grace of God in all its greatness, that would reawaken the people of God from death and the grave, and enable them to live a new and glorious life—the glorious liberty of the children of God in the fullest and highest sense. What a great revolution of affairs was now to be expected! What a fulness of salvation after the night of misfortune—the entire extent of Messianic redemption!"

III. The influence of God upon the spirit of man. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia."

1. *The nature of this influence.* "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." "This does not mean," says Schultz, "that Cyrus was influenced in the same way as were the prophets, upon whom, with their greater susceptibility, the Spirit of the Lord came; but yet an influence in consequence of which Cyrus made the will of God his own will, and executed it in the things under con-

sideration. God gave him the resolution and the desire to execute His intention." All the pure desires and noble resolutions of men's hearts are Divine inspirations. All the good in human life is the result of Divine influence. (c)

2. *The subject of this influence.* "Cyrus king of Persia." Cyrus was the greatest king of the mightiest empire of the world; he was a heathen, but, in common with his countrymen at this period, was probably a pure Theist, believing in One Supreme Being. As a prince, he was distinguished for his justice, and for the mildness and kindness of his administration. His relations to the people of God, and the terms by which they are described in the Scriptures, are very remarkable. He is spoken of as "the righteous man" (Isa. xli. 2); "My shepherd" (Isa. xlv. 28), and "The Lord's anointed" (Isa. xlv. 1). God employed this celebrated heathen monarch in the accomplishment of His purposes, in the emancipation of His people, and the rebuilding of His Temple. (d) "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water" He turneth it whithersoever He will.: He is now using the powers of the world to promote the interests of His cause. We have in this an earnest of His final victory over all heathen powers. "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents," &c. (Ps. lxxii. 10, 11).

3. *The design of this influence.* "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, that he made a proclamation," &c. Divine influence was exerted upon Cyrus to cause him to do an act of great generosity and nobility. The intention of the action of God upon the spirit of man is always gracious. In all the inspirations and impressions which He imparts to man, His aim is to save and bless him, and to make him an agent in blessing others.

IV. The suitable response of man to the influence of God. "Cyrus made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom," &c. God's influence upon the spirit of man is not irresistible. He impresses man, but He does not coerce him. He inspires man, but He does

not compel him. Divine influence does not invade human freedom. Man may harden himself against it, may resist it to his own injury. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost," was a charge brought by Stephen against the Jews. Or, like Cyrus, man may yield to this influence, and suitably and heartily respond to it. When this is the case the Divine influence results in rich blessings. "Quench not the Spirit." "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." (c)

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Is God all-mighty? Then be assured that the throne of right shall stand upon the ruins of all wrong; but here God is apparently at a disadvantage, because you cannot kill evil with the sword. The abolition of evil is a work of time, requiring the combination, the conspiring of innumerable moral influences and educational forces; but that conspiring is going on. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness."—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) "I will go before thee." This was a Divine promise made to Cyrus; and God has made the same promise to all who put their trust in Him. It is surely something to have a Father's promise singing in the heart. Many of us know the inspiration even of a human promise; many of us know that we never could have endured this bitter trial, or surmounted that overshadowing difficulty, had we not enjoyed the presence and hopefulness of some friendly promise in the heart. What we want to feel is the triumphant faith that says definitely to God, "Thou didst promise this, and we will wait for its fulfilment."—*Ibid.*

(c) It is taught that, besides the general moral influences, unconscious and diffused—as it were distilled, like dew, in silence and darkness—there is an active energy, arousing, filling, impelling the souls of men. It is said that the Spirit of the Lord came upon judges, that it came upon kings, upon prophets, upon apostles—came mightily and stirred them up. As sudden and mighty winds make trees rock, and wrench them, and even overturn them, so, as by a mighty rushing wind, the Spirit of God has descended on men—on Samuel, on David, on Isaiah, on Paul. It is taught, likewise, that, while this energy of the Divine mind prepared certain men for emergencies, and prepared them to act official parts, all true Christians, all godly souls, are opening to a quickening influence, if not so mighty yet of the same general kind—an influence which stimulates, assists, ripens, and so finally sanctifies.

The Divine Spirit works along the line of a man's own thinking power, along the channel of a man's own motive power, and wakes up in the man that which was in him. It is not said that God's thought rolls along and becomes a part—a material part—of the current of our thought; on the contrary, it is said that God makes us think, makes us will, makes us feel. What is the formula? "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." That is, work, *work in earnest*, as men do about a thing which they are afraid they shall not accomplish. Why? Because "it is God that worketh in you"—what? putting His own will there and His own thought?—because "it is God that worketh in you *to will and to do.*" There is the point in which the Divine influence expends itself, according to the explicit testimony of Scripture, for the development in man of that which he had in him of dormant power.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(d) One of the designations of Cyrus, "the man that executeth My counsel," furnishes the key to the prophetic view of his character and position—a view which pervades all that is said of him, and promised to him. This forms the most striking and the most sustained of the instances in which the Lord not only asserts His supremacy in the government of the world, but reveals to us the mode in which that government operates, and the form in which it is most usually conducted. The marked manner in which Cyrus and his Persians are represented as set apart to execute the purposes of the Lord, while they considered themselves pursuing their own objects, cannot fail to suggest many interesting reflections respecting the manner in which the Lord acts in executing the high purposes of His will—often by agents who little think whom they are serving, and who are, it may be, as in this case, ignorant even of His name.

The greatest difficulty is supposed to be found in the designation of Cyrus, a heathen, as a "righteous man." But this title, which indicates one who acts with habitual rectitude, who would not consciously inflict wrong—a just man, is not in Scripture confined to Israelites; and, what is more, it correctly describes the character of Cyrus, which, not less than his military exploits, caused his name to be long held in honour by his countrymen. . . . In fact, as Dr. Henderson remarks: "It is not a little remarkable, that of all the virtuous princes of antiquity, he alone was thought worthy of being exhibited as a model of just government. Not only was he exemplary in private life, but his victories and conquests had for their object the vindication of law and justice. He is even said to have been an object of the Divine love (Isa. xlviii. 14). His destruction of the Babylonian Empire and liberation of the Jews were special acts of righteousness; and the abolition of idolatry, which in a great measure followed the success

of the Persian arms, comes also under the same head." . . .

. . . But the Lord had not only called Cyrus by his name—He had "surnamed" him, as our translation somewhat vaguely renders it. What is meant is, not that He had given him any surname—for the name already mentioned was his own proper name—but that He had made honourable mention of him, and bestowed upon him titles of high honour, such as no heathen prince had ever received. What were these titles and honourable distinctions? One of them, "The righteous man," has already engaged our attention. Two more occur in the passage last extracted (Isa. xlv. 28, xlv. 1-4): "My shepherd" and "Mine anointed."

As to the first of these titles, that of "shepherd," we know that good kings and rulers are called shepherds in Scripture, as they are in the ancient classics. It is a fact, however, that David, Cyrus, and Christ in His Messianic character, are the only sovereigns to whom the title is personally given. In other instances it is applied to the office of sovereign rather than to the person of any particular king. What is more remarkable is, that this very title was one to which Cyrus was partial, and the purport of which he fully appreciated. Xenophon describes him as saying, "The business of a good king and a good shepherd are much alike. The shepherd ought, before all things, to provide for the welfare and safety of his flock, and to make use of these creatures consistently with their happiness; and a king ought, in the same manner, to make men and cities happy, and in the same manner to make use of them."

Cyrus, again, is called "the Lord's anointed," in reference to the ancient custom of anointing kings with oil at their inauguration. To be merely the "anointed," was, therefore, no peculiar distinction to Cyrus, but to be "the Lord's anointed" was a very high distinction; and it is given to him obviously because

the Lord had, in His providence, appointed him to be the prince under whose rule the Jews were to be restored, and the other purposes of His will accomplished.—*John Kitto, D.D.*

(e) When we see a casket wrenched open, the hinges torn away, or the clasp destroyed, we mark at once the hand of the *spoiler*; but when we observe another casket deftly opened with a master key, and the sparkling contents revealed, we note the hand of the *owner*. Conversion is not, as some suppose, a violent opening of the heart by grace, in which will, reason, and judgment are all ignored or crushed. This is too barbarous a method for Him who comes not as a plunderer to his prey, but as a possessor to His treasure. In conversion, the Lord who made the human heart deals with it according to its nature and constitution. His key insinuates itself into the wards; the will is not enslaved but enfranchised; the reason is not blinded but enlightened; and the whole man is made to act with a glorious liberty which it never knew till it fell under the restraints of grace.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

We are not forced to have God; we can deliberately take up our pen and strike His name out of the page on which we intend to record our life; or, on the other hand, we can say, "We are of yesterday, and know nothing; we are so wise as not to be able to tell what will occur to-morrow; we are so empty and barren as to carry our little earthly immortality in our nostrils. Lord, lead, and we shall follow; we accept Thy mercy; we will go where Thou goest." So, then, religion is no tyranny; it is no pitiless compulsion of understanding and heart which we resent, but a blessing which first makes us poor, that it may afterwards enrich us with unwasting riches of purity, and strength, and love.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS AND THE GOSPEL.

(Verse 1.)

I. In the disposition from which it originated. The motive which actuated the Persian emperor was benevolence. The love of Christ.

II. In the deliverance which it announced. From Babylon to Canaan. From the captivity of Satan and sin to a state of salvation here and hereafter.

III. In the terms which it specified.

No pecuniary compensation for liberty. Salvation by grace.

IV. In the universality of its offers. Every Hebrew captive. Every sinner is invited.

V. In the aids it promised. Provision of help for the journey. Provisional and spiritual aid for Christians. There were some who did not welcome the proclamation of Cyrus.—*George Brooks.*

THE EDICT OF CYRUS.

(Verses 2-4.)

Notice:

I. The devout acknowledgment of God's sovereignty.

1. *In the bestowment of His favours.* "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth." The Persian Empire at this time was very vast in its extent. In Isaiah xli. 2, the Lord is represented as giving the nations to the righteous man from the East, and making him ruler over kings. The prophecy was remarkably fulfilled in Cyrus. (a). His attention was probably called to it by Daniel; and, perceiving its striking applicability to himself, he speaks of his wide dominions as given to him by Jehovah the God of heaven. (b). "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation; and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven," &c. (Dan. iv. 32, 34, 35). "Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south: but God is the Judge; He putteth down one, and setteth up another." God bestows His gifts according to His own wise and righteous will. (c).

2. *In the authority of His commands.* "And He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." In Isaiah xlv. 28, it is predicted that Cyrus would say "to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Josephus (*Ant. xi. i. 1, 2*) states that Cyrus having read the prophecies by Isaiah on this matter, "an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfil what was so written." He accepted it as a charge from God. Moreover, it is probable that God charged him by His own immediate action upon his spirit. As He stirred up his spirit to make the proclamation, He also probably charged his spirit to rebuild the Temple. And the king acknowledged

His authority, accepted the charge, and proceeded to execute it. (d). All the commandments of the Lord are righteous, and are ever binding. He is infinitely holy, and His will is ever authoritative on all moral beings everywhere. (e).

II. The magnanimous emancipation of God's people. "Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, He is the God which is in Jerusalem." The edict of Cyrus does not grant political freedom to the Jews, but full religious liberty, with permission to go up to Jerusalem to rebuild the national Temple and restore the celebration of its worship.

Notice:

1. *The spirit in which the emancipation was made.* (1.) It was *generous*. "Who among you of all His people?" He does not attempt to keep back any. All are quite at liberty to depart if they are so minded. (2.) It was *pious*. "His God be with him." Thus he wishes them the presence and blessing of God; and having these, they would be sure to succeed.

2. *The purpose for which the emancipation was made.* "Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, He is the God which is in Jerusalem." He sets them free, not for purposes of war, but of worship; not for his own aggrandisement, but for the honour of God; that they might build a temple, not to Ormuzd the god of the Persians, but to Jehovah the God of Israel.

III. The generous exhortation to assist God's people. "And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him," &c. (ver. 4).

Notice:

1. *The purport of this exhortation.* That the subjects of Cyrus should assist the returning Jews with gifts. These gifts were of two classes:—(1.) Some were for their personal use. "Help him with

silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts." (2.) The others were for the great work which they were about to undertake. "The freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."

2. *The persons to whom it was addressed.* "The men of his place" are those who belonged not to the Israelites—the heathen amongst whom they had sojourned, and whose goodwill they seem to have won. We may view it as an example of the world helping the Church in its enterprises. In spiritual things the world is unable to do this, but by material gifts it may aid the Church in the prosecution of its holy mission.

3. *The pattern by which it was enforced.* It is probable that Cyrus enforced his exhortation by his example, in bestowing liberal gifts upon the returning exiles. Rawlinson regards "the freewill offering for the house of God" as the gift of Cyrus himself. This is doubtful; but there is very little reason to doubt that he did render them personal help of this kind. He not only wished them well, but helped them to realise his wishes.

LESSONS:

1. *Be prepared to acknowledge and appreciate moral excellence outside of the visible Church of God.* Cyrus, the centurion of Capernaum (Luke vii. 1-10), and Cornelius the centurion (Acts x. 22) are examples.

2. *Imitate Cyrus in his practical acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God.*

3. *When we cannot offer our labours in good enterprises, let us cheerfully offer our gifts.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) In the forty-first chapter of Isaiah, the Almighty is sublimely introduced as demanding who it was that had raised up this great conqueror, this Cyrus, characterised as "the righteous man from the East;" who had called him to His foot—that is, had made him the instrument of the high purposes of His will. "Who," the interrogation proceeds,

"Gave the nations before him,
And made him ruler over kings?
He gave them as the dust to his sword,
And as driven stubble to his bow.

He pursued them, and passed safely;
Even by the way that he had not gone with
his feet.

Who hath wrought and done it,
Calling the generations from the beginning?
I the Lord, the First,
And with the last; I am He."

This assertion of the instrumentality of Cyrus—of his being in a peculiar manner the child of the Lord's providence, is always thus emphatically produced, and gives the clue to his history.

The fact that the Persians had not before taken part in the affairs of the West, and, in particular, that Cyrus had not, is clearly pointed out in the lines which describe his westward march as one not previously known to his feet. In fact, he had to march so far west as to the neighbourhood of Sardis, before he was enabled to meet the enemy in full force and give him battle. This Sardis was the capital of the Lydian Empire; and it seems to have been the policy of Cræsus to draw the Persian far away from his own resources, and into the district where his own means were most available, before he gave him the opportunity of coming to a decisive action.

The extent of this victory and its important consequences are indicated by the largeness of the terms employed; not one nation, but many nations, not one king, but many kings, are given "as the dust to his sword, and as the driven stubble to his bow." Accordingly, the nations who had leagued against him on this occasion, and whom he subdued, were Lydians, Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians, and all the nations of Asia Minor, and, taken in a large sense, with reference to the final extension of his power, it embraced the Medes, Hyrcanians, Assyrians, Arabians, Cappadocians, Phrygians, Lydians, Carians, Phœnicians, and Babylonians. "He ruled also," says Xenophon, "over the Bactrians, Indians, and Cilicians, as well as the Sacians, Paphlagonians, and Megadonians, and many other nations, whose names even one cannot enumerate. He ruled the Greeks that were settled in Asia; and, descending to the sea, the Cyprians and the Egyptians. These nations he ruled, though their languages differed from his own, and from each other; and yet was he enabled to extend the fear of himself over so great a part of the world, as to astonish all, so that no one dared to attempt anything against him."—*John Kitto, D.D.*

(b) Cyrus saw and acknowledged the Hand by which his path had been marked out, and his steps guided; and he hastened to testify his convictions and his obedience by executing with earnestness the remaining task to which he had been called—that of restoring the Jews to their own land. These are the memorable words of the edict which was promulgated in writing through all his empire: "Jehovah, the God of heaven, hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." There is nothing indefinite or uncertain in

this. If he had said simply, "the God of heaven," we might have been doubtful as to his meaning. It might have been understood of the god he had been used to worship. But here he gives Him the name by which the Lord was peculiarly known among the Hebrews—the great name of Jehovah; and declares unreservedly his conviction that HE was "the God of heaven." Surely this is a great declaration. It shows not only that Cyrus recognized the truth and inspiration of these prophecies, but that they wrought the conviction in his mind that the Jehovah, in whose name they were uttered, was, and could be, no other than "the God of heaven."

That this "Jehovah, the God of heaven," and not his own Ormuzd, "had given him all the kingdoms of the earth," he could only have known from Isaiah's prophecy, which declared the intention to give them to him, so long before he saw the light. Indeed, if he believed anything at all of the prophecy, he could not but believe this—that he owed all his glory and his greatness to his being the predestinated and pre-nominated agent of Jehovah; and that it was He, and no other, who had made the nations "as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow."—*Ibid.*

(c) The whole world is in the hand of God, let us be thankful. The whole past is under His review, let us leave it with the assurance that His judgment is righteous. The whole future is under His control, let us pass into it with the steadiness, the quietness, and the majesty of those who know that all the resources of God are placed at the disposal of all who put their whole trust in His wisdom and love.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(d) It was only through Isaiah's prophecy that Cyrus could have realised the conviction that "Jehovah, God of Israel," had, as he says, "charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." For nowhere else is this command given; and nothing but the convincing evidence of this command being contained in an old prophecy, which in so many other circumstances unmistakably indicates him and no other, could have invested this command, to his thoughtful and sagacious mind, with an authority and power not to be

gainsaid. The intensity of his conviction is, however, manifested by the alacrity and fulness with which he discharged the high duty imposed upon him. This gives a marked intensity to the "me." "He hath charged ME:" "Me," and no other. It was not a duty imperative on any king of Persia, but on him personally and individually.—*John Kitto, D.D.*

(e) The first act of sovereignty is the making laws. This is essential to God; no creature's will can be the first rule to the creature, but only the will of God: He only can prescribe man his duty, and establish the rule of it; hence the law is called "the royal law" (Jas. ii. 8); it being the first and clearest manifestation of sovereignty, as the power of legislation is of the authority of a prince. Both are joined together in Isa. xxxiii. 22: "The Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King,"—legislative power being the great mark of royalty. God, as a King, enacts laws by His own proper authority, and His law is a declaration of His own sovereignty, and of men's moral subjection to Him and dependence on Him. His sovereignty doth not appear so much in His promises as in His precepts: a man's power over another is not discovered by promising; for a promise doth not suppose the promiser either superior or inferior to the person to whom the promise is made. It is not an exercising authority over another, but over a man's self; no man forceth another to the acceptance of his promise, but only proposeth and encourageth to an embracing of it. But commanding supposeth always an authority in the person giving the precept; it obligeth the person to whom the command is directed; a promise obligeth the person by whom the promise is made. God, by His command, binds the creature; by His promise He binds Himself; He stoops below his sovereignty to lay obligations on His own majesty; by a precept He binds the creature, by a promise He encourageth the creature, to an observance of His precept. What laws God makes, man is bound, by virtue of His creation, to observe; that respects the sovereignty of God. What promises God makes, man is bound to believe; but that respects the faithfulness of God.—*Stephen Charnocke, B.D.*

THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS.

(Verses 1-5.)

This proclamation, interesting in itself, is adapted to convey instruction of a very edifying nature if properly considered. We may view it—

I. In a way of literal interpretation.

1. *And here that which first calls for our notice is the person by whom this proclamation was issued.* It was Cyrus king of Persia; who, though by educa-

tion ignorant of God, and how He was to be served, was yet employed as an instrument in effecting His gracious purposes—which shows the power He exercises over the spirits of men, a power far exceeding that merely human, which extends only to their bodies.

2. *But the proclamation itself is that which more particularly demands our at-*

tion. In this we see that a great event was to be effected, namely, the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, after a long and trying captivity; which event opened to them the pleasing prospect of again worshipping Jehovah in their native land. This God had foretold by the mouth of His servant Jeremiah (chap. xxix. 10); and as He did not forget His promise, so neither did He delay the fulfilment of it beyond the proper time (Isa. xlv. 26–28).

II. In a way of spiritual improvement. In the proclamation of Cyrus we may see—

1. *What a sad state the men of the world at large are in.* They are slaves and captives, being in bondage to their lusts, to the world, to Satan, and to the grave (Rom. vi. 12, viii. 21; Eph. ii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 26; 2 Pet. ii. 19; 1 John v. 19). This is a humiliating, but just, view of them.

2. *What an invaluable blessing the Gospel is.* No one needs be told what a blessing the proclamation of Cyrus was to the captive Jews; and precisely such is the Gospel, as announcing deliverance to us (Isa. xxvii. 13).

3. *What will be necessary to obtain what it offers?* However deeply all are interested in doing this, too many, alas! are well contented with their bondage, displaying thus most inconceivable madness; whereas, by repentance and faith, they should go up out of it; and by returning to God enjoy the glorious liberty of His children.

4. *What is our bounden duty when it has become effectual for our good?* God is said to “raise the spirits” of such as were ambitious for liberty; and it need not be said to whom we are indebted, if we differ from others (1 Cor. iv. 7, xv. 10; Jas. i. 17).—*William Sleight.*

GOD WITH US.

(Verse 3: “His God be with him.”)

Notice :

I. The devout wish expressed. “His God be with him.” It is equivalent to our “Good-bye,” which is an abbreviation of “God be with you.” This wish comprises two things—

1. *Personal relation to God.* “His God.” The expression may be viewed in two aspects—(1.) “His God,” as opposed to the gods of the heathen. “Jehovah the God of heaven” be with him. He is the only living and true God. (2.) “His God,” as engaged to him in covenant relation. God had condescended to enter into covenant with the Israelites (Gen. xvii. 1–14; Exod. xix. 3–8; Jer. xxxii. 38–41; Ezek. xvi. 8). And in the Gospel He engages, or covenants, to forgive and save all who accept Christ by faith, to receive them as His people, and to be their God. Thus our Lord speaks: “My Father and your Father; My God and your God” (John xx. 17). All that He has, and all that He is, He gives to them as their portion, to be employed for their good. Without any presumption the true be-

liever in Jesus Christ may say unto the great God, “My God and my Father.” (a). Martin Luther said that the sweetness of the Gospel consisted chiefly in its pronouns—such as *me, my, thy, &c.* “Who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*” (Gal. ii. 20). “Christ Jesus, *my* Lord” (Phil. iii. 8). “*My* Lord and *my* God” (John xx. 28). It is the assurance of our personal interest in God, through Christ Jesus our Lord, that makes Him so unspeakably precious unto us. (b).

2. *Realisation of the presence of God.* “His God be with him.” He is everywhere present; but His presence is realised only by believing, loving, and reverent spirits. Such spirits feel Him near—they have communion with Him, &c. (c). His presence is a guarantee of all the help and blessing which we need. We have all things in Him. (d). But in uttering this wish in respect to the Jews, Cyrus probably had an eye to two things which the presence of God would secure to them—(1.) Guidance and guardianship on their long journey. In the pil-

grimage of life we have infallible direction and inviolable protection, if our God be with us. (2.) Success in their great undertaking. Having the Divine Presence, the returning exiles would be able to overcome the difficulties which lay before them, and to rebuild the Temple of the Lord their God. The presence of God is the pledge of the success and triumph of His people.

II. The kind expression of this wish.

The expression of this wish indicates on the part of Cyrus—

1. *Reverence towards God.* He does not utter these words thoughtlessly, but seriously. His proclamation makes it quite clear that he entertained reverent and exalted views of the Divine Being. In our kind wishes let us never use the Divine Name except with consideration and veneration.

2. *Kindness towards the captives.* He wished them well, and proved the sincerity of his wishes by practically helping them in their best interests.

CONCLUSION :

1. *Do we sustain this personal relation to God?*

2. *Do we realise the blessed presence of God?*

3. *Do we desire that others also may realise His gracious presence?*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) This goodness appears in the choice gift of Himself which He hath made over in this covenant (Gen. xvii. 7). You know how it runs in Scripture: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. xxxii. 38); a propriety in the Deity is made over by it. As He gave the blood of His Son to seal the covenant, so He gave Himself as the blessing of the covenant; "He is not ashamed to be called their God" (Heb. xi. 16). Though He be environed with millions of angels, and presides over them in an inexpressible glory, He is not ashamed of His condescensions to man, and to pass over Himself as the propriety of His people, as well as to take them to be His. It is a diminution of the sense of the place, to understand it of God, as Creator. What reason was there for God to be ashamed of the expressions of His power, wisdom, goodness, in the works of His hands? But we might have reason to think there might be some ground in God to be ashamed of making Himself over in a deed of gift to a mean worm and a filthy rebel; this might seem a disparagement to His majesty; but God is not ashamed of a

title so mean as the God of His despised people; a title below those others, of the "Lord of hosts, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders, riding on the wings of the wind, walking in the circuits of heaven." He is no more ashamed of this title of being our God, than He is of those other that sound more glorious; He would rather have His greatness veil to His goodness, than His goodness be confined by His majesty. He is not only our God, but our God as He is the God of Christ; He is not ashamed to be our propriety, and Christ is not ashamed to own His people in a partnership with Him in this propriety (John xx. 17): "I ascend to My God and your God." This, of God's being our God, is the quintessence of the covenant, the soul of all the promises; in this He hath promised whatsoever is infinite in Him, whatsoever is the glory and ornament of His nature, for our use; not a part of Him, or one single perfection, but the whole vigour and strength of all. As He is not a God without infinite wisdom, and infinite power, and infinite goodness, and infinite blessedness, &c., so He passes over in this covenant all that which presents Him as the most adorable Being to His creatures. He will be to them as great, as wise, as powerful, as good as He is in Himself; and the assuring us in this covenant to be our God imports also that He will do as much for us as we would do for ourselves were we furnished with the same goodness, power, and wisdom. In being our God He testifies it is all one, as if we had the same perfections in our own power to employ for our use; for He being possessed with them, it is as much as if we ourselves were possessed with them, for our own advantage, according to the rules of wisdom and the several conditions we pass through for His glory.—*Stephen Charnocke, B. D.*

(b) Only to be permitted to contemplate such a Being as Jehovah; to see goodness, holiness, justice, mercy, long-suffering, and sovereignty personified and condensed; to see them united with eternity, infinite power, unerring wisdom, omnipresence, and all-sufficiency; to see these natural and moral perfections indissolubly united and blended in sweet harmony in a pure spiritual Being, and that Being placed on the throne of the universe; to see this would be happiness enough to fill the mind of any creature in existence. But in addition to this, to have this ineffable Being for *our God*, our portion, our all; to be permitted to say, "This God is our God for ever and ever;" to have His resplendent countenance smile upon us; to be encircled in His everlasting arms of power, and faithfulness, and love; to hear His voice saying to us, "I am yours, and you are Mine; nothing shall ever pluck you from My hands, or separate you from My love; but you shall be with Me where I am, behold My glory, and live to reign with Me for ever and ever." This is too much; it is honour, it is glory, it is happiness too overwhelming, too transporting for mortal minds to conceive, or for mortal

frames to support ; and it is perhaps well for us that here we know but in part, and that it doth not yet appear what we shall be.—*Edward Payson, D.D.*

(c) My friend has gone away from me over the sea and beyond the mountain, but I have him in my heart ; his thoughts, his views of life, his behaviour under given circumstances, his noble impatience, his magnanimous scorn of all that is low and mean, never leave me ; they will mould my life, they will save me in many a temptation. He is with me always because of the realising power of love. And this that we know something about in friendship, in the family circle, in literature, reaches its highest consummation in Jesus Christ ; for though He has gone away from us, He says, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Though we cannot see Him, yet He says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Though we would gladly lay hold of His wounded hand, He says it is better not.

It is expedient for you that fleshly contact cease, and that you lay hold of Him by the tendrils of your love. For what if we did grasp hands, death would break up our union ; but if we grasp hearts, we are one for ever.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(d) "I have read," says an old divine, "of a company of poor Christians who were banished into some remote part, and one standing by, seeing them pass along, said that it was a very sad condition those poor people were in, to be thus hurried from the society of men, and made companions with the beasts of the field. 'True, said another, 'it were a sad condition indeed if they were carried to a place where they should not find their God ; but let them be of good cheer, God goes along with them, and will exhibit the comforts of His presence whithersoever they go. God's presence with His people is a spring that never fails.'"—*The Sunday School Teacher.*

THE RELEASE OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE REDEMPTION OF MAN FROM SIN.

(Verses 3 and 5.)

We discover an analogy in these two things as regards—

I. The subjects. The Jews were exiles and captives in Babylon. Apart from the redemptive power of God, man is the captive of Satan and the slave of sin. He is "taken captive by him at his will." He is the slave of sinful passions and habits. He is captive, imprisoned, and bound (Isa. lxi. 1 ; Luke iv. 18). "Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin" (John viii. 34). "I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. vii. 23). In his sinful state, man is an exile from his true condition and place, and the bondsman of evil powers. (a).

II. The agents. Cyrus, and Jesus Christ. The analogy between them is at least twofold.

1. *Both were called of God to this work.* Ages before his birth Cyrus was pre-nominated for this work, and spoken of as the anointed of the Lord, and as strengthened by Him for the accomplishment of this work (Isa. xlv. 24—xlv. 6). And Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the Servant, the Anointed, the Sent of God (Isa. xlii. 1 ; lxi. 1—3 ; Luke iv. 18, 19 ;

John iii. 16, 17 ; Gal. iv. 4, 5 ; 1 John iv. 9).

2. *Both effected this work by battling with and overcoming the oppressors.* Cyrus had to conquer the Babylonian Empire before he could release the captive Jews. And our Lord and Saviour, as the Son of Man, encountered sin and mastered it ; He resisted temptation and overcame it ; He battled with the devil and vanquished him ; He grappled with death and abolished it ; and thus He offers freedom from sin and Satan to all men. (b).

III. The source. In both cases the blessing flowed from the free and unmerited grace of God. The Jews had no claim upon Him against whom they had so persistently and so grievously rebelled. He "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" to grant them release, of His own spontaneous and gracious will. In like manner He gave His Son Jesus Christ for the salvation of men. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us," &c. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us," &c. (Tit. iii.

5-7). He gave His Son, He bestowed the Holy Spirit, He instituted means and ministries of grace, all of His own sovereign favour. Human redemption in its origin, in its accomplishment, and in its conditions, is entirely of divine grace. "It is of faith that it might be by grace." (c).

IV. The extent.

1. *It is offered to all.* "Who is there among you of *all* His people?" &c. Every Jew was free to go to Jerusalem if he pleased. Salvation from sin is provided for all, and freely offered to all. Christ "died for all." "God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved," &c. "God so loved the world," &c. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Go ye into all the world," &c.

2. *It is accepted only by some.* "Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all whose spirit God had raised," &c. Great numbers preferred to remain in Babylon. (1.) Many did not feel any deprivation or degradation in their exile and subjection. They had been born in Babylon, had passed their lives there, &c. Many do not accept the offered "redemption that is in Christ Jesus" because they are not conscious of the slavery of sin. Like the Jews of a later age, they say, "We were never in bondage to any man." (d). (2.) Many had attachments and interests in Babylon which they could not or would not leave. And great numbers in this day will not comply with the conditions of spiritual redemption. Their love of the things of this world, and their devotion to temporal things, bind them to the Babylon of the world and sin. When summoned to "Arise, and depart," they are unwilling to obey.

V. The object. "Go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." A striking illustration of the grand end of redemption, which may be expressed thus—

1. *The universal realisation of the presence of God.* So St. John describes it: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them," &c. (Rev. xxi. 3).

2. *The universal presentation of worship to God.* "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth," &c. (Rev. v. 13, 14).

"And the Temple again shall be built
And filled as it was of yore;
And the burden be lift from the heart of
the world,
And the nations all adore.
Prayers to the throne of Heaven
Morning and eve shall rise;
And unto and not of the Lamb
Shall be the sacrifice."—P. J. Bailey.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Sin may be conceived of as *an object*, but also as a *power*—as something to which our actions are directed, but also as something from which our actions proceed. Sin is an internal principle, and he who "commits sin," who lives in it, obeys it in this sense—obeys it as a force. Occasional acts may not represent, but belie a man's real nature; but he can do as a habit only what he is, and if that is sinful, he is the slave of sin. The whole and constant tendency and bias of the soul is a despotic rule; it is more than any external authority or verbal law. It has a more rigorous and relentless rule. It is more besetting, has a more constant presence and constraining power; it acts directly on the will; it controls and stimulates volition. That is a great bondage which overbears the will, which brings it against itself into subjection, which ignores and defies its choice, but that is a greater far which corrupts and perverts it. There is no slavery like that in which the very seat and source of freedom is held captive. It is the salt itself losing its savour; it is the light leading astray; it is the king and leader falling in battle.—A. J. Morris.

Go to the intemperate man in the morning, when his head aches, his hand trembles, his throat burns, and his whole frame is relaxed and unstrung: he is ashamed, hates his sin, would not do it. Go to him at night, when the power of habit is on him like a spell, and he obeys the mastery of his craving. He can use the language of Rom. vii.: "That which he would, he does not; but the evil that he hates, that does he." Observe, he is not in possession of a true self. It is not he, but sin which dwelleth in him that does it. A power which is not himself, which is not he, commands him against himself.

This is a gross case, but in every more refined instance the slavery is just as real. Wherever a man would and cannot, there is servitude. He may be unable to control his expenditure, to rouse his indolence, to check his imagination. Well, he is not free. He may boast, as the Jews did, that he is Abraham's son, or any other great man's son; that he belongs to a free country; that he never

was in bondage to any man ; but free in the freedom of the Son he is not.—*F. W. Robertson, M. A.*

(b) Christ came to open the prison doors and preach deliverance to the captives. "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." When Paul was describing the bitter bondage of the unregenerate state, he could not finish it without the parenthetical exclamation, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," &c. (Rom. viii. 2-4).

Yes, Christ is a Redeemer, a Redeemer from the slavery of sin, by entering into the personal contest with evil, with sin, Satan, and the world lying in wickedness ; suffering, but not submitting ; falling, but yet a victor ; being "made sin for us, though He knew no sin," and thus becoming "the Author of eternal redemption to all them that obey Him." He became sin, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "Through death He destroyed him that had the power of death." He "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

This is our hope. There is no other can break our chains, or make us wish to have them broken. There is no other can rescue us from bondage, or beget in us the love and aspiration of spiritual freedom. It remains for us to lay hold of this hope. And this can be done only by believing His word. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin ; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you."—*A. J. Morris.*

(c) Every good thing that is in a Christian, not merely begins, but progresses, and is consummated by the fostering grace of God, through Jesus Christ. If my finger were on the golden latch of Paradise, and my foot were on its jasper threshold, I should not take the last step so as to enter heaven unless the grace which brought me so far should enable me fully and fairly to complete my pilgrimage. Salvation is God's work, not man's. This is the theology which Jonah learned in the great fish college, in the university of the great

deep, to which college it would be a good thing if many of our divines could be sent, for human learning often puffeth up with the idea of human sufficiency ; but he that is schooled and disciplined in the college of a deep experience, and made to know the vileness of his own heart, as he peers into its chambers of imagery, will confess that from first to last salvation is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(d) Men may have a high notion of personal independence, and make a great boast of freedom, and yet be in the deepest and most degrading bondage. And we may extend this thought to other things. Moral and spiritual evil may be, and frequently is, allied to a keen sense and a tenacious hold of other kinds of good. We may live in sin, which is the worst *weakness*, and yet have reverence for many kinds of not the lowest power. We may live in sin, which is the deepest *degradation*, and yet have noble elevation of moral thought and sympathy. The thought of slavery may fire our blood with scorn and hate, and yet we may be slaves of sin.

The reason is obvious. Sin is voluntary. It must be. Compulsory sin is a contradiction in terms. Its root and fountain is in the will. It is its being willed that constitutes it sin. For, as Coleridge said, "Nothing is me but my will." In sinning men do what they wish, what gives them pleasure. They feel no constraint ; they are but acting out their wills.

And then, again, the practice of sin gradually destroys the power of seeing and feeling that it is slavery. We see things by means of their opposites. We estimate by contrast. And as we see we feel. It is what is good in man that resists evil, mourns over it, repents of it. One wholly evil could do none of these things, and when men are wholly evil they are lost. It is the memory, the feeling, the aspiration of freedom that makes men writhe under slavery. It is the reason not entirely blinded, the conscience not utterly seared, that sees and smarts under sin. And when the sense of liberty and the sense of holiness have died out, the man may hug his chains, and the sinner is no more able to deliver his soul or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And this is the curse of both slavery and sin.—*A. J. Morris.*

THE RETURN OF THE EXILES.

(Verses 5 and 6.)

In these verses two main points claim our attention —

I. The company who returned. "Then rose up the chief of the fathers," &c. (ver. 5).

1. *They were of various classes.* "The chief of the fathers of Judah and Benja-

min, and the priests, and the Levites, with all whose spirit God had raised." It was well that the chiefs, men of experience and rank and influence, and the priests and the Levites, men who were consecrated to the service of God, should take the lead in this worthy and diffi-

cult undertaking. They who are conspicuous in position should be solicitous to act becomingly; and they whose influence is great should see to it that it is also good.

2. *They were of noble character.* "All whose spirit God had raised." "Only those marched up," says Schultz, "whom the Spirit of God awakened, that is, only the zealous and the awakened, whose spirits allowed themselves to be filled from God with courage and joy to overcome all the difficulties that opposed them, and with a longing for the land of their fathers that outweighed every other consideration. This limitation was, moreover, entirely in accordance with the Divine purpose. They must bring with them a zeal for the service of the true God that could not be quenched, at least entirely, by the difficult and gloomy circumstances in Judea, that might be enkindled and fed in some of them by these very circumstances." They were men of—(1.) *Piety*, as we see from their zeal for the rebuilding of the Temple of God, and the restoration of their national worship. (2.) *Patriotism*, or they would not have left Babylon for their desolate fatherland. (3.) *Courage*, or they could not have confronted the perils of this enterprise. (a).

3. *They were exalted in purpose.* They went "up to build the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem." No personal or selfish aim was theirs; but the honour of their fatherland, and the glory of their God.

"What sought they thus afar?

Bright jewels of the mine?

The wealth of seas? the spoils of war?

They sought a faith's pure shrine!"

—*Hemans.*

4. *They were comparatively few in number.* (1.) Only three of the tribes are mentioned (Judah, Benjamin, Levi) as availing themselves of the opportunity offered by the proclamation of Cyrus. There may have been some of the other tribes with them; but if this were so, their numbers were so few that they are not noticed in this place. The ten tribes of Israel are conspicuous by reason of their absence from this record. (2.) And of the tribes mentioned only

a portion returned to their own country. There is considerable uncertainty as to the exact number; but certainly there were not fifty thousand persons in all. "The return home," says Schultz, "was not a matter that required no consideration. Their native land lay either desolate or occupied with heathen and barbarous nations. Great dangers threatened the little nation, that would put itself in opposition with the inhabitants; and, indeed, severe tasks awaited them. In Babylon, on the other hand, their circumstances had become such that they could very well endure them, yea, they were favourable, as we can see from Isaiah lvi. 11–lviii., hence 'many remained behind in Babylon, unwilling to relinquish their property' (Joseph. *Ant.* XI. i. 3)." (b). An illustration of those who are in love with this present evil world, and decline to enter upon the Christian life with its self-denials and difficulties.

II. *The assistance which they received.*

1. *This was general.* "And all they that were about them strengthened their hands," &c. The Jews who elected to remain in Babylon would be likely to aid them liberally, in order to a certain extent to make up for their apparent neglect in remaining behind. And the Babylonians, encouraged by the exhortation and example of Cyrus, would aid them also.

2. *This was spontaneous.* "They that were about them" were not compelled to aid them at all. It is indeed stated that the gifts for rebuilding of the Temple were "willingly offered;" and the same cheerful liberality doubtless characterised their other gifts. They gave "not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." In the hearty contributions of these heathens towards building the Temple of the true God, have we not a hint and a foreshadowing of the gathering of the heathen world into the Church of Jesus Christ?

3. *This was honourable to both the givers and the receivers.* (1.) To the givers, who were not only willing that the exiles should return home, but generously aided them to do so. (2.) To

the receivers. These gifts are a proof that in the land of their captivity their conduct must have won the esteem of their conquerors.

CONCLUSION :

Apply the subject as illustrating the offers of deliverance from the bondage of sin which are made in the Gospel, and of the aids which are provided for those who accept those offers, and urge their immediate and hearty acceptance.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The dominion of God is manifested in raising up and ordering the spirits of men according to His pleasure. He doth, as the Father of spirits, communicate an influence to the spirits of men, as well as an existence; He puts what inclinations He pleaseth into the will, stores it with what habits He pleases, whether natural or supernatural, whereby it may be rendered more ready to act according to the Divine purpose. The will of man is a finite principle, and therefore subject to Him who hath an infinite sovereignty over all things; and God, having a sovereignty over the will, in the manner of its acting, causeth it to will what He wills, as to the outward act, and the outward manner of performing it. . . . Thus He appointed Cyrus to be His shepherd, and gave him a pastoral spirit for the restoration of the city and Temple of Jerusalem (Isa. xlv. 28); and Isaiah (chap. xlv. 5) tells them, in the prophecy, that He had girded him, though Cyrus had not known Him; *i.e.* God had given him a military spirit and strength for so great an attempt, though he did not know that he was acted by God for those Divine purposes. And when the time came for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt, the spirits of the people were raised up, not by themselves, but by God (Ezra i. 5), "Whose spirit God had raised to go up;" and not only the spirit of Zerubbabel, the magistrate, and of Jeshua, the priest, but the spirit of all the people, from the highest to the meanest that attended him, were acted by God to strengthen their hands, and promote the work (Hag. i. 14). The spirits of men, even in those works which are naturally desirable to them, as the restoration of the city and rebuilding of the Temple was to those Jews, are acted by God, as the Sovereign over them, much more when the wheels of men's spirits are lifted up above their ordinary temper and motion. It was this empire of God good Nehemiah regarded, as that whence he was to hope for success; he did not assure himself so much of it, from the favour he had with the king, nor the reasonableness of his intended petition, but the abso-

lute power God had over the heart of that great monarch; and, therefore, he supplicates the heavenly, before he petitioned the earthly, throne (Neh. ii. 4): "So I prayed to the God of heaven." The heathens had some glance of this; it is an expression that Cicero hath somewhere, "That the Roman commonwealth was rather governed by the assistance of the Supreme Divinity over the hearts of men, than by their own counsels and management." How often hath the feeble courage of men been heightened to such a pitch as to stare death in the face, which before were damped with the least thought or glance of it! This is a fruit of God's sovereign dominion.—*Charnocke*. For further illustration of this topic, see p. 7.

(b) Some readers may perhaps wonder that, on this proclamation of Cyrus, the Jews did not assemble in one body, and directly go and take possession of their ancient inheritance; but a little reflection shows the matter in another light. The city and Temple lay a heap of ruins, and it would cost immense labour and expense to rebuild them. The land was either wholly desolate or occupied by encroaching neighbours; and in either case it would require some time and trouble to procure for themselves habitations and provisions. The journey was long, arduous, and perilous to those who were attended with families and substance; and many enemies would endeavour to plunder them by the way, as far as they could and dared (chap. viii. 21-23; Neh. ii. 7). None of the Jews had seen Jerusalem or the Temple, except such as were above fifty years of age; at which period of life the spirit of enterprise commonly begins to decline. Few were attached to the Temple by true piety; and most of them wanted even that attachment which men naturally feel for the land of their nativity, having been born in the places where they were then settled. Some persons of true and eminent piety were so situated that they did not think it their duty to remove; as Daniel in the court of Cyrus. Others would be hindered by the infirmities of old age, and the peculiar circumstances of their families and connections. In short, the difficulties, hardship, and peril were manifest; the success of the attempt would be doubtful to all but those that were "strong in faith;" its temporal advantages were remote and precarious, and not worth the venture, especially to such as had obtained comfortable settlements or occupations in the land of their captivity. Even the spiritual advantages would appear to the pious mind more intended for posterity than for that generation; and to engage in it, in this view, would require vigorous faith, lively hope, and an active zeal for the honour of God, and the benefit of His Church, and establishment of His worship, in ages to come.—*Thomas Scott*.

THE RESULTS OF THE CAPTIVITY.

(Verses 5 and 6.)

It may be well to consider here what were the actual effects of the captivity upon the Jewish people. These are well stated in Dr. Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. *Cyrus*, from which we quote the following paragraphs:—

The edict of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple was, in fact, the beginning of Judaism; and the great changes by which the nation was transformed into a Church are clearly marked.

I. The lesson of the kingdom was completed by the captivity. The sway of a temporal prince was at length felt to be at best only a faint image of that Messianic kingdom to which the prophets pointed. The royal power had led to apostasy in Israel, and to idolatry in Judah; and men looked for some outward form in which the law might be visibly realised. Dependence on Persia excluded the hope of absolute political freedom, and offered a sure guarantee for the liberty of religious organisation.

II. The captivity which was the punishment of idolatry was also the limit of that sin. Thenceforth the Jews apprehended fully the spiritual nature of their faith, and held it fast through persecution. At the same time

wider views were opened to them of the unseen world. The powers of good and evil were recognised in their action on the material world, and in this way some preparation was made for the crowning doctrine of Christianity.

III. The organisation of the outward Church was connected with the purifying of doctrine, and served as the form in which the truth might be realised by the mass. Prayer—public and private—assumed a new importance. The prophetic work came to an end. The Scriptures were collected. The “law was fenced” by an oral tradition. Synagogues were erected and schools formed. Scribes shared the respect of priests, if they did not supersede them in popular regard.

IV. Above all, the bond by which “the people of God” was held together was at length felt to be religious and not local, nor even primarily national. The Jews were incorporated in different nations, and still looked to Jerusalem as the centre of their faith. The boundaries of Canaan were passed, and the beginnings of a spiritual dispensation were already made when the “Dispersion” was established among the kingdoms of the earth.—*B. F. Westcott, M.A.*

THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS.

(Verses 7–11.)

Notice :

I. The preservation of the sacred vessels. “Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer.” These are the vessels which are mentioned in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 7, and Dan. i. 2. They did not include all the consecrated things; for we read in 2 Kings xxiv. 13, of some that were afterwards “cut in pieces” by Nebuchadnezzar or some of his soldiers.

But in the providence of God these vessels were remarkably preserved, to be in due time restored to their original place and uses. Nebuchadnezzar, regarding them as sacred things, did not appropriate them to purposes of his own, but placed them in the temple of his god Merodach, or Bel, as he was called by the Greeks, at Babylon; and in this way they were preserved.

Learn :

Since God is so careful of the mere vessels consecrated to His service, may we not rest assured that He will much

more preserve His consecrated people? His children are far more precious in His sight than the most costly furniture of His temples. (a).

II. The numeration of the sacred vessels. "Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah." This numbering indicates—

1. *The reverent care of Cyrus for these sacred vessels.*

2. *The grave responsibility of Sheshbazzar for these sacred vessels.* He would be held accountable for the number of them thus counted out to him.

Learn:

That persons, places, and things which are devoted to religious uses should be reverently regarded by us. Their associations should raise them far above the level of common things. (b).

III. The restoration of the sacred vessels. "All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem."

1. *This was a fulfilment of prophecy* (Jer. xxvii. 22). Prophecy is a "sure word." The predictions of the Holy Bible will become accomplished facts; its promises will all be fulfilled. The veracity and the power of God guarantee the fulfilment of the declarations and assurances of His Word.

2. *This is an illustration of the restoration of perverted things to their true uses.* Many of the gifts of God are sadly misused; e.g., wealth, when it is employed for purposes of self-indulgence or vain show, or when it is avariciously hoarded; eloquence, when it is employed to arouse and inspire men in unworthy enterprises; poetry, when it is made the vehicle of impure suggestions, or the quickener of corrupt imaginations; art, &c. All these things, like the sacred vessels of the Jews, shall be restored to their true uses. They shall be employed in harmony with the will of God, for His glory, and for the good of mankind. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Restorer of the violated order, and the broken harmony of the universe of God. "In the dispensation of the

fulness of times God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him." (c).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." God has jewels even amid the ruins of this shattered and degraded world. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Terrible as has been the havoc created by sin, there are "jewels" still on the earth, and no hand can rifle them. Many times have Satan and his legions sought to purloin the treasure, but the Word of the Lord is faithful—"no man can pluck them out of My Father's hand."—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

Beneath the wings of the Almighty God, night with its pestilence cannot smite the saints, and day with its cares cannot destroy them; youth with its passions shall be safely passed; middle age with its whirl of business shall be navigated in safety; old age with its infirmities shall become the land of Beulah; death's gloomy vale shall be lit up with the coming splendour; the actual moment of departure, the last and solemn article shall be the passing over of a river dryshod. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, saith the Lord." "They shall never perish."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) It is a dreadful thing to trifle with sacred matters. If at any time we open the Bible, or anything out of it be opened to us, and we have not the serious design before our eyes and upon our hearts, that we would know more of divine things, that we may be made more like God, and be more fitted for His service and communion both here and hereafter, we shall be found guilty of trifling with that which is sacred; and though in this world the punishment may not be so visibly severe, yet the guilt is undoubtedly greater than that which Uzzah lay under when he rashly laid hold on the ark; and the Bethshemites, when they opened and would be curiously prying into it. When a man meddles with the great things of God, and can give no account for what he does, but only to satisfy his curiosity, and the idle fancy of a vain mind; this, sooner or later, must have a sad issue.—*John Howe.*

(c) The reconciliation which our Lord has effected has bearings as wide as creation. The whole creation will be restored, and inherit with man the peace and glory of Christ. Evil struggles, and will yet struggle, but it is doomed. Christ's death will be fulfilled in the death of evil throughout all nature. His ascension will be fulfilled in the universal diffusion of His Life, Love, and Glory. But

He will not make haste. By His long patience, He gives the utmost possibility to the endeavours of evil. In the end, evil powers will work their own confusion and downfall. The Son of God is sure of final victory. He foresees it. The whole field will come about to Him. He will wait for it. In His ascension, all the elements and powers of nature are already glorified. In Him, they have all come back to God, with increase. They are no longer divided and striving. They underwent their grand decisive and bloody sweat in Him. The worst is past. "The restitution of all things" is certain. All things are at peace in Christ, and the peace is wonderful.

"It is finished," proclaimed the end of the fallen order of nature. "He is risen," announced the beginning of the new order. Christ glorified is God's firstfruits of the whole harvest of His recovered creation. All things will be made after the pattern of Christ's

unity. The reconciliation of all things in Him is very Divine. And when the like reconciliation is fulfilled, both in man and nature, the work of the Mediator will be done, and "the mystery of God finished."

Observe once for all, that whoever speaks merely of the redemption of mankind, mutilates the redemption of God, and is unfaithful to the New Testament. The mystery of God's will and purpose, which Paul commends to us, is the knitting into unity, the gathering together in one, of "all things in Christ, both the things which are in heaven, and the things which are on earth; even in Him." The Headship of Christ is universal. Heaven and earth, and "all things" therein, are to be brought under One Head; and thus into the fellowship of a divinely balanced harmony. The whole course of sin and sorrow is His chastisement, which He will bear until it melts into His own Purity and Peace.—*John Pulsford.*

CHAPTER II.

[CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] In this chapter we have the list of those who returned from captivity with Zerubbabel, and their contributions for rebuilding the Temple. The contents may be arranged thus—1. The description of the chapter (ver. 1), with the names of the leaders of the exodus (ver. 2). 2. The numbers of the people who returned, arranged—(1) according to families (vers. 3–19); (2) according to cities (vers. 20–35). 3. The numbers of the priests and Levites who returned, arranged according to families (vers. 36–42). 4. The numbers of the Nethinim and the descendants of Solomon's servants (vers. 43–58). 5. People and priests who could not produce their genealogy (vers. 59–63). 6. The sum total of the persons who returned, with their servants and beasts of burden (vers. 64–67). 7. The offerings of those who returned for the rebuilding of the Temple (vers. 68, 69), and a concluding statement (ver. 70). This catalogue appears also in the Book of Nehemiah (chap. vii. 6–73), he having "found" the document (ver. 5), and incorporated it in his work. It also appears in the apocryphal book, 1 Esdras v. 7–45. The three texts differ to some extent in the names, and yet more in the numbers. The differences, however, are unimportant, and arose probably from the mistakes of copyists, to which there is great liability in transcribing long lists of names and numbers.

Ver. 1. The province] "*i.e.* the province of Judea as a district of the Persian Empire; so chap. v. 8, Neh. i. 3."—*Keil.* Every one unto his city] All who returned did not settle in Jerusalem. Many were located in neighbouring cities and villages.

Ver. 2. Zerubbabel] = "born in Babylon." His Chaldean name was Sheshbazzar (chap. i. 8). Jeshua] A later and abbreviated form of Jehoshua. He was the son of Jehozadak (1 Chron. vi. 14), or, as it is written in Hag. i. 1, Josedech; was probably born in Babylon; and was the first high priest of the restored community. "A man of earnest piety, patriotism, and courage." The names of nine other persons are given in this verse. Nehemiah (chap. vii. 7) gives the name of Nahamani, which is not mentioned here, and makes twelve in all. Of these ten persons we know nothing except their names, and that, with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, they were probably the twelve heads of twelve divisions into which the new community was arranged. Nehemiah] is not "Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah" (Neh. i. 1); Seraiah] is Azariah; Reelaiah] is Raamiah; Mizpar] is Mispereth; and Rehum] is Nehum, in Neh. vii. 7; Mordecai] not Mordecai the cousin and foster-parent of Esther (Esth. ii. 7). The number of the men of the people of Israel] is "the special title of the first division (vers. 3–35) of the following list, with which the titles in vers. 36, 40, 43, and 55 correspond. They are called 'the people of Israel,' not the people of Judah, because those who returned represented the entire covenant people."—*Keil.* Although, as we before stated, those who returned were almost all from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi.

Vers. 3–35] It is not necessary for us to enter into a comparison of the names and numbers here given and those of the corresponding passage in Nehemiah.

Vers. 36–39. The priests] This brief catalogue corresponds exactly with Neh. vii. 39–42.

Vers. 40–42. The Levites] were of three classes—1. Those who assisted the priests in Divine worship. 2. The singers. 3. The porters. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxiv. 20–31, xxv., and xxvi. 1–19.)

Vers. 43–54. The Nethinims] Nethinim = "given or dedicated ones;" from נתן = "to give," "dedicate," &c. They were captives of war, who were given to the Levites to be employed in the rougher and more laborious duties of their offices (Num. xxxi. 47; Josh. ix. 27). "The Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed (Heb. *given*) for the service of the Levites" (chap. viii. 20). *Keil* briefly designates them "temple-bondsmen."

Vers 55-57. The children of Solomon's servants] were, according to Plumptre (*Bibl. Dict.*) and Rawlinson, the descendants of the remnant of the ancient Canaanites, upon whom Solomon "levied a tribute of bond-service" (1 Kings ix. 20, 21; 2 Chron. viii. 7, 8). But, according to Keil and Schultz, they were prisoners of war from some other nations, whom Solomon made to do services similar to those of the Gibeonites (Josh. ix. 27). In rebuilding the Temple their services would be of great importance.

Ver. 58. Three hundred ninety and two] So also Neh. vii. 60.

Vers. 59, 60. Could not show their father's house, and their seed] Margin: "pedigree." "Although they could not prove their Israelite origin, they were permitted to go up to Jerusalem with the rest, the rights of citizenship alone being for the present withheld."—Keil.

Vers. 61-63. Children of the priests] who could not prove that they belonged to the priesthood.

Ver. 61. Which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai] &c. Keil and Schultz think that the daughters of Barzillai were heiresses, and that the priest who married one of them assumed her name in order to take possession of her inheritance. But this, to say the least, is very questionable, seeing that they had brothers (1 Kings ii. 7); and daughters, according to Jewish law, did not inherit any of their father's property except in those cases in which he had no son (Num. xxvii. 8). It is more probable that the name of the wife's family was preferred because of the honourable associations of that name; for *Barzillai the Gileadite* "was a very great man," and distinguished by reason of his relations to king David (2 Sam. xvii. 27-29, xix. 31-39; 1 Kings ii. 7). The change of name would not invalidate the claim of the descendants of the family to the priesthood; but in process of time it might have occasioned doubts as to their priestly origin.

Ver. 62. Therefore, were they, as polluted] &c. Margin: "Heb., they were polluted from the priesthood." They were pronounced unclean, and so excluded from the priesthood.

Ver. 63. Tirshatha] Margin: "Or, governor." It is the Persian title of the civil governor, and is here given to Zerubbabel. It was afterwards applied to Nehemiah (Neh. viii. 9, x. 1). Not eat of the most holy things] (comp. Lev. ii. 3; Num. xviii. 9). This prohibition involved their exclusion from the discharge of priestly functions. "A portion of the general fees which were offered to the priests was not denied them, since their right to the priesthood was not expressly denied, but left *in suspenso*."—Schultz. Till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim] Zerubbabel expected that when the altar and Temple were rebuilt, Jehovah would again grant them some special manifestation of His presence, and would restore the privilege of obtaining direct answers from Him by means of Urim and Thummim. His expectation, however, was never fulfilled.

Ver. 64] The number here given agrees exactly with that given both in Nehemiah and in 1 Esdras. "The sum total being alike in all three texts, we are obliged to assume its correctness."—Keil.

Ver. 65. Their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven] In Neh. vii. 67 the same number of servants is given. Two hundred singing men and singing women] These singers were employed to increase the delight of the festivities, and to chant dirges in times of mourning (2 Chron. xxxv. 25; Eccles. ii. 8); and as they were hired and paid, and were probably not of Israelite origin, they are here classed with the servants.

Vers. 66, 67] With these verses Neh. vii. 68, 69, exactly agree.

Ver. 68. When they came to the house of the Lord] *i.e.* to the site of the Temple. Probably considerable ruins of the Temple were yet remaining.

Ver. 69] The account of the offerings given in Neh. vii. 70-72 differs from that in this verse, and is held both by Keil and by Schultz to be more correct. Threescore and one thousand drams, or darics, of gold] According to Rawlinson, the daric was worth £1, 1s. 10½d. of our money. The 61,000 darics were therefore equal to £66,718, 15s. Five thousand pound, or mina, of silver] The Greek silver *mina* was worth a little over £4 of our money; and the value of the Hebrew silver *manch*, according to Rawlinson, was probably not very different from the Greek. Thus the offering in silver would be worth over £20,000; and the entire offering in money worth nearly £90,000. Keil, however, reckons the 61,000 darics of gold to be worth £68,625, and the 5000 mina of silver, £30,000, and the entire offering nearly £99,000.

GOING UP OUT OF CAPTIVITY.

(Verse 1 and part of 2.)

We have here presented to our notice—

I. The deliverance from captivity. "These are the children of the promise that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away into Baby-

lon." The captivity from which they were escaping was (1.) *A degradation.* It was the loss of their power and independence. (2.) *A subjection.* It was the loss of their freedom. They were brought under the power of their conquerors. (3.) *A transportation.* "Nebuchadnezzar the king carried them away

unto Babylon." From their own land, with all its hallowed and inspiring memories and associations, they were forcibly removed unto the land of their heathen conquerors. (4.) *A retribution.* Their captivity was the punishment of their numerous, heinous, and long-continued sins against God, and especially their forsaking Him by the adoption of idolatrous customs. Nebuchadnezzar was the rod of God for their chastisement.

The most deplorable degradation and the most real and terrible subjection are those of sin.

But now many of the Jews are going "up out of the captivity." The offer of release has been made, and they who are mentioned in this chapter have accepted it.

Concerning this deliverance, notice :—

1. *It originated in the favour of God* (chap. i. 1).

2. *It was effected by an unlikely agent.* Cyrus.

3. *It was permissive, not compulsory.* The Jews were quite free to accept or to decline the offer of Cyrus.

Salvation from the bondage of sin is freely offered in the Gospel, but no one is compelled to accept the offer. All who accept it do so willingly, of their own accord.

II. The journey home. "And came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city." It is here suggested that this journey was :—

1. *A restoration.* "And came again." They were going unto the land which God had given to their fathers; to the scenes of the most sacred and stirring events in their national history.

2. *A restoration to their own home.* "Came again every one unto his city." It seems to us that where it was practicable the returning Jews would settle in the cities where their ancestors had resided, and take possession of the inheritances which they had held. They went back to the scenes amid which their forefathers lived and laboured, to the lands which they had cultivated, to the places where they had prayed and worked, rejoiced and wept, loved and suffered, lived and died. There must have been in this a very strong and tender attraction to many hearts. (a).

3. *A restoration to religious privileges.* "Came again unto Jerusalem." Jerusalem was not only the metropolis of the nation, but the holy city, the place where the Temple had been and was to be again. "This Mount Zion, wherein Thou hast dwelt" (Ps. lxxiv. 2). "Jerusalem . . . whither the tribes go up," &c. (Ps. cxxii. 4).

The salvation of Jesus Christ restores man to his true condition and to his forfeited inheritance. "When divine grace," said Legh Richmond, "renews the heart of the fallen sinner, Paradise is regained, and much of its beauty restored to the soul."

But they were not returning with complete independence. They were still "the children of the province." Judea remained a "province" of the Persian Empire. Full religious freedom was granted unto them, but politically they remained subject to Persian rule. Sin, even when it is forgiven, blotted out, always leaves some detriment, or loss, or pain behind it. (b).

III. The subordination to leaders. "Which came with Zerubbabel : Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Bannah." Zerubbabel prince of Judah was head over all. Jeshua was the head of the party as regards its religious duties; and in addition to these there were ten recognised leaders. Society could not exist without rulers and leaders. They are necessary—

1. *For the maintenance of order.* The authority of law must be maintained; its sanctions must be enforced, or the bands of society would be utterly dissolved, &c. And for this purpose rulers or magistrates are necessary.

2. *For insuring progress.* The growth and improvement of a community are impossible apart from the exercise of wise leadership.

3. *Because of the differences in the characters and abilities of men.* By their native faculties, their character, and their training, some men almost inevitably become the rulers and leaders of others. (c).*

* These points are treated in a less fragmentary manner in the *Hom. Com. on Numbers*, p. 12.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) There is a sanctity in a good man's house which cannot be renewed in every tenement that rises on its ruins: and I believe that good men would generally feel this; and that having spent their lives happily and honourably, they would be grieved at the close of them to think that the place of their earthly abode, which had seen, and seemed almost to sympathise in, all their honour, their gladness, or their suffering—that this, with all the record it bore of them, and all of material things that they had loved and ruled over, and set the stamp of themselves upon—was to be swept away, as soon as there was room made for them in the grave; that no respect was to be shown to it, no affection felt for it, no good to be drawn from it by their children; that though there was a monument in the church, there was no warm monument in the hearth and house to them; that all that they ever treasured was despised, and the places that had sheltered and comforted them were dragged down to the dust. I say that a good man would fear this; and that, far more, a good son, a noble descendant, would fear doing it to his father's house. I say that if men lived like men indeed, their houses would be temples—temples which we should hardly dare to injure, and in which it would make us holy to be permitted to live; and there must be a strange dissolution of natural affection, a strange unthankfulness for all that homes have given and parents taught, a strange consciousness that we have been unfaithful to our father's honour, or that our own lives are not such as would make our dwellings sacred to our children, when each man would fain build to himself, and build for the little revolution of his own life only. . . .

When men do not love their hearths, nor reverence their thresholds, it is a sign that they have dishonoured both, and that they have never acknowledged the true universality of that Christian worship which was indeed to supersede the idolatry, but not the piety, of the pagan. Our God is a household God, as well as a heavenly One; He has an altar in every man's dwelling; let men look to it when they rend it lightly and pour out its ashes . . . It is one of those moral duties, not with more impunity to be neglected because the perception of them depends on a finely toned and balanced conscientiousness, to build our dwellings with care, and patience, and fondness, and diligent completion, and with a view to their duration at least for such a period as, in the ordinary course of national revolutions, might be supposed likely to extend to the entire alteration of the direction of local interests.—*John Ruskin, M.A.*

Home! angels encamp about it. Ladders are let down from heaven to every pillow in that house. Over the child's rough crib there are chantings as sweet as those that broke above Bethlehem. It is home! home! The children of the family will grow up, and

though they may get splendid residences of their own, they will never forget that homely place, the place where their father rested, and their mother sang, and their sisters played. If you wanted to gather up all tender memories, all lights and shadows of the heart, all banquetings and reunions, all filial, fraternal, paternal, conjugal affections, and had only just four letters with which to spell out that height, and depth, and length, and breadth, and magnitude, and eternity of meaning, you would write it out with these four capital letters: H-O-M-E.—*T. de Witt Talmage, D.D.*

(b) Even pardoned sins must leave a trace in heavy self-reproach. You have heard of the child whose father told him that whenever he did anything wrong a nail should be driven into a post, and when he did what was good he might pull one out. There were a great many nails driven into the post, but the child tried very hard to get the post cleared of the nails by striving to do right. At length he was so successful in his struggles with himself that the last nail was drawn out of the post. The father was just about to praise the child, when stooping down to kiss him, he was startled to see tears fast rolling down his face. "Why, my boy, why do you cry? Are not all the nails gone from the post?" "Oh yes! the nails are all gone, but the marks are left." That is a familiar illustration, but don't despise it because of that. It illustrates the experience of many a grey old sire, who, looking upon the traces of his old sins as they yet rankle in his conscience, would give a hundred worlds to live himself back into young manhood, that he might obliterate the searing imprint of his follies. Have you never heard of fossil-rain? In the stratum of the old red sandstone there are to be seen the marks of showers of rain which fell centuries and centuries ago, and they are so plain and perfect that they clearly indicate the way the wind was drifting, and in what direction the tempest slanted from the sky. So may the tracks of youthful sins be traced upon the tablet of the life when it has merged into old age—tracks which it is bitter and sad remorse to look upon, and which call forth many a bootless longing for the days and months which are past.—*A. Mursell.*

(c) In the long run leadership resolves itself into a question of personal qualification. For a time men may arise who claim commanding positions who are unable to discharge the duties which their ambition has coveted. In such instances there would seem to be a miscarriage of the natural law and order of things; yet it is only temporary; sooner or later unqualified men have to resign positions which they ought never to have assumed.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

In a great leader many elements of qualification are combined. Other men may excel him in detached points, but taken as a whole he rules not perhaps by one dominant faculty,

but by a noble proportion of natural and acquired gifts. The position of a leader is not so easy as it may appear to be to unreflecting observers. Men see the elevation, not the strain and responsibility which that elevation

involves. The only sound rule for promotion to influential positions in the Church is, that *wisdom*, wheresoever found, in the rich or the poor, the old or the young, should be recognised and honoured.—*Ibid.*

A SUGGESTIVE RECORD.

(Verses 2 (last clause)—64: “The number of the men of the people of Israel: The children of Parosh,” &c.)

Consider:

I. The significance of the fact of the record.

1. *It was an honour to the pious and patriotic ones who returned.* In going back to their own land at this time, and for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple, they acted very religiously and courageously; and to their praise their names were recorded, and in the providence of God the record has been preserved to this day. “Them that honour Me I will honour.”

2. *It is an illustration of the Divine record of God’s spiritual Israel.* The name of every true believer in Jesus Christ is “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. xxi. 27). “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke x. 20; comp. Exod. xxxii. 32; Ps. lxix. 28; Phil. iv. 3; Heb. xii. 23; Rev. xiii. 8). “The Lord knoweth them that are His.” (a).

3. *It suggests that every one of His people is precious in the sight of God.* “A book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.” He knows the number of His people, and the name of every one of them. “He calleth His own sheep by name.” He will not lose any one of them. He has not only written their names in His book of life, but has graven them upon the palms of His hands (Isa. xlix. 16). (b).

II. The significance of the contents of the record. We have in this list—

1. *Significant persons.* (1.) Zerubbabel, “the prince of Judah,” an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt. i. 12; Luke iii. 27). It was important that his name should be recorded, that no link might

be absent from the chain of evidence which shows that our Lord was of the family of king David (comp. Isa. xi. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5; Matt. i. 1–17; xxii. 42). (2.) Jeshua, who was a distinguished type of Jesus Christ (Zech. iii., vi. 11–13).

2. *A significant place.* Bethlehem (ver. 21). This place must be rebuilt, and reinhabited by Jews; for in the Divine purposes a great destiny awaited it (Mic. v. 2; Matt. ii. 1). Here, then, in this record we have two persons and one place which sustained close relations to the Messiah.

3. *Significant numbers.* (1.) The number of those who settled in Bethlehem was small—“an hundred twenty and three.” Bethlehem was “little among the thousands of Judah.” Yet how illustrious and universal is its renown! Size and populousness are utterly unsatisfactory tests of worth and greatness. (c). (2.) The number of those who settled in Anathoth was also small—“an hundred twenty and eight” (ver. 23). In this we have an illustration of the fulfilment of the Divine threatenings (Jer. xi. 21–23). The word of the Lord, whether it be a promise or a menace, shall surely be accomplished in due season. (3.) The number of the whole was comparatively small. “The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand, three hundred and threescore” (ver. 64). What a small number as compared with the 603,550 men “that were able to go forth to war in Israel,” who were numbered in the desert of Sinai! How small, too, as compared with the 601,730 men “able to go to war in Israel,” who were numbered in the plains of Moab, before the entrance into the Promised Land! The smallness of the number of those who returned to

their own land may be viewed—(i.) As a discredit to those who remained in Babylon. In them the love of material prosperity was stronger than the love of country. They had neither piety nor patriotism enough to inspire them to make the sacrifices and encounter the perils which the return to their own land involved. (ii.) The greater honour to those who returned. They acted with a noble faithfulness and independence in doing what they deemed to be their duty and privilege, though they were in a minority, and though the course they followed involved loss and danger. They had the courage of their convictions; they were heroes in their fidelity to their country and to their God. (iii.) An element which contributed to the success of their undertaking. To settle down again in the deserted land, and to rebuild the ruined Temple in the face of difficulty and opposition, demanded men of the right quality rather than men in great multitude. It was force of character, and not force of numbers, that was needed for the success of the returning exiles—men of sincere piety and fervent patriotism. As the victory of Gideon over the Midianites was achieved not by the 32,000, some of whom were fearful and others lacking zeal, but by the 300 eager and heroic ones; so with this company under Zerubbabel, success was to be achieved by their faith and courage, not by their multitudinousness. (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) God knows the persons of all His own. He hath in His infinite understanding the exact number of all the individual persons that belong to Him (2 Tim. ii. 19): "The Lord knows them that are His." He knows all things, because He hath created them; and He knows His people because He hath not only made them, but also chose them. He could no more choose He knew not what, than He could create He knew not what. He knows them under a double title; of creation as creatures in the common mass of creation, as new creatures by a particular act of separation. He cannot be ignorant of them in time whom He foreknew from eternity. His knowledge in time is the same as He had from eternity; He foreknew them that He intended to give the grace of faith unto; and He knows them after they believe, because He knows His own act in bestowing grace upon them, and His

own mark and seal wherewith He has stamped them. No doubt but He that "calls the stars of heaven by their names" (Ps. cxlvii. 4), knows the number of those living stars that sparkle in the firmament of His Church. He cannot be ignorant of their persons when He numbers the hairs of their heads, and hath registered their names in the book of life. As He only had an infinite mercy to make the choice, so He only hath an infinite understanding to comprehend their persons. We only know the elect of God by a moral assurance in the judgment of charity, when the conversation of men is according to the doctrine of God. We have not an infallible knowledge of them, we may be often mistaken; Judas, a devil, may be judged by man for a saint till he be stripped of his disguise. God only hath an infallible knowledge of them; He knows His own records, and the counterparts in the hearts of His people; none can counterfeit His seal, nor can any raze it out. When the Church is either scattered like dust by persecution, or overgrown with superstition and idolatry, that there is scarce any grain of true religion appearing, as in the time of Elijah, who complained that he was left alone, as if the Church had been rooted out of that corner of the world (1 Kings xix. 14, 18); yet God knew that He had a number fed in a cave, and had reserved seven thousand men that had preserved the purity of His worship, and not bowed the knee to Baal. Christ knew His sheep, as well as He is known of them; yea, better than they can know Him (John x. 14). History acquaints us that Cyrus had so vast a memory that he knew the name of every particular soldier in his army, which consisted of divers nations; shall it be too hard for an infinite understanding to know every one of that host that march under His banner? May He not as well know them as know the number, qualities, influences, of those stars which lie concealed from our eye as well as those that are visible to our sense? Yes, He knows them, as a general to employ them, as a shepherd to preserve them. He knows them in the world to guard them, and He knows when they are out of the world to gather them, and call out their bodies though wrapped up in a cloud of the putrefied carcasses of the wicked. As He knew them from all eternity to elect them, so He knows them in time to clothe their persons with righteousness, to protect their persons in calamity, according to His good pleasure, and at last to raise and reward them according to His promise.—*Stephen Charnocke, B. D.*

(b) Our God has a particular notice of us, and a particular interest in our personal history. And this was one of the great uses of the incarnation; it was to humanise God, reducing Him to a human personality, that we might believe in that particular and personal love in which He reigns from eternity. For Christ was visibly one of us, and we see in all His demonstrations that He is attentive to

every personal want, woe, cry of the world. When a lone woman came up in a crowd to steal, as it were, some healing power out of His person, or out of the hem of His garment, He would not let her off in that impersonal, unrecognising way; He compelled her to show herself and to confess her name, and sent her away with His personal blessing. He pours out everywhere a particular sympathy on every particular child of sorrow; He even hunts up the youth He has before healed of his blindness, and opens to him, persecuted as he is for being healed, the secrets of His glorious Messiahship. The result, accordingly, of this incarnate history is that we are drawn to a different opinion of God; we have seen that He can love as a man loves another, and that such is the way of His love. He has tasted death, we say, not for all men only, but for every man. We even dare to say, for me—who loved me and gave Himself for me. Nay, He goes even further than this Himself, calling us friends, and claiming that dear relationship with us,—friends because He is on the private footing of friendship and personal confidence: “The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends.” He even goes beyond this, promising a friendship so particular and personal, that it shall be a kind of secret, or cipher of mutual understanding open to no other—a new white stone given by his King, “and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

. . . His Saviour and Lord is over him and with him, as the Good Shepherd calling him by name; so that he is finally saved, not as a man, or some one of mankind led forth by his Lord in the general flock, but as the Master's dear Simon, or James, or Alpheus, or Martha, whose name is so recorded in the Lamb's book of life.—*Horace Bushnell, D.D.*

(c) The moral magnitude of things has no relationship to the physical. What if a man should say that Washington was not a great man because he was not a ten-thousandth part as great as the Alleghany Mountains, comparing moral magnitude with physical? What has the size of a man, or the duration on earth of a man, or his physical powers, to do with the moral measurement that belongs to the understanding, the reason, or the moral sentiments? Is a battle great by the size of the nation that fought it, or the field that it was fought in? Or is it great by the skill and the bravery enacted, and by the long-reaching sequences that flow from it? The part which this world is to play in the far future, the experiment of human life, the story of Divine sacrifice and love, the part which redeemed men are to enact in their translation into the heavenly sphere—these all give a moral grandeur to this world, and utterly overcome the objection that God would not be likely to give minute personal thought to the evolutions of individual life.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(d) Gideon's army, we see, must be lessened. And who so fit to be cashiered as the fearful? God bids him, therefore, proclaim licence for all faint hearts to leave the field. God will not glorify Himself by cowards. As the timorous shall be without the gates of heaven, so shall they be without the lists of God's field. Reader! does but a foul word, or a frown, scare thee from Christ? Doth the loss of a little land or silver disquiet thee? Doth but the sight of the Midianites in the valley strike thee with terror? Home then, home to the world; thou art not for the conquering band of Christ. If thou canst not resolve to follow Him through infamy, prisons, racks, gibbets, flames, depart to thy house, and save thyself to thy loss.—*Bishop Hall.*

RELIGIOUS SERVICE.

(Verses 36–58.)

This section of the record suggests the following observations concerning service in the Church of God:—

I. There are various spheres of service in the Church of God. In the verses before us there are several classes of persons, and each of these classes had its own proper duties to discharge. The priests (vers. 36–39), the Levites who assisted the priests (ver. 40), the Levitical choir or choirs (ver. 41), the Levitical porters or gate-keepers (ver. 42), the Nethinim, who performed the more menial and laborious duties (vers. 43–54), and “the children of Solomon's servants,” who were a grade lower even

than the Nethinim, and did the humblest work of all. In these we have an illustration of the various spheres of religious work in this Christian dispensation. “He gave gifts unto men. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;” &c. (Eph. iv. 11, 12). In our own day we have pastors, preachers, evangelists, conductors of prayer-meetings, Sunday-school teachers, tract distributors, visitors of the sick and sorrowful, leaders of the psalmody of the church, and managers of its financial and other business arrangements. In the work of the Lord Jesus amongst

men there is scope for every kind and degree of faculty. The feeblest power may be beneficially employed; and the greatest gifts may find spheres of service which demand their utmost exercise. This fact deprives the idlers in the Church of God of any legitimate excuse for their indolence. There is work for every one, and suited to every capacity; and the obligation of service rests upon every one. Let every one, then, be up and doing, &c. (a).

II. The humblest sphere of service in the Church of God is a place of privilege and honour. This seems to us to be fairly deducible from the fact that the Nethinim and "the children of Solomon's servants" are here recorded and numbered. Even the bondsmen taken from alien and conquered peoples, being employed in the most menial services in connection with the Temple, find a place in this sacred record of the returning people of God. That we are permitted to do anything for Jesus our Lord, if it be the very lowest and humblest service, should be regarded as a precious privilege and a high honour. Is it not an honour that we may aid in any way, and in any degree, in the conversion, education, or progress of a soul immortal and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ? Is it not an honour that we are permitted, nay, called to be co-workers with our Lord and Saviour in His great redemptive undertaking? (b).

III. The privilege of service in the Church of God is not limited to any particular races or classes of men. Neither the Nethinim nor "the children of Solomon's servants" were Israelites; but they were not excluded from the privilege of employment in connection with the Temple and its services. In this Christian age no races or classes are privileged to share in this service to the exclusion of others. All men may participate in the blessings of Christ's salvation; and every true Christian may serve in some sphere of holy work, and ought so to serve. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." In

the Christian life "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all." Neither is there any exclusive sacerdotal class with special privileges and powers. Every sphere of Christian service is open to every Christian who possesses the qualifications for efficiently discharging the duties of such sphere. (c).

Let every Christian, then, promptly undertake and faithfully discharge some service in the cause of our Lord and Saviour. "Son, go work to-day in My vineyard." "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Every Christian who wants to have a blessing for himself or for others, must set to work by active exertion. Some of you young men might preach—you have the ability, you have the time for study; I want you to lay out your talents in that holiest of enterprises: in the street corners, anywhere, proclaim Christ. Some of you ought to be teaching in Sabbath-schools, but you are putting that talent by; it is rusting, it is spoiling, and you will have no interest to bring to your Master for it. I want that Sabbath-school talent to be used. Many of you might do good service by teaching senior classes at your own houses. This work might be most profitably extended. If our intelligent Christian brethren and matrons would try to raise little classes, of six, eight, ten, or twelve, at home, I know not what good might come of it. You would not be interfering with any one else; for in such a city as this, we may all work as hard as we will, and there is no chance of interfering with each other's labours. This sea is too large here for us to be afraid of other folks running away with our fish. Some of you, perhaps, will do best in tract distribution: well, do it—keep it up; but mind there is something in the tract—and that is not always the case—mind there is something worth reading, which will be of use when read. Do not give away somnolent tracts, which are more likely to send the readers to sleep than to prayer. Some of them might be useful to physicians, when they cannot get their patients to sleep by any other means. Get something useful, interesting, telling, scriptural, and give it away largely out of love to Jesus. And if these labours do not suit your taste, talk personally to individuals. Christ at the well! What a schoolmaster for us! Talk to the one woman, the one child, the one carter, the one labourer, whoever he may be. He who makes one blade of grass grow that would not otherwise have grown, is a benefactor to his race; and he who scatters one good thought which would not else have been disseminated, has

done something for the kingdom of Christ. I cannot tell you what is most fit for everybody to do; but if your heart is right, there is something for each one. There are so many niches in the temple, and so many statues of living stone to fill those niches, to make it a complete temple of heavenly architecture. You and I must each find our own niche. Remember, Christian, your time is going. Do not be considering always what you ought to do, but get to work; shut your eyes and put your hand out, and "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." The very first Christian effort will do, only do it with your might; do it in the name and strength of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) I know of no service that can be more distinguished than the doing of good, the scattering of blessings among the sons of men. Methinks the very angels before the throne might envy us poor men who are permitted to talk of Christ, even though it be but to little children. I reckon the humblest ragged-school teacher to be more honoured than even Gabriel himself, in being commissioned to tell out the story of the Cross, and to win youthful hearts to the Saviour's service. You are not employed as scullions in your Master's kitchen, though you might be content with such a service; you are not made as His hired servants, to toil in meanest drudgery, you are not sent to be hewers of wood and drawers of water; but you are His friends, the friends of Jesus, to do such work as He did; and even greater works than He did are you enabled to do, because He hath gone to His Father. "This honour have all the saints," the honour of being gentlemen-at-arms under Jesus, the Captain of their salvation.—*Ibid.*

(c) The work of conversion is not to be the exclusive prerogative of the pulpit. There is no sacerdotalism in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have a great High Priest, but it is Jesus. There is a holy priesthood, but it is no privileged caste, it is no modern tribe of Levi; it is the whole community of the faithful, the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood. That figment of old Popery, which restricts all endeavour to spread the Gospel of Christ to the clergy merely, is alien from Apostolic teaching, and would leave the harvest to rot, neglected in the field, because of the miserable fewness of the reapers to gather it in. Though I yield to no man under heaven in respect for the office of the Christian ministry; though I would rather, far rather if I know myself, have the seal of its baptism upon my brow than the coronet of any earthly-patented nobility, I do feel that I am but fulfilling one of its most solemn vocations; when I summon every member of the sacramental host to participate in the glorious war. God forbid that I should trespass upon the crown rights of any of the blood royal of heaven. I should feel as if that were for a guardian to squander his ward's inheritance, or for a father to paralyse the growing manhood of his children, to deprive you, the very poorest of you, the luxury of doing good. The highest honour in this world, the honour of bringing souls to Christ, may be the common privilege of you all. The child with the linen coat, who listens, as did little Samuel, when the Master speaks; the love-watchers of the paralytic, who, if they can do nothing else, can take him and let him down through the roof to the room where Jesus is; the little servant-maid that waits upon Naaman's wife—all, all may have an apostolical commission, and may share in the glories of an apostolical reward. There is not a single member of a single church in the world that is exempt from this service. All are summoned to the labour, and all, oh! infinite condescension! may be workers together with God.—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CLEAR SPIRITUAL PEDIGREE.

(Verses 59–63.)

Consider:

I. The doubtful pedigree amongst the people as an illustration of uncertainty as to our spiritual state. Verses 59 and 60 suggest concerning such uncertainty—

1. *That it may consist with association with the people of God.* Those who "could not show their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel," were permitted to go up to Jerusalem with those whose Israelitish descent was beyond question. And they whose evidences as to their spiritual lineage are not clear and conclusive, may

have a name and a place amongst God's spiritual Israel. And more than this, they may really be true members of that Israel. Sincere believers in the Lord Jesus Christ do not always realise the blessedness of Christian assurance. Sometimes even he "that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, walketh in darkness, and hath no light." (a).

2. *That it must involve spiritual loss.* Those persons of doubtful pedigree who journeyed with the Jews to Jerusalem, could not enjoy the full rights of citizenship until they proved their Israeli-

tish descent. And doubt as to our spiritual lineage must involve loss—(1.) *Of spiritual joy.* Such doubters are strangers to the strong consolation which they enjoy who can say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day;” and who can utter the triumphant challenge, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation,” &c. (Rom. viii. 35–39). (b). (2.) *Of spiritual usefulness.* Lacking Christian assurance, our testimony for Christ would be likely to be deficient in clearness and attractiveness, in fervour and force; it would especially fail to set forth the joyful character of true religion. And thus our religious usefulness would be diminished. (c).

II. The doubtful pedigree amongst the priests as an illustration of uncertainty as to our ministerial calling and condition. A man’s ministerial pedigree in the Church of Christ may be said to be unquestionable when he possesses—
1. The Divine vocation. The true minister is assured that he is called of God to his work. He can enter into the feeling of the Apostle, who said, “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!”
2. The Divine qualification. If a man is unfitted for the sacred duties of the ministry, his ministerial pedigree is ruinously defective.
3. The Divine sanction. That a ministry is blessed to the conversion of sinners and the edification of Christian believers is an evidence that it is approved by God.

The verses under consideration (61–63) suggest—

1. *That a ministerial pedigree may be lost by reason of worldliness.* The children of the priests who could not find “their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy,” were descendants of one who “took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name.” Now Barzillai was a great man in his day, and the priest who married his daughter seems to have esteemed his alliance with that distinguished family more highly than the dignity of his priesthood, and

so he adopted the name of Barzillai for his family, and his family register was with the house of Barzillai, and not with the house of Aaron, and in this way it seems to have been lost. His preference for worldly distinction issued in the suspension, if not the total loss, of the sacerdotal heritage of his descendants. We regard this as an illustration of the effect of worldliness on the character and influence of a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The eager pursuit of either the possessions or the distinctions of this present world tends to despoil the Christian minister of spiritual power—to render his perceptions of truth less quick and clear, his spiritual sympathies and susceptibilities less true and active, his spiritual zeal less fervent, his spiritual aspirations less intense and constant, &c. (d).

2. *The loss of ministerial pedigree involves a corresponding loss of ministerial power and reward.* The priests whose pedigree could not be found were prohibited from discharging certain priestly functions, and from receiving certain emoluments of that office. “They were polluted from the priesthood; and the Tirshatha said unto them that they should not eat of the most holy things,” &c. If a minister of the Gospel, from worldliness or any other cause, suffer personal spiritual deterioration or loss, it will tell sadly upon his influence for good, and upon the joy and spiritual reward which he finds in his work. (e).

3. *The final decision as to the standing of a minister of uncertain pedigree must be given by God Himself.* “And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.” The high priest in former times sought to know the will of God by means of Urim and Thummim, and the decisions which were given by this medium were regarded as those of God Himself. So the case of the priests of uncertain pedigree was left for the decision of God. Doubtless there are certain questions of ministerial character and qualification with which Church courts and councils are competent to deal. But when a man’s minis-

terial pedigree is merely doubtful or uncertain, the final decision must be left to the great Searcher of hearts. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth."

"All to the great tribunal haste,
The account to render there;
And shouldst Thou strictly mark our faults,
Lord, how should we appear?"

—*Doddridge.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Faith, let us remember, is the root, and assurance is the flower. Doubtless you can never have the flower without the root; but it is no less certain you may have the root and not the flower. Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the press, and touched the hem of His garment (Mark v. 25); assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, and saying, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God (Acts vii. 56). Faith is the penitent thief, crying, "Lord, remember me" (Luke xxiii. 42); assurance is Job sitting in the dust, covered with sores, and saying, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job xix. 25). "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job xiii. 15). Faith is Peter's drowning cry, as he began to sink, "Lord, save me!" (Matt. xiv. 30); assurance is that same Peter declaring before the council, in aftertimes, "This is the Stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 11, 12). Faith is the anxious, trembling voice, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark ix. 24); assurance is the confident challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. viii. 33, 34). Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone (Acts ix. 11); assurance is Paul the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave, and saying, "I know Whom I have believed. There is a crown laid up for me" (2 Tim. i. 12, iv. 8). Faith is life. How great the blessing! Who can tell the gulf between life and death? And yet life may be weak, sickly, unhealthy, painful, trying, anxious, worn, burdensome, joyless, smileless to the very end. Assurance is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, beauty.—*Bishop Ryle.*

Suppose thou hast not yet attained so much as to this inward peace, yet know thou hast no reason to question the truth of thy faith for want of this. We have peace with God as soon as we believe, but not always with ourselves. The pardon may be past the prince's hand and seal, and yet not put into the prisoner's hand. Thou thinkest them too rash (dost not?) who judged Paul a murderer by

the viper that fastened on his hand. And who art thou, who condemnest thyself for an unbeliever, because of those troubles and inward agonies which may fasten for a time on the spirit of the most gracious child God hath on earth?—*W. Gurnall.*

(b) A man may praise God for the redemption of the world, &c., who has no consciousness of having secured an interest in it, but not like him who feels he has a property in it. How different will be their feelings! Just as great will be the difference of interest which will be felt by a stranger passing through a beautiful estate, and by the owner of it. One may admire the richness of the soil, the beauty of its crops, and the stateliness of its trees; but his interest in it will fall very far short of his who has the title and property in it.—*H. G. Salter.*

(c) Christianity did not in its beginning succeed by the force of its doctrines, but by the *lives* of its disciples. It succeeded first as a light, in accordance with the Master's command, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Make religion attractive by the goodness that men see in you; so sweet, so sparkling, so buoyant, so cheerful, hopeful, courageous, conscientious and yet not stubborn, so perfectly benevolent, and yet not *mawkish* or sentimental, blossoming in everything that is good, a rebuke to everything that is mean or little; make such men of yourselves that everybody that looks upon you may say, "That is a royal good fellow; he has the spirit that I should like to lean upon in time of trouble, or to be a companion with at all times." Build up such a manhood that it shall be winning to men. That is what the early Church did.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(d) What the astronomers say of the eclipse of the sun, that it is occasioned by the inter-vening of the moon between the sun and our sight, is true in this case: if the world get between Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, and our sight, it will darken our sight of Jesus Christ, and bring eclipses upon our comforts and graces. Again, those men that dig deep into the bowels of the earth, they are oftentimes choked and stifled by damps that come from the earth. So is it with Christians, those that will be ever poring and digging about the things of this world, it is a thousand to one that if from worldly things a damp doth not arise to smother their comforts and quench their graces. Lastly, a candle, though it may shine to the view of all, yet put it under ground, and, though there be not the least puff of wind, the very damp will stifle the light of the flame; and so it is that men may shine like candles in their comforts, yet bring them but under the earth, and a clod of that will stifle their candle, will damp their spiritual comforts, and bereave them of those joys that are in themselves unspeakable.—*John Magirus.*

(e) A true minister is a man whose manhood itself is a strong and influential argument with his people. He lives in such relations with God, and in such a genuine sympathy with man, that it is a pleasure to be under the influence of such a mind. Just as, lying on a couch on a summer's evening, you hear from a neighbouring house the low breathing of an instrument of music, so far away that you can only hear its palpitation, but cannot discern the exact tune that is played, and are soothed by it, and drawn nearer to hear more; so the true man, the true Christian minister, is himself so inspiring, so musical, there is so much of the Divine element in him, rendered home-

like by incarnation with his disposition, brought down to the level of man's understanding, that wherever he goes, little children want to see him, plain people want to be with him; everybody says when he comes, "Good;" and everybody says when he goes away, "I wish he had stayed longer;" all who come in contact with him are inclined to live a better life. Manhood is the best sermon. It is good to fill the mind with the goodness and sweetness of the thing itself to which you would fain draw them. "Go, preach," was no more authoritative than "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—*H. W. Beecher.*

POSSESSIONS AND OFFERINGS.

(Verses 65-70.)

These verses present the following homiletical topics, which may be considered with advantage:—

I. The completion of their journey.

"They came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem." No account of the journey is given by the historian. It is, however, certain that the journey was—(1) *long*, the distance was more than one thousand miles, and Ezra and his company (who went up many years afterward) were four months on the way (chap. vii. 9); (2) *difficult*, by reason of their uncertainty as to the best way, and the comparatively small number of beasts of burden; (3) *perilous*, as we see from chap. viii. 22. The country through which their course lay was infested by Bedouin Arabs, who frequently plundered and assaulted travellers. But the returning Jews were sustained, guided, and guarded by the Lord their God. It was by His blessing that they reached their destination in safety. So will He lead and keep all those who forsake sin, seek to do His will, and set their faces Zion-ward. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but He Himself shall be with them, walking in the way; and the foolish shall not err therein. No lion shall be there," &c. (Isa. xxxv. 8-10).

II. The extent of their possessions.

"Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven," &c. (vers. 65-67). There might have been

some wealthy men amongst them; but viewed as a whole this company was certainly poor. Their reduced and impoverished condition is indicated by the number of servants and beasts of burden in relation to the number of persons. They had only one slave to every six persons, one horse to every fifty-eight persons, one mule to every one hundred and seventy-three persons, one camel to every ninety-eight persons, and one ass to every seven persons. Sin always impoverishes and degrades the sinner. Some forms of it lead to temporal poverty, *e.g.*, drunkenness, indolence, wastefulness. "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags" (Prov. xxiii. 21). "I went by the field of the slothful," &c. (Prov. xxiv. 30). But the worst poverty to which sin leads is that of the spirit. It despoils man of high and holy thoughts, of pure and pious aspirations, of generous and noble purposes; it tends to make him "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and to render him unconscious of his destitution and degradation.

III. The presentation of their offerings. "And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord," &c. (vers. 68, 69). Notice:

1. *The object of their offerings.* "They offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place." Their contributions were for the rebuilding of the Temple. In this way they sought to promote the honour of God; and they

were faithful to the purpose for which they were permitted to leave Babylon. Offerings for the building of temples for the worship of the Most High are both prudent and pious; they are encouraged both by philanthropy and by religion; they promote the good of humanity and the glory of God.

2. *The spirit of their offerings.* (1.) They offered *promptly*, without delay; soon as "they came to the house of the Lord, which is at Jerusalem." If they could not begin to rebuild the Temple at once, they could contribute towards the expenses of rebuilding, and they did so. (2.) They offered *spontaneously*, without constraint. "They offered freely for the house of God." "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." It is probable that gratitude for the mercies received during the journey, and for their safe arrival at their destination, would prompt them to present hearty offerings. (a).

3. *The measure of their offerings.* "They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work," &c. This seems to imply—(1.) *Proportion*; that they gave according to their means, the rich according to his riches, and the poor according to his poverty. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not." (b). (2.) *Liberality*; that each one who gave, gave as much as he could. The total amount contributed was, at least, about £90,000; which gives an average of about £2 per person, including servants. An example worthy of imitation by many congregations in our day which are far more favourably circumstanced. (c).

IV. *The settlement in their cities.* "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities." Two ideas are suggested—

1. *Home after exile.* "Dwelt in their cities." Their cities; not the cities of their conquerors. The cities were to a great extent ruined and desolate; but they were their own. It was the land of their fathers, and their own land. (d).

2. *Rest after a long and tedious journey.* The toils and perils of their pilgrimage were over. Rest in their own cities would be sweet to their weary feet, but sweeter still to their spirits.

"But rest more sweet and still,
Than ever nightfall gave;
Our yearning hearts shall fill,
In the land beyond the grave.

There shall no tempests blow,
No scorching noontide beat;
There shall be no more snow,
No weary, wandering feet.

So we lift our trusting eyes
From the hills our fathers trod,
To the quiet of the skies,
To the Sabbath of our God."

—Mrs. Hemans.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) "She hath done what she could." The costliness of her gift in proportion to her means, while it was nothing to Him she would honour, was a guarantee that she was not trifling. Had it been far less than it was, and had it been all she could bring, His blessing would have been the same. For mind, He does not say, "Stop, consider, this alabaster box really cost a good deal of money; it could not have been bought for less than three hundred denarii." No; but He says, "She hath done what she could;" that is, she hath demonstrated the deep and tender attachment of her soul. She believes on her Lord. She loves the Saviour for His holiness, His mercy, His Divine benignity. One penny's worth, if it is only the utmost that self-denial can do, is as good for that as ten thousand shekels. Did He not declare as much, in what He said of the two mites that the poor widow cast into the Temple treasury? Nay, did He not equally accept, and bless with the same favour, another woman, poorer and frailer still, who had nothing to give Him but tears and kisses for His feet? The whole spiritual meaning of gifts consists in the disposition of the giver. Distinctions of weight and measure, standards of currency, tables of value, rates of exchange, calculations of outlay, colour, material, and shape, vanish before that simple and royal touchstone in the breast. It is felt to be so, even in the presents of human friendship; and spiritual sincerity does not pass for less in the eyes of Him who searches and sees the heart.—F. D. Huntington, D.D.

(b) Hohannes, the blind missionary of Harpoot, tells of a place where the Board had spent much money with little result, where he was sent. It was a poor place. The people were to raise six hundred piastres; and the Board was to pay the balance of his salary. The people said they could not raise that sum; a neighbouring pastor said it was impossible, they were so poor. After much anxiety, the

missionary laid the case before God in prayer, when it was impressed upon him that each should give his tenth. He proposed it to the people, and they agreed to it. The money was easily raised, and amounted to more than the entire salary. That people never prospered so much before; their crops were abundant, and their satisfaction great. They not only supported their preacher and school-teacher, but gave two thousand piastres to other purposes.—*Dict. of Illust.*

(c) If there be any principle in our religion; if our obligation to worship be anything more than a seemly form, or an irksome impost upon time and thought; if the idea of God within us be not a remote and impersonal divinity, but a Being warm, near, watchful, provident, the living God of our clinging heart and of our crying soul, then surely it were mockery to render any homage but the truest at His footstool, and to offer any gifts but the chiefest on His altar. The old heathen understood this matter better. Their eyes were blinded and their rites were cruel, but they never erred in this. The goodliest spoil, the most fragrant libation, the fairest in the stall, the nearest to the heart, were reserved to be devoted to their gods; and shall we, heirs of all the ages and of all the economies, we on whom God has caused to shine a sun in His meridian of privilege—shall we anger our God against us by our selfish indifference to His claims, or by our unfilial withholding of His honour? We to whom He has given every faculty which makes us capable of God, shall we withhold from Him the hearts which He asks only to brighten and redeem? We to whom He has allotted a day so clear and so brilliant, shall we insult Him by the offer of the refuse of our time? We who are gifted by Him alike with our wealth and with our power to amass it, shall we deal out our niggard pittance in His cause like the coarse miser churl who parts with coin like blood? Brethren, I summon you, with all possible solemnity, to answer this invocation. If there has been indifference in the past, let our penitence mourn it, and let our consecration atone it, to-day. It is but little at the best that we can offer; our collective wealth would be absorbed by one single city's needs. Our influence, even at its widest, is contracted within a narrow span. The shadows gather swiftly upon the noon of our very longest day.

We are feeble, and half our time must be spent in sleep that we may recruit our strength. We are frail, and Death standing by laughs at our arithmetic when we calculate on future years. We receive unfinished labours from our fathers, and we transmit them unfinished to our children. Watchmen in the night, it is not given to us to tarry until the morning. Guardians of the battle-flag, we can but wave it gallantly for awhile; but we know full well that our hands will stiffen, and that our comrades will bury us before the work is done. But the present is ours. We have room to work; we have light to work in. There are ample opportunities, and there are passionate needs, and there are strong encouragements, and there are facilities such as no age ever possessed, for honest work for God. Now who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord? Give Him your hearts, dear brethren—your costliest and most acceptable offering. The sordid and the worldly may despise your choice, but there awaits you on earth God's palpable smile, and the blessing of those that are ready to perish; and in heaven the angel's welcome, and the conqueror's palm, and the King's palace as the soul's home, and the King Himself in His beauty as your exceeding great reward—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.*

(d) No bricks and mortar and timber can make a home. No marble, however fine and polished, can make a home. No gold, or silver, or tapestry, or painting, can make a home. It is that which makes heaven which makes a home even on this earth. It is love that makes a home. To love, and to be loved, though it be in the peasant's cot, though it be in the rudest barn through the fissures of which the wind makes music, is to be at home; and often you find homes in the rudest dwellings, and none in the most splendid palaces. But where love is likely to be disturbed—where some rude hand can take the threads that love is ever spinning and tying and fastening, and cut them and sever them, the home feeling must of course be partial. And we long for a place and a state where those whom we love will never be taken from us, and where we shall know that we shall abide eternally in the presence of those who love us. "We seek one to come." A higher and a settled dwelling-place, a final home, a permanent state of being.—*Samuel Martin.*

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] This chapter contains—1. The rebuilding of the altar (vers. 1-3a). 2. The renewal of the sacrificial worship and of the observance of the religious festivals (vers. 3b-6a). 3. The preparations for rebuilding the Temple (vers. 6b, 7). 4. The laying of the foundation-stone of the new Temple, the religious celebration of the occasion, and the mingled feelings of the people (vers. 8-13).

Ver. 1. The seventh month] i.e. of the year in which they arrived at Jerusalem. The

seventh month was Tisri, "the month of the full streams," or "floods," which corresponded with the latter part of our September and the greater part of October. (For further notes of time, see notes on ver. 8). As one man] The expression does not signify every man; but, with great unanimity, "as if inspired by one will."

Ver. 2. As it is written in the law of Moses] (See Lev. xvii. 2-6; Deut. xii. 5-11).

Ver. 3. They set the altar upon his bases] *i.e.* they built it in its former position and on the old foundations. For fear was upon them] &c. They were afraid of the hostility of the neighbouring nations. The people of those countries] are the surrounding peoples, which are mentioned in chap. ix. 1. Burnt offerings morning and evening] as commanded in Exod. xxix. 38-42; Num. xxviii. 3-8.

Ver. 4. The feast of Tabernacles, as it is written] (See Lev. xxiii. 33-43). And offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required] The last clause is in the margin: "The matter of the day in his day." Vulg.: "*Opus dies in die suo.*" The offerings for each day of the feast of Tabernacles are carefully prescribed in detail in Num. xxix. 12-38. "The offerings required at this feast were the largest of all. They amounted to fourteen rams, ninety-eight lambs, and no less than seventy bullocks, being twice as many lambs and four times as many bullocks as were enjoined for the Passover. The feast of Tabernacles was especially one of thankfulness to God for the gifts of the fruit of the earth, and the quantity and nature of the offerings were determined accordingly."—*Speaker's Com.*

Ver. 5. After the feast of tabernacles the prescribed order of sacrifices was regularly observed, viz. The continual burnt offering] *i.e.* the daily morning and evening sacrifice (Num. xxviii. 3-8). Both of the new moons] Rather, "And (the offerings) of the new moons" (Num. xxviii. 11-15). And of every one that willingly offered] &c. (Lev. vii. 11-17; Num. xxix. 39; Deut. xvi. 10, 16, 17).

Ver. 6. From the first day of the seventh month] &c. "The altar service, with the daily morning and evening sacrifice, began on the first day of the seventh month; this daily sacrifice was regularly offered, according to the law, from then till the fifteenth day of the seventh month, *i.e.* till the beginning of the feast of Tabernacles. All the offerings commanded in the law for the separate days of this feast were then offered according to the numbers prescribed; and after this festival the sacrifices ordered at the new moon and other holydays of the year were offered, as well as the daily burnt offerings,—none but these, neither the sacrifice on the new moon (the first day of the seventh month), nor the sin-offering on the tenth day of the same month, *i.e.* the day of atonement, having been offered before this feast of Tabernacles."—*Keil.* This interpretation is, however, opposed by Schultz, who says: "It is merely said (ver. 5) that after the sacrifices of the feast of Tabernacles the usual order of offerings was again continued, which included the daily offerings, and then also those of the new moon and other feasts."

Ver. 7. Meat and drink] *i.e.* corn and wine. Unto them of Zidon] &c. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxii. 4; 1 Kings v. 6-18; 2 Chron. ii. 3-18.) According to the grant] &c. This probably refers to the permission to rebuild the Temple, which would involve permission to negotiate with the Phœnicians for such assistance as they needed; for we do not read anywhere that Cyrus made them a grant of Phœnician timber.

Ver. 8. Now in the second year of their coming] &c. "Whether this second year of the return coincides with the second year of the rule of Cyrus" (over Babylon), "so that the foundations of the Temple were laid, as *Theophil. Antioch. ad Antol'ic.*, lib. 3, according to Berosus, relates, in the second year of Cyrus, cannot be determined; for nothing more is said in this book than that Cyrus, in the first year of his reign, issued the decree concerning the return of the Jews from Babylon, whereupon those named in the list (chap. ii.) set out and returned, without any further notice as to whether this also took place in the first year of Cyrus, or whether the many necessary preparations delayed the departure of the first band till the following year. The former view is certainly a possible though not a probable one, since it is obvious from iii. 1, that they arrived at Jerusalem and betook themselves to their cities as early as the seventh month of the year. Now the period between the beginning of the year and the seventh month, *i.e.* at most six months, seems too short for the publication of the edict, the departure, and the arrival at Jerusalem, even supposing that the first year of Cyrus entirely coincided with a year of the Jewish calendar. The second view, however, would not make the difference between the year of the rule of Cyrus and the year of the return to Jerusalem a great one, since it would scarcely amount to half a year."—*Keil.* In the second month] *i.e.* Zif (1 Kings vi. 1), "the month of 'blossom;' or, more fully, 'the bloom of flowers,'" corresponding to our May. Appointed the Levites . . . to set forward the work] *i.e.* to preside over or superintend the rebuilding of the Temple.

Ver. 9. Jeshua] not the high priest, but the head of an order of Levites (chap. ii. 40). Judah] is an error of a copyist. It should be Hodaviah, as in the margin, and chap. ii. 40. In Neh. vii. 43, it is written Hodevah. Together] Margin: "Heb. as one," *i.e.* "all, without exception." The sons of Henadad] &c. Keil suggests, as an explanation of the striking position of the record of "the sons of Henadad," "that the two classes Jeshua with his sons and brethren, and Kadmiel with his sons, were more closely connected with each other than with

the sons of Henadad, who formed a third class." The authority of the clause, however, is doubtful.

Ver. 10. They (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) set the priests in their apparel] *i.e.* in their robes of office (Exod. xxviii. 40, xxxix. 27-29, 41, and chap. ii. 69). With trumpets] (Num. x. 8, xxxi. 6; 1 Chron. xv. 24, xvi. 6; 2 Chron. v. 12). After the ordinance] &c. (1 Chron. xv. 16; xxv. 1).

Ver. 11. And they sang together by course] Or, "And they sang antiphonally." Fuerst gives the meaning: "to sing an alternate song, or in alternate choir (1 Sam. xviii. 7; Ezra iii. 11), . . . but always to sing in reply, not to sing merely." The singing was responsive. One choir sang, "Give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good;" and the other responded, "For His mercy endureth for ever." Shouted with a great shout] for joy that the foundation of the Temple was laid.

Ver. 12. But many of the priests and Levites] &c. "Solomon's Temple was destroyed B.C. 588, and the foundation of the subsequent Temple laid B.C. 535 or 534; hence the older men among those present at the latter event might possibly have seen the former house; indeed, some (according to Hag. ii. 3) were still living in the second year of Darius Hystaspes, who had beheld the glory of the earlier building. Upon these aged men, the miserable circumstances under which the foundations of the new Temple were laid produced so overwhelming an impression, that they broke into loud weeping."—*Keil*.

THE REBUILDING OF THE ALTAR: EXEMPLARY FEATURES OF DIVINE WORSHIP.

(Verses 1-3.)

We discover here—

I. Unanimity and zeal in Divine worship.

Notice:

1. *The evidences of unanimity in worship.* "The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua," &c. The movement seems to have been a spontaneous one on the part of the people. They were not summoned to Jerusalem either by Zerubbabel the prince or by Jeshua the high priest, but went there of their own accord, urged by the religious impulses of their own souls. And they assembled "as one man," *i.e.* as with one heart and will. And the authorities were not tardy in taking up the matter and leading it onward. "Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak," &c. Jeshua with the priests, and Zerubbabel with the princes, entered heartily into the movement. Priests and Levites, prince and people, high and low, cordially united in the preparation for the restoration of their national worship.

2. *The evidences of zeal in worship.* This great gathering at Jerusalem took place "when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities." They had only recently returned from Babylon; their country was to a great extent desolate, and would

their houses would need renovation, or new ones would have to be built by them; many private interests urgently claimed their attention; but all these were freely and resolutely set aside until they had rebuilt the altar of Jehovah, and restored His worship, and made ready to celebrate the sacred festivals of this seventh month. Such unanimity and zeal for the worship of God are worthy of imitation by both individuals and communities in this age.

II. *Sacrifice in Divine worship.* "And builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon." The altar and the burnt offerings suggest—

1. *Man's need of atonement with God.* The consciousness of guilt, and the desire to propitiate God, or the craving of the heart for fellowship with Him, are the experiences which give rise to sacrificial offerings. The altar is an answer to the deep cry of man, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" Burnt offerings were intended, in some cases at least, to express the idea of expiation, as well as that of self-consecration; hence they are said "to make atonement for him" who offered them (Lev. i. 4; xiv. 20, 31). The tendency of sin is to estrange man from God; the tendency of the love of God in the sacrifice of

Jesus Christ is to destroy the power of sin in man, and to bind him to God in loving loyalty. We do not now need the altar and the expiatory victim; but we do need the Cross and the influence of the great Sacrifice, which once for all was offered thereon to put away sin. (a).

2. *Man's duty of self-consecration to God.* The chief significance of the burnt offering was that it expressed the self-consecration of the offerer to God. Without this, such offerings were worthless in the sight of Heaven. The moral or spiritual element was the essential thing in all the sacrifices. Without penitence the sin offering was offensive to God. Without gratitude the peace or thank offerings were rejected by Him. And without the self-dedication of the worshipper the burnt offerings were an abomination unto Him (comp. Ps. l. 8-15; Isa. i. 11-15). Our richest gifts are accepted by God only as they express our self-devotion to Him. "And He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." (b).

III. **Respect for precedent in Divine worship.** This was manifested by the Jews at this time in two particulars—(1.) In assembling at the old place. "The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." They congregated at the place where the Temple had once stood, and where their fathers were wont to worship. (2.) In erecting the altar upon the old foundation, and thus, as it were, associating it with its distinguished predecessor. There is much that is commendable in the feelings which led them to act thus. It is well to be willing to adopt changes in our modes and accessories of worship, when really enlightened judgment, and cultured taste, and sincere religious feeling unite in recommending them. It is also well to cling tenaciously to what is suitable and seemly in existing methods and arrangements of religious worship. The site of the former Temple and the bases of the ancient altar possessed for the Jews a sanctity and an inspiration to which no other spots in this wide world could lay claim. There are memories

and associations clinging around certain ancient forms and places hallowed by holy uses which greatly stimulate and enrich the worship of the devout heart.

IV. **Conformity to Scripture in Divine worship.** In building the altar and in offering their sacrifices, the Jews did "as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God." We must take heed that in our worship, whether clinging to precedent, or accepting suggestions of change, we do not depart from the principles and spirit of worship, as revealed in or fairly deduced from the holy Book. There are certain directions which are unmistakable and imperative: e.g., "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit," &c.

V. **Fear of enemies in Divine worship.** "Fear was upon them because of the people of those countries."

1. *The fear of enemies should not intimidate us from the worship of God.* The Jews built the altar notwithstanding their dread of their enemies. The history of religious persecutions supplies many splendid examples of perseverance in worship despite the threats and cruelties of foes. (c).

2. *The fear of enemies should impel us to worship God.* The Jews were the more eager to build the altar because of the hostility of neighbouring peoples. The opposition of man led them the more earnestly to seek the protection of God. They were not in a position to join battle with their enemies, if they had been attacked by them; but in placing themselves under the guardianship of the Lord God they did that which was far wiser and better. The persecutions of men should cause us to be more earnest in prayer to God.

VI. **Regularity in Divine worship.** "And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening." The offering of the daily sacrifice suggests—

1. *Our daily need of atonement with God.* There are daily temptations, omissions, and transgressions, which tend to alienate the heart from God; hence we

need daily to realise the reconciling influences of the Cross of Christ. (d).

2. *Our daily need of renewed consecration.* Every morning we require a renewal of our purpose and endeavour to live to God. The reception of new mercies also summons us to fresh dedication of ourselves to the bounteous Giver of all our mercies.

3. *Our daily need of renewed blessings.* Forgiveness and grace, guidance and guardianship, are blessings which we need every day, therefore we should seek them in prayer; they are, moreover, blessings which we receive every day, therefore we should acknowledge them in praise to God.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) I do not think any one ever knows the preciousness of the blood of Christ till he has had a full sight and sense of his sin, his uncleanness, and his ill-desert. Is there any such thing as really and truly coming to the cross of Christ until you first of all have seen what your sin really deserves? A little light into that dark cellar, sir; a little light into that hole within the soul; a little light cast into that infernal den of your humanity, and you would soon discern what sin is, and, seeing it, you would discover that there was no hope of being washed from it, except by a sacrifice far greater than you could ever render. Then the atonement of Christ would become fair and lustrous in your eyes, and you would rejoice with joy unspeakable in that boundless love which led the Saviour to give Himself a ransom, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. May the Lord teach us, thundering at us, if need be, what sin means. May He teach it to us so that the lesson shall be burned into our souls, and we shall never forget it. I could fain wish that you were all burden-carriers till you grew weary. I could fain wish that you all laboured after eternal life until your strength failed, and that you might then rejoice in Him who has finished the work, and who promises to be to you all in all when you believe in Him and trust in Him with your whole heart.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) It is not the greatness of Christ's sufferings on the cross which is to move our whole souls, but the greatness of the spirit with which He suffered. There, in death, He proved His entire consecration of Himself to the cause of God and mankind. There, His love flowed forth towards His friends, His enemies, and the human race. It is moral greatness, it is victorious love, it is the energy of principle, which gives such interest to the cross of Christ. We are to look through the darkness which

hung over Him, through His wounds and pains, to His unbroken, disinterested, confiding spirit. To approach the cross for the purpose of weeping over a bleeding, dying Friend, is to lose the chief influence of the crucifixion. We are to visit the cross, not to indulge a natural softness, but to acquire firmness of spirit, to fortify our minds for hardship and suffering in the cause of duty and of human happiness. To live as Christ lived, to die as Christ died, to give up ourselves as sacrifices to God, to conscience, to whatever good interest we can advance—these are the lessons written with the blood of Jesus. His cross is to inspire us with a calm courage, resolution, and superiority to all temptation.—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

Mercy, love, is more acceptable worship to God, than all sacrifices or outward offerings. The most celestial worship ever paid on earth was rendered by Christ, when He approached man, and the most sinful man, as a child of God, when He toiled and bled to awaken what was Divine in the human soul, to regenerate a fallen world. Be such the worship which you shall carry from this place. Go forth to do good with every power which God bestows, to make every place you enter happier by your presence, to espouse all human interests, to throw your whole weight into the scale of human freedom and improvement, to withstand all wrong, to uphold all right, and especially to give light, life, strength to the immortal soul. He who rears up one child in Christian virtue, or recovers one fellow-creature to God, builds a temple more precious than Solomon's or St. Peter's, more enduring than earth or heaven.—*Ibid.*

(c) Lord Macaulay, writing of the persecutions of the Protestant dissenters in the reign of James II., says:—The number of the rebels whom Jeffreys hanged on this (the Western) circuit was three hundred and twenty. Such havoc must have excited disgust even if the sufferers had been generally odious. But they were, for the most part, men of blameless life, and of high religious profession. They were regarded by themselves, and by a large proportion of their neighbours, not as wrong-doers, but as martyrs who sealed with blood the truth of the Protestant religion. Very few of the convicts professed any repentance for what they had done. Many, animated by the old Puritan spirit, met death, not merely with fortitude, but with exultation. It was in vain that the ministers of the Established Church lectured them on the guilt of rebellion and on the importance of priestly absolution. The claim of the king to unbounded authority in things temporal, and the claim of the clergy to the spiritual power of binding and loosing, moved the bitter scorn of the intrepid sectaries. Some of them composed hymns in the dungeon, and chanted them on the fatal sledge. Christ, they sang while they were undressing for the butchery, would soon come to rescue Zion and to make

war on Babylon, would set up His standard, would blow His trumpet, and would requite His foes tenfold for all the evil which had been inflicted on His servants. The dying words of these men were noted down; their farewell letters were kept as treasures; and in this way, with the help of some invention and exaggeration, was formed a copious supplement to the Marian Martyrology.

Never, not even under the tyranny of Laud, had the condition of the Puritans been so deplorable as at that time (autumn 1685). Never had spies been so actively employed in detecting congregations. Never had magistrates, grand jurors, rectors, and churchwardens been so much on the alert. Many dissenters were cited before the ecclesiastical courts. Others found it necessary to purchase the connivance of the agents of the government by presents of hogsheads of wine and of gloves stuffed with guineas. It was impossible for the separatists to pray together without precautions, such as are employed by coiners and receivers of stolen goods. The places of meeting were frequently changed. Worship was performed sometimes just before break of day and sometimes at dead of night. Round the building where the little flock was gathered sentinels were posted to give the alarm if a stranger drew near. The minister in disguise was introduced through the garden and the back yard. In some houses there were trap doors through which, in case of danger, he might descend. Where Nonconformists lived next door to each other, the walls were often broken open, and secret passages were made from dwelling to dwelling. No psalm was sung; and many contrivances were used to prevent the voice of the preacher, in his moments of fervour, from being heard beyond

the walls. . . . Dissenting ministers, however blameless in life, however eminent for learning and abilities, could not venture to walk the streets for fear of outrages, which were not only not repressed, but encouraged, by those whose duty it was to preserve the peace. Some divines of great fame were in prison. Among these was Richard Baxter. Others, who had, during a quarter of a century, borne up against oppression, now lost heart, and quitted the kingdom. Among these was John Howe.—*History of England*, chap. v.

(d) Is it not said in Scripture, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate"? Why is Christ an advocate to-day? Only because we want an advocate every day. Does He not constantly intercede yonder before the eternal throne? Why does He do that? Because we want daily intercession. And it is because we are constantly sinning that He is constantly an advocate—constantly an intercessor. He Himself has beautifully set forth this in the case of Peter: after supper the Lord took a towel and girded Himself, and then, taking His basin and His ewer, He went to Peter, and Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But Jesus told him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in Me." He had been washed once; Peter was free from sin in the high sense of justification, but he needs the washing of purification. When Peter said, "Lord, wash not my feet only, but also my head and my hands," then Jesus replied, "He that is washed"—that is, he who is pardoned—"needeth not save to wash his feet, for he is clean every whit." The feet want constant washing. The daily defilement of our daily walk through an ungodly world brings upon us the daily necessity of being cleansed from fresh sin, and that the mighty Master supplies to us.—*C. H. Spurgeon*.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRED FESTIVALS RESUMED.

(Verses 4–6 a.)

In these verses we have the record of the observance of the religious feasts of the nation. "The continual burnt offering," which we noticed in our exposition of the preceding section, is again mentioned. The feast of Tabernacles, the observance of the new moons, and the presentation of freewill offerings, are also distinctly mentioned. To these, therefore, let us direct our attention. They present to us the following homiletic topics:—

I. The commemoration in Divine worship of national experiences and blessings. Such was the feast of Tabernacles.

1. *It was a memorial of the emanci-*

pation of Israel from Egypt, teaching us that we should cherish the memory of former mercies. (See Lev. xxiii. 43.)

2. *It was a memorial of their life in the wilderness, reminding us that our present condition is that of strangers and pilgrims. (See Lev. xxiii. 40–43; Heb. xiii. 14.)*

3. *It was a thanksgiving for rest and a settled abode in the promised land, suggesting the certainty and blessedness of the rest which remains for the people of God. (Comp. Lev. xxiii. 40 with Rev. vii. 9.)*

4. *It was a thanksgiving for the completed harvest, teaching us to receive the precious fruits of the earth as the kind*

gifts of a bountiful Providence. (See Exod. xxiii. 16b ; Lev. xxiii. 39 ; Deut. xvi. 13-15.)* But this festival was specially appropriate and significant at this time. "It was," as Schultz remarks, "because of the season of the year in which the congregation had arrived in Canaan that the first feast which they could again celebrate in accordance with the law was the feast of Tabernacles. At the same time, however, we may see therein a special providence of God, which was at once lovely and significant to the congregation. The booths adorned with foliage and fruits had previously represented as well the gracious help in the times of the wilderness, as also the gracious blessings of harvest in the present ; corresponding with this, the booths now gained of themselves a reference, on the one side, to the exhibition of grace during the new prolonged wilderness-time of the exile which had entered with so much gloom into the midst of the history of Israel ; so to speak to the booths of protection and defiance which had arisen for the people, by the grace of the Lord, even in the heathen world ; and, on the other side, to the new regaining of Canaan, which, to a certain extent, was a security and a pledge of all the further blessings in store for them in this land. They expressed the thanks which they owed to the Lord for both of these blessings in an especially lively and internal manner. This feast of tabernacles was a festal and joyous conclusion of all the preservations, consolations, and blessings that were behind them, connected with a joyous glance into the future ; it was an evidence that a height had been reached upon which finally even the last height might be attained, an indication that some day, after all their struggles and all their labours, a still more glorious feast of Tabernacles, the Messianic, the eternal and truly blessed one, would come. (Comp. Zech. xiv.)" The text distinctly mentions one feature of this celebration of the feast, viz., the fidelity with which the original direc-

tions for its observance were carried out : "They kept also the feast of Tabernacles as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number," &c. The directions are given in Num. xxix. 13-39. (See *The Preacher's Commentary on Numbers*, p. 528.) For a people in their straitened circumstances the offerings required were very numerous ; but they were fully and cheerfully provided by them. If their means were small, their zeal was great. (a).

II. **The celebration in religious worship of the natural divisions of time.** "And of the new moons." They presented the offerings appropriate to those occasions. "The first day of the lunar month was observed as a holyday. In addition to the daily sacrifice there were offered two young bullocks, a ram, and seven lambs of the first year as a burnt offering, with the proper meat offerings and drink offerings, and a kid as a sin offering (Num. xxviii. 11-15). It was not a day of holy convocation, and was not therefore of the same dignity as the Sabbath. But, as on the Sabbath, trade and handicraft work were stopped (Amos viii. 5), the Temple was opened for public worship (Ezek. xlvi. 3 ; Isa. lxvi. 23), and, in the kingdom of Israel at least, the people seem to have resorted to the prophets for religious instruction (2 Kings iv. 23). The trumpets were blown at the offering of the special sacrifices for the day, as on the solemn festivals (Num. x. 10 ; Ps. lxxxix. 3). . . . The seventh new moon of the religious year, being that of Tisri, commenced the civil year, and had a significance and rites of its own. It was a day of holy convocation" (Num. xxix. 1-6). What was the design of this religious celebration of "the beginnings of their months" ?

We suggest :

1. *To impress them with the value of time.* Its irrevocableness should suggest its invaluableness. The religious observance of the new moons was calculated to emphasise the facts that one month more had passed away for ever, with all its possibilities and opportunities, and that another had commenced its course, and its opportunities must be

* For remarks and illustrations on these points see *The Preacher's Commentary on Numbers*, pp. 529, 530.

promptly seized and diligently employed ere they also departed. (b).

2. *To assist them to form a correct estimate of their life upon earth.* "All men think all men mortal but themselves." Man needs frequent and forcible reminders of the swift flight of time, and of the brevity of his life upon earth. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." The religious observance of the natural divisions of time may be regarded as an answer to this request, inasmuch as it helps to impart and to impress the lesson desired. (c).

3. *To arouse them to make a wise use of the time which remained to them.* As we realise the fact that one month of our allotted time upon earth quickly follows another into the everlasting past, we should also realise with imperial force the solemn conviction, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," &c.

III. **The presentation in Divine worship of personal voluntary offerings.** "And of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord." These offerings were in addition to those required by the law, and were purely spontaneous on the part of the worshipper. The law required much, but in their zeal the returned exiles gave more. And in Christianity there is ample room for the expression of the grateful and reverent emotions of the soul. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." "In all thy gifts," says the Son of Sirach, "show a cheerful countenance, and dedicate thy tithes with gladness. Give unto the Most High according as He hath enriched thee; and as thou hast gotten give with a cheerful eye. For the Lord recompenseth, and will give thee seven times as much." (d)

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The end of the festival days among the Jews was to revive the memory of those signal acts wherein His power for them, and His goodness to them, had been extraordinarily

evident; it is no more but our mouths to praise Him, and our hand to obey Him, that He exacts at our hands. He commands us not to expend what He allows us in the erecting stately temples to His honour; all the coin He requires to be paid with for His expense is the "offering of thanksgiving" (Ps. l. 14); and this we ought to do as much as we can, since we cannot do it as much as He merits, for "who can show forth all His praise?" (Ps. cvi. 2). If we have the fruit of His goodness, it is fit He should have "the fruit of our lips" (Heb. xiii. 15); the least kindness should inflame our souls with a kindly resentment. Though some of His benefits have a brighter, some a darker, aspect towards us, yet they all come from this common spring; His goodness shines in all; there are the footsteps of goodness in the least, as well as the smiles of goodness in the greatest; the meanest therefore is not to pass without a regard of the Author. As the glory of God is more illustrious in some creatures than in others, yet it glitters in all, and the lowest as well as the highest administers matter of praise; but they are not only little things, but the choicer favours He hath bestowed upon us. How much doth it deserve our acknowledgment, that He should contrive our recovery, when we had plotted our ruin! that when He did from eternity behold the crimes wherewith we would incense Him, He should not, according to the rights of justice, cast us into hell, but prize us at the rate of the blood and life of His only Son, in value above the blood of men and lives of angels! How should we bless that God, that we have yet a Gospel among us, that we are not driven into the utmost regions, that we can attend upon Him in the face of the sun, and not forced to the secret obscurities of the night! Whatsoever we enjoy, whatsoever we receive, we must own Him as the Donor, and read His hand in it.—*S. Charnock, B. D.*

(b) Suppose that God had so cast the arrangements of our system as never to give notice, at all, of the passage of time, by the distinction of days, seasons, and years. In that case, we should all be living on together, but how fast or how slow we could scarcely guess. One year of men's childhood seems as long to them, they say, as two, or perhaps even ten years, later in life. This shows you how they would mistake if there were no measure of time save that of their inward judgment. They would never realise how fast they are living. They would take the period equal to ten years, in the later portion of life, to be the same period which constituted only its tenth part in their childhood; and so, when drawing on towards the close of their days,—the very time when they ought most of all to be awake to the shortness of their stay,—then would they be, most of all, insensible to the flight of time, and the swift approach of eternity.

Observe, then, the faithfulness of God. He has made the very universe to be the clock of the universe, and admonish every mortal heart

of the sure and constant passage of time. We are not left to our inward judgments. Time has its measures without, in the most palpable and impressive visitations of the senses. Every twilight tells us that a day is gone, and that by a sign as impressive as the blotting out of the sun ! It is as if we had a clock, so adjusted as to give notice of the hour, by displacing, at a stroke, the light of heaven, suspending the labours of the world, quenching the fevers of its earthly schemes and passions, and diffusing an opiate spell of oblivion over all human consciousness. The impalpable odours of spring penetrate our secret sense as monitors of time. The summer heat is the heat of time, the winter's cold is the cold of time—both forcing their way into our experience by a visitation that we cannot resist. One season tells us that another is gone ; and, when the whole circle of seasons is completed and returned into itself, the new year tells us that the old is gone. And a certain number of these years, we know, is the utmost bound of life. How sure is the reckoning ! It is even compulsory—none can escape it.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

(c) A thousand years is a long time, but how soon it flies ! One almost seems, in reading English history, to go back and shake hands with William the Conqueror ; a few lives bring us even to the flood. You who are getting on to be forty years old, and especially you who are sixty or seventy, must feel how fast time flies. I only seem to preach a sermon one Sunday in time to get ready for the next. Time flies with such a whirl that no express train can overtake it, and even the lightning flash seems to lag behind it. We shall soon be at the great white throne ; we shall soon be at the judgment bar of God. Oh ! let us make ready for it. Let us not live so much in this present, which is but a dream, an empty show, but let us live in the real, substantial future.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(d) Who, with the Word of God in his hand,

THE WORK OF THE DAY DONE IN THE DAY.

(Verse 4 : “*As the duty of every day required.*”)

The pious Jews returned from Babylon having erected an altar, kept also the feast of Tabernacles as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, “as the duty of every day required.” It is in the margin, “the matter of the day in his day.” This has grown into a proverbial saying among those who love Scripture phraseology, and teaches us that we should do the work of the day in the day.

I We may apply this to life in

but must feel that an era of enlarged Christian liberality is hastening on ? . . .

Now, the Christian professor too commonly allows his *regular contribution* to check his liberality, to prevent his giving more than the stipulated sum, though there are times when his benevolent impulses would prompt him to exceed that sum ; then, he will regard his subscription only as a pledge that he will *not give less*, but as leaving his liberality open to all the impulses of an unrestricted benevolence. Now, he is too often disposed to shun the applications for charity, and if he is overlooked and passed by, to view it as a fortunate escape ; but then he will do good *as he hath opportunity*—creating the opportunity which he cannot find already made to his hands. Now, his ability exceeds his inclination ; but then his inclination will be greater than his ability ; like the Macedonian Christians of whom the Apostle testifies, “I bear them record that to their power, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves.” Instead of being charitable only on comparative *dstraint*, he will often anticipate application, and surprise the agents of beneficence by unexpected gifts ; thus strengthening their faith in God, and inciting them to enlarge their designs for the kingdom of Christ : like the same believers of whom the Apostle records, that, instead of needing to be solicited, they entreated him to accept their contributions—“praying us with much entreaty to accept the gift.” Like the happy parent of a happy family, he will hail every new-born claim on his resources, and cheerfully deny himself in order to support it. And, instead of giving as he now does, as scantily as if he only aimed to keep the Christian cause from famishing, he will then act on the persuasion that his own enjoyment is identified with its growth and prosperity.—*John Harris, D.D.*

Works of piety and charity should, like water from a fountain, flow spontaneously from the gratitude and benevolence of a believing heart, and not require to be extorted with importunity, like the toil and trouble of drawing water from a deep well.—*Anon.*

general. This is called a “day,” and it is a single day, a short day, a day which it is impossible to lengthen. And what is the language of reason, of Scripture ? “To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart.” “Behold now . . . is the day of salvation.” And what will be your language if the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ? “I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day ; the night cometh, wherein no man can work.”

II. It will apply to prosperity. This

is called a "day;" and Solomon tells us what is the duty of it. "In the day of prosperity be joyful." He cannot intend to encourage extravagance and excess. We are to "use this world as not abusing it." The wise man would teach us to enjoy the comforts our circumstances afford, in opposition to that self-denial that arises not from religious motive, but from anxiety; from a disposition to live comparatively poor and destitute at present in order to hoard up for the future; whereas the Apostle tells us that "God gives us all things richly to enjoy." God, like a generous friend, is pleased to see His presents enjoyed—"to enjoy is to obey." But let us be always joyful *in Him*; let us enjoy all *in God*, and *God in all*. Behold another thing that the duty of this day requires. It is *gratitude*. Compare your circumstances with those of others, whose plans are equally wise, and whose dependencies seemed equally sure. Compare your present with your former condition; the "two bands" with the "staff." Compare your indulgences with your deserts, and how can you be unthankful? And surely the duty of this day requires *liberality*. He has made you stewards, and not proprietors; and He will soon call you to give up your account. "Charge them that are rich in this world that they do good," &c.

III. It will apply to adversity. This is also called a "day;" and it is said, "In the day of adversity, consider." This is the grand duty of the season. Whatever be your affliction, it is a solemn call to consider your ways, to examine your hearts and lives, to inquire wherefore He contends with you, and what He would have you to do. You are also to consider the alleviations of your suffering; how much worse it might have been; and to compare your resources with your difficulties. Another part of the duty this "day" requires is *submission*. "Submit yourselves under the mighty hand of God," &c. This subjection does not exclude feeling, but regulates it; keeping us, while sensible of the affliction, from quarrelling with Providence, from charging Him foolishly or unkindly, and leading us to say, "It

is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." The duty of this day also requires *prayer*. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," &c. "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." The very exercise of it will soothe him, while the answer of it will deliver him.

IV. We may apply it to the Sabbath. This is called "the Lord's-day" because it is consecrated to the memory of His resurrection, and is employed in His service. But as to advantage, it is *our* day. It "was made for man." We are commanded to "sanctify it, calling the Sabbath a delight," &c. A Christian will say, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" &c. He will take heed *what* he hears, and *how* he hears. But this is not all. He will retire. He will indulge in private reflection.

V. It will apply to every day. No day comes without its appropriate duty. We are to do everything in its season; to do the work *of* the day *in* the day; and not leave it till to-morrow.

1. *Because we may not live till to-morrow.* "We know not what a day may bring forth."

2. *Each day will have its own engagements, and it is wrong to surcharge one period with the additional work of another.* "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is unlawful to encumber to-day with the *care* of to-morrow; and to encumber to-morrow with the *work* of to-day.

3. *Because by this temporary negligence, we have nothing to do, or too much; whereas by doing the work of the day in the day, we are never unoccupied, never oppressed.*

4. *Because by this means the mind is kept cool, and tranquil, and cheerful; and we shall know nothing of the perplexities and ill-temper of those who are always in confusion and haste.*

To verify this important maxim, let me lay down three rules—

(1.) Rise early.

(2.) Grasp not so much business as to "entangle yourselves in the affairs of this life."

(3.) Arrange a plan of life, and firmly adhere to it.—*William Jay.*

THE PREPARATIONS FOR REBUILDING THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 6b, 7: "But the foundation of the Temple of the Lord was not yet laid. They gave money also," &c.)

Two chief points are here presented to our notice—

I. The great work yet to be accomplished. Mingled with the joy of the Jews in their restored worship was the recollection of the great work which as yet was not even commenced. "The foundation of the Temple of the Lord was not yet laid." We regard this as an illustration of—

1. *The incompleteness of human joys.* The gladness of the returned exiles in celebrating the feast of Tabernacles was tempered by the fact that they had only an altar; they had no temple. The brightest day of our life here has its cloud and its shadow. Our most serene seasons are not entirely free from disturbance. Our joys are incomplete. Our gladness is often checked by sadness. "There is a cross in every lot." The victorious and calm eventide of the life of king David was darkened by trials in his family. "Although my house be not so with God" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). St. Paul "was caught up into Paradise" and there received "abundance of revelations;" but there was given to him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet" him. This incompleteness of our joys here is a wise and kind arrangement. We need the shadow as well as the sunshine. We are reminded by vicissitude that this is not our rest, and urged to set our affections on spiritual and eternal things. (a).

2. *The incompleteness of human works.* The altar was built, but the Temple was not begun. The work of these patriotic and pious Jews was only just commenced. It would be long before it was completed. The work of the earnest man is never accomplished. Ere one task is completed another summons him to effort. If he were tempted to settle down to repose, his rest would soon be broken by the demands of unfinished enterprises, or by challenges to new endeavours.

"Labour with what zeal we will,
Something still remains undone,
Something uncompleted still
Waits the rising of the sun."

—Longfellow.

Even when death approaches, most men have much which they desire to accomplish. The statesman is summoned hence devising new measures for his country's good, which he will not assist in passing into laws. The author dies leaving his book unfinished. The Christian minister lays down his charge, leaving many plans for the welfare of his people not yet carried out; and the parent, while he longs still to do much for the welfare of his children. Doubtless the good man is not called to leave this world until his work here is finished; but to us it often seems that life closes here in incompleteness. This incompleteness of our human works is also ordered wisely and well. It tends to prevent stagnation; to rouse to earnest activities, &c. (b).

3. *The obligation of the Church of God.* The Jews at Jerusalem felt themselves bound not to rest content with the joys and blessings of the altar, but to proceed to the more arduous task of rebuilding the Temple. In seasons of religious worship the Church must not forget the work which it is called to accomplish. Our holiest delights should not detain us from our arduous duties. The Church should not entertain the idea of any pause or decrease in its labours until the spiritual temple of our God is raised into utmost and beautiful completeness out of the ruins of our fallen humanity. Let Christians labour on until the head stone of this temple shall be brought forth "with shoutings of, Grace, grace unto it." (c).

II. The prompt preparations for the accomplishment of this work. "They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters," &c. (ver. 7). Two points claim attention—

1. *The variety of service and the unity*

of design. See the various ways in which different persons contributed to the preparations for rebuilding the sacred edifice. (1.) Certain Jews gave of their possessions to pay the workmen. "They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre." (2.) Other Jews laboured in the work of preparation. "The masons and the carpenters." (3.) Zidonian and Tyrian workmen also laboured in this work. "Them of Zidon and them of Tyre brought cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa." And (4) Cyrus assisted by his patronage and by his gifts. "According to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia." And others might be mentioned who otherwise promoted the great object; such as the Levites who acted as overseers of the work. All these, each in his own way and in his own sphere, helped to accomplish the end which was so eagerly desired by most of them. And in building the spiritual temple, there should be the individual effort of every Christian for the attainment of the great object which they all have in common: each one, in some form or other, should contribute his share in the glorious work, and all should keep in view the one grand end. (d).

2. *The co-operation of Jews and Gentiles.* "It was significant also," says Schultz, "that at this building of the Temple again it was not Canaan proper, but the Phœnician Lebanon, that provided the building material, and that corresponding with this, heathen workmen and artists also took part in erecting the house of God. It indicates that the rest of the earth also, and corresponding thereto, the rest of mankind, are to render their gifts and capacities, which are more and more to take part in the complete and true worship of the Lord, that the Lord by no means regards them as profane. The rest of the earth and mankind become thereby, to a certain extent, consecrated in advance and designated as one who, if now already in the Old Testament economy, yet still more some day in the fulness of time, would take part in the highest destiny

of Israel." (e). In the Church of Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all."

CONCLUSION:

1. *Are we "as living stones built up" in the spiritual temple of God?* (Comp. 1 Pet. ii. 4-6.)

2. *Are we also assisting to build this glorious temple?* (Comp. 1 Cor. iii. 10-15.) It is paradoxical yet true, that we should be both stones in the edifice and toilers for its completion. But are we?

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Mark the same people that usually have the highest joys, and see whether at other times they have not the greatest troubles. This week they are as at the gates of heaven, and the next as at the doors of hell: I am sure with many it is so. Yet it need not be so, if Christians would but look at these high joys as duties to be endeavoured, and mercies to be valued; but when they will needs judge of their state by them, and think that God is gone from or forsaken them when they have not such joys, then it leaves them in terror and amazement. Like men after a flash of lightning, they are left more sensible of the darkness. For no wise man can expect that such joys should be a Christian's ordinary state; or God should so diet us with a continual feast. It would neither suit with our health nor the condition of this pilgrimage. Live, therefore, on your peace of conscience as your ordinary diet; when this is wanting know that God appointeth you a fast for your health; and when you have a feast of high joys, feed on it and be thankful; but when they are taken from you, gape not after them as the disciples did after Christ at His ascension, but return thankfully to your ordinary diet of peace. And remember that these joys which are now taken from you may so return again. However, there is a place preparing for you, where your joys may be full. —Richard Baxter.

(b) Human life is short; God's work is complex and prolonged, and steadily flowing on. Hence we are continually beginning, and passing away, and leaving what we begin for others to finish. Every generation is beginning, and every generation is passing away without having finished what it has begun. But that which we begin is not going to stop because we cease to go forward with it. One worker dies; the loom goes on, and another worker takes up the thread that he has laid down. We pass away, and another man, somewhere, is prepared to step into our place. We commence a work, and perform a part of

it; when we are gone, others perform another part; when they are gone, still others perform another part; and so that which we undertake is by others carried along to its bright consummation.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(c) I ask you to remember that every child whose heart is touched by the love of Christ, every worker for God who is ready to sacrifice his time, his comfort, his luxury, his life, for Christ, whose sympathy with the advance of God's kingdom is produced by an intelligent understanding of the magnitude of the interests that are at stake; every bedridden, poverty-stricken Christian, who is daily wrestling with God in prayer; every Sunday-school teacher who identifies himself with this great enterprise, not simply by giving money (that is sometimes an easy way of putting aside a pressing claim), but by earnest thought, honest speech, and loyal feeling; every one of us who, appreciating the magnitude, sublimity, and consecration of Christian missions, does devote himself to this work, rises up for God against the evil-doers, enlists in the great battle which can only terminate when death and hell, the beast and the false prophet, are cast into the lake of fire.—*H. R. Reynolds, D.D.*

(d) I would stir you all up to help in this work—old men, young men, and you, my sisters, and all of you, according to your gifts and experience, help. I want to make you feel, "I cannot do much, but I can help; I cannot preach, but I can help; I cannot pray in public, but I can help; I cannot give much away, but I can help; I cannot officiate as an elder or a deacon, but I can help; I cannot shine as 'a bright particular star,' but I can help; I cannot stand alone to serve my Master, but I can help." There is a text from which an old Puritan once preached a very singular sermon. There were only two words in the text, and they were, "And Bartholomew." The reason he took the text was, that Bartholomew's name is never mentioned alone, but he is always spoken of as doing some good thing with somebody else. He is never the principal actor, but always second. Well, let this be your feeling, that if you cannot do all yourself, you will help to do what you can.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(e) There are those in the Church who believe that God's express aim in Judaism was

to keep the Jewish people as separate from the world as possible; to keep them, like Noah, in an ark, while He plagued and punished the world at His will. But I maintain, on the contrary, that Judaism was always genial and benignant to the stranger who would adopt its belief and accept its blessings. From the evil which was in the world God was minded to keep the Jewish people free at any cost. From idolatry and its attendant pollutions He sought to deliver them, inasmuch as idolatry in the long run inevitably leads to national decline and death. To the stranger, the foreign person or nation, who would dishonour its beliefs and trample on its blessings, Judaism was stern as fate and pitiless as death. The nations which had filled up the measure of their iniquity, whose influence must be corrupting, were ruthlessly exterminated. . . . The Jews were simply God's executioners here, and the same doom, they are plainly warned, awaited them if they suffered themselves to be tempted into the same sins. The nations, of whose pollutions the very land was weary, were swept off as the stubble before the flame. But this was the accident and not the essential character of the dispensation. The law here in England is merciful, though it has often to deal out terrible judgments on flagrant sins. And I am persuaded that the more carefully the spirit of the dispensation is studied, the more plainly will it appear that . . . from Moses to Zechariah, it is a cry to the nations not to rot in their own corruption, "*Come with us and we will do you good.*" How benignantly, in the closing verses of the eighth chapter of the book of Joshua, the "strangers which were conversant among them" are included in the benediction! How earnestly Daniel and his coadjutors sought to diffuse the blessings of Judaism among the nations which had enslaved them, and to make the Oriental despots sharers in the knowledge of the living God, which by revelation they had gained! How emphatically the prophets take up and echo the invitation with growing clearness and earnestness through the ages, until it breaks out into full utterance in the great Successor of Moses, the great Fulfiller of the Law, the Son of David, the King of Zion, "*And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.*" Judaism in all ages was a witness for God to the nations, and a means of drawing all that would be drawn unto Himself.—*J. B. Brown, B.A.*

LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 8–13.)

Notice:

I. The work already done.

1. *Something was already accomplished.* Several months had passed away since the arrangements mentioned in verse 7 were made; and during those

months the masons and carpenters, and the Tyrian and the Sidonian workmen, had not been idle. Considerable labour must have been expended on the site of the Temple before it was ready for laying the foundation thereof.

2. *Arrangements were made for carrying on the work.* "Now in the second year of their coming into the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel," &c. (vers. 8, 9). And in these arrangements there was a *unanimity* which augured well for the success of the enterprise. "Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of the brethren, the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem," were united in their arrangements and efforts for prosecuting the work to a successful issue.

II. *The worship offered.* "And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets," &c. (vers. 10, 11). Notice :

1. *The manner of their worship.* "They set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord." Their worship was orderly and seemly in manner. It was conducted by those who were qualified for the work and called to it by the command of God, and in accordance with the arrangements made by king David (1 Chron. vi. 31, xvi. 4-6, 42, xxv. 1; Neh. xii. 24).

2. *The character of their worship.* "Praising and giving thanks unto the Lord," &c. Their worship consisted of grateful and joyful praise; because of—(1.) The goodness of God. "Praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good." (2.) The perpetuity of His goodness. "For His mercy endureth for ever." (3.) Their perpetual interest in His goodness. "His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel." Reverent and grateful praise is the highest form of worship which we present to the Father of spirits. (a).

3. *The occasion of their worship.* "When the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord." We call attention to the occasion in this place, because it illustrated and stimulated

their thankful praise. God had vouchsafed to them unmistakable manifestations of His goodness and mercy, in preserving and blessing them in Babylon, in granting them so favourable a return to their own land, and in helping them thus far with their work of restoration and renewal. Their own experiences would give force and fervour to their worship-song.

4. *The spirit of their worship.* This was hearty and enthusiastic. "And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." Worship which is not hearty, or which is cold or lukewarm, does not meet with Divine acceptance.

III. *The emotions excited.* "And all the people shouted with a great shout," &c.

1. *Great joy.* "And many shouted aloud for joy." This joy probably arose from—(1.) The consideration of what was accomplished. "Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all," says M. Henry, "praised the Lord with shouts of joy when they saw but the foundation of one laid. To them even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls even this was sweet. They shouted so that 'the noise was heard afar off.' Note.—We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though we have not yet come to the perfection of it; and the foundations of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be fountains of joy to every faithful Israelite." Every step in the progress of our communion with God should be a matter of great joy to us. (2.) The anticipation of what would yet be accomplished. They looked forward with confident and exultant hope to the completion of the sacred edifice.

2. *Great sorrow.* "But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice." Their grief arose chiefly from memories of the past, with which the present contrasted unfavourably. (1.) Recollections of the former

Temple. They "had seen the first house," and they knew well that they could not hope to build one which would be at all comparable with it in magnificence and splendour. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Hag. ii. 3). Moreover, they might have wept because of the sins which had led to the destruction of the former Temple, and the manifold miseries which had resulted from those sins. (2.) Recollections of their own lives. The joyful acclamations of the young generation probably recalled to these "ancient men" the brightness and hopefulness and enthusiasm of their own youth, and the recollection awakened sad thoughts. The contrast between the purpose of early life and the performance of after days, and the sad disparity between the hopes of youth and the attainments of manhood, are generally sufficient to subdue and sadden the hearts of the aged. The difference between the ideal entertained at twenty years of age and the actual realised at fifty or sixty is often a mournful thing. And even if a man is able to carry out his purposes, and achieves what is commonly called "success in life," how different the objects gained appear in possession from what they appeared in anticipation, and how disappointing! Much, very much, after which men aspire and for which they labour, cannot satisfy them; and having obtained their chief aims, they may cry mournfully—

"Years have gone by! and life's lowlands are
past,
And I stand on the hill which I sighed for,
at last:
But I turn from the summit that once was
my star,
To the vale of my childhood, seen dimly and
far;—
Each blight on its beauty seems softened and
gone,
Like a land that we love, in the light of the
morn."—*T. K. Hervey. (b).*

3. *Great joy and great sorrow mingled.*

"The people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people." We may regard this scene as—(1.) An illustration of our

personal experiences in this world. All our joys are tinged with sadness; all our sorrows have their mitigations, and if they do not yield rich compensations the blame will be our own. (c). (2.) An illustration of the experiences of mankind in this world. The shouts of those who rejoice and the cries of those who mourn are ever mingled in this world. The exultations of the victors and the lamentations of the vanquished rise together from earth to heaven. (3.) A feature which distinguishes the present from the future state. These mingled experiences belong only to this present life and world. In hell no one "shouts aloud for joy." And in heaven "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Praise is the very highest mood and exercise of the religious soul; it is the expression towards God of the holiest emotions of which we are capable—reverence, obligation, gratitude, love, adoration. Whenever these are uplifted to God in admiration and homage, there is the worship of praise—the highest and most perfect expression of all that is purest and noblest in our religious nature. As contrasted with the worship of prayer, the worship of praise is manifestly transcendent. Prayer is the pleading of our human indigence and helplessness; praise is the laudation of Divine excellency and sufficiency. Prayer supplicates the good that God may have to bestow; praise is the adoration of the good that there is in God Himself. When we pray we are urged by necessities, fears, and sorrows,—it is the cry of our troubled helplessness, often of our pain or our terror; we are impelled by feelings of unworthiness, memories of sin, yearnings for forgiveness and renewal. Praise brings, not a cry, but a song,—it does not ask, it proffers,—it lifts, not its hands, but its heart,—it is the voice, not of our woe, but of our love, not of beseeching, but of blessing. It comes before God not clothed in sackcloth, but with its "singing robes" about it, not wailing litanies, but shouting hosannas. Prayer expresses only our lower religious moods of necessity and sorrow; praise expresses our higher religious moods of satisfaction and joy. Prayer asks God to come down to us; praise assays to go up to God. The soul that prays falls prostrate with its face to the ground, often being in an agony; the soul that praises stands with uplifted brow and transfigured countenance ready to soar away to heaven. Moreover, the instinct

of praise is deeper in the religious heart than that of prayer; song in the human soul is earlier, and will be later, than supplication. Prayer is the accident of our present sinful necessity; praise is the essence of all religious life and joy. The birthplace and home of prayer is on earth. The birthplace and home of praise is in heaven."—*H. Allon, D.D.*

(b) I used to think a slight illness was a luxurious thing; . . . it is different in the latter stages; the old postchaise gets more shattered at every turn, windows will not pull up, doors refuse to open, or, being open, will not shut again. There is some new subject of complaint every moment; your sickness comes thicker and thicker, your sympathising friends fewer and fewer. The recollection of youth, health, and uninterrupted powers of activity, neither improved nor enjoyed, is a poor strain of comfort. . . . Death has closed the long dark avenue upon loves and friendships; and I look at them as through the grated doors of a burial place filled with monuments of those who were once dear to me, with no insincere wish that it may open for me at no distant period, provided such be the will of God. I shall never see the threescore and ten, and shall be summed up at a discount; no help for it, and no matter either.—*Sir Walter Scott.*

(c) There is no joy unmixed with grief—
Each garden has more weeds than flowers—
Care rides upon the winged hours,
And doubt for ever haunts belief.

We stop to pluck some beauteous flower,
And cold precaution idly scorn,
To find some sharp and hidden thorn
Exacts a forfeit for the dower.

There have been tears of wormwood shed,
For every pleasure life can bring;
The joys of earth are flowers that spring
From out the ashes of the dead—*E. H. Dewart.*

In the bitterest grief, in the sharpest period of agony, in the dullest, most hopeless prospect, there is a source of joy which none but the spirit of Jesus can find or use. St. Paul calls it rejoicing in the Lord. Then we go

out of ourselves, as it were, and leave the last trial like a cloak that is thrown off. We pass from the sharpest and most disappointing trouble into the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. We move in by a mental flash, as it were, and there see the source of life unshaken, undimmed, steady, like the shining of the moon above a battlefield; calm and quiet, as the sunlight amid the shrieks and tumult of a pillaged town.—*Harry Jones, M.A.*

There is great joy of prosperity, of love, of victory, but there is a joy that belongs to the experience of suffering and sorrow which is more divine and exquisite than any joy the heart ever knows outside of trouble. When a soul is afflicted till it is driven into the very pavilion of God, till Christ, as it were, wraps His arms about it and says, "Rest here till the storm be overpast," that soul experiences an exquisiteness of joy which only those who have felt it can understand.—*H. W. Beecher.*

Then happy those, since each must drain
His share of pleasure, share of pain;
Then happy those, beloved of Heaven,
To whom the mingled cup is given,
Whose lenient sorrows find relief,
Whose joys are chastened by their grief.
—*Sir W. Scott.*

(d) This is a world of weeping—a vale of tears. Who is there that has not wept over the grave of a friend; over his own losses and cares; over his disappointments, over the treatment he has received from others; over his sins; over the follies, vices, and woes of his fellow-men? And what a change would it make in our world if it could be said that henceforward not another tear would be shed; not a head would ever be bowed again in grief! Yet this is to be the condition of heaven. In that world there is to be no pain, no disappointment, no bereavement. No friend is to lie in dreadful agony on a sick-bed, no grave is to be opened to receive a parent, a wife, a child; no gloomy prospect of death is to draw tears of sorrow from the eyes. To that blessed world, when our eyes run down with tears, are we permitted to look forward; and the prospect of such a world should contribute to wipe away our tears here—for all our sorrows will soon be over.—*A. Barnes, D.D.*

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 11–13.)

That an exuberance of joy and of sorrow should be excited at once by the same event, is undoubtedly a curious fact; and it will be profitable to show you—

I. What there was at that time to call forth such strong and widely-different emotions. The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had just laid the

foundation of the second Temple, and this was—

1. *To some an occasion of exalted joy.* It was not the mere circumstance that a magnificent building was about to be raised, but the thought of the use to which that building was to be appropriated, that proved to them a source of joy. The erection of it was

justly regarded by them as a restoration of God's favour to them after the heavy judgments which He had inflicted on them during their captivity in Babylon. This event opened to them a prospect of again worshipping Jehovah according to all the forms prescribed to them by the Mosaic ritual. Nor could they fail to view it as tending to advance the honour of their God; in which view pre-eminently it must of necessity fill them with most exalted joy. With such views of the event before them the people could not but shout for joy; and "if they had been silent, the very stones would have cried out against them."

2. *To others an occasion of the deepest sorrow.* The persons who manifested such pungent grief were "the priests, and Levites, and the chief of the fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the former Temple." They wept because they well knew how infinitely this structure must fall below the former in point of magnificence. Of necessity it must want many things which constituted the glory of that edifice, and could never be replaced. The Shechinah, the bright cloud, the emblem of the Deity Himself, was for ever removed. The ark was lost, and the copy of the law which had been preserved in it. The Urim and Thummim too, by which God had been wont to communicate to His people the knowledge of His will, was irrecoverably gone; and the fire which had descended from heaven was extinct, so that they must henceforth use in all their sacrifices nothing but common fire. And what but their sins had brought upon them all these calamities? Would it have been right, then, in these persons to lose all recollection of their former mercies, and of the sins through which they had been bereaved of them; and to be so transported with their present blessings as not to bewail their former iniquities? No! I think that the mixture of feeling was precisely such as the occasion called for.

II. How far similar emotions become us at the present day.

1. *There is at this time great occasion for joy.* We are not, indeed, constructing a material temple for the Lord; but

the whole nation is engaged in endeavours to erect a spiritual temple to Him throughout the world. Never was there a period since the apostolic age, when the exertions were so general, so diversified, so diffusive. And is this no ground of joy? Is there no reason to rejoice in what, we trust, is going on amongst us? If the Gospel be "glad tidings of great joy unto all people," is it no cause for joy that it is brought to our ears; and that it is effectual amongst us to convert men to God? Are there not amongst you some at least who have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God"? Surely we have reason to rejoice.

2. *Yet is there amongst us abundant occasion for grief also.* If we suppose the Apostle Paul, who witnessed the state of God's Church in its primitive and purest age, to come down in the midst of us, what would be his feelings at the present hour? Would his joy be unmixed with sorrow? Would he be satisfied with what he saw? It was with "weeping" that St. Paul contemplated many of the Philippian converts; and for many of the Galatian Church he "agonised as in the pangs of childbirth till Christ should be more perfectly formed in them." And was this from a want of charity, or from a contempt of piety in its lower stages of existence? No; but from love, and from a desire that God should be honoured to the uttermost wherever His Gospel came, and wherever its blessings were experienced in the soul.

See, then—

(1.) *What, above all things, should interest our souls.* Nothing under heaven should transport us with joy like the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world and in the soul. Nothing should produce in us such acute sensations of grief as a consciousness that God is not glorified in the midst of us as He ought to be.

(2.) *What use we should make of our knowledge and experience.* It is not so much an unqualified effusion of joy that is pleasing to the Most High, as that which is moderated with shame, and tempered with contrition.—*Charles Simeon, M.A.*

THE ALTAR AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEMPLE.

Notes for Scripture Lesson (Whole Chapter).

Our lesson contains the account of the *beginning* of the great work of rebuilding the Temple. It is sad to find that through delays and indifference twenty years passed before it was finished, and then only on the arousing preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. They, however, began well, collecting material and laying the foundations by the fourteenth month after their return. Of this great and rejoicing day our lesson contains the brief account.

Looking carefully at the chapter, it will be seen that it contains two things, which, though related, are quite distinct—

1. *The beginning of Worship.*

2. *The beginning of the Temple for Worship.*

It will also be observed that the people very properly thought more of the spiritual worship than of the material building, and found that they could have the worship *at once*, though the Temple to worship in might be long unbuilt. The *things* we give to God, buildings, &c., must always come second, and have no value before Him until we have given Him *ourselves*. The true worshippers worship "in spirit and in truth;" but they properly accept all the helps of buildings and services. The key to the lesson may therefore be the sentence of praise spoken by Paul concerning the Macedonians (2 Cor. viii. 5). They "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

We have then this to set forth and illustrate, and we call it—

I. The true order. First the burnt offering, then the Temple. First the self-surrender, then the doing of duty. First the worship of the soul, then the work of the hands. The burnt offering was designed to represent the *entire yielding of the worshipper to God*. How suitable such an act was for the newly-restored people, just beginning their national life! They properly began with a very solemn consecration of the

whole nation to God by burnt offering. Though we do not bring representative sacrifices now, we follow the example of these earnest-hearted men. Tell of the youth, going out into life from a country town, not knowing what temptations might befall him, and solemnly consecrating himself to God, and using David's resolve, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only." That was his offering of himself on the altar of burnt offering, and the right and noble beginning for his life. That youth lived to work at building in the world the great Temple of God. But in the second part of the lesson we have another event introduced—laying the foundations of the second Temple, and this brings before us—

II. The mingled feelings. In the worship all feelings were absorbed in solemn joy; but when the foundations were laid, such *memories* blended with hope, that tears fell plentifully, and the wail of sorrow almost drowned the shout of triumph. Laying foundations of a new temple or church is the occasion for joy; show how we decorate with flags, &c., and have music and song. And yet *now-a-days*, when a new church replaces an old one, we cannot wonder that very touching memories should crowd round the elder people, making them sorrow in the very midst of other joys. So it is through our life, songs and tears are blended. Joys and sorrows go hand in hand continually. And so it must be in a sin-stricken world until "God Himself shall wipe all tears from our eyes." Impress the duty which surely comes to all who give themselves to the Lord "a living sacrifice." They have *work to do for God in the world*, and whatever forms that work may take, it is really a part of the work of building a great temple in the earth for the glory of God; a great spiritual temple that needs all sorts of workers and work; and, when one day complete, will win from the universe

triumphant songs, with which shall blend no sorrow and no tears. "The Temple of God shall be with men, and He shall dwell among them." God's temple among men *we* must help to build.—*R. Tuck, B.A.*

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] In this chapter we have—(i.) The proposal of the Samaritans to unite with the Jews in building the Temple, and its rejection (vers. 1–3). (ii.) The opposition of the Samaritans because of the rejection of their proposal (vers. 4, 5). (iii.) The letters of the Samaritans to King Artaxerxes against the Jews, one of which is here given (vers. 6–16). (iv.) The reply of Artaxerxes to their letter (vers. 17–22). (v.) The stoppage of the building of the Temple (vers. 23, 24).

Ver. 1. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin] These "adversaries" speak of themselves in the second verse as having been brought up hither by Esarhaddon king of Assur. They are the peoples spoken of in 2 Kings xvii. 24: "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." They described themselves in vers. 9, 10, as "the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations," &c. They "were called Samaritans after the central point of their settlement." They were a very mixed people, including some Israelites, but chiefly composed of heathens.

Ver. 2. For we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him] They did worship Jehovah, but not as the faithful Jews did. They worshipped Him not as the only living and true God, but as one amongst others, according to the statement in 2 Kings xvii. 29–33.

Ver. 3. Ye have nothing to do with us to build] &c. "The question was not," as Keil observes, "whether they would permit Israelites who earnestly sought Jahve to participate in His worship at Jerusalem—a permission which they certainly would have refused to none who sincerely desired to turn to the Lord God—but whether they would acknowledge a mixed population of Gentiles and Israelites, whose worship was more heathen than Israelite, and who nevertheless claimed on its account to belong to the people of God. To such, the rulers of Judah could not, without unfaithfulness to the Lord their God, permit a participation in the building of the Lord's house." **But we ourselves together]** = "we as a compact unity, excluding others."—*Schultz*.

Ver. 4. The people of the land] *i.e.* "the adversaries," of ver. 1. **Weakened the hands]** &c. Hindered them by diminishing their courage and strength for the work.

Ver. 5. And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose] Whether by "hired counsellors" we are to understand ministers of state whom the Samaritans bribed, or legal agents whom they employed to bring about a stoppage of the work, is uncertain. **All the days of Cyrus king of Persia]** &c. "The machinations against the building, begun immediately after the laying of its foundations, in the second year of the return, had the effect, in the beginning of the third year of Cyrus (judging from Dan. x. 2), of putting a stop to the work till the reign of Darius,—in all, fourteen years, *viz.*, five years of Cyrus, seven and a half of Cambyses, seven months of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and one year of Darius (till the second years of his reign)."—*Keil*.

Vers. 6 and 7. Ahasuerus. . . . Artaxerxes. Heb. Ahashverosh. . . . Artachshashta] Dr. Cotton, Bishop of Calcutta, says that Ahasuerus "must be Cambyses," the successor of Cyrus, and Artaxerxes "must be the Pseudo-Smerdis" (*Bibl. Dict.*). So also Rawlinson, *et al.* But Keil, Schultz, *et al.*, hold that by Ahasuerus we must understand Xerxes, and by Artaxerxes "really Artaxerxes" Longimanus. The question is argued by them at considerable length in their observations *in loco*. Bishop Hervey takes the same view, and states it thus: "Ezra. iv. 6–23 is a parenthetic addition by a much later hand, and, as the passage most clearly shows, made in the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. The compiler who inserted chap. ii., a document drawn up in the reign of Artaxerxes, to illustrate the return of the captives under Zerubabel, here inserts a notice of two historical facts—of which one occurred in the reign of Xerxes, and the other in the reign of Artaxerxes—to illustrate the opposition offered by the heathen to the rebuilding of the Temple in the reign of Cyrus and Cambyses. He tells us that in the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, *i.e.* before Esther was in favour, they had written to the king to prejudice him against the Jews—a circumstance, by the way, which may rather have inclined him to listen to Haman's proposition; and he gives the text of letters sent to Artaxerxes, and of Artaxerxes' answer, on the strength of which Rehum and Shimshai forcibly hindered the Jews from rebuilding the city. These letters doubtless came into Ezra's hands at Babylon, and may have led to those endeavours on his part to make the king favourable to Jerusalem which issued in his own commission in the seventh year of his reign. At ver. 24

Haggai's narrative proceeds in connection with ver. 5." Fuerst also holds that Ahasuerus was Xerxes, but on Artaxerxes he says that the name was "borne by Pseudo-Smerdis and Artaxerxes Longimanus." But if Ahasuerus was Xerxes, the Artaxerxes of the text must have been Artaxerxes Longimanus. Matthew Henry propounds another view, viz., that Ahasuerus (ver. 6) was also called Artaxerxes (ver. 7), and is identical with Cambyses. The view of Rawlinson is perhaps correct, that the theory that Ahasuerus is Cambyses and Artaxerxes the Pseudo-Smerdis "presents fewer difficulties than any other." But, notwithstanding difficulties, the other theory seems to us to be the true one. It is beyond our province to enter further into the question.

Ver. 7. Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel] "These names certainly indicate Samaritans who, without being Persian officials, enjoyed, just as Sanballat subsequently, a certain degree of consequence."—Schultz. And the rest of their companions] Margin: "Heb. *societies*." Fuerst: "Associates, colleagues." The writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue] It was written in Syriac or Aramaic characters. And interpreted in the Syrian tongue] It was in the Syriac or Aramaic language. Both the characters and the language were Aramaic. The Samaritans "spoke a language more nearly akin to Hebrew than to" Aramaic; and what they had thought in their own language they translated into Aramaic, and wrote in Aramaic characters.

Ver. 8. Rehum the chancellor] Heb. בְּעַל-טֶעַם. Fuerst: "Properly, lord of the (royal) decree, *i.e.* either *stadtholder*, and so the parallel is פְּתָה (comp. Ezra v. 3, vi. 6, or, according to *Ezra Apocr.* ii. 25; *Jos.* (Arch. xi. 2), and *Kimchi*, &c.) = סֶפֶר מְזַבֵּיר, *chancellor*; but the former is more probable." It is probably the title of the Persian governor of the Samaritan province. Shimshai the scribe] Margin: "Or, *secretary*." Fuerst: "Royal scribe."

Ver. 9. The Dinaites] were probably, as suggested by Ewald, people from the Median city Deinaver. Rawlinson suggests that they were the people of Dayan, a country bordering on Cilicia. The Apharsathchites] were probably the same as the Apharsachites" (chap. v. 6), and were perhaps identical with the Parætacæ, or Parætaceni, a tribe of mountaineers living on the borders of Media and Persia. The Tarpelites]: "The territory Tarpel has been supposed to be found in (Τάρπουροι) of Ptolemy, east of Elam, with which it is mentioned; more correctly, perhaps, the territory Tarpel is at the Mæotic swamp, whose inhabitants Ταρπηγες are mentioned in Strabo (i. p. 757). In no case can it be the Phœnician Tripolis."—Fuerst. The Apharsites] are by some regarded as Persians, by others as the Parhasü, in eastern Media. The Archevites] were people from the city Erech, now Warka. The Susanchites], or Susanites, were from the city of Susa. The Dehavites] were the Dai or Dahi, mentioned by Herodotus (i. 125) among the nomadic tribes of Persia. The Elamites] were the original inhabitants of the country called Elam.

Ver. 10. The great and noble Asnapper] seems to have been a distinguished officer in the service of Esarhaddon (ver. 2), and employed by him to conduct the colonists to Samaria and arrange their settlement there. And at such a time.] Chaldee וּבְכַעֲנָת = "and so now, Ezra iv. 10, vii. 12, *i.e.* and so forth, *et cetera*."—Fuerst.

Ver. 12. And have set up the walls] &c. Keil would translate: "And are setting up its walls and digging its foundations." "Repairing" (Fuerst) "its foundations" would perhaps be better.

Ver. 13. Toll] Rather tax or tribute; the money payment required from every one. Tribute] "A tax on articles consumed, excise.—Fuerst. Custom] "A road tax, a toll." *Ibid.* Thou shalt endamage the revenue] The meaning of the word rendered "revenue" in the text, and "strength" in the margin, is entirely uncertain. Keil, Rawlinson, and others say that אֲפַתִּים depends upon the Pehlevi word אֲוֹרוֹם, and signifies "at last." "And so at last thou shalt endamage the kings." Fuerst, however, says that this "gives no suitable sense." But it seems to us, as Schultz observes, that "the meaning of 'finally,' 'at last,' is entirely appropriate."

Ver. 14. We have maintenance from the king's palace] Margin: "We are salted with the salt of the palace." The Heb. is, "We salt the salt of the palace;" *i.e.* we eat the salt of the palace; a figurative expression, signifying to be in the king's service and to obtain subsistence from him, and implying the obligation to look after his interests. The king's dishonour] Keil: "The damage of the king" עֲרֹהָ, deprivation, emptying, here injury to the royal power or revenue."

Ver. 15. The book of the records of thy fathers.] It is called in Esth. vi. 1, "the book of the records of the chronicles." Thy fathers] are the predecessors of the king on the throne, and the term applies not only to the Medo-Persian but also to the Chaldean sovereigns. Of old time] Heb.: "From the days of eternity," *i.e.* from time immemorial. For which cause was this city destroyed]—by Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 16. No portion on this side the river] The statement amounts to this, that the returned Jews, if allowed to rebuild and fortify Jerusalem, would seize all the country west of the Euphrates, and so the king would lose that part of his dominions. A very absurd exaggeration.

Ver. 17. And at such a time] Rather, "And so forth." (See on ver. 10.)

Ver. 18. Read before me] Persian monarchs were not accustomed to read letters or records themselves, but to have them read to them by others (comp. Esth. vi. 1).

Ver. 20. There have been mighty kings] &c. This is most applicable to David and Solomon, and in a smaller degree to Uzziah, Jotham, and Josiah. Ruled over all beyond the river] *i.e.* over all the region west of the Euphrates.

Ver. 23. By force and power] Or, as in the margin, "By arm and power." They compelled the Jews to desist from building.

Ver. 24. According to Keil, Schultz, *et al.*, the historian in this verse takes up the thread of the narrative which he dropped at the close of verse 5, in order that, by inserting the episodical section (vers. 6-23), he might give in this place "a short and comprehensive view of all the hostile acts against the Jewish community on the part of the Samaritans and surrounding nations." In their view this verse refers to the opposition which was commenced in the reign of Cyrus, while verses 6-23 narrate subsequent hostilities. But according to the view of Bishop Cotton, that Ahasuerus (ver. 6) must be Cambyses and Artaxerxes (ver. 7) the Pseudo-Smerdis, and that this chapter is one continuous narrative, the enforced suspension of the work lasted for about two years.

THE PROPOSAL OF THE SAMARITANS TO THE JEWS.

(Verses 1-3.)

Notice :

I. The proposal made by the Samaritans. "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel," &c. (vers. 1, 2). This proposal was—

1. *Plausible in its form.* They proposed—(1) *To render help in a great and good work.* "They said, Let us build with you." They do not ask for anything for themselves, except permission to co-operate in building "the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel;" but they offer something to the Jews, even their assistance in their great undertaking. (2.) *To render help in this work for an excellent reason.* "For we seek your God as ye do, and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." They urge that they were worshippers of Jehovah even as the Jews were; that they were interested in the promotion of His honour; and that it would therefore be appropriate for them to unite in building a temple unto Him. Moreover, the returned Jews being neither a strong nor a wealthy people, and having much to occupy their time and energies, would naturally be prepared to welcome any suitable offers of assistance. Temptation is always plausible in its presentation to the tempted. (a). But this proposal was—

2. *Evil in itself.* Fair and plausible in appearance, it was false and perilous in reality. The evil of their proposal will appear if we consider that—(1.) They were not Israelites. They were brought into Samaria by Esarhaddon king of Assur. "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim," &c. (2 Kings xvii. 24). They were "Dinaites, Apharsathchites, Tarpelites, Apharsites, Archevites, Babylonians, Susanchites, Dehavites, and Elamites" (ver. 9). If it be allowed that these peoples had become mixed by marriage with the remnant of the Israelites who remained in the land at the captivity, still the heathen elements and usages and influences were predominant amongst them. They were not Israelites either by descent or by sympathy. (2.) They did not worship Jehovah as the true God. When they were first planted in Samaria they were ignorant of the worship of Jehovah; and after they had been instructed in it, they adopted it not as exclusive of the worship of other gods but in common with such worship. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods," &c. "These nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images," &c. (2 Kings xviii. 24-41). To have received such a people into community and co-operation with the true people of God would have been an act of utter unfaithfulness and dis-

loyalty to Him. (3.) Their design in making this proposal was an unworthy one. "The occasion of this request of the Samaritans," says Schultz, "was the correct recognition of the fact that those who should have the Temple at Jerusalem would be regarded as the leading nation, whilst those who should be excluded from this central point of the worship of the land would appear as less authorised, as intrusive; they likewise no doubt expected, if they were admitted to participation in the building of the Temple, as well as to consultation with reference to it, to gain thereby influence in shaping the affairs of the congregation in general. If in addition to this they had also a religious interest in the matter, it was only in order to secure for themselves the favour of the God of the land, whom they recognised as Jehovah, and then therewith also the same possessions and blessings in their new home as the Jews designed for themselves. We cannot regard them as actuated by any higher and purer motive; for their entire subsequent behaviour, which makes them appear as quite indifferent to religious affairs, and also that which we elsewhere learn of their religion (2 Kings xvii. 24-41), is opposed to that view." (4.) The acceptance of their proposal would have been perilous to the Jews. Proneness to associate with their heathen neighbours and to adopt their idolatrous customs had been painfully prevalent in the Israelites previous to their captivity, and had been the chief cause of their miseries. To have acceded to the proposal of the Samaritans would have been to have placed themselves in the utmost danger of falling again into their former sins with all their train of bitter consequences. They were not strong enough to overcome the heathen elements and influences which they must have encountered in association with the idolatrous Samaritans. In such association there was grave peril to their best interests. Separation from the Samaritans was essential to the spiritual safety of the Jews. (b).

II. The proposal rejected by the Jews. "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua,

and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them," &c. (ver. 3). In this rejection there are several noteworthy points—

1. *An exclusive obligation in relation to the work is asserted.* "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel." In such an undertaking the Jews and the Samaritans had nothing in common. The obligation to build the Temple devolved upon the Jews, and they alone would fulfil that obligation.

2. *The alleged similarity of worship is indirectly denied.* The rulers of the Jews in their reply to the Samaritans speak of "our God" and of "the Lord God of Israel," implying that He was not the God of the Samaritans. The returned exiles worshipped Jehovah as the only living and true God, while the Samaritans worshipped Him simply as a local deity, as one god amongst others. In this sense, then, He was "the Lord God of Israel," but not of the Samaritans. (c).

3. *The command of King Cyrus is adduced in support of this rejection.* "As King Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." The authority of Cyrus was binding upon both the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews had his commission to come to Jerusalem and build the Temple; but if it was a work which the Samaritans could appropriately undertake, he need not have encouraged or even allowed the Jews to leave Babylon to do it. Again, if it was a work which might be done by others than Jews, why, seeing that he was so much interested in it, did he not undertake it himself? The mentioning of the authority of King Cyrus by the Jewish leaders was certainly a prudent thing. "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

4. *The rejection of the proposal was unanimous.* "Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel," i.e., all the heads of the people, concurred in declining the co-operation of the Samaritans. This unanimity is further indicated in the expression, "We ourselves together will build," which Schultz correctly explains.

“we, as a compact unity, excluding others.” If the Church of Christ would stand against and conquer its enemies, it must present to them a compact opposition. (d).

5. *The rejection of the proposal was prompt and decided.* There is neither hesitation nor uncertainty in the reply of the heads of the Jewish people to the Samaritans. It is perilous to parley with evil proposals. They should be immediately and firmly repudiated. (e).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) It was but a shallow device, and showed a very inadequate conception of devilish art, to represent Satan a hideous and repulsive figure, with frightful marks to be recognised by, with a beastly foot to certify his track, and all concentrated malignities on his distorted features. Why, men would run from such ugliness by instinct; and if this were the type of evil, it could never come near enough to tempt us. Our virtue would be safe against a seducer that inspired nothing but disgust. In the real Satan we must look for a shrewder cunning, a more subtle diplomacy, a more politic disguise. Whatever he may have been to the superstitious fears of ruder ages, to try the temper of the nineteenth century he takes on the address of a courtier, the self-possession of a man of the world, the royal dignity of a prince, the beauty of a seraph, and the manners of a gentleman. If you meet him now—and meet him you certainly will to-morrow and to-day—he will be transformed into an angel of light.—*F. D. Huntington, D. D.*

(b) Let not any so much presume upon their own strength as to imagine that they can retain their sincerity, though they keep wicked company, and rather convert them to good than be perverted by them to evil, seeing this is a matter of great difficulty. “To be good among the good,” says Bernard, “has in it health and safety; among the wicked to be so, is also commendable and praiseworthy: in that, happiness is joined with much security; in this, much virtue with difficulty.” For as he who is running down the hill can sooner pull with him one that is ascending, than he who is going up can cause him to ascend that is running down; so he who holds a headlong course in wickedness can more easily carry with him one that is ascending the hill of virtue, being a motion contrary to natural disposition, than he can cause him to ascend with him. For in common experience we see that the worsen state prevails more in altering the better to its condition, than the better to make the worse like itself. The infected are not so soon cured by the sound, as they are tainted with their contagion. Rotten apples lying with the sound are not restored

to soundness, but the sound are corrupted with their rottenness. Dead carcasses united to living bodies are not thereby revived, unless it be by miracle, as we see in Elijah and Peter; but the living, if they continue any time united to the dead, partake with them in their mortality and corruption. And thus it is in our spiritual state, wherein the worse more prevails to corrupt the better, than the better to reform the worse.—*Downname.*

(c) Prone before, on every occasion, to adopt the idolatrous practices of the adjacent nations, the Jews now secluded themselves from the rest of the world in proud assurance of their own religious superiority. The law, which of old was perpetually violated, or almost forgotten, was now enforced, by general consent to its extreme point, or even beyond it. Adversity endeared that, of which in prosperity, they had not perceived the value. Prone, the mass of them, all but the wiser and more enlightened who worshipped Jehovah, to worship Him but as a national God, greater and mightier than the gods of other nations (a conception in itself polytheistic), they threw aside this lower kind of pride, to assume that of the sole people of the one true God. Their city, their native soil, their religion, became the objects of the most passionate attachment. Intermarriages with foreigners, neither forbidden by statute nor by former practice, were strictly inhibited. The observance of the Sabbath, and even of the sabbatical year, was enforced with rigour of which we have no precedent in the earlier annals, even to the neglect of defence in time of war. In short, from this period commences that un-social spirit, that hatred towards mankind and want of humanity to all but their own kindred, with which, notwithstanding the extent to which they carried proselytism to their religion, the Jews are branded by all the Roman writers. The best of these writers could not but be unconsciously or involuntarily impressed by the majesty of this sublime monotheism, but their pride resented the assumption of religious superiority by this small people; and the stern self-isolation of the Jews from all religious communion with the rest of mankind was beheld only in its seemingly proud and lonely obstinacy—in its refusal to contaminate itself with what it openly declared to be the unholy and unrighteous and foolish usages of the world.—*H. H. Milman, D. D.*

(d) Union is power. The most attenuated thread, when sufficiently multiplied, will form the strongest cable. A single drop of water is a weak and powerless thing; but an infinite number of drops, united by the force of attraction, will form a stream; and many streams combined will form a river; till rivers pour their waters into the mighty ocean, whose proud waves, defying the power of man, none can stay but He who formed them. And thus forces which, acting singly,

are utterly impotent, are, when acting in combination, resistless in their energies, mighty in power. And when this great union of the several powers of the Church shall be brought to bear unitedly on one point, its triumph will be the subjection of a world to Christ which now defies the solitary efforts of single forces.—*H. G. Salter.*

(e) Decision of character and promptitude of action, qualities so important on board ship in a storm, in the manœuvring of troops in battle, are indispensable to the Christian

life, both to our getting through the “strait gate,” and our getting on in the “narrow way.” How often, for example, does it happen that to hesitate even for one moment between resisting and yielding to temptation is to fall! The battle is lost in that moment of vacillation. In such cases, our safety lies in coming to an immediate decision; in promptly resolving to dally with the tempter not an instant, to flee if we can, and if we cannot flee to fight—so resisting the devil that if we cannot flee from him, he shall flee from us, and leave us.—*Thomas Guthrie, D.D.*

THE PROPOSALS OF THE WICKED AND HOW TO TREAT THEM.

(Verses 1–3.)

“The children of the captivity” who had returned to their own land were true Israelites, both in their origin and in their sympathies; the Samaritans were heathens of various races, or at best only heathens mingled with Israelites. The Jews were decided monotheists; the Samaritans were confirmed polytheists, and are here correctly described as “the adversaries of” the Jews. For these reasons we may fairly regard the Jews as representing the true and good, and the Samaritans the false and evil. Viewed in this respect, the text suggests—

I. That the wicked often propose to enter into alliance with the good. “Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the Temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you.” For selfish reasons these idolaters propose to co-operate with the Jews in building the Temple of the true and only God. In like manner worldly and wicked men often seek to form alliances with the religious and the godly. These alliances are of different kinds, *e.g.*—

1. *Commercial.* Partnerships in business, &c.

2. *Social.* Reception into their society, or personal friendship.

3. *Matrimonial.* From various selfish motives the non-religious man may seek a religious woman for his wife; or the worldly woman a godly man.

4. And even, as in this case, *Religious.*

Persons who have no real godliness, actuated by unworthy motives, sometimes seek to co-operate in religious enterprises.

II. That the proposals of the wicked for alliance with the good are often supported by plausible reasons. “For we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him,” &c. How plausible! And men argue with equal plausibility for the formation of alliances between the worldly and the godly in our own day. Take the alliances mentioned above, and see how men argue for them.

1. *Commercial.* It is argued that religious principles have nothing to do with business transactions.

2. *Social.* That the advantage and enjoyment of social intercourse is independent of the question of personal piety.

3. *Matrimonial.* That the ungodly partner will soon be won over to the beliefs and practices of the godly one; or, at the very least, will derive much moral benefit.

4. *Religious.* That there is very little difference between the two parties; as, in the argument of the Samaritans. Such proposals must needs be plausibly supported, or they would not have even the remotest chance of acceptance. (a).

III. That the alliances proposed by the wicked are always perilous to the good. The Samaritans were “the adversaries of the” Jews, and their proposal was a dangerous one to the Jews. And the alliances we have spoken of place the best interests of the godly in

jeopardy. In such business partnerships the good man's high standard of morality and business principle is in sore danger of a sad reduction. In social and matrimonial relationships of this mixed moral character there is great danger that the delicate bloom of piety will be soon swept away, that zeal for truth and for God will grow cold, that habits of devotion will gradually fail, and thus the very life of the soul will be gravely imperilled. And if the wicked be admitted into religious alliances and enterprises, such enterprises will run imminent risk of being first degraded and then defeated. (b).

IV. That the proposals of the wicked for alliance with the good should always be firmly rejected. The leaders of the Jews are an example to us in this respect. "Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God," &c. When the difference of character is essential and radical, there should be no hesitation as to the treatment of such proposals. Occasional association between the unmistakably good and the unmistakably wicked is sometimes justifiable and necessary; as in business transactions and in the efforts of the good to benefit the wicked. "I pray not," said Christ, "that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil." (c). But the first suggestion of intimate association or close alliance between them, however plausibly presented and enforced, should be at once and decisively checked by the good. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14-18). Resist temptation promptly and firmly. (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Satan never plays a bold game. He wins by not showing his worst at first, by concealing his tricks, transformed into an angel of light. It takes a great deal of effort to put us thoroughly on our guard against his wiles; but when it is done, it is worth the pains.

Tempting men imitate their great leader and prototype. They never go directly and openly to their object. If they would bend you from your integrity, they will flatter your self-respect by holding out to you a moral inducement. If they would corrupt your purity, they insinuate the poison through some appeal to your better affections. If they would weaken the holy restraints that gird in, with their blessed zone, the innocence of childhood, they will urge some sly argument to an honourable pride, or else to a friendly sympathy, or else to a praiseworthy love of independence; and the first battery that has been plied against many a boy's virtue has been the cunning caution that bade him not be afraid of his elders. They may say, as Milton makes the Archfiend say, sitting like a cormorant on a tree that overlooked the sinless Eden and the yet innocent inmates, deceiving even his own black heart—

"Should I at your harmless innocence
Melt, as I do, yet public reason just,
Honour and empire, with revenge enlarged
By conquering this new world, compels me
now
To do what else, though damned, I should
abhor."

Theologians can cover their sectarian misrepresentations with the plea of "zeal for the cause," and controversialists baptize their bigotry with language of Holy Writ wrested from its meaning.

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose . . .

Oh what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"

Says the Apostle Paul, "If Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."—F. D. Huntington, D. D.

(b) Man, being a sociable creature, is mightily encouraged to do as others do, especially in an evil example; for we are more susceptible of evil than we are of good. Sicknes is sooner communicated than health; we easily catch a disease of one another, but those that are sound do not communicate health to the diseased. Or rather, to take God's own expression that sets it forth thus,—by touching the unclean the man became unclean under the law, but by touching the clean the man was not purified. The conversation of the wicked has more power to corrupt the good, than the conversation of the virtuous and holy to correct the lewd.—Manton.

(c) All company with unbelievers or misbelievers is not condemned. We find a Lot in Sodom, Israel with the Egyptians, Abraham and Isaac with their Abimelechs; roses among thorns, and pearls in mud; and Jesus Christ among publicans and sinners. So neither we be infected, nor the name of the Lord wronged, to converse with them that we

may convert them is a holy course. But still we must be among them as strangers : to pass through an infected place is one thing, to dwell in it another. The earth is the Lord's, and men are His ; wheresoever God shall find the merchant, let him be sure to find God in every place.—*Thomas Adams.*

(d) Keep the devil at arm's length, and fight him at a distance. Suffer him, in easy security, to draw near, and resistance is over ; the citadel of your soul is won. Nine-tenths of the gross, degrading, damning sins into which people are betrayed, are committed without premeditation, nay, with a clear purpose against them ; but a man or a woman has toyed with temptation—just thus far I can venture, and stop short of foul and fatal sin.

And then, as the poor bird when he sees the bait in the trap, Satan knows he has you fast ; he knows that those encroachments are never staid. The art of godly living in its earlier stages is an art of wise defences, a constant, earnest vigilance at the outworks of the spirit, that they may never be stormed or sapped by the foe. Gradually, as a man grows in grace and godliness, the outer defence may be abandoned. Paul, the aged, could look steadily in the face many a peril which Paul the neophyte would have wisely shunned. But let the young pilgrim of life beware, and if he feels himself in an atmosphere of temptation, let him raise bulwarks of habits and self-denials by which the pestilent foe may be kept as far as may be from the near neighbourhood of the soul.—*J. B. Brown, B.A.*

THE TRUE BUILDERS OF THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE OF GOD.

(Verse 3.)

The chiefs of the Jewish community here affirm that the building of the Temple at Jerusalem was their work, that the Samaritans had no proper part in it ; and that, therefore, they would do the work themselves, without the proffered aid of the Samaritans. This position, which they took up and maintained, suggests that *the true spiritual Israelites are the only authorised and legitimate builders of the spiritual Temple of God, or that Christian work should be done only by Christians.* This position may be supported by the following reasons :—

I. They alone will build on the true foundation. “Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation : he that believeth shall not make haste.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He is the only foundation of a true character ; the only corner-stone of a true church. Neither theological creeds or systems, nor ecclesiastical politics, nor even divinely instituted sacraments, nor schemes of social improvement, nor the unreliable excellences and fancied merits of individuals—none of these, nor all of them combined, can be the true foundation of the spiritual Temple of God. Christ is the only true and sure foundation. And the true Christian, who is both a stone in the edifice and also a builder of the

edifice, is himself built upon Christ and builds others upon Him. He who is not himself a true Christian will suggest some other foundation, &c. (a).

II. They alone will build with the true materials. The spiritual temple is to be built of living and Christly souls. “Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood.” The Christian Church should be composed of Christian persons, and only of them. The great spiritual dwelling-place of God must be constructed of spiritual persons. The carnally-minded, the worldly-minded, the ungodly, have no true place in it. The Christian builder will seek to build the edifice of true materials ; he will “build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones.” Those who are not themselves true Christians would build of “wood, hay, stubble ;” they would put into the edifice unsuitable materials, &c. (b).

III. They alone will build in accordance with the true plan. The design of the Church is Divine. They who labour in the erection of the spiritual temple are not to carry out their own ideas, but to fulfil the plan of God. The Lord Jesus is the great Master Builder : He also superintends the work. The business of the workmen is to carry out His directions. Here are some glimpses of the Divine design for this temple. “In whom all the build

ing fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." "A glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Only the members of the true spiritual Israel will keep the Divine plan in view, and faithfully build in accordance with it.

IV. They alone will build with the true aim. What is the great end of the spiritual temple which is being built amongst men? The glory of God. For this end the Jews rebuilt their Temple. This is the end of the great redemptive work of our Lord and Saviour, and of the Holy Spirit, and of all Christian agencies. "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." "Ye are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The final cause of this spiritual temple is that God shall be manifest in it everywhere, realised everywhere, obeyed everywhere, adored everywhere. Only the godly will faithfully labour for this end. The ungodly, like the Samaritans, will be moved by political or other inferior considerations, and will aim at some selfish end.

V. They alone will build in the true spirit. The true spirit for Christian work is that of—

1. *Obedience*, as opposed to self-will.
2. *Humility*, as opposed to haughtiness and self-conceit.
3. *Patience* in dealing with difficulties and disappointments, as opposed to petulance.
4. *Trust in God*, as opposed to self-confidence.
5. *Self-consecration*, as opposed to self-seeking. This is the true spirit for the builders of the spiritual Temple of our God; and this spirit belongs only to the true people of God. The first and chief condition of doing good to others is being good ourselves. To accomplish successful Christian work we must live sincere Christian lives. And so our

subject brings us to the cross and to the Saviour, to the atonement and the example of the Lord Jesus. Fitness for holy work begins by trusting in Him, and is maintained by imitating Him. (c).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Christ is often called the foundation; the stone; the corner-stone on which the Church is reared (Isa. xxviii. 16; Matt. xxi. 42; Acts iv. 11; Eph. ii. 20; 2 Tim. ii. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 6). The meaning is, that no true church can be reared which does not embrace and hold the true doctrines respecting Him—those which pertain to His incarnation, His Divine nature, His instructions, His example, His atonement, His resurrection, and His ascension. The reason why no true church can be established without embracing the truth as it is in Christ, is, that it is by Him only that men can be saved; and where *this* doctrine is wanting, all is wanting that enters into the essential idea of a church. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion must be embraced, or a church cannot exist; and where those doctrines are denied, no association of men can be recognised as a Church of God. Nor can the foundation be modified or shaped so as to suit the wishes of men. It must be laid as it is in the Scriptures; and the superstructure must be reared on that alone.—*Albert Barnes, D.D.*

(b) By going to the lowest stratum of human nature, Christ gave a new idea of the value of man. He built a kingdom out of the refuse of society. To compare small things with great, it has been pointed out by Lord Macaulay that in an English cathedral there is an exquisite stained window which was made by an apprentice out of the pieces of glass which had been rejected by his master, and it was so far superior to every other in the church, that, according to tradition, the envious artist killed himself with vexation. All the builders of society had rejected the "sinners," and made the painted window of the "righteous." A new Builder came; His plan was original, startling, revolutionary; His eye was upon the contemned material; He made the first last, and the last first; and the stone which the builders rejected He made the head stone of the corner.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(c) The true philosophy or method of doing good is, first of all and principally, to be good—to have a character that will of itself communicate good. There must and will be active effort where there is goodness of principle; but the latter we should hold to be the principal thing, the root and life of all. Whether it is a mistake more sad or more ridiculous, to make mere stir synonymous with doing good, we need not inquire; enough, to be sure that one who has taken up such a notion of doing good is for that reason a nuisance to the church. The Christian is called a light, not lightning.

In order to act with effect on others, he must walk in the Spirit, and thus become the image of goodness; he must be so akin to God, and so filled with His dispositions, that he shall seem to surround himself with a hallowed atmosphere. It is folly to endeavour to make ourselves shine before we are luminous. If the sun without his beams should talk to the planets, and argue with them till the final day, it would not make them shine; there must be light in the sun itself, and then they will shine, of course. And this, my brethren, is what God intends for you all. It is the great idea

of His Gospel, and the work of His Spirit, to make you lights in the world. His greatest joy is to give you character, to beautify your example, to exalt your principles, and make you each the depository of His own Almighty grace. But in order to this, something is necessary on your part—a full surrender of your mind to duty and to God, and a perpetual desire of His spiritual intimacy; having this, having a participation thus of the goodness of God, you will as naturally communicate good as the sun communicates his beams.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

THE HOSTILITY OF THE SAMARITANS TO THE JEWS.

(Verses 4, 5, and 24.)

The advances of the Samaritans having been firmly declined by the Jews, they resorted to opposition, and endeavoured to thwart them in their great work. Notice:

I. The tactics of the wicked. Having failed to accomplish their selfish purposes by the proposal to co-operate in the work, “the people of the land” at once proceeded to hinder the work. If the Jews would not accept their proffered assistance, they were resolved that they should experience their hostility. The Jews had said that they would do the work alone, whereupon the Samaritans determined that they should not do it at all. They “weakened the hands of the people of Judah,” *i.e.*, they discouraged and intimidated them as regards their great work. The wicked are, alas! fertile in resources for the accomplishment of their evil designs. Their methods are often manifold and crafty. If they cannot bend the good to their wishes and aims by plausible pretences, they alter their tactics and betake themselves to unscrupulous opposition in various forms.

II. The venality of the wicked. The Samaritans “hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose.” M. Henry suggests that these counsellors, “pretending to advise them for the best, should dissuade them from proceeding, and so ‘frustrate their purpose,’ or dissuade the men of Tyre and Sidon from furnishing them with the timber they had bargained for (chap. iii. 7); or whatever business they had at the Persian court, to solicit for any particular grants

or favours, pursuant to the general edict for their liberty, there were those that were hired and lay ready to appear of counsel against them.” Or, as Schultz suggests, they were hired to get the edict of Cyrus cancelled by influencing “the ministers to whom chap. vii. 28 and viii. 25 refer, or other influential persons, to give advice to Cyrus unfavourable to the Jews. At court they naturally did not understand how it could be that those who were as much the inhabitants of the land as the returned exiles, and therefore seemed entitled to the God of the land, should be excluded. If Cyrus had seen in Jehovah his own supreme God, it must have been all the more annoying to him that those who apparently had the best intentions of worshipping Him should be rejected. It would seem as if the reason why the Jews opposed the union could only be a national and political one, and the suspicion was quite natural, that they already designed to form not merely a religious community, but also had national and political designs, that they thus gave an entirely false interpretation to the decree of Cyrus.” But, however these counsellors proceeded in their work, it is reasonable to infer that they were men of some skill and resource and power of persuasion, and they deliberately exercised their abilities in an evil cause for gain. In them the voice of conscience was overwhelmed by the cravings of cupidity. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Acts we have two illustrations of this venality. The learning and eloquence of Tertullus, a Roman

barrister, were employed to promote the cause of tyranny, injustice, and falsehood, and to persecute a true and holy man. And Felix the governor refrains, for the space of two years, from doing what he is convinced is his duty in releasing St. Paul from his imprisonment, in the hope of receiving bribes to do so. It is inexpressibly mournful to see men prostituting their genius, or learning, or wisdom, or eloquence, or power for money. Yet how numerous are the forms and instances of it in our own day, *e.g.*, men write fictions and songs which minister to men's lower nature at the expense of their higher nature, &c. (a).

III. The temporary triumph of the wicked. The Samaritans succeeded in discouraging the Jews, harassing them in their work, and finally putting a stop to their work. They frustrated "their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. . . . Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of Darius king of Persia." For the space of fourteen years the building of the Temple was arrested, *viz.*, for five years of the reign of Cyrus, seven and a half of Cambyses, seven months of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and one year of Darius. The wicked have often succeeded in hindering the progress of the cause of God. St. Paul was hindered by Satan, once and again, from the execution of his purposes (1 Thess. ii. 18). Persecution too has frequently obstructed sadly the work of God, and inflicted grievous trials and sufferings upon His people.

IV. The freedom allowed by God to the wicked. He allowed the Samaritans to resist His purposes, to persecute His people, to arrest the building of His Temple for fourteen years. And still He allows the atheist to deny His existence, the blasphemer to blaspheme His name, and the wicked to "do evil with both hands earnestly." He will not invade the moral freedom with which He Himself has dowered us. And "sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed." His forbearance, even with

the most pernicious and provoking sinners, is very great. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." But let no one presume upon the Divine patience. "Thinkest thou, O man, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering?" &c. (Rom. ii. 4-11). (b). And in the end the Temple of God shall be built, and His purposes fully and splendidly accomplished. The triumph of the wicked is only temporary. God will frustrate their deepest designs, and overrule them for the fulfilment of His own. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." Let us learn, before leaving this section of the narrative, that the most dangerous enemies of the Church of God are hypocritical adherents to it. Half-hearted, inconsistent, ungodly professors of religion are, in their influence, the worst obstructions to the progress of the kingdom of God.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Gold is the only power which receives universal homage. It is worshipped in all lands without a single temple, and by all classes without a single hypocrite; and often has it been able to boast of having armies for its priesthood, and hecatombs of human victims for its sacrifices. Where war has slain its thousands, gain has slaughtered its millions; for while the former operates only with the local and fitful terrors of an earthquake, the destructive influence of the latter is universal and unceasing. Indeed war itself—what has it often been but the art of gain practised on the largest scale? the covetousness of a nation resolved on gain, impatient of delay, and leading on its subjects to deeds of rapine and blood? Its history is the history of slavery and oppression in all ages. For centuries, Africa—one quarter of the globe—has been set apart to supply the monster with victims—thousands at a meal. And, at this moment, what a populous and gigantic empire can it boast! the mine, with its unnatural drudgery; the manufactory, with its swarms of squalid misery; the plantation, with its imbruted gangs; and the market and the exchange, with their furrowed and careworn countenances,—these are only specimens of its more menial offices and subjects. Titles and honours are among its rewards, and thrones are at its disposal. Among its counsellors are kings, and many of the great and mighty of the earth

are enrolled among its subjects. Where are the waters not ploughed by its navies? What imperial element is not yoked to its car? Philosophy itself has become a mercenary in its pay; and science, a votary at its shrine, brings all its noblest discoveries, as offerings, to its feet. What part of the globe's surface is not rapidly yielding up its last stores of hidden treasure to the spirit of gain? or retains more than a few miles of unexplored and unvanquished territory? Scorning the childish dream of the philosopher's stone, it aspires to turn the globe itself into gold.—*John Harris, D.D.*

(b) The patience of God informs us of the reason why He lets the enemies of His Church oppress it, and defers His promise of the deliverance of it. If He did punish them presently, His holiness and justice would be glorified, but His power over Himself in His patience would be obscured. Well may the Church be content to have a perfection of God glorified, that is not like to receive any honour in another world by any exercise of itself. If it were not for His patience, He were incapable to be the Governor of a sinful world; He might, without it, be the Governor of an innocent world, but not of a criminal one; He would be the destroyer of the world, but not the orderer and disposer of the extravagancies and sinfulness of the world. The interest of His wisdom, in drawing good out of evil, would not be served if He were not clothed with this perfection as well as with others. If He did presently destroy the enemies of His Church upon the first oppression, His wisdom in contriving, and His power in accomplishing deliverance against the united powers of hell and

earth, would not be visible, no, nor that power in preserving His people unconsumed in the furnace of affliction. He had not got so great a name in the rescue of His Israel from Pharaoh, had He thundered the tyrant into destruction upon His first edict against the innocent. If He were not patient to the most violent of men, He might seem to be cruel. But when He offers peace to them under their rebellions, waits that they may be members of His Church, rather than enemies to it, He frees Himself from any such imputation, even in the judgment of those that shall feel most of His wrath; it is this renders the equity of His justice unquestionable, and the deliverance of His people righteous in the judgment of those from whose fetters they are delivered. Christ reigns in the midst of His enemies, to show His power over Himself as well as over the heads of His enemies, to show His power over His rebels. And though He retards His promise, and suffers a great interval of time between the publication and performance, sometimes years, sometimes ages to pass away, and little appearance of any preparation to show Himself a God of truth; it is not that He hath forgotten His word, or repents that ever He passed it, or sleeps in a supine neglect of it: but that men might not perish, but bethink themselves, and come as friends into His bosom, rather than be crushed as enemies under His feet (2 Pet. iii. 9): "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Hereby He shows that He would be rather pleased with the conversion than the destruction of men.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

THE ANTAGONISM OF THE WORLD TO THE CHURCH.

(Verses 6–16.)

In these verses we have a further account of the hostility of the Samaritans to the Jews in their great work. Homiletically we may view it as an illustration of *The antagonism of the world to the Church*. This antagonism as it is here illustrated is—

I. Persistent. The opposition to the Jews was carried on during a considerable portion of the reign of Cyrus, the whole of the reigns of Cambyses and of the Pseudo-Smerdis; and it was continued by means of letters of accusation in the reigns of Ahasuerus (ver. 6) and of Artaxerxes (ver. 7). Terrible is the persistence of the world in its hostility to the Church of God. In different forms it is continued age after age; and at present we can discover no signs of its cessation. The spirit of worldliness

is as hostile now to the spirit of decided piety as ever it was. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." "If the world hate you," said our Lord, "ye know that it hated Me before it hated you," &c. (John xv. 18–21). (a).

II. Authoritative. This letter was written and sent to Artaxerxes by two high officers of the Persian monarch. It seems to have been devised by Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and their associates, and to have been written by Rehum the Persian governor in Samaria, and Shimshai the royal scribe in the same province. The letter of accusation had all the weight which the authority of these distinguished officers could impart to it. The spirit of secular governments has often been inimical to the spirit of true godliness,

and their action hostile to the principles of truth and righteousness. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His" Church.

III. Combined. All the colonies of the Samaritans concurred in the statements and in the sending of this letter. "Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions: the Dinaites," &c. (vers. 9, 10). "They followed the cry, though ignorant of the merits of the cause." The popularity of a movement is no proof of its truth or righteousness. Numbers are not a reliable guarantee of the wisdom and worthiness of a cause. Majorities have very frequently been on the side of falsehood, injustice, and folly. Mark what a combination there was against the Lord and Saviour. "Against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together." There is combination in hell.

"Devil with devil damned firm concord holds."

IV. Unscrupulous. This is very manifest in the gross exaggerations of this letter. Notice two or three of them. "Jerusalem . . . the rebellious and the bad city." A most unjust description of its character. "If this city be builded and the walls set up, they will not pay toll," &c. (ver. 13). An unwarranted and slanderous assertion, for these Jews had never given any cause why their loyalty to the Persian monarchs should be suspected. "If this city be builded, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river." An extremely absurd exaggeration. One would suppose that the authors of it must have known it to be a gross misrepresentation. The chief assertions of the letter were unscrupulous and base calumnies. The enemies of the Church of God have never been particular as to the weapons they should use against it. Falsehood and cruelty, fines and imprisonment, bonds and banishment, fire and sword, have all been employed against it.

V. Plausible. This letter to Artaxerxes reveals the craft and plausibility of the Samaritans—

1. *In their profession of loyalty to the king.* "Thy servants" (ver. 11) . . . "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour," &c. (ver. 14).

2. *In their presentation of proof of their assertions.* They suggest "that search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers," &c. (ver. 15). The remarks of M. Henry on this verse are admirable: "It cannot be denied but that there was some colour given for this suggestion by the attempts of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah to shake off the yoke of the King of Babylon, which, if they had kept close to their religion and the Temple they were now rebuilding, they would never have come under. But it must be remembered—(1.) That they were themselves, and their ancestors, sovereign princes, and their efforts to recover their rights, if there had not been in them the violation of an oath, for aught I know, would have been justifiable, and successful too, had they taken the right method and made their peace with God first. (2.) Though these Jews, and their princes, had been guilty of rebellion, yet it was unjust therefore to fasten this as an indelible brand upon this city, as if that must for ever after go under the name of 'the rebellious and bad city.' The Jews, in their captivity, had given such specimens of good behaviour as were sufficient, with any reasonable men, to roll away that one reproach; for they were instructed (and we have reason to hope that they observed their instructions), to 'seek the peace of the city where they were captives, and pray to the Lord for it' (Jer. xxix. 7). It was, therefore, very unfair, though not uncommon, thus to impute the iniquity of the fathers to the children." But it was craftily conceived and executed; and, for a time, it answered the purpose of its authors. The Church now has to contend against, not only the strength but also the subtlety of its foes; not only against the "roaring lion," but also against the "old

serpent." "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." And the blandishments of the world are more perilous to the Church than its threats. Christians need to be "wise as serpents," watchful as trusty sentinels, and prayerful as devoutest saints.

Yet greater is He that is in us and for us, than all our foes, with all their might, and malice, and cunning. "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (b).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) From the fiery days of the stakes of Smithfield even until now, the world's black heart has hated the Church; and the world's cruel hand and laughing lip have been for ever against us. The host of the mighty are pursuing us, and are thirsty for our blood, and anxious to cut us off from the earth. Such is our position unto this hour, and such must it be, until we are landed on the other side of

Jordan, and until our Maker comes to reign on the earth.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) As for the trouble thou puttest thyself to concerning the cause and Church of Christ, which thou mayest see at any time distressed by the enemy, though God takes thy goodwill to them (from which those thy fears arise) very kindly, yet there is no need of tormenting thyself with that which is sure never to come to pass. The ark may shake, but it cannot fall. The ship of the Church may be tossed, but it cannot sink, for Christ is in it, and will awake time enough to prevent its wreck. There is, therefore, no cause for us, when the storm beateth hardest upon it, to disturb Him, as once the disciples did, with the shrieks and outcries of our unbelief, as if all were lost. Our faith is more in danger of sinking at such a time than the cause and Church of Christ are. They are both by the promise set out of the reach of men and devils. The Gospel is an "everlasting Gospel." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one iota of this shall perish." "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever," and shall be alive to walk over all its enemies' graves, yea to see the funeral of the whole world.—*W. Gurnall.*

GOOD CAUSE FOR GREAT ZEAL.

(Verse 14.)

The facts of the case were these. . . . Now let me take these words right out of those black mouths, and put them into my own and into yours. They will suit us well if we turn them to the great King of kings. We may truly say, "Now because we have maintenance from the King's palace," &c. The text will enable me to speak on three points.

I. We acknowledge a very gracious fact. "We have maintenance from the king's palace." Both the upper and the nether springs from which we drink are fed by the eternal bounty of the great King. Hitherto we have been supplied with food and raiment. Although we do not drink of the water from the rock, or find the manna lying at our tent door every morning, yet the providence of God produces for us quite the same results, and we have been fed and satisfied; and, at any rate, many of us, in looking back, can say, "My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." Hence, we have thus, even in things temporal, been made to feel that we have been maintained from the King's

palace. But it has been in spiritual things that our continual experience of the King's bounty has been most notable. We have a new life, and therefore we have new wants, and new hunger, and a new thirst; and God has maintained us out of His own palace as to this new life of ours. We have had great hunger at times after heavenly things, but He has "satisfied our mouth with good things," and our youth has been "renewed like the eagle's." Sometimes we have been drawn aside from our steadfastness, and we have wanted mighty grace to set us on our feet again, and to make us once more "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might;" and we have had it, have we not? In looking back upon all the way wherein the Lord our God has led us, we can sing of the beginning of it, we can sing of the middle of it, and we believe we shall sing of the end of it; for all through we have been maintained out of the King's palace. This is matter of fact both as to things temporal and things spiritual. Beloved, it is a great mercy that you

and I have been maintained out of the King's palace as believers; because, where else could we have been maintained? As to spiritual things, to whom could we go but unto Him who has been so good to us? What empty wells ministers are if we look to them! If we look to their Master, then "the rain also filleth the pools," and we find that there is supply in the preached word for our consolation. And the books you once read with so much comfort appear to have lost their flavour, their aroma, and their sweet savour, and, I may add, even the Word of God itself, though it is unchanged, appears to be changed sometimes to you. But God, your God, oh, how graciously has He still supplied you! "All my springs are in Thee," my God; and had they been elsewhere they long ago had failed.

We may remember that our maintenance from the King's palace has cost His Majesty dear. He has not fed us for nothing. It cost Him His own dear Son at the very first. We should not have begun to live if He had spared His Son and kept Him back from us; but the choicest treasure in heaven He was pleased to spend for our sakes that we might live; and ever since then we have been fed upon Jesus Christ Himself. Let us bless and magnify our bounteous God, whose infinite favour has thus supplied our wants. Think over the kind of maintenance you have had from the King's palace. We have had a *bountiful supply*. As the sun throws out his wealth of heat and light, and does not measure it by the consumption of men, but throws it broadcast over all worlds, even so does God flood the world with the sunlight of His goodness, and His saints are made to receive it in abundance. Our receptive faculty may be small, but His giving disposition is abundant. We have had an *unfailing portion*. As there has been much of it, so it has always come to us in due season. Times of need have come, but the needed supply has come too. The supply *has ennobled us*. For, consider how great a thing it is to be supported from a king's palace; but it is the greatest of all privileges

to be living upon the bounty of the King of kings. "Such honour have all the saints." Even those that are weakest and meanest have this high honour—to be supplied by Royalty itself with all that they need. And there is *reason for good cheer in this*, that we have such a soul-satisfying portion in God. A soul that gets what God gives him has quite as much as he can hold and as much as he can want. He has got a portion that might well excite envy. . . . Let us rejoice, &c.

II. Here is a duty recognised. "It was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour." The reasoning comes home to us. If we are so favoured—we, who are believers—with such a choice portion, it is not meet for us to sit down and see our God dishonoured. By every sense of propriety we are bound not to see God *dishonoured by ourselves*. It is well to begin at home. Art thou doing anything that dishonours thy God, professor—anything at home, anything in thy daily avocation, anything in the way of conducting thy business? Is there anything in thy conversation, anything in thy actions, anything in thy reading, anything in thy writing, anything in thy speaking, that dishonours God? Seeing that thou art fed from the King's table, I beseech thee let it not be said that the King got damage from thee. Perhaps that dishonour may come from *those who dwell under our roof*, and live in our own house. I charge you that are parents and masters to see to this. Do not tolerate anything in those over whom you have control that would bring dishonour to God. We cannot impart to our children new hearts, but we can see to it that there shall be nothing within our gates that is derogatory to the religion of Jesus Christ.

Let the same holy jealousy animate us among *those with whom we have influence*—as, for instance, amongst those who wish to be united with us in Church fellowship. It is the duty of every Church to try, as far as it can, to guard the honour and dignity of King Jesus against unworthy persons, who would intrude themselves into the congregation of the saints, of those who are called,

and chosen, and faithful. To receive into our membership persons of unhal- lowed life, unchaste, unrighteous—of licentious life and lax doctrine, such as know not the truth as it is in Jesus— would be to betray the trust with which Christ has invested us.

Under what sacred obligations do we stand to *maintain the statutes and testi- monies of the Lord!* And, oh, how the King is dishonoured by the mutilation and misrepresentation of His Word! Therefore we are always bound to bear our protest against false doctrine. Those who have their maintenance from the King's palace ought not to allow the Lord to be dishonoured by a *neglect of His ordinances*. The Lord Jesus has given you only two symbolic ordinances. Take care that you use them well. Again, let us take care that He be not dishonoured by a *general decline of His Church*. When churches go to sleep— when the work of God is done deceit- fully—for to do it formally is to do it deceitfully; when there is no life in the prayer-meeting, when there are no holy enterprises afloat for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, then the world says, "That is your Church! What a sleepy set these saints are!" Oh! let not the King be thus dishonoured. And, oh, how can we tolerate it that so many should dishonour Christ *by reject- ing His Gospel!* We cannot prevent their doing so, but we can weep for them; we can pray for them, we can plead for them, we can make it uncom- fortable for them to reflect that believers are loving them, and yet they are not loving the Saviour. Privileged as you are, you ought to love your Master, so that the slightest word against Him should provoke your spirit to holy jealousy.

III. A course of action pursued. "Therefore have we sent and certified the king." How shall we do that?

Doubtless we act as it well becomes us, when we go and tell the Lord all about it? "Certified the King!"—but does He not know? Are not all things open to Him from whom no secrets are hid? Ah, yes; but when Hezekiah received Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter he took it and spread it before the Lord. It is a holy exercise of the saints to report to the Lord the sins and the sorrows they observe among the people—the griefs they feel, and the grievances they complain of—to spread before Him the blasphemies they have heard, and appeal to Him concerning the menaces with which they are threatened. After those people had certified the king, they took care to plead with him. Plead with God! That praying is poor shift that is not made up of pleading. And when you have done it, do not go away and make your prayers into a lie by contrary actions, or by refraining from any action at all. He that prays hard must work hard; for no man prays sincerely who is not prepared to use every effort to obtain that which he asks of God. We must put our shoulder to the wheel while we pray for strength to put it in motion. All success depends upon God; yet He uses instruments, and He will not use instruments that are useless and unfitted to the work. Therefore let us be up and be stirring, for if we are maintained from the King's palace, it is not meet that we see the King's dis- honour, but it is due to Him that we should seek His glory. Alas! there are some here that have never eaten the King's bread, and will be banished from the King's presence if they die as they are. But, oh remember, the King is always ready to receive His rebel subjects, and He is a God ready to pardon. "Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little." "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

THE SUCCESS OF THE SUBTLE SCHEME OF THE SAMARITANS, OR THE
TEMPORARY TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED.

(Verses 17-23.)

I. Examine the letter of the king. "Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum," &c. (vers. 17-22). This letter suggests—

1. *That the subtlety of the wicked frequently obtains a temporary triumph over the good.* We have already noticed that the letter of the Samaritans to the king was very plausible. And that it completely succeeded is clear from the reply of the king to it. (1.) The search in the archives of the nation which they recommended (ver. 15) was made. "I commanded, and search hath been made" (ver. 19). (2.) The result which they predicted (ver. 15) followed the search. "And it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein." The Jews had formerly rebelled against foreign powers by whom they had been subjected. Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria" (2 Kings xviii. 7). Jehoiakim rebelled against the king of Babylon (2 Kings xxiv. 1). Zedekiah also "rebelled against the king of Babylon" (2 Kings xxiv. 20). (3.) The warnings which they gave (vers. 13, 16) were heeded. As a result of the examination of the records of the kingdom, the king discovered that "there had been mighty kings over Jerusalem, which had ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom had been paid unto them;" and so the warnings of the Samaritans seemed to him reasonable and timely, and he acted upon them, inquiring, "Why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" (4.) The end which they aimed at was attained. Their object was to obtain authority to put a stop to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. And the king writes, "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this." The misrepresentations of the

Samaritans had sufficient truth in them to completely mislead Artaxerxes the king and to accomplish their evil design. "Falsehood," says Colton, "is never so successful as when she baits her hook with truth; and no opinions so fatally mislead us as those that are not wholly wrong, as no watches so effectually deceive the wearers as those that are sometimes right."

"A lie which is half a truth
Is ever the worst of lies."

2. *That one generation frequently suffers through the sins of another and an earlier one.* The Jews of this time were suspected of disloyalty, and were prevented from carrying on their great work because some of their ancestors had rebelled against the domination of foreign powers. They smarted for the sins of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. The children of the spendthrift, the drunkard, and the impure man generally have to bear the iniquities of their fathers. (Comp. Exod. xx. 5.) This stern fact should prove a restraint from sin. (a).

2. *That the cause of God is frequently reproached and hindered by the evil conduct of some of its adherents.* The rebellions of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were now made use of to asperse the Jews and to stop the work of God. "A few instances of this kind," as Scott observes, "standing on record, whilst the blameless lives and patient sufferings of thousands are unnoticed and forgotten, serve through revolving ages as a pretext, by which malignant enmity misleads worldly policy. All who love the Gospel should therefore walk circumspectly; avoiding all appearance of evil, especially in this particular, lest the Church of God and posterity should suffer through their misconduct; for the whole body will be condemned without hearing, if a few individuals act improperly." (b).

II. Notice the action of the Samaritans. "Now when the copy of king

Artaxerxes' letter was read," &c. Their action was—

1. *Prompt.* They allowed no delay whatever, but eagerly carried out the royal mandate. "They went up in haste to Jerusalem," &c.

2. *Personal.* They did not depute others to put a stop to the work of the Jews: their interest was too deep and zealous for that. They themselves "went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews."

3. *Powerful.* They "made them to cease by force and power." They compelled the Jews by a display of force, which they probably took with them, to desist from building the city. Thus the plotters prevailed; the enemies were triumphant, and the progress of the good work was arrested. The tact and energy and zeal of the Samaritans were worthy of a good cause, and they were rewarded with success.

LEARN :

1. *That the temporary triumph of a cause or a party is not a proof of its righteousness.* When Jesus Christ was crucified, dead and buried, the enemies of truth and light and God appeared to be completely victorious. (c).

2. *That we are not competent to judge the relation of present events to the purposes and providence of the great God.* These require time for their development, &c. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) This is a truth evident by universal experience. It is seen every day, in every part of the world. If Mr. Paine indulge in intemperance, and leave children behind him, they may feel the consequences of his misconduct when he is in the grave. The sins of the fathers may thus be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. It would, however, be their affliction only, and not their punishment. Yet such visitations are wisely ordered as a motive to sobriety.—*Andrew Fuller.*

The child generally inherits the natural constitution, the mental peculiarities, and sometimes even the moral character of his parent.

His secular condition, too, rich or poor, is frequently determined by his parents. Some inherit a princely fortune, and some a crushing penury, from their ancestors. And their social status, too, is often ruled by the position and conduct of those of whom they were born. Children participate in the shame or the glory connected with the memory of their parents. The brilliant reflection of an illustrious sire seems to lead his offspring to social honour, and to shed a radiance on his name. On the other hand, the infamy which parents by theft, treason, or murder, have gained for themselves, transmits its odious influence down to their children, depreciating their own personal worth, and degrading them in the estimation of their contemporaries.—*David Thomas, D.D.*

(b) Was there ever a club in all the world without disreputable persons in it? Was there ever any association of men that might not be condemned, if the fool's rule was followed of condemning the wheat because of the chaff? When with all our might and power we purge ourselves of deceivers as soon as we detect them, what more can we do? If our rule and practice is to separate them wholly as soon as we unmask them, what more can virtue itself desire? I ask any man, however much he may hate Christianity, what more can the Church do than watch her members with all diligence, and excommunicate the wicked when discovered? It is a foul piece of meanness on the part of the world that they should allege the faults of a few false professors against the whole Church: it is a piece of miserable meanness of which the world ought to be ashamed. Nevertheless, so it is. "Ha! ha!" they say, "So would we have it! so would we have it!" The daughter of Philistia rejoices, and the uncircumcised triumphs when Jesus is betrayed by His friend, and sold by His traitorous disciple. O deceitful professor, will not the Lord be avenged upon you for this? Is it nothing to make Jesus' name the drunkard's song? Nothing to make the enemy blaspheme? O hardened man, tremble, for this shall not go unpunished.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(c) If ever failure seemed to rest on a noble life, it was when the Son of Man, deserted by His friends, heard the cry which proclaimed that the Pharisees had successfully drawn the net round their Divine Victim. Yet from that very hour of defeat and death there went forth the world's life—from that very moment of apparent failure there proceeded forth into the ages the spirit of the conquering Cross. Surely if the Cross says anything, it says that apparent defeat is real victory, and that there is a heaven for those who have nobly and truly failed on earth.—*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] i. The work resumed through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets (vers. 1, 2). ii. The workers interrogated by the Persian authorities west of the Euphrates (vers. 3-5). iii. The letter of the Persian authorities to Darius the king concerning the work (vers. 6-17).

Ver. 1. Then] shows the close connection of this with the last verse of the previous chapter. Zechariah, the son of Iddo] He was really the son of Berechiah, and the grandson of Iddo (Zech. i. 1). It is probable, as Dean Perowne suggests, "that Berechiah had died early, and that there was now no intervening link between the grandfather and the grandson. The son, in giving his pedigree, does not omit his father's name; the historian passes it over, as of one who was but little known, or already forgotten." In the name of the God of Israel, even unto them] Rather, "which was upon them," i.e. the name of God was called upon them, indicating that they belonged to Him (comp. Isa. iv. 1; Jer. xv. 16).

Ver. 2. Then rose up Zerubbabel . . . and Jeshua] &c. The exhortations of Haggai were addressed chiefly to these two leaders (Hag. i. 1, ii. 2, 4), and speedily they responded to them. "In the sixth month, in the first day of the month," the prophet delivered his first message to them; and "in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month," the "work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God," was resumed by them and the people (Hag. i. 1, 14, 15). Zechariah did not enter upon his mission until the eighth month, which was two months later than Haggai. And with them the prophets of God] Haggai and Zechariah. Helping them] by exhortation, encouragement, &c.

Ver. 3. Tatnai, governor on this side the river] Tatnai was governor (*pechah*) of the entire country west of the Euphrates, while Zerubbabel was governor (*pechah*) of Judah only, and was therefore subordinate to Tatnai. Shethar-boznai] was probably the royal scribe or secretary. Who hath commanded] &c. In investigating this matter the Persian magistrates only did their duty.

Ver. 4. Then said we unto them] &c. It is almost certain that the text here has been corrupted in some way, and that the genuine reading is, "Then said they unto them," &c. The question was put by the Persian officers to the Jews, as appears from vers. 9, 10.

Ver. 5. And then they returned answer by letter] &c. Schultz: "'And they then brought back a letter,' &c. The letter to be brought back was certainly to come from Darius." Keil: "'And they should then receive a letter,' &c. They (the royal officials) then receive a letter, i.e. obtain a decision."

Ver. 6. The Apharsachites] are probably the same as "the Apharsathchites" (chap. iv. 9). See notes on that verse.

Ver. 7. They sent a letter] or a report, a message. All peace] i.e. "peace in all things, in every respect."

Ver. 8. With great stones] Margin: "Chald., 'stones of rolling.'" So also Fuerst, who explains it as denoting "heaviness, weight. Ezra v. 8, vi. 4, *stone of heaviness, i.e. a heavy, large stone, hewn.*" And timber is laid in the walls] Rawlinson interprets this as the employment of timber as the material of the party walls. Schultz, as indicating "the inlaying of the walls with woodwork artistically finished." Keil: "The placing of wood in the walls refers to building beams into the wall for flooring; for the building was not so far advanced as to make it possible that this should be said of covering the walls with wainscoting."

Ver. 11. We are the servants] &c. The elders of the Jews when asked for their names replied by stating their relationship to "the God of heaven and earth," which implied their obligation to obey Him. Which a great king of Israel builded and set up] Or, "and a great king of Israel built and completed it."

Ver. 12. But after that our fathers] &c. Keil: "For this reason, because our fathers," &c. Similarly Schultz: "On this account, because our fathers," &c. The significance of this verse he expresses thus: "It is true the Temple has been destroyed, but this does not show any weakness in their God, but rather His holiness." Nebuchadnezzar could not have destroyed their Temple, and carried them away into captivity, if God had not first withdrawn His protection from them because of their sins.

Ver. 15. Take these vessels] &c. "The three unconnected imperatives, 'take, go forth, lay down,' comprehend the three acts, to a certain extent, in *one*, thus expressing likewise the zeal of Cyrus, and the zeal that Sheshbazzar was expected to exhibit."—Schultz. Let the house of God be builded in his place] i.e. in its former sacred place.

Ver. 16. And since that time even until now hath it been in building] These words were probably not a part of the answer of the elders of the Jews to Tatnai, but simply his own statement to the king, which he thought was correct. "It was entirely in the interest of the Jews to be silent respecting the fact that Cyrus had allowed an interruption to take place;" and Tatnai and his associates were probably quite ignorant of the fact that the work had been suspended.

Ver. 17. The king's treasure house] This is called, in chap. vi. 1, "the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon." Important documents were preserved in the treasure house attached to the royal residence.

THE GREAT WORK RESUMED.

(Verses 1 and 2.)

The best commentary on these verses is the first chapter of Haggai. In the light of that chapter we propose to interpret them. For fourteen years the rebuilding of the Temple was stayed. We have now to consider the resumption of the work.

Notice :

I. The inciters to the work. "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews," &c.

1. *Want of interest in the work is implied.* The Jews were backward at making a new effort to erect the sacred edifice, and needed stirring up to their duty in the matter. They had been building their own houses, attending to their own affairs, and had become indifferent as to the rebuilding of the house of God. They said, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. i. 2). Had they been zealous in this affair, they would have renewed their efforts when Darius came to the throne. But the spirit of worldliness possessed them, and they deferred this sacred duty until they were sharply summoned to it.

2. *Obligation to perform the work is implied.* The prophets summoned them to the work "in the name of the God of Israel which was upon them." This implies His authority over them, and their obligation to render loyal obedience to Him. In His name Haggai commanded them to resume this work. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; . . . Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house," &c. (Hag. i. 7, 8). The Jews did not deny the obligation. Fourteen years previous they had claimed it as their exclusive privilege. At that time they were forcibly prevented from fulfilling it; and afterwards, in process of time, they grew indifferent as to its fulfilment, and while acknowledging the obligation, they postponed its discharge. By neglecting the performance of duty our sense of its sacredness and im-

perativeness will almost certainly be diminished.

3. *Exhortations to resume the work were given.* "The prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied unto the Jews," &c. The nature of their prophesying we can ascertain by reference to the books which bear their names. In the address of Haggai (Hag. i. 1-11, 13), which led to the resumption of the work, we find—(1.) Earnest remonstrance because of their neglect (ver. 4). (2.) Solemn and repeated summons to reflection, "Consider your ways" (vers. 5, 7). (3.) Interpretation of the Divine dealings with them, showing that God had withheld His blessing because of their neglect (vers. 6, 9-11). (4.) Command to build the Temple (ver. 8). (5.) Encouragement to them to enter upon the work (vers. 8b, 13). Thus the prophet, under the direction of the Most High, endeavoured to arouse them from their sloth, and incite them to interest and effort in the good and great work.

II. The leaders in the work. "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build," &c.

1. *They resumed the work readily.* In less than a month after the summons of Haggai they began the work. On the first day of the sixth month the first prophetic message was delivered to them, and on the twenty-fourth day of the same month actual operations were resumed at the Temple. The readiness of their response is commendable. Delay in the performance of duty is perilous. Promptitude in its discharge is both binding and blessed. (a).

2. *They led the work appropriately.* It was becoming that Zerubbabel the chief prince, the first man in the state, and Jozadak the chief priest, the first man in the Church, should take the lead in such a work. "Those that are in places of dignity and power," as M. Henry observes, "ought with their dignity to put honour upon, and with their power to put life into every good work ;

thus it becomes those that precede, and those that preside, with an exemplary care and zeal to fulfil all righteousness and to go before in a good work."

3. *They led the work influentially.* "All the remnant of the people" followed their example, "and came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." The force of example is proverbially great; but it is especially influential in the case of those who hold the position of leaders amongst men. The example of those who occupy high stations is—(1.) *Most conspicuous.* It is visible with great clearness and to great numbers. (2.) *Most attractive.* To the majority of mankind the example of persons in eminent positions, from the mere fact that they occupy such positions, has an influence which is denied to others however wise and worthy they may be. (b). Great is the responsibility of those who are called to the high places of society. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," &c. (Luke xii. 48).

III. *The helpers in the work.* "And with them were the prophets of God helping them." The nature of the assistance which the prophets rendered in the work may be gathered from the prophecies of Haggai which were delivered after the work was resumed (Hag. ii). They assisted by their—

1. *Exhortations to vigorous prosecution of the work.* "Be strong, O Zerubabel, saith the Lord," &c. (ver. 4).

2. *Assurances of the presence of God with them.* "For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you," &c. (vers. 4, 5). This means more than His mere presence; for He is everywhere present. "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there," &c. (Ps. cxxxix. 7-10). It is an assurance of His gracious and helpful presence—His presence as their covenant God. With the obedient God is ever present for their protection, encouragement, assistance, &c.

3. *Promises of future blessings from God to them.* "The desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this

house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts," &c. (vers. 7-9). What a mighty inspiration there must have been in promises of such blessings as these, uttered by the prophet of God! He who thus encourages the hearts of workers renders them most valuable help in their work. Thus the earnest thinker, and the firm believer in God, may help those who are engaged in more active labours in building the spiritual temple of our Lord.

IV. *The great First Cause of the work.* It was God who inspired and sent forth the prophets, and who excited the spirit of the Jewish leaders and people to resume the work. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." "All holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed" from Him. He is the great Master-Builder of His own Church. "I will build My Church," said our Lord to Peter. All the inspiration and wisdom, the patience and power of the under-builders, come from Him. And to Him be all the praise. (c).

LEARN :—

1. *The insidious nature of the sin of worldliness.* See how gradually and stealthily it came upon the Jews. (d).

2. *The value of faithful ministers.* They both arouse men to duty, and assist them to perform it.

3. *The solemn obligation of men in eminent stations.* Let them, like Zerubabel and Jeshua, be forward in every good work.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Pleasant is it to entertain the picture of ourselves in some future scene, planning wisely, feeling nobly, and executing with the holy triumph of the will; but 'tis a different thing -- not in the green avenues of the future, but in the hot dust of the present moment—not in the dramatic positions of the fancy, but in the plain prosaic now—to do the duty that waits and wants us, and put forth an instant and reverential hand to the noonday or evening task.—*James Martineau.*

(b) As we give them (kings) all advantages of honour, so do we soothe and authorise all their vices and defects, not only by approbation, but by imitation also. Every one of Alexander's followers carried their heads on one side, as he did, and the flatterers of Dionysius ran against one another in his presence, stumbled at, and overturned whatever was under foot, to show that they were as purblind as he. Natural imperfection has sometimes also served to recommend a man to favour. I have seen deafness affected; and because the master hated his wife, Plutarch has seen his courtiers repudiate theirs, whom they loved; and, which is yet more, uncleanness and all manner of dissoluteness has been in fashion; as also disloyalty, blasphemies, cruelty, heresy, superstition, irreligion, effeminacy, and worse, if worse there be. And by an example yet more dangerous than that of Mithridates' flatterers, who, by how much their master pretended to the honour of a good physician, came to him to have incision and cauteries made in their limbs; for these others suffered the soul, a more delicate and noble part, to be cauterised. But to end where I began: the Emperor Adrian, disputing with the philosopher Favorinus about the interpretation of some word, Favorinus soon yielded him the victory; for which his friends rebuking him, "You talk simply," said he, "would you not have him wiser than I, who commands thirty legions?"—*Montaigne*.

(c) The scribe is more properly said to write than the pen, and he that maketh and keepeth the clock is more properly said to make it go and strike than the wheels and poises that hang upon it, and every workman to effect his work rather than the tools which he uses as his instruments. So the Lord, who is the chief Agent and Mover in all actions, may more fitly be said to bring to pass all things which are done in the earth than any subordinate causes, as meat to nourish us, clothes to keep us warm, the sun to lighten us, friends to provide for us, &c., seeing they are but His instruments.—*Downame*.

Day and night the tides are rising along our shores, filling bay and estuary, silently for the most part, yet surely. The power that draws them resides afar off in the heavenly bodies, and is not seen or noticed, but only inferred. All the goodness of men, their generous impulses, their loves and faiths and inspirations of purity, their zeal and enthusiasm in self-denial and devotion—that great moving tide of goodness which is moving in upon the human heart—is derived from God, who, afar off, silent as the moon in summer nights, is drawing all men unto Him.—*H. W. Beecher*.

(d) Nearly all can recall that favourite fiction of their childhood—the voyage of Sinbad the Sailor into the Indian Sea. They will remember that magnetic rock that rose from the surface of the placid waters. Silently Sinbad's vessel was attracted towards it; silently the bolts were drawn out of the ship's side, one by one, through the subtle attraction of that magnetic rock. And when the fated vessel drew so near that every bolt and clamp were unloosed, the whole structure of bulwark, masts, and spars tumbled into ruin on the sea, and the sleeping sailors awoke to their drowning agonies. So stands the magnetic rock of *worldliness* athwart the Christian's path. Its attraction is subtle, silent, slow; but fearfully powerful on every soul that floats within its range. Under its enchanting spell, bolt after bolt of good resolution, clamp after clamp of Christian obligation, are steadily drawn out. What matters it how long, or how fair has been the man's profession of religion, or how flauntingly the flag of his orthodoxy floats from the mast head? Let sudden temptation smite the unbolted professor, and in an hour he is a wreck. He cannot hold together in a tempest of trial, he cannot go out on any cruise of Christian service, because he is no longer held together by a Divine *principle* within. It has been silently drawn out of him by that mighty loadstone of attraction—a sinful, godless, self-pampering, Christ-rejecting *world*.—*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*

THE GREAT WORK INVESTIGATED AND CONTINUED.

(Verses 3-5.)

I. The sacred work investigated by the secular authorities. "At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them," &c. (vers. 3, 4).

Notice:

1. *The nature of the investigation.* Two points are inquired into:—(1.) The authority of the builders. "Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?" (2.) The

names of the builders. "Then said they unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?"

2. *The spirit of the investigation.* It is probable that some of the Samaritan enemies of the Jews, prompted by bitter and hostile feelings, communicated with Tatnai and instigated this inquisition. But as regards the inquisition itself there is nothing to complain of; for—(1.) Tatnai had the authority to make the

investigation. He was "governor on this side the river;" all the country west of the Euphrates was subject unto him. The governorship of Zerubbabel, being of Judea only, was subordinate to that of Tatnai, who therefore acted within the limits of his power in making this inquisition. (2.) Tatnai exercised his authority in a commendable manner. He made no vexatious or impertinent inquiries. And he presented an impartial and honest report to Darius the king. Very different was the course which he and his associates pursued from that of Rehum and his associates (chap. iv.). There is nothing in the conduct of the present Persian officials which bears any resemblance to the unscrupulous and bitter hostility which their predecessors displayed to the Jews.

The eye of the world is upon the work of the Church to-day. And while there are some who would wilfully misrepresent and maliciously oppose that work, there are others who regard it fairly, and speak of it with candour and truthfulness. Let the members of the Church see to it that it shall be apparent to all unprejudiced persons that their work tends to promote truth and righteousness, purity and peace, piety and patriotism. (a).

II. The sacred work carried on through the Divine blessing. "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease," &c. These words suggest—

1. *The Divine interest in the work.* "The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews" is an expression denoting His deep concern in the progress of their undertaking. As we attentively observe that in which we are greatly interested, so God regards His Church and the enterprises in which it is engaged.

2. *The Divine oversight of the work.* His eye ever upon the Jewish leaders suggests the accuracy and thoroughness of His knowledge of them and of their great business. In His providence the great God watches over the interests and efforts of His people. (b).

3. *The Divine inspiration of the workers.*

The consciousness that "the eye of their God was upon" them encouraged the Jews, made even coward spirits brave, and nerved even the feeblest arm for vigorous toil, and so raised them above fear, and enabled them to carry on the work. And to-day to godly souls there is unlimited inspiration in the consciousness that the Divine Eye is upon them. (c).

4. *The Divine protection of the workers.* "The eye of their God upon" them clearly involved this. The figure implies not only interest and knowledge and oversight, but also defence. His eye was upon them not only to inspire but also to shield them; not only to mark their perils, but also to preserve them from injury. And in this way the work was carried on. It suffered no interruption by reason of the inquisition of the Persian officials, and the reference of the case to Darius. (d).

If we are engaged in the work of the Lord, we may confidently look to Him for protection. The path of duty is the path of safety. And the consciousness of the eye of our God upon us should make us patient in suffering, calm in peril, earnest in work, and courageous in conflict.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) If the Church will go forth to win new victories, she needs only to take fearlessly up the supremacy with which her God has dowered her, namely, the reconciling life of her indwelling Lord. Shutting up all internal questions that make her militant against herself, she is to move on in her own absolute, sublime majesty, militant only against every form of sin, to enthrone the kingdom of God. She must cease to beg favours of worldly policy. She must stop her infamous coquetry with Mammon. She must not be bowing on Sundays to sectarian prejudice, nor on week-days to social respectability, nor ever whisper guilty flatteries to popular sins, nor wait till great public vices are manifestly dying out of themselves, and feeble with approaching dissolution, before she dares strike at them. The staunch, uncompromising sincerity of old Puritans and confessors must be in her muscles. An awful zeal must gird up her loins. Purity, freedom, equity, are to be more to her than costly churches; the prayers of saintly men, and women and children too, her patronage; and her daily speech, the benediction of charity.—*F. D. Huntington, D. D.*

(b) The infinite knowledge of God fits Him

to be a special object of trust. How could we depend upon Him, if He were ignorant of our state? His compassions to pity us, His readiness to relieve us, His power to protect and assist us, would be insignificant, without His omniscience to inform His goodness and direct the arm of His power. This perfection is, as it were, God's office of intelligence: as you go to your memorandum-book to know what you are to do, so doth God to His omniscience. This perfection is God's eye, to acquaint Him with the necessities of His Church, and directs all His other attributes in their exercise for and about His people. You may depend upon His mercy that hath promised, and upon His truth to perform; upon His sufficiency to supply you, and His goodness to relieve you, and His righteousness to reward you; because He hath an infinite understanding to know you and your wants, you and your services. And without this knowledge of His, no comfort could be drawn from any other perfection; none of them could be a sure nail to hang our hopes and confidence upon. This is that the Church always celebrated (Ps. cv. 8): "He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations;" and (ver. 42), "He remembered His holy promise;" "And He remembered for them His covenant" (Ps. cvi. 45). He remembers and understands His covenant, therefore His promise to perform it, and therefore our wants to supply them.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(c) Were the Olympian Agonistæ inspired by the admiring gaze of applauding thousands? Did the thunders of acclamation which awoke the echoes of Olympus excite the Athletæ to higher energies? How, then, shall we be affected who believe that we are ever under the watchful eye of the dread Supreme? The

KING looks on those who are running the heavenly race—who are wrestling with spiritual antagonists—and who are handing "a cup of cold water" to some drooping and thirsty disciple! As the King's eye brightens with approbation, let us resolve to climb the highest steepes of duty and to walk on the loftiest mountains of holy enterprise!—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(d) The tribulation and poverty of His Church is not unknown to Him (Rev. ii. 8, 9): "I know thy works and tribulation," &c. He knows their works, and what tribulation they meet with for Him; He sees their extremities when they are toiling against the wind and tide of the world (Mark vi. 48); yea, the natural exigencies of the multitude are not neglected by Him; He discerns to take care of them. Our Saviour considered the three days' fasting of His followers, and miraculously provides a dish for them in the wilderness. No good man is ever out of God's mind, and therefore never out of His compassionate care: His eye pierceth into their dungeons, and pities their miseries. Joseph may forget his brethren, and the disciples not know Christ when He walks upon the midnight waves and turbulent sea; but a lions' den cannot obscure a Daniel from His sight, nor the depths of the whale's belly bury Jonah from the Divine understanding: He discerns Peter in his chains, and Stephen under the stones of martyrdom; He knows Lazarus under his tattered rags, and Abel wallowing in his blood; His eye and knowledge goes along with His people, when they are translated into foreign countries, and sold for slaves into the islands of the Grecians, for He "will raise them out of the place" (Joel iii. 6, 7). He would defeat the hopes of the persecutors, and applaud the patience of His people.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

THE LETTER TO THE KING CONCERNING THE WORK.

(Verses 6–17.)

This letter has three chief divisions, each of which requires brief notice.

I. The inquisition of the Persian authorities. "The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river," &c. (vers. 6–10). Here is a report of—

1. *The observations which they made.* (1.) That the work was being *well* done. "Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls." This seems to show that the work was being done in a substantial and excellent manner. (2.) That the work was being *rapidly* done. "And

this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands." Inspired by the exhortations of Haggai the prophet, and encouraged by the example of Zerubbabel the prince, and Jeshua the chief priest, the people worked zealously and the edifice was progressing quickly.

2. *The inquiries which they proposed.* (1.) As to the *authority* of the builders. "Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?" (comp. ver. 3). (2.) As to the *names* of the builders. "We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them" (comp. ver. 4).

II. The reply of the Jewish leaders.

“And thus they returned us answer, saying,” &c. (vers. 11–16). This answer is remarkable both for its prudence and for its piety. It seems to us to present the following aspects of the work. That it was—

1. *Not a mere human enterprise, but a Divine commission.* When asked to give their own names, the Jewish elders replied, “saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth,” &c. Of their personal names and distinctions they say nothing; but assert that in rebuilding the Temple of Jehovah they were acting as servants of the Supreme Being, whom they were bound to obey. The work was to them not optional, but obligatory.

2. *Not an innovation, but a restoration.* “We build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up.” Nearly five hundred years had passed since Solomon built the first Temple. The building they were raising was not a novel invention of their own, but was supported by the venerable antiquity of its predecessor, and by the fame of the great king which built that predecessor.

3. *Not in a spirit of presumption and pride, but of obedience and humility.* “But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.” At least three portions of this statement have a bearing of more or less importance in the present position of affairs. (1.) That the destruction of the former Temple was not owing to any imperfection on the part of their God. Nebuchadnezzar did not prevail against Him. This testimony vindicates Him against any imputation of inability to defend His people and His Temple. (2.) That the destruction of their former Temple was owing to their God having forsaken them. “He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.” He withdrew His protection from them, and they speedily fell before the Chaldeans. (3.)

That their God forsook them because of their numerous and heinous sins. Their fathers provoked Him unto wrath by abominable idolatries, and He retired, leaving them to themselves and to the gods whom they had chosen. They forsook God, then God forsook them. This testimony reveals the fact that it was in a spirit of penitence rather than of presumption that they were working. It also shows the obligatoriness of the work: having seen the evil of their ways and returned unto Jehovah their God, it behoved them to rebuild the Temple for His worship.

4. *Not in opposition to, but in conformity with, royal authority.* “But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon,” &c. (vers. 13–16). Three things (which we have already noticed) are here laid down. (1.) That the work was commanded by King Cyrus. “King Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. . . . Let the house of God be builded in his place” (comp. chap. i. 1–3). (2.) That the work was assisted by King Cyrus. “And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God,” &c. (vers. 14, 15, and comp. chap. i. 4–11). (3.) That the work was carried on by the officer appointed by king Cyrus. “Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem,” &c. (ver. 16, and comp. ver. 2, and chap. i. 8). Thus they show that in this work they were obedient and loyal subjects of the Persian monarch.

5. *Not political, but religious in its character.* They were building an edifice which was designed not for plotting but for piety, not for political schemes but for religious services—“the house of God.” Moreover, they were not building this Temple to any merely local or national deity, but to the One Supreme Being—“the God of heaven and earth.” Thus the reply of the Jewish elders was fitted to honour Jehovah their God, and to disarm the opposition of men; it was both pious and prudent. (a).

III. The appeal of the Persian authorities to the king. “Now, therefore, if it seem good to the king,” &c. They ask Darius—

1. *To ascertain whether Cyrus did authorise and encourage this work.* "Let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem."

2. *To issue instructions for their guidance in relation to this work.* "And let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter."

CONCLUSION :

Two things we may well admire and imitate—

1. *The fairness of the Persian officials.* Let us deal justly with those who differ from us in faith or opinion; let us be careful to represent their views and beliefs fairly and accurately, &c. (b).

2. *The faithfulness of the Jewish leaders.* They "witnessed a good confession." Let us imitate them in this. By the testimony both of the lip and of the life, let us honour "the God of heaven and earth." (c).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) As the hermits were communing together, there arose a question as to which of all the virtues was most necessary to perfection. One said chastity; another, humility; a third, justice. St. Anthony remained silent till all had given their opinion; and then he spoke, "Ye have all said well, but none of you have said aright. The virtue most necessary to perfection is prudence; for the most virtuous actions of men, unless governed and directed by prudence, are neither pleasing to God, nor serviceable to others, nor profitable to ourselves."—*Dict. of Illus.*

(b) There are a great many who cannot accept religion as a mere fact. There are a great many on whose minds are thronging thousands of thoughts. There are those who come to religion from the side of their household, and from the side of their affections. And they cannot doubt. Blessed be that man who had such a father and mother, that as long as the memory of father and mother lives he cannot doubt. Under such circumstances, whatever the intellect may do, the heart rectifies it. The intellect may write "Scepticism," but the heart rubs it out, and writes "Love." But many have no such childhood, no such teaching, and no such association. My memory goes back to the Sabbaths of my childhood—to the bright hill top, to the church-bell, and so long as I remember these things, and have a vision of my mother, and a recollection of my father, I cannot doubt religion. But there

are many who had no such parents, or none within their remembrance. Many have had their whole life's training in the most material elements, some in artistic relations, some in realms of doubt, some in intellectual gladiation. Men come to the subject of religion from entirely different points. And when men come to religion in such ways that they have in themselves no moral witness to the truth, and have suggestions and doubts that they do not seek, but that are forced upon them, there is a certain respect to be paid to them, and a certain sympathy to be experienced for them.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(c) We all have our creeds, and, in spite of ourselves, we profess them;—the creed of fashion; the creed of appetite; the creed of a selfish expediency; the creed of a sect; the creed of indifference, which is as irreligious and as bigoted in its way as any other; or the creed of eternal right and Gospel faith. Conduct is the great profession. Behaviour is the perpetual revealing of us. A man's doctrines flow from his fingers' ends, and stand out in his doings. What he may say is not his chief profession, but how he acts. Character lets out the secret of his belief; what he *does* tells what he is. He has "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," when he has "Christ formed within him." His profession is as natural as the pulse in his veins. The good man makes profession of his goodness by simply being good; but the Christian man will not forget that he is not wholly good till he has joined himself to Christ's body. He publishes his adhesion as spontaneously as nature publishes her laws,—as the sun its light,—as the rose its sweetness; by being steadfast; by shining; by fragrant charities. It costs a graceful elm no spasm to paint a graceful image on our eye, and the sea spreads its mysterious arms around the hemispheres without vanity. They make their nature known by silently keeping its laws. And because the Christian soul is made to be a conscious member in a living organism or church, it keeps its own high law only by being there. Religion belongs in the heartbeat of a man's affections, and the breath of his daily desire; till it has so possessed him, it is a small matter that he keeps its effigy as a connoisseur keeps his marble Apollo,—on the outskirts of his practical fortunes. The true hospitality takes it to the heart. But when the heart has taken it in, it will not lock it there, and make it a prisoner. It must go abroad again, for the blessing of man and the praise of God. It will put its owner into the Church, not to show himself, but that he may the better become one with his brethren, and their common Head. So does the religion that is natural unite the public confession of it with the hiding of its inward power.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

The matter of professing Christ appears to be regarded by many as a kind of optional duty, just as optional as it is for light to shine, or goodness to be good, or joy to sing, or gratitude to give thanks, or love to labour and

sacrifice for its ends. No, my friends, there is no option here, save as all duties are optional, and eternity hangs on the option we make. Let no one of you receive or allow a different thought. Expect to be open, out-

standing witnesses for God, and rejoice to be. In ready and glorious option, take your part with such, and stifle indignantly any lurking thought of being a secret follower.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD.

(Verse 11.)

“We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.”

These words lead us to consider—

I. The universal supremacy of God. “The God of heaven and earth.” The idea of sovereignty is involved in the idea of God. “The very name of a God includes in it a supremacy and an actual rule. He cannot be conceived as God, but He must be conceived as the highest authority in the world. It is as possible for Him not to be God as not to be supreme.” Our text brings to our notice the extent of the Divine supremacy, but we shall do well briefly to notice—

1. *The ground of the Divine supremacy.* God is the universal Sovereign because of—(1.) The perfections of His being. He is infinitely wise, righteous, and kind. He is supreme in authority because He is supreme in ability and excellence. “God therefore being an incomprehensible ocean of all perfection, and possessing infinitely all those virtues that may lay a claim to dominion, hath the first foundation of it in His own nature.” (a). (2.) Because all things were created by Him. The maker of anything has an undoubted right over the thing which he has made. The invention is the property of the inventor; the picture, of the painter; the book, of the author. God’s creatorship is most complete; all things, in respect both of matter and of form, were made by Him; therefore His sovereignty is absolute. (3.) *Because all things are sustained by Him.* “By Him all things consist.” He “upholds all things by the word of His power.” “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” He is the Force of all forces; the Superintendent of all laws and processes of nature, &c. “As the right to govern resulted from creation, so it is perpetu-

ated by the preservation of things.” (4.) And this supremacy should be the more heartily recognised and responded to by us because of the benefits which He bestows upon us, and especially because of our redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God,” &c. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present,” &c. (b).

2. *The extent of the Divine supremacy.* (1.) It extends throughout heaven. He is “the God of heaven.” He is supreme over heavenly beings. “Angels that excel in strength, do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.” They are “His hosts, ministers of His, that do His pleasure.” The music and joy of their being is in doing His will. He is supreme over heavenly bodies. “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth.” “He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by name.” (2.) It extends throughout earth. He is “the God of heaven and earth.”

“By knowledge supreme, by wisdom Divine,
God governs the earth with gracious design.
O’er beast, bird, and insect His providence
reigns,
Whose will first created, whose love still
sustains.”

He rules over all men. The highest potentate and the humblest peasant are alike under His authority. He “bringeth the princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity,” &c. (Isa. xl. 23, 24). He rules over men in every respect. Nothing pertaining to their life is too great or too small for His oversight and control. Even “the bounds

of their habitation" are determined by Him. (3.) It extends throughout hell. "The devil and his angels" are rebels against God's authority, but they cannot annul that authority, or free themselves from the restraints of His arm. Satan could not afflict Job beyond a certain limit, which was determined by God (Job i. 12; ii. 6). "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell," &c. (2 Pet. ii. 4). "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation," &c. (Jude 6). Thus the Divine supremacy is universal in its extent. (c).

II. The great obligation of man. "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth;" and are therefore under solemn obligations to obey Him. His will we should accept as our law. And our obedience to Him should be—

1. *Complete.* We should conform to His will in all things. No department of our life is beyond His control. We may not select certain commandments for our obedience, and reject or ignore others. We must "have respect unto all His commandments." (d).

2. *Perpetual.* His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Our obedience must be continued as long as our being. The redeemed will "serve Him day and night in His Temple" through all eternity.

3. *Heartly.* Mere mechanical obedience is not acceptable to Him. The service of the hireling is an abomination in His sight; but that which is spontaneous and sincere He delights in. (e).

4. *Joyous.* Obedience to Him should be a pleasure to us. Joyous service is frequently commended in the Scriptures. "I will run in the way of Thy commandments." "Thy statutes have been my songs." "Serve the Lord with gladness." "I delight to do Thy will, O my God." (f).

III. The exalted privilege of man. It is deemed an honour to serve human sovereigns and princes. How much greater—how immeasurably greater—is the honour of serving the God of heaven and earth! When the service of God is rightly estimated, it is regarded as a glory, and rejoiced in as a privilege.

CONCLUSION:

What is our attitude towards the sovereignty of God? Do we bow to it only when we are forced to do so, and because we are forced to do so? Or do we rejoice in being "the servants of the God of heaven and earth"?

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) This is the natural order God hath placed in His creatures, that the more excellent should rule the inferior. He committed not the government of lower creatures to lions and tigers, that have a delight in blood, but no knowledge of virtue; but to man, who had an eminence in his nature above other creatures, and was formed with a perfect rectitude, and a height of reason to guide the reins over them. In man, the soul being of a more sublime nature, is set of right to rule over the body; the mind, the most excellent faculty of the soul, to rule over the other powers of it; and wisdom, the most excellent habit of the mind, to guide and regulate that in its determinations; and when the body and sensitive appetite control the soul and mind, it is a usurpation against nature, not a rule according to nature. The excellency, therefore, of the Divine nature is the natural foundation for His dominion. He hath wisdom to know what is fit for Him to do, and an immutable righteousness whereby He cannot do anything base and unworthy; He hath a foreknowledge whereby He is able to order all things to answer His own glorious designs and the end of His government, that nothing can go awry, nothing put Him to a stand, and constrain Him to meditate new counsels. So that if it could be supposed that the world had not been created by Him, that the parts of it had met together by chance, and been compacted into such a body, none but God, the supreme and most excellent Being in the world, could have merited, and deservedly challenged the government of it; because nothing had an excellency of nature to capacitate it for it, as He hath, or to enter into a contest with Him for a sufficiency to govern.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(b) That benefit of redemption doth add a stronger right of dominion to God; since He hath not only as a Creator given them being and life as His creatures, but paid a price, the price of His Son's blood, for their rescue from captivity; so that He hath a sovereignty of grace as well as nature, and the ransomed ones belong to Him as Redeemer as well as Creator (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20): "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price;" therefore your body and your spirit are God's. By this He acquired a right of another kind, and bought us from that uncontrollable lordship we affected over ourselves by the sin of Adam, that He might use us as His own peculiar for His own glory and service. By this redemption there results to God a right over our

bodies, over our spirits, over our services, as well as by creation; and to show the strength of this right, the Apostle repeats it, "you are bought," a purchase cannot be without a price paid; but he adds price also, "bought with a price." To strengthen the title, purchase gave Him a new right, and the greatness of the price established that right. The more a man pays for a thing, the more usually, we say, he deserves to have it; He hath paid enough for it; it was, indeed, price enough, and too much for such vile creatures as we are.—*Ibid.*

(c) The sapphire throne of God, at this moment, is revealed in heaven, where adoring angels cast their crowns before it; and its power is felt on earth, where the works of creation praise the Lord. Even those who acknowledge not the Divine government are compelled to feel it; for He doeth as He wills, not only among the angels in heaven, but among the inhabitants of this lower world. Hell feels the terror of that throne. Those chains of fire, those pangs unutterable, are the awful shadow of the throne of Deity; as God looks down upon the lost, the torment that flashes through their souls darts from His holiness, which cannot endure their sins. The influence of that throne, then, is found in every world where spirits dwell; and in the realms of inanimate nature it bears rule. Every leaf that fades in the trackless forest trembles at the Almighty's bidding, and every coral insect that dwelleth in the unfathomable depths of the sea feels and acknowledges the presence of the all-present King.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(d) All the commandments have the same Author, and the same sanction. He who thinks to atone for the breach of one by the observation of another; he who reserveth to himself a license of indulging in any favourite, darling lust, while, in general, he preserveth the appearance of an exemplary conduct, is a

hypocrite, and, unless he repent, will be brought to shame, if not before men here, yet before men and angels hereafter.—*Bishop Horne.*

The hypocrite is in with one duty, and out with another: like a globous body, he toucheth the law of God in *one* point—some particular command he seems zealous for; but meets not in the rest; whereas, the sincere heart lies close to the whole law of God in his desire and endeavour.—*W. Gurnall.*

(e) As fruits artificially raised or forced in the hot-house have not the exquisite flavour of those fruits which are grown naturally, and in their due season; so that obedience which is forced by the terrors of the law, wants the genuine flavour and sweetness of that obedience which springs from a heart warmed and meliorated with the love of God in Christ Jesus.—*H. G. Salter.*

(f) Men are commonly more cheerful in their obedience to a great prince than to a mean peasant, because the quality of the master renders the service more honourable. It is a discredit to a prince's government, when his subjects obey him with discontent and dejectedness, as though he were a hard master, and his laws tyrannical and unrighteous. When we pay obedience but with a dull and feeble pace, and a sour and sad temper, we blemish our great Sovereign, imply His commands to be grievous, void of that peace and pleasure He proclaims to be in them; that He deserves no respect from us, if we obey Him because we must, and not because we will. Involuntary obedience deserves not the title: it is rather submission than obedience, an act of the body, not of the mind: a mite of obedience with cheerfulness, is better than a talent without it. The testimonies of God were David's delight (Ps. cxix. 24). Our understandings must take pleasure in knowing Him, our wills delightfully embrace Him, and our actions be cheerfully squared to Him.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

ARGUMENTS AGAINST SINNING.

(Verse 12.)

In this verse we have three weighty reasons for abstaining from sin.

I. It provokes God. "Our fathers provoked the God of heaven unto wrath." By many sins, and especially by the practice of idolatry with its accompanying vices, the people of both Israel and Judah had long provoked Jehovah before He suffered them to be carried into exile. The evil of sin, as a provocation of the Most High, will be more impressively realised if we reflect that He is a Being of—

1. *Infinite purity.* He is "glorious

in holiness;" . . . 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity.' Sin is the very opposite of holiness; therefore it grieves Him, and if persisted in, it provokes Him. It is the "abominable thing, which He hates." Have we not in this a reason for shunning it? (a).

2. *Infinite patience.* He is "not easily provoked;" "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." He "is longsuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come

to repentance." How wonderful was His forbearance with His ancient people! How long He suffered them, notwithstanding their heinous, widespread, and long-continued sin! Yet at length they provoked Him unto wrath. How wicked and how persistent must the sin be which provokes so patient a Being to anger! Therefore let us flee from sin. (b).

II. It deprives the sinner of His protection. "He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean." By their sin the Israelites deprived themselves of the sure defence which His presence afforded to them, and frustrated His gracious purposes in relation to them. This truth is pathetically and beautifully expressed in Ps. lxxxii. 11-16: "My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me," &c. By his sin the sinner places himself beyond the protection of the Divine Providence; he takes up the position of a rebel against the Divine government, and so forfeits the rights and privileges which that government confers upon its loyal subjects.

III. It strips the sinner of power to battle with his foes. "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon." Bereft of the Divine presence and protection, the men of Israel and of Judah could not stand before their enemies. Guilt robs a man of courage. The consciousness of righteous action in a righteous cause is the mightiest inspiration in conflict and the surest defence in peril. Sin deprives a man of this. Guilt brings faintness into men's "hearts; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth," &c. (Lev. xxvi. 36, 37). "The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion." Or, as Shakespeare expresses it—

"Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind;
The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

A guilty "conscience does make cowards of us all."

And Wordsworth:

"From the body of one guilty deed

A thousand ghostly fears and haunting thoughts proceed." (c).

By all these reasons let us beware of sin, shun it, hate it; and "follow after holiness." For in respect of holiness we may reverse the argument of our subject, and affirm that (1) it is well pleasing to God; (2) it secures to its possessor the Divine protection; and (3) it invests its possessor with moral strength and courage.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Is it (if the supposition may be allowed) anything merely *personal* which God condemns in the action of the sinner against Himself? Can the sinner do *God* any harm? Can the mightiest chief in all the armies of hell pluck one star from the sky, or keep back the light of the sun, or bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? God is not, so to speak, alarmed for His *personal* government. The offences against His *power* cost Him no concern, but the offences against His *holiness* afflict Him with great sorrow. The parent cares nothing for the mere blow of the child's tiny fist, but the passion which prompted it breaks his heart. God has to maintain the public virtue and order of the universe. He fears no stroke of power; but if, for mere convenience of expression, we may distinguish between His personality and His attributes, we may say that offences against His person are forgiven, but offences against His attributes cannot be forgiven apart from confession and repentance on the side of the criminal.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) The more His patience is abused, the sharper will be the wrath He inflicts. As His wrath restrained makes His patience long, so His compassions restrained will make His wrath severe; as He doth transcend all creatures in the measures of the one, so He transcends all creatures in the sharpness of the other. Christ is described with "feet of brass, as if they burned in a furnace" (Rev. i. 15), slow to move, but heavy to crush, and hot to burn. His wrath loseth nothing by delay; it grows the fresher by sleeping, and strikes with greater strength when it awakes: all the time men are abusing His patience, God is whetting His sword, and the longer it is whetting the sharper will be the edge; the longer He is fetching His blow, the smarter it will be. The heavier the cannons are, the more difficultly are they drawn to the besieged town; but, when arrived, they recompense the slowness of their march by the fierceness of their battery. "Because I have purged thee," *i.e.*, used means for thy reformation, and waited for it, "and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused My fury to rest upon thee. I will not go back, neither will I spare; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee" (Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14). God will spare as little then as He spared much before: His wrath

will be as raging upon them as the sea of their wickedness was within them. When there is a bank to forbid the irruption of the stream, the waters swell; but when the bank is broke, or the lock taken away, they rush with the greater violence, and ravage more than they would have done had they not met with a stop: the longer a stone is in falling, the more it bruiseeth and grinds to powder. There is a greater treasure of wrath laid up by the abuses of patience: every sin must have a just recompense of reward; and therefore every sin, in regard of its aggravations, must be more punished than a sin in the singleness and simplicity of its own nature. As treasures of mercy are kept by God for us, "He keeps mercy for thousands;" so are treasures of wrath kept by Him to be expended, and a time of expense there must be. Patience will account to Justice all the good offices it hath done the sinner,

and demand to be righted by Justice; Justice will take the account from the hands of Patience, and exact a recompense for every disingenuous injury offered to it. When Justice comes to arrest men for their debts, Patience, Mercy, and Goodness will step in as creditors and clap their actions upon them, which will make the condition so much more deplorable.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(c) They say sheep are scared with the clatter of their own feet as they run; so is the sinner with the din of his guilt. No sooner Adam saw his plate off, and himself to be naked, but he is afraid of God's voice, as if he had never been acquainted with Him. Never can we truly recover our courage till we recover our holiness. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we boldness before God" (1 John iii. 21). —*W. Gurnall.*

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] This chapter contains—(i.) The search for and discovery of the decree of Cyrus (vers. 1–5). (ii.) The decree of Darius for the furtherance of the building of the Temple (vers. 6–12). (iii.) The carrying on and completion of the building of the Temple (vers. 13–15). (iv.) The dedication of the Temple (vers. 16–18). (v.) The celebration of the feasts of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread (vers. 19–22).

Ver. 1. Then Darius the king made a decree] "These words seem to refer only to the command to make an investigation; but in reality they serve as an introduction to the decree which was promulgated to Tatnai, &c. (comp. v. 6). It is as if the subsequent narrative: and search was made] were taken up merely as an explanation of the decree following in ver. 6 sq."—*Schultz.* The house of the rolls] Margin: "Chald. books." Schultz: "writings." (Comp. chap. v. 17.) Laid up] Margin: "Chald. made to descend." The apartment was probably underground.

Ver. 2. Achmetha] i.e., Ecbatana. "The name 'Achmetha, which at first sight seems somewhat remote from Ecbatana, wants but one letter of *Hagmatana*, which was the native appellation. . . . Two cities of the name of Ecbatana seem to have existed in ancient times, one the capital of Northern Media; the other the metropolis of the larger and more important province known as Media Magna. The site of the former appears to be marked by the very curious ruins at *Takht-i-Suleiman*; while that of the latter is occupied by *Hamadan*, which is one of the most important cities of modern Persia. There is generally some difficulty in determining, when Ecbatana is mentioned, whether the northern or the southern metropolis is intended. Few writers are aware of the existence of the two cities, and they lie sufficiently near to one another for geographical notices in most cases to suit either site. The northern city was the 'seven-walled town' described by Herodotus, and declared by him to have been the capital of Cyrus (Herod. i. 98, 99, 153; comp. Mos. Choren. ii. 84); and it was thus most probably there that the roll was found which proved to Darius that Cyrus had really made a decree allowing the Jews to rebuild their Temple."—*Bibl. Dict.* A roll] "The ancient Persians used parchment for their records, as appears from Ctesias (cap. Diod. Sic. ii. 32)"—*Rawlinson.*

Ver. 3. In the first year of Cyrus the king] (Comp. chaps. i. 1; v. 13.) Omit "concerning" as supplied by the translators of the A. V. The house of God at Jerusalem] These words "stand alone by themselves, and constitute to a certain extent a title." The place where they offered sacrifices] Keil: "As a place where sacrifices are offered." Schultz: "As a place where offerings are brought." And let the foundations thereof be strongly laid] Schultz: "'And whose foundations are capable of supporting' (namely, the structure)." The height thereof threescore cubits] &c. In these dimensions the length is not specified; probably because in this respect the new Temple was to correspond with the former one.

Ver. 4. With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber] The meaning of this is uncertain. One interpretation is that the word translated *row* (רִבְּוֹ) should be rendered "storey;" and that it applies "to the three storeys of chambers that surrounded Solomon's, and afterwards Herod's Temple, and with this again we come to the wooden Talar which surmounted the Temple and formed a fourth storey."—*Bibl. Dict.* But it is questionable whether רִבְּוֹ ever signifies "storey." Fuerst gives, as the meaning of the word, "a layer, a row," as of stones or bricks in a wall. So also Keil. Schultz says it means "that three of the Temple walls were of hewn stone, the other, namely, the front, which must for the most part be com-

posed of a large entrance, was to be made of wood." In support of this view he argues from 1 Kings vi. 36, "that Solomon provided the inner court (of his Temple) on three sides with walls of quarried stone, on the one other side, without doubt the front side, where the chief entrance was, where then there was probably a larger door, with an enclosure of hewn cedar. . . . In the Temple of Herod also, the entrance side of the holy place was still composed of one great folding door, sixteen cubits broad." Another interpretation is that the walls were three rows or courses of stone in thickness with an inner wainscoting of wood. And another, taking **רָבָרָבָ** as signifying row, or layer, is that the walls were built of three layers of large stones and then a layer of timber, repeated from the base to the summit. But there is a complete absence of evidence of the existence of buildings of this kind in the East in olden times. And let the expenses be given out of the king's house] or from the royal revenues (Comp. ver. 8.) This must either refer to the cost of only the materials of the building, or it was never carried into effect; for the Jews themselves contributed largely to the cost of the building (chaps. ii. 68, 69; iii. 7).

Ver. 5. And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God] &c. (Comp. chaps. i. 7, 8; v. 14, 15.)

Ver. 6. Now therefore Tatnai] &c. This is the decree made by Darius the king (ver. 1). Your companions the Apharsachites] (See on chap. v. 6.) Be ye far from thence] *i.e.* do not trouble or interfere with the Jews in this matter.

Ver. 10. That they may offer sacrifices] &c. This was the object aimed at by Darius the king in the preceding orders of his decree. "We find," says Keil, "that in after times sacrifices were regularly offered for the king on appointed days: comp. 1 Macc. vii. 33, xii. 11; 2 Macc. iii. 35, xiii. 23; Joseph. *Antiq.* XII. ii. 5, and elsewhere."

Ver. 11. Alter this word] either by transgressing or by abolishing it. Let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon] Keil: "Let a beam be torn from his house, and let him be fastened hanging thereon." Schultz: "Let him be fastened thereon and crucified." It is almost beyond doubt that crucifixion is the punishment signified here. And let his house be made a dunghill for this] "that is, let it be torn down and changed into a common sewer, comp. 2 Kings x. 27; Dan. ii. 5."—Schultz.

Ver. 14. And Artaxerxes king of Persia] "This king did not reign till long after the completion of the Temple, and the insertion of his name here can only be accounted for by supposing that the compiler or editor of this record inscribed his name as one who, in later times, contributed to the maintenance of the Temple, and so kept up the work his predecessors had begun."—*Clemance*. And Schultz points out that, instead of giving a simple narrative of the completion of the building, "the author would rather express recognition and thanks, and hence could forget none who were deserving of mention. Artaxerxes came into consideration only on account of the gifts which he caused to be brought to Jerusalem by Ezra" (chap. vii. 15-20).

Ver. 15. The month Adar] which is the twelfth month, and corresponds with our March. The building was completed about twenty years after the laying of the foundation by Zerubbabel, and four years five months and a few days after the resumption of the work by reason of the prophesying of Haggai (Hag. i. 15).

Ver. 17. An hundred bullocks, two hundred rams] &c. These numbers, though small as compared with those offered at the dedication of the former Temple (1 Kings viii. 5, 63), considering the number and the circumstances of the people, constitute a hearty and joyful offering. A sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats] &c. While the great majority of those who returned with Zerubbabel were of Judah, it is probable that some families of the other tribes returned with them, and that for that reason a sin offering was presented for every tribe. Moreover, as Keil observes, a sin offering was brought for *all* Israel, "because the Temple was intended for the entire covenant people, whose return to the Lord and to the land of their fathers, according to the predictions of the prophets, was hoped for. (Comp. *e.g.* Ezek. xxxvii. 15, sq. Jer. xxxi. 27, sq.)"

Ver. 18. They set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses] &c. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxiii. 6-23; xxiv. 1-19; 2 Chron. xxxv. 5, 12.) As it is written in the book of Moses] (Comp. Num. iii. 6-10; viii. 5-26.) With this verse the Chaldee section closes.

Ver. 19. Kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. (Comp. Exod. xii. 6.)

Ver. 20. For the priests and the Levites were purified] &c. Rawlinson says that this is a mistranslation, and that it should be, "For the priests had purified themselves, and the Levites were all pure as one man, and killed," &c. He further suggests that this was the reason why the Levites killed the paschal lambs not only for themselves and for the people, but also for their brethren the priests (Comp. 2 Chron. xxix. 34.) But, as Keil remarks, from the days of Josiah it seems to have been customary for the Levites to slaughter the passover lambs for the whole community, both priesthood and laity. (2 Chron. xxxv. 11, 14, 15.) Schultz translates, "For the priests and Levites had purified themselves as one man, they were all clean, and killed," &c. He suggests that the latter slaughtered the lambs "for the priests, because they were so busy elsewhere."

Ver. 21. And all such as had separated themselves] &c. "Those who separated themselves

from these heathen are not proselytes from heathenism, but descendants of the Jews and Israelites who had remained in the land when the rest of the nation had been carried captive, as all the parallel passages show, comp. ix. 1, 10, x. 2, 10, 11; Neh. ix. 2, x. 28. They had without doubt intermarried with the heathen, and the more they had entered into communion with them, the less were they in a position to observe the Mosaic laws respecting food and purification. To separate themselves from the impurities of the heathen meant for them to forsake altogether communion with the heathen, and seek communion with the Jewish congregation."—*Schultz*.

Ver. 22. Kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days] (Comp. Exod. xii. 15, xiii. 7, &c.) The king of Assyria] "Darius, the king of Persia, is here called king of Assyria, not only as ruler of the territory of the previous Persian empire (Keil), or because Assyria from ancient time had been the usual name for all that region (Clericus), which cannot be proved from Judith ii. 1; but, above all, likewise, because Darius, as head of the great empire of the world, properly took the same relative position over against the people of God as the Assyrian and Chaldean kings had once had, because it was properly only a continuation or renewal of the same, and because the thought was now to be expressed, that finally that very enemy who had once so fearfully and destructively oppressed the people of God, had been changed by the grace of God into a friend, so that he had even himself strengthened the hands of the congregation in re-establishing the destroyed Temple."—*Ibid*.

A THOROUGH SEARCH AND AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

(Verses 1-5.)

I. The search for the decree of Cyrus.

1. *Was thorough.* "Search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon," as being the most likely place in which to find a copy of the alleged decree of Cyrus. The document, however, was not found there. But the search was not abandoned when it failed there, but was continued at Achmetha, or Ecbatana, as being the place where, next to Babylon, it would most probably be discovered. The thoroughness of this search seems to us an evidence of the desire of Darius the king to deal fairly and honourably with his Jewish subjects.

2. *Was successful.* "And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll," &c. Thus the honest and earnest search was rewarded, the veracity of the statement of the elders of the Jews (chap. v. 13-15) was clearly proved, and the lawfulness of the authority by which they acted firmly established.

Learn:

Honest and thorough investigation promotes the interests of religion and of the Church of God. Partial examination, and yet more, examination by persons whose opinions or feelings are prejudiced, often leads to conclusions which are inimical to the cause of God

and of religious truth. But sincere, patient, thorough investigation into the credentials of Christianity is eminently desirable, and conduces to its progress. Merely human systems of religion may well shun the light; some of the doctrines of men concerning Christianity, upon examination, may prove untenable; and error may naturally seek to evade every real test; but truth, righteousness, and the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ court inquiry, and by inquiry they spread and prevail. (a).

II. The discovery of the decree of Cyrus. "And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: In the first year of Cyrus," &c. (vers. 2-5). The edict thus brought to light contained three commands of the utmost importance to the Jews.

1. *That their Temple should be rebuilt.* "In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree:—The house of God at Jerusalem:—Let the house be built," &c. It was to be built (1) at the old place; "at Jerusalem." This was important, because of the old and precious associations and memories which clustered thickly around it. (2.) For the old purposes. "The house of God . . . a place where they may offer sacrifices." It was for the worship of the same holy Being, and in

the same manner, as their fathers had worshipped. (3.) In solid and durable manner. "And let the foundations thereof be strongly laid," so as to be thoroughly capable of supporting the superstructure, that the edifice may endure the longer.

2. *That the expenses of building be granted them from the royal revenues.* "And let the expenses be given out of the king's house." Either this command was intended to apply only to the materials of the building, or it was never fully carried out. It may be that they did not receive what was here ordered them, as Matthew Henry suggests, because the face of things at court was soon changed. But we know that, out of their own resources, the Jews contributed largely to the expenses of the building (chaps. ii. 68, 69; iii. 7).

3. *That the costly and sacred vessels of the former Temple should be restored.* "And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God," &c. (ver. 5). (1.) These vessels had been degraded to base uses by heathen kings. "Which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the Temple which was at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon." "And he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god" (Dan. i. 2). Belshazzar, at his great and impious feast, "whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels," &c. (Dan. v. 2-4). (2.) They had been preserved from destruction or loss in the Providence of God. God had so ordered events that these vessels were regarded by the heathen Nebuchadnezzar as sacred, and were by him deposited in a secure place. (3.) They were restored to their original place and use by a heathen king, who was moved thereto by the Spirit of God. Let them "be restored, and brought again unto the Temple which is at Jerusalem, to their place, and (thou) shalt place them in the house of God." Seeing that God thus preserves even consecrated utensils, how much more will He keep His consecrated people! "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed," &c. (Isa. xli. 10, 13). "Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by

thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters," &c. (Isa. xliiii. 1, 2).

Learn:

The advantages of written history. The testimony of the Jewish elders concerning the edict of Cyrus might have been denied by some, and by others suspected of exaggeration in their own favour, and in this way the great work might have been again arrested; but this state-document, found in one of the royal offices or chambers, was unimpeachable. Tradition is variable and uncertain; but the record written at the time of the events is fixed and trustworthy. (b). How great should be our gratitude for the sacred writings—"the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever"! (c).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The religion of Christ might be shown to abound in circumstances which contradict and repel the idea of a human origin. For example, its representations of the paternal character of God; its inculcation of a universal charity; the stress which it lays on inward purity; its substitution of a spiritual worship for the forms and ceremonies, which everywhere had usurped the name and extinguished the life of religion; its preference of humility, and the mild, unostentatious, passive virtues, to the dazzling qualities which had monopolised men's admiration; its consistent and bright discoveries of immortality; its adaptation to the wants of man as a sinner; its adaptation to all the conditions, capacities, and sufferings of human nature; its pure, sublime, yet practical morality; its high and generous motives; and its fitness to form a character, which plainly prepares for a higher life than the present;—these are peculiarities of Christianity, which will strike us more and more in proportion as we understand distinctly the circumstances of the age and country in which this religion appeared, and for which no adequate human cause has been or can be assigned.

Passing over these topics, each of which might be enlarged into a discourse, I will make but one remark on this religion, which strikes my own mind very forcibly. Since its introduction, human nature has made great progress, and society experienced great changes; and in this advanced condition of the world, Christianity, instead of losing its application and importance, is found to be more and more congenial and adapted to man's nature and wants. Men have outgrown the other institutions of that period when Christianity appeared, its philosophy, its modes of

warfare, its policy, its public and private economy; but Christianity has never shrunk as intellect has opened, but has always kept in advance of men's faculties, and unfolded nobler views in proportion as they have ascended. The highest powers and affections which our nature has developed find more than adequate objects in this religion. Christianity is indeed peculiarly fitted to the more improved stages of society, to the more delicate sensibilities of refined minds, and especially to that dissatisfaction with the present state, which always grows with the growth of our moral powers and affections. As men advance in civilisation, they become susceptible of mental sufferings, to which ruder ages are strangers; and these Christianity is fitted to assuage. Imagination and intellect become more restless; and Christianity brings them tranquillity, by the eternal and magnificent truths, the solemn and unbounded prospects, which it unfolds. This fitness of our religion to more advanced stages of society than that in which it was introduced, to wants of human nature not then developed, seems to me very striking. The religion bears the marks of having come from a Being who perfectly understood the human mind, and had power to provide for its progress. This feature of Christianity is of the nature of prophecy. It was an anticipation of future and distant ages; and when we consider among whom our religion sprung, where, but in God, can we find an explanation of this peculiarity?—*W. E. Channing, D.D.*

(b) In Books lies the *soul* of the whole Past Time; the articulate audible voice of the Past, when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream. Mighty fleets and armies, harbours and arsenals, vast cities, high domed, many engined,—they are precious, great: but what do they become? Agamemnon, the many Agamemnons, Peri-

cleses, and their Greece; all is gone now to some ruined fragments, dumb mournful wrecks and blocks: but the Books of Greece! There Greece, to every thinker, still very literally lives; can be called up again into life. No magic *Rune* is stranger than a Book. All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of Books. They are the chosen possession of men.—*Thomas Carlyle.*

(c) It is a blessed thought that the words of the Bible were written for us—that the Spirit of God looked along the ages, and saw that in such an event or circumstance of life we should need just such counsel and help. And then He inspired a pen to write it down. Not for our good only, but for thousands who have gone before and who will come after. No promise is there that has not been proved thousands of times—no warning, but many have taken it home. It is like a good chart which has everything on it that a mariner in any seas may need. Its truths never wear out. Says one, who has been a deep student of it: “The Bible will bear a thousand readings, and the man who has gone over it the most frequently and carefully is the surest of finding new wonders there.”—*The Study.*

What a wonderful Book is the Bible! Just let us look at it. There it lies—a Book several thousand years old—a Book at war with all the evil passions of a wicked world—a Book dwelling in an enemy's country—a Book exposed to every species of assault—a Book that has been shot at by innumerable archers, and yet there it lies, unhurt, invulnerable, not a crevice to be found in its coat of mail, not the shadow of a genuine doubt upon its Divinity, not a speck upon its glorious robes! Well may we say as we gaze upon it, “Surely God is in this Book! how dreadful is this Book! it is none else than the Book of God; it is the gate of heaven!”—*Anon.*

THE DECREE OF DARIUS.

(Verses 6-12.)

In this royal edict we have:

I. A prohibition. “Now Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: let the work of this house of God alone.” All interference with the builders and the building of the Temple is here forbidden by the king. Tatnai and Shethar-boznai seem to have acted with conspicuous fairness toward the Jews; but it is probable that some of their former Samaritan enemies would have hindered them in their great work

if they could have done so. Such hindrance this edict imperatively prohibits.

II. An injunction. The royal decree goes on to command Tatnai and his companions in office to help onward the work of the Jewish builders.

1. *They were to allow the building of the Temple.* “Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.”

2. *They were to assist the building of the Temple.* “Moreover, I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of

God: that of the king's goods, of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered."

3. *They were to assist the worship of the God of the Temple.* "And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail."

Notice:

1. The *sufficiency* of this assistance. It provides for the daily and other burnt offerings, for the meat offerings, and for other things according to the expressed requirements of the Jewish priests.

2. The *continuity* of this assistance. "Let it be given them day by day."

3. The *urgency* of the command of this assistance. "Let it be given them without fail; . . . let it be done with speed." In this way unusual importance is given to this edict for helping forward the Temple and the worship of Jehovah. *The object of the king in thus aiding their worship* is noteworthy: "That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." This is a remarkable utterance from a heathen monarch. It reveals—(1.) His reverence towards God. Twice in this decree he speaks of Him as "the God of heaven;" and from his wish that sacrifices and prayers should be presented to Him, it is evident that he believed in His power to aid and bless men. (2.) His faith in the efficacy of prayer to God. Darius knew that the Jews "were a praying people," says Matthew Henry, "and had heard that God was nigh to them in all that which they called upon Him for. He was sensible he needed their prayers and might receive benefit by them, and was kind to them in order that he might have an interest in their prayers. It is the duty of God's people to pray for those that are in authority over them, not only for the good and gentle, but also for the froward; but they are particularly bound in gratitude to pray for

their protectors and benefactors; and it is the wisdom of princes to desire their prayers. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us." (a).

III. **A malediction.** "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word," &c. (vers. 11, 12).

1. *Severe penalties are denounced against any who should violate the decree.* (1.) The crucifixion of the offender. "Whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, let him be fastened thereon and crucified." (2.) The consignment of the memory of the offender to shame and loathing. "And let his house be made a dunghill for this." Language such as this is not unfrequently employed by Orientals (2 Kings x. 27; Dan. ii. 5; iii. 29). "They imprecate all sorts of indignities and abominations on the objects of their dislike, and it is not uncommon for them to smear over with filth what is the object of their contempt and abhorrence. Thus when the Caliph Omar took Jerusalem, at the head of the Saracen army, after ravaging the greater part of the city, he caused dung to be spread over the site of the sanctuary, in token of the abhorrence of all Mussulmans, and of its being henceforth regarded as the refuse and offscouring of all things."

2. *A stern imprecation is uttered against any who should attempt to injure the Temple.* "And the God that hath caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter, to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem." Where his own power was inadequate to protect the Jews and their Temple, he invokes the hand of God against those who would injure the sacred place.

CONCLUSION:

1. *See the force of example.* Darius was moved by the example of Cyrus in thus showing favour to the Jews. In this case we have—(1.) An example of excellent character. The conduct of Cyrus towards the Jews was good and noble. (b). (2.) An example of pos-

thumous power. Cyrus had been dead for several years, but the decree which he had made determined the conduct of Darius towards the Jews. Our influence for good or for evil does not cease with our life upon earth. (c). (3.) An example nobly followed. The decree of Darius was even more noble and generous than that of Cyrus.

2. See the workings of Divine Providence. In this decree we see that—(1.) God sometimes uses unlikely agents in accomplishing His purposes. Darius, king of Persia, was one of the most important agents in rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, &c. (2.) God overrules the opposition of enemies for the accomplishment of His purposes. We are far from saying that Tatnai and Shethar-boznai were enemies to the Jews; but we know that the Samaritans were bitterly hostile to them; and now, as the result of the appeal to Darius, all his subjects west of the Euphrates are commanded to contribute to the Temple and to the worship of Jehovah. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) A man who lives habitually near to God is like a great cloud for ever dropping with fertilising showers. This is the man who can say, "The earth is dissolved; I bear up the pillars thereof." France had never seen so bloody a revolution had there been men of prayer to preserve her. England, amidst the commotions which make her rock to and fro, is held fast because prayer is put up incessantly by the faithful. The flag of old England is nailed to her mast, not by the hands of her sailors, but by the prayers of the people of God. These, as they intercede day and night, and as they go about their spiritual ministry, these are they for whom God spareth nations, for whom He permitteth the earth still to exist; and when their time is over, and they are taken away, the salt being taken from the earth, then shall the elements dissolve with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up; but not until He hath caught away the saints with Christ into the air, shall this world pass away.—C. H. Spurgeon.

(b) If the present lecturer has a right to consider himself a real Christian,—if he has been of any service to his fellow-creatures, and has attained to any usefulness in the Church

of Christ, he owes it, in the way of means and instrumentality, to the sight of a companion, who slept in the same room with him, bending his knees in prayer on retiring to rest. That scene, so unostentatious, and yet so unconcealed, roused my slumbering conscience, and sent an arrow to my heart; for, though I had been religiously educated, I had restrained prayer, and cast off the fear of God. My conversion to God followed, and soon after my entrance upon college studies for the work of the ministry. Nearly half a century has rolled away since then, with all its multitudinous events; but that little chamber, that humble couch, that praying youth, are still present to my imagination, and will never be forgotten, even amidst the splendours of heaven, and through the ages of eternity.—J. A. James.

(c) The truth is, that no man or woman, however poor their circumstances or mean their lot, are without their influence; like an electric spark, passing from link to link, that runs flashing down the chain of successive generations. Indeed, a man's life is as immortal as his soul; and by its influence, though dead, he yet speaketh and worketh. . . . Men live after they are dead. Outliving our memory, and more enduring than any monument of brass or marble, our example may prove like the circle that rises round the sinking stone, and growing wider and wider, embraces a larger and larger sphere, till it dies in gentle wavelets on the distant beach. It reaches a distant shore; your example a distant time. Take care, then, how you live.—Thomas Guthrie, D.D.

(d) All things are for the best, by virtue of no inherent power in evil to develop good, for evil must ever gravitate towards an increase of itself; but by virtue of an overruling Wisdom bringing good out of evil, and converting the evil itself into the instrument of good. This is true of natural laws. The storm destructive of life and property fills the atmosphere with the seeds of larger and freer life. Pestilence is the providential stimulus of sanitary progress. Difficulties and conflicts are the school of all the heroic virtues. Fortitude, self-control, heroic force of will, unselfish generosity, a rational love of liberty, and liberality tolerant of other men's opinions, all grow out of this soil. They are not hot-house exotics, needing to be stimulated into artificial life, but vigorous evergreens, flourishing only in the free air of heaven, and striking their roots deep only in their native soil. The exercise of a Divine wisdom and power over-ordering evil for good is but the application of the same principle to the higher sphere of God's moral government, but another and a louder strain of the same harmonious music. The past history of the world is one long illustration of this truth. The experience of the past becomes prophetic, and catching its language from the glowing pages of the inspired Scripture, sings its songs of triumphant hope

for the future. Looking back to the past and forward to the future, faith recognises that all is best. From the height of the revealed

promise peeping on tiptoe into the future, it catches a glimpse of a more glorious hereafter. —*Canon Garbett.*

A BELIEVER'S EXPENSES.

(Verse 4.)

“*Let the expenses be given out of the king's house.*”

The times are hard. Expenses are very well when one is able to meet them easily, but they involve a thousand perplexities if the income is insufficient. The most expensive living possible is that of the believer. It is not difficult to satisfy the bare requirements of the body. There is more swallowed up by the requirements of a man's position. But the human soul has the greatest needs. If we speak of its simple necessities, what a costly matter is the sustaining of its life! Think, however, of its expensive enjoyments, its superabounding luxuries! From whence do they all come? We are spiritually penniless. Are we not living far beyond our income? No. Heaven's exchequer supplies bountifully all our requirements and enjoyments.

I. What are our expenses? The expenses referred to in the text are those connected with the return of the Jews to their own land, the rebuilding of the Temple, and its continual sacrifices.

1. *Their release from captivity* was doubtless an expensive blessing. Our release from the thralldom of sin involved enormous expenditure. Was paid “out of the King's house.” Did not God give His Son? Did not the Son pay down His blood and His life? “Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” What a price!

2. *Their return to Jerusalem.* The liberated Jews in Babylon were probably impoverished by their captivity. Cyrus says, “Return to your own land, I will pay your expenses.” The important step of public profession of faith in Christ, and of union with His Church, need peculiar supplies of grace.

It is promised to you “out of the King's house.”

3. *The material for a new Temple* was provided by king Cyrus. There is much new material to be built up in our habits and life. Extensive alterations must be made. We require a new building, the material of which shall be faith, hope, love, humility, chastity, self-denial, &c. Can we obtain these from our own slender purse?

4. *Wages for the workmen* are part of these expenses. It was a long job—the Temple-building—and the workmen must not stand still. The Christian who makes no progress in the Divine life may account for it—his source of supplies has been neglected—“the King's house.”

5. *The restoration of the sacred vessels from Babylon* (ver. 5) meant expense. Our bodies being temples of the Holy Ghost, every physical power and every mental faculty should be “a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use.” But these, also, have been profaned and defiled in our captivity to sin. They must now be restored to their proper use, and purified.

6. *The daily sacrifices* were a further item in the expenditure (ver. 9). (1.) Our hearts are altars whereon should be offered the sacrifices of worship and praise. (2.) Our life is an altar whereon should be offered our whole conduct, and our special effort for Christ.

II. Where shall we find means to meet these expenses? There is one great treasury of light—the sun—inexhaustible. “The King's house” is an inexhaustible treasury of grace.

1. *The word of His truth.* Hidden mines of wealth. Rich doctrines, rich examples, rich promises, rich pledges. Our needs appeared big until we saw the supply here.

2. *The throne of His grace.* “Let

us come boldly," &c. (Heb. iv. 16). "Ask what ye will," &c. "Whatever ye shall ask," &c.

"Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much."

3. *The fellowship of His people.* Experience tells us of the supplies to be found here.

4. *The dispensation of His providence.* God's abundant, unasked mercies every day. Everything in nature is a storehouse of food; the clouds over our heads, the clods under our feet, the atmosphere which we breathe. Everything in Providence supplies food for the believer. "We know that all things work together for good," &c.

5. *The opposition of his foes.* The Persian monarch was naturally Israel's enemy, yet God arranges that He shall pay Israel's expenses. Even the lions we may meet shall supply sweet honey for our nourishment and refreshment.

6. *The work of His Son.* This includes all others. "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." What is there wanted that is not to be found here? "In Him dwelleth all the fulness

of the Godhead." "Full of grace and truth; and of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

III. How shall we act in the presence of such abundance?

1. *We need not be afraid of exhausting Heaven's treasures.* Here is grace abounding! We may be prodigals, for our Father has plenty.

2. *We dare not be slow in availing ourselves of these supplies.* Live up to your privileges, or you will suffer, and the bountiful King will be insulted.

3. *We cannot help wondering at the goodness of the King.* Was it not enough that He should liberate us from sin? He "crowns us with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

4. *We will not forget to express our gratitude to the King.* As He is at all the expense, He shall have all the praise. Here I will begin the song, and when I arrive at the "King's house" I shall in richer language

"The gratitude declare
That glows within my ravished heart."

5. *We must not be so selfish as to hide these glad tidings.* "This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."
—R. S. Latimer.

THE DESIRE OF A SOVEREIGN AND THE DUTY OF SUBJECTS.

(Verse 10.)

I propose to consider the words before us in a twofold point of view—

I. As the desire of a heathen prince.

1. *It was a just and reasonable desire,* as the history will clearly show. The Jews, by the permission of Cyrus, had begun to rebuild their Temple, &c.

Now, consider the obligations which this benevolent monarch was conferring on the Jews, and then say whether the desire which he expressed was not *just and reasonable*. He had ordered that "whatever they had need of, young bullocks and rams and lambs," &c. (ver. 9). Was it not reasonable that he should expect these things to be applied to their distinct use, and that, when he was showing such a paternal regard for

the welfare of their nation, he should be remembered by them in their devotions, and have an interest in their prayers? Surely this was the least return which they could render to him for his extreme kindness.

2. *It was also a wise and politic desire.* Religion and loyalty are inseparable. It cannot be that a man who truly fears God should fail essentially in honouring the king. On the other hand, a man who has no fear of God before his eyes, has no principle sufficiently strong to keep him faithful to his king, if he be drawn either by interest or inclination to oppose him. Hence, then, it was wise in Darius, though a heathen prince, to encourage piety amongst the Jews.

Nor was he less politic in desiring a

remembrance in their prayers. Intercession will induce a habit of mind friendly to the person for whom it is offered, and, if offered in sincerity by a whole nation, would prove a bulwark around the throne, stronger than all the fleets and armies that could be raised for its defence.

II. As the duty of a Christian people.

1. In the service of *our heavenly King*, the "offering of sacrifices to Him of a sweet savour" may well be considered as comprehending our duty to Him; whether *as sinners*, who stand in need of His mercy, or *as saints*, who desire to glorify His name. The Jewish sacrifices were presented as an atonement for the sins of the people; and they prefigured that "Lamb of God, which in His eternal purpose was slain from the foundation of the world." These *we* are not required to bring; because that adorable Saviour, in whom all the types and shadows of the Mosaic law were to be fulfilled, has come. "He loved us, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." *This* sacrifice we must ever bring before the God of heaven and earth. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." "*His* is the only name whereby any man can be saved."

But there are other sacrifices also, which, *as saints*, we are to offer, and which have a sweet savour before God. Our whole person, body, soul, and spirit, is to be presented to the Lord, as the Apostle tells us: "I beseech you, by the

mercies of God, that ye present your bodies," &c. (Rom. xii. 1). And if only we come to God through Christ, there is not a service which we can render to Him which shall not come up with acceptance before Him, as a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. Such are our alms (Heb. xiii. 16); such our prayers (Ps. cvii. 22); such our very sighs (Ps. li. 17); such is our every service, of whatever kind (1 Pet. ii. 5).

And do not imagine that your attention to this duty is unimportant as it respects the welfare of the state. There is a far closer connection between national piety and national prosperity than men generally imagine. (Comp. chap. vii. 23.)

To this must be added your duty to your earthly prince, to be instant in prayer to God on his behalf. *This is your duty*; for the Apostle says, "I exhort that, first of all, supplications, prayers," &c. (1 Tim. ii. 1-3).

It is your interest also; for the welfare of every individual in the nation is bound up in the welfare of the king.

Let us, from the example of this heathen prince, learn *how to employ our influence*. Let us use it for "the God of heaven;" let us employ it to protect the oppressed, to encourage piety, and to maintain the honour of God in the world.

Let us learn also *how to improve the privileges we enjoy*. Let us abound in praises to our heavenly Benefactor, in affectionate loyalty to our earthly king, and in every work, whereby God may be glorified, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures may be advanced.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

THE COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 13-15.)

Let us consider—

I. The ready compliance of the Persian officers with the royal commands.

1. *They carried out their commands faithfully.* "Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did."

2. *They carried out their commands*

readily. "So they did speedily." They exhibited neither reluctance nor delay in carrying out the directions which they had received from king Darius. We have in this another evidence of the freedom from prejudice, the impartiality, and the fairness which marked the conduct of Tatnai and Shethar-boznai towards the Jews.

II. The satisfactory progress and

ultimate completion of the building of the Temple. "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered," &c. (vers. 14, 15). This successful issue of their important undertaking was accomplished by the co-operation in various ways of many persons and powers, through the good Providence of God. Let us glance at such of these as are here mentioned.

1. *The grand Authority for the great work.* "They builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel." The builders prosecuted their work as "the servants of the God of heaven and earth" (chap. v. 11). They were summoned to their work and encouraged in it by the prophets of Jehovah, "in the name of the God of Israel" (chap. v. 1). They were working in obedience to His express command. And "there would have been no command of Cyrus and Darius without God's command."

2. *The royal promoters of the great work.* "And according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." Although Artaxerxes had nothing to do with the erection of the sacred edifice, he is mentioned by the historian because of the great favour he showed to the good cause many years afterwards. Each of these monarchs had rendered valuable assistance to the Jews in restoring and carrying on the worship of Jehovah. (1.) They gave permission for the return of the exiles and for the rebuilding of the Temple (chaps. i. 1-4; vi. 1-12; vii. 11-13). (2.) They granted them protection in rebuilding the Temple (ver. 7). (3.) They bestowed upon them liberal assistance both for their work and for their worship (chaps. i. 4-11; vi. 8-10; vii. 14-23).

3. *The worthy leaders of the great work.* "And the elders of the Jews builded." They were forward in taking up the work when summoned thereto by the prophet Haggai (chap. v. 2), and they continued steadfast and diligent in the prosecution thereof. By their example they encouraged the people in their duty.

4. *The inspired inciters in the great*

work. "And they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo." When the people were disheartened and wearied through difficulties and hindrances, these holy messengers of Heaven encouraged and strengthened them "through the Divine word and in the power of the Divine Spirit." With the assurances of success in their great work, and of the rich blessing of their God, they stimulated and invigorated the people in the prosecution of that work. (Comp. Hag. ii. ; Zech. iv. 6-10.)

5. *The ultimate completion of the great work.* "And they builded and finished it," &c. It was completed at last. There had been difficulties in the way of the work, and opposition to it, and for some time lack of interest in it on the part of the Jews themselves; but by the several concurrent favourable influences, and especially by the blessing of God, the undertaking was at length brought to a successful issue. And *the time of its completion is significant.* "And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." Says Schultz: "For a work of such importance the date is properly given. . . . It was now for the first the exactly right time. The Temple was ready just seventy years after its destruction, so that the prophecy of the seventy years was now fulfilled exactly thereby."

CONCLUSION :

The building of this Temple may be regarded as a figure of—

1. *The building of the temple of God in individual Christians.* "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" &c. (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17). "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith," &c. (Jude 20, 21). "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue," &c. (2 Pet. i. 5-7). And building thus, by the blessing of God, this edifice also shall be completed. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until" (Alford: "will perfect it up to") "the day of Jesus Christ." (a).

2. *The building of the temple of God in the world.* A great and glorious spiritual temple is being erected out of the ruins of fallen humanity. The work is frequently and sadly obstructed; the adversaries to it are many; the builders at times seem only half-hearted in their work; and the progress appears to be irregular and slow; but the edifice shall surely be brought to splendid completion. Opposition, however crafty and organised and powerful, can neither frustrate the purposes nor hinder the fulfilment of the promises of God. Here is the grand issue of the work of the builders of the spiritual temple: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them," &c. (Rev. xxi. 3, 4). (b).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The work of sanctification must go on until the saint can say, "I and my Father are one." That is the sublime end of Christianity. It is not to multiply theological technicalities; it is not to build one church spire higher than another; it is not to furnish a grindstone on which pugnacious bigots may whet their little swords; it is to gather up a shattered and overthrown humanity, to re-burnish the living stones on which the fire of an enemy has left traces of fury, to rebuild the fallen empire of manhood, until it shall be beautiful and holy as a palace built for God.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

It is the part of a good workman not to leave his work imperfect; a good physician will not forsake his patient when he has done but half his cure; the husbandman gives not over when he has sown but part of his ground; and he that does but half build a house is but half a carpenter. So he that enters into the way of Christianity, and stands still, is but half a Christian—the greatest part of his work is yet behind. It is not enough to begin well, but to continue in well-doing; it is not so much the entrance into, as the perseverance in goodness that is required. God left not the great work of the creation in the first or second day thereof, but in six days finished it to the glory of His name; not as then in the generation of His creatures, but now also in their regeneration; whom He loves, He loves to the end; and the good work He has begun in any, shall be perfected. Having, then, so fair a copy to write by, so good an example to live by, let us so run that we may obtain; so sail in the sea of this world that we may never give over till we arrive in the

desired haven; so to begin as to be sure to make an end; that it may never be said to our great and just reproach, "This man began to build, but was not able to finish" (Luke xiv. 30).—*Whittaker.*

(b) Inasmuch as "all the building is growing in the Lord" (Eph. ii. 21), and according to His order, it will, in the end, not only be a glorious temple of humanity, but marvelously adapted for the indwelling and manifestation of God. "I will dwell in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." I will fill them, and they shall represent My fulness. "The whole building," the redeemed of every generation, growing more and more into unity with each other, and with Christ, and through Him, with all the hidden powers of the Godhead, is a work which is every way worthy of an Almighty Father. To what glory, to what beauty, will the kingdom grow? to what wisdom will its members attain? what will be their powers? what their fellowships? what their individual freedom of action? what their service and end, as one empire in the Son, and in the Father! —*John Pulsford.*

Did you ever win a soul to Christ? Did you ever get a grip of the hand of spiritual gratitude? Did you ever see the tear starting from the eye when the convert said, "Bless you! I shall remember you in heaven, for you have brought me to Christ?" Ah, my dear friend, you will not be satisfied merely with this. This is a kind of food that makes men hungry. Oh, that you had a rich banquet of it, and yet wanted more still. The Church will be built. If you and I sit still, it will be built. This is a truth, though it is often turned to a mischievous end—the Church will be built, even without us. But, oh, we shall miss the satisfaction of helping in its building. Yes, it will grow; every stone will be put in its place, and the pinnacle will soar into its predestined place, but every stone from foundation to pinnacle, will seem to say to you, "Thou hadst nothing to do with this! Thou hadst no hand in this!" When Cyrus took one of his guests round his garden, the guest admired it greatly, and said he had much pleasure in it. "Ah," said Cyrus, "but you have not so much pleasure in this garden as I have, for I planted every tree in it myself." One reason why Christ has so much pleasure in His Church is because He did so much for it; and one reason why some saints will have a greater fulness of heaven than others to rejoice in will be because they did more for heaven than others. By God's grace they were enabled to bring more souls there; and as they look upon the Church they may, without self-reliance, and ascribing it all to grace, remember what they were enabled to do in its building up.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

THE SUBSERVIENCY OF A FAITHFUL MINISTRY TO THE ERECTION OF GOD'S
SPIRITUAL TEMPLE.

(Verse 14.)

I. The building of the Temple through the instrumentality of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

1. *Many difficulties obstructed the progress of the work.* Scarcely was the foundation laid, before an attempt was made to impede the work through *the hypocrisy of pretended friends.* The Samaritans offered to co-operate with the Jews in raising the intended fabric; but their design was to frustrate, rather than promote, the completion of it. Many will profess to desire the same objects, and will offer to concur in prosecuting them to a certain point, who, if their offers were accepted, would only defeat the ends proposed. The Jews, however, determined to prosecute their work alone (chap. iv. 1-3). That device having failed, they were assaulted by *the hostility of open enemies.* Complaints were made against them, and they were represented as plotting to gain their liberty and independence, &c. In this way the servants of God have been assailed in all ages: our Lord was calumniated as an enemy to Cæsar; and His apostles as "movers of sedition," &c. This plan succeeded, the Jews yielded to despondency, and for the space of fifteen years suspended the work (chap. iv. 23, 24). *A spirit of indolence and supineness* soon prevailed among them, and would have operated to a total dereliction of the work, if God had not sent His prophets to rouse them from their lethargy.

2. *Through the preaching of the prophets, however, these difficulties were overcome.* The prophet Haggai justly reproved them for attending so carefully to their own accommodation, &c. (Hag. i. 2-5, 7). The prophet Zechariah also urged them to bear in mind how awfully their fathers had suffered for the neglect of God (Zech. i. 1-6); and then, by a variety of images which he had seen in visions, encouraged them with assurances of success in their labours (Zech.

i.-iv.). Thus were the people stimulated to exertion. But no sooner did they resume their work, than their enemies renewed their application to the government to issue again their mandate to discontinue it (chap. v. 1-10). This effort, however, was overruled, as similar efforts have often been, for the furtherance of the work it was intended to destroy (comp. chap. vi. 1-10 with Phil. i. 12); and in the short space of four years the edifice was completed (ver. 15).

II. The subserviency of a faithful ministry to the erection of God's spiritual temple. The Temple of old was a shadow of that spiritual temple which is erected for God in the hearts of men; "being built on the foundation of the apostles," &c. (Eph. ii. 20-22). The erection of this—

1. *Is connected with the same difficulties.* Who that begins truly to surrender up his soul to God, does not find many impediments from *pretended friends?* They will profess to approve of religion, and will propose to go with us to a certain length, that so they may have the greater influence to keep us from "following the Lord fully," and from serving Him with our *whole* hearts. If we are enabled to withstand their efforts, then we shall be assailed by *open enemies.* Not unfrequently will they become our greatest foes, who by their relation to us ought rather to become our firmest protectors. And too often do *timidity and sloth* induce us to relax our efforts, till, if God do not by some special act of providence or grace awaken us, we lose the time for working, and, like the foolish virgins, experience for ever the fatal effects of our remissness.

2. *Is carried on and perfected by the same means.* God has established an order of men *on purpose to carry on this spiritual building* in the world (Eph. iv. 11-13). The apostles may be called "master builders;" but every pastor and teacher is engaged in the same

work, according to the office that has been assigned him. We call you, then, to "consider your ways;" consider what has hindered you hitherto, &c. Consider too the promises of God. What assurances of success are given, &c. "Up

then, and be doing," every one of you; and "your God will be with you." Yield not to discouragements of any kind, &c. Seek "as living stones to be built up a spiritual house," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5).—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

(Verses 16–18.)

The dedication of the Temple was characterised by—

I. Religious rejoicing. "And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." It would not have been very surprising if they had mourned because it was so inferior in magnificence and splendour to the Temple of Solomon. It is probable "that the carving and the gold, and other ornaments of Solomon's Temple far surpassed this, and the pillars of the portico and the veils may all have been far more splendid, so also probably were the vessels; and all this is what a Jew would mourn over far more than mere architectural splendour." Moreover, some of the most sacred and glorious things of the first Temple were altogether absent from this one, *e.g.*, the Ark of the covenant, the cherubim, the Shechinah, and the Urim and Thummin. Sometimes when we have reached the end of long cherished hopes and efforts, we are disappointed and depressed because the result does not come up to our ideal and desire. And we should not, therefore, have been surprised if the Jews had looked upon their finished work with sadness. But it was not so. They "kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." And they had good reasons for devout gladness; *e.g.*—

1. *Protracted labours brought to a successful termination.*

2. *The honour offered to Jehovah their God.*

3. *The benefits which were likely to accrue to men through their sacred edifice and its worship.* Joyousness in the service of God is a conspicuous feature of the religious life in post-exile times. This is especially manifest in

the Psalms of this period. Comp. Ps. cxxxv., cxxxvi., cxlvi.—cl., and cxviii., which, says Schultz, "without doubt the congregation then sung, although it was really composed somewhat earlier; and especially did they appropriate with greatly agitated hearts the shout of triumph: 'The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doth valiantly. . . . Open to me the gates of righteousness,' &c. And we also should "serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing, enter into His gates with thanksgiving," &c. (*a*).

II. Devout gratitude. "And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs." In these offerings we discover—

1. *An expression of gratitude.* They presented both burnt offerings and peace offerings; and while both were expressive of gratitude, the latter were especially so. The peace offerings were eucharistic. The Psalmist refers to them when he says, "I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving." They had great and strong reasons for gratitude. "The Lord had done great things for them." And they sang, "The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad." (*b*).

2. *An expression of their complete self-dedication to God.* The burnt offerings were laid whole upon the altar, and there consumed by fire, thus setting forth the entire consecration of the offerer to God. This was the chief meaning of the burnt offerings. The dedication of churches is acceptable to God only as the worshippers dedicate themselves to Him. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." "I be-

seech you, therefore, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice," &c. (c).

The number of these offerings is small as compared with the very large number offered by Solomon at the dedication of the former Temple. "Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep." But Zerubabel offered only "an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats." The total number of animals sacrificed then was 142,000; the total now is only 712. Yet Zerubabel and the people with him offered—(1.) Freely. (2.) Liberally, when we take into account their small numbers and reduced circumstances, as compared with those of the time of Solomon. (3.) Cheerfully. And "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not."

III. Deep humility. "And for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." Consider—

1. *The nature of this offering.* "A sin offering." This was an acknowledgment of sin on the part of those for whom it was offered, and that the sinner deserved death by reason of his sin, but that God in His mercy accepted the death of the victim as an atonement for the sinner. And in this way the people humbly confess their sin before God. Sin had brought their miseries upon them, had stripped them of their national power and protection, had been the real cause of their captivity. Hence this sin offering was appropriate in its relation to past sins, and a hopeful indication as to their future conduct. (d).

2. *The number of the victims composing this offering.* "A sin offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." The confession of sin was intended for the whole nation, and the atonement was designed "for all Israel." This was a recognition on the part of the offerers

of the unity of all the tribes, an evidence that "the Temple was intended for the entire covenant people," and an expression of the hope that all would return to the land of their fathers, and to the enjoyment of the full privileges of the people of God.

IV. Appropriate arrangements for its future use. "And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses." Thus arrangements were made for—

1. *Regular and orderly services.* They aimed at—(1.) *Completeness* in their worship. Both priests and Levites were set in their respective spheres of work. No duties were to be neglected. (2.) *Continuity* in their worship. They were set in classes and divisions, so that when one had fulfilled its appointed term of service another would take its place. (Comp. 1 Chron. xxiii.—xxvi.)

2. *Scriptural services.* "As it is written in the book of Moses." They were careful that their worship should be in accordance with the expressed will of God. It is well said by Matthew Henry: "Though the Temple service could not now be performed with so much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, yet perhaps it was performed with as much purity and close adherence to the Divine institution as ever, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the beauty of holiness."

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the principal points of this exposition are applicable to the dedication of churches in our own day.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The priests of old were not to sully themselves with sorrow when they performed their functions, and saints who are of a higher priesthood should show forth delight in their approaches to their God. Angels sing, and why not God's other servants, who are a little lower, and yet far higher? David danced before the ark, which was but a symbol of Divinity; what ails us that our heart so seldom dances before the Lord Himself? The old creation has its sunshine and flowers; its lowing herds and bleating flocks; its heaven-mounting larks and warbling nightingales; its rivers laughing, and its seas clapping

hands; is the new creation of grace to render less happy worship to God our exceeding joy? Nay, rather let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, and show ourselves glad in Him with psalms. Most of the English versions alter the old hundredth Psalm into, "Him serve with fear;" but for my part, by God's grace I mean to sing it as it used to be and still is sung in Scotland—

"All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell,
Come ye before Him and rejoice."
—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(b) It is an excellent thing when Christian men know how to sing as well as to work, and mingle holy music with holy service. The best music of a Christian consists in thankfulness to God. Thanks should be rendered by the believer with all the acts common to men. Our eating, our drinking, our social meetings, our quiet conversings one with another, in all we should give thanks unto God and the Father. This we should do in the labours peculiar to our vocation. Whatever your trade and calling may be, if you cannot sing aloud, you can sing in your hearts while your hands are busy; you can ring out the praises of God as well to the sound of the hammer on the anvil as to the peal of the organ; your feet at the sewing machine may beat time to a sacred tune; you can as well praise God while you crack your whip as when you sing to a Psalm tune. Why not? If the heart be right you can mount up to the heavens from any place of labour.—*Ibid.*

(c) It is the end and essence of all religion to turn the mind from self to God; to give it absorbing views of the Divine beauty and glory; to fill it with Divine love and zeal; to make it feel honoured in honouring God, blessed in blessing Him; to make it feel that nothing is good enough or great enough for Him. . . . A man thus inspired will no more think of inquiring the advantages, the probable gain of his deeds and his adoration, than he would think of the profitableness of gazing with admiration on a lovely landscape, or regaling his soul with the noble qualities of a hero or a martyr. Such a man has offered himself to

God; he has given his own soul, with all its powers. His other gifts are but results and forms of this first and greatest gift; all other offerings are virtually included in this. And, in truth, this consecration of self is the grand and essential condition, the seminal principle of all consecration. We have no just thought of God, no oneness of spirit with His Spirit, if we look on ourselves simply as sacrificers; we are sacrificers as well; both sacrificers and sacrifices; we have to present ourselves as sacrifices to God. And if there be this first and best offering, the offering of ourselves, it will infuse a spirit of life and fulness into all our service, animating the form, quickening the body of all service; a spirit of delight and strength and earnestness; a large and enlarging, a noble and an ennobling spirit. The prudent, commercial temper, in religion, is one of narrowness and pain and bondage; we never possess ourselves thoroughly till we forget ourselves, never realise our power and inherit our portion till all spiritual engagements and acts cease to be the mere meeting of a demand, the mere performance of a condition, and become the home and rest and reward of the soul.—*A. J. Morris.*

(d) The effect of these views and recollections (viz., those of true Christians) are penitence, contrition, and deep humiliation of soul, and by them all their religious feelings are pervaded and characterised. When they love their God and Redeemer, it is with a penitent love; when they rejoice in Him, it is with a penitent joy; when they believe in Him, it is with a penitent faith; when they obey Him, it is with a penitent obedience; when they offer Him thanksgivings and praises, penitence mingles with them her humble confessions and contrite sighs; and the place on earth which they most covet, in which they most delight, is that of the woman who stood weeping at the feet of Christ, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. Even while observing a joyful festival, tears, the fountain of which is supplied by godly sorrow for sin, and gratitude to the Redeemer; tears, which it is delightful to shed, are seen on the same countenances which glow with love and hope, and beam with holy humble joy in God.—*E. Payson, D.D.*

THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER.

(Verses 19–22.)

A few weeks after the dedication of the Temple the feasts of the Passover and of unleavened bread were celebrated; and this marked the beginning of the new period in which the worship of God, with its festivals and observances, was regularly and fully carried on.

Notice:

I. The personal preparation for these sacred festivals. This comprised—

1. *The purification of the priests and Levites from ceremonial uncleanness.* "For the priests and Levites had purified themselves as one man, they were

all clean, and killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves." "The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministrations." They who "bear the vessels of the Lord" should be clean (Isa. lii. 7).

2. *The separation of the people from heathen associations and immoralities.* "And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat." And separation from sinners and their corrupt practices is still indispensable to union and communion with God. "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. (2 Cor. vi. 16-18). We cannot meet with God in holy fellowship unless we are in a suitable spiritual condition. And as a rule, men require preparation of heart (Job xi. 13), in order to meet Him thus. To enjoy intimate communion with God, we must turn aside from the ways of darkness, and "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John i. 5-7). (a).

II. The principal significance of these sacred festivals. It would be out of place here to enter at any length into a consideration of the meaning of these feasts. But inasmuch as their chief significance was emphasised upon this special occasion, it behoves us to notice that significance.

1. *The Passover was a memorial of their covenant relation with God.* "The Exodus," as Dr. Howson observes, "was looked upon as the birth of the nation; the Passover was its annual birthday feast. Nearly all the rites of the festival, if explained in the most natural manner, appear to point to this as to its primary meaning. It was the yearly memorial of the dedication of the people to Him who had saved their first-born from the destroyer, in order that they might be made holy to Himself. This was the lesson which they were to teach to their children throughout all genera-

tions. When the young Hebrew asked his father regarding the paschal lamb, 'What is this?' the answer prescribed was, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt,' &c. (Exod. xiii. 14, 15). Hence, in the periods of great national restoration in the times of Joshua, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Ezra, the Passover was observed in a special manner, to remind the people of their true position, and to mark their renewal of the covenant which their fathers had made." This covenant relation was originally based upon what God had done for them in bringing them out of their bondage in Egypt, and in preserving their first-born from the destroying angel; and now the grounds of that relation were strengthened by the deliverance from Babylon, which He had effected for them, and by the fact that He had raised up for them such powerful and liberal friends as Cyrus and Darius. Thus they had special reasons for celebrating this Passover with extraordinary heartiness and devotion. How many and mighty are the reasons which constrain us to devote ourselves to God! (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19). (b).

2. *The feast of unleavened bread was a solemn recognition of their obligation to live holily unto God.* "The unleavened bread signified the abiding state of consecrated holiness." "Through the feast of unleavened bread," says Schultz, "they vowed, in that the strict abstinence from leaven was connected therewith, to walk not in the old leaven of wickedness and wantonness, but in the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (Comp. 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.) "We have far more cogent motives to rise into the new and pure life of sincerity and truth." (c).

III. The special joy in these sacred festivals. "And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy."

1. *All the ordinary reasons for joy were applicable upon this occasion.* The great facts commemorated were joy-inspiring. So also was the covenant relation which arose from these facts, with its privileges, &c.

2. *There were also special reasons*

for joy on this occasion. "For the Lord had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

Notice :

(1.) The *Author* of their joy. "The Lord had made them joyful." They regarded Him as the great fountain of all their blessings. "All my springs are in Thee." (2.) The *occasion* of their joy. That by the favour and assistance of Cyrus and Darius they had completed the Temple of God, and were able to celebrate all the sacred ordinances of their religion in a becoming manner. (3.) The *character* of their joy. It was religious in its source, occasion, character, and expression. It expressed itself in the reverent worship of the holy God. Let our joy be of the same character. "Rejoice in the Lord alway : again I say, Rejoice." (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Sequester yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty. You cannot come hot, reeking out of the world into God's presence, but you will find the influence of it in your duties. It is with the heart a few minutes since plunged into the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working muddy and disquiet ; though the wind be laid and storm over, thy heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a lute or viol, and play presently upon it, without some time to tune it. When thou goest to God in any duty, take thy heart aside, and say, "O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about. I am going into the awful presence of God, about business of everlasting moment."—*H. G. Salter.*

(b) Dr. Doddridge, on one occasion, interested himself on behalf of a condemned criminal, and at length succeeded in obtaining his pardon. On announcing to him the joyful intelligence, he prostrated himself at the Doctor's feet, and exclaimed, "Oh, sir, every drop of my blood thanks you, for you have had mercy on every drop of it ! Wherever you go, I will be yours." With how much greater propriety may the Christian prostrate himself at the feet of Christ, and make use of similar language.—*Bible Illustrations.*

(c) "Holiness to the Lord !" where is that

inscription to be stamped now ? Not on the vestments of any Levitical order ; not on plates of sacerdotal gold, worn upon the forehead. Priest and Levite have passed by. The Jewish tabernacle has expanded into that world-wide brotherhood where whosoever doeth righteousness is accepted. Morning has risen into day. Are we children of that day ? For form, we have spirit ; for Gerizim and Zion, our common scenery. The ministry of Aaron is ended. His ephod, with its gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, and cunning work, has faded and dropped. The curious girdle and its chains of wreathen gold are broken. The breastplate of judgment that lay against his heart, and its fourfold row of triple jewels—of sardines, topaz, and carbuncle—of emerald, sapphire, and diamond—of ligure, agate, and amethyst—of beryl, onyx, and jasper—has been crushed and lost. The pomegranates are cast aside like untimely fruit. The golden bells are silent. Even the mitre, with its sacred signet, and the grace of the fashion of it, has perished. All the outward beauty and glory of that Hebrew worship which the Lord commanded Moses has vanished into the eternal splendours of the Gospel, and been fulfilled in Christ. What teaching has it left ? what other than this ?—that we are to engrave our "Holiness to the Lord," first on the heart, and then on all that the heart goes out into, through the brain and the hand : on the plates of gold our age of enterprise is drawing up from mines, and beating into currency ; on bales of merchandise and books of account ; on the tools and bench of every handicraft ; on your weights and measures ; on pen and plough and pulpit ; on the doorposts of your houses, and the utensils of your table, and the walls of your chambers ; on cradle and playthings and school-books ; on the locomotives of enterprise, and the bells of the horses, and the ships of navigation ; on music-halls and libraries ; on galleries of art, and the lyceum desk ; on all of man's inventing and building, all of his using and enjoying ; for all these are trusts in a stewardship, for which the Lord of the servants reckoneth.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(d) Christianity is not a sepulchral thing, a gloomy life, a depressed condition of social existence. It is impossible that it can be so as the world brands it, with such a prescription as this from an apostle's lips, "Rejoice evermore." True, the Christian has his sorrows ; but these are not unsweetened. True, the Christian life has its shadows and its showers ; but these are not unmingled with bright beams of heavenly light ; and the saddest aspects of a Christian's daily life are but the April showers of spring that usher in the approaching bright and beautiful summer—the everlasting and the heavenly sunshine. Christian life is not a penance, as the Romanist thinks it ; but a privilege, as God describes it. It is not a reluctant sacrifice wrung from us, but a joyous and freewill offering gladly and gratefully rendered by us. And, therefore, the

light of our life is not a dim, but a bright religious life. The injunction of our Apostle is, "Rejoice always;" and the prayer of the Apostle's Lord, "That My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And Peter, catching up the thought of his Lord still shining with undiminished lustre on the leaves of memory, answers in his epistle, "Whom, having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice

with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And the Apostle Paul, echoing the same grand sentiment, says, "We joy in God." "Rejoice; again I say, Rejoice." This shows us, that of all happy men upon earth the Christian should be happiest. His sorrows come from sin, his griefs spring from evil; his sunshine, his gladness, and his joy are the spontaneous and moral elements of his true Christian and holy life.—*John Cumming, D.D.*

THE DEDICATION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE.

Notes for Scripture Lesson. (Verses 16–22.)

The new house at length was ready. It was larger than the Temple of Solomon (see article on Second Temple in any good Bible dictionary), though very far less gorgeous. Its size, however, was "not larger than an average parish church of the last century. Solomon's was smaller." (Article, "Temple of Zerubbabel," *Smith's Bibl. Dict.*) There is, too, a very great contrast between the number of sacrifices at the dedication of the two Temples (comp. Ezra vi. 17, with 2 Chron. vii. 5), as there is also between the gorgeousness of the ritual in one case, and its comparative plainness in the other. Each feature noted by Ezra is of interest and importance.

I. The occasion was one of joy—the worship of God should be joyful. Hebrew and Christian worship are joyful, because believers worship a revealed God of salvation. Heathen worship is a straining or groping of man after God (1 Kings xviii. 26–29). It cannot be joyful. But we worship a God of Love, who revealed Himself to the Hebrews in sacrifices and prophecy, and who reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ, "full of beauty, truth, and grace." If we would see the gladness of the worship in the second Temple, let us turn to the 146th, 147th, and 148th Psalms, which were composed by, or under the direction of, Haggai and Zechariah, for the service of this house of God. The burden of Hebrew song is "Rejoice in the Lord!"

II. The service was one for which all who had to take part in it had previously purified themselves (ver. 20). All who have to take any part in the work of teaching, or worship of

God's house, should prepare themselves for it by communion with God, and a renewal of the covenant with Him to put away all iniquity.

III. There were burnt offerings as a token of the consecration of the people (see the title of these Psalms in the LXX.), heart and soul afresh to God (ver. 17, 1st part). Let us (1) glory in what God is to us, and (2) give our whole selves to God.

IV. There were sin offerings — "A sin offering for all Israel" (ver. 17). Every tribe was represented. These sin offerings were "but shadows of good things to come" (see Heb. x. 1–12; John i. 29). In Divine worship there should *always* be a recognition of sin, and of Christ's having "put away sin" by the sacrifice of Himself.

V. There was the observance of the Passover (Exod. xii.). Doubtless an effort was made to finish the Temple at the close of the year, that the feast, which celebrated the great national deliverance of the people, might naturally fall in place during the dedication ceremonies. Their national life was based on redemption. They loved God, *because* God loved them; this is the order now, and we cannot reverse it (1 John iv. 19).

VI. The feast of unleavened bread was kept joyfully for seven days. (1) A feast in token of national unity and fellowship; (2) of unleavened bread, in token of their desire to cultivate purity; (3) a feast in which, as of old, "the stranger" joined, if ready to separate himself to Israel's God (ver. 21; Exod. xii. 48, 49).

VII. The new national life thus inaugurated had far less of pomp and

show about it than were seen in the days of Solomon. But there was more of spiritual power (Hag. ii. 9). The people had been purified in the furnace

of affliction, and from this time idolatry was unknown among them. — *C. Clemance, D.D.*

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

Outline of Scripture Lesson. (Whole Chapter.)

I. The Jews had a truth to learn which God knew only captivity in a strange land would teach them. That truth was, that national and individual prosperity depend on the maintenance of religious worship. The captivity had the desired effect; the people traced their fall to its real source (Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 2). Ages before, they, on looking back, had remembered other things (Num. xi. 4, 5), and would willingly return to the house of bondage for the sake of creature comforts. Long ages of national discipline and Divine teaching had taught them that men do not live by bread alone. (Comp. Deut. viii. 3 with Matt. iv. 4.) Now they remembered and sighed for the nourishment of their higher life. Instead of recalling, with tears, the land flowing with milk and honey, and their former political greatness, and the glory of their kings (as David and Solomon), they "wept when they remembered Zion."

Bring out the province of memory, and how the character is indicated by that which memory recalls with most of joy or of sorrow. The day will come when the memory of each one will be most active, when the Lord will say to many an one, "Son, remember" (Luke xvi. 25).

II. They showed how well they had learned this truth by at once, on their return, commencing the rebuilding of the Temple, and persevering with the work, in the midst of many difficulties and interruptions, for twenty-one years. Let the teacher bring out the difference between the work of the people on coming out of the Egyptian house of bondage; and now, on returning from the Babylonian captivity, show how the different work is indicative of great progress in national sentiment and religious life. The old work showed that freedom

was then won by the sword; this, that the greatest freedom and happiness of a people are secured by the truth (John viii. 32), the central, liberty-winning truth being, There is one true and ever-living God, and that happy is the people whose God is the Lord (Ps. cxliv. 15).

So far, what has been said may be regarded as recapitulatory exercise.

III. Their persevering, self-denying work was crowned with success—the Temple was at length finished. The completion of great undertakings is a time of great interest. Take, as examples, some celebrated buildings, palaces, fortresses, exhibition buildings, &c. Will they answer the purpose for which they have been erected? Is the purpose one that warrants the expectation of the Divine blessing? If not (as the Tower of Babel), the building will presently become a monument of human folly (Ps. cxxvii. 1).

Bring out the purpose of this building, and show its importance, relatively, to other erections. The Temple was built before the walls of the city were repaired. It was the true rock of strength, the fortress, the spiritual Gibraltar, the key to the possession of the Promised Land. Why? (See Ps. xlvi.; xviii. 2, 3; lxxi. 3.)

IV. It was meet that the opening services should be marked by the liveliest demonstrations of religious joy.

1. For here was a vast work, pursued by a small number of people through many interruptions, and continued for many years—(during which those who assisted at the foundation, above twenty years before, were daily dying off)—brought to a successful close; while enemies and difficulties increased, the stimulating influence of the presence of the elders of the people diminished.

2. Not only was there the joy caused

by the ending of the work, joy caused by retrospective glances, but joy inflamed by the hope of the future. We are accustomed, in the opening of places of worship, to rejoice in the prospect of the truth that may be there proclaimed to future generations.

3. It was joy marked by feasting and song. Probably they sang Psalms cxlvi., cxlvii., cxlviii., which, in the Septuagint, are called Psalms of Haggai and Zechariah. Reference to these Psalms will show that joy was deep and religious; that they praised God as the Creator of the world, as the God of providence, and as the God of Israel, and (see Ps. cxlviii. 11, 12) that all classes and ages were to share in the joy and the song.

4. It was joy marked by the control of law and order. It was no wild bacchanalian revelry, but devout and reverential thanksgiving. There was in it the remembrance of former mercies (see vers. 20-22). Hence the acknowledgment of the God of the past as the God of the present, and the belief that He would be the God of the future.

V. In spirit and principle, this dedication of the Temple may be applied in the case of the opening of any build-

ing devoted to religious purposes. Such an event is an occasion for joy of the deepest and most holy kind. There is in it the grateful memory of the past, and believing hopefulness for the future. All places of prayer, and religious work in the world, are the true successors of this Temple, whose dedication we have been considering. They are designed to conserve and to promulgate that salvation which is of the Jews, and which, by type and ceremony, was first manifested by shadows in the past, but which now with clearer light has appeared unto all men.

VI. We are engaged in rearing a Temple. It is not built of bricks and stones, but of living souls. In it are our sons and our daughters, polished after the similitude of a palace. (1.) Have we a place therein? (2.) Are we doing our utmost to bring others in? (3.) Let us not be content till every one in our class is built up into this spiritual temple. (4.) Let us also labour for the whole school, and for the world at large; till, as the glory of God filled the Temple of old, the "whole earth may be filled with His glory" in the reign of love, and truth, and salvation.—*J. Cowper Gray.*

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] We now enter upon the second and concluding part of this book, which treats of the return of certain Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under Ezra, and the reformation which he accomplished amongst the people (chap. vii. 10). The first section of this part gives the history of the return of Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem, with the names of "the chief of their fathers" and the numbers of the respective families (chaps. vii. and viii.). The present chapter contains—(i.) The genealogy of Ezra and a brief statement of his journey with others to Jerusalem (vers. 1-10). (ii.) The commission given by Artaxerxes the king to Ezra (vers. 11-26). (iii.) Ezra's praise to God for the favours received from the king (vers. 27, 28).

Ver. 1. Now after these things] Fifty-seven years had elapsed since the events recorded in the close of the preceding chapter. "Such gaps," as Schultz observes, "the ancient sacred history has again and again; it is silent respecting the times between Joseph and Moses, respecting the time passed by the generation rejected of God in the wilderness, respecting the time of the exile. There was lacking in these times useful material calculated for the edification of the congregation." Artaxerxes king of Persia] Heb. *Artachshasta*. Artaxerxes Longimanus, son of Xerxes and grandson of Darius, is meant. Ezra the son of Seraiah] "Ezra was probably the great-great-grandson of Seraiah; for the high priest Jeshua, who had gone to Jerusalem seventy-eight years before with Zerubbabel, was a grandson of Seraiah. One hundred and thirty years had already passed since the execution of the latter (2 Kings xxv. 18-21) in the year 588."—*Schultz*. According to the usage of the writers of Scripture, every descendant is designated a "son," and every progenitor, a "father."

Vers. 1-5] A number of generations are not mentioned between Ezra and Aaron. Three names are omitted between Ezra and Seraiah (ver. 1), and "in verse 3 six members of the line are passed over between Azariah and Meraioth (according to 1 Chron. vi. 7-10), without doubt only for the sake of brevity, as is frequently the case in the longer genealogies."

Ver. 6. A ready scribe in the law of Moses] "The word *סופר* means in older works

writer or secretary; but even as early as Jer. viii. 8, the lying pen of the סֹפֵר is spoken of, and here therefore סוֹפֵר has already attained the meaning of one learned in the Scripture, one who has made the written law a subject of investigation. Ezra is, however, the first of whom the predicate הַסֹּפֵר, ὁ γραμματεὺς, is used as a title."—Keil. Which the Lord God of Israel had given] It thoroughly accords with the piety of Ezra to regard and speak of the law as the gift of God. And the king granted him all his request] "The question how this favouring of Ezra is related to the writing of Artaxerxes given in chap. iv., is best answered by the fact that Ezra's journey occurred somewhat later, that Artaxerxes, since he had been moved to that writing by his officials, had paid more attention to the Jews, and that he furthered Ezra's journey in order to strengthen the Jewish congregation; perhaps also in order to show thereby that he actually was ready to be as just as possible, notwithstanding the prohibition issued respecting the walls of the city. It is shown then by this approval that he would perhaps recall at a suitable time even that prohibition which indeed had been issued at first only provisionally."—Schultz. According to the hand of the Lord his God upon him] This expression is found only here and in vers. 9, 28; viii. 18; Neh. ii. 8, 18; and with slight variations in chap. viii. 22, 31; and it signifies, according to the favour and furtherance which God had granted to him.

Ver. 7. And there went up some of the children of Israel] &c. (Comp. chap. ii. 70.)

Ver. 9. For upon the first day of the first month] &c. The journey occupied exactly four months, which seems an unnecessarily long time. "The direct distance of Babylon from Jerusalem," says Rawlinson, "is no more than about five hundred and twenty miles; and it may therefore seem surprising that the journey should have occupied four months. But no doubt the route followed was that circuitous one by Carehemish and the Orontes valley, which was ordinarily taken by armies or large bodies of men, and which increased the distance to about nine hundred miles. Still the time occupied is long, and must be accounted for by the dangers alluded to in chap. viii. 22, 31, which may have necessitated delays and *detours* to avoid conflicts." Moreover, we read of one rest of three days by the river of Ahava (chap. viii. 15), and there might have been other rests during the journey.

Ver. 12. Artaxerxes, king of kings] One of the recognised titles of the Persian monarchs, to whom were subject a number of tributary sovereigns. Perfect peace] "Peace" has been supplied by the translators of the A.V., and that improperly, in the opinion of some Hebraists. The explanation of נְמִיר (from נָמַר = to complete) is difficult. Fuerst says it is the passive participle. Keil is inclined "to regard it as an adverb used adjectively: To the scribe in the law of God perfectly, for the perfect scribe, &c., corresponding with the translation of the Vulgate, *doctissimo*." The correct meaning is probably that which is given in the margin of the A.V., "Unto Ezra the priest, a perfect scribe of the law of the God of heaven." And at such a time] Rather: *et cetera*, and so forth. (Comp. chap. iv. 11.) The letter of the king is given in the Chaldee original.

Ver. 14. His seven counsellors] constituted the supreme court of the kingdom. (Comp. Esth. i. 14.) To inquire concerning Judah] &c. "Probably the commission was general to inquire into the state of the province. According to Xenophon (*Cyrop.* VIII., vi. 16), it was a part of the Persian system for the king to send an officer once a year into each province to inspect and report upon it."—Rawlinson. According to the law of thy God] &c. *i.e.* "righteously and justly, according to the principle of thy religion."

Vers. 15, 16. And to carry the silver and gold] &c. "Three kinds of offerings for the Temple are here spoken of: 1st, the gifts of the king and his counsellors for the service of the God of Israel; 2d, the gold and the silver that Ezra should obtain in the province of Babylon, *i.e.* by the collection which he was consequently empowered to make among the non-Israelite population of Babylon; 3d, the freewill offerings of his fellow-countrymen."—Keil.

Ver. 20. Out of the king's treasure house] *i.e.* the royal treasury. "The Persian system of taxing the provinces through the satraps involved the establishment in each province of at least one local treasury. Such treasuries are mentioned occasionally in Greek history (see *Arrian, Exp. Alex.* I. 17; III. 18, 19, &c.)."—Rawlinson.

Ver. 22. Here the limit is stated which the treasurers were not to exceed in their grants to Ezra. An hundred talents of silver] According to Bishop Cumberland's computation of the Hebrew silver talent, this would amount to about £35,350. According to Dr. Arbuthnot's tables it would amount to £34,218, 15s. But according to Mr. R. S. Poole ("Dict. of the Bible," articles, *Money*, and *Weights and Measures*), it would be as much as £40,000. But it is not certain that the Hebrew talent was meant. An hundred measures of wheat] Margin: Chald. *cors*. *Cor* is the later word for homer. It was equal to ten ephas or baths, almost two bushels (1 Kings v. 11; Ezek. xlv. 14). The bath was equal to seven and a half gallons, according to Dr. Arbuthnot; but, according to the Rabbinites, to between four and five gallons, while, according to Josephus, it was between eight and nine gallons. Wheat, wine, oil, and salt] were required by the Jews for their meat offerings; and "as the Persian tribute was paid partly in money and partly in kind, the treasuries would be able to supply them as readily as they could furnish money."

Ver. 23. Let it be diligently done] Keil translates, "completely done." So does Schultz also. Why should there be wrath] &c. (Comp. vi. 10.)

Ver. 24. We also certify you] or, "and to you it is made known." "The treasurers which are beyond the river" are still addressed. Or ministers] Rather, "and ministers." "The expression comprises any servants of the Temple who might have been omitted in the classes enumerated."—*Keil*. It shall not be lawful to impose] &c. In this respect "the decree of Artaxerxes was more favourable to the Jews than those of all previous Persian monarchs." Toll, tribute, or custom] (See notes on chap. iv. 13.)

Ver. 25. That is in thine hand] *i.e.* "which thou possessest." All the people that are beyond the river] is limited to Israelites or Jews by the following clause, all such as know the laws of thy God. And teach ye them that know them not] These words do "not refer to the heathen, but to born Israelites or Jews, who, living among the heathen, had not hitherto made the Mosaic law the rule of their lives. Such were the judges to constrain to the observance and obedience of the law.

"By granting these privileges, Artaxerxes was not only treading in the footsteps of Cyrus and Darius Hystaspes, but even going beyond these princes in granting to the Jews a jurisdiction of their own."—*Keil*.

Vers. 27, 28. Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers] &c. "This abrupt transition from the words of Artaxerxes to those of Ezra may be compared with the almost equally abrupt change in vi. 6. The language alters at the same time from Chaldee to Hebrew, continuing henceforth to be Hebrew till the close of the book."—*Rawlinson*.

Ver. 28. And hath extended mercy unto me before the king] *i.e.* hath awakened in him such a kind disposition towards me. And I gathered together] &c. Ezra regards this as a result of his being "strengthened." Chief men to go up with me] These chief men being heads of households, their families would accompany them to the land of their fathers.

EZRA THE DISTINGUISHED.

(Verses 1-10.)

In this paragraph Ezra appears before us as—

I. A man of distinguished ancestry. "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, &c." (vers. 1-5). He was able to trace his pedigree up to Aaron the high priest; and he was "descended from the heads of that line." To have descended from godly progenitors is a blessing of incalculable worth. This blessing comprises—

1. *The inspiration of noble examples.*
2. *The inheritance of excellent constitutional moral tendencies.* (a).
3. *The rich results of parental prayers.* (b).

"My boast is not that I deduce my birth
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the
earth;
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
The son of parents passed into the skies."
—*Cowper*.

II. A man of distinguished attainments.

1. Here are *distinguished attainments*. "This Ezra was a ready scribe." This does not mean merely a ready writer; but, as Bishop Patrick observes, "he calls himself a scribe, from his declaring and explaining the things contained in

the Scriptures. The word in the original signifies one skilled and learned in that which was the Book by way of eminence, a teacher and expounder of it; and he was a 'ready scribe,' because he was peculiarly expert and understanding in the law, both in matters which related to the priesthood, and to the civil authority."

2. Distinguished attainments *in a great subject*. "He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses." Ezra was famous for his learning and skill, not in any trivial matters, or in things of inferior importance, but in themes and things of the most vital and enduring interest. He was "mighty in the Scriptures." And, passing over the Jewish traditions concerning him in this respect, we may observe, quoting the words of Bishop Hervey, "that the pointed description of Ezra (vii. 6) as 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses,' repeated in 11, 12, 21, added to the information concerning him that 'he had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments' (vii. 10), and his commission to teach the laws of his God to such as knew them not (25), and his great diligence in reading the Scriptures to the people, all give the

utmost probability to the account which attributes to him a corrected edition of the Scriptures, and the circulation of many such copies. The books of Nehemiah and Malachi must indeed have been added later, possibly by Malachi's authority." (c).

3. Distinguished attainments in a great subject by a great Author. "He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given." In the estimate of Ezra, the law was not a human code which originated with Moses; the Scriptures were not merely the richest treasures of their national literature, which had required many ages for their accumulation. They had God for their author; they were His special gift to His chosen people; they were sacred things to this earnest and reverent student of them.

III. A man in the enjoyment of distinguished favour. "This Ezra went up from Babylon, . . . and the king granted him all his request." It is probable that the officers of the Persian government in Syria were not faithfully and fully carrying out the decree of Darius as regards the grant of supplies for the Jewish worship at Jerusalem (chap. vi. 9, 10), and that Ezra, representing the elders of the Jews, requested the king to issue new commands concerning them; for the commission of Ezra from the king provides fully for these things (vers. 15-23). His request seems also to have been for permission for himself to go up to Jerusalem, and for all such as were disposed to accompany him, that they might be allowed to do so. And this pious and patriotic scribe stood so high in the estimation of Artaxerxes that "the king granted him all his request." That he should enjoy so much of the confidence and favour of such a monarch as Artaxerxes is a valuable testimony to the worth of Ezra. "The king's favour is toward a wise servant."

IV. A man of distinguished influence. "And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests," &c. (ver. 7). Ezra was trusted not only by the king and his counsellors, but by his own countrymen also, with

whom he had great influence. This influence was over—

1. *Various classes of men.* Priests, Levites, people of the other tribes, not set apart for religious services, and Nithinim, accompanied him to Jerusalem from Babylon.

2. *Large numbers of men.* Of all classes there were upwards of 1770 adult males in the party which went up to Jerusalem with Ezra; so that the total, including wives, children, and servants, would probably be from 8000 to 9000 souls. (d).

V. A man of distinguished success. We have an example of this in his journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. "He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first," &c. (vers. 8, 9). This journey was—

1. *Long.* About nine hundred miles by the route which they probably pursued.

2. *Difficult.* It was by no means an easy matter to conduct so large a number of persons, including many women and "little ones," through so long a journey in those times and countries. (Comp. chap. viii. 21.)

3. *Perilous.* They were in danger of being attacked by Arabian freebooters, by whom the country through which they had to travel was infested. (Comp. chap. viii. 22, 31.)

4. *Successful.* "On the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him."

VI. A man of distinguished aim. "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord," &c. (ver. 10). We see that he aimed at—

1. *The acquisition of the highest knowledge.* "He had prepared"—set or fixed—"his heart to seek the law of the Lord." He resolutely sought thoroughly to know the Scriptures.

2. *The practice of the highest knowledge.* "And to do it." He endeavoured to conform his life to the law of Jehovah. (e).

3. *The impartation of the highest knowledge.* "And to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." By both pre-

cept and example he strove to bring the people to know and obey the Divine law. We must know ourselves what we would teach others; and if we would teach with practical effect, we must ourselves practise what we teach.

VII. A man of distinguished blessing. "The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. . . . Came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him."

1. *The blessing of God rested upon him.* By reason of it he was protected in journeyings, and prospered in his undertakings.

2. *The blessing of God was acknowledged by him.* He traced his successes to their First Cause; and gratefully acknowledged the gracious providence of God in his life. (*f*).

We are all recipients of the manifold blessings of God; let us also heartily recognise them as such, and gratefully bless the Giver.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(*a*) If you plant seeds for apple-stalks, you are obliged to graft every one of them; but if you take from a good apple-tree a cutting, it will grow up and bear the same kind of fruit which that tree bears. Now, I do not say that literally there is a transfer of qualities from parents to children, as there is a literal transfer of fruit from the original tree to the tree which is produced from a cutting, so that the apples are greenings or pippins according to the stock from which they sprung; but I believe it is substantially like that. I believe it is in the power of father and mother to rear the child so that from its earliest periods it shall be drawn by the Spirit of God.—*H. W. Beecher.*

Your father was a holy man, — will you undertake to *break the line of a holy succession*? Ought not the fame of his holiness to awaken your own religious concern? Are you prepared to make yourself the turning-point in the line of a pious ancestry? Beware lest you say in effect, "For generations my fathers have trusted in God and looked to Him for the light of their lives, but now I deliberately disown their worship and turn away from the God they loved." This you can say if you be so minded. God does not force Himself upon you. You may start a pagan posterity if you please.—*Joseph Parker, D. D.*

(*b*) Though God has not bound Himself to hear the prayers of any one for the salvation of the soul of another, yet He frequently does so; and hence perhaps, though grace does not

run in the *blood*, yet we frequently see it runs in the *line*. Many more of the children of God's children prove gracious than those of others.—*Dr. Ryland.*

(*c*) That is a good day in which you learn something new of the Bible. Do not keep treading around in just the same place, reading the same Psalms of David over and over again because they are short, while you neglect other portions of the Gospel. If your friend writes you a letter written on four sides of a letter-sheet, you do not stop after you have read the first page. You do not treat him well unless you read the second page, the third page, and the fourth page, as well as the first. God our Father has written us a very long letter, all full of affection and counsel; and what a mean thing it is if we only read one or two of the pages when all of them demand our attention. How many verses could you quote to me from Obadiah, or Habakkuk, or Nahum, or Leviticus? Not one. Find out what part of the Bible you know the least about, and study it. Do not spend your entire time under one tree when there is around about you a great orchard.—*T. De Witt Talmage, D. D.*

(*d*) The greatest works that have been done, have been done by the ones. The hundreds do not often do much, the companies never do; it is the units, just the single individuals that, after all, are the power and the might. Take any Church—there are multitudes in it; but it is some two or three that do the work. Look on the Reformation!—there might be many reformers, but there was but one Luther: there might be many teachers, but there was but one Calvin. Look ye upon the preachers of the last age, the mighty preachers who stirred up the churches!—there were many coadjutors with them; but, after all, it was not Whitefield's friends, nor Wesley's friends, but the men themselves, that did it. Individual effort is, after all, the grand thing. A man alone can do more than a man with fifty men at his heels to fetter him. Look back through all history. Who delivered Israel from the Philistines?—it was solitary Samson. Who was it gathered the people together, to rout the Midianites?—it was one Gideon, who cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Who was he that smote the enemy?—It was Shamgar, with his ox-goad; or it was an Ehud, who, with his dagger, put an end to his country's tyrant. Separate men—Davids with their slings and stones—have done more than armies could accomplish.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

(*e*) I ask you to remember, at home, in the shop, and in the counting-house, that you are epistles of Christ; and that in your spirit, habits, and character, His very thoughts are to be translated into forms which common men can read and understand. You would condemn with heaviest censure the presumptuous hand which wilfully corrupted the text

of the printed book in which the acts and thoughts of God are preserved for the instruction of the world; you would condemn with censure hardly less severe the carelessness which should omit chapter after chapter, and give false readings instead of true. But *you* are the living revelation of God to mankind. Through you it is meant that the Holy Ghost should speak, not in mere words, but in acts, which are more intelligible and emphatic than words. The very life of the Spirit of God is intended to be manifest in your conduct, as the life of a plant is manifested in the flower, and the life of a tree in the fruit. Are you giving a true revelation to mankind, or are you perverting, corrupting, falsifying it?

Your religious emotions irreligious men can know nothing of, but your virtues and vices are a language plain and familiar to them as their mother tongue. They can read these without note or comment. They can judge of the Divine inspiration of these without any argument from miracles. As the style of a great artist is re-

cognised in the drawing and colouring of his pictures; as the genius of Mozart or Beethoven may be known at once by the movement of the melody and the flowing sweetness or mysterious complexity of the chorus, so—if you are really God's workmanship—there ought to be the manifested impress of the Divine hand in your character, and to those who know you well, your life ought to be plainly the revelation of a Divine idea.—*R. W. Dale, M.A., D.D.*

(*f*) When men have had a successful season in merchandise, they are apt to attribute it to their own acumen or their partners in business. When men have had a successful season in husbandry, they attribute it to the phosphates used, or to the agricultural journal that gave them the right kind of information. How seldom it is that men first of all go to the Lord, who is the owner of the field, and who presides over all merchandise, and who gives us all our worldly as well as our spiritual success!—*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*

STUDYING, PRACTISING, AND TEACHING THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

(Verse 10.)

The conduct of Ezra as described here is eminently worthy of imitation. Let us contemplate its chief features—

I. The acquisition of Divine truth for himself. “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.” In aiming at the attainment of a knowledge of the Divine law, Ezra adopted—

1. *The right method.* He sought for the knowledge which he desired; he put forth efforts to acquire it. Would any one attain a competent knowledge of any science? He must seek it, he must read, think, experiment, &c. Would any one “know the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”? He must “search the Scriptures,” &c. Personal effort is indispensable.

2. *The right manner.* Ezra sought for this knowledge resolutely and earnestly. “He had prepared”—*i.e.*, fixed or set—“his heart to seek the law of the Lord.” He who would seek successfully must seek resolutely. It is the earnest student who overcomes obstinate difficulties, disentangles bewildering perplexities, and makes glorious discoveries. Moreover, though it is not mentioned in this verse, we have abundant evidence of the fact that Ezra was a *devout* stu-

dent of the Scriptures. In this province of investigation, reverence is as important as earnestness. “The meek will He guide in judgment,” &c. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,” &c.

3. *The right place.* Ezra sought “the law of the Lord” in the Holy Scriptures. Divine truth may be discovered in the material creations of God, in the revolutions of human history, &c. But he who would acquaint himself with moral law, let him “search the Scriptures;” he who would know the redemptive truth of God, let him study the Bible.

II. The embodiment of Divine truth in his life. Ezra had set his heart not only to seek the law of the Lord, but also “to *do* it.” He translated his discoveries into deeds. The truth which he acquired by his heart and mind, he practised in his life. In this also he is an example to us. And the importance of imitating him in this respect will appear if we consider that *knowledge misapplied is—*

1. *Useless.* Knowledge of the laws of nature benefits us only as it leads us to act in harmony with those laws. And knowledge of Gospel truth becomes a blessing to us only as we receive it into

our heart by faith, and give practical expression to it in our lives. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," &c. (Matt. vii. 21-27). It is the "doer of the work" that is "blessed in his deed" (Jas. i. 25). (a).

2. *An occasion of condemnation.* "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes," &c. (Luke xii. 47, 48). (b).

III. **The communication of Divine truth to others.** Ezra had set his heart also "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." A solemn obligation rests upon man not only to acquire truth, but also to impart it. He who has learned of others must himself in his turn become a teacher of others. Here is the Divine law on the question: "Freely ye have received, freely give."

"Thyself and thy belongings
Are not thine own so proper, as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, them on thee.
Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do:
Not light them for themselves; for if our
virtues

Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely
touched,

But to fine issues; nor nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use."—*Shakespeare.*

"Measure for Measure," i. 1.

Ezra first learned the truth for himself, then practised it in his own life, and then taught it to others. He taught others both by his speech and by his action. Merely verbal teaching will not bear comparison with that which is also of the character and conduct. The latter is—

1. *More intelligible.* Minds which would utterly fail to follow our arguments can understand our actions.

2. *More continuous.* Instruction by means of sermons or lessons is necessarily occasional, but the teaching of the life is constant. (c).

3. *More influential.* "How forcible are right words!" But how much more forcible are right works! Ezra's power as an expository preacher was great, as we see from Neh. viii.; but his power

as a holy and zealous man was greater. And it seems to us that much of his power as a preacher arose from the saintliness and strength of his character. (d).

Let all Christians, but especially Christian preachers and teachers, copy the example of Ezra, and first study the Scriptures for themselves, then live the Scriptures for themselves, and then teach the Scriptures to others.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) As compared with professions, good deeds are put into ever-lustrous eminence, both by their solid quality, and by that grand refutation of all talking hypocrisy and ceremonial cant, from the mouth of the Judge Himself, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father." We cannot be wrong—if there is such a thing as truth in God's universe, we must be right—in esteeming one palpable and ponderable action in Christ's name before a library of dogmatic *credos*, subscription to the straitest ecclesiastical vows, or the handsomest adjustment of the mantle of public conformity. If we must have one without the other, an acre of statements must be let go rather than an ounce of life.—*P. D. Huntington, D.D.*

I beseech you more earnestly endeavour to reduce the things you know to practice. Nothing can be more absurd than to content ourselves with only a notional knowledge of practical matters. We should think so in other cases; as if any man should satisfy himself to know the use of food, but famish himself by never eating any, when he hath it at hand! Oh, what holy and pleasant lives should we lead in this world, if the temper and complexion of our souls did but correspond to the things we know. The *digesting our food* is what God eminently calls for.—*John Howe.*

(b) The more any one doth only *notionally* know in the matters of religion, so as that the temper of his spirit remains altogether unsuitable to the design and tendency of the things known, the more he hath lying ready to come in judgment against him; and if, therefore, he count the things excellent which he knows, and only please himself with his own knowledge of them, it is but a like case as if a man should be much delighted to behold his own condemnation written in a fair and beautiful hand; or as if one should be pleased with the glittering of that sword which is directed against his own heart; and so little pleasant is the case of him who thus satisfies his own curiosity with the concerns of eternal life and death, that any serious person would tremble on his behalf, at that wherein he takes pleasure, and apprehend

just horror in that state of the case whence he draws matter of delight.—*Ibid.*

(c) If we distinguish man as a creature of language, and thus qualified to communicate himself to others, there are in him two sets or kinds of language,—one which is voluntary in the use, and one that is involuntary; that of speech in the literal sense, and that expression of the eye, the face, the look, the gait, the motion, the tone or cadence, which is sometimes called the natural language of the sentiments. This natural language, too, is greatly enlarged by the conduct of life, that which, in business and society, reveals the principles and spirits of men. Speech, or voluntary language, is a door to the soul, that we may open or shut at will; the other is a door that stands open evermore, and reveals to others constantly, and often more clearly, the tempers, tastes, and motives of their hearts. Within, as we may represent, is character, charging the common reservoir of influence, and through these twofold gates of the soul, pouring itself out on the world. Out of one it flows at choice, and whensoever we purpose to do good or evil to men. Out of the other it flows each moment, as light from the sun, and propagates itself in all beholders.

The door of involuntary communication, I have said, is always open. Of course we are communicating ourselves in this way to others at every moment of our intercourse or presence with them. But how very seldom, in comparison, do we undertake by means of speech to influence others! Even the best Christian, one who most improves his opportunities to do good, attempts but seldom to sway another by voluntary influence, whereas he is all the while shining as a luminous object unawares, and communicating of his heart to the world.—*H. Bushnell, D.D.*

(d) If every disciple is to be an “epistle known and read of all men,” what shall we expect but that all men will be somehow affected by the reading? Or, if he is to be a light in the world, what shall we look for, but that others, seeing his good works, shall glorify God on his account? How often is it seen, too, as a fact of observation, that one, or a few good men, kindle at length a holy fire in the community in which they live, and become the leaven of a general reformation! Such men give a more vivid proof in their persons of the reality of religious faith, than any words or arguments could yield. They are active; they endeavour, of course, to exert a good voluntary influence; but still their chief power lies in their holiness, and the sense they produce in others of their close relation to God.

. . . Where the direct or active influence of men is supposed to be great, even this is due, in a principal degree, to that insensible influence by which their arguments, reproofs, and persuasions are secretly invigorated. It is not mere words which turn men; it is the heart mounting uncalled into the expression of the features: it is the eye illuminated by reason—the look beaming with goodness; it is the tone of the voice, that instrument of the soul, which changes quality with such amazing facility, and gives out in the soft, the tender, the tremulous, the firm, every shade of emotion and character. And so much is there in this, that the moral stature and character of the man that speaks are likely to be well represented in his manner. If he is a stranger, his way will inspire confidence and attract good will. His virtues will be seen, as it were, gathering round him to minister words and forms of thought, and their voices will be heard in the fall of his cadences.—*Ibid.*

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

(Verse 10.)

This learned and pious priest is an eminent model for the study of those who are engaged in the public service of God. Born in Babylon, he nevertheless became an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. His zeal for the pure worship of God—for the reformation of social manners and faithful administration of the law; his personal consecration, his profound study of the sacred writings, his deep views of the evil of sin, his power with God in prayer, his personal humility and true nobleness of character, entitle him to rank among the most illustrious of God’s worthies in the ancient Church.

The text points out some indispensable qualifications for an able minister of the New Testament.

I. Devotedness to God’s Word.

1. The minister is called to this; it is the indispensable requirement of his office.

2. Its inexhaustible riches require profound and constant research.

3. Prayer is absolutely necessary for the right understanding of the Scriptures.

II. Personal religion.

1. Without this all other qualifications will prove unavailing.

2. Its influence upon the minister’s

own heart and life is necessary to his success.

3. Its power over others.

III. Public instruction.

1. Its subjects. Scripture :—God in Christ, sin, salvation.

2. Its spirit. Dependent on Divine aid, faithful, bold.

3. Its manner. Simple, unaffected, earnest, practical, affectionate. — *The Preacher's Portfolio.*

DIVINE SEQUENCE.

(Verse 10.)

In most operations due sequence is of as great importance, in order to success, as correct action or proper quality. To transpose the order in a succession of processes is certain failure. How manifestly fatal as to the result, for a farmer to sow before ploughing, or to harrow before sowing! How vain the blacksmith's labour if he smite the iron first, and then make it hot! Everything in its due order is a universal law. It applies to Sabbath-school teaching as inexorably as to other matters, and to ignore it is culpable folly. The law of true sequence in this case is plainly taught in the Word of God, and is forcibly illustrated in the conduct of Ezra.

I. There must be diligent searching for the law of God. "Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord." Teachers must know before they can teach, and there is need for searching in order to knowledge. "Search the Scriptures" is the first step in the Divine sequence. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." And for effective teaching, to head-knowledge there must be heart-sympathy.

II. There must be a hearty doing of the discovered will. Ezra prepared his heart not only to seek, but "to do" the law of the Lord, and this is the second process in the Divine order. Alas! for him who seeks to teach others laws which he does not himself obey, and to enforce commands which he himself defies! Doing, moreover, stands in

double relation to knowing and teaching. "If any man will *do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John vii. 17). Hence its importance in relation to knowledge. It is also indispensable to true teaching; for by our lives we must teach, even though we be very unskilful with our tongues. "Whosoever shall do and teach, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 19).

III. Then may we teach the law of the Lord. This is the last step in the Divine sequence; and how firm a foundation will the teaching rest upon if the sequence has been duly observed! Knowledge treasured in the heart and acted in the life will give power and energy to the teachings, such as can in no other way be gained. How forcible will such teaching be—how irresistible! What efficacy the observance of this Divine sequence gave to Ezra's teaching may be learned from his subsequent history, for all the congregation were by his words convinced of their sin, and truly repenting, they cried, "As thou hast said, so must we do" (chap. x. 12), and they did it. So will our scholars act, if we faithfully fulfil the Divine conditions. Let us give heed to this sequence. It is taught in many parts of Scripture; but let Ezra's embodiment of it make it plain. Let his example stir our emulation, and his success whet our desire for a like result.—*B. P. P., in The Sunday School Teacher.*

THE COMMISSION OF ARTAXERXES TO EZRA.

(Verses 11–26.)

I. The granting of this commission. This letter, conveying such large powers, was given—

1. *In answer to the request of Ezra.* We see this from ver. 6: "the king granted him all his request;" and from

ver. 28: God "hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors," &c. It was a courageous thing for Ezra to make such a request before such an assembly (comp. Neh. ii. 2; Esth. iv. 11); and the fact that it was granted is a forcible testimony to the very high esteem in which he was held.

2. *By the supreme authority of the empire.* "Thou art sent of the king and of his seven counsellors" (ver. 14). "God hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes" (ver. 28). Thus the commission carried the greatest weight and importance.

II. The articles of this commission.

1. *Those which are addressed to Ezra.*
 (1.) *Permission for him to go up to Jerusalem with as many of his fellow-countrymen as wished to do so.* "I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel," &c. (ver. 13). This permission was necessary to enable them to go forth, because they were captives. And it was simply a cordial permission; it was not a sentence of banishment from Babylon. The Jews were not sent away, but freely allowed to go if they desired to do so. (2.) *Authority to investigate the affairs of those Jews who were already settled in their own land.* "Thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire," &c. (ver. 14). The subject of the inquiry is not stated; and it cannot be determined whether it referred to their general condition and progress, or more particularly to their religious condition. But the rule by which the inquiry was to be conducted is clearly laid down: "according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand." Thus the Divine law was honoured by the Persian monarch and his supreme council. (3.) *Authority to receive, convey, and distribute money and other valuables for the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem* (vers. 15-19). Notice—(i.) The treasures committed to him. "The silver and gold which the king and his counsellors freely offered," &c. (ver. 15). The contributions of money which the non-Israelite population in all the province of Babylon, and such Jews as elected still to remain in Babylon, were

disposed freely to contribute for the worship of the God of Israel. "And all the silver and gold that thou canst find," &c. (ver. 16). And certain vessels which had been given for use in the Temple-service at Jerusalem. "The vessels also that are given thee," &c. (ver. 19). It is probable that the sacred vessels which Zerubbabel had taken to Jerusalem were inadequate to their requirements at the great religious festivals. (ii.) The use to be made of these treasures. The vessels were to be delivered up in the Temple to the proper persons for use in its services. "The vessels . . . deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem." The money was to be employed in the purchase of animals and other things for religious sacrifices. "That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks," &c. (ver. 17). And the residue of the money was to be appropriated to such religious uses as seemed good to Ezra and to his brethren. "And whatsoever shall seem good to thee and to thy brethren," &c. (ver. 18). (4.) *Authority to obtain further needful supplies from the royal treasury in Syria.* "And whatever more shall be needful for the house of thy God," &c. (ver. 20). The requirements at Jerusalem could not be fully known by Ezra until he had looked into the state of affairs there; hence this warrant concerning further supplies was both thoughtfully and generously given. And such a use of royal revenues was both wise and worthy in the highest degree. (5.) *Authority to appoint magistrates and judges with full judicial powers.* "And thou Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges," &c. (vers. 25, 26). Observe: (i.) Their jurisdiction was over the Jews and the proselytes to the Jewish religion. They were to "judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God," &c. (ii.) Full power was granted to them for maintaining their authority and enforcing their decisions. They were authorised to inflict the severest penalties which the law prescribed. "Whosoever will not do the law of thy God," &c. (ver. 26). They were "re-

sponsible to the king alone for the exercise of their authority.”

2. *Those which are addressed to the Persian treasurers in Syria.* “And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river,” &c. (vers. 21–24). These commands refer to two things—

1. *To contributions which they were to make to Ezra.* They were to furnish him with certain supplies for the service of the Temple of the God of heaven, according to his request. (1.) These supplies were liberal. “Unto an hundred talents of silver,” &c. (ver. 22, and see explanatory note). (2.) These supplies were to be quickly and fully furnished. “Whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily. . . . Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be completely done,” &c. (3.) The reason assigned for furnishing these supplies is significant. “For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?” This inquiry implies a conviction of several things:—*e.g.*, that the God of heaven is almighty; that the neglect of His worship was likely to awaken His anger; that His anger should be earnestly dreaded and deprecated; and that a liberal regard for His worship was likely to secure His favour. 2. *To exemptions from taxation which they were to make.* Every minister of the Temple, from the high priest to the humblest of the Nethinim, was to be entirely relieved of government taxation. “Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites,” &c. (ver. 24). This was at once a liberal favour and an honourable distinction for all those whom it concerned.

This official letter reflects very great credit upon Artaxerxes. It is, as M. Henry observes, “to the praise of this heathen king, that he honoured the God of Israel though His worshippers were a despicable handful of poor men, who were not able to bear the charges of their own religion, and were now his vassals, and that, though he was not wrought upon to quit his own superstitions, yet he protected and encouraged the Jews in

their religion, and did not only say, ‘Be you warmed, and be you filled,’ but gave them such things as they needed.”

III. The spirit of this commission.

The letter indicates clearly a spirit of—

1. *Great reverence for God.* Thrice it speaks of Him as “the God of heaven,” thus showing that Jehovah was regarded by the king not as a mere local deity, but as the Supreme Being. And the inquiry, “Why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?” implies (as we have mentioned above) certain important convictions concerning Jehovah, God of Israel. (a).

2. *Profound respect for the law of God.* “According to the law of thy God which is in thine hand” (ver. 14). “Do after the will of your God” (ver. 18). “Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be completely done,” &c. (ver. 23). Ezra is commissioned to teach those persons the laws of God who did not know them (ver. 25). And, according to ver. 26, the law of Jehovah was made the law of Artaxerxes so far as the Jews were concerned. “The law of thy God, and the law of the king.” (b).

3. *Sincere regard for the worship of God* (vers. 15–24). The munificence of the royal grant for this worship indicates the depth and sincerity of his regard for it.

4. *Heartly appreciation of the character of a good man.* That this large and liberal commission was granted to Ezra in answer to his request is an evidence—(1.) That the life of Ezra must have been distinguished by wisdom, uprightness, and piety. (2.) That Artaxerxes sincerely appreciated the wisdom and worth of Ezra, for in honouring him the king seems to have taken pleasure. This letter is greatly to the praise of both the monarch of Persia and the scribe of the law of Jehovah. (c).

CONCLUSION :

The liberal gifts of Artaxerxes for the support of the worship of God may be exhibited as—

1. *A rebuke to the parsimony of many Christians in this respect.*

2. *An example to all Christians. (d).*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) How should we reverence that God that hath a throne encompassed with such glorious creatures as angels, whose faces we are not able to behold though shadowed in assumed bodies! How should we fear the Lord of Hosts, that hath so many armies at His command in the heavens above, and in the earth below, whom He can dispose to the exact obedience of His will! How should men be afraid to censure any of His actions, to sit judge of their Judge, and call Him to an account at their bar! How should such an earthworm, a mean animal as man, be afraid to speak irreverently of so great a King! Not to fear Him, not to reverence Him, is to pull His throne from under Him, and make Him of a lower authority than ourselves, or any creature that we reverence more.—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(b) We cannot be too strongly impressed with the goodness or benevolence of the Divine law. Right and good are correlative ideas, but we are not equally affected by them. More spontaneously can we conclude that all good is right, than that all right is good. And we more slowly confess the good of law, because we commonly regard law itself as restraint rather than as protection. We forget that it is far more restraint upon others than upon ourselves, and that our protection is in that restraint. Every interdict is on all, and each one obtains the benefit. Every obligation binds the whole race to the security and welfare of the individual. The best definition of liberty is, protection from wrong. And if we inspect the great social law, what is it but a fence and safeguard thrown around our dearest, most precious, interests? Its heed holds back that which receives every denouncement, when we call it lawless. Its observance defends the allegiance of our household, the sanctity of our life, the legitimacy of our offspring, the possession of our store, the reputation of our character, even to the proscription and to the driving from the heart of any secret wish that might seek to injure us. It sets a seal upon all. Our forbearance to aggrive others, which must be harmful to ourself, is repaid by forbidding any grievance against our welfare from the millions upon millions who might otherwise inflict it. The duty which every man owes to love us as himself, is a blessed and rich return of our duty thus ourselves to love every man. The rule commands and obliges every man to love me, to uphold me,—invests him as my brother, authorises him as my keeper, arms him as my defender, pledges him as my surety, adorns him as my example, couples him as my co-heir. It is the law of love. It is the perfect commutative justice. How benign must be the univereal regulation, all whose requirements, bearings, consequences, motives, aims, are fulfilled by love! The same

reflections are appropriate with respect to the claims of the Deity. . . . Let us honour law as the crowning blessing of blessings. Let us remember that intellectual creatureship without it is as inconceivable as it would be insupportable. Let us acknowledge it as the most sublime of ideas, the true exponent of happiness, the proper basis of dignity, the exclusive shield of freedom, the pure fountain of goodwill,—inaugurating truth in its state, decking benevolence in its majesty, lifting right to its throne, and then proclaiming with imperial authority that all this is but God, and that, therefore, there is none good but One, that is God!—*R. W. Hamilton, LL.D., D.D.*

(c) There is something in a holy life which wonderfully conciliates the minds of men. At first, indeed, like a strong influx of light, it offends their eyes; and the beholders, unable to bear the effulgence of its beams, turn away from it, or perhaps desire its utter extinction. But when it has shone for a long time before them, and they have had sufficient opportunity to contemplate its worth, they are constrained to acknowledge that “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;” and they begin to venerate the character, whose virtues at first were occasions of offence.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

(d) In collecting money for the repairs of the Temple, which Athaliah and her sons had dilapidated, the good priest did a thing worth noticing. He had a chest placed right alongside the brazen altar in front of the Temple, and in the lid of the chest was a hole bored, and into the hole the priests, selected for the purpose, dropped the coins which the people brought, either as their half-shekel tax, or as the offering for vows, or as a freewill offering to the Temple of Jehovah. When I read this story and then read from Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, “Upon the first day of the week” (the Lord’s-day, mind you!) “let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him,” I cannot help thinking that *giving is a part of worship!* Close alongside of the altar, where the type of the Lamb of God was offered up, was the money chest. How exalted giving to the Lord’s cause is in this light! And Paul calls it Sunday work, puts it with prayer, and praise, and Bible instruction, and all that is improving to the soul. I take it that if all Christians in our land would entertain the notion of Jehoiada and Paul about giving to the Lord (and it is not their notion, but the Holy Ghost’s), our spiritual temple would not be so dilapidated—thousands would flow forth from willing hearts where now hundreds are squeezed out. Take the idea, my brother with the long purse; yes, and my brother with the short purse, too. Make your giving a part of your worship, and then thank Jehoiada and Paul, but above all the Lord, for making your Christian life the happier.—*Dr. Crosby.*

REASONS FOR ACTIVE DEVOTEDNESS TO THE CAUSE OF GOD.

(Verse 23.)

Here Artaxerxes issues a decree, gives wealth, displays great zeal for God, and as though ambitious to sink the monarch in the preacher, exhorts to diligence and fervour in the work. "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven," &c. We may well sit at the feet of this lord of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, and learn from heathen lips the extent of our duty and the nature of our obligations. We plead for missions.

I. To assign some reasons for active devotedness to the cause of God and truth in the world.

1. *From the Divine authority by which it is enjoined.* It "is commanded by the God of heaven." We love to see the estimate of Christian duties from the men of the world, who, while they are blind as bats in discerning their own defects, are clear-sighted as eagles to mark the inconsistencies of the professed followers of Christ. They often take a just measure of our obligations, and reason with wonderful exactness and form just conclusions, from the principles which we lay down, as to the course which we ought to follow,—just as Artaxerxes did here. The text is remarkable from the quarter whence it comes; not from the hovel of poverty, but from the throne of power; not from one who prophesied in sackcloth, but from one clothed in the purple and fine linen of royal houses.

The law of love to the perishing heathen is clearly laid down. We labour under no uncertainty upon the subject. We are not left to the trembling ifs and conjectures of mere circuitous and inductive reasoning, but the rule is express and final: "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother." The same law which says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." We should like to see inscribed over all our missionary institutions the law, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The same God who bids

us "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" that we may be saved, bids us "Go into all the world," &c. God makes man the medium of His blessings to man. He blesses us by making us blessings. The harvest of immortal souls is to be gathered in, but human hands are to be employed in the work. The scattered flock of Christ, wandering upon the dark mountains of the Eastern and Western world, claim your ready aid, and Jesus commissions you to bring them into the fold.

2. *From the urgent necessity which exists for your exertions.* "In Judah was God known; His name was great in Israel;" but His spiritual claims were unknown and disregarded everywhere else. And the Gospel cannot be proclaimed in the heathen world except Christians proclaim it; for "how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" &c. (Rom. x. 14, 15). We cannot plead ignorance of the state of the heathen world, or of the religious destitution of the heathen without the Gospel. It was never safe to use this plea as an excuse for indifference, but it is wholly impossible to urge it now. "We know that the whole world lieth in wickedness." "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain," &c. The islands and continents of the kingdoms under darkness have been completely explored. The reports of travellers, merchants, missionaries, and scientific men only confirm the testimony of Scripture as to the moral misery and degradation of mankind without the Gospel. Where Christianity is not, the race is stationary, if not retrograde; social life loses its security and charm, &c.

3. *From the fearful consequences of the neglect of this duty.* "For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" The king feared God's anger, and apprehended that the neglect of Zion's interests would be fatal. He could not be ignorant of the ruin that had overtaken the Pharaohs

of Egypt, Sennacherib of Assyria, and the monarchs of Babylon; and he trembled for himself, for his sons, and for the future stability of the Persian throne.

It is not safe for *individuals* to oppose the kingdom of Christ. They who "break His bands asunder," do it at their own peril. And there is no neutrality: not to assist is to oppose; not to seek Christ is to neglect Him. Every one of us is taking a side—for Christ against Satan, or for Satan against Christ. It is not safe for *churches* to do so. What has become of the Jewish church? of the seven churches of Asia? &c. Their golden lamps have been extinguished. It is not safe for *nations* to neglect the interests of religion. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish," whether that nation be Persia or Judea, Carthage or Rome, Spain or England. I should tremble for Britain's safety, if she forgot her obligations to the God of the Bible, and failed to pay some small fraction of the mighty debt she owes to the Providence that has exalted her, by extending the Gospel. God has not raised her so high for any mean and ignoble purpose. He has not given her the empire of the seas, and a

voice among the nations at which the mightiest tremble, and an extent of colonial territory heretofore unknown, merely for purposes of national aggrandisement or personal pride; but to render us, as we hope, the world's benefactors, the heralds of the Cross, the willing harbingers of the onward triumphs of the Prince of Peace. Fulfilling this duty, Britain stands: failing to fulfil it, Britain falls; for God's wrath will be against the realm of the Queen and her sons.

4. *From the success which has attended the fulfilment of this duty.*

II. To offer some suggestions as to the spirit and mode in which this work should be carried on.

1. *Earnestly, without remissness.* "Let it be diligently done." Learn a lesson from the activity of the opposite party. The infidel and socialist come into your workshops and manufactories. The emissaries of the Papacy are not idle. Popery is fighting, not for existence, but for dominion.

2. *Prayerfully, without pride.*

3. *Speedily, without delay.*

.

—*Samuel Thodey.*

THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES.

(Verse 23.)

The words before us breathe a spirit which we should scarcely have expected to find in a heathen prince; but it is remarkable that some of the richest effusions of piety in the whole Scriptures proceeded from heathen monarchs, *e.g.*, Darius and Nebuchadnezzar. To make a due improvement of the words before us we shall consider them—

I. In reference to the Jewish Church.

1. *The state of the Jewish Church at this time is not unlike to that in which it was in the days of Ezra.* Though the Temple worship was restored, it was carried on by the Jews without any zeal for God's honour, or any of that spirituality of mind which is the very essence of all acceptable worship. Nor was the

law of God regarded amongst them with any just measure of submission; for, in direct opposition to its most authoritative dictates, they formed connections with the heathen round about them, &c. (chap. ix. 1-9). So at this time the Jewish people are at a very low ebb, both in respect of morals and religion. . . . It is impossible to behold them in their religious services, and not see how thick a veil is yet upon their hearts. Nor do they manifest any respect for their own law in its sublimer precepts. Of real holiness of heart and life they are ignorant in the extreme.

2. *But to us is given, no less than to Ezra, a command to advance their welfare.* Ezra received a commission from Artaxerxes to go and rectify the abuses

which obtained at Jerusalem, &c. And have we no command to seek the welfare of that degraded people? Are we not told what God's purpose is respecting them; namely, to "raise up the tabernacle of David," &c.? (Amos. ix. 11). This is God's express command to us strangers of the Gentiles: "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls," &c. (Isa. lx. 10-12). With their *material* temple we have nothing to do; but for the erection of God's spiritual temple amongst them we are bound to labour, proclaiming to them the advent of their Messiah, saying, "Behold your salvation," &c. (Isa. lxii. 11; xl. 9).

3. *In this work we should engage with all diligence.* It is not to be effected by good wishes merely, but by great exertions. It was not without great exertions on the part of men that the Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ; and the same kind of efforts which the apostles made for the conversion of the Gentiles we are to make for the restoration of the Jews to the favour of their God. This is our duty. God has told us that He has made us the depositaries of His Gospel, not for our benefit merely, but for the benefit of His outcast people: "As ye in times past," &c. (Rom. xi. 30, 31).

II. In reference to the Church which is amongst us.

1. *Ye, brethren, need to have God's work advanced in the midst of you.* Ye are God's house (Heb. iii. 6); ye also are called the temples of God, in which He lives and dwells (2 Cor. vi. 16). But in whom is God honoured as He ought to be? In whom are found sacrifices so pure, so spiritual, so abundant, as God calls for at our hands? Truly there is much amiss in all of us; much evil to be rectified, and much defective to be supplied.

2. *I call upon you, then, to engage in the Lord's work with your whole hearts.* We will suppose that you are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation which God has laid in Zion (Isa. xxviii. 16). But no man is contented with having laid a foundation; he proceeds to build upon it, and never considers his work as finished till he has brought

forth the top-stone. So it must be in this spiritual building which is begun within us. We must come to Christ daily "as lively stones, that we may be built up," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 4-6). To this, then, would I call you, &c. Oh! learn of a heathen to venerate the Divine authority, and to exert yourselves to the uttermost to promote the Divine glory.

Let me call you to obey this imperial mandate—

1. *In a way of personal reformation.* At the time of the Passover, the Jews swept every corner of their houses, in order to purge from them every particle of leaven which might have escaped their more general and superficial search. And this is what we are called to do. Alas! there are many evil dispositions which lurk within us, and which a superficial survey will not enable us to detect. Pride, envy, discontent, &c. Oh, be diligent in "purging out this old leaven, that ye may be a new lump" (1 Cor. v. 7, 8).

2. *In a way of ministerial exertion.* In this, persons of rank and influence ought to take the lead. Who can see a heathen monarch thus interesting himself for his Jewish subjects, and not wish that all monarchs with "their counsellors" were embarked in this holy cause? In this the clergy, also, should be most distinguished. Gladly did Ezra avail himself of the liberty accorded to him of going to Jerusalem for the purpose of remedying the evils which obtained there, &c. It was an office of great labour, yet he willingly undertook it. And does not this show, how those who are distinguished for rank and learning amongst the clergy should employ their talents and influence for the Lord?

The readiness with which the people of Babylon concurred in this good work shows how all classes of the community amongst ourselves should unite in the work. They contributed no less than eighty thousand pounds in silver, and one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in gold, besides a vast abundance of wheat, &c. This was done by heathens to honour the God of the Jews. What,

then, should not be done by us Christians, who profess to serve the God of the Jews, and to feel our obligations to

Him for all the wonders of redeeming love ?—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

EXEMPLARY PRAISE.

(Verses 27, 28.)

I. The true offerers of praise. We regard Ezra as an example of the true and acceptable worshipper. He exhibits in these verses—

1. *Unaffected humility.* There is not here the least indication of self-laudation or self-commendation. All thought of his own character and influence and work seems lost in his admiration and thankfulness for the doings of God. Humility is always becoming in man; but in drawing near to the great and mighty, the holy and blessed God, humility is especially incumbent upon us. (a).

2. *Sincere piety.* Of this here are two evidences—(1.) Ezra traces all good to God. He looks above secondary causes to the great First Cause. The godly soul sees the hand of God in all the worthy purposes and kind actions of men, and in all that is true and good in life. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” &c. (b). (2.) Ezra delights in the worship of God. It was matter of joy to him that the king designed “to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.” “We read not of any orders given to paint or gild it, or to garnish it with precious stones, but to be sure that the ordinances of God were administered there constantly, and carefully, and exactly, according to the institution; and that was indeed the beautifying of the Temple.” When God is honoured by the erection of beautiful temples, and more, by the presentation of spiritual and reverent worship, the good man realises great joy of spirit.

3. *Practical religiousness.* Ezra’s pious feelings were expressed in consistent actions. He blessed God in words, and sought to bless Him in works also. “And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I

gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.” The noblest praise that we can present to God is that of hearty conformity to His will. “Thanksgiving is a good thing; thanksgiving is better. (c).

II. The grand Object of praise. “Blessed be Jehovah God of our fathers.”

1. *The Supreme Being.* “Jehovah God.” “Jehovah,” *i.e.* the Self-Existent, the Eternal, the Unchangeable One. “God,”—the primary idea of the word is the Strong One, the Almighty. The true object of worship for man is the Omnipotent and Eternal, the Supremely Great and Good.

2. *The Supreme Being in covenant relation with His worshippers.* “Jehovah my God” (ver. 28). The Israelites had entered into solemn covenant relations with God (Exod. xxiv. 3–8). God by the Psalmist speaks of them thus: “My saints; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” Again He says: “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people” (Lev. xxvi. 3–13). And the true worshippers to-day are in covenant relation with God; they have embraced Him as their Supreme Good, and have fully given themselves to Him.

3. *The Supreme Being whom our fathers worshipped.* There is pathos in the expression “Jehovah God of our fathers.” That they worshipped Him binds us tenderly yet tenaciously to His service. There is inspiration also here. He who proved Himself the unfailing Friend and Helper of our fathers is worthy of our trust: He will not fail us, &c.

“In Thee our fathers put their trust;
Thy ways they humbly trod;
Honoured and sacred is their dust,
And still they live to God.

Heirs to their faith, their hope, their prayers
 We the same path pursue :
 Entail the blessing to our heirs ;
 Lord, show Thy promise true."

—Conder. (d).

III. Good reasons for praise. "Blessed be Jehovah God of our fathers, which hath put," &c.

1. *He inspires the worthy purposes of men.* He put it into "the king's heart to beautify the house of Jehovah which is in Jerusalem." "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever He will." "All holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed" from Him.

2. *He beneficently influences the moral judgments of men.* "And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and all his mighty princes." The influence of Ezra over the sovereign and these mighty princes was very great; and to his mind the secret of it was that God had inclined them to regard him with esteem, and to give their judgment in his favour.

3. *He invigorates the heart and life of His servants.* "And I was strengthened as the hand of Jehovah my God was upon me," &c. God encouraged His servant in order that he might carry out his sacred mission, and he at once proceeded to do so. The strength which God gives must be used in accordance with His will, and for His glory. "If God gives us His hand, we are bold and cheerful; if He withdraws it, we are weak as water. Whatever service we are enabled to do for God and our generation, God must have all the glory of it. Strength for it is derived from Him, and therefore the praise of it must be given to Him." (e).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Two men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a very righteous man, as he seemed to himself and to others; but God, who seeth not as man seeth, accounted the unrighteous man the more righteous of the two. So have I seen two flowers, side by side, the one erect, and without a misgiving, looking up to heaven; the other, with its head all adown upon its breast, looking only to the earth. But the flower that looked

earthward, as though not worthy to look heavenward, was the more heavenly of the two. Then said I, Pride and self-sufficiency are a miserable insufficiency; but meekness and self-distrust are allied to All-sufficiency. Question: Does God always give least to those who think themselves greatest, and most to those who think least of themselves? Answer: Humility hath the palm.—*John Pulsford.*

(b) As rivers empty their streams again into the bosom of the sea, whence they at first received them; so men give the praise of what they do unto that by which they do it. If they attempt any enterprise with their own wit, you shall have them bring the sacrifice to their own wit or net. But faith teaches the creature to blot out his own name, and write the name of God in its room upon all he hath and doth.—*W. Gurnall.*

What I have done is worthy of nothing but silence and forgetfulness; but what God has done for me is worthy of everlasting and thankful remembrance.—*Bishop Hall.*

(c) Holiness was meant, our New Testament tells us, for everyday use. It is home-made and home-worn. Its exercise hardens the bone, and strengthens the muscle in the body of character. Holiness is religion shining. It is the candle lighted, and not hid under a bushel, but lighting the house. It is religious principle put into motion. It is the love of God sent forth into circulation, on the feet, and with the hands, of love to man. It is faith gone to work. It is charity coined into actions, and devotion breathing benedictions on human suffering, while it goes up in intercessions to the Father of all pity. Prayers that show no answers in better lives are not true prayers. Of religion without holiness—or the spurious pretence current under that name—the world has seen enough; it has more than once made society, with all its reforms, go backward; it has sharpened the spear of the scorner, and sealed the sceptic's unbelief. It has hidden the Church from the market. It has gone to the conference and communion-table, as to a sacred wardrobe, where badges are borrowed to cloak the iniquities of trade. It has said to many an outcast and oppressed class, "Stand by thyself; the Master's feast is for me, and not for you." It has thinned the ranks of open disciples, and treacherously offered to objectors the vantage-ground of honesty. My friends, get faith, and then use it. Gain holiness, and wear it. Pray, and watch while you pray. Keep the Sabbath; keep it so carefully that it shall keep you all the week,—a mutual friendship. Come to the church; come to carry the church back with you, not in its professions nor its external credit, but its interior substance, into a consistent holiness.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(d) The covenant made with the Patriarch was made with Abraham and his seed after

him. Throughout the Mosaic period, children were included with their fathers in all the blessings of the elder Testament. "The promise is unto you *and your children*," is the constant doctrine through all God's messages to the Israelites. We are expressly told, that under Christ, in the New Testament, the same covenant is renewed, only expanded and deepened. Throughout, the law of descent is carefully respected. The hereditary tie is recognised. Offspring, at birth, are supposed to be bound up in the same bond of Christian privileges and helps which encircles their believing progenitors.—*Ibid.*

(e) What reward shall we give unto the Lord for all the benefits He hath bestowed?

From the cheerless gloom of non-existence He waked us into being; He ennobled us with understanding; He taught us arts to promote the means of life; He commanded the prolific earth to yield its nurture; He bade the animals to own us as their lords. For us the rains descend; for us the sun sheddeth abroad its creative beams; the mountains rise, the valleys bloom, offering us grateful habitation and a sheltering retreat. For us the rivers flow; for us the fountains murmur; the sea opens its bosom to admit our commerce; the earth exhausts its stores; each new object presents a new enjoyment; all nature pouring her treasures at our feet, through the bounteous grace of Him who wills that all be ours.—*Basil.*

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] This chapter contains—(i.) A list of the heads of houses, with the number of adult males accompanying each of them, who went with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem (vers. 1-14). (ii.) An account of the encampment for three days at the river Ahava, and the doings there; viz., obtaining ministers for the Temple service (vers. 15-20); proclaiming and observing a religious fast (vers. 21-23); arranging for the safe keeping during the journey of the offerings and the precious vessels for the Temple (vers. 24-30). (iii.) A brief record of their departure from Ahava and arrival at Jerusalem (vers. 31, 32); and (iv.) Of the careful delivery of the treasures in the Temple (vers. 33, 34), the offering of sacrifices to God (ver. 35), and delivering their commissions unto the king's lieutenants (ver. 36).

Ver. 1. The chief of their fathers] or, "the heads of their families." Keil: "The heads of the houses."

Vers. 2-14] This list is parallel with that of chap. ii. 3-19. Many of the family names (or, as Keil calls them, "designations of races," e.g. Pharosh, Pahath-moab, &c.) are common to both; while some are found in each which are absent from the other. The presence of the same family names "in both lists is to be explained by the circumstance that portions of" such families or races "returned with Zerubbabel, and that the rest did not follow till Ezra's departure." The number of families in Ezra's list is smaller than in that of Zerubbabel, and the members of each family less numerous. The total number of adult males, including Levites and Nethinim (vers. 18-20), who returned with Ezra was 1775, according to this list.

Vers. 2, 3] The first member of ver. 3 should probably be joined to ver. 2: Of the sons of David; Hattush, of the sons of Shecaniah] It is almost certain that this is the Hattush of 1 Chron. iii. 22, the son of Shemaiah and grandson of Shecaniah.

Ver. 5] The Hebrew text seems to be imperfect here by reason of the falling out of a name. Keil suggests that the reading, as in the LXX., should be, "Of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel." (Comp. chap. ii. 8.)

Ver. 10] A similar defect seems to exist in the text of this verse. The deficiency is thus supplied in the LXX., "And of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah." (Comp. chap. ii. 10.) This emendation is also accepted by Keil.

Ver. 13. And of the last sons of Adonikam] &c. "Here, instead of the name of the head of the house, we read the words, 'last, and these their names;' whereupon three names are given, and not till then, 'and with them sixty males.' Here, then, it is not the head of the house who is named, but in his place three heads of families, amounting together to sixty males. Now, as these three families did not form a house, these sixty sons of Adonikam who returned with Ezra are, with regard to the six hundred and sixty-six sons of Adonikam who returned with Zerubbabel (chap. ii. 13), designated the last, or last arrived, and thus comprised with them as one house."—*Keil.*

Ver. 15. The river that runneth to Ahava] In vers. 21 and 31: "the river of Ahava." The name both of a place and of a river. "The latest researches," according to Mr. Grove (*Bibl. Dict.*), "are in favour of its being the modern *Hit*, on the Euphrates, due east of Damascus," and north-west of Babylon, from which it was about eighty miles distant. The place is famous for its bitumen springs. "The river of Ahava" is a small stream which here flows into the Euphrates. And there abode we in tents three days] From this statement, and that of ver. 31, "We departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month," we learn that they arrived at Ahava on the ninth day of the first month; the journey from Babylon having been commenced on the first day of that month (chap. vii. 9).

Ver. 17. Casiphia] “a place of uncertain site on the road between Babylon and Jerusalem.”—*Bibl. Dict.* “The place Casiphia is entirely unknown, but cannot have been far from the river Ahava.”—*Keil.* It seems that both Levites and Nethinim, the upper and lower orders of Temple ministers, had settled in Casiphia; and that Iddo was the chief man of the place, and possessed considerable influence amongst these orders.

Ver. 18. By the good hand of our God upon us] (Comp. chap. vii. 6, 9, 28.) A man of understanding] Heb.: *Ish sechel.* Keil regards this as a proper name. But it seems to us better to take it as in the A. V.; or as Fuerst renders it, “A man of knowledge.” The man of understanding was named *Sherebiah*. The ׀ copulative (*and*) was probably “inserted by a careless copyist,” or, if it be retained, it should be translated *even*. “A man of understanding, . . . even Sherebiah.” He is again mentioned in ver. 24; Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 24.

Ver. 19. Hashabiah] is again mentioned in ver. 24; Neh. x. 11; xii. 24.

Ver. 20. The Nethinims] (See on chap. ii. 43.) All of them were expressed by name] *i.e.* Iddo sent a list of them to Ezra.

Ver. 21. A right way] Fuerst: An “even” or “plain way;” *i.e.* a prosperous journey (Comp. Jer. xxxi. 9: “A straight way, wherein they shall not stumble.”)

Ver. 24. Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah] &c. It seems from the rendering of the A. V. that Sherebiah and Hashabiah were priests; but they have been already described as Levites (vers. 18, 19). The Heb. is לְשֵׁרֵבְיָהּ; but in the A. V., as in the Vulgate, ׀ is not translated. Keil suggests that for לְ, we should read ׀, and translate, “and Sherebiah;” for this reason that if we retain לְ, and translate “for Sherebiah,” we “place the priests in a servile relation to the Levites, contrary to their true position.” We prefer to retain the לְ, and to translate, “Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests to Sherebiah,” &c. This would not involve the subordination of the priests to the Levites; but would mean that Ezra appointed twelve chiefs of the priests to act with twelve chief Levites, of whom Sherebiah and Hashabiah were two, in keeping the offerings for the Temple during the journey.

Ver. 26. Six hundred and fifty talents of silver] According to Dr. Arbuthnot’s tables this would be equivalent to £222,421, 17s. 6d. of our money; and according to Mr. R. S. Poole’s estimate (*Bibl. Dict.*), to about £260,000. Of gold an hundred talents] or £547,500 of our money, according to Dr. Arbuthnot, and a little over £1,000,000, according to Mr. Poole.

Ver. 27. Two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold] Margin: “Heb., ‘yellow, or shining brass, desirable as gold.’” “They may have been,” says Canon Farrar, “of orichalcum, like the Persian or Indian vases found among the treasures of Darius (Aristot. de Mirab. Auscult.)” —*Bibl. Dict.* Keil speaks of them thus: “Two brazen vessels of fine golden brilliancy, precious as gold.”

Ver. 29. The chambers of the house of the Lord] (Comp. 1 Kings vi. 5; Neh. xiii. 5.)

Ver. 31. The river of Ahava] (See notes on ver. 15.) He delivered us from] &c. (Comp. ver. 22.)

Ver. 32. Abode there three days] for rest after the fatigues and trials of their long journey. (Comp. Neh. ii. 11.)

Ver. 33. Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest] He is mentioned again in Neh. iii. 4, 21; x. 5; xii. 3. Eleazar the son of Phinehas] is probably the person who is named in Neh. xii. 42. Meremoth and Eleazar were priests. Jozabad the son of Jeshua] is mentioned in chap. x. 23; Neh. viii. 7. Noadiah the son of Binnui] is not named in the subsequent history. Jozabad and Noadiah were distinguished Levites.

Ver. 34. By number and by weight] &c. The vessels were both weighed and counted; the gold and silver were probably only weighed. And all the weight was written at that time] “*i.e.* an authentic list was made at the delivery which then took place.”—*Keil.*

Ver. 35. The children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity] *i.e.* those who had returned with Ezra. Offered burnt offerings] &c. (Comp. chap. vi. 17; and see notes on that verse.)

Ver. 36. The king’s lieutenants] Keil: “The satraps of the king.” He says they “were the military chiefs of the province.” Rawlinson says they “were the highest class of the Persian provincial governors.” The governors] were, according to Keil, “the heads of the civil government.” Rawlinson: “It denotes a lower grade of official.” They furthered the people] &c., or, “they supported the people,” &c.

THE ASSEMBLY AT AHAVA.

(Verses 1–20.)

I. The long journey commenced. went up with me from Babylon,” &c.
 “These are now the chief of their fathers, “Upon the first day of the first month”
 and this is the genealogy of them that (chap. vii. 9) they set out from Babylon,

and continued their journey for several days without any lengthened encampment. They entered upon their journey, we conceive, with mingled feelings of hope and fear. They were encouraged by hopes of reaching their famous fatherland, and of there enjoying the precious privileges of their religion; but the pleasure of these anticipations was moderated by the thought of the difficulties and dangers of the long journey that lay before them. Moreover, it is almost certain that, in leaving Babylon, most of them were sacrificing temporal advantages, and breaking up treasured associations, and severing themselves from dear friends, and these things could not have been done without much mental suffering; but at the summons of duty and the invitations of sacred privileges, they deliberately encountered these trials, and went up from Babylon. Their departure may be looked at as an illustration of the exodus of the soul from the captivity of a life of sin and its setting out on its upward pilgrimage.

II. An important inspection made.

“And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days; and I viewed the people and the priests.” On the ninth day of the first month they encamped at Ahava, they remained there “in tents three days” (ver. 15), and then, “on the twelfth day of the first month,” they departed from the river of Ahava to go unto Jerusalem (ver. 31). This halt illustrates—

1. *The need of seasons of rest.* The company with Ezra needed rest after the excitement and trials of their departure, and the toils of the first stage of their long journey. The Almighty recognised and provided for man’s need of rest when He ordained the night to succeed the day, and in the institution of the Sabbath. Jesus Christ recognised it, and said unto His disciples, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile.” In our life-pilgrimage there are times when we need to rest from our labours for awhile, and, if possible, to lay aside our cares. (a).

2. *The use of seasons of rest.* Ezra employed the three days which were

spent at Ahava in such a manner that great advantages to his company resulted from them. He reviewed the assembled people, &c. Rest time should not be waste time. As individuals we should use our seasons of rest in reviewing the way in which the Lord hath led us, in considering our present condition and circumstances, and in preparing ourselves for future work. And if a church has comparative rest for a brief season, such rest should be employed in equipping its members for more vigorous service.

III. A grave deficiency discovered.

“I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.” There were no Levites in the company, except such as were priests, and they had their own proper duties. All the priests were “of the sons of Levi,” but all “the sons of Levi” were not priests, but those only who were of the family of Aaron. Of the Levites proper, members of the other families of the tribe of Levi, who ministered in subordination to the priests, Ezra could not find any in his company. None of them was present. This was to their discredit. They should have been most eager to embrace the opportunity of going to Jerusalem, and there entering upon the duties of their sacred calling. They who are in possession of sacred privileges and engaged in the performance of sacred duties, are not always characterised by personal zeal and devotedness in the cause of God. Ministers of religion are sometimes slow in making personal sacrifices and rendering personal assistance even in a good enterprise. (b). They should be leaders, &c.

IV. *The supply of the deficiency sought.* “Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan,” &c. (vers. 16, 17). Ezra was unwilling to proceed until he had secured a band of Levites to go with them. The means which he employed to obtain them are worthy of notice. He sought them—

1. *By means of influential men.* He called for eleven leading men of his company; nine of them are characterised as “chief men,” and the other two as “men of understanding” or wisdom (ver. 16), and sent them to seek for “ministers for

the house of God." Such men were likely to succeed where men of an inferior type would have failed. Important affairs should be entrusted only to competent men.

2. *By sending them to the right place.* He "sent them unto the place Casiphia." It has been conjectured that there was at Casiphia a college "for the education of priests, Levites, and Nethinim, over which Iddo presided; where they had the free exercise of their religion, and had so comfortable a support that they were not inclined to remove. 'It is very probable they had their synagogues or other places where they met for religious worship; for we find the people resorting to Ezekiel in their captivity, and him preaching to them the Word of God, in many places of his book (Ezek. xxxiii. 31), &c. And Ezra in all likelihood was an instructor among them.'"—*Bishop Patrick*. But, apart from conjectures, it is clear that a considerable number of Levites and Nethinim dwelt at Casiphia, and that Ezra was cognisant of the fact; therefore to that place he despatched his messengers.

3. *By sending them to the right man.* Ezra "sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief," &c. Iddo was probably a Levite; for the Nethinim being a lower order of Temple servants, it is not at all probable that one of their number would be "chief" over Levites. Iddo was "the chief at the place Casiphia," was evidently disposed to further the movement under Ezra, and, from his sending a list of the names of those who went from Casiphia (ver. 20), seems to have been a man of methodical and business-like habits.

4. *By sending them with precise instructions.* Ezra "told them what they should say unto Iddo," &c. Margin: "Heb., 'I put words in their mouth.'" Thus this mission was admirably selected and sent forth, and it deserved success. (c).

V. *The supply of the deficiency obtained.* "And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding," &c. (vers. 18-20). Notice—

1. *The supply was sufficient.* About

forty Levites and two hundred and twenty Nethinim went from Casiphia and joined the returning exiles under Ezra.

2. *The supply was various.* There were Levites, and Nethinim "for the service of the Levites." Different grades of ministry are necessary for the various spheres of service in the Church of God.

3. *The supply was remarkable for the presence of at least one man of distinguished ability.* "They brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, even Sherebiah." This man afterwards rendered important service in the history of the people, as we see from ver. 24; Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 24.

4. *The supply was obtained by the blessing of God.* "By the good hand of our God upon us they brought us," &c. Thus Ezra traces the success of this mission to the gracious assistance of God.

"Except the Lord conduct the plan,
The best concerted schemes are vain,
And never can succeed;
We spend our wretched strength for nought!
But if our works in Thee be wrought
They shall be blest indeed."

—C. Wesley.

"If," says M. Henry, "where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well supplied, let God have the glory, and His good hand be acknowledged as qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them."

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) It will be confessed by all men, even by the veriest slaves to their ever-driving ambition, that physical rest is sometimes needed. The aching limb asks for it; the hand that is so weary that it cannot any longer hold pen, or tool, or weapon of war, says, in its trembling weakness, "Let me rest awhile;" and the fevered brain, over-driven, excited almost to madness, says, in its sleeplessness and throbbing and heat, "Let me rest awhile." Well, then, here is so much gained. We shall be able to make our way from this low point to a much higher phase of rest, and find our way upward, from the cry of the feeble and exhausted flesh, to the greater, more solemn, and urgent wants of our over-excited spiritual nature; we shall understand, in some degree, that our highest, divinest faculties must occasionally pause, rest, and recover themselves, if

they would fully, with completeness and perfectness, discharge all the duties and obligations which Almighty God has imposed upon them. Rest is as necessary as labour. He is not a philosopher, but a madman, who lights the candle of his life at both ends.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) There is an old proverb, "The temple mouse fears not the temple idol." It is a painful experience, present to the hearts of most of us, how different is the awe of the first service in which we ministered, and of the fiftieth or hundredth. At first, the putting on of the surplice was a dedication—the entering of the vestry was a solemnity—the opening Sentences, the Exhortation, the Confession, read by our lips, seemed as though they consecrated those lips themselves to a new use and a new religion. So was it with each function of the holy office. The first reading of the Commandments—the first Sermon—the first Communion in which we followed with the Cup—the first baptism, the first wedding—the first visit to a sick-room, the first commendatory prayer beside the dying, the first saying of the words, "Dust to dust," by the open grave—each was an event, each was an epoch, of the life within—it had an effect, a spiritual effect, upon the conscious immortal man. It may be that we relied upon this—thought it needless to impress the feeling, to turn emotion into principle, by prayer and watching—felt confident that the repetition of the occasion would revive the effect—trusted to this, and left it there. A year afterwards we could stand unmoved by the grave, talk and laugh in the vestry, fall half asleep as we read the Prayers. Even with the best efforts made and persisted in, we could never reawaken the solemnity of the beginning. Duty becomes habit, habit becomes familiarity, and familiarity, if it breeds not contempt, at least forbids that kind of awe which is more nature than grace.

And some of us make the fatal mistake of expecting our Profession to make or to keep us spiritual. Living always in holy things, what can we be but holy? We learn a new lesson as years advance—and although we can give thanks still for the blessing of having the inward and the outward life of one piece and of one colour, occupied in the same thoughts and the same studies, mutually helpful and sympathetic with each other—yet we feel more and more that there is no security, in this harmony, for holy living; that there is no royal road, but

that which is open for all wayfarers, to the saint's life and the saint's rest; nay, that there is even an added risk, for the priest of God's temple, lest he find that "common" to him which is "holy" for all besides, just because he must daily touch and daily handle, daily prepare and daily dispense, that bread of life which souls only can digest, and which his soul may, by the very having, have not. There is nothing for it but to say to ourselves, and act upon it, "Like people, like priest." Just what they want, I want—just what I bid them do, I will do. I will prepare for my work, I will do my work, not as though it could sanctify, not as though it were (of itself) either hither or thither as to my soul's state, but as needing, like any commonest trade or handicraft, a soul at peace with God beforehand, a soul in full communion with God beforehand, a soul preoccupied by the Holy Spirit sought and cherished, a soul setting God always before it, by Him first quickened, then to Him afterwards ministering.—*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*

(c) Ministers will not be found ready made, and ministers cannot be made to order. There is no royal road to the supply of the ministry. There is no climate in which ministers are indigenous. There is no patent by which ministers can be manufactured. Ministry is a gift, ministry is a growth, ministry is an inspiration. It is not every educated man—still less is it every uneducated man—who is even capable of it. The minister is the ultimate product of a long operation of Providence and of grace, working individually, working secretly, and giving no account of itself. When our Lord looked upon the vast shepherdless multitudes, He had but one suggestion to make for the ministerial supply: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest"—and He was there Himself—"that He will send forth"—and the word is a very strong one—"labourers into His harvest." This is the one hope now. In comparison with this, any other suggestion must be timid and tentative. Yet something perhaps might be done by a keen and practised eye directed towards our schools and homes. Young intelligence, young diligence, young devotion, sought out by the loving watchfulness of master or minister, might be fashioned, here and there, even from a humble stock, by a wise influence and sometimes a generous bounty, into an eventual aptitude for the ministry. To foster this promise, but in one or two cases, into performance, is a noble ambition for any one who cares for his Church's future.—*Ibid.*

THE COMPANIONS OF EZRA ON HIS JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

(Verses 1–20.)

The following observations are suggested by these verses:—

1. Whilst love of the world and fear of the cross induce most men to neglect

the salvation of the Gospel, they who obey the gracious call stand recorded in the Book of Life, and will be honoured by God Himself (vers. 1–14).

2. When some of a family embrace the Gospel, they who linger behind may probably follow; till sometimes, in answer to fervent prayers, the very last are brought in (ver. 13).

3. Alas! that professed ministers, who ought to take the lead in every good work, are generally so backward to labour, or venture, or suffer in the cause of God, and need to be stirred up by the example and exhortations even of their lay brethren! (ver. 15, last part).

4. But such as address them on these occasions should be "chief men," or "men of understanding;" lest they should be irritated, instead of being persuaded (vers. 16, 17). They must not,

however, be left to their negligence: and their superior brethren, having given them a good example, may send or speak to them, with more authority and effect than others can; and often those who were before inattentive will profit by meek and faithful admonitions.

5. When ministers for the work of the house of our God are raised up, who are men of piety and understanding, we should acknowledge "the good hand of our God upon us," and give Him the praise; as we ought at all times to lift up our prayers to Him for this blessing to His Church (vers. 18-20).—*Arranged from Scott's Comm.*

MEN OF UNDERSTANDING.

(Verse 18.)

"By the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding . . . Sherebiah."

Sherebiah was not merely a man of knowledge and intelligence, but of wisdom and prudence. *Sechel*, here rendered "understanding," signifies moral excellences as well as mental abilities, as may be seen from its use elsewhere. The word rendered "them of understanding" in Dan. xi. 35, and "they that be wise" in Dan. xii. 3, comes from the same verb as *sechel*, viz., *sachal*. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding (*sechel*) have all they that do," &c. (Ps. cxi. 10). "There is no solid wisdom but in real piety." (a).

The text teaches that—

I. Men of understanding are the gifts of God. Ezra traces the presence of Sherebiah amongst them to "the good hand of their God upon them." Wise men are God's gifts, inasmuch as—

1. *They derive their abilities from Him.* He bestowed upon them the faculties and capacities of their mental and moral nature.

2. *They rightly develop their abilities by His blessing.* He inspires them to every worthy purpose, and aids them in its prosecution.

3. *They attain their moral excellences*

by His blessing. They "are His workmanship," &c. (Eph. ii. 10). "By the grace of God they are what they are" (1 Cor. xv. 10).

II. Men of understanding are of great worth amongst men. Ezra perceived the value of Sherebiah to his company, acknowledged the goodness of God in his arrival amongst them, recorded his quality and his coming, and found him very useful subsequently. Men of understanding are of great worth in society because—

1. *Understanding is essential to the beneficent employment of other gifts and powers.* For example—(1.) Zeal without understanding is a very perilous thing. "Zeal without knowledge is like expedition to a man in the dark." (2.) Strength without understanding often acts injuriously. "Wisdom is better than strength. . . . Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good."

"It is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant."—*Shakespeare.*

(3.) Great gifts of any kind without moral excellences are productive of great evils. Without grace, great powers are great engines of mischief and ruin, a curse and not a blessing to society. "Good

understanding" is needful to ensure the usefulness of great abilities.

2. *The employment of understanding itself confers great benefits upon society.*

(1.) In restraining from unwise and sinful projects. We have an example in Acts v. 34-40. (2.) In originating and inciting to wise and good projects. (3.) In devising appropriate methods for the attainment of such projects. (4.) And for direction in life and work generally. "Wisdom is profitable to direct." See how useful Sherebiah was to the Jews (ver. 24; Neh. viii. 7; ix. 4, 5; x. 12; xii. 24). (b).

CONCLUSION: It behoves us—

1. *To praise God for men of understanding.*

2. *To prize such men.* Too often they have been neglected, and frequently cruelly persecuted while living, and honoured after death. Let us value them highly while they are yet with us. (c).

3. *To endeavour to become men of understanding.* "Wisdom is the principal thing: get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding." "In understanding be men." (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The greatest man is he who chooses right with the most invincible resolution; who resists the sorest temptation within and without; who bears the heaviest burdens cheerfully; who is calmest in storms, and most fearless under menaces and frowns; whose reliance on truth, on virtue, and on God is most unflinching.—*Seneca*.

Remember that he is indeed the wisest and the happiest man who, by constant attention of thought, discovers the greatest opportunity of doing good, and, with ardent and animated resolution, breaks through every opposition that he may improve these opportunities.—*P. Doddridge, D.D.*

(b) We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near; the light which enlightens, which has enlightened, the darkness of the world; and this, not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary, shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic noble-

ness, in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them.—*Thomas Carlyle*.

(c) Let us not forget that if honour be for the dead, gratitude can only be for the living. He who has once stood beside the grave, to look back upon the companionship which has been for ever closed, feeling how impotent, *there*, are the wild love and the keen sorrow, to give one instant's pleasure to the pulseless heart, or atone in the lowest measure to the departed spirit for the hour of unkindness, will scarcely for the future incur that debt to the heart, which can only be discharged to the dust. But the lesson which men receive as individuals, they do not learn as nations. Again and again they have seen their noblest descend into the grave, and have thought it enough to garland the tombstone when they had not crowned the brow, and to pay the honour to the ashes which they had denied to the spirit. Let it not displease them that they are bidden, amidst the tumult and the dazzle of their busy life, to listen for the few voices, and watch for the few lamps, which God has toned and lighted to charm and to guide them, that they may not learn their sweetness by their silence, nor their light by their decay.—*John Ruskin, M.A.*

(d) If you look at what keeps the world astir, you will at once conclude that most men around you are under the actuating influence of a very different maxim from that presented in Prov. iv. 7: "Wisdom is the principal thing: get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding." You might, without being at all chargeable with a libel, read, "*Money* is the principal thing; therefore get money; and with all thy getting, get a *fortune*." This, alas! is the world's "one thing needful." All else is postponed to this. The world's advice to the young is, "Get money first. Secure a *competency*," a word of which the limit is never defined; "and when that has been done, you will have leisure to think about what good folks call 'better things.' Mind you the main chance. This world is the one with which we have first to do, as we are placed first in it. *This world, then, first, and then the next.*" Ah! what a delusion!—*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*

Labour to be men of knowledge and sound understanding. A sound judgment is a most precious mercy, and conduces much to soundness of heart and life. A weak judgment is easily corrupted; and if it be once corrupt, the will and conversation will quickly follow. Your understandings are the inlet or entrance to the whole soul; and, if you be weak there, your souls are like a garrison that hath open or ill-guarded gates; and if the enemy be once let in there, the whole city will be quickly his own. Ignorance is virtually every error; therefore, let the Bible be much in your hands and hearts.—*R. Baxter*.

EZRA'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

(Verses 21-23.)

I. Confidence in God avowed. "We had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God," &c. (ver. 22). Here is a declaration of faith—

1. *In His providence.* Ezra believed that God was interested in human affairs; that "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings;" and that His hand was working amongst men, directing and controlling, rewarding and punishing them. (a).

2. *In His providence as efficiently promoting the interests of His people.* "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him." He regards His people with approval, guides their footsteps, guards them and their interests, and makes "all things work together for good to them."

3. *In His providence as opposed to those who forsake Him.* "His power and His wrath are against all them that forsake Him." The power which works for righteousness must be hostile to the workers of iniquity. The government of a holy God must set itself against impiety and wickedness.

II. Confidence in God tested. A long journey, which would involve many difficulties and dangers, was before Ezra and his great company; and he was the responsible leader in that journey. Can he trust in God and in His providence now? His confidence was tested—

1. *By their need of guidance.* The journey they were entering upon was a long one; they required some one to lead them in "a right way." They had no visible symbol of the presence of God with them and guiding them, as their fathers had in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Can Ezra and his companions trust the invisible "hand of their God" in this matter?

2. *By their need of protection.* The journey that lay before them was a perilous one. (1.) There was danger from "the enemy in the way." The

country through which they had to travel was infested with Arabian freebooters. And it seems probable, from vers. 22 and 31, that a plan had been arranged by some of them for attacking and plundering this company. (2.) This danger was increased by the treasures which they carried with them. There was their own "substance," and the gold and silver and precious vessels for the Temple service; the gold and silver alone, according to one computation, being worth upwards of three quarters of a million of our money, and according to another, upwards of a million and a quarter. What a temptation this would be to "the enemy in the way." (3.) Their danger was also increased by the character and composition of their company. Amongst them were many women and "little ones," who in case of an attack would not be able to assist in repelling it, but would themselves require defence. Thus, if they were assaulted, they would be able to offer only a feeble resistance. Can Ezra trust their defence to the hand of their God upon them for good? Can he go forward towards "the enemy in the way," relying upon that power which is against the wicked? Or, will he seek for help elsewhere?

III. Confidence in God maintained. Ezra considered their position and prospects, their difficulties and dangers, and their consequent needs, and he decided to trust in God for all, and to give practical proof of their confidence:

1. *In not seeking guidance and defence from the king.* "I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way." The terms of the king's commission to Ezra leave no room for doubt that if he had requested of him a military escort, the request would have been readily granted; but he determined not to do so. He and his companions might have adopted the words of David, "The Lord will hear from His holy heaven with the saving strength

of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the Name of the Lord our God" (Ps. xx. 6, 7).

2. *In seeking guidance and defence from God.* "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava," &c. (ver. 21). See how they sought unto God for what they needed—(1.) Humbly. They fasted and afflicted themselves before their God, in deep self-abasement and penitence on account of sin, and with a view to its forgiveness. (2.) Believingly. They not only fasted before God, but they prayed unto Him for a prosperous journey. Their confidence in Him did not lead them to neglect prayer to Him. True faith in God and in His gracious providence is not a substitute for prayer to Him, but an incentive thereto. (b). (3.) Earnestly; as is indicated by their fasting and prayer, to which for a time they seem to have entirely given themselves. "So we fasted and besought our God for this."

Thus Ezra's confidence in God, being tested, did not fail, but was nobly maintained and manifested. (c).

IV. Confidence in God vindicated. "And He was intreated of us." Their faith was vindicated—

1. *In their inward assurance.* They had a firm conviction that their prayers were heard and accepted, and that God would secure to them a prosperous journey.

2. *In the outward result.* They were led by a right way; they were delivered from the enemy that lay in wait for them; they had a prosperous journey, and arrived safely in Jerusalem. The confidence in God which they had avowed and maintained was splendidly vindicated by His hand upon them for good in their journey. They who honour Him with their hearty trust, He will honour with His great salvation. (d).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) But what is to be the justification of this implicit confidence? It can only be justified upon the supposition that God is a being having particular powers, and of a particular character. Confidence in God, for instance,

would be entirely irrational if He were conceived of as a destiny, as a force, as a soul of the universe,—if He were not believed to be a person distinct from the universe, its ruler, and its sustainer, as well as its creator, acting upon it in the perfection of His freedom, and without any sort of limit to His power, except such limits as His own moral nature may impose. Again, confidence in God would be misplaced if it were believed that He is the personal, the free, the omnipotent creator; and yet if He were imagined to act, as we should say in human words, capriciously, that is, without reference to those eternal laws of righteousness and truth, the traces, the echoes of which we find within ourselves, and which are in their essence, and demonstrably, not fruits of His arbitrary enactment, but constitutive parts of His eternal nature. Our Lord, therefore, reveals God as a Father, a revelation which assures us at once of His power and His love. It is the combination of these two facts, God's almightiness and God's love, which taken together constitute or warrant what we term His providence, His power, that is, under the guidance of his love making provision for the good of His creatures generally, but supremely and in particular of man, and, among men, in a yet more eminent degree of His servants.—*Canon Liddon.*

(b) "God's promises, by reason of His unchangeableness, may be relied on; what occasion, then, of prayer, seeing the thing promised will come round of its own steady accord, whether you open your lips or no?" The answer is short and simple. These promises are made only to those who expect, and desire, and ask for them. They are not promised indifferently, and come out of their own accord at all, but to such only who have meditated them, and who value them, and desire them, and earnestly seek them; being, in truth, too valuable to be thrown about to a scrambling mob; being the high and holy attractions by which God intended to work upon the nature of man, and lead it out of its present low and sunken estate into glorious liberty and unwearied ambition of every noble excellence. They are prizes in the hand of God to stimulate the soul's activities,—more glorious prizes than laurel wreaths, or the trumpeting of fame, or principalities and thrones,—and they are yielded only to an application of faculties, at the least, as intense and ardent as is put forth in pursuit of human ambition. God does not cheapen His promises down to a glance at them with the eye, or a mouthing of them with the tongue, but He requireth of those that would have them an admiration equal to that of lovers, an estimate equal to that of royal diadems, and a pursuit equal to that of Olympic prizes.—*Ed. Irving.*

(c) Suppose I were to set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and before I started were to go to Brown Brothers & Co., and obtain letters of credit for the cities of London,

Jericho, &c. Then, with these papers, which a child might destroy, which would be but ashes in the teeth of flame, which a thousand chances might take from me, I should go on with confidence and cheer, saying to myself, "As soon as I come to London I shall be in funds. I have a letter in my pocket from Brown Brothers & Co. which will give me five hundred dollars there; and in the other cities to which I am bound I shall find similar supplies, all at my command, through the agency of these magic papers and pen strokes of these enterprising men." But suppose that, instead of this confidence, I were to sit down on ship-board, and go to tormenting myself in this fashion—"Now, what *am* I to do when I get to London? I have no money, and how do I know that these bits of paper which I have with me mean anything, or will amount to anything? What shall I do? I am afraid I shall starve in the strange city to which I am going." I should be a fool, you say; but should I be half the fool that man is who, bearing the letters of credit of the Eternal God, yet goes fearing all his way, cast down and doubting whether he shall ever get save through his journey? No fire, no violence, nor any chance can destroy the

cheques of the Lord. When He says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and "My grace shall be sufficient for thee," believe it; and no longer dishonour your God by withholding from Him the confidence which you freely accord to Brown Brothers & Co.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(*d*) A heathen could say, when a bird scared by a hawk flew into his bosom, "I will not betray thee into the enemy, seeing thou fliest to me for refuge;" how much less will God yield up a soul to its enemy when it takes sanctuary in his Name, saying, "Lord, I am hunted with such a temptation, dodged with such a lust; either Thou must pardon it, or I am damned; mortify it, or I shall be a slave to it; take me into the bosom of Thy love, for Christ's sake; castle me in the arms of Thy everlasting strength; it is in Thy power to save me from or give me up into the hands of my enemy; I have no confidence in myself or any other; into Thy hands I commit my cause, myself, and rely on Thee." This dependence of a soul will undoubtedly awaken the almighty power of God for his defence.—*W. Gurnall.*

FAITH AND PRUDENCE.

(*Verses 21-23.*)

In the text we find Ezra about to return to Jerusalem, and ashamed to ask the king for any military protection. He had made certain statements to Artaxerxes, and he was reluctant to act in a manner which might bring those statements into question. He felt, what Christian people often feel, the conflict between prudence and faith. Prudence dictates one line of conduct, Christian consistency seems to dictate another, and the perplexity is sometimes painful.

We observe—

I. That, as a grand rule in the Christian life, faith and prudence must go together. The Scriptures often relate the marvellous helps which good men have found in the days of peril, but they give no countenance to presumptuous reliance on supernatural intervention. As the rule of life, the Scriptures bind us to take all human precautions against the various forms of mischief we have reason to apprehend. In this unbelieving generation there is not much reason to speak against excessive faith, but there is some reason thus to speak. The

workman gave as his reason for not going to church, "That religious people were hypocrites, because they called the temple God's house, and yet put upon it a lightning rod." This worldly workman could not see that God's Church ought to recognise God's law, and act agreeably thereto; but he thought he saw a glaring contradiction in this union of prudence and piety. And some noble men in the Church sympathise with this workman, and reject the securities which prudence would counsel. They will leave their property uninsured; in times of disturbance they will not claim the protection of the magistrate; and in time of sickness they will not call the physician. This is, to a large extent, a serious mistake. As a rule, we are to accept the band of soldiers which Ezra, in peculiar circumstances, rejected. We must not rashly cast ourselves into peril on the idea that "angels have charge concerning us." We must "not tempt the Lord our God." We must not, without imperative reason, leave the ship and step upon the sea, otherwise, with Peter,

we must suffer disaster. If devout men do not attend to the dictates of prudence, they must suffer for it; and not only so, but they injure Christianity likewise. The truth of religion is based on false issues, and thus brought into suspicion or contempt. "The good man guideth his affairs with discretion." Yet there are times—

II. When faith in God must supersede the provisions of ordinary prudence. When faith and prudence gave different counsel, Ezra chose to "walk by faith, and not by sight," and we must all feel that he did right. The question is: When are we to go beyond merely prudential considerations, and venture all on the unseen power of God? An attentive consideration of Ezra's situation and conduct may throw some light on this delicate question. We are "shut up to faith" when—

1. *Prudential action would most probably be construed as a denial of the Divine government.* Ezra had told the king that "the hand of God was upon all them for good who seek Him." And now Ezra considered that to reveal any anxiety for a guard of soldiers would appear to the heathen king like a practical denial of the overshadowing providence of Jehovah. A band of soldiers would have hidden the Shepherd of Israel; Artaxerxes alone would have been seen; and so Ezra, with a fine spiritual instinct, saw the hour for simple trust had come, and by declining the soldiers left open the full view of God, and His gracious and glorious government. A line of action is here marked out for ourselves. To remove the scruples of the few we are not to take the lightning conductors from our temples, and essay similar reformations; but we must seek so to act that we satisfy the world generally that we *do believe* in the Divine superintendence and care. A worldly man believes *only* in the band of soldiers; and, to let him know that we believe in something beyond, we must sometimes be willing to act without the band of soldiers altogether. Are we not *too anxious* about material helps and visible securities? We have boasted of the power of the Lord's good hand, and are

we then to resort to sorry shifts for our safety and success? Has not the Church, by clinging so feverishly to visible resources, and helps, and defenders, given some sanction to the world's unbelief? When—

2. *Prudential action would cause us to lean on worldly associations and resources.* Artaxerxes was an idolater, and Ezra was anxious not to ask too much at his hands. It seemed inconsistent to Ezra that he should be soliciting a band of pagan soldiers to protect God's people and the treasures of God's Temple. Here, again, we have a line of action marked out for us. We are the confessed servants of the Holy One of Israel, and prudence must not lead us to worldly alliances and dependence upon sinful circles. In our *personal* life we must observe this. We must beware of compromises with the world for the sake of our personal safety and aggrandisement. And in regard to *God's Church*, we must observe this. Policy would often direct us to expect great things from the greatness, wealth, or wisdom of unregenerate men for the Church's sake. So far from seeking their assistance, we ought to be shy of their gold and patronage. Thus did Ezra. And thus acted Paul and Silas (Acts xvi. 16–19). When prudence would lead us to seek for much, either for ourselves or for the Church, at the hands of unbelieving men, we must pause and follow the path faith indicates. Let us dare anything, suffer anything, rather than compromise our own character and the character of God, in the eyes of the world, by linking our fortunes and the fortune of the Church with those who are joined to idols. When—

3. *Prudential action might embarrass the progress of God's kingdom.* If Artaxerxes had detected any inconsistency in Ezra, he might have ceased to be favourable to his cause, and have prevented or delayed the return to Jerusalem. Rather than endanger the popularity and progress of the cause of God, Ezra was prepared to run great risks. Here another line of action is marked out for us. If prudence would circumscribe, fetter, or destroy the work of

God, the time has come to appeal to loftier considerations. Calculating, cautious piety would condemn the act of Ezra as imprudent, and no doubt, speaking after the manner of men, it was imprudent; but many imprudent things have been done, or there would not have been so much Christianity in the world as there is; and many more imprudent things will have to be done before Christianity fills the world. The practical, calculating spirit of our age invades the Church, and in the administration of its affairs we frequently ask too anxiously about "ways and means," and are afraid to venture to victories beyond unless we can "see our way." Let us remember that God's kingdom is a supernatural one, and in its promotion we must often act with a boldness which could not be justified in the court of prudence. There is a holy venturesomeness in evangelisation which carries with it a far higher guarantee of success than do the pondered schemes of a rationalising statesmanship. Thus, then, there are times—times which a true, delicate, noble spirit will not fail to recognise—when we must renounce the counsellings of worldly wisdom, and, stepping boldly into the darkness, cry, with Ezra, "Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee!"

III. The separation of faith from prudence must be effected only in the spirit of sincere and earnest dependence upon Heaven (ver. 23). No precipitancy, no levity, no presumption. By fasting and prayer they obtained the sweet assurance that God would honour their faith and preserve them. "He was entreated of us." Not lightly must we discard ordinary defences and helps. When we can do no other, we must humbly, solemnly rest ourselves in the hand of God. The times come to us all when faith and policy give contradictory counsel. When such times come, let us not be found wanting to our profession and our God. In many circumstances simple trust in God will prove the truest policy. . . . And, on the contrary, policy, leading God's people to rest on worldly men, and means, and measures, finally demoralises and betrays them. Hear how God reproaches Israel for their lack of faith in the Unseen Powers: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord. . . . Now the Egyptians are men, and not God," &c. (Isa. xxxi. 1, 3).—*W. L. Watkinson.*

EZRA AND HIS TIMES.

(Verses 21–23.)

Let us see how much is included in these words of Ezra, and endeavour to ascertain their bearing on our position and circumstances.

I. Ezra's language was in striking contrast with the general state of opinion around him. He says, not egotistically,—great men have no egotism,—but he says, because he cannot help living when there was a time to speak, "I was ashamed; *others* can take their own course, but I could not ask our heathen but noble king for a band of horsemen and soldiers to help us in the way." Others might, and probably did, feel that it would only be courteous to accept the king's offer; others, that

it would look more respectable; others, that it would be safer; others, that they would get through their journey quicker; and others, that Ezra was carrying things rather too far, he might have a little thought for timid women and children. Such thoughts as these were very current, depend upon it, amid that motley crowd. He knows he is right, and can afford to be singular; and, as he can bide his time, he knows the people will one day thank him for what they may now condemn. And here we see a guiding principle for us. At particular crises of public opinion, it devolves upon some men to go into the land of the enemy, that they may bring truth out of cap-

tivity. It is a perilous and generally a thankless task; but it must be done, that it may be brought out into a glorious enlargement, before men shall see its form or feel its power. Such men have no ultimate fear for truth; they know its vitality depends upon no accidental prosperity, and can be destroyed by no accidental adversity; such men never change sides; they have sometimes sailed with truth under sunny skies into a secure haven; they have also sailed with her through many a "stormy wind and tempest," and they have always come right at last. The world wonders at their eccentricity, and recommends them to beg or borrow a band of soldiers and horsemen, to assist them in their progress; but they are "ashamed" to think of such a thing; it hurts their consciences, and wounds there are long in healing, and when healed they leave ugly scars. If they could make truth successful to-morrow, they must do it with truth's weapons, and her weapons only; but they cannot advance the liberation of truth by any unworthy means, or by any unnatural alliance. "Christ for ever, and His word," cried Luther, as he left Wittenberg with a penny in his pocket, and a threadbare gown upon his back. "Christ for ever, and His word," let every modern Ezra and Luther say, until that word shall enlighten every mind and emancipate every heart; and this it will do, if we will let truth do its work, without "soldiers and horsemen."

II. Ezra's situation afforded him an opportunity for asserting this great principle under very trying circumstances. In reading the Old Testament, it is needful to call to mind the peculiar political constitution of the Jews. It was a pure theocracy. The only one the world has ever seen, or is likely to see. God was their King, and their King was their God. God would defend them; He would be a wall of fire round about them; He would lead them forth to battle; He would be their national safeguard. This the Jews continually forgot. Their crying sin was departure from the true theocratic idea. They trusted in every-

thing but truth; in every one but God. Egypt and Assyria were, by turns, their strongholds of confidence. Hence the prophet's cry, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help," &c. (Isa. xxxi. 1, &c.).

But Ezra fell back upon the old principle of the theocracy. What was true in Judea, he took to be true in Babylon. That which was true to Isaiah was true to him now. He could not see any clear path of safety, except in the path of duty; and he would rather be there than in the way of mere expediency. Others might suggest that, under present circumstances, they need not be so very precise; they had permission to return to Jerusalem, was not that enough? If the king, of his own goodness, chose to help them with horsemen, they could accept his offer up to the gates of Jerusalem; they were not now in the land of the theocracy, and allowance must be made for their peculiar circumstances; and to be so strict about an abstract principle was being righteous overmuch. All that was perfectly incomprehensible to Ezra; he knew of no guiding star but principle, and that alone he resolved to follow.

And Christ's whole life illustrates this principle of confidence in God and in truth, once exhibited by Ezra under circumstances of great temptation; a principle we seek to uphold, as constituting a very essential part of a free, a spiritual Church state. "How often was Christ urged by the impatient longings, and the worldly spirit of the Jews, to gratify their intense and long-cherished hopes, and to establish His kingdom in a worldly form, before the last demand was made upon Him, as He entered, in the midst of an enthusiastic host, the capital city of God's earthly dominion, before His last refusal, expressed in His submission to those sufferings which resulted in the triumph of God's pure spiritual kingdom!"

Thus, oftentimes, the good man will have to strive against the spirit of his age; but obeying Christ, and confiding in Christ, whilst doing so, his conflict will lead to certain victory: he will not

conquer by "a band of horsemen and soldiers," but by the exhibition and enforcement of truth, by the use of weapons that are not carnal, but spiritual; weapons mighty, nevertheless, to the pulling

down of strongholds, in the use of which the Christian warrior says, "Now thanks be unto God, who causeth us to triumph in every place, by Jesus Christ."—*W. G. Barrett.*

EZRA AN EXAMPLE IN BUSINESS.

(Verses 21-23.)

The circumstances in which Ezra was placed were as difficult as can be conceived. He had to contend with the scorn and opposition of pagans, and with the corruptions of Jews. He bears up under his difficulties: he labours through them; he endures as seeing Him who is invisible.

- I. His humiliation.
- II. His faith.
- III. His prayer.
- IV. His holy jealousy.
- V. His success.

—*R. Cecil.*

CONTRASTS.

(Verse 22.)

"The hand of our God is upon all them for good," &c.

I. A contrast of human character.

1. *Those that seek God.* To seek God implies—(1.) Faith in Him. Seekers after God believe in the existence of truth, righteousness, love; in the existence of a Supreme and Perfect Being; they believe that *God is*. (2.) Desire after Him. Seekers after God believe in Him as the Supremely Good and Beautiful—not only the Almighty, but the All-attractive. They do not simply seek His blessing or His favour, but Himself. The former may be mean; the latter must be noble. To seek Him is to desire the highest truth and righteousness, goodness and beauty, &c. (3.) Prayer to Him. They who come to God believe not only that He is, but that "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Out of the faith and longing of their heart they petition Him for His favour and His presence. Their attitude and inclination is towards God.

2. *Those that forsake God.* Sin is frequently represented as forsaking God, departure from Him, distance from Him (Isa. lix. 2; Jer. i. 16, ii. 13; Luke xv. 13; Eph. ii. 13; Col. i. 21, 22). Forsaking God begins in the heart. Some sinful thought or purpose has been che-

rished, and so God has been shut out of the heart. Guilt has been contracted, and the sinner has become afraid of God, and tried to escape from Him. (Comp. Gen. iii. 8-10.) This forsaking God proceeds from the heart to the conduct. God's commands may be outwardly obeyed for a time by one who has forsaken God Himself; but ere long the commands also will be set at naught. When the affections are estranged from God, the actions will soon follow, &c.

Here then is the contrast of character: The one seeks God, draws ever nearer to Him, &c.; the other forsakes God, departs ever farther from Him, &c. Ask yourself—Which is my character? Am I a seeker or a forsaker of God?

II. A contrast of Divine treatment.

1. "*The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him.*" His power is exercised on their behalf; His providence watches over and secures their true interests. But is this really the case? Do we not sometimes find those that seek God in poverty, privation, and pain? Do they not sometimes cry, "Thy hand is heavy upon me"? not, Thy hand is upon me "for good"? Earthly parents see many things to be for the good of their children, which appear unmixed evils to the children themselves. Does the sick infant see

that the nauseous medicine which heals him is for his good? Does the young schoolboy see that it is for his good to master the declensions and conjugations of grammar? And

“What am I?

An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.”

—*Tennyson.*

Not by any hasty conclusions on the results of human character and conduct; not by an induction formed from a brief and narrow observation of human experiences, must our judgment of the Divine procedure be determined; but by His own revelations of His character and government, and by the testimonies of the wise and good amongst men. These unite in assuring us that “the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him.” (1.) For their good temporally. Being perfectly acquainted with the circumstances, temperament, and tendencies of every man, He gives to each one who seeks Him what will really be for his good. “No good will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (2.) For their good spiritually. Many and precious are the spiritual benefits which He bestows upon His people, *e.g.*, pardon and peace, purity and power, grateful recollections and inspiring anticipations, &c. (3.) For their good eternally. He is preparing them for a glorious destiny, and endless. Our Lord has gone to prepare a place for us in His Father’s house. And as He was both guide and guardian to Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem, so is He the guide and guardian of all His people to their blessed and abiding home. They enter heaven through Him.

2. “*His power and His wrath are against all them that forsake Him.*” A sentimental theory which ignores the stern aspects of the character of God is very popular with some people. There is a growing tendency to magnify the love of God, and then deny His wrath, &c. We rejoice in knowing that “He will have all men to be saved;” that He has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from

his way and live;” but we cannot question His wrath. God is tender, without weakness; angry, without sin. He is just, as well as merciful. Sin has been punished by Him, is punished by Him, and will be punished by Him. (Comp. Prov. xi. 21; 2 Pet. ii. 4–9; Rev. vi. 16, 17). (a). “His power;” who can estimate it? It is “against all them that forsake Him.” (b). Who can conceive “His wrath”? It is infinite as His love. It is His love flaming forth against the incorrigibly wicked. (c). “He is mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered?”

CONCLUSION:

1. *How solemnly man’s destiny is in his own hands, or, more correctly, in his own choice!* “Deeds are destiny; character is fate.” For our character we are each responsible. Heaven or hell is the result of man’s own choice and character.

2. *In this world character may be changed.* Those who have forsaken God may return to Him, assured of a joyous welcome. By the grace of God sinners may here and now be converted into saints. “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,” &c. (Isa. lv. 6, 7). “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God,” &c. (Hos. xiv. 1, 2, 4).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) It is very common to separate the question of punishment from its strict relationship to justice, and to argue it on infinite goodness. What is this proper view of God? “Good is the Lord.” But is He good to restrain any administration of government, or to impede any exercise of law? Does His goodness look more indifferently on moral evil than His justice? Is it not its peculiar province to check the consequences of sin? We know not of the goodness which exists only to pity and to spare,—which is a misprison of right and holy principle, which is a connivance at every moral perturbation of the universe. It is easy to reduce this “awful goodness” to our depraved wish and idea. . . . “Our God is a consuming fire.” “He is terrible out of His holy place.” “God shall destroy for ever.” “The enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs.” Those passages which speak of His ire and wrath are many, reiterated, and vehement. Do they tell of goodness, partial and fond, as it is now presumed? A mere indulgence? A figure, most beautiful and

frequent, does Holy Scripture present. God is our Parent. "Have we not one Father?" It is a figure,—"like as a father." It is argued that all punishment, except for the improvement of the child, would be inconsistent with that relation. But may not the case of the son's disobedience be so heinous, that all, under the influence of the most natural feeling, would justify a treatment the most extreme? disownment? disinheritorship? final separation? The paternal relationship, though not as to its fact, yet, as to its exercise, may be altered by the conduct of the offspring: moral government cannot be altered. The one might be renounced: the other is necessary and insubvertible. May we not fear that, in consequence of sin, the paternal favour is withdrawn, and the filial privilege forfeited? Let that father be the magistrate. The child is now under his jurisdiction as well as discipline. That child may be the transgressor of social law. It is conceivable that his father may be called to pass sentence upon him. Will not all, if it be his inevitable duty, see in its discharge a title to their admiration? Without any impeachment of his tenderness, is not such bearing truly great? Does not history hallow it? Has it not saved commonwealths? Why should not the same suffrage be accorded to God? He is the "righteous Father." He sitteth King for ever. He reigns not for a part, but for the whole. His goodness must agree with universal justice, or with that which is the same thing, the protection of universal claim and interest. . . . And if this notion of goodness is to be entertained, how frequently would it have been disappointed! Had earlier creatures than ourselves been forewarned that our earth was soon to be formed, and our race to be created, it would have seemed improbable to them that aught but good could be admitted. The entire scheme would have demanded this expectation. What evils do exist, moral and physical! Then their idea of that which goodness can allow would have been disappointed. It would have been false. When men have been threatened with Divine judgments, they have imagined a presumption against them in the Divine goodness. To the antediluvian the impending fate appeared most unreasonable; the men of Sodom derided the fear of overthrow. If they thought of God at all, arguments like those which we have considered were ready. Goodness forbids it. A parent cannot do it, &c. Then their idea of that which

goodness can allow was disappointed. It was false. So we may speculate concerning the future state. Its punishment may affect our views as exaggerated beyond all showing of truth, of reason, of analogy. We may interpose the Divine goodness. We may pronounce that this state of things cannot be. But we are not placed more favourably to give judgment than they who have palpably erred. Our idea may be disappointed. It may be false.—*R. W. Hamilton, LL.D., D.D.*

(b) How miserable will all wicked rebels be under this power of God! Men may break His laws, but not impair His arm; they may slight His sword, but cannot resist His power. If He swear that He will sweep a place with the besom of destruction, "as He hath thought, so shall it come to pass; and as He hath purposed, so shall it stand" (Isa. xiv. 23, 24). Rebels against an earthly prince may exceed him in strength, and be more powerful than their sovereign; none can equal God, much less exceed Him. As none can exercise an act of hostility against Him without His permissive will, so none can struggle from under His hand without His positive will. He hath an arm not to be moved, a hand not to be wrung aside. God is represented on His throne "like a jasper stone" (Rev. iv. 3), as One of invincible power when He comes to judge; the jasper is a stone which withstands the greatest force. Though men resist the order of His laws, they cannot resist the sentence of their punishment, nor the execution of it. None can any more exempt themselves from the arm of His strength than they can from the authority of His dominion. As they must bow to His sovereignty, so they must sink under His force. A prisoner in this world may make his escape, but a prisoner in the world to come cannot (Job x. 7): "There is none that can deliver out of Thine hand." There is none to deliver when He tears in pieces (Ps. l. 22).—*S. Charnocke, B.D.*

(c) Wicked men hereafter will feel the full weight of God's wrath. In this world they have the wrath of God abiding on them, but then it will be executed upon them; now they are the *objects* of it, but then they will be the *subjects* of it. Now it hangs over them, but then it shall fall upon them in its full weight, without any alleviation, or any moderation or restraint.—*President Edwards.*

SEEKING THE LORD, AND ITS ADVANTAGES.

(Verse 22.)

"The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him," &c. Our text contains a great scriptural truth, applicable to all ages, countries, and persons. It is a truth which is cor-

roborated by many parallel passages, and therefore expresses a subject of more than ordinary importance. There are two things clearly expressed in the text,—man's responsibility, and the

different results of piety and sin. God's hand shall be upon all those who seek Him, and that for good, and His wrath is against those who forsake Him. Observe, we are directed—

I. To seeking God, and its advantages. Seeking God denotes—

1. *A consciousness of our need of Him.* Men in general do not regard God, He is not in all their thoughts. Many feel as Pharaoh did when he exclaimed, "Who is the Lord?" &c. But the enlightened, convicted sinner, and the true Christian, feel that God is the fountain of their existence, and the only source of their peace and happiness. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee," &c. God is all and in all to the pious mind; and their need of Him is every moment's experience.

2. *Earnest and fervent prayer to God* (ver. 23.) Seeking and praying are synonymous. Thus Christ taught His disciples. "Ask, . . . seek, . . . knock," &c. Thus, too, Job says (xxiii. 3), "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" &c. We cannot find God but by earnest prayer and supplication, and He is ever near to all who call upon Him. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord," &c.

3. *To seek the Lord is to come to Him in the way of His appointment.* We may seek anxiously and fervently, but what will it avail if we seek in the wrong way? Thus heathen philosophers laboured to know the true God. Thus, too, many anxious pagans. Many are like the devotional eunuch, they read, &c., but understand not. The Word of God is, however, explicit and full on this subject. Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life." "One God, and one Mediator," &c. "No man cometh to the Father but by" Christ.

4. *To labour in all things to have His approbation.* To commit all to Him; to refer all to Him; to acknowledge Him in all; and seek His blessing upon all our steps. To set the Lord always before us, and to labour to walk well-pleasing in His sight.

Notice the advantages arising to those who thus seek Him, "The hand of our God is upon all," &c.

(1.) *The hand of His pardoning mercy.* To those who thus seek Him, He says, "I, even I, am He who blot out your iniquities." "Seek ye the Lord," &c. Then it follows, "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," &c.

(2.) *The hand of His delivering power.* He delivers the souls of His people, raises them from the horrible pit, &c. Translates them from the kingdom of darkness, brings their spirits out of the prison of sin, and from the dominion of Satan. Rescues from "the gall of bitterness, and the bond," &c.

(3.) *The hand of His providing goodness.* They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. He is their Shepherd, and they shall not want. He leads them into green pastures, &c. "My God shall supply all your need," &c.

(4.) *The hand of His heavenly guidance.* The Lord leads and guides His people. "He led them by the right way," &c. "The Lord shall lead thee continually," &c. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

(5.) *The hand of His sustaining grace.* The Christian is weak and feeble; of himself, insufficient: exposed to many enemies and perils. The saints of the Lord are therefore only absolutely secure in His hand. He keeps them by His mighty power; He preserves them for His kingdom and glory. There is often—

(6.) *The hand of His manifest providence.* How clearly do we see this in the history of His Church and people! It is said of one, "So long as he sought the Lord, the Lord made him to prosper." How many thousands have experienced that "godliness is profitable to all things," &c.

II. Forsaking God, and its attendant evils. To forsake God is the opposite course to that we have described in seeking the Lord. It is refusing Him homage and veneration. It is to disobey Him; to live without His fear; to turn from the way of righteousness; to withdraw our hand from the Gospel plough; to draw back; to make shipwreck, &c. Now, against these, His power and

wrath are declared. Power to punish, wrath to inflict a fearful and eternal doom. Power and wrath of God to cast both body and soul into hell fire. (See Heb. x. 22, &c.) "A certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

APPLICATION. We learn :

1. The value of true religion. The good hand of the Lord upon us.
2. The awfulness of apostasy from the Lord.
3. The necessity of both vigilance and perseverance. (See Heb. iii. 12; iv. 10-13.)
4. Urge the unconverted to seek the Lord, and live.—*Jabez Burns, D.D.*

THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE SACRED TREASURES.

(Verses 24-30.)

Having sought the Divine guidance and protection in their journey, Ezra proceeds to make wise arrangements for the safe conveyance of the offerings for the service of the Lord at Jerusalem. True prayer will always be followed by earnest effort in the same direction.

Notice :

I. The treasures to be guarded.

"The silver, and the gold, and the vessels, the offering of the house of our God," &c. (vers. 25-27). These treasures were—

1. *Valuable in themselves.* "Six hundred and fifty talents of silver," &c. (vers. 26, 27). (We have already stated the estimated value of these things: see *Explanatory Notes* on ver. 26, and homily on "Ezra's confidence in God," vers. 21-23.)

2. *Valuable as being consecrated to God.* Mark how Ezra speaks of them: "The offering of the house of our God: . . . the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers." To every pious mind the fact that they were designed for sacred uses would greatly enhance their worth.

3. *Valuable as being the spontaneous gifts of friends and well-wishers.* "The king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered . . . a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers." As expressions of the good will and kind feeling of the donors to the returning exiles and to their religion, these treasures were very precious. They were well worthy of the most watchful care.

II. The guardians of the treasures.

"Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests," &c. (ver. 24). These guardians were—

1. *Adequate in number.* There were twenty-four of them in all; twelve priests and twelve Levites. It was well to have a goodly number for the weighty responsibility.

2. *Appropriate in official character.* They were priests and Levites. Ezra "said unto them, Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also." The consecrated things were intrusted to consecrated persons. This was in harmony with Divinely-appointed usage amongst them (see Num. iii. 5-10). It was also in accordance with the charge of God by Isaiah the prophet: "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. lii. 11). The principle is of universal application, that holy things should be committed to the charge of holy persons.

3. *Distinguished amongst their brethren.* Ezra selected "twelve of the chief priests;" and Sherebiah and Hashabiah were eminent amongst the Levites (see on vers. 18, 19). By selecting eminent men for this trust Ezra acted prudently; for they would be the more likely to keep it with fidelity than untried men. He also acted religiously; for he thus honoured in the eyes of the people the Lord God, to whom these treasures had been offered.

III. The charge to the guardians of the treasures—

1. *Points out the value of the things committed to them.* In three ways Ezra does this—(1.) By weighing them so carefully before delivering them into

their hands. He "weighed unto them the silver," &c. (vers. 25-27). (2.) By reminding them of their source. They were the voluntary offerings of "the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present." (3.) By reminding them of their destination. They were designed for the service of the Lord God of their fathers.

2. *Enjoins watchful care of these things.* "Watch ye, and keep them." They were to see to it that they were neither lost, nor stolen, nor intermingled with the other possessions of this great company during their long journey.

3. *Indicates their responsibility for them.* "Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites," &c. (ver. 29). Thus Ezra gave them to understand that they would be required to deliver them up at the end of the journey safely and accurately. They would have to account for them—(1.) Exactly: "until ye weigh them." The same weight which had been given to them they must deliver up at the end of the journey. (2.) Unto the chief men of the nation: "the chief of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel." (3.) In the chief place of the nation: "at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord." Thus Ezra impressed upon them the importance and sacredness of the trust committed to them, and the greatness of their responsibility.

IV. The acceptance of the guardianship of the treasures. The selected priests and Levites did not seek to excuse themselves from this trust and its onerous obligations; they do not seem to have offered any demur in relation to it, but accepted it at once. "So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver," &c. (ver. 30).

CONCLUSION:

1. *Our subject speaks to ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* How precious and sacred is the trust committed to them! How solemn their responsibility! (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2; Tit. i. 7, 9.) By the Holy Ghost let them seek to be faithful to their glorious, awful trust (1 Tim. vi. 20; 2 Tim. i. 14). (a.)

2. *To all who have charge of public funds or the property of others.* Let them copy the scrupulous care and fidelity of Ezra, that they may be able, when called upon, to give a punctual and exact account of the things committed unto them.

3. *To all men.* God has committed some gift to every man to be used in accordance with His holy will; and He will call every man to account for such gift. Blessed are they who will be able to render such an account as shall call forth from Him the "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Comp. Matt. xxv. 14-30.) (b.)

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Brethren, have we at all understood what was done to us when we were ordained—that it was an act of exchange and of interchange—we giving ourselves to Jesus Christ; He giving to us a trust of ministry, on the definite basis of a Divine communication of truth?

How little have they realised the good deposit, who have regarded it as nothing more than the reading of services or the preaching of sermons, out of the resources of natural or acquired knowledge, and as only a part of the life, of which all other parts might be just as earthly, just as self-indulgent, just as frivolous, as if no transaction at all had passed between us and Jesus Christ! How many must confess, sorrowfully and with tears, that they were not conscious then, if they have ever awakened to the consciousness afterwards, of anything whatsoever having been put into their hands when they became ordained men! Oh, we do not blame them—still less would we let them despair. But surely it is something to be grieved for, that we thus undertook a sacred office in utter ignorance of its sacredness; that we thus took it upon us to tell men the way of salvation, when we scarcely so much as knew what they needed to be saved from, or what it was to be saved.

The good deposit. Let us first of all feel it to be *something*. Let us try to touch and to handle just one substantial ingredient of it. Let us resolve, let us struggle, let us pray, that this revelation, this self-manifestation of God, which is enshrined in this volume called holy, shall shine out of it upon us. It shall not be a name, it shall not be a formula, it shall not be a mere buzzing sound—it shall be a voice. If we could make one verse speak, if we could make one little sentence of the Testament call us by our name, and tell us to do something because of it, it might be "the beginning of months" to us. It might be the dawning of the day—it might be the very sunrising of an altered life; for then, certainly, we never could rest till it had spoken

again to us, and again, and again. Then we should begin to turn to it as our adviser, as our counsellor, as our friend. Then we should never attempt to write or to preach till the revelation had put a word in our mouth; we should listen for it in the night watches; we should kneel to it as we rose from our sleep, God-sustained and God-commissioned.

How serious should we then be—how evidently taken knowledge of as men that had a trust, and were set and bent upon faithfulness to it! Men would come then to listen to us, as to men who were in communication with the world out of sight—as men who were charged, each separate time of ministering, with something special to say, and with the true way of saying it.—*C. J. Vaughan, D. D.*

(*b*) Obligation and capacity are commensurate. God does not desire to “reap where He has not sown, nor to gather where He has not strawed,” but where He has “given much, of them He will expect the more.” He ex-

pects not from a brute the service of a man, nor from a man the obedience of an angel; He expects not from him that has one talent the results of five, nor from him that has five the results of ten; but He does expect everywhere, and from all beings, that each shall serve according to his actual and “several ability.”

With respect to the power to do something for Christ, this differs in different men, and in the same man at different times. There are differences of talent, wealth, influence, station, opportunity; and there are very frequently growth and accession in all these things as Christians advance and succeed in life. It will often be found, however, that the most able and endowed classes do the least; and of certain individuals it is sometimes true, that as their means increase their doings diminish; for it is diminution, if, while Providence enlarges power, the service rendered is only what it was.—*T. Binney, LL.D.*

FROM AHAVA TO JERUSALEM; AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE CHRISTIAN.

(Verses 31, 32.)

Notice—

I. The setting out from Ahava.

“Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem.” They went forth—

1. *From captivity to liberty.* In Babylon they were not in cruel bondage, as their fathers had been in Egypt; and in departing from Babylon they did not go forth to civil or political freedom, as their fathers did when they left Egypt. But in Babylon they were captives. They could not leave the places in which they were settled without permission. Their departure is repeatedly spoken of as a going “up out of the captivity.” And while they who departed were still subject to the Persian civil government, they were allowed full religious freedom. The Christian pilgrim is emancipated from the captivity of sin. “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” But the believer in Christ Jesus is “made free from sin;” he is delivered from “the bond of iniquity,” from the thralldom of evil habits, &c. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (*a*)

2. *From exile to their ancestral home.*

They were going forth to the land of their fathers, which was sacred and dear to them by many precious and glorious memories and associations. They were going home. Christians are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly,” &c. “Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” “Our conversation” (rather, country or citizenship) “is in heaven.” We, too, are going home.

3. *From the land of idolatry to the scene of true worship.* The priesthood, the altar, and the temple of the true and living God were at Jerusalem. The chief reason of their return to their own land was that there they could more fully and perfectly worship Jehovah, the God of Israel. We are travelling to the scene of pure and perfect and perpetual worship. Our journey will end in heaven, and there every thought and affection, every word and action will be sacred. (Comp. Rev. vii. 15, xxi. 2, 3.) (*b*).

“There God in Christ revealed
In fulness of His grace
Shall we behold for ever,
And worship face to face.”

II. The progress on the journey.

“And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.” They progressed—

1. *Notwithstanding enemies.* The path of the Christian pilgrim is beset with foes. His progress is opposed by—(1.) Invisible, spiritual enemies. He has to contend against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not “against flesh and blood, but against principalities,” &c. (Eph. vi. 10–17). “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about,” &c. (1 Pet. v. 8, 9). (2.) Enemies in human society. The allurements of the world; “the deceitfulness of riches;” the temptation to substitute policy for principle, and to sacrifice the spiritual and eternal for the material and temporal, &c. (3.) Enemies in our own nature. “The flesh lusteth against the spirit,” &c. (Gal. v. 17). Carnal appetites contend against spiritual aspirations, &c.

2. *By reason of the Divine blessing.* “The hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered,” &c. He was both guide and guardian to Ezra and his company. And He leads and protects His people in their heavenward journey. “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” “Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper,” &c. (Heb. xiii. 5, 6).

III. *The arrival at Jerusalem.* “And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.” Their arrival was characterised by—

1. *Grateful rest.* For three days they rested after their long and toilsome journey. The rest would be very welcome, &c. “There remaineth a rest to the people of God.” In heaven the Christian pilgrims “rest from their labours.” (c.)

“Rest more sweet and still
Than ever nightfall gave,
Our weary hearts shall fill
In the land beyond the grave.”

2. *Joyful welcome.* Many of the pilgrims in Ezra’s company had relatives in Jerusalem, persons who had gone up there

with Zerubbabel, or the children of such persons, and heartily would they welcome their newly-arrived kinsfolk. Have we not kinsfolk in the “better country” who wait to greet us on our arrival there? We are not journeying to a strange land, but to our “Father’s house.” Many of our loving and beloved ones are already there, and wait to welcome us into their shining ranks, and sacred services, and delightful society. And when once we are united there, we shall part no more. (d.)

“O happy world! O glorious place!

Where all who are forgiven
Shall find their loved and lost below,
And hearts, like meeting streams, shall flow,
For ever one, in heaven.”

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The work of grace shall conquer the work of depravity; the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus shall set free the soul from the law of sin and death. Nothing else could do it, nothing external to the soul; no outward law of excellence could do it, nothing that did not work within the soul as a living principle of life and action. By this new principle introduced, this new determination of the will in accordance with Divine grace, the man is set free from the evil dispositions of the unregenerate heart, from its inbred, habitual, long-cherished, long-growing, and powerful corruptions; he is set at liberty to serve God out of love, no longer bound in slavery to the law of sin and death in an evil nature. This is the great deliverance; this is freedom indeed; instead of the death of sin, a death to sin, a redemption from its indwelling power by the working of an opposite power of holiness and life, which, as Christ’s own life, imparted to the soul, becomes the *habit* of the soul. But it is too low an expression when we say *imparted to the soul*, for in order to work this freedom, this regeneration, this new creatureship in Christ, Christ Himself takes up His abode within the soul, and works in it. So the man says, this freeman of Christ, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” This new life in the soul is not only a life in Christ, but the life of Christ. “Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,”—liberty from the bondage of corruption, from the law of sin and death, liberty of life, liberty of holiness, liberty to serve God, not as a slave but as a child, not with the spirit of bondage to fear, but with “the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”—*G. B. Cheever, D. D.*

(b) All earthly shrines shall pass away. The beautiful temples shall fade into oblivion; the fanes which utter their silver melody as each Sabbath dawns, awakening the sweetest

associations of the soul and calling man from cares and sorrow to God and peace,—all, all shall depart. The music, so subtle and deep and elevating, shall sink into silence; the prayers, so eloquent and importunate and fervid, shall cease; the call to dying sinners, and neglecters and despisers of Jesus, shall no longer be heard. Altars and priests shall be no more. And instead shall come the holiest worship and the purest homage, and the cleansed heart and the immortal body, and man shall walk in that region which sin cannot enter, and death cannot shadow, and pain cannot touch, amid scenes of beauty and undecaying sweetness, and in that realm whose King is the Lord of hosts, and whose subjects are the obedient servants of their lawful Monarch, and the willing children of their Royal Parent. And instead of temples for the hymn of homage, and the prayer of faith, and the voice of persuasion, there shall be the spiritual worship of redeemed souls, and angelic beings uttering a deeper language than ever was heard on earth, and breathing a more liquid hymn of tenderness than ever rose from an earthly pile, and the soft and exquisite expression shall be fully realised: "I saw no temple therein."—*J. W. Lester, D.D.*

Sublime beyond the reach of words to express is the choral service of the heavenly Temple. Inspiring and thrilling are the strains that rise from that mysterious mount on which stands the collective Church of the First-born, and whose praise swells and flows triumphantly away, till the universe is filled with the harmony which comes "rolling back full on the throne of God."—*R. Ferguson, LL.D.*

(c) Peace is the very highest mode of joy. It is the joy of rest; and this rest partakes the repose of the Divine nature. It is on God that the soul is fixed, and hence she cannot but enjoy the calm and the quiet of Infinite Perfection.

"As the wave a ray of light receives,
And rests unbroken;"

so it is the fact of each nature being in im-

mediate union with God and of His fulness flowing into it, which insures its everlasting rest. In such a case, unrest is impossible. Here we may see a ripple on the bosom of the most placid lake, but there every breast is soothed into unruffled peace. The gentle words of the Saviour—**FEAR NOT**—addressed to the spirit as she was passing through the waters of death, have there deepened into the tranquillity of a sinless nature, and on the bosom of her God she will recline for ever.

This deep repose of soul in the world of glory is not incompatible with the loftiest and the most unwearied activity. Rest is often confounded with sloth, and repose with indolence. But neither indolence nor sloth can exist in heaven, where the purity of each individual nature involves a corresponding vitality, and the vitality a corresponding activity. It is true that the motion of the soul there is ever towards rest; but it is no less true that the rest is ever towards motion. In seeking the one only centre of her life, it is that the soul may come back replenished and filled unto the fulness of God, and thus be prepared to enter on new and still higher spheres of service. In her moments of most profound quiet, her every power is on the utmost stretch and reach of effort.—*Ibid.*

(d) Thy dead men shall live; that decaying dust shall rise again. Weep not as though thou hadst cast thy treasure into the sea, where thou couldst never find it; thou hast only laid it by in a casket, whence thou shalt receive it again brighter than before. Thou shalt look again with thine own eyes into those eyes which have spoken love to thee so often, but which are now closed in sepulchral darkness. Thy child shall see thee yet again; thou shalt know thy child; the selfsame form shall rise. Thy departed friend shall come back to thee, and having loved his Lord as thou dost, thou shalt rejoice with him in the land where they die no more. It is but a short parting; it will be an eternal meeting. For ever with the Lord, we shall also be for ever with each other. Let us comfort one another, then, with these words.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

AT JERUSALEM: THE FAITHFUL SURRENDER OF IMPORTANT TRUSTS.

(Verses 33–36.)

We have here—

I. A sacred trust faithfully discharged. "Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God," &c. (vers. 33, 34). This trust was discharged—

1. *With minute accuracy and reverent care.* Notice—1. The particular accuracy with which everything was accounted for. Everything was—(1)

weighed. "The silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed," &c. "By weight of every one." (2.) Numbered. "By number and by weight of every one." (3.) Inventoried. "And all the weight was written at that time." 2. The reverent care with which these treasures were delivered up. This is indicated—(1.) In the sacred place in which they were delivered. "In the house of our God." (2.) By the conse-

crated persons to whom they were delivered. "By the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest," &c. It appears from ver. 29 that "the chief of the priests and Levites and the chief of the fathers of Israel" were also present at the time. (a.)

2. *With a grateful sense of relief.* It seems to us that the twelve priests and the twelve Levites, who had charge of these treasures during the long and perilous journey, must have felt relieved and thankful when the journey was concluded in safety, and the treasures were surrendered entire and inviolate. Blessed is he who, in relation to the trusts of life, will be able to render as satisfactory an account as this! Blessed who at the end of life's journey will be able to say, "Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me five talents," &c. (Matt. xxv. 20, 21). Or, with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight," &c. (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8). (b.)

II. Divine worship devoutly offered. "The children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel," &c. In these sacrifices there was—

1. *An acknowledgment of sin and of the need of atonement with God.* They "offered twelve he-goats for a sin offering."

2. *An expression of thankfulness and self-consecration.* They "offered twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs; all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord."

3. *An indication of the unity of the twelve tribes of Israel.* A sin offering and a burnt offering was offered for each of the twelve tribes. "Offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six (8 × 12) rams, twelve he-goats for a sin offering." (For further notes on the significance of these sacrifices, see homilies on chaps. iii. 1-3, vi. 16-18; and for illustrations, see those accompanying the above-mentioned homilies.)

III. The royal letters duly delivered. "And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants," &c.

1. *The delivery of these letters was an evidence of loyalty to the Persian govern-*

ment. It was an acknowledgment of the authority of Artaxerxes the king, and of his officers west of the Euphrates. The same Word which commands us to "fear God" commands us also to "honour the king" (1 Pet. ii. 13-17). "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," &c. (Rom. xiii. 1-7).

2. *The time of their delivery was an evidence of their supreme regard for Jehovah their God.* First, they gave up the sacred vessels and treasures for the worship of Jehovah; then they presented to Him their humble and grateful sacrifices, and then they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's officers. Our loyalty to the earthly sovereign must be subordinate to our reverence for God. To Him must be given our highest, holiest affections, and our constant and complete obedience.

IV. Valuable help promptly rendered. "The king's lieutenants and governors on this side the river furthered the people, and the house of God." They carried out the behests of the king expressed in the letters which Ezra delivered to them. Thus the journey of Ezra came to a very satisfactory and successful issue.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Many fill their life with regrets for being confined to such a narrow sphere of usefulness. If they only were in the ministerial office, or had millions of money, they would do so and so; but what can an ordinary labourer, a poor Sunday-school teacher, accomplish? Friend, be content to serve God where He has placed you; for there precisely you can accomplish the most. It is better to make the best of what you have than to fret and pout for what you have not. The man with one talent is never accountable for five; but for his one he must give as strict an account as the other for his five. It may require more humility to husband one talent than five; and, so far as the improvement or misimprovement of either is concerned, they are both equally important in the sight of God. The king's million and the widow's mite are worth the same with the Eternal.—*Dict. of Illust.*

(b) "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Oh blissful sentence! Words of unutterable, inconceivable import! Language of condescend-

ing grace, not now to be comprehended! To be acknowledged before the assembled universe, not only as His servants, but His *good* and *faithful* servants. To be told that we have served Him faithfully, and told it from the throne of His glory! To hear *Him* say "Well done!" and have the plaudit reverberated in ten thousand times ten thousand echoes from the lips of admiring and adoring angels, till heaven rings with the sound, "Well done, well done, thou faithful servant of the Lamb!" Nor is this all. "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." "Come into the same place, yea, into the same joy. Come and dwell with Me, and have one felicity common to both."

This reward will be bestowed on *all* His faithful servants without exception. It belongs not to apostles merely, nor to martyrs, reformers, missionaries, and ministers; but to

the most obscure, and illiterate, and humble Christians on earth. It is not the service of official station merely that is alluded to, but the service of personal religion. Christ is as truly served by the most retired believer, though not as publicly, nor as extensively, as by the most popular and successful preacher. It is the service of faith, patience, self-denial, suffering, mortification, that is to be rewarded; the service of a devoted heart and a holy life that is to be thus honoured and blessed, whether the man who performs it follows Christ in the retirement of a private or the activities of a public station. It is true the reward will be in proportion to the service, and the degrees of glory according to the degrees of grace; but all faithful servants will be rewarded by admission to the presence and service and enjoyment of Christ in heaven.—*J. A. James.*

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] We now come to the social and religious reformation effected by Ezra amongst the Jews who had previously returned to their own land (chaps. ix. and x.). And in this chapter we have—(i.) The complaint of the princes to Ezra concerning the mingling of the people of Israel with the idolatrous people of the lands (vers. 1 and 2). (ii.) The great amazement and grief of Ezra because of this (vers. 3 and 4). (iii.) The confession and prayer of Ezra for the people of Israel (vers. 5–15).

Ver. 1. Now when these things were done] Some time seems to have elapsed between the events recorded in chap. viii. and those narrated in chap. ix. Ezra and his company arrived in Jerusalem "on the first day of the fifth month" (chap. vii. 9), and on the fourth day of that month they delivered up the treasures in the Temple, and offered burnt offerings and sin offerings unto the Lord God (chap. viii. 32–35). The next note of time is in chap. x. 9: "It was the ninth month and the twentieth day of the month" when the great assembly took place at Jerusalem. This assembly had been summoned three days previously. So that there seems to have been an interval of more than four months between the arrival at Jerusalem and the events related in chaps. ix. and x. Probably some portion of this time was occupied in making arrangements with the king's satraps and governors (chap. viii. 36). **The people of the lands]** are the dwellers in the adjacent districts, who are afterwards mentioned. **Doing according to their abominations]** It is better to omit "doing," which has been unnecessarily supplied by the translators of the A. V. "Have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, according to their abominations, (even) of the Canaanites," &c. Or, "in respect of their abominations, (even) of," &c. **The Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites]** were descendants of the ancient Canaanites, whom Israel failed to exterminate, and who were not carried into captivity with the Israelites, but remained in some parts of Palestine. **The Ammonites, the Moabites]** dwelt on the east. **The Egyptians and the Amorites]** on the south.

Ver. 2. The holy seed] The expression is probably taken from Isa. vi. 13. By calling, by covenant, and by profession the Israelites were a separate people, a holy people (see Exod. xix. 5–8; xxxiii. 16; chap. vi. 20, 21). **Have mingled themselves with the people of the lands]** thus violating an express command of the Lord their God (Deut. vii. 1–4). **Yea, the hand of the princes and rulers have been chief]** &c., *i.e.* the upper classes were the first to transgress in this respect.

Ver. 3. I rent my garment and my mantle] As an indication of his great grief and horror, he rent both his outer and inner garments. The custom was a very ancient and a very common one for expressing sorrow, and is frequently mentioned in the Bible (see Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34; Josh. vii. 6; 1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. i. 11; 2 Kings ii. 12; Job i. 20, *et al.*) **And plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard]** This also was expressive of grief, horror, and moral indignation. To shave the head in great sorrow was not unfrequent amongst the Jews (Job i. 20); but this is the only example in the canonical Scriptures of a person plucking out his own hair by the roots in grief and indignation. **And sat down astonished]** or "benumbed, stunned."—*Fuerst.*

Ver. 4. Every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel] &c. They trembled in their alarm because of the punishments threatened in the law of God for such transgressions as had been committed. **I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice]** Inasmuch as business

is generally transacted in the morning in the East, the princes in all probability made their complaint to Ezra in the forenoon, in which case he sat stunned and silent for several hours.

Ver. 5. **I arose up from my heaviness]** Rather, as in margin: "affliction." Fuerst: "self-affliction." Keil: "mortification, or humiliation." **And having rent my garment and my mantle]** This does not refer to the former rending (ver. 3). For the second time he expresses his grief and horror in this manner.

Ver. 6. **I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face]** &c. Keil: "I am ashamed, and am covered with shame, to lift up," &c. The same words are used together in Isa. xlv. 16; Jer. xxxi. 19; and other places. **Our trespass is grown up unto the heavens]** Margin: "our guiltiness." Keil: "our guiltiness is great, (reaching) unto the heavens." (Comp. 2 Chron. xxviii. 9.)

Ver. 7. **Since the days of our fathers]** This expression may be taken as reaching back to the time when their fathers came out of Egypt; but it seems probable that Ezra meant by it, since the time when under their kings idolatry and idolatrous customs were practised amongst them. **To confusion of face]** (comp. 2 Chron. xxii. 21; Dan. ix. 7, 8). **As it is this day]** They were then in subjection to Artaxerxes.

Ver. 8. **For a little space]** or, a "little moment." The eighty years that had elapsed since the emancipation by Cyrus he speaks of as "a little moment," as compared either "with the long period of suffering from the times of the Assyrians (comp. Neh. ix. 32) till the reign of Cyrus" (Keil), or with "the long enjoyment of Divine favour from Abraham to Zedekiah" (Rawlinson). **A remnant to escape]** Keil: "rescued remnant." Those who had returned to the land of their fathers were but "a remnant" as compared with the numerous population of former days. **And to give us a nail in His holy place]** Margin: "or, a pin: that is a constant and sure abode." Fuerst: "נַיִם = a peg, nail, driven into the wall (Isa. xxii. 25; Ezek. xv. 3); a tent pin, to which a tent is fastened (Judg. iv. 21; Exod. xxvii. 19); the fastening being used as an image of being established (Isa. xxii. 23); of remaining (Ezra ix. 8). for which נַיִם stands in ix. 9." Ezra seems to have regarded the Temple as a pledge of their permanence, and a means of increased life and vigour; for he goes on to say: **that our God may lighten our eyes]** &c.

Ver. 9. **For we were bondmen]** Rather, "we are bondmen." They were still subject to the Persian king. Only as regards the exercise of their religion were they granted independence. **And to give us a wall]** &c. This must be understood figuratively; for the walls of Jerusalem were not yet rebuilt (see Neh. i. 3; ii. 13). God had disposed the Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, to protect them in the possession of their country and capital. The wall is a figure of defence, safety, and continuance.

Vers. 11, 12. **Which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants the prophets, saying, The land]** &c. This is not a verbal quotation, but a statement which correctly represents many passages of Scripture (see Exod. xxiii. 32, 33, xxxiv. 12-16; Lev. xviii. 24-30; Deut. vii. 1-4, xxiii. 6, *et al.*)

Ver. 13. **Hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve]** The last word is supplied by the translators of the A.V. Margin: "Heb. 'hast withheld beneath our iniquities.'" Fuerst: "*Thou hast delivered (us) below our iniquities, i.e. undervaluing our iniquity.*" Keil: "Thou hast spared us more than our iniquity deserved." Or, "Thou hast checked, hast stopped, beneath our iniquities." Though not a close rendering of the Hebrew, the A.V. gives the meaning of it. **And hast given us such deliverance as this]** Rather, "Thou hast given us (such) a remnant as this."

Ver. 15. **Thou art righteous]** "Ezra appeals to the righteousness of God, . . . to rouse the conscience of the community, to point out to them what, after this relapse into their old abominations, they had to expect from the justice of God."—Keil. Or, he acknowledges the justice of God in His dealings with them, by which they were reduced to a mere remnant. **For we cannot stand before Thee because of this]** (comp. Ps. lxxvi. 7; cxxx. 3).

THE GOOD MAN'S SORROW OVER THE PEOPLE'S SIN.

(Verses 1-4.)

Notice :

I. **The painful communication made to Ezra.** "Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying," &c. (vers. 1, 2). Information is here given to Ezra—

1. *Of a great sin committed.* "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated them-

selves from the people of the lands, according to their abominations," &c. The men of Israel had taken wives of the idolatrous Canaanites and other heathen peoples. (1.) This was a positive transgression of a plain and oft-repeated command (see Exod. xxiii. 31-33, xxxiv. 12-16; Deut. vii. 1-4; Josh. xxiii. 12, 13). (2.) It was a peri-

lous transgression. Every sin is perilous. But this one was especially so. The foreign and idolatrous wives were likely to lead their husbands into their sinful customs; and yet more likely to train up their children in them. This was expressly pointed out to them by Moses: "They will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods," &c. (Deut. vii. 4). Their previous history contained evidence painfully abundant and conclusive of the danger of these prohibited marriages. Even Solomon, notwithstanding his great wisdom and that he was so richly blessed by God, erred greatly and sadly through the influence of heathen wives. "His wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings xi. 1-13). And this sin the Jews who had returned to their own land were guilty of.

2. *Of the prevalence of this sin.* No class of the community was free from it. "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites" (ver. 1) were all guilty of it. The evil was general in the community.

3. *Of the aggravations of their sin.* (1.) "The priests and the Levites" (ver. 1), whose business it was to teach the law and promote obedience to it, were themselves guilty of violating it in this respect. The law for the regulation of the marriages of priests was particularly strict (Lev. xxi. 7, 13, 14); and by reason of this and of their sacred character and calling, their marriages with heathen wives were especially reprehensible. (2.) The princes and rulers were foremost in the offence. "Yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." It was their duty to have maintained and enforced the observance of the law, yet they took the lead in violating it. Other and greater princes had done the same evil thing; e.g., Solomon, Ahab, *et al.* Again, the eminence of their position would impart great force to their example, and it was their duty to see that the excellence of the latter corresponded with the eminence of the former; but it was the opposite of this. In this matter, at least, their example was as pernicious as it was influential. (a.)

This distressing communication was made to Ezra by persons of unimpeachable credibility. They were in responsible positions—"princes;"—and in making this statement, if they did not impeach themselves, they certainly impeached their order. It is probable that they had been stirred up to do so by the influence of Ezra. During the four months which had passed since his arrival at Jerusalem, he had been inquiring into the condition of the people (comp. chap. vii. 14), and the administration of justice, and the measure of their acquaintance with the law (comp. chap. vii. 25, 26); he had also probably been expounding and applying the law; and the result was, that the minds of these princes were enlightened, their consciences were aroused to a sense of the sin which had been committed, and they went to Ezra and made known to him the sin which was so general in the community.

II. *The effect which this communication produced upon Ezra.* "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle," &c. (ver. 3). The statement caused Ezra—

1. *Great amazement.* "I sat down astonished"—stunned. Domestic life in the East is characterised by great privacy; so that Ezra in making inquiries into the state of the people might well have been ignorant as to the occupants of the apartments of the women. The statement of the princes was quite a revelation to him, and filled him with bitter astonishment. The sins of religious people in our day might well utterly amaze a really godly man.

2. *Deep grief.* "I rent my garment and my mantle." The usual mode of expressing sorrow amongst Eastern peoples was by tearing the garment. The tearing both the outer and the inner garments may betoken the intensity of Ezra's distress. The prevalence of iniquity is ever a source of pain to the godly. It was so to the Psalmist: "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not Thy word. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes," &c. (Ps. cxix. 158, 136). And to Jeremiah: "Oh that my head were waters," &c. (Jer. ix. 1; xiv.

17). Ill fares it with the soul when we can contemplate sin without sorrow.

3. *Intense moral indignation.* "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished." Thus he expressed not only his surprise and grief, but also his utter abhorrence of the sin of which they were guilty. God has declared His hatred of sin (Jer. xlv. 4); and as His servants grow in likeness to Him, their hatred of sin will also grow. We may not hate the sinner; while we condemn we may also pity him; but it behoves us to regard sin with repugnance and anger.

III. *The effect of Ezra's grief upon others.* "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel," &c. Thus the distress of Ezra—

1. *Excited their alarm.* They "trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away." They were filled with fear lest the judgments pronounced upon those who were guilty of this sin should be inflicted upon them. They could not do otherwise than regard with consternation that which afflicted Ezra with so much distress.

2. *Attracted them unto him.* Every one who thus trembled at the words of God assembled unto Ezra. Some might have been drawn to him by curiosity; but certainly they who were alarmed because of the threatened punishments were not of the number. They came to him moved by deep concern on account of the guilt contracted, and by sympathy with his sorrow because of it. And he and they remained apparently speechless for a considerable time—probably for three or four hours. Emotions are sometimes too deep to find expression in words. At such times silence is more expressive than even the most mighty and moving words (comp. Job ii. 13). Mark the power of one true and good man to influence others beneficially. The sorrow of such a man is deeply impressive; it awakens serious reflection, &c. And his moral indignation goes far to carry conviction of the sinfulness of that which enkindles it. (b).

CONCLUSION :

1. *Separation from the world is obligatory upon the true Christian.* We do not by this mean neglect of the secular duties of life. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." "Diligent in business." In business the Christian must associate with the worldly. Nor do we mean separation from political parties and pursuits. As citizens we have duties which we may not neglect without sin. Nor yet, retirement from the world into seclusion. "I pray not," said our Lord, "That thou shouldest take them out of the world," &c. We mean separation from the aims, principles, spirit, and society of the world. And this not from any Pharisaic conceit of our moral superiority, but for our own safety and usefulness, and for the honour of God. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate," &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14–18). (c).

2. *Sin in others should be regarded by the true Christian with unfeigned sorrow, and reprobation of the sin.* See how Ezra grieved! how our Lord wept over guilty Jerusalem! (d).

3. *Sin in the avowed people of God is especially heinous and mournful.* Their privileges are greater than those of the world, consequently their obligations also are greater, and their sin involves a darker guilt. It is a greater dishonour to God; it checks the progress of His cause and kingdom, &c.

4. *Therefore it behoves Christians to give all diligence to walk holily and unblamably before God and before men.* "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord." Let us take heed that we be not found false witnesses. "Ye are the salt of the earth," &c. (Matt. v. 13–16). (e).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) If a man could be wicked and a villain to himself alone, the mischief would be so much the more tolerable. But the case is much otherwise. The plague flies abroad and attacks the innocent neighbourhood. The guilt of the crime lights upon one, but the example of it sways a multitude, especially if the criminal be of any note or eminence in the world. For the fall of such an one by any temptation (be it never so plausible) is like that of a principal stone, or stately pillar, tumbling from a lofty edifice into the deep mire of the

street : it does not only plunge and sink into the black dirt itself, but it also dashes and bespatters all that are about or near it when it falls. Was it not thus with Samson, who, of a judge of Israel, and a terror to his enemies, a man all made up of miracle, rendered himself both the shame of the former and the contempt of the latter ; a scoff and a byword to all the nations round about him (as every vicious and voluptuous prince must needs be) ; and all this by surrendering up his strength, his reason, and his royal trust to the charms of a brutish temptation, which quickly transformed and made him a more stupendous miracle of folly and weakness than ever he had been of strength ; and a greater disgrace to his country than ever he had been a defence ; or, in a word, from a judge of Israel, a woeful judgment upon it ? And was it not thus also with David ? This was the worst and most killing consequence of the temptation which he fell by (2 Sam. xii. 14), that he had by that enormous act "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." And no doubt the religion he professed, as well as the sin he had committed, was thereupon made "the song of the drunkards ;" and many a biting jeer was obliquely cast at one, as well as directly levelled at the other.—*R. South, D. D.*

(b) The Christian ought to clear a space for himself wherever he goes. Little children, humble hearts, mourning souls, reverent, noble, heavenly-minded persons ought to come round him and say, "Welcome in God's name. Don't leave us ; abide with us a long while." But knaves and hypocrites, people who are rolling iniquity under their tongue as a sweet morsel—masked people—ought to feel terribly uncomfortable when a Christian man comes among them. They ought to know him from afar. There should be surrounding him a kind of atmosphere in which men that are evil cannot breathe and live—the knave should shrink away from his sight ; the coward should hide himself in the lowest and vilest dust ; and the man who was contemplating some keen, clever stroke, in which there should be dishonour and injustice, should feel himself paralysed, disabled, half-damned, in the presence of a man whose soul is afire with Divine truth.—*Joseph Parker, D. D.*

(c) The Jewish law shadowed out an everlasting truth. God's people are an exclusive nation ; God's Church is for ever separated from the world. This is her charter, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing ; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." God's people may break that charter, but they do it at their own peril. And we may be very sure of this, when a religious person begins to feel an inclination for intimate communion with the world, and begins to break down that

barrier which is the line of safety, the first step is made of a series of long, dark wanderings from God. We are to be separate, brethren, from the world. Mistake not the meaning of that word. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. *Our* world is not that. The world is that collection of men in every age who live only according to the maxims of their time. The world may be a profligate world, or it may be a moral world. All that is a matter of accident. *Our* world is a moral world. The sons of our world are not idolaters, they are not profligate, they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. Their society is more pleasing, more lively, more diversified in information than religious society. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dulness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. . . . And yet now, pause. . . . The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the Israel of God. His home in that deep, unruffled tranquillity which belongs to those who are trying to know Christ.—*F. W. Robertson, M. A.*

(d) You must learn to be good haters—but not of *men*. You do not need anything to instruct you on that point. You are too good in that already. You are to abhor *evil*. Ah ! there are hundreds of men that know how to hate men, where there is one that knows how to love a man and hate evil. Because evil is offensive to God, because it is repugnant to the innate delicacy of every moral sentiment, because it wastes you, because it wastes your neighbour, because it is hurtful to society, because every benevolent instinct requires that you should hate that which is the common foe of all mankind, therefore you should hate evil. We are to hate all qualities and actions which corrupt the individual, which injure manhood in man ; all that creates sorrow or suffering, or tends to do it. In short, we are to take our beginning in the law of God ; and being filled with goodwill toward every living creature, that spirit breathing itself like summer throughout, we are to hate, come from what quarter it may, everything that injures society, that injures men in the mass, or that injures men in their individual capacity. Whether it be in their bodies, their souls, or their estate, whatever works mischief to mankind, you are to be its enemy. The want of this moral rebound, and of this indignation, will be found to be ruinous. The presence of it is wholesome. The absence of it is effeminating. It destroys the individual to whom it is lacking, and it is mischievous to the community in which it is lacking.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(e) It is recorded of Alexander the Great, that a soldier was reported to him as having betrayed great cowardice on a particular occa-

sion, on which Alexander called him to him and asked his name. On hearing that his name was Alexander, he upbraided him with the dishonour that he brought on such a name, and entreated him either to change his manners or to change his name, asking him how he could dare, while known as Alexander, to act unworthily? And shall not the Christian remember the high and holy name by which he is called, and dread encountering

the guilt and meanness of dishonouring his Head, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"? That name, in its very signification, tells him that he is related to the *anointed One*, and that (as the name implies) all His members, in their measure and degree, are anointed ones. How shall they who take this sacred unction upon them dare to dishonour this name, and so sin against Christ!—*H. G. Salter.*

THE GOOD MAN'S CONFESSION OF THE PEOPLE'S SIN.

(Verses 5-15.)

We have here—

I. Deep personal shame and sorrow on account of the sins of the people. These feelings Ezra expresses by—

1. *A symbolical action.* "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness, and rent my garments and my mantle." Thus before the assembled people he proclaims the grief and moral indignation with which he regarded their sin.

2. *A suggestive attitude.* "I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God." The posture indicates deep humiliation before God and earnest supplication unto Him.

3. *An explicit avowal.* Ezra said, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God." In this avowal notice—(1.) The shamefulness of sin. "Sin is a reproach to any people." It is an "abominable thing." (2.) The good man is ashamed because of the sin of others. He feels the dishonour which is offered by it to God, and the ingratitude, folly, and wickedness of those who commit it. He cannot be an unmoved spectator of the workers of iniquity. The knowledge of human wickedness affects him as it did Ezra, or leads him to cry with the Psalmist, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Thy law." (3.) The good man is specially conscious of the shamefulness of sin when he draws near to God in worship. In the light of His presence the exceeding deformity and heinousness of sin are painfully clear; and the godly soul, burdened in feeling with the iniquities of others, is ashamed to lift up his face to God. (Comp. Isa. vi. 1-5.) (a).

II. Humble confession of the sins of the people. Ezra confesses—

1. *The great accumulation of their sins.* "Our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens." The idea seems to be that their iniquities, like waves of the sea, rolled over them threatening to overwhelm them; and their guilt was piled up to the very heavens. The confession of the Psalmist is similar: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head," &c. (Ps. xxxviii. 4). "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me," &c. (Ps. xl. 12).

2. *The long continuance of their sins.* "Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day." From generation to generation they had been a perverse and rebellious people. A sad continuity in sin characterised their history.

3. *The sore aggravations of their sins.* (1.) That they had been committed notwithstanding the Divine judgments. "For our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been delivered into the hands of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day." God had visited them with heavy judgments, but they had not turned from their iniquities. He had severely reformed them, but they were not reformed. As a people they had suffered long and sorely for their sins, and yet they were still guilty of those sins. (2.) That they had been committed notwithstanding the Divine mercies. Of these several are mentioned by Ezra. (i.) Mercy in the measure of the punishment inflicted upon them. "Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve." God might justly have entirely forsaken them, or have

made an utter end of them; but in His wrath He had remembered mercy. (ii.) Mercy in disposing the Persian monarchs to treat them with so much generosity. "For we were bondmen, yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia," &c. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" (chap. i. 1) to grant them permission to return to their fatherland. He inclined the heart of Darius to treat them so favourably. And it was by His good hand upon Ezra that Artaxerxes "granted him all his request" (chap. vii. 6). (iii.) Mercy in bringing a rescued remnant to their own land again. "And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape," &c. A considerable remnant of the people had been safely restored and comfortably settled in the country given by God to their fathers. (iv.) Mercy in enabling them to rebuild the Temple of their God. "To give us a nail in His holy place," &c. "To set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof." For a people in their circumstances this was a great achievement, and a great mercy from the Lord their God. To the pious amongst them it would be the crowning blessing that the Temple was restored, and that the ordinances of their holy religion were regularly and becomingly celebrated. (v.) Mercy in granting them security in their own land. Two expressions seem to suggest this: "To give us a nail in His holy place." Margin: "Or, 'a pin;' that is, a constant and sure abode." "And to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem;" not a literal wall, for as yet the walls of Jerusalem were not restored; but a shield and shelter, peace and protection. Their Samaritan enemies were restrained, and did not trouble them. And the officers of the Persian government favoured and supported them and the house of God. Yet despite all these mercies, they were now living in the regular practice of sin against their gracious God. How black the ingratitude of such conduct! And how foolish, for their sins might lead

Him to withdraw His favour from them. Neither judgments nor mercies had availed to restrain them from heinous transgression. (3.) That they had been committed against plain and positive commands. "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments, which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants, the prophets," &c. (vers. 10-12, and see *Explanatory Notes* on them). They could not plead ignorance or uncertainty of the law as an excuse for their evil doings. (4.) That they had been committed against commands the reasons of which had been clearly set before them. It had been shown to them that obedience to these commands was necessary for—(i.) The maintenance of their power. "That ye may be strong." (Comp. Deut. xi. 8.) As they mingled with the heathen they lost strength and courage. (ii.) Their enjoyment of the produce of the land. "And eat the good of the land." (Comp. Isa. i. 19.) They should eat it, and not strangers. They should eat it in peace and happiness. (iii.) Their continued possession of the land. "And leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever." (Comp. Deut. xi. 9; Prov. xiii. 22; Ezek. xxxvii. 25.) Their separation from the heathen was necessary to their secure possession of their country. Thus, these commands were not arbitrary, but reasonable; and the reasons for them were stated. Obedience would have been both rational and advantageous; it was both their duty and their interest. Yet they transgressed these commands. No obligation seemed strong enough to bind them to their duty in this respect; no motive adequate to constrain them to obedience. Most persistent and most aggravated were their sins. (b).

III. A solemn anticipation of the consequence of the continuance of the sins of the people. "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass," &c. (vers. 13-15).

1. *Continuance in sin would lead to their utter end as a community.* "And after all that is come upon us for our

evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, wouldest not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" This inquiry does not denote doubt, but certainty. Looking at God's commands to them, and His past dealings with them, Ezra was convinced that if they persisted in these sinful alliances God would bring them to an utter end.

2. *That such a consequence of continuance in sin would be just.* "O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous," &c. (ver. 15). In His past dealings with them God had been just and merciful. He would still be just towards them. They were guilty before Him; they had nothing to plead in extenuation of their sins, but must leave themselves in His hands.

3. *That such a consequence of continuance in sin was to be dreaded.* This is quite clear from the close of Ezra's humble appeal to God (vers. 13-15). If sin be not truly repented of its consequences will be found to be dreadful. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness."

LEARN:

1. *The great evil of sin.* It is evil in itself; it is a great wrong against God; it is terrible in its consequences, &c. (c).

2. *The grand hope of the sinner.* God is merciful as well as just. The greatest sinner, being penitent, may approach unto Him, and, confessing his sin, may obtain full and free forgiveness. "There is forgiveness with Thee," &c. (Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 7). "If we confess our sins," &c. (1 John i. 9). (d).

3. *The right relation of the good man to sin.* Like Ezra, he should hold it in abhorrence, should be burdened in feeling because of its prevalence in others, should exhibit to them its heinousness, and should humbly confess it before God.

When iniquity abounds, let God's faithful people "weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord," &c. (Joel ii. 17). (e).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Our whole lives present one unbroken series of duties neglected, of favours not acknowledged. And, oh! how do they appear, when we review them in the light of God's countenance! When we see before us our Creator, our Preserver, our Benefactor, our Sovereign, and our Heavenly Father; when we see in Him, to whom all these titles belong, infinite excellence, perfection, glory, and beauty; when we see with what profound veneration, with what raptures of holy, grateful affection He is regarded and served by all the bright armies of heaven;—and then turn and contemplate our past lives, and reflect how they must appear in His sight, can we refrain from exclaiming with Job, "We have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now our eyes see Thee: wherefore we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes"! Must not each of us say with the Psalmist, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me"! Nay, more, when you see what God is, and how He is worshipped in heaven, and then look at the coldness, the formality, the want of reverence with which you have often approached Him in prayer, and listened to His word, must you not feel conscious that should He call you into judgment you could not answer for one in a thousand of the iniquities which have stained your holy things, your religious duties?—*E. Payson, D.D.*

(b) The criminality of any sin is in proportion to the motives and obligations which opposed its commission. To sin against many and powerful motives indicates greater depravity, and is, of course, more criminal than to sin against few and feeble motives. Suppose a person is informed that if he commits a certain crime he shall be imprisoned. If, notwithstanding the threatening, he perpetrates the crime, he shows that he loves the crime more than he loves liberty. Again, suppose him to be assured that if he commits the crime he shall be put to death. Should he after that commit the crime, it would indicate greater depravity than before, it would show that he loved the crime more than life. But the Word of God threatens sinners with everlasting misery if they persist in sin, and promises them everlasting happiness if they will renounce it. I need not tell you that what is everlasting is in one respect infinite, viz., in duration. Here, then, are two infinitely powerful motives presented to the sinner to deter him from sin—infinite happiness and infinite misery. Every one, then,

who persists in sin, notwithstanding these motives, shows that he loves sin more than everlasting happiness, that he hates holiness more than he dreads everlasting misery. His attachment to sin, and, of course, his depravity and criminality, are therefore boundless or infinite.—*Ibid.*

(c) Every sin is a violation of an infinitely perfect law. It will readily be allowed that to violate a good law is a greater evil than to violate a law the goodness of which is doubtful. It will also be allowed that if there were any law made by human governments, on obedience to which the honour, the welfare, and even the existence of a nation depended, —to violate that law would be the greatest crime which a subject could commit. Now the law of God is perfectly holy, just, and good. If it were universally obeyed, universal and endless happiness would be the consequence. But disobedience to this law tends to produce universal and endless misery. Take away the law and the authority of God, there would be no right but that of the strongest; violence, discord, and confusion would fill the universe; sin and misery would overspread the earth, would ascend to heaven, subvert the throne of Jehovah, and compel Him to live in the midst of a mad, infuriated mob, the members of which were continually insulting Him and injuring each other. Now every violation of God's law tends to produce this effect.—*Ibid.*

Others may throw garlands upon sin, picturing the overhanging fruits which drop in her pathway, and make every step graceful as the dance; but we cannot be honest without presenting it as a giant, black with the soot of the forges where eternal chains are made, and feet rotting with disease, and breath foul with plagues, and eyes glaring with woe, and locks flowing in serpent fangs, and voice from which shall rumble forth the blasphemies of the damned.—*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*

(d) Confession is a necessary basis of forgiveness. Confession is not a simple act. Confession is in reality a multitudinous act; it is many acts in one; it is a convergence of right judgment, right feeling, and right action. There are kinds of confession which are wholly unavailing. . . . This is not the confession in which David poured out his soul; his words are full of heart. His language seems to be baptized with tears. Every word is a groan from the soul; and consequently his confession comes within the assurance of

that world-enclosing and most blessed promise, that if we confess our sins, God will erase them from His book, and remember them no more for ever. Think of God *forgetting*. Think of the Infinite casting aught behind His back! Back of the Infinite! Where is *that*? He will put our sins away from Him, as far as the East is from the West. What geometrician can set forth in lines that distance, or tell in words the vastness of that immensity?—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(e) Abhorrence of evil is indispensable to the purity of a man's own self who is in the midst of "a perverse and crooked generation." I do not believe any man can avoid the formation of feeling, and to a certain extent the expression of it, and maintain himself incorrupt. It is unnatural. What would you give for a man's humanity who could stand by and see a little boy deliberately tortured, and maintain a sweet and smiling face, and perfect equanimity, saying, "It is neither my child, nor the child of anybody that I know anything about;" and saying, "It is wrong; I suppose it is wrong; but there is no use of being excited about it"? What would you think of a man that could stand and look upon wickedness and not feel all his nature rebound at it? You cannot see a man steal (provided it is not yourself!) without the utmost horror. You never see a mean thing done (if it is only done by another) without some sensibility in regard to it.

Now, the expressions of these feelings are, by reaction, the modes in which moral sense, the repugnance to wickedness, to evil, is strengthened. And if you, for any reason, forbear to give expression to the feeling, it goes out for want of expression. It is like fire that is smothered. And the man who is so extremely prudent that he never does give utterance to his feelings of indignation against great wrongs, is a man that emasculates himself; and he becomes a moral eunuch. A man is not worthy of the name of man who has no power of indignation. A man is not worthy of being ranked in the roll of manhood who does not know how to issue soul-thunder.

The feeling, and suitable expression, of indignation, then, is not only salutary as a mode of penalty, and of restraint to the wickedness of society, but it is quite indispensable, also, to the moral purity of the individual, the spectator, himself. It is one of those exercises by which the very moral sense itself, the judge and test of all things right or wrong, is kept in tone.—*H. W. Beecher.*

EZRA'S HUMILIATION FOR THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE.

(Verses 5–6.)

I The reason of his sorrow. Many of the people had connected themselves in marriage both with the Canaanites and

other heathens around them. This he justly regarded as a most heinous evil.

1. *As being a violation of an express command.* Ezra himself speaks of it in this view (comp. vers. 10–12 with Deut. vii. 2, 3). It is possible that, whilst the generality sought only the gratification of their own corrupt appetites, “the princes and rulers, who were chief in this matter,” justified their conduct on the ground of policy. They might urge that, being few in number, it was desirable for their own preservation to make alliances with those whose hostility they feared. In this way many set their own reasonings in opposition to God’s revealed will. But reason is altogether out of place on such occasions. We are not at liberty to sit in judgment on God’s commands, and to determine how far it is expedient to obey them, &c.

2. *As having an evident tendency to bring the people back to idolatry.* It was for their idolatries that the nation had been sent into captivity; and a recurrence of the same evil was likely to result from so intimate a connection with idolaters. (Comp. Deut. vii. 4.) Their disregard of this danger showed how little they had profited by the judgments that had been inflicted on them, or the mercies that had been vouchsafed unto them. But thus it is with all who seek the friendship of the world: God has told them that “friendship with the world is enmity with God” (Jas. iv. 4); that it is impossible to maintain communion with both (Matt. vi. 24; 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15); and that therefore all who cultivate the friendship of the world will be regarded and treated as the enemies of God (1 John ii. 15–17); yet they will run the risk, and for the sake of gratifying their corrupt wishes, will endanger the everlasting salvation of their souls.

II. The expressions of his sorrow.

1. *The expression of his grief the instant he was informed of their misconduct.* This was more violent than any of which we read in the Holy Scriptures. Often have men rent their mantle and their garments; but of him alone we are told that “he plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard.” He was almost distracted; he was so overwhelmed as to be incapable of speech or action; “he

sat down astonished,” &c. Shall we think all this extravagant? No truly, if we duly estimate the evil they had committed, and the danger to which the whole nation was reduced. We are told of David, that “horror took hold upon him,” and that “rivers of tears ran down his cheeks,” &c. St. Paul appeals to God, that he had “great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart,” &c.

2. *His humiliation before God more particularly demands our attention.* “At the time of the evening sacrifice,” as if revived and encouraged by the consideration of the great atonement, “he arose from his heaviness, and fell upon his knees,” and confessed with shame and anguish of heart both his own sins and the sins of all the people. What a just view had he of national transgressions. Many would have thought that because he disapproved of the evils that had been committed, he had no share in the guilt, nor any occasion to humble himself before God on account of them; but the members of the body politic are, in their corporate capacity, like the members of the natural body, all to a certain degree responsible for those evils which generally, though not universally, prevail among them. At the day of judgment indeed, none will have to answer for anything but what they themselves were personally guilty of; but in this world, where alone nations can be dealt with as nations, we should consider ourselves as participating in whatever relates to the nation at large. Oh that we felt for our own sins as he felt for the sins of others! We are told plainly enough what is that repentance which godly sorrow will produce (2 Cor. vii. 10, 11); let us therefore look to it that we “approve ourselves to be clear in this matter.”

APPLICATION:

And now the evening sacrifice is just offered; “now once in the end of the world, hath Christ appeared,” &c. (Heb. ix. 26.) Let us spread before Him both our national and personal transgressions; not doubting but that “if we confess our sins, God is faithful,” &c. (1 John i. 9).—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

EZRA'S ADDRESS.

(Verse 8.)

Israel had often suffered for their sins, especially for idolatry. Worst of all by enemies—latterly carried into captivity. Now, after seventy years, restored. Now Ezra relates his experience. Deep sorrow and shame for their sins (ver. 2, &c.). His distress, prayer, and confession, &c. In the midst of this comes our text, full of instruction, counsel, &c. The subject shows—

I. The grace they had experienced.

Observe—

1. *In bondage.* Not desert, but grace—undeserved favour.

2. *Grace from Jehovah,* their covenant God.

3. *Grace to preserve.* “A remnant.” Seventy years’ captivity. Not all extinguished. Some kept, sustained—and a remnant only.

4. *To be restored to their land—nation—city—worship—inheritances—and home.*

II. The exalted position to which they had been raised.

1. “*A nail,*” or *pin*—these were inserted in the building of the place. Designed—(1.) For ornament. (2.) For usefulness. (3.) For permanence. So Christ, the Messiah (Isa. xxii. 23). Levites were nails, pins. The priests—the high priest—an exalted place. The musicians.

2. *In the “holy place” of God.* Tabernacle—Church of the old covenant. Not in palaces—schools of learning—halls of science—academies of philosophy; but in the far higher, holier Church of the living God. Observe this is expressive—(1.) Of their honour—true dignity. (2.) Of their security. (3.) Of their privileges and favours.

III. The blessings connected with these privileges.

And here there is reference—

1. *To spiritual illumination.* “God may lighten,” &c. (Ps. xiii. 3; xxxiv. 5). (1.) Eyes to see their own unworthiness. (2.) Their own helplessness. (3.) The Lord’s goodness. (4.) The Lord’s will and ways.

2. *Spiritual reviving.* Rekindling of the fire—stirring up—re-inspiring—re-strengthening—reviving. Faith—hope—zeal—love—obedience.

3. *Gratefulness for deliverances.* In our bondage—that God should show grace. Deliverance from it, &c. And now gratefully reviewed, &c.

4. *The brevity of these signal mercies*—“a little space.” For working—fighting—building up ourselves. Also the Church—“a little space.” We are reminded of this—(1.) By those who have passed away. The fathers, &c. Those we have known—succeeded. (2.) By the advance we have made in life. Look back to childhood—youth, &c. How changed! (3.) By the uncertain, fragmentary remains, we can only possess. “Time is short,” &c. “We spend our years as a tale that is told.” The Judge at the door. “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day,” &c. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” &c. Let the subject be—

1. *A test of character.* Are we of the remnant? Called—the chosen—the faithful.

2. *An appeal as to our position.* In the Church, “a nail” or pin—somewhere.

3. *A question as to our desires.* Are we seeking the reviving?

4. *An exhortation.* Appeal to those outside the Church to come with us, &c.—*Jabez Burns, D.D.*

FORBIDDEN MARRIAGES.

(Verse 12.)

“*Give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons.*” The Israelites were prohi-

bited from taking heathen women for their wives, and from giving their daughters in marriage to the heathen.

And true Christians are commanded not to marry those who are not Christians. What are the reasons why such marriages should not be contracted? Because—

I. They are opposed to the express command of God. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” &c. (2 Cor. vi. 14). “There is,” says Barnes, “a difference between Christians and those who are not so great as to render such unions improper and injurious. The direction here refers, doubtless, to all kinds of improper connections with those who were unbelievers. It has been usually supposed by commentators to refer particularly to marriage. But there is no reason for confining it to marriage. It doubtless includes that.” And M. Henry: “Those relations that are our choice must be chosen by rule; and it is good for those who are themselves the children of God to join with those who are so likewise; for there is more danger that the bad will damage the good than hope that the good will benefit the bad.” Again, St. Paul writes that Christians are to marry “only in the Lord” (1 Cor. vii. 39); which Alford explains thus: “i.e., within the limits of *Christian* connection—in the element in which all Christians live and walk—‘let her marry a Christian.’ So Tertull., Cypr., Ambros., Jerome, Grot., Est., Bengel, Rosenm., Olsh., Meyer, De W.” Whitby: “She must marry a believer, one who is in Christ by faith and profession.” And Barnes: “That is, only to one who is a Christian, with a proper sense of her obligations to Christ, and so as to promote His glory.” (a).

II. They are inconsistent with the most sacred aspects and ends of marriage. Marriage was instituted by God (Gen. ii. 20–24; Matt. xix. 4–6); and it was intended by Him to be a union of persons not merely as regards their temporal interests, but in their spiritual sympathies. In its best aspect marriage is a union of souls. (b). They who are thus united have sympathy with each other in their deepest, highest, and holiest experiences. They are one in soul, one in Christ, and one for ever.

The marriage which is not a union of souls is defective, and it degrades the Divine institution. One of the ends contemplated in the institution of marriage was that they who are joined in this relation should be mutual helpers. Woman was created to be “an help meet for” man. And this must surely hold good in relation to the highest and most important concerns of life, viz., the salvation of their souls, or their life, health, and progress as spiritual beings. Husbands and wives should aid each other in their upward and heavenward path. But how can they do this if the genuine Christian is mated with one who is not a Christian? (c). The absence of this high and holy union is sometimes mournfully manifest in married life. How inexpressibly sad it is when in the sore troubles of life husband and wife look to different quarters for relief, and consolation, and help! The true Christian looks to the Heavenly Father, and obtains calmness and peace and hope, to which the unbelieving partner is a stranger. When their union should be most closely and preciously realised, the gulf which separates them is most painfully felt. In like manner the unbeliever is utterly unable to enter into the tenderest, holiest, and most cherished experiences—those of the religious life—of the Christian partner.

III. They imperil the salvation of the soul. The believing husband or wife may be successful in leading the unbelieving partner to real trust in Christ and hearty consecration to Him. But in very many instances the actual result is the opposite of this. “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin” (Neh. xiii. 26). “There is far greater ground of fear that they shall pervert you, than there is ground of hope that you shall convert them.” The risk of this kind which such marriages involve is one which no Christian is justified in deliberately encountering. (d).

“Maid, choosing man, remember this :
You take his nature with his name ;
Ask, too, what his religion is,
For you will soon be of the same.”

IV. They are inimical to wise and harmonious home government. In such marriages there is a difference of opinion as to the ends to be sought and the methods to be employed in the government of the family ; and as to the spirit which should pervade the home ; and, further, as to the course of life to be pursued therein. Such differences must militate against the order and harmony which should characterise family life.

V. They are detrimental to the best interests of the children of the marriage. One of the objects contemplated in the institution of marriage was the production of “a godly seed” (Mal. ii. 15), and in the marriages which are Divinely forbidden this object is likely to be frustrated. The diversity of spirit, principles, aims, and methods, which exists where one parent is really a Christian and the other is not, must exert an injurious influence upon the children. (c). How many and forcible, then, are the reasons why Christians should marry “only in the Lord” !

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) They that enter, or think of entering, into the married state, are required to do it in the Lord, as an *only thing*. Marry they may, “only in the Lord.” But when they neglect this, they leave out the only thing that can make a blessed marriage ; which certainly must argue a very profane mind, when men and women dare venture, and rush upon a matter of so great importance as that, and leave out the very only thing that concerns them in it.—*John Howe*.

(b) The relation of which we now treat, instituted by the benevolent Creator Himself, is the closest, the most intimate and tender, of all earthly connections. Its closeness and endearing intimacy were evidently meant to be indicated by two circumstances :—(1.) The manner of the formation of the first woman ; not, as the man himself had been, from “the dust of the ground,” but from a bone of his own body ; and that bone one of the safeguards of the most important and vital organs of his frame, being part of the protecting bulwarks of his heart—the fountain of life to his whole frame, and the seat of all his affections. I dare not for a moment doubt the emblematic significance of this remark-

able fact. It is as far as possible from being fanciful. Adam himself perceived, and felt, and expressed it, when, on the delicate and lovely counterpart of himself being brought to him by the Divine Maker, he exclaimed, with new, and delightful, and sinless emotion : “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh ; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” In our language the sentiment is not, and cannot be, correctly transfused. In the original the name for woman is simply that for man, with a feminine termination, which, from the structure of our language, we cannot imitate. The nearest approximation to it would be she-man ; but, unfortunately, it sounds too ludicrously to be at all sufferable. To this original formation of woman Paul beautifully alludes, when he describes the very thing of which we have been representing it as significant of the tender care with which husbands should regard and cherish the chosen partners of their lives. “So ought men to love their wives,” &c. (Eph. v. 28-30). (2.) The second thing by which this was indicated was the pronouncing of this relation, by Jehovah Himself, superior in its imperative requisitions to every other. The relation of child to parent is specially tender and powerful ; yet it must give way before the obligation under which that child, when he becomes a husband, is laid to the “wife of his youth :” “For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.” It is the only one of life’s relations that is represented as constituting a species of identity—a dual unit : “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”—*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*

(c) Husband and wife should be as the milch-kine, which were coupled together to carry the ark of God ; or as the two cherubim, that looked upon one another, and both upon the mercy-seat ; or as the two tables of stone, on each of which were engraven the laws of God. In some families married persons are like Jeremiah’s two baskets of figs, the one very good, the other very evil ; or like fire and water, whilst the one is flaming in devotion, the other is freezing in corruption. There is a twofold hindrance in holiness : first, on the right side ; secondly, on the left. On the right side : when the wife would run in God’s way, the husband will not let her go : when the fore-horse in a team will not draw, he wrongs all the rest ; when the general of an army forbids a march, all the soldiers stand still. Sometimes on the left : how did Solomon’s idolatrous wives draw away his heart from heaven ? A sinning wife was Satan’s first ladder, by which he scaled the walls of Paradise, and took away the fort-royal of Adam’s heart from him. Thus, she that should have been the *help* of his *flesh*, was the *hurt* of his *faith* : his *nature’s under propper* becomes his *grace’s under miner* ; and she that should be

a crown on the head, is a cross on the shoulders. The wife is often to the husband as the ivy is to the oak, which draws away his sap from him.—*W. Secker.*

(d) Such unlawful unions have been usually advocated thus :—The godly party pretends to make no doubt but that the other party may be converted : “God can easily convert men when He will ; and if there be but love, persons are easily won over to the same mind with those they love.” *Answer*—(1.) Then it seems because you love an ungodly person, you will be easily turned to be ungodly. If so, you are not much better already. If love will not draw you to their mind to be ungodly, why should you think love will draw them to your mind to be godly ? Are you stronger in grace than they are in sin ? (2.) If you knew well what grace is, and what a sinful, un-renewed soul is, you would not think it so easy a matter to convert a soul. Why are there so few converted, if it be so easy a thing ? You cannot make yourselves better by adding higher degrees to the grace you have ; much less can you make others better by giving them the grace which they have not. (3.) It is true that God is able to convert them when He will ; and it is true that, for aught I know, it may be done. But what of that ? Will you in so weighty a case take up with a mere possibility ? God can make a beggar rich, and for aught you know to the contrary, He will do it ; and yet you will not therefore marry a beggar ; nor will you marry a leper, because God can heal him ; why then should you marry an ungodly person, because God can convert him ? See it done first, if you love your peace and safety.—*R. Baxter.*

A consistent Christian young man became attached to a pleasure-loving and gay young

lady, and married her against the advice of his brethren. Her influence silenced his prayers, estranged him from the house of God, and led him to her ways of pleasure. Sickness called his attention back to religion. Twice his wife had driven him from his duty. Now, in agony and remorse, with a fearful eternity before him, he gazed upon her and cried, “Rebecca, Rebecca, you are the cause of my eternal damnation !” and died.—*Dict. of Illust.*

(e) Hannah vows, if the Lord will give her a son, by bearing him, she will return that son to the Lord by serving Him (1 Sam. i. 11). A spouse should be more careful of her children’s breeding than she should be fearful of her children’s bearing. Take heed lest these flowers grow in the devil’s garden. Though you bring them out in corruption, yet do not bring them up to damnation. Those are not mothers, but monsters, that whilst they should be teaching their children the way to heaven with their lips, are leading them the way to hell with their lives. *Good education is the best livery you can give them living ; and it is the best legacy you can leave them dying.* You let out your cares to make them great. Oh lift up your prayers to make them good ; that before you die from them, you may see Christ live in them. Whilst these twigs are green and tender, they should be bowed towards God. Children and servants are in a family as passengers are in a boat ; husband and wife, they are as a pair of oars to row them to their desired haven. Let these small pieces of timber be hewed and squared for the celestial building. By putting a sceptre of grace into their hands, you will set a crown of glory upon their heads.—*W. Secker.*

USE OF GOD’S DIVERSIFIED DISPENSATIONS.

(Verses 13, 14.)

I. God’s diversified dispensations towards us. God visited His people of old with alternate mercies and judgments ; and thus He has dealt with us also.

1. *He has visited our sins with judgments.* And it is of the utmost importance that we should acknowledge the hand of God in them. They spring not out of the dust, &c. God uses men as instruments, just as He did the Assyrians and Chaldeans, to punish His people ; but still it is His hand alone that inflicts the stroke (Ps. xvii. 13 ; Isa. x. 5–7, 13–15, xxxvii. 24–26 ; Gen. xlv. 8). We must confess, however, that our sufferings have by no means equalled

our deserts (Ps. ciii. 10). Take any one of our national sins, &c. If God had proceeded against us according to the tremendous aggregate of our iniquities, we should have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. *He has also vouchsafed us a deliverance.* The “deliverance” granted to the Jews on their return from Babylon was not inferior to that which they had formerly experienced in their departure from Egypt. And has not ours also been exceeding great ? . . . In this too must we view the hand of God. Whoever were the means, God was the author of it. It is He who produces all the changes in the state of individuals (1

Sam. ii. 6–8), or of kingdoms (Jer. xviii. 6, 7, 9). And as the discerning of His agency in our afflictions is necessary to effect our humiliation, so the beholding of it in our mercies is necessary to excite our gratitude.

II. The effect they should have upon us. If the destruction of sin be the end which God proposes to Himself in all His conduct towards us, then we should endeavour to make everything subservient to that end. The pointed interrogation in the text strongly shows in what light we should view a renewed violation of God's commandments, after He has taken such pains to enforce the observance of them.

1. *How unreasonable would it be!* No man can read the account of Pharaoh's obstinacy in the midst of all his successive judgments and deliverances, and not stand amazed at his more than brutish stupidity. Yet it is thus that we shall act, if we do not now put away our sins, &c. And how irrational such conduct would be God Himself tells us: He even calls heaven and earth to express their astonishment at it, &c. (Isa. i. 2, 3). And if we be guilty of it, He will justly vent His indignation against us, as He did against His people of old: "They are a perverse and crooked generation," &c. (Deut. xxxii. 5, 6).

2. *How ungrateful!* Ingratitude is considered as one of the greatest aggravations that can be found in any offence of man against his fellow-man; and how much more must it enhance the guilt

we contract in our disobedience to God! See what a stress God Himself lays upon this in the transgressions of David (2 Sam. xii. 7–9), and Solomon (1 Kings xi. 9), and Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxxii. 25); and will it not stamp a tenfold malignity also on our offences? (Comp. Jer. vii. 9, 10.)

3. *How dangerous!* This is particularly noticed by Ezra, in the words following the text; and the state of the Jews at this moment is an awful comment upon it. God tells us that, as the impenitence of the Jews was the reason of His continuing to afflict them (Isa. ix. 12, 17, 21; x. 4), so He will "punish us seven times more for our sins" (Lev. xxvi. 18, 21, 24, 28) if we now continue in them. To what a state of misery we may in that case expect to be reduced, we may judge from what was actually experienced by the Jewish nation (Judg. x. 11–14).

ADDRESS:

Remember that God is not an indifferent spectator of our conduct. Sin is that "abominable thing which His soul hateth" (Jer. xlv. 4); and He will surely destroy either it or him that retains it. And if His judgments be not inflicted on the sinner in this life, there still is a future day of retribution, when every man shall give account of himself to God, and receive the just recompense of all his actions. Let every one of us shudder at the thought of ever again breaking the least of God's commandments.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES.] In this chapter we have the account of—(i.) Shechaniah's proposal to put away the strange wives (vers. 1–5). (ii.) Ezra's fast because of the people's sin (ver. 6). (iii.) The proclamation calling upon all the Jews to assemble at Jerusalem within three days (vers. 7, 8). (iv.) The coming together of the people at Jerusalem, and their acceptance of the proposal to put away the strange wives (vers. 9–14). (v.) The opposition of Jonathan the son of Asahel and others (ver. 15). (vi.) The carrying out of the proposal (vers. 16, 17). (vii.) The names of the men who had taken strange wives (vers. 18–44).

Ver. 1. Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed] Rather, "Now whilst Ezra prayed and whilst he confessed." **Before the house of God]** *i.e.* in the court of the Temple.

Ver. 2. Jehiel] Perhaps the Jehiel whose name occurs in ver. 26, as having married a heathen wife. **Now there is hope in Israel]** Rather, "for Israel." He came to this conclusion because the people were sensible of their sin and sorrowing by reason of it.

Ver. 3. According to the counsel of my lord] Keil: "the Lord." Ezra had given no advice in the matter as yet. But Shechaniah might have inferred what Ezra would counsel from his words and actions (chap. ix. 3–15).

Ver. 5. According to this word] *i.e.* according to the proposal of Shechaniah.

Ver. 6. Went into the chamber] (Comp. 1 Kings vi. 5; chap. viii. 29; Neh. xiii. 4, 5) **Of Johanan the son of Eliashib]** We cannot arrive at any certain conclusion as to who this Johanan was. According to Mr. Aldis Wright, he was one of the chief Levites (Neh. xii. 23). From a comparison of Neh. xii. 22, 23, with vers. 10 and 11 of the same chapter, Rawlinson concludes that he was the grandson of Eliashib the high priest. Keil says, "Johanan, the son of Eliashib, cannot actually be Johanan-ben-Eliashib (Neh. xii. 23) the high priest. . . . For the high priest Eliashib was a contemporary of Nehemiah, and the high priest Johanan was not the son, but, according to the definite statement (Neh. xii. 10), the grandson of Eliashib, and the son of Joiada (the correct reading of Neh. xii. 11 being, Joiada begat Johanan and Jonathan). Now a chamber of the Temple could not in Ezra's time have been as yet called after a grandson of Eliashib, the contemporary of Nehemiah; and both Johanan and Eliashib being names which frequently occur (comp. vers. 24, 27, 36), and one of the twenty-four orders of priests being called after the latter (1 Chron. xxiv. 12), we, with Ewald (*Gesch.*, iv. p. 228), regard the Johanan-ben-Eliashib here mentioned as an individual of whom nothing further is known,—perhaps a priest descended from the Eliashib of 1 Chron. xxiv. 12, and who possessed in the new Temple a chamber called by his name." **He did eat no bread nor drink water]** He fasted strictly. Fasts of this strictness were not common. A few cases are recorded (see Exod. xxxiv. 28; Deut. ix. 9, 18; Jon. iii. 7).

Ver. 7. And they made proclamation] &c. Lit., "And they caused a voice to pass throughout," &c., *i.e.* they proclaimed by heralds. (Comp. chap. i. 1.)

Ver. 8. Forfeited] Margin: "Heb., devoted," *i.e.* appropriated to the treasury of the Temple.

Ver. 9. The ninth month] was named Chisleu, and nearly corresponds with our December. **In the street]** רחוב = a wide space, a large, open place. Probably here it means the great court before the Temple. **For the great rain]** Chisleu was in the rainy season. "During the months of November and December the rains fall heavily, but at intervals."—*Bibl. Dict.*

Ver. 10. Have taken strange wives] Lit., "Have caused strange wives to dwell," *i.e.* have taken them to live with you.

Ver. 14. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand] or, as Keil, "Let then our rulers stand for the whole congregation," *i.e.* for the good of the congregation, and transact its business. **With them the elders of every city and the judges]** as being acquainted with the several cases. **For this matter]** Margin: "Till this matter (be despatched)." Keil: "As long as this matter lasts." The rulers were to continue to judge the accused as long as the matter lasted. The latter part of the verse would run thus: "Until the fierce wrath of our God be turned from us, as long as this matter lasts." The last words define more exactly the leading idea of the verse.

Ver. 15. Were employed about this matter] Rather, "Stood up against this (matter)," as in 1 Chron. xxi. 1; 2 Chron. xx. 23; Dan. viii. 25, xi. 14. *Meshullam* is probably identical with the Meshullam of ver. 29, who had taken a heathen wife.

Ver. 16. And the children of the captivity did so] Notwithstanding the opposition of Jonathan and his companions, the people carried out the determination which they had expressed. **With certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers]** Keil translates, "And men, heads of houses according to their houses." The meaning is, that each recognised house or family was represented on the commission by its head. **And all of them by their names]** or, "and they all by names." A list of their names was written (comp. chap. viii. 20). **Were separated]** or, selected for this business. **The tenth month]** *i.e.* Tebeth, which nearly answers to our January.

Ver. 17. The first month] *i.e.* Nisan, which nearly corresponded to our April. The commission sat for three months, and at the end of that time they had completed their business.

Ver. 18. The sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak] This is Jeshua the high priest who came up from Babylon with Zerubbabel.

Ver. 19. They gave their hands] *i.e.* "bound themselves by shaking hands, to put away their wives, *i.e.* to dismiss them, and to sever them from the congregation of Israel."—*Keil.* **And being guilty they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass]** The Heb. is simply, "And guilty, a ram of the flock for their trespass;" which is explained by Keil that they were condemned to bring a ram as a trespass offering (Lev. v. 14-16). Fuerst: "*And the guilty* (gave their hands to bring) *a ram for their trespass.*"

Vers. 20-22. Of the sons of Immer, Hanani] &c. "By comparing chap. ii. 36-39, we perceive that not one of the orders of priests who returned with Zerubbabel was free from participation in this transgression."—*Keil.*

Ver. 25. The singers and the porters] (Comp. chap. ii. 41, 42.)

Ver. 26. Moreover of Israel] "As distinguished from priests and Levites, *i.e.* of the laity."—*Keil.*

Ver. 44. And some of them had wives by whom they had children] Rather, "And there were among them wives who had brought forth sons." This fact is mentioned probably to show how thoroughly this reformation was effected. It would be more difficult, for several reasons, to put away a wife who had given birth to children than to put away a childless wife; but the difficulties did not prevent the execution of the duty.

THE REFORMATION PROPOSED.

(Verses 1--25.)

Three principal points require attention—

I. The proposal of reformation prepared for. “Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel,” &c. (ver. 1). Ezra’s great distress, and humble confession, and earnest appeal to God, had influenced the people in such a manner and to such an extent as to prepare them for such a proposal as that made by Shechaniah. The impression which Ezra’s condition and conduct by reason of their sin produced upon the people was—

1. *Sympathetic.* His horror and self-abasement on account of their sin aroused their consciences to a sense of their own guilt. His great sorrow awakened grief in them, and they “wept very sore.”

2. *Extensive.* It seems that the fact of his grievous distress was widely made known, and all the city was stirred by it. Very many were moved by his grief and penitence. “There assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children.” The fact that both men and women, and so many of them, were much affected is important as indicating preparedness for reformation.

3. *Deep.* The people in the great assembly before the house of God were very much moved. The impression was profound as well as extensive. “The people wept very sore;” or “wept a great weeping.” Ezra’s influence for good in this respect was very great. The distress which he manifested was contagious, and spread rapidly, widely, and powerfully amongst the Jews at Jerusalem. Now this was indispensable as a condition for the proposal of any real reformation with a reasonable prospect of success. Until the sinfulness of these marriages was realised, and genuine concern in relation to them was experienced by the people, it would have been vain to have suggested measures for their abolition. But now this “very great

congregation” was in a condition to consider such measures, and probably to adopt and enforce them.

II. The proposal of reformation made. “Then Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra,” &c. (vers. 2-4). In this wise and brave address Shechaniah—

1. *Frankly acknowledges the sin.* “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land.” We do not find his name amongst those who had sinned in this thing; but, like Ezra (chap. ix. 5-15), he includes himself amongst the offenders. He does not attempt either to extenuate or palliate or excuse the sin, but ingenuously confesses it. This was important. The disease must be discovered before it can be remedied. The sin must be perceived and acknowledged before it can be forgiven and done away. There could be no true reformation without a clear perception and a humble confession of the sin. (a).

2. *Discovers reasons for hope.* “Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing.” As M. Henry observes: “The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease is threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed, a stop put to the spreading of the contagion; and so the judgments which the sin deserves may be prevented, and all will be well. ‘Now there is hope;’ now that the disease is discovered, it is half cured. Now that the alarm is taken, the people begin to be sensible of the mischief, and to lament it; a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out upon them, and they are all thus humbling themselves before God for it, ‘now there is hope’ that God will forgive and have mercy. ‘The valley of Achor’ (that is, of trouble) is the ‘door of hope’ (Hos. ii. 15); for the sin that truly troubles us shall not ruin us. There is hope now that Israel has such a prudent, pious, zealous governor as Ezra to manage this affair.”

3. *Proposes the abolition of the sin.* "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God," &c. (ver. 3). His proposal was to the effect that they should enter into a solemn covenant with God to make an end of this sin, and to make an end of it—(1.) Completely. "To put away all the wives, and such as are born of them." Marriage with idolaters was prohibited as a preventive of idolatry and its associated abominations (Exod. xxxiv. 11-17; Deut. vii. 1-6; 1 Kings xi. 1-8; Neh. xiii. 23-28); and the presence of the idolatrous wives was a continual temptation to the sin. The Jews had done wrong in marrying such women; and Shechaniah would have them undo that wrong as far as possible by putting away such wives. The true penitent abandons the sin for which he grieves, even though its renunciation be very painful. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out," &c. (Matt. v. 29, 30). It is better that the surgeon should amputate the diseased limb, than that we should retain it and by so doing imperil the life of the body. So must sin be renounced even at the cost of sharp sufferings. Moreover, the true penitent seeks to repair if possible, and as far as may be, the injury he has done. Repentance leads to restitution. "What has been unjustly got cannot be justly kept, but must be restored." It is one of the sorest sorrows of the penitent soul that complete restitution for sin cannot be made; that the evil done can never be undone; that the false or malignant speech may be afterwards contradicted by him who uttered it, but he can neither unsay it, nor totally annul its effects. Now, it was in this spirit, which seeks to repair the wrong done and to remove the temptation to do it again, that Shechaniah proposed "to put away all the wives and" their children. (b). (2.) In accordance with the counsel of the godly. "According to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God." It does not appear that Ezra and they who sympathised with him had as yet advised this or any other line of action; but from their distress Shechaniah inferred that his

proposal would commend itself to them. Their recommendation of his measure would contribute to its general acceptance. (3.) In accordance with the commands of God. "And let it be done according to the law." I am not aware of any express command to put away heathen wives, to which Shechaniah can refer; but the spirit of the law, which repeatedly and solemnly prohibited such marriages, seemed to require their divorcement. "Divorces were permitted to the Israelites, *by the judicial law*, to prevent worse consequences;" but there could be no consequences worse than the seduction of the husbands and the training of the children to idolatry. Moreover, the law which commanded the Israelite to put to death any one enticing him to idolatry, even if the enticer were his "brother, the son of his mother, or his son, or his daughter, or the wife of his bosom, or the friend, which was as his own soul" (Deut. xiii. 6-11), would surely sanction the putting completely away of heathen wives. If a Christian sin by marrying an unbeliever, he may not adopt the course recommended by Shechaniah. The rule for him, or for her, as the case may be, is laid down in 1 Cor. vii. 12-14.

4. *Summons Ezra to take the lead in abolishing it.* "Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee," &c. (ver. 4). In this appeal of Shechaniah to Ezra we have—(1.) An assertion that the work pertained to him. It was the business of Ezra to take this matter in hand, for two reasons: First, his commission authorised him to do it (see chap. vii. 26). He was sent by Artaxerxes to enforce obedience to the law of God. And, second, his character qualified him for doing it. His acquaintance with the law of God, his practical conformity to that law, his position as a teacher of it, and his great influence with the people, all combined to qualify him for taking the lead in effecting this reformation. (2.) A call to courage in respect to this work. "Be of good courage." Perhaps Ezra took too dark a view of the case, and was too despondent concerning it, and required this hopeful

and earnest call to courage. The dependant would never succeed in carrying out such a reformation; the business imperatively required a brave and resolute spirit. (3.) A summons to action. "Arise, . . . be of good courage, and act." It was of the utmost importance to seize the present favourable opportunity for beginning the reformation. In their present state of sore distress on account of the sin, the people of this great assembly would be ready to enter upon any possible course for making an end of that sin. Therefore it behoved Ezra to arise from his deep grief, and begin the reformation. Let his deep feelings now impel him into earnest action, and the deep feelings of the people will impel them to unite with him. The case demanded immediate and resolute action (comp. Josh. vii. 10-15).

5. *Promises co-operation in abolishing it.* "We also will be with thee." Shechaniah thus takes the place of spokesman for the "very great congregation" assembled before the house of God; and pledges them to stand by Ezra and to work with him in effecting the great reformation. The co-operation of such an assembly in this undertaking would go far to guarantee its success. (c).

III. **The proposal of reformation accepted.** "Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites," &c. (ver. 5).

1. *It was accepted influentially.* "The princes, the priests, the Levites," the men of the most eminent position and commanding influence, gave in their adhesion to the movement.

2. *It was accepted extensively.* "And all Israel." All that great multitude which had assembled unto Ezra out of Israel, pledged themselves to co-operate in carrying out the proposal of Shechaniah. The party of reformation was strong both in the number and in the power of its adherents.

3. *It was accepted solemnly.* Ezra made them "to swear that they should do according to this word; and they sware." When the keenness of their present distress had abated, if any of them had been tempted to draw back,

they would have been prevented from doing so by the solemnity with which they had pledged themselves to the undertaking.

CONCLUSION :

The lessons suggested by this subject are many and important. Let us attend to the principal ones.

1. *The manifestation of intense feeling is sometimes commendable, and very influential for good* (ver. 1).

2. *A deep feeling of the guilt of sin is a strong encouragement to hope for forgiveness, amendment, &c.* (ver. 2). (d).

3. *That repentance only is genuine which leads to restitution and reformation* (ver. 3). (e).

4. *It is of the utmost importance to translate religious feeling into corresponding action without delay* (vers. 3, 4). (f).

5. *Great leaders may receive valuable aid from even their humblest followers.* Shechaniah, apparently an able man, suggested the reformation and urged Ezra to attempt it at once; but even the obscurest person in that "very great congregation," by swelling the tide of penitent feeling, helped to set the project of reformation well afloat.

6. *It is sometimes wise to fortify good resolutions by a solemn covenant with God, or by a serious pledge to man* (vers. 3, 6).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Let us strive after God's view of sin. To Him sin is infinitely hateful; He cannot tolerate it with the least degree of allowance; it troubles His otherwise perfect and happy universe; it despoils human nature; it overthrows all that is Divine in manhood; it calls into existence the worm that gnaws for ever; it is the cause of death and the source of hell. To under-estimate the heinousness of sin is to put ourselves out of the line of God's view; to understand sin is to understand redemption. Sin interprets the Cross; sin shows what is meant by God's love. We cannot be right in our relation to Jesus Christ, we cannot be just to His holy Cross, until we regard sin with unutterable repugnance, until we rise against it in fiery indignation, fighting it with all the energy of wounded love, and bringing upon it the damnation of concentrated and implacable anger. I am not speaking of what are called great sins; I am not thinking of murder, of commercial plunder, of adultery, drunkenness, or theft; I am speaking of sin as sin, sin

nestling secretly in the heart, sin rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, sin indulged in secret places, sin perverting the thought, sin poisoning the love, sin sucking out the life-blood of the soul; I am thinking of *sin*, not of *sins*—of the fact, not of the details; and I ask, with passionate yet well-considered pointedness, Have we not been led to under-estimate the guilt of sin?—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(b) There is often, when men repent, the necessity of a reparation. A man that in his past life has been inflicting wrong may not be able to make all the reparation. A man whose distributive gains have been flowing in from a hundred sources, and varying every year, may not be able to carry back the tribute and re-bestow it where he fraudulently or wickedly obtained it. Yet while this is the case frequently in respect to gains, there are many things which a man may repair. A man may have wronged a fellow-man by his tongue, and it is necessary, if he is going to be a Christian, that that shall be all repaired. A man may have a quarrel on his hands, and if he is going to be a Christian, that quarrel must come to an end. A man may be high and obstinate, and that man, if he is going to be a Christian, must come down and confess, "I was wrong, and I give up the transgression wholly, absolutely." It may be that a man has been living on ill-gotten gains. It may be orphan's property. No matter if it makes a beggar of him, the man who is living on fraudulent gains, if he is going to be a Christian, must make reparation, and give them up. If, for proper and suitable reasons, he finds that he cannot give them up, he must at least confess; for although everybody knows his sin, everybody does not know that he knows it—at any rate they do not know that he knows it in such a way that he is willing to confess it. Confession is a testimony to the power of God, and to the power of the new-found virtue in his soul.—*H. W. Beecher.*

(c) The social element in religious movements—that which men often decry in revivals—is apt to infuse a generous enthusiasm, a largeness, into men's minds. There are times when men cannot alone do noble things; but if there be scores and hundreds of men that seem at the same time to be filled with the same influence, then they rise to heroic proportions, and are able to do easily things that would overtax their individual power.

This seems to have been one of those cases where men were seized, not simply with a conviction of sin and with a disposition to repent; but with a disposition to repent in a manner that should be heroic, and should stamp both their sense of iniquity and transgression, and their sense of the genuineness of their repentance and conversion.—*Ibid.*

(d) The essence of repentance is sorrow, sorrow for our sin. Sorrow is painful, and we shrink from pain; we avoid it. To those that

have not felt the evil that repentance cures, how dark and bitter a thing it is to be away from God, homeless, fatherless, an orphan, and made so by selfish ingratitude,—to those it will not seem a good. It is a good only to those who feel the evil it delivers them from, the nobler peace it brings them to. We know there is one thing worse than pain; the painless disease that kills; the slow, insidious, fatal malady that eats away the springs and energies of life, without giving the warnings of bodily distress. To stop that, to heal that, we gladly go in search of pain. We tell the surgeon to hurt us that we may live. Physical vitality is often undermined unconsciously. To avert that process by a pang, by a period of needful and saving agony, we account a blessing. After the first stages of suffocation, the drowning, on their own testimony, pass into a state of insensibility to suffering, or even, as many maintain, of positive and exquisite pleasure. Adam Clarke, who went through it, says, in his autobiography, it was like being borne gently through the most luxurious tropical verdure, the keenest enjoyment. And when this swift, easy passage to destruction is interrupted, and friendship applies restoratives, there are spasms, tortures; the sufferer begs to be let alone, to die. It is not otherwise with the spiritual sensibilities. It is their coming back from death to life that makes their distress. But no wise man, only the demented man, regrets that distress. Paul, with his singular exactness of expression, says that the sorrow that is *unto life*, the price of living for ever, needeth not to be repented of, not to be sorrowed for. The pain that rescues life is a good.—*P. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(e) Reformation is just as essential as repentance. That is, it is just as essential that you should, up to your power, do the deeds of a good man or woman, as that you should take the resolution to be a good man or woman. If you are heartily sorry for misspent years, you will make it your business to spend your future years wisely. If you are called to renounce an undevout heart, the same Lord calls you to work with holy hands. In whatever the past has been irreligious and mean, the future must be sanctified and noble. Despising your selfishness, you must go on to generosity. Renouncing a paltry ambition, you must serve humanity and truth for their own immortal sake. The invisible energy that makes the acorn vital is nothing, unless you give it soil and air for growth and expansion into the fair proportions of the oak.

Thus, in fact, reformation becomes the *test* of repentance, proving its sincerity and its worth. We infer that a miser is penitent, when we see him giving liberally to the poor, or to spreading the Gospel. A sensualist may profess to have repented; but we are not sure, till we see him forsaking dissipation, and living temperately and chastely. A vain, frivolous girl deserves small confidence as repenting, till her whole appearance reveals a constant life

hidden with Christ in God, and the dignity of a sober devotion to the welfare of others. It is not to be believed that a sullen or angry temper has been actually repented of, till the countenance loses its unhallowed fire, and the voice its asperity, and the words come gently, like His, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.—*Ibid.*

(f) It is a perilous thing to separate feeling from acting; to have learnt to feel rightly without acting rightly. It is a danger to which, in a refined and polished age, we are peculiarly exposed. The romance, the poem, and the sermon teach us how to feel. Our feelings are delicately correct. But the danger is this:—feeling is given to lead to action; if feeling be suffered to awake without passing into duty, the character becomes untrue. When the emergency for real action comes,

the feeling is as usual produced: but accustomed as it is to rise in fictitious circumstances without action, neither will it lead on to action in the real ones. “We pity wretchedness and shun the wretched.” We utter sentiments, just, honourable, refined, lofty; but somehow, when a truth presents itself in the shape of a duty, we are unable to perform it. And so such characters become by degrees like the artificial pleasure grounds of bad taste, in which the waterfall does not fall, and the grotto offers only the refreshment of an imaginary shade, and the green hill does not strike the skies, and the tree does not grow. Their lives are a sugared crust of sweetness trembling over black depths of hollowness; more truly still, “whited sepulchres”—fair without to look upon, “within full of all uncleanness.”—*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*

TRUE LOYALTY.

(Verse 4.)

The word “loyalty” is much used in these days. A picture here of the thing. The spirit which was animating many in Israel at this juncture finds utterance here from the lips of one. He speaks in the name of others. The issue shows he had warrant for so doing. We also see that he speaks well. By examining his language we shall find that true loyalty is marked—

I. By genuine respect. In the commonwealth of Israel at that time there was great need of reform. The people had not long returned from captivity. They were powerless and few. Yet the very evil which had previously occasioned their captivity had begun to reappear. Steps had been taken which, if not retraced, would certainly bring that evil about. Many in high places—some of the speaker’s own relatives—were in fault (see ver. 26). The matter therefore was pressing. He felt it so. He desired reform very earnestly; he recommended it very strongly (see vers. 2, 3). Yet he would not take upon him to be the first to move in this matter. He would not set aside those whose office it was to do this. “Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee.” You see exactly the state of his mind. Notwithstanding the depth of his zeal and convictions, he would sooner do nothing than be disrespectful to Ezra.

No change, in his judgment, would be proper reform that should set proper authority on one side.

II. By sincere sympathy. This is shown here in the words that come next: “We also will be with thee; be of good courage, and do it.” It is possible to defer to authority in a very cold and unfriendly spirit, to leave too much on the hands of our rulers, and to fail in taking our proper share of *odium* and labour in supporting them and their measures. We do well, therefore, to note from this language that we owe much to them in both these respects. If we wish to be truly loyal, we are bound to encourage them openly in their righteous efforts. We are bound also to promise them our support and assistance. In fact, to do otherwise is covert rebellion. Not to encourage is to hinder in a taciturn way. Not to assist is, in an indolent fashion, to oppose. How could Ezra have moved at all in this matter, how could he have moved to good purpose, but for this language of Shechaniah?

We may apply these lessons—

1. *To the laws of our land.* Except where religious principle is in question, these should be the laws of our lives. It is the object of the “criminal classes” to try and evade them. It should be the object of God-fearing persons to try

and observe them. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's" (Matt. xxii. 21; see also Rom. xii. 1, 2, 7). All this should be regarded by us as part of our duty towards God. This also should be applied by us carefully to all the points it embraces; e.g., our income-tax returns; our action towards contraband trade; our respect for the administrators of justice; our support of its officers, and so on. A bad citizen will never make a good Christian. A good Christian, in these matters, would rather exceed than fall short, after the example of Christ Himself (Matt. xvii. 24-27).

2. *To the laws and officers of our Church.* Ezra was acting here ecclesi-

astically as much as politically; of the two, perhaps rather more so. So of our Lord in paying the di-drachma, or Temple tribute, as above (see also Matt. xxiii. 2, 3). In all things, therefore, in regard to which a Church hath power to ordain, in all matters where its ministers have a right to be consulted, let us not only acquiesce, but encourage; not only encourage, but support. Yet let us do it without interference, and without taking their proper work from their hands. The English word "leader" signifies both a commander and a guide. Therefore never be many steps behind your leader; never be one step in front. —*W. S. Lewis, M.A. in The Clergyman's Magazine.*

THE REFORMATION DECIDED UPON.

(Verses 6-12.)

Notice:

I. **The summons to the people to assemble at Jerusalem.** Proclamation was made throughout that part of the country in which the returned Jews had settled, requiring them to come to Jerusalem within a specified time, and announcing severe penalties in case any one failed to do so. Concerning this summons, notice—

1. *The circumstances in which it originated.* When the proposal of Shechaniah was adopted by the great congregation assembled before the house of God, "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan, the son of Elia-shib; and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water; for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away." Here in this chamber Ezra seems to have consulted the chief men, the princes, the elders, and the priests, as to the best measures for carrying out the resolution which had been so solemnly made. And his consultations were in a spirit of profound penitence and earnest piety, which was manifested by his fasting and mourning.

2. *The persons to whom it was ad-*

dressed. "They made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity." The summons was issued to all the adult male population of the Jews, who out of exile had returned to their own land. It applied to the entire Jewish community in Palestine.

3. *The authority by which it was issued.* "They made proclamation . . . according to the counsel of the princes and the elders." Not by Ezra alone was the summons sent forth, but by him in connection with the recognised and rightful heads of the community. The authority of the mandate was unquestionable.

4. *The speedy obedience which it required.* "That they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem . . . within three days." "The limits of Judea at this time," says Rawlinson, "appear to have been Bethel on the north, Beersheba on the south, Jericho on the east, and the Mediterranean upon the west. As the frontier was nowhere much more than forty miles from Jerusalem, three days from the day that they heard the proclamation would be sufficient time to allow all the able-bodied men to reach the capital." No time

was granted for hesitation or delay. Resolute and quick obedience was demanded of all.

5. *The penalties by which it was enforced.* "And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders," &c. (ver. 8). Should any one prove a defaulter, he is here threatened with a twofold penalty — (1.) The forfeiture of his entire property to the Church. "All his substance should be forfeited;" or, as in the margin, "devoted" (comp. Lev. xxvii. 28). Ezra was authorised by the Persian monarch to inflict this penalty (comp. chap. vii. 26). (2.) Personal exclusion from the community. "And himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away." He would be deprived of all the rights and privileges which pertained to him as a member of that community.

II. The assembly of the people at Jerusalem in obedience to this summons. Notice:

1. *The universal attendance at the assembly.* "Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together within three days." There seems to have been no defaulters. If any were inclined to disregard the summons, the severe penalties proclaimed against absentees constrained them to obey it. And all were present within the appointed time.

2. *The felt importance of the assembly.* The historian seems to have regarded it as an epoch in the history of the community; for he carefully records the date of its occurrence. "It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month." The importance of the great and solemn meeting was doubtless felt by most, if not by all the people.

3. *The depressed spirit of the assembly.* "All the people sat in the street of the house of God," &c. (ver. 9). They were troubled and alarmed because of—(1.) The sin by reason of which they had been called together. "Trembling because of this matter." The consciousness of guilt distressed them, and made them fearful. (2.) The extraordinarily heavy rain which was falling at the time.

"And for the great rain." This great gathering took place in the rainy season; but the showers at this time were evidently of unusual severity, and were in the mind of the people associated with the fact of their grievous trespass. How impressive and melancholy a spectacle! The vast multitude seated before the Temple of God, tired, troubled, and trembling, beneath the dark canopy of heavy clouds, with the rain falling down upon them in torrents!

III. The address of Ezra to the assembled people. "And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them," &c. (vers. 10, 11). This address comprises—

1. *A declaration of their sin.* "Ye have transgressed and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel." A decided recognition of the sin was indispensable to reformation. By these marriages they had augmented greatly the guilt of the community.

2. *An exhortation to repentance.* He calls upon them to discharge two of the principal duties of repentance. (1.) Confession of sin. "Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do His pleasure." Confession of sin is a relief to the penitent soul. (a). It is also an essential condition of forgiveness. (b). "Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," &c. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee," &c. (Ps. xxxii. 5). (2.) Abandonment of sin. "And separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives." This is an essential element in true repentance. "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c. (Isa. lv. 7). "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy." "Repentance," says Shakespeare, "is heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing." (c).

IV. The declaration of the assembled people. "Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do." Thus they announced their determination to follow the counsel of Ezra.

Notice—

1. *The unanimity of their determination.* "All the congregation answered and said," &c. This augured well for the success of the movement.

2. *The earnestness of their determination.* "Answered with a loud voice." This was not a half-hearted or reluctant assent, but a free and whole-hearted resolution.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) As the frank and dutiful child, when he has committed a fault, does not wait till another goes and tells his father, or till the father discovers by his frowning countenance that it has come to his ear; but freely, and of his own accord, goes pleasantly to his father, and eases his aching heart by a free and full confession; and this with such plain-heartedness, giving his offence the weight of every aggravating circumstance, so that if the devil himself should come after him, to glean up what he hath left, he should hardly find wherewithal to make the case appear blacker;—thus does the sincere soul to God; adding to his simplicity in the confession of his sin such a flow of sorrow, that God, seeing His dear child in danger of being carried down towards despair, if good news from Him do not speedily stay him, cannot but tune His voice rather into a strain of comforting him in his mourning, than chiding him for his sin.—*W. Gurnall.*

(b) It is impossible for the Almighty Himself to forgive men unless men come to Him with contrition, with repentance towards Himself, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Believe me, there is no action so difficult as the action of forgiveness. There is no action so complicated as the action of pardon. It seems a very simple thing to say, "I forgive you; say no more about it; there is an end of the whole affair: away you go." He who could speak so, is immoral. He who could talk so, is not to be trusted. If a man could treat the moral relationships of life so, it would but prove that his conscience had been drugged, that his judgment had been hoodwinked, and that there was nothing morally permanent in the quality of his soul but corruptness.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.*

(c) Convince a man that the only way to save his life is to part with his limb, and he does not hesitate an instant between living with one limb and being buried with two. Borne into the operating theatre, pale, yet resolute, he bares the diseased member to the

knife. And how well does that bleeding, fainting, groaning sufferer teach us to part with our sins rather than with our Saviour. If life is better than a limb, how much better is heaven than a sin!

Two years ago a man was called to decide between preserving his life, and parting with the gains of his lifetime. A gold-digger, he stood on the deck of a ship that, coming from Australian shores, had—as some all but reach heaven—all but reached her harbour in safety. The exiles had been coasting along their native shores; and to-morrow, husbands would embrace their wives, children their parents, and not a few realise the bright dream of returning to pass the evening of their days in happiness amid the loved scenes of their youth. But as the proverb runs, there is much between the cup and the lip. Night came lowering down; and with the night a storm that wrecked ship, and hopes, and fortunes all together. The dawning light but revealed a scene of horror—death staring them in the face. The sea, lashed into fury, ran mountains high; no boat could live in her. One chance still remained. Pale women, weeping children, feeble and timid men must die; but a stout, brave swimmer, with trust in God, and disencumbered of all impediments, might reach the shore, where hundreds stood ready to dash into the boiling surf, and, seizing, save him. One man was observed to go below. He bound round his waist a heavy belt, filled with gold, the hard gains of his life; and returned to the deck. One after another, he saw his fellow-passengers leap overboard. After a brief but terrible struggle, head after head went down—sunk by the gold they had fought hard to gain, and were loth to lose. Slowly he was seen to unbuckle his belt. His hopes had been bound up in it. It was to buy him land, and ease, and respect—the reward of long years of hard and weary exile. What hardships he had endured for it! The sweat of his brow, the hopes of day, and the dreams of night were there. If he parts with it, he is a beggar; but then if he keeps it, he dies. He poised it in his hand; balanced it for a while; took a long, sad look at it; and then with one strong, desperate effort, flung it far out into the roaring sea. Wise man! It sinks with a sullen plunge; and now he follows it—not to sink, but, disencumbered of its weight, to swim; to beat the billows manfully; and, riding on the foaming surge, to reach the shore. Well done, brave gold-digger! Ay, well done, and well chosen; but if "a man," as the devil said, who for once spoke God's truth, "will give all that he hath for his life," how much more should he give all he hath for his soul? Better to part with gold than miss a heavenly crown!—*Thomas Guthrie, D.D.*

A GREAT AND TROUBLED ASSEMBLY.

(Verse 9.)

How much good one man may do who has the grace of God in his heart and the fear of God before his eyes! "One sinner destroyeth much good;" one saint may accomplish much. He may be a centre of gracious influences to the Church and the world, a terror to the bad, a tower of strength to the good. The world owes much to its great men, more to its good ones. Ezra was one of these. He was the means of bringing part of the Church out of captivity, and of renewing the faded splendours of holiness and devotion which it had lost. He stood in the line of illustrious reformers, and was considered in the Jewish Church a second Moses.

The Book of Ezra closes with an account of their national humiliation for the sin of taking foreign wives, and the measures taken for putting them away. Public proclamation had been made for this purpose. The text shows the result. It teaches—

I. That it is the tendency of sin to produce sorrow and consternation of soul. "All the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain." The matter spoken of was the sin of marrying strange or foreign wives. It was of great consequence that this evil should be corrected at this time, that their genealogies might be kept pure, that their estates might descend in the right direction, and, above all, that the line of the Messiah might be preserved in the chosen tribe. The deep grief of Ezra and the ready submission of the princes and people show its importance in a national point of view. They all partook of the feelings of shame and consternation. They sat trembling in the open street. "And for the great rain." They probably thought there was something ominous or judicial in this, designed to put an accent of terror upon God's displeasure at their sin.

Learn, then, that it is the tendency of sin to produce sorrow, and that the providences of God often give a voice

to conscience, and produce an inward agony which none but the sinner himself can know. There is a scorpion sting in remembered guilt, when outward troubles and inward fears meet together. Joseph's brethren: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother," &c. (Gen. xlii. 21). The sight of Elijah agonised the mourning mother: "Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (1 Kings xvii. 18). Sin often begins with gladness and ends in terror. Grace begins with tears and ends with triumph.

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" The spirit can bear temporal ills with much fortitude, and arm itself against outward or inward affliction; but a wounded spirit, pierced and wounded by those arrows of the Almighty's quiver, which find their way to the heart, is intolerable. By a wounded spirit—here described as a spirit of "trembling"—we apprehend a spirit convinced of sin under the terrors of the law, led to a full and just view of its own condition and condemnation. This is the disposition to which, under the efficacious influence of Divine grace, all "the vessels of mercy" are sooner or later led, in a greater or less degree, because the conviction of sin is the very beginning, lies at the foundation of genuine godliness. Sins overlooked and forgotten now appear in their true light. Conscience once asleep is now awakened. The thunders of the law are heard, and there are fearful apprehensions of deserved wrath. "The people wept very sore." They could not "wash their hands in innocency," and therefore they bathed their eyes with tears. A deluge of iniquity in the heart may well produce a deluge of grief in the conscience. Jeremiah wished "that his head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears," &c. (Jer. ix. 1). And Ezra himself, though not a partaker of the scandalous guilt of those who had taken foreign wives, exhibits much more earnestness and inten-

sity than many who had. The practice of sin hardened their consciences; the sight of sin softened his (chap. ix. 3-6).

II. That God marks with peculiar interest the time in which repentance unto life begins in the soul. "It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month." No breath of prayer, no exercise of faith, no sigh of repentance can ever escape Him. God is very attentive to times and dates. The dates of the commencement of carrying out the reformation and of its completion are preserved (vers. 16, 17). The day in which the three thousand were converted is distinctly recorded: "When the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Acts ii. 1). The day in which the foundation of the second Temple was laid was memorised: "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's Temple was

laid, consider" (Hag. ii. 18). And is He less attentive to the building of the spiritual temple in the soul? The moment Saul of Tarsus began to pray was a memorable season in the calendar of Heaven (Acts ix. 11). And the prayer of faith and penitence does wonders.

III. That repentance, where it is real, will be attended with its appropriate fruits. The people put away the strange wives (vers. 11, 12, 16, 17). "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance," &c. (Luke iii. 8-14).

IV. That the names and persons of genuine penitents are for ever precious to God and recorded in His book. "And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak," &c. (vers. 18-44). They were held up as patterns of sin repented, sin forsaken, and sin forgiven.—*Samuel Thodey.*

THE REFORMATION EFFECTED.

(Verses 13-17.)

The great assembly having earnestly decided that the strange wives should be put away, the next consideration was as to the mode by which this decision might be carried out. It is frequently, and especially in a popular assembly, much easier to resolve that a thing shall be done, than to devise a prudent and practicable method of doing it. In the paragraph now before us we see how the great reformation was carried out. It was effected—

I. Notwithstanding difficulties. Two difficulties are suggested in the thirteenth verse:—

1. *The greatness of the undertaking.* "Neither is this a work of one day or two; for we are many that have transgressed in this thing." The cases being numerous, considerable time would be required to deal with them satisfactorily. Moreover, some of the cases would probably need very careful consideration. Amongst the foreign wives some perhaps had become proselytes to the Jewish religion; and amongst the

children of these marriages some of the sons had perhaps been circumcised, and these wives and sons could not be put away. It was necessary that an impartial and sufficient investigation of each case should be made, and the cases were many, so that the task to be performed was not by any means a light or easy one.

2. *The inclemency of the weather.* "But the people are many and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without." The reformation could not be carried out by a great popular assembly, such as that gathered before the Temple; and, even if it had been practicable in other respects, the drenching showers would have prevented it. The assembly could not have continued to sustain those showers; and there was no building in the country that could have sheltered so vast a multitude.

Learn: *To eradicate sin is a task of the greatest difficulty.* How hard it is to overcome a sinful habit in ourselves!

Only the most patient, persistent, prayerful, and believing effort has any chance of success in such an attempt. How difficult it is to eradicate an evil, whether of belief or of practice, from the Church of God! It is a task requiring the zeal of an enthusiastic reformer, the piety of a devoted saint, and the wisdom of a profound sage. Nothing is easier than the propagation of moral evil; but its eradication is supremely difficult. (a).

II. Notwithstanding opposition. "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah stood up against this; and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them," that is, in their opposition to this measure of reform (see *Explanatory Notes* on ver. 15). It is not surprising that opposition should have been offered to this matter. The severance of these marriage ties must have been very painful to most of the persons concerned therein. And very plausible objections might have been urged against their severance. The examples of distinguished Israelites might have been pleaded as precedents in favour of such marriages. Joseph had married an Egyptian (Gen. xli. 45); Moses, a Midianite (Exod. ii. 16, 21), and afterwards a Cushite (Num. xii. 1); Boaz, Ruth, a Moabitess (Ruth iv. 9-13); David, Maacah a Geshurite (2 Sam. iii. 3); Solomon, an Egyptian princess (1 Kings iii. 1, vii. 8). These cases might have been adduced and urged as making against the rigorous measure proposed at the present time. It would have been passing strange if there had been no opposition to this unsparing reformation. It is surprising that the opposition was not more extensive.

Learn: *In effecting any great reformation opposition is to be expected.* Such reformations injure the secular interests of some persons, run counter to the prejudices of others, make war upon the practices of others, and so awaken resistance. Great reformations are generally carried out despite determined opposition. (b).

III. With exemplary wisdom and fairness. "Let now our rulers of all

the congregations stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times," &c. (vers. 14, 16). Thus this reformation was effected—

1. *By the proper authorities.* The "rulers of all the congregation," i.e., the princes and elders of the people, were proposed as a judicial commission to conduct this matter. "And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names were separated, and sat down to examine the matter." The cases were investigated and determined by the rightful judicial authorities of the community, with Ezra as their president.

2. *With competent and reliable witnesses.* "And with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof." "With the accused were to come the elders and judges of every city, to furnish the necessary explanations and evidence." They would be likely to possess the requisite information as to the cases in their respective cities, and their character and position would give increased weight to their testimony.

3. *In the presence of the accused.* "Let all them which have taken strange wives come at appointed times" to Jerusalem for trial. No one was condemned in his absence, or without being allowed an opportunity of pleading his cause if he wished to do so.

4. *With due regard for the convenience of the people.* It was arranged that the cases from each city or locality should be taken by themselves "and at appointed times," and not be mixed with the cases from other localities. By this plan the Jews from the provinces would not be unnecessarily detained in Jerusalem; but having answered the summons to appear there, the cases from their locality would be taken consecutively until they were all adjudicated, and then they would be at liberty to return to their homes and duties.

5. *With careful inquiry.* The time during which the judicial commission sat, and the probable number of cases investigated, furnish evidence of patient examination into the cases. The in-

quiry lasted for three months. They "sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month." It is probable that they sat for seventy-five or seventy-six days, and it seems to us that they may have investigated an average of three cases a day. One hundred and thirteen persons were found to have taken foreign wives; and, in accordance with the decision of the judges, they put them away. Evidently the examination was not hurried and superficial, but patient and thorough.

Learn :

The importance of combining prudence of method with earnestness of purpose in carrying out great reformations. Zeal in a good cause should be guided and regulated by sound judgment. A noble aim should be pursued by wise and worthy methods, or it may never be attained, or attained with needless loss and trouble. "Wisdom is profitable to direct." (c).

IV. Thoroughly. "And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives." They completely abolished the evil from the community. It was most desirable and important for the people themselves that the wrong should be courageously grappled with and utterly done away. If a surgeon has to remove diseased flesh from his patient, he must cut it completely away, or he is neither skilful in his practice nor kind to his patient. Sin is very tenacious in its hold, and though checked for a time, springs forth into new and active development. Checking is not enough, it must be killed. Notwithstanding the complete abolition of the foreign wives from the community at this time, the evil reappeared and had to be dealt with by Nehemiah (Neh. xiii. 23-28).

Learn :

The importance of making an end of sin when we are battling with it. Let us put it utterly away, cut off all occasions of it, and shun every temptation to it. (d). And a yet more effective safeguard and surety against it, is the

cultivation of the opposite virtues. Let the avaricious cultivate generosity, and the proud man seek after humility, &c. And let every one cry unto God, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) Sometimes this separation from familiar evil is a struggle as between life and death, shaking the whole soul, and tearing its shrinking quick in torture. It is like the sword that pierceth to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. And yet, such is the power of the conviction of the Spirit of truth when humility has once begun its holy and honest work within us, how many even go out to meet that saving sorrow! Indeed, when the heart has slept too long in the lap of indulgence, there often creeps upon it, I believe, an undefined feeling that before long this rest must be ended; the foreshadow of some darker angel cast across the path. And if the ear of our sympathy were quicker and finer than it is, we should doubtless often overhear, in the tones that breathe around us, the sadness and the prayer of an unsatisfied spirit striving against the evil in it! Blessed is the mind that springs with alacrity and thanksgiving to its better ministry!

For all true souls really touched with the spirit, and consecrated to the fellowship, of Christian obedience will be ready for this sacrifice. Not all equally ready. The bonds of past practice and attachment hang unequal weights about our necks. But what awakened soul will not willingly be drifted away from the accustomed repose, if it is thereby brought nearer to the righteousness and charity of Christ? This, in fact, is the test of the sincerity of faith; the willingness to give up all that has been precious but not holy, and launch out upon the future, trusting only to the Unseen Hand—like the Patriarch, of whom that beautiful thing is written, that when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive, he obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went, dwelling in the land of "promise," and looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Great difficulties will threaten every such obedient foot—the wilderness before, the bondage to evil behind; but God is mightier than they—a pillar of fire for the night, and of bright cloud by day: "Greater He that is for us than they that are against us." Outside our private battle, society exposes gigantic wrongs to be redressed; but the right which is to redress them is sure, and the prophetic ear of hope hears the sound of its footsteps from afar. There are changed faces, disappointed companions, an angry class or denomination forsaken, sneers, imputations, false charges, and criticisms—such feeble weapons of the modern world's inquisitions as betray the cowardice of persecution, without its positive creed or its power. But these are

not a terror to him who hears the voice say, "Awake, arise, and Christ shall give thee light!"—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(b) It is a remarkable, but awful, fact that liberty and religion both have arisen to prosperity in the world on successive stages of blood. Blood nurtured the tree of Grecian and of Roman freedom. With bloody swords our fathers in the puritanic and covenanting days gained our civil and religious victories. Through a shower of blood came down, in 1789 and the after years, the genius of liberty to the continental shores. Even while we write (1859), the blood of John Brown of Virginia is dropping into the dust, to rear a glorious and a terrible harvest of freedom to his black countrymen. And the religion of Jesus, need we say, arises from the root of a blood-sprinkled cross. This springs, doubtless, in part from the Divine plan and purpose, but it augurs also something dreadfully wrong in the present system of things. Through the dominion of the evil power men's minds, in every age, have been steeped in selfishness, besotted with lies; and when truth and good try to stir them, they succeed, but the stir they produce is that of rage and resistance. The darkness comprehends them not, but apprehends and destroys their votaries, and many of the followers of the prince of evil perish in the strife, too, and thus "blood toucheth blood." Nor can we conceive the final contest of the world decided without a "great slaughter" among the "multitudes—the multitudes in the valley of decision;" and even the gorgeous Flora of the millennial meadows shall derive its glory from transmuted and transfused blood.—*G. Gilfillan, M.A.*

(c) The property of cords contracting their length by moisture became generally known, it is said, on the raising of the Egyptian obelisk in the square facing St. Peter's, at Rome, by order of Pope Sixtus V. The great

work was undertaken in the year 1586; and the day for raising the obelisk was marked with great solemnity. High mass was celebrated at St. Peter's; and the architect and workmen received the benediction of the Pope. The blast of a trumpet was the given signal, when engines were set in motion by an incredible number of horses; but not until after fifty-two unsuccessful attempts had been made, was the huge block lifted from the earth. As the ropes which held it had somewhat stretched, the base of the obelisk could not reach the summit of the pedestal; when a man in the crowd cried out, "*Wet the ropes!*" This advice was followed; and the column, as of itself, gradually rose to the required height, and was placed upright on the pedestal prepared for it.—*Biblical Treasury.*

(d) Clip the hairs short, yet they will grow again, because the roots are in the skull. A tree that is but pruned, shred, topped, or lopped, will sprout again; root it up, and it shall grow no more. What is it to clip the outward appearances, and to lop the superfluous boughs of our sins, when the root is cherished in the heart?—*Thomas Adams, D.D.*

How grand a thing to get a passion down and hold it by the throat, strangling it despite its struggles! It is fine work to hang up some old sin as an accursed thing before the Lord, just as they hung up the Canaanitish kings before the face of the sun; or if you cannot quite kill the lust, it is honourable work to roll a great stone at the cave's mouth, and shut in the wretches till the evening comes, when they shall meet their doom. It is a joyous thing when by God's grace under temptation you are kept from falling as you did on a former occasion, and so are made conquerors over a weakness which was your curse in past years. It is a noble thing to be made strong through the blood of the Lamb so as to overcome sin.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

THE LIST OF OFFENDERS.

(Verses 18-44.)

For what purpose is this catalogue of names inserted here? The list is probably the final record or report of Ezra and his fellow-commissioners, and brought their duties in this matter to an end. But why is it preserved here in the sacred Book? Has it any moral significance? Is it of any permanent value? And if so, in what way is it valuable? We suggest, in reply—

I. As a warning against sin. This catalogue shows us—

1. *Sin extending to all classes.* Here are the names of seventeen priests (vers.

18-22) who had committed the sin of marrying foreign wives, and four of them belonged to the family of the high priest, "Jeshua the son of Jozadak." They had transgressed in this matter notwithstanding their sacred calling, and that they had received commands imposing special restrictions as to their marriages (Lev. xxi. 7). Again, we have the names of ten Levites of three different classes, viz., assistants of the priests, singers, and porters (vers. 23, 24). And besides these there are the names of eighty-six laymen. A sacred

calling, with its hallowed associations and solemn obligations, affords no exemption either from temptation to sin or from the liability to yield to temptation. Let Christian ministers and teachers heed well this fact. Sin is not confined to certain classes or callings. It is found amongst all classes—the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, &c. “All have sinned.” (a).

2. *Sin injuring the reputation.* The names of these offenders “are here recorded to their perpetual reproach.” “Sin is a reproach to any people.” Sin has covered with infamy many a name, which but for it would have been eminent and illustrious for great gifts and noble achievements.

3. *Sin corrupting the influence.* This must have been true of every one of these offenders. The example of each one would be morally pernicious, tending to extend the offence of marrying these foreign wives. But this was especially true in the case of the priests. Their participation in this sin would cause it to appear in the eyes of, at least, some of the people as no sin at all, but quite consistent with duty and piety. In this way their influence, which should have been morally purifying and invigorating, became corrupt and injurious. Thus this catalogue remains as a warning against sin.

II. As an example of genuine repentance. Three characteristics of true repentance marked the conduct of these offenders—

1. *They confessed their sin with sorrow.* “The people wept very sore. And Shechaniah answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land.” When Ezra said to the assembled people, “Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers . . . all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.” Sincere and sorrowful confession of sin is a mark of true repentance, and a condition of Divine forgiveness. “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee,” &c. (Ps. xxxii. 5). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and

just to forgive us our sins,” &c. (1 John i. 9).

2. *They offered sacrifice on account of the sin.* “And being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass.” This trespass offering, as Keil observes, “was imposed upon them according to the principle of the law (Lev. v. 14–19), because they had committed a *מעל* (trespass) against the Lord, which needed expiation.” The presentation of this offering was not limited to the four priests who “gave their hands” as a pledge that they would make it. “The same obligations, namely, the dismissal of their strange wives, and the bringing of a trespass offering, were imposed on” all the other guilty persons; but these obligations, having been once stated, it was not deemed necessary to repeat. Every offender was required to bring his sacrifice, and every one did so. And now forgiveness is offered freely to the penitent sinner through the blood of Jesus Christ. “We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Repentance is the condition of forgiveness, and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is the medium through which it is attained. (b). Where there is true repentance the need of reconciliation with God will be deeply felt, and the sacrifice of the Cross will be accepted with thankful joy. (c).

3. *They forsook the sin.* All the offenders put away their strange wives. Even when children had been born of these marriages, rendering the removal of the wives and mothers much more difficult and painful, the difficulties were overcome, the pain was borne, and the wives were put away. True repentance involves practical reformation—change of conduct. (d). Thus the men whose names are here recorded are examples of genuine repentance.

III. As an encouragement to genuine repentance. Their repentance was accepted by God, and as a result—

1. *Their sin was forgiven.* If the sinner “turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;” &c. (Ezek. xxxiii. 14–16).

2. *The Divine favour was vouchsafed.* The wrath of their God for this matter

was turned from them (ver. 14). He approved their penitence and blessed them in their obedience.

Let sinners take encouragement to seek true repentance. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," &c. (Isa. lv. 6, 7). "There is forgiveness with God. . . . With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption." "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (e).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

(a) The world over, in its serious hours the heart longs, sighs, groans, and travails with sorrows that cannot be uttered, to be delivered from the bondage of sin and death. The Scripture has no other doctrine of the matter on any of its pages, and scarcely one page where this is not. Read the burning confessions of the fifty-first Psalm, and of many another before and after it, where the fire of remorse, which is only the lurid reflection of sin, almost visibly scorches the Psalmist's heart; read the terrible descriptions of that state of man without his Redeemer written by Paul to the Romans; or the tragic picture of Paul's own fearful struggles with the law of his members; or the awful prophecies of a society forgetting its Lord, given in Jude. Recall the narratives of depravity in Scripture history, and the denunciations upon it by prophets, and the thrilling exhortations against it by apostles. Remember that the Bible begins with the first inroad of sin, and finishes with warnings of its punishments. Above all, remember that the first word of the new dispensation was "Repent," and its consummation was the cross built on Calvary to assure forgiveness to "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;" and you will hardly need to multiply these convincing tokens that all the ministrations of our religion to the human soul presuppose that we all have sinned,—are sinners still. If any of you are disposed to complain that there is too much preaching against sin, apply your criticism to the Bible. The Christ whom we preach came to be a Saviour from sin, did He not? How much better to think and feel thoroughly what sin is now, than when the "space for repentance" is exchanged for the

determination of the judgment!—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(b) Repentance is necessary to forgiveness—a *sine qua non*—a condition, though not in any respect in the sense of desert, yet in the sense of indispensable existence or of being something without which the blessing cannot be enjoyed. This is a truth, a Bible truth. But it is not the ground of pardon, or in any way its meritorious cause. That is the atonement. And, according to the Bible, instead of repentance being the ground of forgiveness, that which is the ground of forgiveness is itself the motive, or inducement, or persuasive, to repentance. It is that consideration by which the Spirit of God in the Word is ever urging sinners to repent and turn unto God. . . . Moreover, that repentance is sufficient to obtain forgiveness, there is nothing in the analogy of Providence that warrants us to conclude. There is much to the contrary. Repentance and reformation do not, in point of fact, in the present experience of mankind, place transgressors, with regard to the temporal effects of their sins, in the same state as if they never had offended. The ruined health and fortune of the intemperate and profligate are not retrieved the instant they repent and reform. Nor is there anything in reason to sustain the position. It is very manifest, that present obedience can only fulfil present obligation. There is, as has often been observed, just as good ground for affirming that former obedience atones for present sins, as there is for affirming that present obedience atones for former sins. Repentance neither alters the nature nor obliterates the guilt of what is past; and present duty, even were it free from all mixture and imperfection, can do no more than answer for itself. It cannot possess, for our former selves any more than for others, aught of the nature or efficacy of works of supererogation. There will be no such works known at the bar of God.—*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*

(c) Our want is deliverance from our evil, including both forgiveness for the past and strength now; something to

"Be of sin the double cure,—
Cleanse us from its guilt and power."

Manifestly this cannot come from ourselves. It must come from Him whom our ingratitude has offended; from the Ruler whom our selfish wickedness has wronged. It must come from God. Look closely at this want; for it is that vital spot in all humanity where sorrow is most keen, and where relief is most joyful. The sure result of evil is pain; of persistent sin is death. Hence the voluntary surrender to pain, pain even unto the body's death, is felt and has been ever felt, to be the natural expression of a penitent soul. It is propitiation; not because God takes pleasure in His children's suffering, but because that is the soul's fitting tribute to the just majesty of

goodness and the holy authority of Right Government without penalty is gone, and all its blessed protections are dissolved. Hence the honest heart cries out in its shame and fear, "Let me suffer for my sin." Suffering for it there must be somewhere; transgression is a costly business; so it must always be and always look; right must stand at any rate; law must be sacred, or all is gone; and since nothing is so dear as life, and blood is the element of life, life itself must be surrendered, and "without the shedding of blood is no remission." Take the next step. Just because this life is so dear, He who loves us infinitely, and to whom it is dearer than to us, will be willing to lay down for us His own. He will not even wait for our consent; but in the abundance of that unspeakable compassion, in the irresistible freedom of that goodness, He will do it beforehand—only asking of us that we will believe He has done it, and, accepting our pardon, be drawn by that faith into the same self-sacrificing spirit. Herein is love indeed. Suffering for our peace! Sacrifice, not that our service may profit and pay Him, but that our transgression of a perfect law may be pardoned, and the noble life of disinterested goodness may be begotten in ourselves.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*

(d) Some confess their sins without so much as intending to forsake them. Marvellous delusion! As if it were possible to impose upon the Almighty Himself. As if the hollow confession of the lips availed anything against the stubborn impenitence of the heart! Very beautiful is that liturgy of the Established Church. Yet how many are there who have knelt in silks and satins to-day, and found a certain anodyne for conscience in the mere repetition of the cry, "O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us miserable sinners"? Or, not to look abroad for examples which may be found at home, how many of

us within these walls have moved the lips and bent the knee, while locked up inviolate in a secure corner of the heart has lurked all the while that evil thing which the lips have professed to expel. That is not repentance. Rather, it resembles a contrivance for beginning the world upon a new score, because the old has grown inconveniently long. True repentance has always an eye to the future as well as to the past; and to confess those sins which you secretly intend to repeat, or which it is not your settled purpose to abandon, is to cheat conscience and to mock God.—*J. G. Pigg, B.A.*

(e) You cannot believe too much in God's mercy. You cannot expect too much at His hands. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." No sin is so great but that, coming straight from it, a repentant sinner may hope and believe that all God's love will be lavished upon him, and the richest of God's gifts granted to his desires. Even if our transgression be aggravated by a previous life of godliness, and have given the enemies great occasion to blaspheme, as David did, yet David's penitence may in our souls lead on to David's hope, and the answer will not fail us. Let no sin, however dark, however repeated, drive us to despair of ourselves, because it hides from us our loving Saviour. Though beaten back again and again by the surge of our passions and sins, like some poor shipwrecked sailors sucked back with every retracing wave and tossed about in the angry surf, yet keep your face towards the beach where there is safety, and you will struggle through it all, and though it were but on some floating boards and broken pieces of the ship, will come safe to land. He will uphold you with His Spirit, and take away the weight of sin that would sink you, by His forgiving mercy, and bring you out of all the weltering waste of waters to the solid shore.—*Alex. Maclaren, D.D.*

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“A book and an index are to be made on opposite principles. A good book cannot be too concise. A good index can hardly be too prolix. Repetitions are to be avoided in the former. In the latter they should abound.”—Lord Brougham.

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A

HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

(CHAPTERS I. TO VI.)

BY

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AND

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PREFACE.

THIS book is one of a series on the Old Testament, projected by Mr. R. D. DICKINSON of Farringdon Street. The object of the series is to lend occasional aid to busy men. If the following pages should help such in the *homiletic* treatment of an unread Book of the Bible, they will have accomplished their purpose.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

NEHEMIAH.

INTRODUCTION.

I. Biographical Sketch. Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah (ch. i. 1), and brother of Hanani (ch. vii. 7). His father had not availed himself of the permission to return to his fatherland, withheld probably by possessions and honours acquired in the land of captivity. He was apparently of the tribe of Judah, since his fathers were buried at Jerusalem, and Hanani his kinsman seems to have been of that tribe (ch. ii. 3 ; vii. 2). Some think he was of priestly descent, because his name appears at the head of a list of priests in Neh. x. 1—8 ; but it is obvious from ch. ix. 38, that he stands there as a prince, and not as a priest. The expression in v. 18, that Nehemiah “offered sacrifice,” implies no more than that he provided the sacrifices. Whilst acting as cupbearer in the royal palace at Shushan, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, or B. C. 446, he received tidings of the mournful and desolate condition of the returned colony in Judea, and obtained permission of the king to make a journey to Jerusalem, and there to act as lieutenant or governor. Being furnished with this high commission, which included letters to the satraps and subordinates, and enjoying the protection of a military escort (ii. 9), Nehemiah reached Jerusalem in the year B. C. 446, and remained there till B. C. 434, being actively engaged for 12 years in promoting the public good (v. 14). During this time Nehemiah refused to receive his lawful allowance as governor, in consideration of the poverty of the people, and moreover maintained at his own expense a table for 150 Jews, at which any who returned from captivity were welcome. He returned to Persia B. C. 434, but hearing of new abuses having crept in during his absence revisited Judea, where he effected various reforms. It is not unlikely that he remained at his post until about B. C. 405, towards the close of the reign of Darius Nothus. That he lived to be an old man is thus quite probable from the sacred history, and this is expressly declared by Josephus, who states that he died at an advanced age. Of the place and year of his death nothing is known.

II. Authorship of Book. Generally attributed to Nehemiah. The central part (vii. 6—xii. 31) is somewhat different in style. The writer does not speak in the

first person as elsewhere, and there seems to be a different use of the Divine names, *Jehovah*, *Adonai*, *Elohim*. These differences are no proof against Nehemiah's authorship. The same feature occurs in Daniel. All Old Testament writers use documents of which they were not the authors. Chap. vii. 6—73 is professedly a register which Nehemiah found and inserted. Chap. viii—xi. 30, may have been composed by Ezra and incorporated by Nehemiah into his work. Chap. ix. 5—38 is a prayer probably composed by Ezra, and chaps. x. 1—27 ; xi. 3—26 contain lists of names doubtless extracted from public annals. Chaps. viii., ix. 3, and x. 28, xi. 2, may have been written either by Nehemiah or some contemporary Levite. They relate to priestly matters in which the civil governor could not appear as the most prominent person.

III. Date of Book. Probably compiled by Nehemiah after the 32nd year of Artaxerxes. Supposing him to have written it about 10 years before his death, and about thirty years after his first visit to Jerusalem, we arrive at the year B. C. 415, at which time it would be possible for him to relate and describe all that is contained in the canonical Book of Nehemiah.

IV. Object of Book. Briefly to describe what Nehemiah effected at one time by direct personal effort, at another in conjunction with Ezra. As Nehemiah's efforts for the civil welfare of the people were but a continuation of those by which Zerubbabel the prince, Joshua the high-priest, and Ezra the scribe had laid the foundation of the community of returned exiles, so does his Book form the continuation and completion of that of Ezra, and may be regarded as its second part and sequel. It is not only similar in style, but has the same historical object, viz.—to show how the people of Israel after their return from the Babylonish captivity, were, by the instrumentality of Nehemiah, fully re-established in the Land of Promise.

V. Canonicity of Book. Never seriously disputed. Nowhere quoted in the New Testament. Generally included in the Book of Ezra.

VI. Language and Style. Similar to that of the Chronicles of Ezra. Some few words and forms are not found elsewhere in Scripture, but the general Hebrew is exactly that of books purporting to be of the same age. Several words occur only in this Book as, *Sahvar* (to inspect), *Mogal* (a lifting up), *Tahalukah* (a procession), *Mikrah* (reading), and a few more. The text of Nehemiah is generally pure and free from corruption, except in the proper names, in which there is considerable fluctuation in the orthography, both as compared with other parts of the same Book, and with the same names in other parts of Scripture.

VII. Contemporaneous History. *Samaritan.* The Samaritans were not descendants of the ten tribes, but a purely heathen people who at first included Jehovah in the number of their gods, and by degrees, under the influence of their relations with the Jews, came to worship him as the only true God. They were not however recognized by the Jews as having any part in God's inheritance. Their attitude was bitterly hostile to the Hebrews, and their power to hinder

increased by the fact that as native heathen they would be trusted by the Persian monarch. Sanballat was their chief at this time. *Hebrew*. Judea was thinly populated by the returning exiles. Jerusalem, an open village, exposed to all the attacks of its neighbours. The temple rebuilt by Ezra was still unfinished. A few isolated dwellings existed amidst the rubbish which lay in such great heaps about the city that the way round it was impassable. The prophet Malachi closed the Old Testament canon towards the end of Nehemiah's life. *Persian*. Artaxerxes I. (surnamed Longimanus, on account of his long hands) was king. Persia was in its zenith of splendour and power, although the elements of decay were already beginning to work in the empire. Artaxerxes had come to the throne through the assassination of his father Xerxes by Artabanus the chief of the guard. At the instigation of Artabanus he put his brother Darius to death as the murderer of his father, but on discovering the designs of Artabanus against himself he slew the double traitor. He then subdued a revolt headed by his brother Hystaspes, reduced rebellious Egypt, and made peace with Greece. The empire then enjoyed a period of quiet which may be regarded as the culminating point of its glory, during which the events of Nehemiah's history occurred.—*Lange. Roman*. Herodotus flourished B. C. 450. Rome governed by Censors, and Peloponnesian war B. C. 431. Roman empire was rising into power. *Grecian*. Pericles flourished at Athens, B. C. 461—429. Socrates, Xenophon, and Thucydides were contemporaneous with Nehemiah. Plato was born B. C. 429, the year in which Pericles died, and about fourteen years before Nehemiah's probable death.

VIII. Contents of Book.

1. ANALYSIS.

(i.) *Preparation for the wall building.*

1. Nehemiah's grief and prayer (ch. i.).
2. Nehemiah's petition to the king (ch. ii. 1—8).
3. Nehemiah's journey (ch. ii. 9—11).
4. Nehemiah's inspection and appeal (ii. 12—20).

(ii.) *The wall building.*

1. The stations (ch. iii.).
2. The opposition from without (ch. iv.).
3. The opposition from within (ch. v.).
4. The craft of the enemies (ch. vi.).
5. The guarding of the gates (ch. vii. 1—4).
6. The genealogy (ch. vii. 5—73).

(iii.) *Discipline of the new community.*

1. The public reading of the law (ch. viii. 1—12).
2. The preparations for the feast of tabernacles (ch. viii. 13—16).
3. The feast of tabernacles (ch. viii. 17, 18).

4. The special fast (ch. ix., x.).
5. The distribution of the inhabitants (ch. xi.).
6. The Levitical genealogy (ch. xii. 1—26).
7. The dedication of the walls (ch. xii. 27—43).

(iv.) *Later reforms.*

1. Levitical apportionments (ch. xii. 44—47).
2. Separation from strangers (ch. xiii. 1—3).
3. Nehemiah's reforms 12 years later (ch. xiii. 4—31).

2. *INCIDENTAL REFERENCES.*

We learn incidentally the prevalence of usury, and of slavery as its consequence ; the judicial use of corporal punishment (xiii. 25); the continuance of false prophets (vi. 7, 12, 14); the restitution of the Mosaic provision for the maintenance of the priests and Levites, and the due performance of the Temple service (xiii. 10); the freer promulgation of the Holy Scriptures by the public reading of them (viii. 1); and the more general acquaintance with them arising from their collection into one volume, and the general stimulus given to the art of reading among the Hebrews during their residence in Babylon; the reviving trade with Tyre (xiii. 16); the agricultural pursuits, and wealth of the Jews (v. 11; xiii. 5); the tendency to take heathen wives, indicating possibly a disproportion in the number of Jewish males and females (x. 30; xiii. 3); the danger the Hebrew language was in of being corrupted (xiii. 24); the hereditary crafts practised by certain priestly families, e. g. the apothecaries, or makers of sacred ointments and incense (iii. 8), and the goldsmiths, whose business it probably was to repair the sacred vessels (iii. 8), and who may be regarded as the ancestors of the money-changers in the Temple (John ii. 14); and statistics, reminding us of Domesday-Book, concerning not only the cities and families of the returned exiles, but the number of their horses, mules, camels, and asses (vii.)—*Smith*. The list of returned captives who came under different leaders from the time of Zerubbabel to that of Nehemiah (amounting in all to only 42,360 adult males, and 7,337 servants), which is given in ch. vii., conveys a faithful picture of the political weakness of the Jewish nation as compared with the times when Judah alone numbered 470,000 fighting men (1 Chron. xxi. 5). This explains the great difficulty felt by Nehemiah in peopling Jerusalem with a sufficient number of inhabitants to preserve it from assault (vii. 3; xi. 1). It is an important *aid* too, in understanding the subsequent history, and in appreciating the valour and patriotism by which they attained their independence under the Maccabees. The account of the wall-building contains the most valuable materials for settling the topography of Jerusalem to be found in Scripture.

CHAPTER I.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.] 1. The words] (Heb. Divray). See 1 Kings xi. 41, where the same word is rendered "acts." **Hachaliah]** His ancestral home was Jerusalem (ii. 3). Hence he was probably of the tribe of Judah. Having amassed a fortune, and gained a position at Susa, he was unwilling to avail himself of the permission to return to his fatherland. By his influence he had probably opened a way for the advancement of his still more distinguished son. **Chisleu]** The third month of the civil, and ninth of the ecclesiastical year, coinciding with parts of our November and December. **In the twentieth year]** That is, of the reign of Artaxerxes I., surnamed Longimanus (Long-handed), B. C. 446. **Shushan]** Sometimes called Susa or Suses, the capital of Persia, situated in the plains of the Tigris, was from the time of Cyrus the winter palace of the king, and residence of the Court. Xenophon, Plutarch, and others, mention both Babylon and Ecbatana as its seat during some part of the year. The province of Susiana is now called Kustan. Shuster, its capital, contains 15,000 inhabitants. The Susian palace was a magnificent building, remarkable for its "pillars of marble, its pavement of blue, red, white, and black, and its hangings of white, green, and blue, which were fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to the pillars" (Est. i. 6). The palace was furnished with couches of gold and silver, on which the guests reclined when they banqueted. The drinking vessels were also of solid gold (v. 7). The present ruins of Susa cover a space a mile square, the portion of which near the river Shapur is probably "Shushan the palace." 2. **Hanani]** Brother by blood relationship (vii. 1), afterwards appointed one of the assistant governors of Jerusalem (vii. 2). **That had escaped]** They had been allowed to return by the edict of Cyrus (Ezra i.). **Came]** The distance from Jerusalem to Susa is more than 1000 miles, and at the usual rate of travelling would occupy 45 days. In winter it would occupy at least 2 months. Ezra with his caravan was four months on his journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra vii. 9). 3. **The wall of Jerusalem is broken down]** In ruins, not utterly razed, or it could not have been built in 52 days. Nebuchadnezzar had broken it down 142 years before (2 Kings xxv. 10), and the attempt to rebuild had been stopped by Smerdis 76 years before this date. 4. **God of heaven]** (Elohe-hash-shamayim), a phrase not confined to writers of Babylonish period (Gen. xxiv. 3, 7; Jonah i. 9). It distinguished Jehovah from the gods of earth formed of material substances. The style is repeated in Rev. xi. 13 (ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). 5. **Terrible]** Awe-inspiring (Heb. Norah). **That keepeth covenant and mercy]** Lit. "that keepeth the covenant of mercy." "The great and terrible God," is borrowed from Deut. vii. 21, and "that keepeth," &c. from Deut. vii. 9. 6. **Let thine ear be attentive, &c.]** A phrase derived from Solomon's prayer (1 Kings viii. 29). Refers to the greater attention paid by the ear when the eyes are open towards the source of the sound. 8. **The word which thou commandedst thy servant Moses]** Not the words, but the spirit of the promise, is given (Lev. xxvi. 39-42). 11. **The king's cupbearer]** (Heb. Mashkeh, one who gives to drink. Greek οἴνοχόος, wine-pourer). The office one of great honour and confidence, since it gave an opportunity of being near the king's person. It gave Nehemiah an opportunity of increasing his fortune, a circumstance which afterwards very much facilitated his mission.—*Hengstenberg*. The chief butler or cupbearer to the king of Egypt was the means of raising Joseph to his high position. Rabshakeh, who was sent by Sennacherib to Hezekiah, appears from his name to have fulfilled a like office in the Assyrian court.—*Gesenius*. Cupbearers are also mentioned as amongst the attendants of Solomon (1 Kings x. 5; 2 Chron. ix. 4).

HOMILETICAL CONTENTS OF CHAPTER I.

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| „ 2. Aggressive Benevolence. | „ 8. God's Memory. |
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| „ 4. Unselfish Sorrow. | „ 10. Electing Grace. |
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CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE REFORMER.

i. 1—11. *The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah.*

NEHEMIAH the civilian, as contrasted with Ezra the ecclesiastic, is brought forward in this Book as the patriot deliverer of his people. His training had fully

qualified him for the onerous position he was called to occupy. He may be regarded as a typical reformer. No blot can be found on his character, no guile in his spirit. Note concerning this typical reformer :

I. His motives are pure. Personal ambition is sunk in desire for the public good. Selfish motives are abandoned for generous impulses. Reward is unthought of. Truth and freedom are sought for, oblivious of personal gain. 1. *He accepts royal distinction that he may advance his people's interests.* He had risen from an exile captive to be a royal cupbearer by the force and moral worth of his character, in spite of jealousy and an alien creed. The title "Tirshatha," or commander, had been given him, and he became one of the most powerful subjects of the Persian monarch. This honour, though won by personal merit, is not employed in the service of personal ambition, but in the interests of his oppressed kinsmen and fellow-citizens. Royal distinction may only be accepted by a true reformer conditionally, (1) *That no vital principle is sacrificed.* The Jew must not become a heathen either in morals or worship. The mandates of a monarch must not override the monitions of conscience. Truth must not bow to expediency. The knee must not bend to either Baal or Dagon. The "Golden Image" cannot be recognized, even though the fiery furnace be the alternative. Nehemiah sacrificed no vital principle in accepting royal favour. He remained true to his nation and loyal to his God. He was known as a sympathizer with the cause of the oppressed exiles. The deputation from Judea came to him openly at the royal palace, fearing no molestation. Openly he received and welcomed them. Conditionally, (2) *That it is made subservient to his people's good.* Apart from this, Nehemiah's exalted separation from his oppressed fellow-countrymen would have been unpatriotic and selfishly mercenary. At Shushan he was really serving them better than he could have done at Jerusalem. For (1) he was learning the principles of government at the very seat and centre of the most powerful government of the world. In the royal palace, and under a right royal sovereign, he was gaining a royal spirit. Thus had God prepared other great leaders for their life work. Joseph and Moses in the court of Pharaoh learned lessons which were invaluable to the chosen seed. (2) He had access to the monarch himself. Such a boon was no small privilege, and eventually led to events of the utmost importance. 2. *He employs what influence he may possess for the benefit of his people's cause.* His position gave him considerable influence at Court, which he wielded, not, as most would have done, for his own personal aggrandizement, but for the benefit of his people's cause. Thus, like Joseph and Esther, he was able to influence royal decrees in favour of the Hebrew exiles. Most of the Jews were unable to approach Artaxerxes' person, but the office of Nehemiah gave him an introduction which he was not slow to use for his country and people. Some have opportunities of usefulness denied to others. They have the eye, the ear, the favour of the great. They should use these not for selfish purposes; but to mention truths which elevated persons seldom hear, to recommend religion which they generally misunderstand, to plead for those who are seldom represented in royal circles. Personal influence is one of the talents for which we are responsible to God. How are we using it? Jerome tells us that Nebridius, though a courtier and nephew to the empress, never made suit but for the relief of the poor afflicted. Terence, one of the generals of the emperor Valens, being bidden to ask what he would, asked nothing but that the Church might be delivered from her Arian foes. Thereupon, says Theodoret, the emperor tore into shreds his petition and bid him ask again, when he replied he would never ask anything for himself if he might not prevail for the Church. 3. *He is always ready to relinquish personal luxury for the public good.* If he enjoys honour and emolument on his brethren's behalf, the moment their interests demand their surrender the sacrifice must be made. Herein consists difference between genuine and spurious patriotism. The one delights in self-sacrifice; the other feeds on ambition. Such self-denial is required

(1) if the suffering can be the better served. Hitherto it had not been so. The time had now come when Nehemiah can only serve them by coming amongst them. Duty summoned him from the ease and luxury, to the privation and ceaseless toil of Jerusalem, and he "conferred not with flesh and blood," but gave up all at once. Such self-denial is required (2) if personal honour be associated with the people's oppression. The true patriot cannot serve two masters, or be loyal to two antagonistic principles. If the sovereign be a tyrant, *his* place is with the people. The side of the oppressed is alike the side of justice and of mercy. The bread of luxury is then mildewed with the tears of the slave, and the wine of the banquet mingled with the blood of the rack. Thus are all faithful servants of God called upon to lay down their goods, and their lives, *if need be*, in defence of the Church. For this cause Isaiah gave his body to be sawn asunder. For this cause Jeremiah was cast into a filthy dungeon, and Daniel into a den of lions. For this cause Paul pleaded his cause in chains at Jerusalem and Rome before Festus, Felix, and Agrippa; and Jesus before Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate; and for this cause John the Baptist lost his head. He that will lose his life thus shall certainly find it. In this respect Nehemiah was a type of Christ, who "though he was rich, for our sakes became poor," &c. (2 Cor. viii. 9).

Illustration:—Turner, the greatest of English landscape painters, had a generous nature. He was one of the hanging committee of the Royal Academy. The walls were full, when Turner's attention was attracted by a picture sent in by an unknown provincial artist. "A good picture," he exclaimed, "it must be hung up and exhibited." "Impossible," responded the committee. "The arrangement cannot be disturbed; quite impossible." "A good picture," reiterated Turner, "it must be hung up;" and finding his colleagues as obstinate as himself, he took down one of his own pictures and hung up this in its place.

II. His sympathies are generous. 1. *His ear is open to the cry of distress.* Though rich he listens attentively to the story of woe: though occupying a high position he gives heed to the wants of his poorer brethren. Communion and sympathy are the instincts of a true and genuine patriotism. Nehemiah was not a mere passive listener, for he "asked them concerning the Jews." He entered into particulars, and was minute in his inquiries. The inquiry of an uninterested or half-interested person, would have been alike curt and cursory. Court life and duties had not deadened his human sympathy. "The good man heareth the cause of the poor," says Solomon (Prov. xxix.). The duty of every good man to consider his complaint, and pity and help him. 2. *His heart is deeply affected by the tidings which he receives.* "The remnant are in great affliction and reproach," &c. The tidings were not entirely new, but probably sadder than he had anticipated. Hence his great distress. His patriotism not a mental deduction only, but a mighty passion of the soul. He is not only a human, but a *humane* being. A prince, a commander he may be; put pre-eminently a *man* and a *brother*. "The enthusiasm of humanity" was not unknown even in this remote age. Here is (1) a sudden outburst of generous sympathy and sorrow. "I sat down and wept." Passionate grief usually the least enduring. Not so this. (2) Sorrow increasing rather than diminishing as time wears on. "I mourned certain days," *i. e.* four months, from November to April. Here is another Rachel weeping, &c.; another Jeremiah exclaiming "Oh that my head were waters," &c. (Jer. ix. 1). (3) Sorrow accompanied by abstinence from food. "And fasted." This another mark of the reality and pungency of his grief. Ahab may go to the mountain-top to eat and be merry. Elijah must go into solitude, and pour out his complaint to God. David finds "his heart is smitten and withered like grass, so that he forgets to eat his bread" (Ps. cii. 4). A sorrow that rolls in luxury and revels in delightful pleasure and appetizing food is but a poor counterfeit. 3. *He resolves to identify himself with the cause of the oppressed.* His sympathy does not effervesce in tears. His will is won, and he at once sets about planning their relief. A true reformer must not stand aloof. Isolation is

the law of selfishness. Association is the secret of influence. The plans he forms may involve the sacrifice of all, a long and perilous journey, and even the monarch's frown, but he shrinks from nothing that can advance his people's cause.

Illustrations :—At the siege of Mons, during the career of the great Marlborough, the Duke of Argyle joined an attacking corps when it was on the point of shrinking from the contest ; and pushing them open-breasted he exclaimed, "You see, brothers, I have no concealed armour : I am equally exposed with you : I require none to go where I refuse to venture. Remember you fight for the liberties of Europe, which shall never suffer by my behaviour." This spirit animated the soldiers. The assault was made, and the work was carried.—*Percy*. "Sympathy is a debt we owe to sufferers. It renders a doleful state more joyful. Alexander the Great refused water in a time of great scarcity, because there was not enough for his whole army. It should be amongst Christians, as amongst lute-strings, when one is touched the others tremble. Believers should be neither proud flesh, nor dead flesh."—*Secker*.

III. His spirit is devout. Nehemiah no godless reformer seeking for his countrymen emancipation from an alien yoke and nothing more. He sought the moral, as well as the material welfare of the chosen seed. 1. *He recognizes the existence and authority of the world's Guardian and Governor.* He who seeks to eliminate God from human affairs is no true patriot. This not a mere dogma, but a regulative principle with Nehemiah. Divine sovereignty not fiction, but solemn fact. He believed in a God of Providence. "To own God as fashioning every link in the complicated chain of our history ; to discern his hand in the least as well as in the greatest ; to realize a Providence which overrules what is evil, as well as orders what is good, a Providence which restrains the unwilling whilst it leads the obedient, a Providence so transcendent, that none and nothing can thwart it, so minute, that none and nothing can escape it, a Providence which directs the insect's wing and the atom's flutter, as well as the planet's course and the archangel's flight, to do this clearly, constantly, experimentally, is an attainment in the Divine life as rare as it is precious. We must interweave these assurances with the tissue and texture of our lives ; they must enter as an essential element into the formation of our purposes, and into the conduct of our pursuits. It is thus that we must 'walk with God.'"—*Stowell*. 2. *He acknowledges Divine aid to be superior to all other.* (1) As the most powerful of all. If Omnipotence be on his side nothing can withstand. So reasoned Nehemiah. Hence he flies to the source and fountain-head of *all* power. He appeals to the throne of the universe before appealing to any lower tribunal. He who enlists the aid of the Lord of Sabaoth commands not only myriads of ministering spirits, but all the forces, destructive and benignant, of the universe. (2) As controlling all other aid. Nehemiah will presently approach the earthly monarch, whose spirit is in the hands of the King of kings. This he knows, hence seeks Divine assistance in making successful suit. He desires God's aid that he may ask (a) for the right *thing*, (b) at the right *time*, (c) in the right *manner*. He who thus seeks human interposition through Divine agency will find the Divine will working in his favour through human instrumentality. No aid can be so effectual as that of Omnipotence. 3. *He regards prayer as the appointed means by which Divine aid is to be secured.* Does not make his belief in the omniscience of Divine Providence a ground for personal indolence, or restraining prayer. The true patriot no fatalist. By prayer and supplication he makes known his request unto God (Phil. iv. 6). This prayer, recorded for our instruction, is one of the model prayers of the Bible. (1) Reverent in its attitude towards God (v. 5). (2) Persistent in pressing its suit (v. 6). (3) Penitent in tone and temper (v. 6, 7). (4) Scriptural in argument (v. 8, 9). (5) Child-like in spirit (v. 10, 11). (6) Definite in aim (v. 11).

Illustrations :—Augustus Cæsar possessed such an attachment to his country that he called it *his own daughter*, and refused to be called its master, because he would rule it not by fear, but by love. After his decease, his disconsolate people lamented over him, saying, "O would to God that he had never lived, or that he had never died." A Lacedæmonian mother had five sons in a battle that was fought near Sparta, and seeing a soldier that had left the scene of action, eagerly inquired of

him how affairs went on. "All your five sons are slain," said he. "Unhappy wretch!" replied the woman: "I ask thee not of what concerns my children, but of what concerns my country." "As to that all is well," said the soldier. "Then," said she, "let them mourn that are miserable. My country is prosperous, and I am happy." (a) A great chasm opened in the Roman Forum, which the soothsayers said could not be filled but by that which was most valuable to the State. Marcus Curtius, an eminent soldier, mounted his war-horse, and full-armed rode into the gulf, a noble sacrifice for his country.

GOODNESS SUPERIOR TO CIRCUMSTANCES.

i. 1. *I was in Shushan the palace.*

I. High social positions are not generally favourable to eminent piety.

1. *Because luxury and liberty tend to lust and licence.* Court morals are proverbially corrupt. When wealth to purchase is united with authority to command, selfish ambition and sensual indulgence too often ensue. In high life the temptations to self-pleasing are generally too strong for unaided human nature. Long prosperity breeds a plague of dust, as does prolonged fair weather in the Italian valleys. Dust that blinds the eyes of the soul, and chokes the spirit with earthly cares. 2. *Because the pride of human pomp is inimical to the spirit of true religion.* Palaces are above most places theatres of human exaltation and proud display. Religion does not flourish amidst human pomp and pride. By the lowly birth of the Son of God, heaven has poured its contempt upon the mere accidentals of greatness. True religion is by the very humility of its nature antagonistic to the spirit of the world. Nebuchadnezzar could not withstand this spirit. In his prosperity and pride he exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built," &c. (Dan. iv. 30). In his humiliation he regained that religion which he had lost in his exaltation. 3. *Because affluence is apt to beget independence of God.* When Jeshurun waxed fat he kicked (Deut. xxxii. 15). When God's chosen people prospered they forgot God (Isa. li. 13; Judg. iii. 7). A sense of need brings men near to God. When the lap is full, God is forgotten. Hence the words of Christ, "How hardly shall they that have riches," &c. (Mark x. 23). Rich men have often to be made poor before they will acknowledge God. Merchant has most reason to watch and pray in the day of his prosperity. Easier to bear

the ebb of disappointment than the flood-tide of success. Most reason to watch when we think ourselves most secure. A poor Christian remarked when receiving unexpected relief, "Oh! what a blessed thing it is to be poor, that one may see the hand of God so plain." The hand of God often concealed from the rich in the very affluence of its gifts; whilst to the pious poor quite naked. Hezekiah was humbly grateful when he exclaimed after the slaughter of the hosts of Sennacherib, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day" (Isa. xxxviii. 19); yet the sad record of his after days is, "But Hezekiah rendered not unto the Lord, according to the benefit done unto him: for his heart was lifted up" (2 Chron. xxxii. 25). "It was as much as we could do to keep our feet upon the splendid mosaic floor of the palace Giovanelli, at Venice; but we found no such difficulty in the cottage of the poor glass-blower in the rear. Observation shows that there is a fascination in wealth which renders it extremely difficult for the possessors of it to maintain their equilibrium; and this more especially where wealth has been suddenly acquired; then, unless grace prevent, pride, affectation, and other mean vices, stupefy the brain with their sickening fumes, and he who was respected in poverty becomes despised in prosperity. What man can help slipping when everybody is intent on greasing his ways, so that the smallest chance of standing is denied him. The world's proverb is, "God help the poor, for the rich can help themselves;" but it is just the rich who have most need of Heaven's help. Dives in scarlet is worse off than Lazarus in rags, unless Divine love shall uphold him.—*Spurgeon.* 4. *Because the multiplication of cares tends to deaden,*

spirituality. Increase of wealth means increase of anxiety. Milton has taught us by his picture of the man with the muck-rake that secular cares readily become all-engrossing, and turn the eyes away from the crown of life. The Hebrew word for riches signifies "*heavy*," for riches are a burden, and they that will be rich do but load themselves with thick clay. "There is a burden of care in getting them, of fear in keeping them, of temptation in using them, of guilt in abusing them, of sorrow in losing them, and a burden of accounts at last to be given up concerning them."

—*Henry.* "As poison works more furiously in wine than in water, so corruptions betray themselves more in a state of plenty than in a state of poverty."—*Secker.* Mr. Cecil called to see a rich hearer, and said, "I understand you are very dangerously situated." The man replied, "I am not aware of it." "I thought it probable you were not, and therefore called upon you. I hear you are getting rich; take care, for it is the road by which the devil leads thousands to destruction." 5. *Because the commands of an earthly monarch are liable to clash with the mandates of Jehovah.* The earthly king who has no fear of God before his eyes, will not be likely to respect the claims of a Higher Court. He will consequently have no conscience for sacred things, and will be likely to ignore such conscience in his subjects. But the servant of Jehovah has no choice. He must say with the noble three, "We will not serve thy god" (Dan. iii. 18); and with Peter and John, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts iv. 19). With Daniel and John the Baptist he must obey God rather than man, though death be the consequence. Thus is the path of the just beset with perils in the high places of power and pomp.

Illustration:—"Philip, Bishop of Heraclea, in the beginning of the fourth century was dragged by the feet through the streets, severely scourged, and then brought before the governor, who charged him with obstinate rashness in disobeying the imperial decrees; but he firmly answered, 'My present behaviour is not the result of rashness, but proceeds from my love and fear

of God, who made the world, and whose commands I dare not transgress. I have hitherto done my duty to the emperors, and am always ready to comply with their just orders, according to the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ: but I am obliged to prefer heaven to earth, and to obey God rather than man.' The governor on hearing this speech immediately passed sentence on him to be burnt, and the martyr expired, singing praises to God in the midst of the flames."

II. Piety is not impossible in any position of life. 1. *Inward grace is stronger than outward circumstances.* The temptations to slothful ease and self-indulgence may be fearfully strong, but not stronger than Divine grace. The seductions of luxury and the witchery of pleasure may charm with enticing subtlety, but cannot ensnare the man who is faithful to his God, and like Nehemiah recognizes "the good hand of his God." "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 Jno. iv. 4). "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace" (Jno. xvi. 13). Illustrate by Bunyan's picture, in the Interpreter's house, of fire on which Satan poured water and Christ oil. "If a letter were to be addressed to that most influential word, *circumstances*, concluding thus:—'I am, Sir, your very obedient, humble servant,' the greater part of the world might subscribe it."—*Horace Smith.* 2. *The God of providence is also the God of grace.* Where he places, there he can and will sustain. If God puts Nehemiah into the Persian palace, he will support him there. Nowhere are faithful witnesses more needed than in the high places of the earth. The nearer the fount of social influence, the greater the power for good or evil. Grace is adapted to providential circumstances.

Illustration:—The trees are adapted to the demands of their position. The fir of the northern hills defies the wintry blast by reason of its strong roots which penetrate the crevices of the soil. The tall palms send their roots down three feet into the earth, and then spread out, securing a firm anchorage, and are able to stand the sweep of the desert winds. The roots of the pine are spread over the surface, but it grows in less exposed situations. The mangrove which fringes the estuaries and lagoons of the tropics, exposed to the tides, on a shifting soil, supports itself by sending roots from its trunk and lower branches down into the muddy ground,

so that the whole has the appearance of a tree propped up by artificial stakes. We may infer that a like adjustment of strength to situation pervades the moral world.

3. *Many of the holiest characters in history have been found in the most unfavourable situations.* Joseph in Pharaoh's court with an adulterous queen; Moses in the same court; Obadiah under Jezebel and Ahab; David exposed to the evil influence of Saul; Daniel and Mardocheus in the court of Ahasuerus; all served God faithfully though exposed to the most trying ordeals. In the New Testament we find Christians in every station of life: Zenas the lawyer, Erastus the chamberlain, Paul the tent-maker, Luke the physician, Zaccheus the tax-gatherer, Peter the fisherman, and Joseph the carpenter. Learn from this fact, (1) not to condemn bodies and professions of men indiscriminately. (2) Not to make our business an excuse for ungodliness. Some lines of life are indeed much less favourable to morality and religion than others; they afford fewer helps and more hindrances than others; and this consideration should powerfully influence those who have the disposal of youth. But where the providence of God places us, the grace of God can keep us. "These," says God, "had the same nature, were partakers of the same infirmities, and placed in the same circumstances with yourselves. But they escaped 'the corruption that is in the world, through faith.' They found time to serve me. 'Go thou and do likewise.'" — *Stowell*. "Amidst the sternest trials, the most upright Christians are reared. The Divine life within them so triumphs over every difficulty as to render the men, above all others, true and exact. What a noble spectacle is a man whom nothing can warp, a firm, decided servant of God, defying hurricanes of temptation!" — *Spurgeon*. Grace makes itself equally at home in the palace and in the cottage. No condition necessitates its absence, no position precludes its flourishing. One may compare it in its power to live and blossom in all places, to the beautiful blue-bell of Scotland, of which the poetess sings:—

"No rock is too high, no vale too low,
For its fragile and tremulous form to grow:
It crowns the mountain with azure bells,
And decks the fountain in forest dells:
It wreathes the ruins with clusters grey,
Bowling and smiling the livelong day."

III. *Positions perilous to piety should be avoided except at the special call of Providence.* 1. *Material prosperity should always be regarded as subordinate to spiritual vitality.* (1) It really is so. It matters little what be our position in this world. It matters everything what is our position in the next. "What shall it profit," &c. (Mark viii. 36). Things which are seen are temporal, things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 18). What man thinks, of no consequence; what God thinks, everything. The life of earth, whatever be its character, soon terminates; the life of eternity never. (2) He who acts upon this principle gains in the end. Lot chose the fertile plain of Sodom, and preferring temporal gain lost all. Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," &c., and became their chosen leader (Heb. xi. 25). Solomon asked neither long life nor riches, but he lost neither in choosing religion (1 Kings iii. 11). (3) Through neglecting to act upon this principle piety has often been lost. Many a worldly marriage has ruined a promising Christian. Many a hopeful life has been wrecked upon the rocks of uncurbed ambition. He who places the world first and heaven second will soon make ambition everything and religion nothing. "Caligula with the world at his feet longed for the moon, and could he have gained it, would have coveted the sun. It is in vain to feed a fire which is the more voracious the more it is supplied with fuel. He who seeks to satisfy his ambition has before him the labours of Sisyphus, who rolled up a hill an ever-rebounding stone, and the task of the daughters of Danaus, who are condemned for ever to fill a bottomless vessel with buckets full of holes. Could we know the secret heart-breaks of those who have forsaken religion for the sake of gratifying ambition, we should need no Wolsey's voice crying, 'Fling away ambition,' but should flee from it

as from the most accursed blood-sucking vampire which ever uprose from the caverns of hell." — *Spurgeon*. Pope Adrian VI. had this inscription on his monument, "Here lies Adrian VI., who never was so unhappy in any period of his life as at that in which he was a prince." 2. *No one has a right to tempt God by unnecessarily exposing himself to temptation.* This sin of presumption, against which Paul warned Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 9). Christ met it in the wilderness in the form, "Cast thyself down." God will not protect those who rashly presume upon his guardianship. Mockery to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," if we run into it unbidden. When we needlessly expose ourselves we entice sin and court failure. "Temptations are enemies outside the castle, seeking entrance." If there be no false retainer within who holds treacherous parley, there can scarcely be even an offer. No one would make overtures to a bolted door, or a dead wall. It is some face at the window that invites proffer. The violence of temptation addressed to us is only another way of expressing the violence of the desire within us. It costs nothing to reject that which we do not wish: and the struggle required to overcome temptation measures the strength in us of the temptable element. Men ought not to say, "How powerfully the devil tempts!" but, "How strongly I am tempted." — *Beecher*. 3. *Providence will protect those whom it calls to perilous duty.* (1) The path of duty is sometimes a path of danger. Christian visitors at home endanger their lives amongst the poor, and Christian missionaries abroad amongst the heathen. Not only bodies, but souls are endangered through the prevalence of surrounding

vice, which Christian workers must come into contact with. (2) Special guardianship is exercised over those whose providential path is one of danger. God will not leave them. Disciples in storm were not deserted because they had gone at Christ's bidding. Nehemiah, Daniel, Joseph were untainted by court life because they were surrounded by Jehovah's Shield. (3) We should be careful not to mistake presumption for providential guidance. Many have done so and fallen. Peter walking on the water an instance.

Illustration :—A gentleman who wished to test the character of some men who had offered themselves for the situation of coachman, took them to a narrow road which bordered on a deep precipice, and inquired of them how near to the dangerous verge they could drive without fear. One named a few inches, another still fewer. The gentleman shook his head, and dismissed them. He could not risk his life with them. A third was asked, "How near this edge can you drive in safety?" He drew back replying, "I should drive as far from it as possible. The place is dangerous. I should avoid it altogether." He was employed, because he could be trusted not to run into needless peril.

Illustration :—A soldier named Miller felt a strong desire to be a minister though still unconverted. After his conversion he felt a renewal of this desire. In the battle of Wilderness he was badly wounded, and remained 24 hours on the field. The surgeon refused to operate upon him, because death was inevitable. He was removed to Fredericksburg, again examined, and his wounds pronounced fatal. To a friend he said, "The surgeon says I must die; but I do not feel that my work is done yet. When I gave myself up to God last winter I promised him that I would labour for his cause in the Gospel ministry. I feel that he has a work for me to do, and that man is immortal until his work is done." A few days after a third consultation of doctors was held, whose decision was, "You will recover; but it is the most miraculous escape we have ever seen." After many months' confinement he was able to begin his preparation for the ministry.

AGGRESSIVE BENEVOLENCE.

i. 2. *I asked them concerning the Jews, &c.*

I. True Benevolence is an active principle. 1. *It seeks that it may save the lost.* Not content with remaining at home, it goes after the suffering. Nehemiah not altogether ignorant of state of Jews, nor accurately acquainted

with it. He solicits particulars. Goes out of his way to discover need that he may assist it. The close cross-examination to which deputation were subjected proved the thorough earnestness of questioner. Christ great example of

active benevolence, alike in the whole work of redemption, and the details of his mortal life. The Church works in same spirit. It comes "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The true Christian cries out, "The love of Christ doth me constrain, to seek the wretched sons of men." 2. *Its motive therefore is love rather than duty.* Benevolence without love is cold as ashes. Uncharitable charity a ghastly mockery. Stern duty seldom prompts true charity. This must spring from love alone. Benevolence follows the example of him who "was rich, but for our sakes became poor," &c. A child looking into the face of a lady who had relieved and nursed her in sickness artlessly asked, "Are you God's wife?" God is love, and true benevolence is lovingly God-like.

II. True Benevolence is not deterred from painful investigation through fear of possible sacrifices. 1. *It seeks to know the worst.* Nehemiah not satisfied with superficial knowledge. He probed the national sore. True benevolence acts in the same spirit. It fathoms the abyss that it seeks to close; it probes the wound it seeks to heal. (1) Philanthropy deals with the worst human ailments. It shrinks from no contagion, and shuns no patient however loathsome. Its home is the hospital and fever ward. (2) It grapples with the blackest facts of human history, and sheds light upon darkest, foulest blots in human nature. Nothing daunts, nothing drives it to despair. For the most hopeless there is hope; for the worst there is mercy. (3) It seeks to alleviate the direst sufferings of the Church. No breach too wide to be healed. No Church too dead to be revived. No persecutions too cruel to be endured. It seeks not to heal lightly or suddenly, but thoroughly. 2. *It shrinks from no sacrifice.* Nehemiah was aware that he could not relieve his brethren without great personal sacrifice. Not only wealth, but probably position, and perhaps even life, would have to be surrendered. This did not deter him. Self-sacrifice the mark of true benevolence. Hireling charity shuns this test.

(1) Money, (2) Time, (3) Personal ambition all freely given up for the sake of the suffering Church.

Illustration :—When a teacher was wanted by Dr. Mason of Burmah for the war-like Bghais, he asked his boatman, Shapon, if he would go; and reminded him that instead of the fifteen rupees a month which he now received, he could only have four rupees a month as teacher. After praying over the matter he came back; and Dr. Mason said, "Well, Shapon, what is your decision? Can you go to the Bghais for four rupees a month?" Shapon answered, "No, teacher: I could not go for four rupees a month; but *I can do it for Christ.*" And for Christ's sake he went.

III. True Benevolence is not easily discouraged. 1. *It regards no case as absolutely hopeless.* Jerusalem and its inhabitants were in a pitiable plight, yet Nehemiah did not sit down in despair. He wept, it is true, but he prayed, and for four months he continued to pray with an importunity that nothing could discourage. Humanity may be very corrupt, but not hopelessly so. The Church may be at a low ebb, but the lowest ebbing point is nearest the flowing point. The night was very dark, but 'tis ever darkest before the dawn. Benevolence knows that what is impossible with man, is possible with God. (1) It helps not only the needy, but the most needy. (2) It believes in the possible regeneration of human nature, however degraded. (3) It believes in the possible revival of the Church, however encrusted with superstition or formalism. 2. *It recognizes the infinite resources of Jehovah.* If looked earthward only, been discouraged. Would have exclaimed mournfully, "Who is sufficient," &c. But looking heavenward its eye rests upon the unspeakable riches of God in Christ. Remembering the Divine omnipotence it has no fear. It remembers the infinite resources, (1) of Divine pity, (2) of Divine power, (3) of Divine pardon. None need despair, even when engaged in the most arduous work for such a master as God. (a) His wealth is boundless. The universe belongs to him. (b) This infinite wealth is treasured up for the benefit of his needy servants. (c) This boundless wealth is accessible to all who need it, and apply in faith.

Illustrations:—(a) “It is said of the Lacedæmonians, who were a poor and homely people, that they offered lean sacrifices to their gods; and that the Athenians, who were a wise and wealthy people, offered fat and costly sacrifices; and yet in their wars the former always had the mastery over the latter. Whereupon they went to the oracle to know the reason why those should speed worst who gave most. The oracle returned this answer to them—That the Lacedæmonians were a people who gave their *hearts* to their gods, but that the Athenians only gave their *gifts* to their gods.” Thus a heart without a gift is better than a gift without a heart.—*Seeker*.

St. Theresa, when commencing her homes of mercy with only three half-pence in her pocket, said, “Theresa and three half-pence can do nothing, but God and three half-pence can do everything.” Dr. Judson laboured diligently for six years in Burmah without baptizing a convert. At the end of three years, he was asked what evidence he had of ultimate success. He replied, “As much as there is a God who will fulfil all his promises.” A hundred churches and thousands of converts already answer his faith. We will suppose that some opulent person makes the tour of Europe. If his money fall short he comforts himself with the reflection that he has a sufficient stock in the bank, which he can draw out at any time by writing to his cashiers. This is just the case spiritually with God’s elect. They are travellers in a foreign land remote from home. Their treasure is in heaven, and God himself is

their banker. When their graces seem to be almost exhausted, when the barrel of meal and cruse of oil appear to be failing, they need but draw upon God by prayer and faith and humble waiting. The Holy Spirit will honour their bill at first sight; and issue to them from time to time sufficient remittances to carry them to their journey’s end. “I have heard of a Spanish ambassador, who, coming to see the treasury of Saint Mark in Venice, fell a-groping at the bottom of the chests and trunks, to see whether they had any bottom; and being asked the reason why he did so, answered, “My Master’s treasure differs from yours, and excels yours in that his have no bottom, and yours have.” All men’s mints, bags, purses, and coffers may be quickly exhausted and drawn dry; but God is such an inexhaustible portion that he can never be drawn dry: all God’s treasures, and his mints and his bags, are bottomless. Thousands of millions in heaven and earth feed upon him every day, and yet he feels it not: he is still giving, and yet his purse is never empty: he is still filling all the court of heaven, and all the creatures on earth, and yet he is a fountain that still overflows. There are some who say, that it is most certainly true of the oil at Rheims, that though it be continually spent in the inauguration of the kings of France, yet it never wastes: but whatever truth is in this story, of this I am most sure, that though all the creatures in both worlds live and spend continually on Christ’s stock, yet it never wasteth.—*Brooks*.

THE BANEFUL CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

i. 3. *The remnant that are left . . . are in great affliction and reproach, &c.*

This state of things would never have come to pass, but for the disobedience and idolatry of the children of Israel. It was the natural and inevitable fruit of their own sin. Not mere unfortunate calamity, but punitive and penal discipline. From the text we learn,—

I. That sin brings misery upon human souls. “In great affliction,” *i. e.* misery, want, privation. Suffering always follows sin in the nature of things. 1. *Because sin is a violation of law.* Sin transgresses the eternal law of righteousness, which cannot be broken with impunity. Its penalty is pain, and eventually death. Law-breakers everywhere must suffer. (1) See this in relation to laws of health. Violate those laws by unwholesome food, self-indulgent excesses, absorption of poison, and derangement or death will ensue. (2) See this in relation to the laws of society. Ill-manners provoke exclusion. None defy these rules without paying penalty.

(3) See this in relation to national laws. What mean our courts of justice, our prisons and penal settlements, but that law cannot be transgressed without suffering (β). 2. *Because sin separates from God.* Its very nature, essence, is antagonism to God. Wherever it reigns it produces tastes and dispositions contrary to the will of God. Now God is the author of all happiness. The opposite of happiness is misery. Man severed from God like branch cut from tree, or limb torn from body. The man who has not made peace with God cannot be happy, because the “wrath of God abideth on him.” No real peace when hostile to God. 3. *Because sin creates discord.* Where there is discord there is misery. Sin works discord—(1) In the individual. It stirs up evil passions against the reign of conscience. No internal peace until the Stronger has cast out the strong man armed who usurps his place in the heart. Christ

alone can "say to our warring passions, peace." (2) In the Church. It provokes enmity between man and man, and different sections of the one great body of Christ. (3) In the world. It lifts up the war sign, and mingles nations in the bloody embrace of strife. When sin comes to an end men shall learn war no more. Want of harmony always painful. Inharmonious colours pain the eye, and inharmonious sounds jar upon the ear. All discord is the enemy of peace and pleasure.

II. Sin brings reproach upon the Church. "In great affliction *and reproach.*" The Jews were not only in a desolate condition, but were taunted by the Samaritans with being in that condition. "Sin a reproach to any people" (Prov. xiv. 34), especially to the Church—for, 1. *It destroys her power, and paralyzes her efforts.* Spirituality secret of Church's power. Stripped of this, she is like Samson shorn of his locks. An unholy Church is a mournful spectacle, a miserable ruin. The Church at Jerusalem was now demoralized through her unspirituality and want of faith. 2. *It provokes the taunts of blasphemy.* Church's enemies always vigilant. Did not hesitate to throw insinuation in her teeth. "Where is now their God?" "As it is a pitiful sight to see a prince or nobleman cast from his dignity, spoiled of his honour, lands, and goods, and forced to become a carter, and drive the plough, or lie in prison; so surely it must needs move any heathen man, to see the city where he and his elders were born and buried to be overthrown, lie open to all enemies, unfenced with walls or gates, and inhabited only by a few cottagers, and no better than the poorest ragged hamlet in the country."—*Pilking-ton.* 3. *It encourages the growth of infidelity.* Sceptics, both intellectual and sensual, not slow to point to Church's failure in support of their boastful pretensions. Perhaps the Church's failures and discords have done more to strengthen atheism than any books or arguments levelled against religion.

III. Sin removes national defences. "The walls are broken down." This material dismantling only a type of the

national demoralization which had taken place. 1. *Unity is a national defence.*

(1) A nation divided against itself can no more stand than a city, whereas a thoroughly united people can resist almost any attack from without. (2) Sin undermines national unity by sowing discord and jealousy, and creating party feeling. It sets all the classes of society against each other (masters and servants, landowner and labourer), and seeks to stifle charity and forbearance. 2. *Bodily vigour is a national defence.* (1) It saves from poverty in time of peace. Strong manhood a security against penury if united with temperance and industry. (2) It enables resistance to become effectual in time of war. Sensuality undermines manhood, and unfits for arduous toil in peace or war. Refer to Franco-German war as instance. French people were socially demoralized by vice. Their manhood was undermined. Religion teaches the sanctity of the human body, and thus preserves it from premature corruption. 3. *Domestic purity is a national defence.* What the family life is, the national life will soon become. Domestic fidelity begets a sense of responsibility. It promotes healthy moral tone. This, backbone of a nation's vigour. Sin encourages lust and breaks down all social barriers, and thus robs a nation of one of its most powerful bulwarks. 4. *Force of character is a national defence.* This made England what she is, and America. It is this which gives weight to our words and actions in foreign courts and countries. Force impossible where sin reigns. Why? Because no true cohesion where no godliness. An unholy life is under no regulating principle, but at the mercy of passions and desires. Where there is internal anarchy, and no central principle of rectitude ruling the conduct, there can be no true decision or moral force in the life. (a)

IV. Sin dishonours national government. "The gates thereof are burned with fire." City gates not only for resistance, but also the seat of government. There the assembly of chiefs gathered; there criminals were tried; there justice was administered, and important subjects

discussed. Compare "Ottoman Porte," where word for gate is synonym for government; also, "on this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Here "gates" equivalent to kingdom. The demolition of the city gates suggests—

1. *That the administration of justice was neglected.* Crime ran riot. There was no security, no confidence, no defence, therefore none dare seek redress where none could be obtained. Bribery and terrorism the offspring of lax morality. The moral sense deadened, justice impossible.
2. *That the inroads of enemies were unchecked.* No barriers to midnight marauders. Whole nation manifestly paralyzed and dispirited. National honour and independence trodden in the dust. "The walls are destroyed, and the gates burned," when the rulers and ministers do not their duty, but care for other things. And as this wretched people had justly, for their disobedience, neither walls left to keep out the enemy, nor gates to let in their friends, but were all destroyed; so shall all godless people be left without godly magistrates to govern them, and live in slavery under tyrants that oppress them, and be led by blind guides that deceive them.—*Pilkington.* The Jews to this day when they build a house (say the Rabbins) leave one part of it unfinished in remembrance that Jerusalem and the temple are at present desolate; or they leave about a yard square unplastered on which they write the words of the Psalmist, "If I forget Jerusalem," &c. (Ps. cxxxvii.); or else the words, "Zechor Lechorbon," "The memory of the desolation."

V. Sin brings a blight upon the whole land. When Adam sinned, the earth, which was before decked with fruits, brought forth weeds. The wickedness of Sodom punished not only by the destruction of its inhabitants, but by the desolation of the land, so that even the air is so pestilent that birds fall dead as they fly over it. The whole country of Palestine, "a land flowing with milk and honey," for the sins of the Jews has become barren, as David said, "The Lord turneth a fruitful ground into a barren, for the wickedness of the dwellers in it" (Ps. cvii.). Jerusalem was not only destroyed now, but afterwards by Vespasian, whose general, Titus, left not "one stone standing on another" (Matt. xxiv. 2). "Herein behold the vileness of sin, that not only man, but the earth, stones, cities, trees, corn, cattle, fish, fowl, and all fruits are perished, punished and turned into another nature, for the sin of man: yea, and not only worldly things, but his holy temple, law, the ark, the cherubims, mercy-seat, Aaron's rod, and holy jewels, are given into the hands of a heathen king, because of the disobedience of his people."—*Pilkington.*

Illustrations :—(α) When Nicephorus Phocas had built a wall about his palace for his own security in the night-time, he heard a voice crying to him, "Oh! emperor, though thou build thy walls as high as the clouds, yet if sin be *within* it will *overthrow* all."

(β) "Suppose I were going along the street, and were to dash my hand through a large pane of glass, what harm should I receive? You would be punished for breaking the glass. Would that be all the harm that I should receive? No, you would cut your hand with the glass. So it is with sin. If you break God's laws, you will be punished for breaking them; and your soul is hurt by the very act of breaking them."

UNSELFISH SORROW.

i. 4. *I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days.*

I. The occasion of his grief. "When I heard these words I sat," &c. 1. *Not personal loss.* Men mourn when death enters the home and robs them of their loved ones; when privation comes and strips them of their luxuries; when disappointment blights their ambition; when disease or accident deprive them

of vigorous health. Nehemiah's grief not caused by any of these things. He was in no danger at present of losing either friend, or substance, or good name. Nor would he thus have mourned if he had. 2. *Not spiritual despair.* He certainly discovered imperfections in his life not before observed, but nothing to drive

him to religious despair. Condemnation and shame follow the awakening of conscience. His not asleep. Religious declension had not estranged him from God. He had walked with God even in the palace. 3. *But public calamity.* "When I heard *these words* I sat down and wept." What words? Those by which his brother had just described the "affliction and reproach" into which the Church at Jerusalem had fallen. (1) His brethren were in distress. His human sensibilities not blunted by the formalities of court life. Poor relations not to be forgotten when fortune favours us. (2) The Church was desolate. This as important to a good man as if his own home was burnt or wrecked. (3) The holy city was in ruins. Other cities had been razed to the ground, and he felt no grief like this. Babylon, a much greater city, had been taken by Cyrus not long before; Samaria, their neighbour, by Sennacherib and Shalmaneser. But this was "the holy city" (Matt. iv.). Over its final destruction Christ wept (Luke xix.). It had been beautified with temple, priests, and holy ordinances; and strengthened by many worthy princes and laws, and was a wonder to the world. Its fall was synonymous with the disgrace of true religion. (4) Sin was triumphant. The sin of unbelief and moral impotence within, and of blasphemy and boastful arrogance without. Persecution and poverty are the Church's glory; but impotence and discord her eternal shame. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" her enemies asked; and in bitter irony are ever ready to exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another!" When God's cause languishes and his Church is dishonoured it is time for good men to weep. In time of common calamities "Should we then make mirth?" (Ezek. xxi. 10).

Illustrations :—"The Romans severely punished one that showed himself out of a window with a garland on his head in the time of the Punic war, when it went ill with the commonwealth. Justinus, the good emperor of Constantinople, took the downfall of the city of Antioch by an earthquake so much to heart that it caused him a grievous sickness, A. D. 527. When Pope Clement and his cardinals were imprisoned by

the duke of Bourbon in St. Angelo, Cæsar in Spain forbade all interludes to be played. In England the king was exceedingly sorry, and Cardinal Wolsey drained the land of twelvescore thousand pounds to relieve and ransom the distressed pope, for whom he wept grievously."—*Trapp.*

II. The characteristics of his grief.

1. *It was intense.* "I sat down and wept." Probably he had stood to hear their story. Now his heart melts like wax. His grief is overwhelming. Falling into his seat he gives vent to a flood of weeping. Not the transitory ruffling of the emotions, nor mere sentimental sympathy elicited by a tale of woe. His brethren's sorrows became his own. Jeremiah's prayer answered, "Oh that my head were waters," &c. (Jer. ix. 1). With David, he "watered his couch with his tears." The sins of his people became in some measure his own. In this see faint type of Christ, who "bore our griefs," &c. Faint anticipation of that "man of sorrows," who "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Heb. v. 7) in the garden of Gethsemane. 2. *It was enduring.* "And mourned certain days." Not the evanescent passion of superficial sorrow, but the deep soul-stirring grief of a noble and generous nature. Blind and violent sorrow generally dies away like the noisy crackling of thorns in the fire. Its very intenseness makes its brevity. Grief that has a deep and abiding provocation dies not thus. It contemplates the future as well as the present. The past it mourns, but seeks help for the future. Nor can it be appeased until the disgrace is wiped away, and deliverance found. Like Mary, it waits at the sepulchre until the angel appears to assure it of the resurrection of buried hopes. 3. *It was self-denying.* "And fasted." Not the comfortable and self-indulgent grief that makes the very sorrow an excuse for sottish excess. All such grief bears a lie upon its face. The mind affects the body. Severe mental strain, whether of agony or rapture, weakens appetite and kills desire. *Real heart-pain is always ascetic in its bodily aspect.* The grief of the hypocrite or half-hearted is self-indulgent and short-lived because superficial. The grief of an earnest man of

truth is terrible and irresistible because of its self-forgetfulness. Fasting is (1) Often associated with profound grief in Scripture (2 Sam. i. 12; xii. 16—21; Ps. xxxv. 13; lxix. 10; Dan. vi. 8; Jonah iii. 5). (2) May be the natural attendant of grief, or the outward symbol of its presence. (3) Is recognized and commended in Scripture as a religious exercise (1 Sam. vii. 6; Jer. xxxvi. 9; Matt. vi. 17; Acts x. 30; 1 Cor. vii. 5).

III. The issue of his grief. "And prayed before the God of heaven." Herein consists difference between godly and selfish sorrow. The one ends in blank despair, the other finds relief in prayer. The passionate writhing of a rebellious heart dares not look up. It leads to suicide and madness. Note, 1. *Grief is sanctified by prayer.* Pain no inherently sanctifying or softening virtue. Only when borne in faith and godly resignation does it leave a blessing. It then becomes sacred, and softens the heart, like dew upon mown grass, or showers on the thirsty soil. Submissive and prayerful sorrow one of the most gracious experiences that can happen to man. 2. *Grief is relieved by prayer.* "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication," &c. (Phil. iv. 6). In prayer the burden is cast upon One who is able and willing

to bear it. If men find their burdens and anxieties lighter when they speak of them to their fellows, surely the relief must be greater when they unburden their mind to God, who is not only willing, but able to succour. Pent up mountain torrents are turbulent and furious; open streams are calmer, and more placid in their flow. 3. *Grief is made fruitful by prayer.* Sorrow without an outlet produces not good, but harm. It renders the spirit morose, and comforts no mourner. Only when grief is poured into the ear of God can it bear any good fruit. A saint's tears are better than a sinner's triumphs. Bernard saith: "Lachrymæ pœnitentium sunt vinum angelorum." "The tears of penitents are the wine of angels." St. Lawrence Justinian, Patriarch of Venice, says: "He cannot help sorrowing for other people's sins, who sorrows truly for his own." St. Augustine: "We mourn over the sins of others, we suffer violence, we are tormented in our minds." St. Chrysostom: "Moses was raised above the people because he habitually deplored the sins of others. He who sorrows for other men's sins, has the tenderness of an apostle, and is an imitator of that one who said: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" (2 Cor. xi. 29).

FASTING.

i. 4. *And fasted.*

I. Occasions of fasting. 1. Afflictions of the Church (Nehemiah). 2. National judgments (Joel). 3. Domestic bereavement (David). 4. Imminent danger (Esther). 5. Solemn ordinances (Paul and Barnabas set apart).

II. The design of fasting. 1. *To assist penitence.* "To afflict the soul," a phrase often employed in connection with abstinence (Lev. xvi. 29; Isa. lviii. 5). Without spiritual repentance bodily mortification worthless, and meaningless. 2. *To mortify bodily lusts and promote heart purity.* Fasting not end, but means. Not essential to holiness; only an accidental of our fallen state. No fasting in heaven, because

no fleshly corruptions. Without falling into Manichean heresy, which makes sin necessarily inherent in the human body, we must regard the body as an enemy to spirituality. Paul did; hence, "I keep under my body," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 27). 3. *To humble and give sympathy with the poor.* Opulent classes sympathize too little with struggling poor, because do not understand meaning of want. If practise occasional abstinence, and really suffer hunger, can better understand what others suffer constantly.

III. The duty of fasting. 1. *Forms part of general principle of self-denial essential to true discipleship.* "If any man will be my disciple let him take

up his cross daily," &c. (Luke ix. 23). This duty not to be despised because some abuse it. Because some make it meritorious, no reason why we should neglect it altogether. Most sacred ordinances (Lord's Supper) have been most grossly perverted, and most gracious privileges most grossly abused. Counterfeits only prove the value of true coin. 2. *Implied, and therefore enjoined, by words of Christ.* "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. xvii. 21). 3. *Enforced by the example of Christ.* In all things he our pattern. What Christ sanctioned by his own act cannot be considered as either superfluous, or superstitious. Point all objectors to him. 4. *Associated in Scripture with the bestowal of great blessings.* Nineveh spared when the inhabitants prayed, and mourned, fasting (Jonah iv. 11). Ahab pardoned when he humbled himself with fasting (1 Kings xxi. 29). Christ promises heavenly reward to those whose fasting is sincere (Matt. vi. 16).

IV. The manner and degree of fasting. 1. *Sometimes total abstinence from food for a time* (Esther iv. 16). 2. *More often abstinence from superfluous food* (Dan. x. 3).

V. The spirit in which to fast. 1. *With sincere humility.* Ostentation condemned by Christ (Matt. vi. 16). Uncharitableness or peevishness often accompany the exercise and deprive it of all sweetness and profit. It may become a source of pride and a cover for sin. 2. *With true repentance.* This the essential principle of all abstinence. *The sacrifice of the will* is the truth forthshadowed. This only one outward sign of the complete surrender of the will in all things. Nothing meritorious. Only means to an end. That end the

complete subjection of flesh to spirit, of the carnal nature to the spiritual. If it be objected, "You should pay attention to the weightier matters of morality and benevolence," we reply: "These ought ye to do, and not to leave the others undone." These outward things, as kneeling, weeping, and fasting, are good helps and preparations unto prayer. As Sarah continued three days in fasting and prayer, that the Lord would deliver her from her shame (Tobit iii.); so Tobias maketh it a general rule, saying: "Prayer is good joined with fasting." Ecclesiasticus says (xxx. 5): "The prayer of him that humbleth himself pierceth the clouds, and she will not be comforted until she come nigh, nor go her way until the highest God have mercy upon her."

Illustrations:—Neander says, "Although the early Christians did not retire from the business of life, yet they were accustomed to devote many separate days entirely to examining their own hearts, and pouring them out before God, while they dedicated their lives anew to him with uninterrupted prayers, in order that they might again return to their ordinary occupations with renewed zeal and earnestness. These days of holy devotion, days of prayer and penitence, which individuals appointed for themselves, were often a kind of fast days. They were accustomed to limit their corporal wants on those days, or to fast entirely. That which was spared by their abstinence was applied to the support of their poorer brethren."

"There are Christians whose 'flesh,' whether by its quantity, or natural temperament, renders them sluggish, slothful, wavering, and physically by far too fond of the 'good things' of the table and the wine-cellar. That sort of Christian pressingly needs fasting, ay, thorough fasting. Brave, large-hearted Martin Luther nobly confessed *his* need, and nobly acted it out, not without strife and 'lusting.' Of fasting as a whole, and as applying to all, it may be said that while it has been perverted into a pestilent superstition, yet, in the words of Bishop Andrews, 'There is more fear of a pottingerful of gluttony, than of a spoonful of superstition.'"
—*Grosart.*

INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

i. 5—11. *And prayed before the God of heaven.*

Prayer variously designated *invocation, petition, supplication, or intercession*, according to the aspect in which it is regarded. The subject of this paragraph is *intercessory prayer, i. e.* prayer offered by one human being on behalf of another. That such intervention is admissible, and effectual in the Divine economy, is evident from the teaching of Scripture. 1. *It is frequently enjoined* (Numb. vi. 23—26; Job xlii. 8; Ps. cxxii. 6; Jer. xxix. 7; Joel ii. 17; Matt. v. 44; Ephes. vi. 18;

1 Tim. ii. 1; Jas. v. 14; 1 Jno. v. 16). 2. *Illustrations of its efficacy abound.* Abraham (Gen. xvii. 18—20; xviii. 23; xx. 7—18). Moses (Exod. viii. 12—31; ix. 33; xvii. 11—13; xxxii. 11—34). Jacob (Gen. xlvii. 7; xlix.). David (2 Sam. xii. 16). Ezra (ix. 3—15). Job (i. 5; xlii. 10). Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 20—23). Peter (Acts ix. 40). Paul (Acts xxviii. 8).

I. Here is intercessory prayer, based upon a true conception of the Divine character. 1. *It regards him as the majestic ruler of the world.* “O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God.” *Great* in power and government. *Terrible* in judgment and punishment. Such views of the Divine majesty calculated to inspire reverence and wholesome fear. Would check any tendency to presumption, and place the suppliant in a true position at the Divine *footstool* (Ps. xcix. 5; cxxxii. 7). 2. *It regards him as the faithful and compassionate Father of his children.* (1) *Faithful*, “that keepeth covenant.” Some parts of covenant unconditional; a promise concerning seasons (Gen. viii. 22); destruction of the world (Gen. ix. 14—17). Some conditional upon moral conduct (Josh. vii. 11; xxiii. 16). (2) *Compassionate*, “and mercy” (Exod. xx. 6). (3) *To his children.* “Them that love him, and keep his commandments.” This, beautiful description of filial spirit. The motive principle and the manifest conduct both indicated. First, inward affection, “that love him;” then, outward obedience, “that keep his commandments.” The first revealing itself by the second. The second the offspring of the first. “That he may at once both tremble before him, and trust upon him; he describeth God by his goodness as well as by his greatness, and so helpeth his own faith by contemplating God’s faithfulness and loving-kindness.”—*Trapp*.

II. Here is intercessory prayer, untiring in its importunity and unselfish in its benevolence. 1. *Unwearied in its importunity.* “Which I pray before thee now day and night” (v. 6). Four months elapsed between the commencement of his intercession in Chisleu (i. 1), and the beginning of its fulfilment in Nisan (ii. 1). Night and day, *i. e.* unceasingly, did Nehemiah press his suit. Such importunity sure to prevail. Inspired by the Holy Ghost, commended by the Saviour, and encouraged by the word of God, it cannot fail eventually (Acts xii. 5; 2 Cor. xii. 8; 1 Thess. iii. 10). “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,” &c. (Matt. xi. 12). Parable of the unjust judge (Luke xviii. 5). Perseverance necessary not because God reluctant to hear, but because men are slow to value his gifts. When we rightly appreciate God’s mercies he bestows them freely, not before. The “Jews divide their day into *prayer, work, and repast*; neither will they omit prayer for their meat or labour. The Mahommedans, what occasion soever they have, either by profit or pleasure, to divert them, will pray five times every day; and upon the Friday (which is their Sabbath) six times. How few and feeble are our prayers in comparison, either for ourselves or our brethren in distress.” 2. *Unselfish in its benevolence.* Much anguish of mind, and self-sacrifice, accompanied the urging of this prayer. Rest forsook his frame and slumber his eyelids (Ps. cxxxii. 4; Prov. vi. 4). His whole soul so thoroughly stirred that he cared neither for sleep nor food. Such intercession has all the marks of sincerity, and every probability of success.

III. Here is intercessory prayer, accompanied by self-abasement and contrition. “And confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee; both I and my father’s house have sinned” (v. 6). From the spirit and language of this prayer we learn—1. *That close approaches to God reveal unsuspected moral defects in the character even of good men.* “I and my father’s house have sinned.” Though a sincere believer and servant of Jehovah, Nehemiah now discovered and remembered personal and family sins which bowed him to the earth in sorrow. The more closely he approaches the “Holy One who cannot look upon sin” (Heb. i. 13), the more distinctly and painfully does he perceive his unworthiness and demerit. Thus was it with Manoah (Judg. xiii.), and Isaiah (Isa. vi.), and St. John (Rev. i). When want real power in times of urgent

need they discover their weakness. When daring suppliants press up to the steps of the mercy-seat they discover stains previously unsuspected. Comparatively innocent they may be (as Nehemiah was), but not without sin, and such as needs to be confessed and pardoned. 2. *That the discovery of moral defects teaches good men their common depravity and mutual need of Divine mercy.* "Confess the sins of the children of Israel which *we* have sinned" (v. 6). He discovers that in God's sight there is "no difference." He needs mercy and deserves wrath as much as they. Their sins are identified with his own. The suppliant who pleads for others' sins, as though he had real contact with them, and felt their burdensomeness, will prevail. He who pharisaically thanks God that he is not as other men, in his prayers will not succeed much. When we can say, "of whom I am chief," God will pardon both us and those for whom we intercede. 3. *That the discovery of moral defects deprives good men of all right to intercede for others on the ground of their own merit.* The holiest may not approach the throne of Mercy in his own name, or make his relationship to God a ground of appeal. Only *one* name, *one* plea, will avail. The *name* and *blood* of Christ are our grounds of appeal. The promise and character of God were theirs of old. "For thy name's sake" was the Old Testament form of "For Christ's sake" in the New. When *we* have done our utmost we are only unprofitable servants dependent upon Divine forbearance, and can perform no works of meritorious supererogation. 4. *That the discovery of moral defects brings good men into that state of humility which is essential to success in prayer.* "To that man will I look; even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. lxvi. 2). Self-sufficiency renders God's arm powerless to hear or help. Self-despair, which casts itself at the feet of God, saying, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion," is sure to meet with a ready response. Human weakness commends itself to Divine omnipotence and compassion. Our impotence is our strongest recommendation to God.

IV. Here is intercessory prayer fortifying itself with strong arguments, and appealing to the most powerful motives. 1. *It makes the promise of God its ground of appeal.* "Remember, I beseech thee, the word which thou commandedst thy servant Moses" (v. 8; Deut. iv. 25—31; xxx. 1—10). No argument so powerful with God as "*Remember.*" When men honour *God's Word*, he will not be slow to hear *their words*. When the prayer of faith builds upon the word of promise it rests upon a sure foundation. "God not a man that he should lie, or the son of a man that he should repent" (Numb. xxiii. 19). 2. *It regards the verification of one word as a reason for expecting the fulfilment of another.* "If ye transgress, I will scatter you . . . If ye turn, I will gather you" (v. 8, 9). Half the prophecy had been carried out; Nehemiah claims the fulfilment of the other half. "All the promises of God are yea" (2 Cor. i. 20). "No variableness or shadow of turning with God" (Jas. i. 17). He who kept his covenant with Noah will keep it with his posterity to the end of time. 3. *It regards the verification of maledictions as a ground for expecting the still more certain fulfilment of blessings.* If the *curses* were literally carried out, how much more willingly will the great Father bestow the promised *blessings*. If in chastising he was faithful, surely he will not be less so in healing and restoring. The *fact* of their dispersion becomes the basis of his claim for their restoration. He who is faithful in that which he does unwillingly, will not be less faithful in that which he delights to do. If, because of his word, he punished, because of his word he will show mercy. 4. *It appeals to the relationship existing between God and his chosen people.* "These are *thy* servants, and *thy* people" (v. 10). Can he who has borne with them so long and so tenderly desert them now? The paternal heart is appealed to. If an earthly parent acknowledges this as the most powerful sentiment in his nature, how much more the heavenly. Had he not said, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. xlix. 15). 5. *It repudiates a disloyal*

or *presumptuous motive*. "Thy servants, who desire to fear thy name" (v. 11). Not that they might boast and defy the God who had delivered them, as their fathers had done; not that they might free themselves from a heathen yoke only; but that they might fear and worship the God of Israel. Blessings that are to be laid on God's altar when received will not be long withheld. 6. *It makes past deliverance the ground of present expectation*. "Whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand." The memory of the exodus from Egypt, and the victories of the wilderness and Canaan, excites the hope that God will again interfere on behalf of his people. The remembrance of those years of the right hand of the Most High, stimulates Nehemiah's prayer. Thus should the past ever instruct the present. He who studies the Church's history will find ample material for the nourishment and strengthening of his faith in God.

V. Here is intercessory prayer accompanied by diligence in the performance of daily duties. "And grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer" (v. 11). The most earnest supplication not exonerate from personal effort, and the discharge of necessary duties. Prayer not to be made a substitute for work. The suppliant must relax no painstaking effort, and watch for the openings of Providence. Every step must be taken as though all depended on our own effort, and yet in entire dependence on Divine guidance. Thus may we in a sense answer our own prayers. Not necessary to leave ordinary spheres of work. Nehemiah asks Divine guidance in regular duty, that the monarch may be induced to grant him the petition which he was anxious to present at the first favourable opportunity.

Illustrations:—One of the holiest and most devoted of modern missionaries, who after surmounting almost insuperable obstacles, at length completed his translation of the Scriptures into a language of surpassing difficulty, inscribed upon the last page of his manuscript these words:—"I give it, as the result of long experience, that prayer and pains, with faith in Christ Jesus, will enable a man to do anything."

Æschylus was condemned to death by the Athenians, and about to be executed. His brother Amyntas had signalized himself at the battle of Salamis, where he lost his right hand. He came into court, just as his brother was condemned, and without saying a word, held up the stump of his right arm in the sight of all. The historian says that, "when the judges saw this mark of his sufferings, they remembered what he had done, and for his sake pardoned the brother whose life had been forfeited."

"At the time the Diet of Nuremberg was held," says Tholuck, "Luther was earnestly praying in his own dwelling; and at the very hour when the edict was issued, granting free toleration to all Protestants, he ran out of his house, crying out, 'We have gained the victory.'"

Rev. Charles Simeon wrote to a friend: "With the hope of ultimate acceptance with God, I have always enjoyed much cheerfulness before men; but I have at the same time laboured incessantly to cultivate the *deepest humility* before God. I have never thought that the circumstances of God having forgiven me, was any reason why I should forgive myself; on the contrary, I have always judged it better to loathe myself the more, in proportion as I was assured that God was pacified toward me (Ezek. xvi. 63). Nor have I been satisfied with viewing my sins, as men view the stars on a cloudy night, one here, and another there, with great intervals between; but have endeavoured to get, and to preserve continually before my eyes, such a view of them as we have of the stars in the brightest night: the greater and the smaller all intermingled, and forming as it were one continuous mass. There are but two objects that I have desired for these forty years to behold; the one is my own vileness, the other is the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and I have always thought that they should be viewed together, just as Aaron confessed all the sins of the children of Israel, whilst he put them on the head of the scape-goat. The disease did not keep him from applying the remedy; nor the remedy from feeling the disease."

PRAYER FOR CHURCH REVIVAL.

i. 5—11. *And prayed before the God of heaven, &c.*

I. Prompted by love for the Church. 1. *Therefore persistent*. "Day and night." This love not fickle, or easily discouraged. "Many waters cannot quench love" (Cant. viii. 7). Not fruitless emotion, but practical in its aim. 2. *Therefore fervent*. "Wept and mourned." The love deep, not superficial; therefore the

prayer was fervent. This love, previously slumbering, now fully awakened ; therefore prayer intense. This love, now sorely tried ; therefore fervent prayer required.

II. Recognizes the personal unworthiness of the petitioner. "Both I and my father's house have sinned." This confession consistent with the priestly intercession of those who stand before God in the people's name. Jewish high priests "offered sacrifice first for their *own sins*, and then for the sins of the people" (Heb. vii. 27). Must come not as having any right to intercede, but as magnifying God's mercy.

III. Is full of faith. "Remember the word" (v. 8). 1. *Notwithstanding the Church's declension.* Sin not overlooked, or ignored ; but viewed in the light of Divine mercy. Confessed, pardoned, and forsaken, it no longer becomes a hindrance. God will not remember against them his people's sin when they repent thereof. 2. *Because of the veracity of the Divine promise.* "I will gather." This, basis of all hope then and now. When pleading the promises, should do so in faith, nothing doubting, for "God hath magnified *his word* above all his name" (Ps. cxxxviii. 2). This promise embraces—(1) The assurance of mercy after chastisement. "I will scatter . . . I will gather" (viii. 9). (2) The renewal of former kindness. "Whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand" (v. 10). (3) The vindication of the Divine name and honour. "These are thy servants, and thy people" (v. 10).

Illustrations :—It is related of an ancient king that he never granted a petition that was offered with a trembling hand, because it marked a want of confidence in his clemency. "Have faith in God" (Mark xi. 22).

A pious sick man in the western part of New York, used to pray for the preachers and the churches of his acquaintance daily at set hours. In his diary were found entries like this, "I have been enabled to offer the prayer of faith for a revival in such a place." So through the list. It is said that each church was soon enjoying a revival, and nearly in the order of time named in the diary.

THE MAJESTY AND MERCY OF GOD.

i. 5. *The great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy.*

From this sublime invocation we gather—

I. That there is perfect harmony in the attributes of the Divine nature. God is one. His nature indivisible. Men speak as though justice were necessarily opposed to mercy. No necessary antagonism. A God all mercy would be a God not only unkind, but unjust. Mistake to speak of mercy triumphing over justice. Mercy harmonizes with justice, never annihilates it. God is just, and "yet the justifier of him that believeth" (Rom. iii. 26). In the pardon of a sinner we see the vindication of Divine justice no less than the magnifying of Divine mercy ; and Divine mercy unites with Divine justice in the destruction of the finally impenitent. No wrath so fearful to contemplate as "the wrath of the *Lamb*" (Rev. vi. 16).

II. That the Divine attributes are equally enlisted in the work of human

salvation. Salvation as much an act of justice as of mercy. The holiness of God an important factor in the production of both repentance and regeneration. By the view of holiness, sin is discovered in its true colours. By the indwelling of the spirit of holiness, sin is destroyed and eradicated. "Mercy and truth are met together" (Ps. lxxxv. 10). Hence Watts has truthfully sung—

"Here the whole Deity is known ; nor dares a creature guess,
Which of the glories brightest shone ; the justice or the grace."

III. That the harmony of the Divine nature is the only true basis of moral goodness. 1. *The contemplation of Divine compassion alone tends to antinomianism.* Mercy may be magnified at the expense of the moral law. God willing to forgive, but equally willing to defend against and deliver from sin itself. Guard against danger of so

magnifying Divine mercy as to make sin a light offence. God's law is, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." "Reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sin" (Rom. vi.). Then, as a merciful provision, "If any man sin we have an advocate," &c. (1 Jno. i.). 2. *The contemplation of the Divine holiness alone tends to legalism.* By viewing the spotless purity of the Divine character, and the rigid requirements of Divine law, apart from the gracious promises of Divine mercy, a spirit of legal bondage, or self-righteous asceticism, is engendered. Hence spring meritorious works, penances, and self-inflicted flagellations and other useless tortures. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved us" (Tit. iii. 5). 3. *The contemplation of the unity of the Divine nature is essential to the formation of a true moral character.* The spotless purity and immaculate holiness of the Divine nature deter from iniquity, and the violation of God's law; whilst the tender mercy and loving-kindness of his nature encourage the penitent to crave pardon and grace.

IV. That the harmony of the Divine nature furnishes the only true ideal of moral goodness. 1. *Human goodness is at best one-sided.* Some virtues developed at expense of others. Few Christians are fully and evenly matured. One aspect of moral goodness cultivated to the exclusion of others. Men follow too much their natural disposition in this. The gentle are apt to cultivate the passive graces alone, whilst the bold forget to clothe themselves with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. 2. *Divine goodness alone is perfectly impartial.* God both majestic and merciful; infinitely high, yet infinitely condescending. No exaggeration, nor inequality, nor partiality characterizes his nature or his government. His purity unsullied, his peace unruffled, his dignity uncompromised, his fidelity unchallenged, &c.

V. That notwithstanding the har-

mony of the Divine nature, men come into contact with different aspects of that nature according to their moral condition. As the magnet draws to itself certain metals similar in nature, and rejects certain others alien from it; so do men in their various characters attract different phases of God's nature.

1. *A penitent spirit is necessary to the experience of Divine mercy.* Only such will seek it; only such require it: only such are capable of receiving and living in the enjoyment of it. 2. *An obedient spirit is necessary to the continued experience of God's favour.* Paternal benedictions only promised to those who possess a filial spirit. "If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father," &c. (Jno. xiv. 15). Disobedience always incurs Divine displeasure, and obscures the light of the Father's countenance. 3. *A rebellious spirit will infallibly provoke the exercise of Divine wrath.* "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4). "God cannot look upon iniquity" (Deut. xxxii. 4). His character is pledged to active antagonism to evil. Sin not punished now as it deserves, because this is "the day of salvation;" and the mediatorial intercession of Christ holds back the thunderbolts of righteous anger.

Illustrations:—A Jew entered a Persian temple, and saw there the sacred fire. He said, "How do you worship fire?" He was told. Then the Israelite replied, "You dazzle the eye of the body, but darken that of the mind; in presenting to them the terrestrial light, you take away the celestial." The Persian then asked, "How do you name the Supreme Being?" "We call him Jehovah Adonai; that is, the Lord who was, who is, and who shall be." "Your word is great and glorious; but it is terrible," said the Persian. A Christian approaching, said, "We call Him Abba, Father." Then the Gentile and the Jew regarded each other with surprise, and said, "Your word is the nearest and the highest; but who gives you courage to call the Eternal thus?" "The Father Himself," said the Christian, who then expounded to them the plan of redemption. Then they believed, and lifted up their eyes to heaven, saying, "Father, dear Father;" and joining hands, called each other brethren.—*Krummacher.*

IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER.

i. 6. *I pray before thee now day and night.*

I. Natural. 1. *If it be the expression of real need.* When children want, they ask; when they feel deeply, they ask earnestly. This prayer protracted through four months; yet not mere repetition of words. Difference between real and artificial want: one listless in prayer, the other importunate. Conscious want asks and asks again. Prayer not to be regarded as end, but means. Many reverse this order. Nehemiah did not pray for sake of prayer, but for sake of object sought. 2. *If it be the expression of urgent need.* When we suffer pain we cry out. Starving man always importunate. The more needy the more earnest. Sinners under conviction of sin, groan and wrestle in agonizing importunity until they find relief. Christians wrestle with "strong crying and supplications" until they prevail. Sailors in a sinking vessel and miners in the prospect of certain death pray with real importunity because they are in urgent extremity. In the same spirit should we approach the throne of grace; for our need is the same, though we may not feel it. 3. *If it be the expression of hopeful need.* None can persevere earnestly in a cause known to be hopeless. Hope cheers on the most despairing. Without hope nothing arduous could be undertaken. This inspires prayer. It looks to the goal, and anticipates eventual success. This hope must have a true foundation, and not rest on desire or possibility only. The word of God is the only secure foundation on which it can build (v. 8).

II. Necessary. 1. *In order that the suppliant may be rightly affected.* Nothing truer than that success in prayer depends on spirit of suppliant. Importunity promotes—(1) Tenderness, (2) Spirituality, (3) Humility, (4) Zeal. Often the petitioner is not morally fit to receive the grace or gift desired. Prayer purifies the heart, sanctifies the will, and removes hindrances out of the way. 2. *In order that the gifts may be rightly appreciated.* God will not cast his

pearls before swine. He will only give when his gifts are valued. What we seek for long and earnestly, we value highly when we gain. What easily won, lightly esteemed and easily lost. This true of money, lands, home, child, &c. The more hardly money is earned, the more carefully it is used. Those who have never earned, but inherited wealth, generally become spendthrift, because ignorant of value of money. Home only possesses its full significance to those who have crossed oceans and continents, and endured perils on land and sea to reach it. That life the most precious to the parent which has been oftenest snatched from the jaws of death. Gifts nearly lost, or dearly bought, are counted to be most precious and priceless. 3. *In order that God's conditions may be fulfilled.* (1) Faith required. "He that cometh unto God," &c. (Heb. xi. 6). (2) Whole-hearted earnestness required. "When they seek me with their whole heart" (Ps. cxix. 2). (3) Submission to the Divine will required. "Thy will be done." All these conditions are promoted by continued importunity.

III. Scriptural. 1. *The Bible enjoins it by precepts the most explicit.* (Deut. iv. 7. 1 Ch. xvi. 11. 2 Ch. vii. 14. Job viii. 5. Ps. l. 15; lxxxii. 10; cxlv. 18. Prov. ii. 3. Isa. xxx. 19; lviii. 9. Jer. xxxi. 9. Lam. ii. 19. Matt. vii. 7. Luke xviii. 1. Rom. xii. 12. Phil. iv. 6. 1 Thess. v. 17.) 2. *The Bible encourages it by examples the most striking.* (Gen. xviii. 32; xxxii. 26. Exod. xxxii. 32. Deut. ix. 15. Judges vi. 39. 1 Sam. i. 10; xii. 23. Ezra ix. 5. Ps. xvii. 1; xxii. 2. Dan. vi. 10; ix. 3. Matt. xv. 23; xx. 31. Acts vi. 4; xii. 5. 2 Cor. xii. 8. 1 Thess. iii. 10.)

IV. Successful. Though long delayed the answer came, and Nehemiah's importunity was amply rewarded. 1. *Not in the sense that God's will can be affected by man's importunity.* That will is perfect and immutable. "I am God, I

change not" (Mal. iii. 6). If that will were variable there could be no confidence amongst men. The government of the world would rest upon no firm and solid foundation. Whilst the Divine will can never be changed, the exercise of that will may be affected by human conditions. The Father's will is to save the whole race; for "he willeth not the death of the sinner;" but according to the laws which he has appointed for man, his will is limited by certain conditions which must be fulfilled before he can exercise that will. The same occurs in earthly relations. A wise father has a spendthrift son, whom he loves and would gladly treat with lavish generosity, but that he knows it would be his ruin. That son becomes reformed, and (not the father's will, for that has remained the same, but) the father's treatment of his son is altered accordingly. He can now do what he had the heart and will to do before, but not the judgment. 2. *Not in the sense that God is reluctant, and can be overcome by human persuasion.* This, a common error. Seen not so much in distinct affirmation as in public prayers, religious literature, and devout conversation. For our sakes, not for God's sake, importunity required. Parable of unjust judge only designed to teach *one salient truth*, viz. the necessity for unwearied devotion in prayer, not the unwillingness of God to hear. The Old Testament passages (Gen. xviii. 32; Exod. xxxii. 32), which represent God as apparently reluctant, and eventually persuaded, are

anthropomorphic. God's actual, practical government of the universe is amenable to the intercessions of the righteous. Certain blessings are promised only in answer to "effectual fervent prayer" (Jas. v. 16). 3. *In the sense that importunity and prevalence are mysteriously, but certainly, connected.* The "how" we may not be able to define; but the fact we cannot deny. The process here as elsewhere is mysterious, but the result is patent to all thoughtful and devout minds. Who can explain the connection between the seed and the plant, or between mind and matter? The presence of a mystery does not destroy our faith in the fact. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are; yet he prayed," &c. (Jas. v. 17). Let them deny the facts who can; and they are worth many arguments.

Illustrations.—Prayer pulls the rope below, and the great bell rings above in the ear of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give an occasional pluck at the rope: but he who wins with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly, and pulls continuously with all his might.—*Spurgeon.*

"If from the tree of promised mercy thou
Wouldst win the good which loadeth every
bough,
Then urge the promise well with pleading cries,
Move heaven itself with vehemence of sighs;
Soon shall celestial fruit thy toil repay—
'Tis ripe, and waits for him who loves to pray.
What if thou fail at first, yet give not o'er,
Bestir thyself to labour more and more;
Enlist a brother's sympathetic knee,
The tree will drop its fruit when two agree;
Entreat the Holy Ghost to give thee power,
Then shall the fruit descend in joyful shower."

FORGOTTEN SINS REMEMBERED.

i. 6. *Both I and my father's house have sinned.*

I. Sins forgotten are not necessarily sins forgiven. 1. *Wicked men soon forget their sins.* This arises from indifference to the nature and consequences of sin. Sin becomes a trifling matter easily committed, readily forgotten. Not therefore either forgotten or forgiven by God. "I have spilled the ink over a bill, and so have blotted it till it can hardly be read, but this is quite another thing from having it blotted out, for that cannot be till payment is made. So a

man may blot his sins from his memory, and quiet his mind with false hopes, but the peace which this will bring him is widely different from that which arises from God's forgiveness of sin through the satisfaction which Jesus made in his atonement. *Our blotting is one thing, God's blotting out is something far higher.*—*Spurgeon.* 2. *Good men may forget their sins.* They often do. Nehemiah had done. Not heinous and wilful sins, for such they do not commit. "He

that committeth sin is of the devil" (1 John). Sins of ignorance and of inadvertence, as well as of unbelief, &c., may be committed even by believers, and then forgotten—(1) Through neglecting faithful self-examination, (2) Through an uneducated or half-enlightened conscience, (3) Through a low moral sense.

II. Forgotten sins often hinder prayer. They did so in Nehemiah's case. Not until his own and his father's sins had been acknowledged and pardoned could he prevail in prayer. What earnest Christian not had similar experience? The spirit of prayer mysteriously absent; oft repeated requests strangely unanswered. On carefully searching have found the hidden sin and put away the hindrance. (1) They deprive the soul of the spirit of supplication. (2) They act as barriers preventing access to God.

III. Forgotten sins often interfere with Church prosperity. No blessing for the Church at Jerusalem until these sins and theirs had been confessed and put away. Achan and his wedge of gold brought shame and defeat upon the armies of Israel. Secret evils cherished often cause great disaster and moral feebleness to the Church. 1. *By depriving her of that joy which is her strength.* "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Without the clear assurance of the Divine favour joy impossible. When Church depressed and doubting, her work languishes. 2. *By hindering*

God's blessing from attending her efforts. Without his benedictions all the Church's enterprises must fail. Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but God gives the increase.

IV. Forgotten sins are often remembered in seasons of gracious visitation. When God comes near and manifests himself as refiner's fire, his servants are quick to discern, and sensitive to feel their most hidden faults, for—1. *Revivals of religion promote self-examination and abasement.* 2. *Revivals of religion create a higher moral sense.*

V. Forgotten sins must be confessed when brought to remembrance. 1. *Vicariously.* Not only own sins but sins of brethren and family, and Church. If we pray for them God will give them repentance and they will be saved. "They shall be made willing in the day of his power." 2. *Separately.* As, in the text, Nehemiah confesses their sins by name, so should all earnest suppliants acknowledge their failures, not in general terms only, but in detail and separately. This will produce clear views of sin in all its reality, and will deepen the sorrow of a sincere repentance. 3. *Accompanied by prayer for mercy.* This, great end of confession, viz. that guilt be cancelled, and sins remitted. Confession in itself no virtue, unless it spring from a desire for pardon, and a determination to shun the cause of sin in the future.

GOD'S MEMORY.

i. 8. *Remember, I beseech thee, the word that, &c.*

I. God's memory is infallible. 1. *Its records are accurate.* No human records are so. Errors in everything human. Memory of man fails, and deceives him. God's memory absolutely infallible, because he alone can see things as they really are. 2. *Its records are impartial.* Prejudice and personal bias enter into all human histories. This bias often quite unconscious and unavoidable. Perfect disinterestedness impossible under existing limitations of human life. God only can look down from the serene heights of

immaculate purity, and impartially record the transactions of men. 3. *Its records will form the basis of man's acquittal or condemnation at the Day of Judgment.* The verdict pronounced by Christ in the case of the seven Asian churches, a prelude of the General Judgment of all churches and peoples. Each letter commences with, "I know thy works" (Rev. ii.), implying that the judgment pronounced is infallibly true. Such momentous issues, as *eternal life* and *eternal death*, could not depend upon anything less than an infallible record

of the whole period of earthly probation ; and none but God can furnish such a record. Not one shall be unrighteously condemned. No miscarriage of justice can possibly occur at that tribunal.

II. God's memory is omniscient. Hence the appeal, "Remember." 1. *It takes cognisance of the most obscure events as well as the most public.* No deed of darkness or act of cruelty unobserved. No cup of water or widow's mite given without the notice of at least One Eye. "What was done in secret shall one day be proclaimed on the housetop." "All things are naked and open to the eyes of him." "Hell is naked before him, and destruction" (Job xxvi. 6). 2. *It is acquainted with the most microscopic details of human life.* Not only does he observe and regulate suns and starry systems in their orbits, but the most infinitesimal animalculæ live and move and have their being under his eye. If he be anywhere, he is everywhere ; if he be in anything, he is in everything. If he order the seraph's flight, he ordains the sparrow's fall : if he tells the number of the stars, he numbers the very hairs of the heads of his saints. The minuteness of Providence its perfection. Since he is above all, and through all, and in all, let us look to him *for* all, let us look to him *in* all. 3. *It fathoms the most secret thoughts and motives.* "Thou compassest my path," &c.; "for there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest

it altogether" (Ps. cxxxix.). Thoughts unbreathed in word are recorded in his memory ; and motives unsuspected by the most intimate friend are there written down.

III. God loves to be reminded of his word. "Remember, I beseech thee, the word which thou commandedst thy servant Moses" (v. 8). 1. *Not that he needs to be reminded of it.* Strictly speaking God can neither remember nor forget, for all things are present with him. Figuratively he is said to do both (Isa. lxii. 6, 7). 2. *Not that he desires to forget.* He delights to honour the word of his promise, and is "not slow concerning his promise, as some men count slackness" (2 Pet. iii. 9). 3. *But because he loves to see his children believing his word.* All men love to be trusted. Parents especially delight to see their children exercise the most implicit trust in their veracity. God also seeks to be trusted, and is pleased when his word is believed. Christ's upbraiding couched in these words : "O slow of heart to believe" (Luke xxiv. 25).

Illustration :—"There is a recent application of electricity by which, under the influence of its powerful light, the body can be so illuminated as that the workings beneath the surface of the skin may be seen. Lift up the hand, and it will appear almost translucent, the bones and veins clearly appearing. It is so in some sense with God's introspection of the human heart. His eye, which shines brighter than the sun, searches us, and discovers all our weakness and infirmity." —*Pilkington.*

PUNISHMENT AND PENITENCE.

i. 8, 9. *If ye transgress, I will scatter you, &c.*

Here we trace that sequence which is everywhere taught in Bible, viz. :

I. That sin is invariably followed by punishment. 1. *Sometimes with loss of temporal good.* "I will scatter you abroad." The loss of national status and social integrity followed loss of God's favour. They are to-day a standing witness to all the world of the faithfulness of Jehovah's word. Josephus says that in his time they had grown so wicked, that if the Romans had not destroyed and dispersed them, without doubt either the earth would have swallowed them up, or fire from heaven would have consumed them. This kind of punishment not always inflicted. Wicked men flourish and grow rich, yet their end is miserable enough. 2. *Always with loss of spiritual blessing.* "Friendship of world enmity against God." God's favour only secured and continued by separation from sin. Withdrawal of Divine approval must follow deviation from path of Divine precepts. 3. *Hereafter with the loss of all good.* Hell is most frequently referred to as a loss, the negation of all that is dear and sweet and to be desired ; loss of heaven, of peace, of God's presence,

of opportunity, of gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, in word, the *loss of the soul*. The loss of *hope* bitterest ingredient in cup of despair. Sin not always *manifestly* punished in this world; but always *really* so. In the next life the punishment will be manifest to all the universe. Sin *shall not* go unpunished. "The thought of the future punishment for the wicked which the Bible reveals is enough to make an earthquake of terror in a man's mind. I do not accept the doctrine of eternal punishment because I delight in it. I would cast in doubts if I could, till I had filled hell up to the brim: I would destroy all faith in it: but that would do me no good; I could not destroy the thing. Nor does it help me to take the word 'everlasting,' and put it into a rack like an inquisitor, until I make it shriek out some other meaning; I cannot alter the stern fact." "The pea contains the vine, and the flower, and the pod in embryo: and I am sure when I plant it, that it will produce them and nothing else. Now every action of our lives is embryonic, and according as it is right or wrong, it will surely bring forth the sweet flowers of joy, or the poison fruits of sorrow. Such is the constitution of this world; and the Bible assures us that the next world only carries it forward. Here and hereafter 'whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.'"—*Beecher*.

II. That true penitence is invariably followed by pardon. "But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments," &c. The sequence carried out in this history. National repentance was followed by national restoration to God's favour and forfeited privileges. 1. *True repentance implies the forsaking of evil.* This, first step. Greek words (*metameleia*, and *metanoya*) signify change of purpose, and change of thought. Not mere desire or emotional sorrow: but deep contrition resulting from clear view of heinous character of sin. Only when Jews abandoned idolatry and heathen associations could they be received again as God's heritage. 2. *True repentance implies turning to God.* By sin do men turn from God: by repentance they return and cleave to him. Judas an instance of insincere repentance; he turned from his sin, but turned not to God, but went straight into arms of despair. Peter's true repentance urged to the feet of his offended Saviour, where he found mercy. 3. *True repentance includes a determination of future obedience.* This mentioned as a condition in God's promise, and quoted in Nehemiah's prayer, "if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments," &c. Evangelically keep them, for with a legal obedience none can do so. The penitent must have at least an earnest desire and firm resolve to do them as far as he can by God's grace. 4. *Pardon is as certain to follow true penitence as punishment sin.* Both rest upon God's "I will." His threatenings and his promises both stand true. If he fulfil the curses, he will certainly fulfil the benedictions. If punishment has followed sin, we may confidently look for mercy to follow the forsaking of sin. God not less ready to restore than to scatter. 5. *Pardon is accompanied by the restoration of forfeited privileges.* "Yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them into the place which I have chosen, to set my name there" (v. 9). Not only would they be redeemed from exile and captivity, but re-established in Jerusalem, and enjoying all the privileges of God's special providence and protection. When sinners turn to God they receive all the evangelical blessings of the New Testament Covenant through Christ. Adoption, assurance, sanctification, heirship, heaven, are all theirs, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Illustrations:—"Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me: and he shall make peace with me." I think I can convey the meaning of this passage by what took place in my own family within these few days. One of my children had committed a fault, for which I thought it my duty to chastise him. I called him to me, explained to him the evil of what he had done, and told him how grieved I was that I must punish him for it. He heard me in silence, and then rushed into my arms, and burst into tears. I could sooner have cut off my arm than have struck him for his fault; he had taken hold of my strength, and had made peace with me."—*R. Tolls*.

The first physic to recover our souls is not cordials, but corrosives; not an immediate stepping into heaven by a present assurance, but mourning and lamentations, and a bitter bewailing of our former

transgressions. With Mary Magdalene, we must wash Christ's feet with our tears of sorrow, before we may anoint his head with "the oil of gladness."—*Browning*.

Like *Janus Bifrons*, the Roman god looking two ways, a true repentance not only bemoans the past, but takes heed to the future. Repentance, like the lights of a ship at her bow and her stern, not only looks to the track she has made, but to the path before her. A godly sorrow moves the Christian to weep over the failure of the past, but his eyes are not so blurred with tears, but that he can look watchfully into the future, and, profiting by the experience of former failures, make straight paths for his feet.—*Pilkington*. Repentance without amendment is like continual pumping at a ship, without stopping the leak.

ELECTING GRACE.

i. 9—10. *Now these are thy servants, and thy people.*

I. A chosen place. "The place that I have chosen to set my name there."

1. *Historically, Jerusalem.* By God's appointment this city is called the "holy city;" because he chose it for the dwelling-place of his people, and the site for his temple. Hence the Psalmist: "The Lord hath chosen Zion, he hath chosen it for a dwelling-place for himself: this is my resting-place for ever: here will I dwell, because I have chosen it" (Ps. cxxxii.). For this reason it was holy, though the people by their wickedness had defiled it. Other towns and countries have been chosen by God to play an important part in working out his gracious purposes in the redemption of man, as Bethlehem, Nazareth, Babylon, Rome, &c. Jerusalem exalted above all other cities. The place, however, can make no one holy or acceptable before God: for "he chose not the man for the place's sake, but the place for the man's sake."—*Pilkington*. 2. *Typically, the Church militant.* The Christian Church is now to the world what the holy city was of old. There God dwells, and appoints his ordinances and manifests his glory. As in the holy city so in the Christian Church, there may be worldlings and aliens who nominally belong to the Church, but really have no right or portion therein. Membership in the Church does not necessarily involve spiritual life in the New Testament any more than it did in the Old Testament dispensation. "The Church is God's workshop, where his jewels are polishing for his palace and house; and those he especially esteems, and means to make most resplendent, he hath oftenest his tools upon."—*Leighton*. "Hypocrites are not real members, but excrescences of the Church, like falling hair or the

parings of the nails are of the body."—*Salter*. 3. *The Church triumphant.* The Church militant and the Church triumphant really one; like a city built on both sides of a river. There is but a stream of death between grace and glory. Heaven is the final home of God's chosen people. There he has recorded his name, and there doth he dwell in unclouded light. Often called the *New Jerusalem*.

II. A chosen people. "These are thy servants and thy people." His by separation from the surrounding heathen, by redemption from Egypt, by special and unnumbered favours. From these words we may gather who are God's elect. 1. *God's elect are they who recognize him as Lord.* "Thy servants." Entering his service they obey his behests, and in all things submit to his will. As servants who are diligent and dutiful have a right to the care and protection of their masters, so Jehovah's servants may reckon upon his providence and grace. Let the obedience and joyfulness of our lives proclaim the character of the God we serve, else the world may say of us, as Aigoland, king of Saragossa, said of certain lazars and poor people, whom he saw at the table of Charlemagne when he came to be baptized, "that he would not serve a God who did no more for his servants than had been done for those poor wretches." 2. *God's elect are they who recognize him as their king.* "And thy people." As such they render him regal homage, and honour all his laws, because they love his person. And as earthly subjects look up to their monarch and his government for protection and relief, so do the subjects of the King of kings look up to him for assistance and deliverance in their extremity. 3. *God's elect recognize him as their great*

Redeemer. "Whom thou hast redeemed," &c. Israel *only* thus redeemed, none others could claim this mark of electing grace. If not redeemed, then non-elect. Same mark of Divine election still holds good. Whatever men may imagine, only those are elect who show by their life that they have come out of spiritual bondage. Note concerning this redemption, (1) That it was a *Divine work*. "*Thou hast redeemed.*" An act worthy of God: impossible to any one but God: reflecting highest glory on the character of God. Nothing less than Divine power, joined with infinite love and unerring wisdom, could have accomplished the world's redemption through the atonement of Christ. (2) That it was a *work of surpassing difficulty*. "*By thy great power and by thy strong hand.*" The redemption from Egypt was difficult because of the waywardness of the Israelites, and the opposition of Pharaoh. The ransom of the race from the penalty of sin still more difficult, on account of the depravity of fallen humanity, and on account of the claims of God's inviolable law. The provision and subsequent government of Israel a work of gigantic and humanly insurmountable difficulty. Yet as Jehovah fed and led, and settled his people not only in the wilderness but in Canaan, so will he supply all the need of all his children. "He is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him" (Heb. vii. 25). (3) That it was a work *accomplished through human agency*. Moses was the leader and deliverer of Israel under God's direction. "*Thy strong hand*" may refer to his agency, as "*thy great power*" indicates the source of his strength. The second redemption required a human agent. Christ came as God's "*strong hand*" to lift up and lead out of captivity the enslaved human race.

Illustrations:—A senator related to his son the account of the book containing the names of illustrious members of the commonwealth. The son desired to see the outside. It was glorious to look upon. "Oh! let me open it," said the

son. "Nay," said the father, "'tis known only to the Council." "Then," said the son, "tell me if my name is there." "And that," said the father, "is a secret known only to the Council, and it cannot be divulged." Then he desired to know for what achievements the names were inscribed in that book. So the father told him; and related to him the achievements and noble deeds by which they had eternized their names. "Such," said he, "are written, and only such are written in this book." "And will my name be there," asked the son. "I cannot tell thee," said the father; "if thy deeds are like theirs, thou shalt be written in the book; if not, thou shalt not be written." And then the son consulted with himself; and he found that his whole deeds were playing, and singing, and drinking, and amusing himself; and he found that this was not noble, nor temperate, nor valiant. And as he could not read as yet his name he determined to make "his calling and election sure."

We may adopt Archbishop Leighton's beautiful illustration of a chain, which he describes as having its first and last link,—election and final salvation,—in heaven, in God's own hands; the middle one—effectual calling—being let down to the earth into the hearts of his children; and they laying hold of it, have sure hold of the other two, for no power can sever them.

"Though the mariner see not the pole-star, yet the needle of the compass that points to it, tells him which way he sails. Thus, the heart that is touched by the loadstone of Divine love, trembling with godly fear, and looking towards God in fixed believing, points at the love of election, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward, towards the haven of eternal rest. *He that loves may be sure that he was loved first*; and he that chooses God for his delight and portion, may conclude confidently that God hath chosen him to be one of those that shall enjoy him for ever; for that our love, and electing of him, is but the return and re-percussion of the beams of his love shining upon us."—*Salter*.

Suppose a rope cast down into the sea for the relief of a company of poor shipwrecked men ready to perish, and that the people in the ship, or on the shore, should cry out unto them to lay hold on the rope that they may be saved; were it not unreasonable and foolish curiosity for any of those poor distressed creatures, now at the point of death, to dispute whether the man who cast the rope did intend and purpose to save them or not, and so minding that which helpeth not, neglect the means of safety offered? Thus it is that Christ holdeth forth, as it were, a rope of mercy to poor drowned and lost sinners. It is our duty then, without any further dispute, to look upon it as a principle afterwards to be made good, that Christ hath gracious thoughts towards us: *but for the present to lay hold on the rope.*—*Rutherford*.

MODEST GOODNESS.

i. 11. *Thy servants, who desire to fear thy name.*

I. It counts it an honour to serve God in any capacity. "Thy servants."

1. *It regards God as Master as well as Father.* Dutiful obedience to explicit commands, required no less than filial to devotion. It surrenders not only affection, but will. 2. *It regards the meanest task in God's service as an unspeakable honour.* The lowest office in the court of an earthly monarch is a post of honour; how much more so the lowest footstool in the house of the King eternal. The service not a task, because offspring of love. (α)

II. It makes very humble professions before God. "Who desire to fear thy name."

1. *It dares not mention faultless conduct.* With Abraham it says, "I, that am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak unto the living God" (Gen. xviii. 27); with Jacob, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies" (Gen. xxxii. 10); with Asaph, "So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 22); and with Paul, "I am less than the least of all saints" (Eph. iii. 8). The Pharisee appealed to his virtuous conduct, and was rejected; the publican, to his unworthiness, and was accepted. This, a sphere of action and of trial, rather than of rapture and triumph. "Blessed is the man that feareth always." 2. *It makes profession only of good intentions.* "Who desire to fear thy name." Even Nehemiah can boast of nothing higher. The whole life of a Christian is nothing else but sanctum desiderium, a holy desire; seeking that perfection which cannot be fully attained on earth (Phil. iii. 12). 3. *It does not remain satisfied with good desires.* Many there are who cannot speak with assurance of any higher experience than the presence of holy purposes and intentions. They cannot yet say they *do* fear, or love him, but that they desire to do so. Encouraging promise for all such:—"Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness," &c. (Matt. v.). These desires are

proofs of something good, and pledges of something better. They are evidences of grace, and forerunners of glory. They are the pulse of the soul, indicating the state of spiritual health. But these desires must be active ones, issuing in realized power and purity, and Christ-like gentleness. Desires which issue in no effort to attain them are like the vain prayer of Balaam, who could say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. xxiii. 10); but who had no concern to live their life. Herod wished to see our Saviour work a miracle, but would not take a journey for the purpose. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" and would not wait for an answer. Desires are nothing without endeavours. (β)—*Jay*.

III. It cherishes a reverent fear of God. "Who desire to fear thy name."

1. *Not fear of punishment.* Such fear cast out by love. All fear that hath torment eradicated in the believer by the "expulsive power of a new affection." (γ) 2. *The filial fear of grieving an infinitely tender Father.* "God has three sorts of servants in the world; some are *slaves*, and serve him from a principle of fear; others are *hirelings*, and serve him for the sake of wages; and the last are *sons*, and serve him under the influence of love."—*Secker*.

Illustrations: (α) When Calvin was banished from ungrateful Geneva, he said, "Most assuredly if I had merely served man, this would have been a poor recompense; but it is my happiness that I have served Him who never fails to reward his servants to the full extent of his promise."

(β) Sir Joshua Reynolds, like many other distinguished persons, was never satisfied with his own efforts, however well they might satisfy others." When M. Mosnier, a French painter, was one day praising to him the excellence of one of his pictures, he replied, "Alas, Sir! I can only make sketches, sketches."

Virgil, who was called the prince of the Latin poets, was naturally modest, and of a timorous nature. When people crowded to gaze upon him, or pointed at him with the finger in raptures, the poet blushed, and stole away from them, and often hid himself in shops to escape the curiosity and admiration of the

public. The Christian is called upon to "let his light shine before men:" but then it must be with all meekness, simplicity, and modesty.

(γ) Pagan nations have always stood in awe of deities, whose wrath they have deprecated, and whose love they have never hoped for. Their worship is one of slavish joy-killing dread. In the East India Museum, in London, there is an elaborately carved ivory idol from India,

with twelve hands, and in every hand a different instrument of cruelty. On the door of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas, in Friburg, Switzerland, is a notice requesting the prayers of the charitable, for the souls of the departed, who are represented as being surrounded by purgatorial flames. Underneath is a contribution-box with this inscription, "Oh! rescue us; you at least who are our friends."

UNANSWERED PRAYERS.

i. 11. *Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, &c.*

Here is help urgently needed, earnestly solicited, yet unaccountably delayed. The prayer does not seem to have been answered until four months later, though offered continually. Prayer may remain unanswered—

I. Through some defect in the spirit of the suppliant. 1. *Want of submission.* The Lord's prayer is the model for all prayer. There we find three conditions preceding the only petition for temporal good, viz. "Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done," &c. These implicitly precede all true prayer. Unsubmissive prayers sometimes answered to teach men their folly in choosing their own way in preference to God's. Payson was asked, when under great bodily affliction, if he could see any particular reason for this dispensation. "No," he replied, "but I am as well satisfied as if I could see ten thousand; God's will is the very perfection of all reason." It is said that Dove, the Leeds murderer, was preserved from what appeared to be the certain fatal termination of an illness, by the passionately unsubmissive prayers of his mother, who lived to see her son led to the gallows. 2. *Weakness of faith.* "He that cometh unto God must believe," &c. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. xi. 6). This truth illustrated by most of Christ's miracles. 3. *Self-seeking motives.* God regards the spirit, and will grant nothing to gratify unhallowed and selfish ambition. We ask amiss if we seek for good that we may consume it on our lusts (Jas. iv. 3). Thus did Simon Magus desire the gift of the Holy Ghost for the sake of personal gain and fame, but was detected and punished (Acts viii. 9—13). (α)

4. *An unforgiving spirit.* "Let us lift up holy hands, *without wrath*," &c. (1 Tim. ii. 8). An uncharitable spirit condemns itself whenever it repeats the words, "Forgive us *our* trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." "If we regard iniquity in our heart God will not hear us" (Ps. lxxvi. 18). The importance of a forgiving spirit in approaching the throne of mercy is fully and clearly expressed in the opening sentences of the Communion Service. "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, draw near," &c. 5. *A superficial sense of want.* God only promises to satisfy real, not fancied wants. Until we come to feel the *pain* of want, not able fully to value heavenly gifts. God bestows few blessings where not wanted, or not valued.

II. Through some defect in the nature of the petition. 1. *It may be unsuitable.* This, not cause of delay in Nehemiah's case. The king's favour was necessary to the success of his enterprise. Good men err in judgment. God may answer prayer, but not as we expected. The means desired may not be the most suitable for the attainment of the end contemplated. 2. *It may be harmful.* Child may ask for a razor to play with. Father refuses because life would be endangered. Our Father loves *his* children too well to grant them what he knows would ruin both body and soul. 3. *It may be impracticable.* Whilst true that nothing is impossible with God, also true that he has chosen to govern the moral and material universe by certain fixed laws, some of which he never interferes with, and others only for very momentous reasons. Our

prayers may require the over-riding of these laws on insufficient grounds; hence their failure. This he will make known to the sincere suppliant by the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Ghost.

III. Through immaturity in the conditions required to give full value to the blessing sought. This probably the cause of the delay in Nehemiah's case. He was a good and upright man, and his petition was unimpeachable, for it was eventually granted. Circumstances were not ripe. Answers are sometimes delayed: 1. *Because God's agents are not yet in full sympathy with the work.* King not yet in favourable mind, people not yet driven to extremity. All God's agents are to be educated in his school for his work. When their training complete he brings them forth and uses them, not before. Thus Moses, David, Paul, &c. were educated. 2. *Circumstances are not yet congenial.* Every great enterprise needs favourable surroundings for its inception, as much as the seed requires good soil. Bury the acorn in the sand, and it remains barren. Cast the corn-seed into the ocean, and it produces no harvest. Even so, the most laudable enterprise, the most desirable reformation, planted

in the midst of unfriendly circumstances will come to nought. Germany was ready for Luther, England for Wesley, Scotland for Moody, hence their success where others failed. 3. *Because the time was not opportune.* The hour had not yet come. God's times are in his own hands. Of the times and seasons knoweth no man. Having done all, it is our duty to wait the moving of the pillar. At the right moment God will manifest himself, and appear on behalf of his people.

Illustration:—(a) It is recorded of an architect of the name of Cnidus, that having built a watch-tower for the king of Egypt, to warn mariners from certain dangerous rocks, he caused his own name to be engraved in large letters on a stone in the wall, and then having covered it with plaster, he inscribed on the outside, in golden letters, the name of the king of Egypt, as though the thing were done for his glory. He was cunning enough to know that the waves would ere long wear away the coat of plastering, and that then his own name would appear, and his memory be handed down to successive generations. How many are there who, whilst affecting to seek only the glory of God and His Church, are really seeking whatever is calculated to gratify self-love. Could the outer coat of their pretences be removed, we should see them as they really are, desirous not of God's glory, but of their own — *Trench.*

MAN'S EQUALITY BEFORE GOD.

i. 11. *In the sight of this man.*

The familiar way in which Nehemiah speaks of the king before God suggests—

I. That the greatest earthly potentates are themselves subjects of a higher King. They equally under his laws and subject to his will. (a) They and their meanest subjects on a perfect level in the heavenly court. God no respecter of persons. This thought should enable us to conquer the fear of man. This thought should make us satisfied with our lot. Their Master and Judge and ours the same. (β)

II. That the most powerful monarchs are but men. "*This man.*" 1. *Fallen men.* "All we like sheep," &c. "There is no difference," &c. "None righteous, no not one" (Ps. xiv. 2; Rom. iii. 9; Isa. liii. 6; Ps. cxliii.

2. All needing the same mercy; all requiring to seek it in the same way (humbly), and on the same terms (repentance and faith). "All stand before judgment-seat of Christ" (Rom. xiv. 10; 2 Cor. v. 10). 2. *Suffering men.* Liable to same pains, infirmities, be-reavements, accidents, &c. One touch of nature makes all the world akin. One pang of suffering too. 3. *Dying men.* All amenable to king of terrors. He enters the palace as well as poor-house. Queen Elizabeth begged for another hour to live, but death was inexorable. It lays the monarch low with the same stroke that smites his meanest subject. Honours thus fleeting not to be compared with the everlasting joys which are at God's right hand.

III. That God is no respecter of human distinctions. 1. *Not that he disapproves of the ordinary distinctions of social position.* This inevitable. If all men made equal to-day, some would have risen and others have fallen by to-morrow. Masters and servants, monarchs and subjects, teachers and taught, there must of necessity be as long as human society exists. The ideas of the socialist contrary alike to Divine law and practical utility. Only before God are men in any sense equal. 2. *But that he regards character as everything; the accidentals of social position as nothing.* What a man is, not what he has, commends him to God. (γ)

IV. That the best means of influencing earthly monarchs is to secure the aid of Jehovah. So did Nehemiah. The propriety of this act seen in his management of the undertaking. Inter-course with God will best prepare for dealings with men. When we thus address ourselves to God, difficulties vanish. "His kingdom ruleth over all." Every event under his direction; every character under his control. When Herod imprisoned Peter, the Church assembled together, not to draw up a petition and address it to the king; but to seek God's interposition. They applied, not to the servant, but the master; to one who had Herod completely under check: "Prayer was made, without ceasing, of the Church unto God for

him." What was the consequence? "When Herod would have brought him forth," &c. (Acts xii. 6). Solomon says, "The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. xxi. 1). Eastern monarchs were absolute; yet God had them more under his command than the husbandman has a direction of the water in a meadow. There is a two-fold dominion which God exercises over the mind of man. 1. *By the agency of his grace*, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. From a furious persecutor, he becomes at once an apostle. 2. *By the agency of his providence.* History is full of this.—*Jay.*

Illustrations :—(a) What are they when they stand upon the highest pinnacles of worldly dignities, but bladders swelled up with the breath of popularity? nothings set astrut; chessmen, that on the board play the kings and nobles, but in the bag are of the same material, and rank with others.—*Bp. Hopkins.*

(β) King Canute was one day flattered by his courtiers on account of his power. Then he ordered his throne to be placed by the sea-side. The tide was rolling in, and threatened to drown him. He commanded the waves to stop. Of course they did not. Then he said to his flatterers, "Behold how small is the might of kings."

(γ) With God there is no freeman but his servant, though in the galleys; no slave but the sinner, though in a palace; none noble but the virtuous, if never so basely descended; none rich but he that possesseth God, even in rags; none wise but he that is a fool to the world and himself; none happy but he whom the world pities. Let me be free, noble, rich, wise, happy to God.—*Bp. Hall.*

ADDENDA TO CHAPTER I.

I. 3. SIN RUINS A KINGDOM.

I. If there be a moral governor of the universe, sin must provoke him. A righteous God must love righteousness; a holy God, holiness; a God of order, order; a God of benevolence, benevolence; and accordingly he must abhor all that is opposite to these. Hence, it is said, that "God is angry with the wicked every day; the wicked

shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all workers of iniquity." And this is essential to every lovely and reverential view we can take of God. For who could adore a being who professed to govern the world, and suffered the wicked to go on with impunity.

II. If sin provoke God, he is able to punish it. He is "the Lord of Hosts,

the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." All the elements are his. Every creature obeys his nod, from an archangel to a worm. How idle therefore to talk of armies, navies, and alliances, and say after comparing force with force, "Oh! the enemy cannot come!" He cannot come unless God send him; but he can come easily enough if he should. Is anything too hard for the Lord, when he would either show mercy or execute wrath.

III. Bodies of men are punishable in this world only. In eternity there are no families, churches, nations. If therefore a country is to be destroyed, it is tried, condemned, and executed here. When we see an individual sinner prospering in the world, and not immediately punished, our faith is not staggered; for we know that "his day is coming." But if a wicked people were allowed to escape, we should be confounded, we should ask, "Where is the God of Judgment?" For in this case they *are* not punished now; and they *cannot* be punished hereafter.

IV. There is a tendency in the very nature of sin to injure and ruin a country. It violates all the duties of relative life. It destroys subordination. It relaxes the ties which bind mankind together, and makes them selfish and mean. It renders men enemies to each other. Social welfare cannot survive the death of morals and virtue.

V. God's dealings with guilty nations are confirmed both by his word and all human history. He has invariably punished them in due time. Witness the state of Nineveh, Babylon, and others. Thus the nation Samuel addressed put his declaration to the trial and found it true. A succession of severe judgments befell them, till at last wrath came upon them to the uttermost, and "the Romans came and took away both their place and nation."

VI. God always gives previous intimation of his coming to judge a nation. So that were men not blind and deaf, they must see and hear his coming. When you see the body wasting away by disease, and every complaint growing more inveterate, you

suspect that death will be the consequence; it is already begun. Christ said, "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. . . Ye hypocrites! ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?"

VII. If God has favoured a nation with the revelation of his will, their sins are aggravated by means of this light. "Where much is given, much will be required." "He that knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." Thus, a heathen country committing the very same sins with a country enlightened with the Gospel, is far less criminal. A country overspread with superstition, where the Bible is scarcely known, would be far less guilty than a country favoured with a purer worship, and where evangelical instruction is open to all.

VIII. When God has distinguished a people by singular instances of his favour, that people will be proportionally criminal, unless they distinguish themselves by their devotedness to him. Thus God from time to time aggravated the sins of the Jews. "He made them ride upon the high places of the earth," &c. "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked," &c.

IX. When a nation is under the corrections of the Almighty, they are eminently sinful if they disregard the tokens of his wrath. Hence Isaiah says, "In that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weeping and to mourning, &c., and behold joy and gladness; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Jeremiah also says, "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."

X. Shameless sinning is a sure proof of general corruption. And where is there a man who is not more ashamed of a threadbare coat than a dishonest action? To fail in business, and defraud innocent sufferers of their lawful property, is no longer scandalous.

Impurity is tolerated. Behold the experiments which fashion has tried upon the reserve, the decency, the purity of woman! Learn—1. Who is the worst enemy of his country—*the sinner*.

2. Who is the best friend—*the Christian*. “By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.”—*Jay, abridged*.

i. 7. FORGOTTEN SINS REMEMBERED.

I. We are all chargeable with faults. Testimony of Scripture and conscience are both against us. “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.” “They are all gone out of the way: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Eccl. vii. 20; Rom. iii. 12). David feared God, and hated evil, yet needed to pray, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Ps. xix. 12). James, though an apostle, affirms, “In many things we offend all.” John was beloved above all the apostles, and bore most of his Master’s image, yet he declares, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 Jno. i. 8). “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” This fact is confirmed by everything we feel within us, and observe without us. What faults? We have forgotten the Son of God, the Lord of life and glory. We are chargeable with ingratitude, not against an earthly benefactor, but a heavenly one. Every forbidden action that we have done, every sinful word that we have spoken, every irregular thought that we have entertained, or unhallowed wish that we have harboured in our breast, accumulates our load of guilt.

II. We are liable to forget our faults. Men have convictions of sin, but they stifle them. Amidst the pleasures or employments of time, they lose even the recollection of their guilt; and go forward in the same course, suspecting no danger, till utter destruction overtakes them. 1. *Through ignorance of the true nature of sin.* Its malignity is not properly understood. Men think of sin as a light matter: if it inconvenience them, they exclaim against it; if not, they practise it with little compunction or concern. They do not reflect on what sin is in the sight of God, nor think as they ought of its result in a future world; and hence

they forget it. 2. *Through self-love.* Self-love when regulated is laudable and useful; because it leads to the hatred of what is evil, and to the pursuit of what is good. But that love of self which possesses and actuates thousands, is little different from the love of sin; they love indolence, sensual gratification, and ease; they resemble a man with a diseased limb, who chooses death by fatal degrees, rather than amputation. 3. *Through hurry of business.* 4. *Through elevation in worldly circumstances.* Great numbers, from the pressing importunity of their secular concerns, from the eager desire of getting forward in the world, forget their souls, forget their sins, forget the Saviour, and abide in the most dangerous state of folly and insensibility.

III. Various circumstances are adapted to remind us of our faults.

1. *Providential occurrences.* These regard ourselves, the affliction of our persons, or our immediate connections. The case of the widow of Zarephath an illustration. She had one son; the prophet Elijah resided in her house; no affluence was there: but by him, the Lord made her barrel of meal not to waste, and her cruse of oil not to fail. Suddenly her son was taken from her by the stroke of death; hear what she said to the prophet, “Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” (1 Kings xvii. 18). Had her son lived, and Providence continued to smile, probably her convictions would have remained asleep. Other providential occurrences regard the condition of those about us, and thus strike our observation. We witness sometimes the difficulties in which others are involved; we think of what occasioned such difficulties, and are reminded of similar causes in ourselves, which might have produced similar effects. An idle man sees in another the effects of

indolence,—that he is reduced to poverty, and clothed in rags ; a drunkard observes in another the effects of intemperance,—that his health is impaired his circumstances embarrassed, and his character ruined. These things are adapted to awaken conviction, to bring a man's own faults to remembrance. Illustration furnished by the account of “the woman taken in adultery” (Jno. viii. 7—9); Joseph's interview with his brethren (Gen. xlii. 21), and Belshazzar's feast (Dan. v. 1—7). In each case the men remembered their faults. 2. *The ministry of God's word.* This word is profitable not only for “doctrine and instruction,” but also for “correction and reproof.” See this in the case of the Jews who stoned Stephen. “They were cut to the heart” (Acts vii. 45). The case of Felix also another illustration in point. Whilst Paul “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled” (Acts xxiv. 25). When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, “they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts ii. 37). David and Nathan (2 Sam. xii. 7—12). “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. iii. 20).

IV. When we are reminded of our faults we should be ready to confess them. “Confess your faults one to another” (Jas. v. 16). This gives no countenance to the arbitrary practice of popish confessions ; for according to this passage the people have as much right to demand confession from the priests, as the priests have from the people. It enjoins candour, and open confession of blame, when professing Christians have offended one another. Confession also must be made to God.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper ; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. xxviii. 13). This clearly implies that they can have no mercy who do not confess their sins. Let a man proudly persist in maintaining his innocency ; let him think highly of what he calls his moral rectitude ; let him vainly imagine that his good deeds outweigh his bad ones ; or let him sink into a state of obstinate indifference—that man is certainly not in the way of mercy. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 Jno. i. 8, 9). What sins ? Lament before God a hard heart, a proud heart, a corrupt heart. Lament before him a fretful temper, a peevish, a passionate temper. Lament the weakness of your faith, the deadness of your hope, the languor of your love, the coldness of your zeal, the inefficiency of all your desires and resolutions.

V. Confession of faults should always be attended with real amendment. This is an incumbent duty ; for what is repentance ? It includes a disposition to undo all the evil which we have done. Zaccheus' repentance was of the right kind, for he offered to make restitution. “Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore him fourfold” (Luke xix. 8). Repentance is nothing without reformation ; and reformation, in many instances, is a mere name without restitution : “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, *I will not offend any more.* If I have done iniquity, I will do no more” (Job xxxiv. 31, 32).—*Kidd, abridged.*

i. 10. AN ELECT PEOPLE.

I. True believers are the objects of a special choice. Note—1. *Its author.* “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” We cannot, without contradicting Scripture, dispute the fact that God's people are a *chosen people*—chosen of God. Do not object to the

term ; remember where you find it ; seek rather to understand the subject, and objections will subside. Whilst God *injures* none, surely he may confer special benefits on some. Let it be granted that the choice of some implies that others are not chosen ; yet who can gainsay the

language of St. Paul, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" &c. (Rom. ix. 20). "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Doubtless he shall!—of this we may rest assured: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."

2. *The date of this choice.* "From the beginning." This expression must be explained by similar passages which relate to the same subject. St. Peter says, "Ye are a chosen generation, elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Pet. ii. 9; i. 2). St. Paul, "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." Foreknowledge leads us back to some period previous to the existence of those persons; and there is no text more explicit than that which occurs in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "According as he hath chosen us in him (Christ), before the foundation of the world." Now, what was before the foundation of the world must have been in eternity; for we cannot conceive a point of time, before time commenced. Time is a parenthesis in eternity; a limited duration which regards creatures. Here then is taught the *freeness* of this choice. If it was from the beginning, it was before man had his being: consequently there could be no worthiness in us, or any of our race, influencing the Most High to such a choice.

3. *The end of this choice.* "To salvation." The Israelites as a nation were chosen of God, but not all of them to salvation, for many fell; and we are admonished to take heed lest we "fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. iv. 11). The twelve were chosen to the office of apostleship, but not all of them to salvation, for Judas was of their number. "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jo. vi. 70). Do you ask, "What is salvation?" It is heaven. It includes the complete deliverance from all evil, and the full possession of all good; it includes an entire freedom from sin, and the constant enjoyment of purity and peace; it includes an everlasting release from all that is painful and distressing, and the

endless fruition of whatever can satisfy and exalt the immortal mind, the eternal fruition of God himself.

II. True believers are persons of a peculiar character. The people of God are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." They are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, "that they should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Ephes. i. 4).

1. *They are believers of the truth.* Chosen to salvation, "through belief of the truth." Not possible to give a more concise definition of faith than here—"the truth;" hence our Lord said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." *Believing* the truth is receiving it as the record of God, in such a way as to feel affected and influenced by it according to the nature of the things which it regards. Are we believers of the truth? If not, we have no Scriptural evidence of our election of God to salvation.

2. *They are partakers of the Spirit.* "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9). A man is not born again but of the Spirit; and the new birth or regeneration is the commencement of the new life. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. iii. 16). Not without reason are we admonished, "Quench not the Spirit."

3. *They are the subjects of sanctification.* The Holy Spirit produces it, and gradually promotes it; they are chosen to salvation "through sanctification of the Spirit." Sanctification is holiness, and there is no way of attaining holiness but by "the Spirit of Holiness." Sanctification is the best evidence of faith; it is also the best possible mark of election to salvation. We have proof that we are "of God," only so far as we are *like* God. Is he our Father? Where then is resemblance to him? If multitudes of professors examine themselves by this test, it is to be feared they will have little hope left of their interest in everlasting love.—*Kidd.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Benevolence. 1. It is said of Lord Chief Justice Hale, that he frequently invited his poor neighbours to dinner, and made them sit at table with himself. If any of them were sick, so that they could not come, he would send provisions to them from his own table. He did not confine his bounties to the poor of his own parish, but diffused supplies to the neighbouring parishes as occasion required. He always treated the old, the needy, and the sick with the tenderness and familiarity that became one who considered they were of the same nature with himself, and were reduced to no other necessities but such as he himself might be brought to. Common beggars he considered in another view. If any of these met him in his walks, or came to his door, he would ask such as were capable of working, why they went about so idly. If they answered, it was because they could not get employment, he would send them to some field, to gather all the stones in it, and lay them in a heap, and then paid them liberally for their trouble. This being done, he used to send his carts, and cause the stones to be carried to such places of the highway as needed repair. 2. "I often think," says Coleridge, "with pleasure, of the active *practical* benevolence of Salter. His rides were often sixty, averaging more than thirty miles a day, over bad roads, and in dark nights; yet not once was he known to refuse a summons, though quite sure that he would receive no remuneration; nay, not sure that it would not be necessary to supply wine, or cordials, which, in the absence of the landlord of his village, must be at his own expense. This man was generally pitied by the affluent and the idle, on the score of his constant labours, and the drudgery which he almost seemed to court; yet with little reason, for I never knew a man more to be envied, or more cheerful, more invariably kind, or more patient; he was always kind from real kindness and delicacy of feeling, never being even for a moment angry.

Prayer must be submissive. 1. A Christian widow in London saw, with great alarm, her only child taken dangerously ill. As the illness increased she became almost distracted from a dread of losing her child; at length, it became so extremely ill, and so convulsed, that she kneeled down by the bed, deeply affected, and in prayer said, "Now, Lord, thy will be done." From that hour the child began to recover, till health was perfectly restored. 2. Lord Bolingbroke once asked Lady Huntingdon how she reconciled prayer to God for particular blessings, with absolute resignation to the Divine will. "Very easily," answered her ladyship, "just as if I were to offer a petition to a monarch, of

whose kindness and wisdom I had the highest opinion. In such a case my language would be, —I wish you to bestow on me such or such a favour; but your Majesty knows better than I, how far it would be agreeable to you, or right in itself, to grant my desire. I therefore content myself with humbly presenting my petition, and leave the event of it entirely to you." 3. The late Mr. Kilpin of Exeter writes, "I knew a case in which the minister praying over a child apparently dying, said, 'If it be thy will spare——' The poor mother's soul, yearning for her beloved, exclaimed, 'It *must* be his will, I cannot bear *ifs*.'" The minister stopped. To the surprise of many the child recovered; and the mother, after almost suffering martyrdom by him while a stripling, lived to see him hanged before he was twenty-two! It is good to say, "Not my will, but thine be done."

Modest goodness. 1. Two or three years before the death of John Newton, when his sight was so dim that he was no longer able to read, an aged friend and brother in the ministry called on him to breakfast. Family prayer succeeded. It was the good man's custom to make a few remarks upon the passage read. After the reading of the text, "By the grace of God I am what I am," he paused for some moments, and then uttered the following affecting soliloquy:—"I am not what I *ought* to be! Ah, how imperfect and deficient. I am not what I *wish* to be. I am not what I *hope* to be. Soon, soon, I shall put off mortality, and with mortality, all sin and imperfection. Yet though I am not what I *ought* to be, nor what I *wish* to be, nor what I *hope* to be, I can truly say I am not what I *once* was, a slave to sin and Satan, and I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' Let us pray." 2. "An individual," says a missionary, "employed in the translation of the Scriptures at a station where I resided, on arriving at the passage, 'Now are we the sons of God' (1 Jno. iii. 2), came running to me in great haste, exclaiming, No, no, it is too much; allow me to render it, 'Now are we permitted to kiss his feet.' A simple and beautiful representation of those feelings with which Christians should ever contemplate the dignity of their character, and the honour conferred upon them." 3. Dr. Lathrop was a man of generous piety, but much opposed to the noisy zeal that seeketh the praise of men. A young divine, who was much given to enthusiastic cant, one day said to him, "Do you suppose you have any *real religion*?" "None to *speak of*," was the excellent reply.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.] 1. **Nisan**] Called Abib in Exod. xiii. 4, first month in Hebrew national year. Corresponds to parts of our March and April. 3. **Let the king live for ever**] (Heb. hammelek Polam yihyeh.) (Comp. 1 Kings i. 31; Dan. ii. 4; vi. 6—21.) The mere formula of address, like our "God save the Queen." Even Daniel used it without compunction. **The place of my fathers' sepulchres**] The Persians regarded their burial-places as peculiarly sacred. 6. **The queen also sitting by him**] Some have thought this was Esther, but "Shegal" refers to the principal wife of the king. Damaspia was the name of the chief wife according to Ctesias. 7. **The governors**] (Heb. pahawoth, modern pacha.) Oriental name for viceroy. **Beyond the river**] *i. e.* Euphrates. 8. **Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest**] may have been a Jew. Name, Hebrew. Word translated "forest" is "*pardes*," our "paradise." It signifies a *walled round place*, a preserve of trees. Probably a royal park of which Asaph was keeper. **The palace which appertained to the house**] Probably Solomon's palace, situated at the south-east corner of the temple-area, was next to *the house*; *i. e.*, the temple as the house of God (2 Chron. xxiii. 12—15). **The house that I shall enter into**] Some think this refers also to the temple, which Nehemiah would enter into to inspect; more probably the house where he would dwell during his stay in Jerusalem. 10. **Sanballat the Horonite**] (Beth-horon, in full.) Two Horons in Palestine, a few miles north of Jerusalem; also Horonaim in Moab. Sanballat, probably a native of the last mentioned, was a Moabite; and satrap of Samaria under the Persians. Tobiah, his vizier or chief adviser. Origin of name Sanballat uncertain. **Tobiah, the servant, the Ammonite**] Tobiah, a Jewish name (Ezra ii. 60; Zech. vi. 10). Probably a renegade Jew, who had become a slave, and had risen by his talents and cunning to be Sanballat's chief officer, hence the epithet, "Tobiah, the slave." 13. **The gate of the valley**] (Heb. Sha'or hag-gai.) Probably overlooking valley of Hinnom, called in Jer. ii. 23 simply "the valley." It was about 1200 feet south of the present Jaffa gate. The Septuagint calls it Portam Galilæ; the gate of dead men's skulls, because that way they went to Golgotha. **The dragon well**] So called either because some venomous serpent had been found there, or because the waters ran out of the mouth of a brazen serpent. (Heb. Fountain of the sea-monster.) **The dung port**] (Rather, *Rubbish-gate*.) The gate near which the refuse of the city was cast, and burned. Directly before that part of Hinnom known as Tophet (Jer. vii. 31, 32; xix. 6—14). 14. **The gate of the fountain**] A gate in front of the pool of Siloam (ch. iii. 15). **The king's pool**] (Berechath hammelek.) The pool of Siloam, so called because it watered the king's garden. **There was no place for the beast that was under me to pass**] The ruin was great, and the rubbish so accumulated, that Nehemiah could not pursue his course along the wall any further, but was obliged to go down into the valley of the brook Kidron (Nachal, *the brook*.) 15. **And viewed the wall**] That which was left of it. 16. **The rulers**] A Persian word (Seganim) signifying the executive officers of the colony. **Nor to the nobles**] (Heb. white ones.) Among the Jews great men robed in white, as among the Romans in scarlet or purple. Herod and Christ (Luke xxiii. 11; Matt. xxvii. 28). 19. **Geshem the Arabian**] Lieutenant of Arabia under the king of Persia, or chief of those Arabs whom Sargon had settled in Samaria (Rawlinson's *Anc. Mon.*, vol. ii. p. 146).

HOMILETIC CONTENTS OF CHAPTER II.

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DIVINE INTERPOSITION.

ii. 1—8. *And it came to pass in the month Nisan, &c.*

THE first chapter occupied with account of state of Jerusalem and Nehemiah's grief and prayer. This opens with the relation of those circumstances which led

to the fulfilment of his desires, and the accomplishment of his purposes. We learn from text—

I. That God's interposition was opportune. "It came to pass *in the month Nisan*" (v. 1). The best month, because the one chosen by God. Chosen by God because the best. Note—1. *That God's plans are worked out with the utmost precision.* Trace this in Bible. Often find expressions such as—"In due time," "Fulness of time," "Appointed time," "Mine hour is not yet come," "A set time," &c. God's timepiece never gains or loses. All his plans carried out with unfailing accuracy. He is neither slack, "as some men count slackness," in fulfilling his threats or his promises. Many details, apparently insignificant, combine to work out the most magnificent plans. A loop is a small thing, yet most gorgeous tapestry woven in single loops. A link a small thing, yet chain depends on support of every link. Trifles are links in the chain of God's providential government, or rather there are no trifles. Illustrate by complex machinery of Lancashire cotton, or Coventry silk, or Kidderminster carpet machinery, which whilst wonderfully intricate, works out the appointed pattern with utmost precision and accuracy. Yet all human exactness fails in comparison with God's perfect accuracy. 2. *That God often interferes on his people's behalf when they least expect it.* Through not discerning God's methods of working, they get discouraged, and think themselves overlooked. Whilst we look for him to appear in one way he comes in another, and whilst we mournfully strain our eyes down one path, lo, he comes by another. Our most unlikely times are God's most favourable ones. 3. *That God generally interferes on his people's behalf in their most urgent extremity.* It was so here. Nehemiah so distressed that his countenance was sad for first time. The case of the Jews was becoming desperate. God interferes in their extremity as he had done on the shores of the Red Sea—(1) To try their faith, (2) To elicit their gratitude, (3) To impress upon them their dependence upon him. The text suggests—

II. That God's interposition required human co-operation. God's agents are of two kinds, willing and unwilling, allied and non-allied. Both of these found in this history. 1. *Allied.* As Esther came to the kingdom, so Nehemiah to his office, for such a time as this (Esth. iv. 14). Though he was a prisoner, a stranger, of an alien religion, yet is he God's agent as well as the king's servant. Note concerning him,—(1) That he was *duly qualified* for his appointed work. *Mentally* he possessed forethought (ch. ii. 5), tact (ch. v. 5), and ingenuity (ch. iii.). His address to Artaxerxes a marvel of clever pleading. Words carefully chosen, respect humbly paid to rank, superstitious reverence for burial-grounds introduced. No argument more powerful with an Eastern monarch. *Spiritually*, he was richly endowed with every grace required in so difficult a work. Courage, sympathy, generosity, and profound piety all combined to make him an eminently spiritual man. Such agents God chooses for important enterprises, utilizing great endowments for arduous tasks. Note, (2) That he was *favourably situated*. When God has work for his servants to do, he by his providence places them where they can do it. Nehemiah evidently a favourite with Artaxerxes, from fact of his having chosen him to this important office, over the heads of the Persian nobles. Had he been otherwise situated, or appointed to any other office, he would not so readily have found access to the king's ear. God appoints our lot and circumstances, and requires us to make the best of them, and not seek to leave them, with the idea that we can best serve him elsewhere. Note, (3) That he was *rightly actuated*. No personal ambition inspired his petition, but pure, unalloyed, unselfish desire for the prosperity of God's Church, and the holy City. No desire for gain, for he used his fortune in feeding the poor, and entertaining the returning exiles in his own house at Jerusalem. They who are engaged in God's work must lay aside all thoughts of worldly gain or personal honour. Reward there is, but not usually of a worldly sort. 2. *Un-allied.* God employs unconscious agents as well as willing ones. "As he put small thoughts into the heart of Ahasuerus for great purposes" (Esth. vi. 1), so here

he caused a heathen prince to favour a hostile religion, and to defend a people whom his subjects hated. God even employs his enemies (though not in the same sense in which he employs his friends), to carry out his purposes. Pharaoh, Philistines, Chaldeans, Romans, &c.

III. That God's interposition was accompanied by providential coincidences. All these known to Divine omniscience and taken into account. 1. *Nehemiah was unusually sad.* "I had not been beforetime sad in his presence." No mourner might be seen in Ahasuerus' court (Esth. iv. 4). Momus wished that men had windows in their breasts, that their thoughts might be seen. This not necessary, for "a merry heart maketh a glad countenance; but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken" (Prov. xv. 13). Nehemiah had been afflicting his soul for four months. No wonder he betrayed it in his countenance. The Hebrews say that a man's inside is turned out, and discovered in oculis, in loculis, in poculis, in his eyes, purse, and cup. 2. *The king was unusually friendly.* Most Eastern monarchs would have condemned him at once either to banishment or death. Artaxerxes might have done so at another time. *Sad* looks were, in their eyes, *bad* looks, and savoured of assassination: but love thinketh no evil, and the king had confidence in his servant. 3. *The queen also was present.* Not Esther, the queen-mother, for Hebrew word signifies wife. "Because 'the queen sat by,' it is probable that there was some solemn feast that day; for the queens of Persia used not to come into the king's presence, but when they were called by name, as it is written in the book of Esther." This might be the cause of Nehemiah's great fear: but would also be in his favour. The presence of a woman, even without her personal intercession, would temper any harshness the king might feel, and thus aid the suppliant's suit.

DISINTERESTED LOVE FOR A SUFFERING CHURCH.

ii. 1—8. *And it came to pass, &c.*

I. Its sorrow. "Why is thy countenance sad?" &c. (v. 2). 1. *In spite of personal prosperity.* This often hardens heart and deadens sympathies. So long as their own homes are flourishing many care little how God's house fares. This cannot satisfy a truly good man who has the welfare of God's cause at heart. No measure of personal prosperity will compensate for spiritual dearth and deadness in the Church. 2. *In the very midst of social festivities.* The revelry of the banquet could not repress the wretchedness of his heart, for whilst he was in the midst of rejoicing and mirth his spirit was not there. The inward grief was stronger than outward surroundings, and broke through all restraint. The wound of a broken heart cannot be healed by any outward gaiety of circumstance.

II. Its confession. "Why should not my countenance be sad?" (v. 3). 1. *It is not ashamed of the people of God.* "The city the place of my father's sepulchres." Surrounded by Persian nobles not an easy matter to thus avow friendship for an alien and oppressed people. Many temptations to expedient silence would have to be overcome. Much was risked by this avowal. Much probably to be gained by ignoring them. True piety is courageous. It says, "Thy people shall be my people" (Ruth i.), for richer for poorer, for better for worse, at all hazards and in all times. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. xvii. 17). "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24). 2. *Not ashamed of poor relations.* When men rise from a low estate into high circles they readily forget those who once were equals, unwilling to betray their humble origin. Such pride always despicable as useless. No disgrace to have poor relations. The disgrace is in disowning them. Nehemiah not guilty of such folly or cowardice. He not only acknowledges, but pleads for them. 3. *Not afraid of personal danger.* Royal displeasure no trifle under the sway of Oriental despots. Witness recent events in Turkey. Thrones overturned by plots and intrigues continually. The nearer the

throne, the more likely to incur suspicion. Artaxerxes had come to the kingdom through intrigue and bloodshed. Would be naturally vigilant and wary on this account. Hence the danger incurred by one even so favoured as Nehemiah, when he dared to avow sympathy with a captive and recently conquered people inhabiting a neighbouring province. Fervent love always self-forgetful. It confers not with flesh and blood, but willingly incurs danger for sake of its object. This, type of Christ's love for his Church.

III. Its petition. "And I said unto the king," &c. (v. 5). 1. *It seeks help from God.* "I prayed unto the God of heaven" (v. 5). This, first step. God has more interest in his Church than any other, and can do more. If his aid be secured, it matters little who else fails. If his denied, none can do much. 2. *It craves human assistance.* "If it please the king, let letters be given me," &c. (v. 7). Recognizes the principle that God always works by human agency, and helps man by man, to teach him lessons of mutual sympathy and mutual dependence. 3. *It asks permission to give its own aid, and that with self-denial.* Nehemiah not one who would only work at others' expense. No bargain for costs or travelling expenses. He asks that he may be permitted to engage in an enterprise that will considerably diminish his private resources, and involve constant and heavy personal sacrifices. If we desire success in great reformations we must be prepared to make great sacrifices. Our gifts joined with God's, will accomplish almost anything. We have no right to expect God to render his assistance where we withhold our own.

IV. Its joy. "So it pleased the king to send me" (v. 6). 1. *Its prayer is granted.* Both Jehovah and Artaxerxes looked favourably upon his request. When prayer is thus graciously answered, men should rejoice and speak good of the name of the Lord. Thus did the royal Psalmist often extol Jehovah's name. 2. *Its way is providentially opened.* And this more prosperously than he could have anticipated. Not only permission granted to leave Persia for a time, but also to take with him an escort; and full authority to build, and command supplies, when he arrived at Jerusalem (v. 7, 8). Thus does God cause our cup to overflow with mercy, giving us far more than we deserve, and more than we either asked or had reason to expect. Not only *out of*, but *according to*, his riches in glory, does he supply his children's wants. A millionaire might give a penny *out of* his abundance; but not if he gave *according to* (in proportion to) his riches. Then must he give what would be a fortune to a poor man. Even so, God gives not grudgingly, or stintedly, but royally. "It was but ask, and have; and so it is betwixt God and his people. When there was a discussion amongst some holy men as to which was the most profitable trade, one answered, beggary; it is the hardest, and the richest trade. Common beggary is the commonest and easiest, but he meant prayer. A courtier gets more by one suit often than a tradesman or merchant haply with twenty years' labour; so doth a faithful prayer."—*Trapp.*

SUBJECT AND SOVEREIGN.

ii. 1, 2. *And I took up wine, and gave it to the king, &c.*

I. He did not allow his duty to God to clash with his duty to his sovereign. His religion not diminish his civility. "If it please the king." "Fear God, and honour the king," both enjoined in apostolic precept. He had been taken from his native land and placed under another king, whom it was his duty to serve and obey, in all quietness and meekness, until God ordered his lot

otherwise. So lived Pharaoh, Daniel, Mardocheus, Ezra, and others. Jeremiah and Baruch taught the Jews thus to pray for those under whose sway they were living as captives, "Pray for the life of Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar his son; seek the peace of that country whither ye be carried away captives" (Jer. xxix.; Baruch i.). St. Peter taught the Christians that servants

should not forsake their masters, though they did not believe (1 Pet. ii.). Both St. Peter and St. Paul command the faithful wife to abide by her unfaithful husband (1 Cor. vii. ; 1 Pet. iii.). The Scriptures enjoin faithfulness, duty, and obedience toward all men, so far as we offend not God thereby. Duty to God and duty to man two aspects of same life. One requires the other. Each incomplete, being alone. The more efficiently we discharge one, the more perfectly do the other. Neither may be made a substitute for the other. "This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

II. He did not allow spiritual exercises to interfere with the discharge of secular duties. He prayed incessantly, yet failed not in discharge of duties as cupbearer. The believer should be "diligent in business," as well as "fervent in spirit," lest he bring reproach upon religion. Spiritual activity no excuse for neglecting secular duty. To be slothful in business will quench devotion as fatally as to pursue business with inordinate affection. The hardest devotion healthiest. The devotion of the cloister, for the most part, like the ghastly light that hovers over decomposition and decay; the devotion which characterizes the diligent, spiritually-minded man of business, resembles the star which shines on in the storm as in the calm, when the sky is clouded as when it is serene.

III. He regarded the path of duty as the path of providential blessing. Not forsaking the common duties of his daily calling, he waited for the opening of his providential path. The faithful

discharge of duty itself a blessing. This, the channel through which special grace most likely to flow. Men need not leave the world to find the secret of holiness; or their ordinary sphere of work to find the secret of blessing. The patient, conscientious discharge of life's ordinary tasks, always the safest path to pursue. (a)

IV. He found the favour of his sovereign of great service in carrying out the work of God. His civility and humble demeanour had won the confidence and esteem of his royal master. This friendship now stood him in good stead. Yet he presumes not upon this regard, but approaches the throne tremblingly, as a subject should, even the most favoured. Monarchs like not presumption even in their courtiers. Diogenes says, "A man should use his prince or peer, as he would do the fire. The fire if he stand too near it will burn him; and if he be too far off he will be cold. So to be over-bold, without blushing or reverence, bringeth into discredit of both sides; for the king will think him too saucy, and the subject will forget his duty." Courteous and kindly behaviour has nothing to lose, and much to gain. Civility costs little, and is often worth much.

Illustration :—(a) Mr. Carter, a pious minister, once coming softly behind a religious man of his own acquaintance, who was busily engaged in tanning a hide, and giving him a tap on the shoulder, the man started, looked up, and with a blushing countenance said, "Sir, I am ashamed that you should find me thus." To whom Mr. Carter replied, "Let Christ, when he cometh, find me so doing." "What!" said the man, "doing thus?" "Yes," said Mr. Carter, "faithfully performing the duties of my calling."

SPIRITUAL RECOLLECTEDNESS.

ii. 4. *So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

This, a remarkable illustration of religious presence of mind.

I. The outcome of a consecrated life. Unless he had been in the habit of making everything a matter of prayer, would not have been able thus to collect himself whilst trembling with excitement, fear, and suspense before the king.

Having formed the habit of doing nothing without consulting God, had no difficulty in acting upon it. Agitated and affrighted, it would have been perfectly *natural* for him to have stammered forth his appeal in some incoherent manner. But here the irrepressible spirit of devotion, which

permeated his whole life, revealed itself. If a man never prays anywhere save at stated times, and on public occasions, there is reason to fear that he never prays at all. If a man lives in the spirit of prayer, sudden emergency will spontaneously summon the familiar habit to his aid. Special prayer should be the outcome of constant prayerfulness. The way to have the heart in harmony with the worship of the sanctuary, is never to suffer its chords to be jarred. It was said of a distinguished Christian that he lived on the steps of the mercy-seat. It was said of a recent Bishop, who was sent to Western Africa, that "he lived upon his knees." This is to live safely. This is to live in the porch of heaven. Hence it was said of a dying saint, "I am changing my place, but not my company." Like Enoch, he had walked with God, and death was to him only like passing out of the vestibule into the inner sanctuary.

II. The result of long habit. Holy recollectedness not come naturally, nor easily, even to good men. Repeated action becomes habit. Practice makes perfect in this, as in other things.

III. A mark of self-distrusting humility. He dared not ask, without seeking wisdom higher than his own, in matter of such momentous issues. Self-diffidence impelled him to cast the burden of his responsibility upon one who was an unerring counsellor. "Travellers make mention of a bird so timid in disposition, and so liable to the assaults of unnumbered enemies, that

she almost lives in the sky, scarcely ever venturing to rest her wings; and even when forced through very weariness to repose, she seeks the loftiest rock, and there still keeps her eyes only half shut, and her pinions only half folded, in readiness, on the first sign of danger, to spread her wings, and soar away to the heavens for safety." True emblem of how the child of God should "pass the time of his sojourning here in fear." Seldom should the wing of his devotion droop, or the eye of his watchfulness close; and even when he must repose it should ever be in an attitude of vigilance and prayerfulness."—*Stowell*.

IV. A source of incalculable blessing. 1. *It imparts confidence.* "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. xxviii. 16). He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, whose heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon thee," &c. The calmness which comes from reliance upon a wisdom that is superhuman; the consciousness of Divine support. 2. *It preserves from missing the providential path.* The God of providence will direct those who cast themselves upon his care. Such "shall not full direction need; nor miss their providential way." 3. *It conduces to the accomplishment of God's will.* When everything is submitted to that will, and the stumbling-blocks of *self-will, pride, ambition, &c.* are removed, nothing can hinder the fulfilment of the purposes of Jehovah.

EJACULATORY PRAYER.

ii. 4. *So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

I. It was suddenly required. A question addressed to Nehemiah by the king, point-blank, upon which hung, possibly, not only issues of life and death, but the success or failure of his long-prayed-for object. Great emergency. Great benefit to be able to seek aid of Omnipotence. Long formula impossible. No audible petition could be offered. Quick as thought the silent prayer of the heart flew to the ear of God, and not in

vain. "He will fulfil the *desire* of them that fear him" (Ps. cxlv. 19). "The devout spirit, like the well-strung Eolian harp, not only gives out sweet sounds when woke by the gentler breathings that steal over its chords, but when vibrating under the ruder blasts that sweep across its strings." "On many occasions the servant of God requires special assistance, care, and counsel. Men of business are frequently called

upon to decide summarily on questions big with importance, to make up their judgment *at once* on measures the issues of which they can neither over-estimate nor foresee. How commonly is the physician forced to form his conclusions in a moment; yea, to form them on uncertain grounds, and indeterminate symptoms. Yet a mistaken conclusion may endanger the life of his patient. Now if in such circumstances the medical man, or the merchant, rely simply on his own skill, and confer simply with his own judgment, to the neglect of calling in the wisdom and blessing of the Almighty, what a fearful risk and burden does he bring upon himself! But let his heart breathe forth the aspiration to God—'Lord, direct me.' Will he not then, having cast his burden on the Lord, having invoked unerring skill, be able to act with faith, and nerve, and calmness? Call ye this fanaticism? The grossest fanaticism is that which leaves out God."—*Stowell.* (a)

II. It was silently offered. No opportunity for audible vocal prayer. This, good when alone, or in public assembly for worship, but not possible now. A sudden and secret desire darted up to heaven. Thus Moses cried unto God, yet said nothing (Exod. xiv. 15). Hannah was not heard, yet she prayed (1 Sam. i.). Austin reports it to be the custom of the Egyptian Churches to pray frequently and fervently, but briefly and by ejaculation, lest their fervour should abate. It is the praying and crying of the heart that God delights in. Let no man then excuse himself and say he cannot pray; for in all places he may lift up his heart to God, though in the market, or on the mountain. (β)

III. It was suitably addressed. "To the God of heaven." Ezra had previously used this expression. (See explanatory notes). It recognized the supremacy of Jehovah, and his power

over human hearts and events. Thus calculated to impart confidence, and destroy the fear of man. The expression is similar in meaning to "Lord of Sabaoth," or "Lord of Hosts." "All power is given," &c.

IV. It was very brief. Yet quite long enough. Not time for much. A question had been asked and an answer was required. Yet, between question and answer, was ample time for sending prayer to heaven, and receiving a reply. Length no virtue in prayer. Faith and fervour the two principal elements of success. St. Augustine says, "He that carrieth his own temple about with him, may go to prayer when he pleaseth." How quickly thought can fly! many thousands of miles in a minute. Prayer can travel as rapidly as thought towards heaven.

V. It was completely successful.
1. *In that wisdom to ask aright was given.* Nehemiah's petition was marked by—(1) *Becoming humility.* "If it please the king." (2) *Tact.* "The place of my fathers' sepulchres." (3) *Forethought.* "Let letters be given me."
2. *In that the king's heart was favourably disposed towards him.* "And the king granted me," &c. This, God's doing, in direct answer to prayer. Nehemiah confesses this when he adds, "according to the good hand of my God upon me."

Illustrations:—(a) "Sudden extremity is a notable trial of faith, or any other disposition of the soul. For as, in a sudden fear, the blood gathers suddenly to the heart, for guarding of that part which is principal; so the powers of the soul combine themselves in a hard exigent, that they may be easily judged of."—*Bp. Hall.*

(β) "As the tender dew that falls during the silent night makes the grass, and herbs, and flowers to flourish and grow more abundantly than great showers of rain that fall in the day, so secret prayer will more abundantly cause the sweet herbs of grace and holiness to flourish and grow in the soul, than all those more public and open duties of religion, which too often are mingled with the sun and wind of pride and hypocrisy."—*Brooks.*

RELIGIOUS PRUDENCE.

ii. 7. *Moreover, I said unto the king, &c.*

Not satisfied with bare permission to go to the relief of his co-religionists at

Jerusalem, he makes provision for all contingencies, and anticipates every

difficulty that is likely to arise. From this learn:—

I. That prudent forethought is essential to success in spiritual as in secular enterprises. For, 1. *God has nowhere commended rashness.* The reverse of this enjoined and approved in word of God. "He will guide his affairs with discretion" (Ps. cxii. 5). "The fool shall be servant to the wise of heart," (Prov. xi. 29). "A prudent man," &c. (Prov. xii. 23; xiv. 15). "He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good" (Prov. xvi. 20). "Give not that which is holy" (Matt. vii. 6). "Which of you intending to build," &c. (Luke xiv. 28). Examples.—Jacob (Gen. xxxii.). Joseph (Gen. xli.). Jethro (Exod. xviii.). David (1 Sam. xvii.). Abigail (1 Sam. xxv.). Paul (Acts xvi.). Town-clerk of Ephesus (Acts xix.). 2. *Pains-taking effort is at the foundation of all human success.* "By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread" (Gen. iii. 19), is the curse pronounced upon all human labour. Even the curse turned into blessing, for labour is not necessarily an evil. "No gains without pains," under present social laws. No reaping without sowing. No permanent and substantial success in business, or art, or literature, or religion, without earnest, patient, unremitting diligence (2 Pet. i. 10). This inexorable law reigns in the spiritual realm as in the secular, for—3. *Spiritual work as well as secular is amenable to natural law.* Miracles wrought now in the moral rather than in the physical universe. Not obsolete in the latter, more frequent in the former. Natural law is no respecter of persons. It demands allegiance from the saint and sinner alike. Errors in spiritual work are as surely followed by penalties as in secular. Sloth and sensuality undermine the success of religious as certainly as profane enterprises. Here, as elsewhere, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

II. That prudent forethought is not opposed, but helpful, to spiritual faith. 1. *It furnishes a rational basis for expecting success.* No right to expect success, merely because we hope for and earnestly desire it. "We are saved by

hope;" but it must rest on a solid foundation. Hope without faith is dead. If there is a *living*, there is a *dead*, hope (1 Pet. i. 3). The one stimulates, the other seduces. Faith must have a rational basis to distinguish it from credulity. The basis may appear irrational to men who do not acknowledge God or the supernatural. 2. *It acts upon the supposition that mental powers were given to be employed in the service of God.* The use of this faculty no more opposed to strong faith and intense spirituality, than the use of other mental powers, as memory, imagination, perception, &c. All powers are to be consecrated to holy purposes, and diligently employed in assisting faith. 3. *It takes no step without seeking Divine guidance and approval.* Nehemiah used every precaution to ensure success, and made every needful arrangement beforehand, but not without previous thought and earnest prayer. Even so must we take each step, in religious work especially, depending on the Holy Ghost for direction. He committed himself to God; yet petitions the king for a convoy; teaching that in all our enterprises God is so to be trusted as if we had used no means; and yet the means are so to be used as if we had no God to trust in.

Illustrations:—As the hermits were communing together, there arose a question as to which of all the virtues was most necessary to perfection. One said, chastity; another, humility; a third, justice. St. Anthony remained silent until all had given their opinion: and then he spoke. "Ye have all said well, but none of you have said aright. The virtue most necessary to perfection is *prudence*; for the most virtuous actions of men, unless governed and directed by prudence, are neither pleasing to God, nor serviceable to others, nor profitable to ourselves." Juvenal speaks to the same effect: "No other protection is wanting, provided you are under the guidance of prudence." Bishop Hacket bears similar testimony:—"He that loves to walk dangerous ways shall perish in them. Even king Josiah, one of the most lovely darlings of God's favour among all the kings of Judah, fell under the sword for pressing further against his enemies than the word of the Lord did permit him. The ancient Eliberitan Council enacted, that all those who plucked down the idols or temples of the heathen should not be accounted martyrs, though they died for the faith of Christ, because they plucked persecution upon themselves, and provoked their own martyrdom."

THE HAND OF GOD.

ii. 8. *According to the good hand of my God upon me.*

The hand sometimes used in an ill sense, for inflicting punishments (Ruth i. 13; Jer. xv. 17), for we *strike* with the hand. Sometimes in a good sense, for helping others, for we *bestow favours* with the hand. In Psalm lxxxviii. 6, "Cut off from thy hand," means fallen from thy favour. Pindar uses the expression, "Θεῶ σὺν παλάμῃ," in the sense of "by the aid of God." Thus Nehemiah is to be understood. By the Divine favour, which inclined the king to do what he desired, his suit had prevailed.

I. The hand of God is with his people for protection. Nehemiah's life was in jeopardy in God's service. Hence God's special protection. 1. *He was protected from the wrath of the king.* Had the king been in an angry mood Nehemiah might have paid for his temerity with his life. "The wrath of man" doth he restrain. David delivered from the outburst of Saul's murderous anger. Nehemiah saved from the outbursting of Artaxerxes'. God will ever defend those who trust him and seek his glory, from the malice of evil oppressors. 2. *He was protected from the hostility of his enemies.* The Samaritans and surrounding heathen would have not only hindered his work, but probably taken his life, but for the military guard which the king granted, through God's gracious influence. Thus will the Lord "make a hedge about his people" (Job ii.), for "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him" (Ps. xxxiv.).

II. The hand of God is with his people for providential guidance. 1. *The hand of God guided Nehemiah to the Persian court.* 2. *To the official position which brought him into the presence of the king.* 3. The providence of God directed him *when to speak*, and 4. *what to say.* "If it please the king," &c. "Silken words must be given to kings, as the mother of Darius said (ἡ δισία, ἡ ἰκίστα); neither must they be rudely and roughly dealt with, as Joab

dealt with David (2 Sam. xix. 5), who therefore could never well brook him afterward, but set another in his place."—*Trapp.*

III. God's servants should thankfully acknowledge the good which they receive from him. Nehemiah does not take any credit to himself, but gives all glory to God. This conduct requires—

1. *Genuine humility.* He might have boasted of his services to the king, of his place and authority in the Persian Court, and arrogated to himself the credit of success; but he was of another spirit, and ascribed all to the "good hand of his God." Ingratitude is the child of pride; thankfulness the offspring of humility. A proud man will never be truly grateful; a humble man possesses the first element of gratitude. Benefit a vain man, and he will ascribe the service to his own desert, he will regard it as no more than a just tribute to his excellence; but serve a lowly man, and he will attribute the service to the kindness of his benefactor. A proud child thinks that he has laid his parents under obligation; a lowly child feels that he can never liquidate the debt of gratitude he owes to them. The same holds good in relation to God. We must be lowly to be grateful. The lark hides her nest in the grass, but her flight is far up in the heavens. This spirit continually exclaims, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed," &c.; and, "I am less than the least of all his mercies" (Lam. iii. 22). Paul a striking illustration of it: "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this *grace* given," &c. David also exclaims when the splendid offerings had been collected for the erection of God's house: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness," &c. (1 Chron. xxix. 11).
2. *True faith.* The believer in chance who ascribes everything to fortune, or fatality, cannot own a Divine hand. Faith, discerning the Almighty hand within the machinery of second causes, actuating, controlling, determining all, is the parent of sincere gratitude.

Men of business, from the very nature of their occupations, specially liable to lose the lively exercise of this practical faith. "Hard by the altar of incense in the ancient temple, stood the altar of burnt-offering. As the one signified the atonement to be made by Christ, and the other the fragrant merits of that atonement; so did the latter represent also the offering of prayer to God through Christ's mediation by his faithful people, and the former the oblation of praise, presented through the same intercession, as a sweet-smelling savour to God. Prayer and praise are twin services. They should always go hand in hand. Praise is the fragrance breathed from the flower of joy. He is happiest who is thankfullest. This lesson taught by the brute creation. Morose and unkindly animals express as little of enjoyment as they do of gratefulness by their snarling and growling sounds. The beasts and birds of night are rarely glad-some. But the lambs which sport and gambol in their green pastures, and the birds which in the early morning wake

the echoes of the woodland with their songs, all tell most unmistakeably that they are happy. How much more then must it be the blessedness of man 'to look through nature, up to nature's God,' and glorify the giver in all his varied gifts."—*Stowell*. (See *Addenda*.)

Illustrations :—"Your father had a battle with Apollyon," said Great-heart to Samuel, "at a place yonder before us, in a narrow passage, just beyond Forgetful Green. And indeed the place is the most dreadful place in all these parts; for if at any time pilgrims meet with any brunt, it is when they forget what favours they have received, and how unworthy they are of them. This is the place, also, where others have been hard put to it."—*Bunyan*.

Luther said when he heard a little bird sing, when he was out in the fields one morning, "The bird had no storehouse or barn, and did not know of any provision for the future, and yet it seemed to sing, 'Mortal, cease from toil and sorrow, God provideth for the morrow.' We do not find any sparrows with large storehouses, or any swallows with a great quantity of grain laid by for the morrow; yet never find a sparrow starved to death, or a swallow that has perished from cold. God 'careth for them, and are ye not much better than they?'"

THE INITIAL STAGES OF A GREAT REFORMATION.

ii. 9—20. *Then I came to the governors, &c.*

I. Great reformations often have an insignificant commencement, and are slow in developing their true proportions. Who would have expected such great things to spring from that interview in the palace, and now from the visit of this one man to Jerusalem? Yet who dare "despise the day of small things"? How slight the first streak of dawn! How minute the grain of mustard-seed! Some of the noblest exploits of the Church have had the feeblest beginnings. A few Christian men met together in the vestry of a plain chapel; they pondered and prayed over the state of the heathen world; they conceived and planned the glorious enterprise of evangelizing all pagan lands. They arose and built. The Church Missionary Society is the result. Not only small at beginning but *slow in developing*. May travel rapidly on land or by sea, but in morals must be content to proceed gradually. Deep-rooted evils, profligate and abandoned habits, not to be eradicated in a moment; nor are excellent characters manufactured in a moment, as a piece of work from the loom. The restoration of God's image rather resembles the growing likeness to its beautiful original in the canvas of the artist. At first the outline, and slowly the form and features, of the human face appear; gradually they assume more distinctness and expression, and the likeness stands confessed. So does the Holy Ghost restore the waste places of Christ's Church, and the moral deformities of his children.

II. Reformation work requires a vigorous leader. Nehemiah eminently qualified for the post, for—1. *He occupied a commanding social position.* The office of cupbearer a very honourable one with the Persians. A son of Prexaspes, a distinguished person, was made cupbearer to Cambyses. The poets make Gany-

medes to be cupbearer to Jupiter, and even Vulcan himself is put into this office. It gave him influence with king and court, and status amongst even Persian nobles. 2. *He was inspired with intense enthusiasm.* Without this fire no hearts melt, no great work accomplished. It burns up all evil sordid desires, and kindles all goodness. Jeremiah was influenced by it. Kept silence for a time, but was constrained to break out again, saying the word within him was like burning fire (Jer. xx.). To the same effect Elijah cries out: "I am very zealous for the Lord of Hosts" (1 Kings xix.). Moses prayed to be blotted out of God's book, rather than his people should be destroyed (Exod. xxxii.). St. Paul "counted not his life dear unto him," &c. (Acts xx.). Phineas, when none else would take the sword to vindicate the outraged laws of Jehovah, himself slew the offenders (Numb. xxv.). Our Lord himself, moved with indignation, drove out the profaners of his sanctuary (John ii.). Such holy enthusiasm glowed in Nehemiah's heart, and urged him to undertake this difficult and dangerous work. 3. *He possessed unwearied energy and perseverance.* His enthusiasm not fitful, but patient. He had calculated the difficulties of his undertaking, and was prepared to carry it through. No great work will succeed without plodding. A great statesman once answered a friend who inquired to what he attributed his great success in life, thus—"I know how to plod." Without this virtue Nehemiah must have succumbed to the almost overwhelming difficulties that beset his path.

III. Reformation work should not be undertaken without a deliberate estimate of its magnitude and difficulty. Blind courage that counts no costs always short-lived. This stood the tests which it had to endure because founded upon intelligent and mature conviction. 1. *Nehemiah forestalled opposition.* An escort had been asked for and granted (v. 10). Forewarned is forearmed. Thus did he fortify himself against failure from this quarter. Christian soldiers "must put on the whole armour of God" (Eph. vi. 11), and expect to be assailed. No mistake greater than presumption. To despise or ignore an enemy sure sign of weakness. 2. *He carefully examined the work to be done.* "And I arose in the night," &c. (v. 12). Wise proceeding before engaging in a work that might prove to be impracticable. Accurate knowledge helps the judgment and stimulates courage. 3. *He weighed the matter before proceeding to action.* "So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days" (v. 11). Days spent in seclusion not spent in vain, if time be occupied in thought and prayer. (See outline on "Preparatory Retirement.")

IV. Reformation work in its initial stages is almost certain to provoke opposition. "When Sanballat the Horonite," &c. (v. 10). 1. *This often proceeds from a misconstruction of the nature of the work.* "Will ye rebel?" (v. 19). Bad men always ready to attribute evil motives. Sometimes springs from ignorance, more often from wilful malice. Charges of treason more frequently brought against reformation work than any other. Insinuation often more deadly in its operation than open calumny. 2. *This often springs from aversion to self-sacrifice.* For this reason the men of Jabesh-Gilead stood aloof when Benjamin was to be punished; and were afterwards destroyed for their neutrality (Judges xxi.). Work that requires self-denial and hard toil cannot be good in the eyes of those who have no love for any but themselves.

V. Reformation work cannot be carried on without mutual co-operation. "So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (v. 18). *Necessary as a security against discouragement.* Individual workers labouring in isolation always liable to discouragement. "Not good for man to be alone." Christ recognized this principle in religious work, when he sent his disciples by twos. Mutual sympathy and counsel will often cheer faltering courage, and strengthen failing hope. 2. *Necessary as a safeguard against combined opposition.* Good men must combine, and present a united front to the combined forces of wickedness and opposition. Unity is strength in all work, and in all conflict.

VI. Reformation work cannot succeed without the Divine blessing. "The

God of heaven, he will prosper us" (v. 20). When every precaution has been taken, and all available human aid enlisted, still all depends on God for success. 1. *Because the forces of evil are too strong for the unaided powers of man.* Melancthon found this by experience, when he thought to convert the world to Christianity in a very short time. "Without me ye can do nothing." "Not by might, nor by power," &c. 2. *The blessing of God will compensate for any amount of opposition.* "If God be for us," &c. "Greater is he that is in you," &c.

Illustrations:—(a) The artist Correggio, when young, saw a painting by Raphael. Long and ardently did the thoughtful boy gaze on that picture. His soul drank in its beauty as flowers drink moisture from the mist. He waked to the consciousness of artistic power. Burning with the enthusiasm of enkindled genius, the blood rushing to his brow, and the fire flashing from his eyes, he cried out, "I also am a painter!" That conviction carried him through his initial studies; it blended the colours on his palette; it guided his pencil; it shone on his canvas, until the glorious Titian, on witnessing his productions, exclaimed, "Were I not Titian, I would wish to be Correggio."

(β) In the museum at Rotterdam is the first piece painted by the renowned Rembrandt. It is rough, without marks of genius or skill, and uninteresting, except to show that he began as low down as the lowest. In the same gallery is the masterpiece of the artist, counted of immense value. What years of patient study and practice intervene between the two pieces! If all have not genius, all have the power to work; and this is greater than genius.

(γ) Coleridge, one day when some one was enlarging on the tendency of some good scheme to regenerate the world, threw a little thistle-down into the air, which he happened to see by the roadside, and said, "The tendency of this thistle-down is towards China! but I know, with assured certainty, it will never get there; nay, it is more than probable, that after sundry eddyings and gyrations up and down, backwards and forwards, it will be found somewhere near the place where it grew." Such is the history of grand schemes of reformation apart from Divine power and benediction.

(δ) William Rufus, having seen the coast of Ireland from some rocks in North Wales, is reported to have said, "I will summon hither all the ships of my realm, and with them make bridge to attack that country." This threat being reported to Murchard, Prince of Leinster, he paused a moment, and then said, "Did the king add to this mighty threat, *if God please?*" and being assured he made no mention of God in his speech, he replied, rejoicing in such a prognostic, "Sure, that man puts his trust in human, not in Divine power, I fear not his coming."

SECULAR AID FOR SPIRITUAL WORK.

ii. 9. *Now the king had sent captains of the army, &c.*

This martial escort granted to Nehemiah in response to his own request. As an official dignitary, had right to public honour and body-guard. Learn—

I. That the Church may employ secular power for purposes of protection. When one has suitable means at hand for avoiding danger, he must not despise them (Josh. ii. 15; 2 Cor. xi. 33). 1. *Every law-abiding subject has a right to claim the law's protection.* This holds good except in the case of conduct which is likely to provoke a breach of the peace. 2. *It is a good man's duty to seek the protection of secular power rather than rashly to expose himself to danger.* Paul sought the shield of the law when certain men had taken an oath to kill him (Acts xxiii.). 3. *When secular aid is denied, or granted only on terms inconsistent*

with righteousness, the believer may confidently cast himself upon the protection of Jehovah. "When my father and mother forsake me," &c. Under such circumstances the three Hebrews and Daniel committed their case to God. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him" (Ps. xxxiv.).

II. That the Church may not employ secular power in matters of faith. Ezra's work had been more purely spiritual than Nehemiah's now was, hence he sought no such aid as this. Both sought the religious reformation of the people, but Nehemiah's chief mission was to restore the city of Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. 1. *God has never authorized the use of any but moral means in spiritual work.* All coercion inadmissible. "My kingdom is not of this world." "Go ye into all

the world," is the commission which follows upon the proclamation of Divine sovereignty. "All power," &c. "He that *winneth* souls is wise." The fire and the rack may command submission, but will never win the heart, or convince the conscience. (β) 2. *The employment of secular power in matters of faith has always been productive of disastrous results.* This method predominated over all others in the dark or mediæval ages. Hence the war and bloodshed, strife and controversy, hatred and heresy that prevailed. A notable exception was Stephen, king of Poland, who when urged by some of his subjects to constrain certain who were of a different religion to embrace his creed, nobly answered, "I am king of men, and not

of conscience. The dominion of conscience belongs exclusively to God."

Illustrations:—(α) An old lady taking a long railway journey, prayed almost all the time that God would protect her from harm. When she reached the last platform, and was but a few minutes walk from her home, she felt that now she could take care of herself; but just here she fell, and received an injury from which she was a long time recovering. We must trust in God at all times.

(β) The missionaries to the Fiji islands were threatened with destruction by the enraged natives, and had no means of defence except prayer. Their enemies heard them praying, became fearful, and fled. The reason was given by one of themselves. "They found you were praying to your God, and they know your God is a strong God; and they are gone." St. Augustine was saved from death by a mistake of his guide, who lost the usual road, in which the Donatists had laid wait to murder him.

FIRST HINDRANCE.—SECRET JEALOUSY.

ii. 10. *When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah, &c.*

The name Sanballat signifies a pure enemy; for he belonged to a spiteful people who had always been troublesome to the children of Israel, and did constantly vex and provoke them to evil (Numb. xxii. 3, 4).

I. Here is jealousy tyrannical in its spirit. The Hebrews in Palestine had been hitherto poor and helpless. They were anxious to improve their condition, but these enemies were eager to keep them poor that they might be able to oppress and plunder them. Jealousy naturally cruel, inasmuch as it feeds upon the poverty and destitution of others, and fears their prosperity, lest it should lose its food. They probably heard of this new enterprise through their wives, who might be Jewesses. Among the Turks every vizier used to keep a Jew as private counsellor, whose malice was thought to have had much to do with the Turks' bitter persecution of Christianity.

II. Here is jealousy anti-religious in its attitude. Grieved that any should "seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (v. 10). Their opposition doubled by the fact that this was God's work, and these were his people. They hated the name and worship of Jehovah.

The malice of unbelievers and scoffers against the kingdom of God can never be satisfied. If envy had not blinded these men, they might have seen that they meant them no harm. As the building of this Jerusalem had many enemies, so the repairing of the spiritual Jerusalem (the Church) by the preaching of the gospel hath many more.—*Pilkington.*

III. Here is jealousy covetously selfish in its motives. Samaria had become the leading state west of Jordan, and any restoration of Jerusalem might interfere with this predominance. The fear of losing their gains had much to do with the acrimony of their opposition. Hippocrates in his epistle to Crateva gives him this good counsel; that if it were possible, amongst other herbs, he cut up that weed covetousness by the roots, that there be no remainder left; and then know certainly that together with the bodies, he would be able to cure the diseases of the mind.

IV. Here is jealousy self-torturing in its effects. "It grieved them *exceedingly*" (v. 10). The expression a very strong one. (Compare Ps. cxii.) "The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth." Keen mental torture implied. Envy compared

to a poisonous serpent. Because it cannot feed upon other men's hearts it feedeth upon its own, drinking up the most part of its own venom, and is therefore like the serpent Porphyrius, which was full of poison, but wanting teeth, hurt none but itself. Austin describes it as a "madness of the soul;" Gregory, as "a torture;" Chrysostom, "an insatiableness;" Cyprian, "blindness, a plague subverting kingdoms and families, an incurable disease." A disease that neither Esculapius nor Plutus could cure; a continual plague and vexation of spirit, an earthly hell.

Illustrations :—The poets imagined that Envy dwelt in a dark cave; being pale and lean, looking asquint, abounding with gall, her teeth black, never rejoicing but in the misfortunes of others, ever unquiet and careful, and continually tormenting herself. (See *Addenda*.)

"The Bible abounds with instances of this sin.

We find it in Cain, the proto-murderer, who slew his brother in a fit of jealousy. We find it in the dark and gloomy and revengeful spirit of Saul, who under the influence of jealousy plotted for years the slaughter of David. We find it in the king of Israel when he pined for the vineyard of Naboth, and shed his blood to gain it. Yea, it was envy that perpetrated that most atrocious crime ever planned in hell or executed on earth, on which the sun refused to look, and at which nature gave signs of abhorrence by rending the rocks; I mean the crucifixion of Christ; for the Evangelist tells us, that for envy the Jews delivered our Lord."—*J. A. James*.

The infatuated Caligula slew his brother, because he was a beautiful young man. Mutius, a citizen of Rome, was reputed to be of such an envious and malevolent disposition, that Publius, one day observing him to be very sad, said, "Either some great evil hath happened to Mutius, or some great good to another." "Dionysius the Tyrant," says Plutarch, "out of envy punished Philoxenus the musician, because he could sing; and Plato, the philosopher, because he could dispute better than himself." Cambyses killed his brother Smerdis, because he could draw a stronger bow than himself or any of his party.

PREPARATORY RETIREMENT.

ii. 11. *So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.*

God's servants frequently thus retired for deliberation before entering upon arduous tasks. Moses had a forty-years half-involuntary preparation for his life work, in the wilderness of Midian. Paul spent three years in Arabia before commencing his career as a missionary. The disciples were commanded "to *tarry* at Jerusalem until," &c. Our Lord himself, at the commencement of his public ministry, was "led of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted." And here we see Nehemiah spending three days in retirement, before entering upon a work that would tax all his powers and graces to the very utmost. Consider the reason of this—

I. It gave him time to look round. Jerusalem altogether strange to him. Unacquainted with the exact state of affairs or parties in the city. To have rushed headlong without premeditation into so gigantic an enterprise would have been madness. Probably made secret inquiries as to vigilance of foes, and spirit of people, as well as their numbers, character, and wealth. Knowledge always source of power to workers

and leaders. Knowledge of human nature, human history, and character, of great service in Christian work.

II. It gave him time to look forward. Evidently a man of wise foresight. Could see both difficulties and the way to meet and overcome them. Careful, yet not over-anxious, because made God his counsellor and guide. Neither optimist nor pessimist. By anticipating difficulties we may obviate them, and so make them comparatively harmless when they do come. Guard against other extreme, of making them when there are none, and magnifying them when they are insignificant. Such pre-vision not inspiring, but disheartening.

III. It gave him time to look within. Now was the time for self-examination. Motives tested, heart probed. Trying moment to faith. Looking at self alone drives to despair. "Who is sufficient for these things?" the cry of one burdened with such tremendous responsibility. Luther spent the night before the Diet of Worms on the floor of his little chamber, humbling himself

before God, and laying hold on Divine strength. No wonder he triumphed.

IV. It gave him time to look upward. The contemplation of his own faults and frailty alone would have completely unnerved him for the work he had come to accomplish. His eye would turn from personal demerit to infinite perfection; from personal impotence to infinite strength. From penitence to prayer a single step, thence to confidence and hope. Such preparation necessary for all who would achieve great works for God. Careless self-confidence as sure to meet with failure as humble and contrite faith to be crowned with success. (See Addenda.)

Illustrations:—"Domitian, about the begin-

ning of his reign, usually sequestered himself from company an hour every day; but did nothing the while but catch flies, and kill them with a penknife. God's people can better employ their solitariness, and do never want company, as having God and themselves to talk with. And these secret meals are those that make the soul fat. It was a wise speech of Bernard, that "Christ, the soul's spouse, is bashful, neither willingly cometh to his bride in the presence of a multitude."—*Trapp*.

The noblest works, like the temple of Solomon, are brought to perfection in silence.—*Sir A. Helps*.

Solitude hath been the custom not only of holy men, but of heathen men. Thus did Tully, and Anthony, and Crassus, make way to that honour and renown which they afterwards obtained by their eloquence; thus did they pass *a solitudine in scholas, a scholis in forum*, "from their secret retirement into the schools, and from the schools into the pleading place."—*Farindon*.

THE WALLS INSPECTED.

ii. 12. *And I arose in the night, &c.*

I. A work involving considerable danger. 1. *From the ruined state of the walls* (v. 13—15). No safe path. Stones scattered along road made travelling dangerous. God's servants often required to traverse perilous roads. Missionaries often wonderfully preserved when journeying. 2. *From the enmity of the Samaritans.* Had they known would probably have waylaid so small and defenceless a company. Exposed to the midnight marauders who lurked about the city, taking advantage of its open condition. This danger did not deter. God often protected his servants from malice and bloodthirstiness of hostile nations. Missionary annals of Church furnish many instances of sublimest heroism and hair-breadth escapes from threatened destruction.

II. A work requiring personal sacrifice. 1. *He gave up his much-needed rest.* The physician will watch by his patient all night. The captain will not think of sleep if his vessel be in danger. So should the Christian forego his rest in times of danger, that he may call upon God in faithful prayer. David "rose at midnight to give praise" unto the name of the Lord (Ps. cxix.). Our mortal enemy, Satan, sleepeth not night or day, but continually

"goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" and had we not an equally vigilant watchman we should be destroyed. "Behold, he neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, that is the watchman of Israel" (Ps. cxxi.). Christ himself set us an example of self-denying vigilance; prayed the whole night before sending forth his disciples (Luke vi.). Joshua marched all night to conquer the Amorites (Josh. x.). Gideon arose in the night to pull down the altar of Baal (Judg. vi.). 2. *He laid aside his official dignity.* Might have sent a deputy, or gone attended by strong escort, or numerous retinue; but preferred to go himself, to teach us that nothing should be painful or degrading to any man, however exalted his station, which concerns the prosperity of God's City and Church. David, when the ark was brought out of Abinadab's house, played on instruments, and after casting off his kingly apparel, danced before the ark in his ephod. Michal mocked, and was punished; but David declared that he would yet "more lowly cast himself down," and was blessed of the Lord (2 Sam. vi.). Moses forsook the dignity and pleasure of Pharaoh's court to become a tender of sheep, that he might serve the cause of God (Heb. xi.).

Christ washed the disciples' feet, and humbled himself to the death of the cross, that he might effect our redemption. Such humble self-abasement is the greatest honour that can come to a man. Pride has its own reward, and a paltry one it is; but humility shall be rewarded by the great Father in heaven.

III. A work requiring great moral courage. The view of such a wreck likely to dishearten. The magnitude of the task would appear all but overwhelming. Would serve to impress him with a sense of personal insufficiency for so gigantic a work. Ezekiel, surrounded by the valley of bleached bones, when suddenly asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" in despair could only reply, "O Lord God, thou knowest." Nehemiah, surrounded by a ruin equally hopeless, can only cast himself and his work upon the strength of the Omnipotent. (a)

IV. A work which had an important bearing upon subsequent operations. 1. *It furnished accurate information of the work to be done.* Some render the words, "viewed the walls," "*broke the walls*" (*i. e.* broke off a piece of the wall), to try the soundness of it, that he might know whether it required to be pulled down entirely, or might be repaired on the same foundation. Must have been moonlight, or could not have seen to do this; as, to have carried torches or lamps would have betrayed their presence. Knowledge obtained by personal investigation always most valuable. Illustrate this in the case of pastors, sick visitors, and Sunday School

teachers. They who come into personal contact with human nature in its varied phases know best how to remedy its ills, repair its losses, and alleviate its woes. In all religious work knowledge is power. 2. *It kindled his enthusiasm for the performance of the work.* The greater the ruin, the greater the work of restoration. Small works require commonplace zeal; but great enterprises demand extraordinary grace. Two truths brought home to him by sight of ruins. (1) *How faithful God is.* He threatened that Jerusalem should become a heap (Isa. xxv. 2). Here was the manifest fulfilment of the threat. Surely, if God be faithful in punishing, he will not be less faithful in healing. (2) *How vile sin is.* This desolation the result of Israel's disobedience. The restoration of the city should be a sign of Israel's return to obedience; these thoughts would serve to inflame Nehemiah's zeal. The same thoughts are calculated to stimulate all Christian effort.

Illustration :— (a) As Luther drew near to the door which was about to admit him to the Diet of Worms, he met a valiant knight, the celebrated George of Freundsberg, who four years later drove the French into the Ticino. The brave general, seeing Luther pass, tapped him on the shoulder, and shaking his head, blanched in many battles, said kindly: "Poor monk, poor monk! thou art now going to make a nobler stand than I or any other captain have ever made in the bloodiest of our battles. But if thy cause is just, and thou art sure of it, go forward in God's name, and fear nothing. God will not forsake thee." He went forward and won a glorious victory.

A TIME FOR SILENCE.

ii. 12. *Neither told I any man what God, &c.*

There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak (Eccl. iii. 7). Taciturnity in some cases an eminent virtue. He is a wise man who can discern the proper season for its exercise. Jerome says, "Let us first learn *not* to speak, that we may afterwards open our minds with discretion." Solomon puts silence before speech, as a virtue rarer and more precious. Learn—

I. Good intentions are best kept

secret until they are ascertained to be practicable. Nehemiah would only have marred his work by disclosing his intention before he was sure it was worth disclosing. Ideas are prolific as insects, but few of them are fit to live. When Nehemiah had viewed the walls, he was able to render a reason, and expound his plan for their restoration. A good rule for all who contemplate any work of importance. They should first consider,

then speak. Rashly to enter upon a crude enterprise is to court failure. A wise man will not open his mouth to others until he has formed some plan for the accomplishment of his purpose. Guard against other extreme of obstinate persistence in a course condemned by others as unpractical.

II. Good intentions are best kept secret until they can be carried out with decisive energy. Great enterprises demand great faith, and intense enthusiasm. Many a grand reform has prematurely failed through the half-heartedness of its chief supporters. Had Luther been less bold he would have been unfit for the work which God entrusted to him. Courage is contagious, and cowardice too.

III. Good intentions are best kept secret from those who are likely to oppose them. Nehemiah aware of the vigilance and enmity of Sanballat and his party. Careful to avoid betraying his purpose to those who were related to them by inter-marriage. Herein we see the prudence of this great man. In this, worthy of our imitation, who are engaged

in good works for God. Take no counsel with scoffers, nor give them any advantage in their profane opposition. Caution and forethought as necessary in this warfare as in carnal. We must not cast pearls before swine.

IV. Good intentions are best kept secret until the co-operation essential to success can be relied on. This work impossible without co-operation. Useless to attempt it until this secured. By personal effort and interview we prepare the way for united action and ultimate success. The soldiers must be enlisted one by one, then the battle-cry may be sounded. Workers in the Church must be secured one by one, then the work may be openly announced. This preparatory work done in silence and secrecy, afterwards declared openly.

Illustration:—“When Homer makes his heroes to march, he gives them silence for their guide; on the contrary, he makes cowards to babble and chatter like cranes. The one pass along like great rivers, letting their streams glide softly with silent majesty; the others only murmur like bubbling brooks. A sign of not being valiant is to strive to seem valiant.”

AN APPEAL FOR HELP.

ii. 17. *Then said I unto them, &c.*

I. The ground of the appeal. “Ye see the distress that we are in” (v. 17). An appeal to their *patriotism*, their *pity*, and their *piety*. *God’s* city is desolate, *your* city is in ruins. “We (putting himself along with them) are in distress.” A reproach to the Church, an object of derision to the world, shall we rest satisfied where we are? “Ye see.” The fact is patent, it cannot be concealed. No need to expatiate on this point, for you are mourning on account of it every day. See here model for all Christian appeals. Shame a powerful motive. To this Nehemiah appealed. What inconsistency in their conduct!—that they who boasted of the greatness and goodness of their God should be living in this miserable plight, as though he could not or would not deliver them! For very shame we should arise and build the waste places of Zion; strengthen her

stakes, and lengthen her cords; then shall her converts be multiplied.

II. The nature of the appeal. “Come, and let us build.” 1. *It solicited personal effort*; “let us build.” Time for debating and discussing past. Time for work had come. Nehemiah not satisfied with their good wishes, or money, or prayers; but sought their personal assistance. Every Christian is called upon to take his share of work in the Church. Not all adapted for same kind of work. All kinds of work, intellectual and manual, may be sanctified to the cause of God. In Israel’s battle with Midian, when Sisera was defeated and slain, we find all kinds of work recorded and commended (Judges v. 14). Meroz was cursed for its cowardly neutrality. We may not substitute money, or prayers, or good wishes for *work*. “Every man’s *work* shall be tried,” &c. “Let your light so

shine before men, that they may see your *good works*." "Well done, good and faithful servant." The child and the invalid, the school-girl and maidservant, the merchant and his errand-boy, have all some work to do for God. To every believer he says, "*Go work* to-day in my vineyard." At our peril do we say "I go," and go not. 2. *It promised personal aid*. "Let us build." Not go, but "*come*:" not go *ye*, but come, "*let us build*." An example as noble as rare, to see a courtier leave that wealth, and ease, and authority in the midst of which he was living, and go to dwell so far from court in an old, torn, and decayed city, where he should not live quietly, but toil and drudge like a day-labourer, in dread and danger of his life. Yet they who are earnest in God's work think not of ease, and bid none go where they are unwilling to go themselves, or do work which they are too proud to touch. Personal example in workers, and soldiers especially, far more powerful than personal authority. *Come*, always more successful than *go*.

III. The motive urged. "That we be no more a reproach" (v. 17). Here we see the misery they were in urged as a motive for action. Several years had elapsed since Cyrus gave them permission to return, and yet hitherto they had been unable to rebuild the walls. This plea often occurs in the Bible. "For thy great Name's sake," an argument often employed by eminent pleaders. (2 Kings xix. 4; Ps. xlii. 10; lxxiv. 18; lxxix. 12; lxxxix. 51; Prov. xiv. 31; 1 Kings viii. 41, 42; 1 Chron. xvii. 24; Ps. xxv. 11; Ps. lxxiv. 10; Jer. xiv. 7.) Jehovah jealous for his name, and will vindicate his character. When his Church is reproached and scorned he is assailed, and in jealousy for his honour will defend his own. Christ said to Saul of Tarsus, "Why persecutest thou me?" The wounds inflicted upon the members of his body on earth, were felt by him, the living head, in heaven.

IV. The encouragement offered. "Then I told them of the hand of my God," &c. (v. 18). The time for silence now past, and the time for speech come. The walls inspected, the work carefully

planned and thoroughly resolved upon, it only remained to make a bold appeal for immediate help, and commence forthwith, before the enemy could muster their forces or mature their plans. Note, promptness in religious work will often sweep away like a tornado all obstacles, and baffle all opponents. He assured his co-patriots—1. *That God was the instigator of the work*. "I told them of the hand of my God, which *was good* upon me" (v. 18). In previous verse the *law* was preached, here the *gospel*. First, he set forth their misery, then encouraged them by the promise of God's mercy. This order the true one for all teachers and ministers. They are the best scholars who will work without the rod: yet none so good but need the rod sometimes. A wise schoolmaster will make such use of both gentleness and severity as to gain his point with the least possible friction. 2. *That the king approved of the work*. "Also the king's words that he had spoken unto me." God had given him such favour in the king's sight, that as soon as he asked licence to go and build the city, where his fathers lay buried, it was granted; and the liberality and goodwill of the king were so great that he granted him soldiers to conduct him safely to Jerusalem, and commission to his officers for timber to build with. Why should they mistrust or doubt? With both God and the king on their side, what needed they more? God's servants should always seek to make themselves agreeable to those in high station, that they may receive their help in doing his work. Learn to be thankful for wise and benevolent rulers, and pray for their conversion (1 Tim. ii. 2).

V. The success of the appeal. "And they said, Let us rise and build" (v. 18). 1. *The response was prompt*. Without delay or discussion they entered with spirit upon the work there and then. Would that all congregations were equally prompt in accepting the invitations of the Gospel! "Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. vi. 2). Would that all Christians were as ready to work! 2. *The response was practical*. "Let us

rise and build." Not propose substitute, or alternative, but undertook *the work required* of them. Example for all Christian workers, not to go round difficulties, but meet them in the face. *Practical work* must be done in a *practical way*. Fancy and flimsy methods break down, whilst simple and personal effort accomplish great results.

3. *The response was unanimous.* "Let us rise and build." Even the listless were stirred for the time (Eliashib for instance). All with one accord undertook to carry out the work by God's blessing, and the king's favour. Co-operation necessary to the success of any large undertaking. World never converted until the churches are united.

THE STRENGTH OF UNITY.

ii. 18. *So they strengthened their hands for this good work.*

I. Consists in its power to protect individual workers against discouragement.

1. *Isolated workers are always liable to depression.* This, the result of bearing alone the burden of care and duty incident to their work. Few men have the indomitable courage of a Nehemiah, a Paul, a Luther. Most spirits quail when unsupported by the aid and sympathy of kindred workers.

2. *Mutual sympathy and conference relieve mental strain, and renew exhausted energy.* "Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. xxvii. 17). Burdens confessed are half removed. Mutual counsel will cheer the drooping spirit, and stimulate to increased effort. Christ recognized this when he sent out his disciples two and two. It is not good for man to be alone. "Where no counsel is the people fall" (Prov. xi. 14). "Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth" (Eccl. iv. 9, 10).

Illustration:—There are stragglers in the Church as well as in the army, who fall out of the ranks and are lost. Sometimes they manage to subsist for a while, living on the charity of the people and the scraps left by those in camp, but generally fall a prey to their isolation and exposure. One such found his way, during the American war, to the hospital at Sedalia. He was dying then, and could not give his name or regiment. He was a mere boy, and unequal to the toil of marching. He was wet and cold and weary, and in a few hours died, and was buried in a nameless grave. So do many fall out of the Church's ranks, and soon faint by the way. Pliny writes of a stone in the island of Scyros, that if it be whole, though a large and heavy one, it swims above water, but being broken it sinks. So long as saints keep whole, nothing

shall sink them; but if they break up, and divide, they are in danger of going down.

II. Consists in its power of resisting combined opposition from without.

1. *The full force of individual strength only awakened by the enthusiasm of united action.* Men are like the stone pyrites, which is cold and dull until well rubbed; then it becomes so brilliant and hot as to burn the hand. Intense earnestness only kindled by the contagion of glowing spirits. Coals need to be pressed together to become thoroughly hot. So do souls require to be brought into very close contact, and inspired by one common impulse, to be fully roused to fervour and self-sacrificing devotion.

2. *In unity, the full force of individual strength is directed against the common enemy.* Not as separate individuals, but as forming one combined and glowing mass. Such union is resistless as a stream of glowing lava.

Illustrations:—The sand-reed, which grows on the sandy shores of Europe, represents the influence of religion and the Church upon society. Its roots penetrate to a considerable depth, and spread in all directions, forming a net-work which binds together the loosest sands; whilst its strong tall leaves protect the surface from drought, and afford shelter to small plants, which soon grow between the reeds, and gradually form a new green surface on the bed of sand. But for the sand-reed, the sea-wind would long since have wafted the drift-sand far into the interior of the country, and have converted many a fruitful acre into a waste; but that invaluable grass opposes its stubborn resistance to the most furious gale. So does the united front of Church organization present an insuperable barrier to the aggressions of profanity and unbelief.

Standing one day before a beehive, Gotthold observed with delight how the little honey-birds departed and arrived, and from time to time

returned home laden with the spoils of the flowers. Meanwhile a great yellow hornet, the wolf among bees, came buzzing up in eager quest of prey. As it was evening-tide, and the bees after the heat of the day had settled about the mouth of the hive to breathe the cool air, it was amusing to observe that their fierce adversary lacked courage to attack their combined host and serried ranks. True, he often advanced for the purpose, but seeing how densely and compactly they were sitting, was forced to retreat empty-handed. At last, a bee, somewhat belated, arrived by itself; and on this straggler he instantly seized, fell with it to the earth, and instantly devoured it.

III. Consists in its power to cope with the inherent difficulties of the work, which otherwise would be insurmountable. 1. *Work which cannot be done by few may be accomplished by many.* This true of the wall-building. A small company of workers, however willing, would have been altogether inadequate for the work to be done. True of many other large Christian undertakings. Especially true of church or chapel building where the workers are mostly poor. 2. *Work which cannot be done by many acting separately, may be accomplished by the same acting in unison.* Unity is strength. It doubles the capacity of each individual worker. A hundred separate links or threads will

accomplish nothing; but join into a chain or a cable, and they may save a hundred lives.

Illustrations :—"Separate the atoms which make the hammer, and each would fall on the stone as a snow-flake; but welded into *one*, and wielded by the firm arm of the quarryman, it will break the massive rocks asunder. Divide the waters of Niagara into distinct and individual drops, and they would be no more than the falling-rain; but their united body would quench the fires of Vesuvius, and have some to spare for other volcanoes."—*Guthrie*.

✓ "Union is power. The most attenuated thread when sufficiently multiplied will form the strongest cable. A single drop of water is a weak and powerless thing; but an infinite number of drops united by the force of attraction will form a stream, and many streams combined will form a river; till rivers pour their water into the mighty oceans, whose proud waves, defying the power of man, none can stay but he who formed them. And thus, forces which, acting singly, are utterly impotent, are, when acting in combination, resistless in their energies and mighty in power."—*Salter*.

✓ "A thousand grains of powder, or a thousand barrels, scattered, a grain in a place, and fired at intervals, would burn, it is true, but would produce no concussion. Placed together in effective position, they would lift a mountain, and cast it into the sea. Even so, the whole Church, filled with faith, and fired by the Holy One who gave the tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost, will remove every mountain, fill up every valley, cast up the highway of the Lord, and usher in the jubilee of redemption."—*Boardman*.

SECOND HINDRANCE—OPEN DERISION.

ii. 19. *They laughed us to scorn, and despised us.*

I. Here is an attempt to stop the work of God by the combined opposition of wicked men. "When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah," &c. 1. *The work of God is sure to meet with opposition from wicked men.* They must hate and hinder it, because they are opposed to *all that is good* or godly. The triumph of good means the overthrow of evil. They will find some excuse for their oppression, and thus endeavour to make their conduct appear reasonable. 2. *The work of God will often provoke the combined hostility of those who have nothing else in common.* Thus did the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, &c., combine for the destruction of Israel, but in vain, for Jehovah brought to nought their evil

counsels. Such opposition Luther met with when he began to reform. The pope excommunicated him; the emperor proscribed him; Henry, king of England, and Lewis, king of Hungary, wrote against him; but the work prospered, because it was of God.

II. Here is an attempt to stop the work of God by pouring contempt upon it. "They laughed us to scorn." 1. *They despised the workers.* "As a company of fools, who could never effect what they attempted. So Erasmus and Sir Thomas More thought to ridicule the Lutherans out of their religion. This the Scripture calls cruel mocking (Heb. xi. 36), and ranks it with bloody persecution. The bitterest persecution which man can inflict is that of cruel

taunts and scurrilous invectives : but the least harmful also. Jude, Peter, and Paul, all foretold that in the last days there should come mockers (2 Pet. iii. ; 2 Tim. iii. ; Jude). Christ thus spitefully treated by Herod, Pilate, the priests, and the people. Solomon says, "He that mocketh shall be mocked" (Prov. iii.). David thus describes the reward of mockers, "He that dwelleth in the heavens shall mock them, and the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. ii.). Michal was childless all her life as a punishment for mocking David (2 Sam. vi.). The children that mocked Elisha were devoured by bears (2 Kings ii.). Belshazzar, king of Babylon, was destroyed with his kingdom when he despised the warnings of God (Dan. v.).

2. *They ridiculed the work.* "What is this thing that ye do?" Scoffingly they asked the question, as Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Wicked men will never be fast for a taunt. If the Church's character be above reproach, the Church's work is ridiculed as impossible or useless.

III. **Here is an attempt to stop the work of God by insinuating an evil design.** "Will ye rebel against the king?" 1. *When a good work cannot otherwise be hindered an evil motive is sure to be suggested.* The work is open, the motive secret. More easy to explain and defend former than latter. Men fear what is secret. Wicked men employ this dread for their own ends. 2. *Disloyalty to the State has always been a favourite charge with the Church's enemies.* Elijah is accused by Ahab of being a troubler of Israel (1 Kings xviii.). David was persecuted by Saul because the people sung, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. xviii.). Daniel was accused of disobedience, and consigned to the lions' den, because he prayed to the God of heaven (Dan. vi.). The Israelites were persecuted in Egypt lest they should rebel against Pharaoh (Exod. i.). Herod sought to slay the infant Christ, lest He should dethrone him (Matt. ii.). Christ was accused and executed as a malefactor guilty of treason (Jno. xviii.). The Apostles were accused of teaching sedi-

tion, and subverting the commonwealth (Acts v.). St. Paul was charged with the same crime at Athens (Acts xvii.). Luther was called a "trumpeter of rebellion." To excuse the shameful massacre of St. Bartholemew, a medal was struck with the inscription, *Valour against the rebels*, on one side, and on the reverse, *Piety hath excited Justice*.

IV. **Here is an attempt to stop the work of God utterly frustrated.** "Then answered I them, and said," &c. (v. 20). The boastful arrogance of Sanballat nothing daunted Nehemiah; and as they were not ashamed to charge him and his people unjustly, so he is not ashamed to step forth boldly in defence of the work they had undertaken. Thus Moses bearded Pharaoh; thus Jephthah withstood the Ammonites (Judg. xi.); thus Hezekiah defended the Jews from the blasphemies of Rabshakeh; thus David stood up against Goliath (1 Sam. xvii.); thus did Moses and Aaron withstand the reviling and calumny of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numb. xvi.). Nehemiah here in the same spirit appeals to God as the ground of his hope, and the source of his confidence. Balak, the king of Moab, hated the camp of Israel, and bribed Balaam, a prophet, to curse them. Just so does the world hate the Church, and is never happier than when it can hire the ministers of the Church to turn against it, and betray its interests. But it can no more succeed by its curses than the wicked Balak could; it must seduce Christians to sin, and then it prevails; not by its own power, but by tempting the Church to provoke the anger of God. (See Addenda.)

Illustrations :—(a) Pliny, governor of Pontus, under the emperor Trajan, was appointed to punish the Christians, but seeing their great number he doubted what he should do, and eventually wrote to the emperor that "he found no wickedness in them, but that they would not worship images, and that they would sing psalms before day-light unto Christ as God, and did forbid all sins to be used among them." The emperor hearing this became a great deal more gentle to them (Euseb. Lib. iii. cap. 33). Sallust, tormenting Theodorus, a Christian, in various ways, and for a long time, to make him forsake his faith, but all in vain, went to the emperor Julian, and told him what he had done, counselling him

that "he should prove that way no more by cruelty, for they got glory by suffering patiently,

and he got shame in punishing so sharply," because they would not yield to him.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD AN INCENTIVE TO WORK.

ii. 20. *The God of heaven, he will prosper us, therefore, &c.*

"Knowledge is power," says the philosopher; "faith is power," says the saint. And what is faith? Confidence in God, in his almighty power and faithfulness; a confidence which nerves the soul for every task. No principle can brace a man like the principle of implicit trust in God. It leads not to indolence, but to effort, because—

I. It suggests almighty protection. "The God of heaven." 1. *It regards Jehovah as King of the celestial universe.* "Lord of Hosts," one of God's most frequent names (Ps. xlvi. 7; Isa. i. 24; Jer. xlvi. 18; Zech. i. 6; Mal. i. 14). "All power is given unto me in heaven" (Matt. xxviii.). When the God "who rolls the stars along," and "upholdeth all things by his word;" the God who doeth according to his will amongst the armies of heaven, and controls the hidden forces of the universe; the God who is Almighty, and Omniscient, and Eternal, to whom every celestial knee bows in willing homage and adoration; when this God is on our side, who can be afraid?—what can hinder? 2. *It regards Jehovah as the providential ruler of the terrestrial universe.* This implied rather than expressed. "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth." In earth because in heaven. All destinies in his hand, all events under his control.

II. It suggests providential direction. "He will prosper us." 1. *The way may be dark, but God will unfold it.* When we have, like Nehemiah, done our best, and given our utmost, then we may safely commit our cause to God and patiently await the issue. Thus Abraham followed the leadings of Providence (Gen. xii.). Thus confidingly did he place his son Isaac on the altar (Gen. xxii.), saying, "God will provide himself a sacrifice." Thus the apostles went at the Saviour's bidding without scrip, &c. (Luke xxii.). In this spirit let all who fear God boldly begin his work,

and continue it steadfastly, looking for his guidance, and they shall not be disappointed.

Illustration:—A Swiss chamois hunter, crossing the Mer de Glace, fell into one of the enormous crevasses that rend the ice in many places. He fell a hundred yards without serious injury; but his situation seemed hopeless. He could not climb out; and the cold would soon freeze him to death. A stream of water ran down the crevasse; he followed it, wading, stooping, crawling, or floating as best he could. At length he reached a vaulted chamber from which there was no visible outlet. The water heaved threateningly. Retreat was impossible. Delay was death. Commending himself to God the hunter plunged into the whirling flood. Then followed a moment of darkness and terror; then he was thrown up amid the flowers and hay-fields of the vale of Chamouni. Thus mysteriously are we led by a gracious Providence to safety and success.

2. *The way may be crowded with difficulties, but God will remove them.* "He will prosper us." Difficulties as many as Nehemiah encountered may beset our path and work, but not more or mightier than God can remove. *How* deliverance shall come we know not, and must leave to God. All we know is that *it will come in due time.* On one occasion Luther was very importunate at the throne of grace to know the mind of God, and it seemed to him as if God spoke aloud and said: "*I am not to be traced.*" We can *trust* where we cannot trace. The Almighty has his "times and seasons." An eminent saint thus wrote to a friend: "It has frequently been with my hopes and desires in regard to providence, as with my watch and the sun. My watch has often been ahead of true time; I have gone faster than providence, and have been forced to *stand still and wait*, or I have been *set painfully back.*" Flavel says, "some providences are like Hebrew letters, they must be read backwards."

III. It suggests Divine benediction. "He will prosper us." 1. *It matters not how men may hinder if God prosper*

the work. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" 2. *It matters not how the king's favour may fluctuate if Jehovah's remain the same.* He is the Unchangeable One. Man's favour may be fickle, and therefore little to be relied upon. God's never fails, therefore with confidence his saints may say, "He will prosper us."

IV. It anticipates ultimate success. "He will prosper us." 1. *It concludes that what God initiates he intends to complete.* A good beginning is a strong reason to persuade a man that God will grant good success in the end. David comforted himself when he met Goliath by the thought that he who had delivered him from the lion and the bear, would now continue his gracious interposition. God's plans never fail. 2. *It concludes that what God commences he is able to consummate.* When God said to Paul that all the souls with him should be safe, there were various means used; all were not able to swim to the shore, and the ship was not able to bring them all to shore, but yet by broken boards and by

one means or other, all got to shore. So the Lord brings things to pass in a strange, but a sure manner; sometimes by one way, sometimes by another. He breaks in pieces many ships, that we think should bring us to shore, but then he casts us on such planks as will eventually bring us there.

Illustration :—"I looked upon the wrong side of a piece of tapestry, and it seemed to me a continued nonsense. There was neither head nor foot therein, a company of thrums and threads, with many pieces and patches of several sorts, sizes, and colours, all which signified nothing to my understanding. But then looking on the reverse, or right side, all put together did spell excellent proportions, and figures of men and cities; so that indeed it was a history, not wrote with a pen, but wrought with a needle. So, if men look upon some of God's providential dealings with a mere eye of reason, they will hardly find any sense therein. But alas! the *wrong side* is before our eyes, whilst the *right side* is presented to the God of heaven, who knoweth that an admirable order doth result out of this confusion; and what is presented to him at present, may hereafter be so showed to us as to convince our judgments of the truth thereof."—*T. Fuller.*

THE MISERABLE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH'S ENEMIES.

ii. 20. *Ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, &c.*

I. They are excluded from the Church's pale. 1. *Jerusalem a type of the Church militant and the Church triumphant.* There God's name recorded. 2. *From which sinners are self-excluded.* By their country, creed, and conduct Sanballat and his friends were excluded from communion with the true Israelites. Scoffers by their own conduct condemn themselves to separation from the true spiritual Church of God. Idolaters can have no part with those who worship the true God, for he will be worshipped in "spirit and in truth."

II. They are cut off from the Church's privileges. 1. *The privilege of Church membership.* "No portion." This a privilege which many ignore. If the Church is the Body and the Bride of Christ, surely it must be an honour to belong to it. 2. *Privilege of Church support.* "Nor right." To the poor and afflicted this a great boon. As in the

Apostles' days, so now the Church undertakes to care for its poor. 3. *Privilege of ancestral reputation.* "Nor memorial." The Samaritans endeavoured to claim Jewish ancestry, but unsuccessfully. Saints are held in sweet remembrance in the Church. Their name is often "as ointment poured forth." This honour denied to the families of those who have no fellowship with the Church.

III. They are forbidden to participate in the Church's work. As they feared not their threats, so now they would have none of their help. "Be ye not unequally yoked," &c. God's servants are knit together by two bonds; the one is Christ their head; the other, brotherly love. Neither of these exist amongst idolaters. This work is—1. *The most exalted in which any human being can engage.* Work for God, for human souls, for the Church which Christ has redeemed by his own blood, for all

eternity, cannot but exalt and ennoble those who take part in it. 2. *The most remunerative in which any human being can engage.* All is pure gain without any loss. The gain is not temporal, but eternal. The reward is found in the glory that is brought to Christ, the salvation that is brought to men, and

the reflex benefit which descends upon the soul of the worker. 3. *Work which requires moral qualifications possessed only by the true servants of God.* Hence the unfitness of the Samaritan unbelievers. God never sends men out into the world as apostles until they have become true disciples in heart and life.

ADDENDA TO CHAPTER II.

ii. 8. THE HAND OF GOD,—THANKSGIVING.

I. The duty of thanksgiving. "Giving thanks," a duty commanded (Eph. v. 20). When thanks are given thankfulness is implied, or it is mere formality. The seat of thankfulness is the heart; there it ought to be cherished with the utmost care, and every motive remembered by which it is enlivened and increased. If the heart be thankful, it is perfectly reasonable and proper that its feelings be expressed. The most powerful arguments enforce this duty. 1. *Its antiquity.* It is as old as the creation. No sooner did intelligent beings exist than gratitude was expressed: "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job xxxviii. 7). Paradise was the seat of thanksgiving before man fell; and consequently before the voice of prayer was heard, or the sigh of penitence was known. 2. *Its perpetuity.* It not only commenced sooner, but will continue longer than other duties; it will survive most other acts of service. Prayer will cease; repentance will be no more; faith and hope, as to their present use, will terminate; but thanksgiving will be the delightful business of the upper world, and will extend to the countless ages of eternity. 3. *Express injunctions* to give thanks are numerous in Holy Scripture. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good" (Ps. cvii. 1). "Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises unto our God" (Ps. cxlvii. 1). 4. *Example of the best men.* What good men have lived without gratitude?

What eminent characters are recorded in the Bible who abound not in thanksgiving? Nature conspires to engage us in this employment. "All thy works praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints shall bless thee." "Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul."

II. To whom thanksgiving is to be offered. 1. *To men.* We ought to give thanks to men for the favours we receive from them. So far as they are our benefactors they are entitled to grateful acknowledgments, and ingratitude is justly marked as one of the worst of crimes, and as evidencing the basest disposition of heart. 2. *To God.* He is our greatest benefactor: every other is but his instrument and agent. The Most High is our best Friend; for other friends we are indebted to him, and they are all of his sending. Hence the injunction, "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High" (Ps. l. 14). "Giving thanks unto God, even the Father." Here we are reminded of his paternal character. He has the heart of a father, the tenderest feeling, the kindest affection. "Like as a father," &c. Such is the God to whom our thanksgivings are offered.

III. The time when thanksgiving is seasonable. 1. *When we enter the sanctuary.* "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise." 2. *When we are the recipients of abounding mercies.* And who is not? He

daily loadeth us with benefits. 3. *When we have received some special favour*, or been delivered from some great calamity. Hannah prayed and wept, and returned to offer thanksgiving in the place where she had prayed (1 Sam. i.). The lepers were reproached by Christ for not returning thanks for their miraculous cure. Nehemiah acknowledged "the good hand of God," which had been over him for good, opening alike the king's heart, and his own providential path. 4. *Always*. "Giving thanks *always*." "I thank my God *always*, on your behalf." "I will bless the Lord *always*; his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Ps. xxxiv.

1). Saints are not to be always singing praises, or with their lips expressing gratitude; yet there is a sense in which they are always to be "giving thanks." They ought to cherish a thankful heart, a disposition of gratitude; and should frequently take occasion, by every suitable means, to manifest and express it. Thanksgiving should therefore be offered *to the end of life*, and in every *changing circumstance* of life. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," &c. (Phil. iv. 6). This service is never unseasonable; and sometimes it is peculiarly appropriate.—*Kidd*.

ii. 11. PREPARATORY RETIREMENT.

The pleasures and advantages of solitude have been often admired, and recommended. All love the world; yet all complain of it; and whatever schemes of happiness are devised, the scene is always laid in a withdrawalment from it. It is there the warrior feeds his courage, and arranges the materials of victory. It is there the statesman forms and weighs his plans of policy. There the philosopher pursues his theories and experiments. There the man of genius feels the power of thought, and the glow of fancy. And retirement is friendly to communion with God. Consider—

I. The duty of retirement. Premise two things—1. The *place* is indifferent. It matters not whether it be a private room, or an open field. 2. It is not a state of *absolute retirement*. Man was made for society as well as solitude. A great part of our religion regards our fellow-creatures, and can only be discharged by intermixing with them. What our Saviour thought of hiding in woods and cells, appears obviously from his words, "Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men," &c. It is therefore possible for a Christian to be alone, when he *ought* to be abroad. It may be much more pleasing often to sit alone, reading or reflecting, than to be called forth to give advice or to visit the afflicted. What God requires is *comparative* and *occa-*

sional secession for moral and spiritual purposes. "Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." This duty enjoined by *example* as well as by precept. "Isaac went out into the field at eventide to meditate." "Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled with him a man, until the dawning of the day." "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house," &c. Daniel retired three times a day. Peter went up to the house-top to pray about the sixth hour, and received a Divine communication. Of our Saviour, whose life has the force of a law, it is said, "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." At another time, "he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." *The Sabbath* brings us immediately into the presence of God, and gives us an opportunity to examine our character and condition, such as cannot be obtained during the six days of toil. It renews those pious impressions, which our intercourse with the things of time and sense is continually wearing off. This retirement often enforced by the *dispensations of Providence*. **Affliction**

both disinclines us to social circles, and disqualifies us for them. Sickness separates a man from the crowd, and confines him to his bed that he may ask, "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" A *reduced condition* will diminish your associates. It will drive away the selfish herd, who think that a friend is born for prosperity. This retirement produces—1. *A devotional temper.* There we can divulge what we could not in the presence of the dearest earthly friend. 2. *A desire to rise above the world.* This will induce a man to retire. Where is the world conquered? In a crowd? No—but alone. In the midst of its active pursuits? No—but viewed in the presence of Jehovah, and in the remembrances of eternity. Then its emptiness appears. Then the fascination is dissolved. Then we look upward, and say, "Now what wait I for? my hope is in thee." 3. *A wish to obtain self-knowledge.* Only when alone can he examine his state, estimate his attainments, explore his defects, discern the source of past danger, or set a watch against future temptations. 4. *Love to God.* When we are supremely attached to a person, his presence is all we want; he will be the chief attraction, even in company. Friendship deals much in secrecy; kindred souls have a thousand things to hear and to utter that are not for a common ear. This pre-eminently the case with the intimacy subsisting between God and the believer. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy." "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there will I speak comfortably unto her."

II. The advantages of retirement.

1. *It furnishes opportunity for communion with God.* "Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee" (Ezek. iii. 22). We admire the nobleman that kindly notices a peasant; and the sovereign who deigns to converse with one of his poorer subjects. But

here is the Creator talking with his creature. Some of us cannot aspire after intercourse with many of our fellow-creatures by reason of our condition, and our talents. But whatever be our condition, or our talents, we have a free and invited access to God. The *subject* of this communion is variously called "his secret," and "his covenant." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." "He will speak peace unto his people." "The meek will he teach his way." The *mode* of this communion is not supernatural, as of old. God talked with Moses, as a man talketh with his friend. It is mere fanaticism to expect God to commune with us in dreams, visions, sudden impulses, and audible sounds. He opens our understandings in the Scriptures. He leads us into all truth. He applies the doctrines and promises of his word by his Spirit. The *result* and *evidence* of this communion will be that our hearts will burn within us. Other effects produced by this communion are—1. *A deep and solemn sense of our vanity and vileness.* Fellowship with God, instead of encouraging unhallowed presumption, gives a man such intimate views of the peculiar glory of God as fill him with godly fear. Thus was it with Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Job, Isaiah, and Peter. 2. *An unquenchable desire for closer communion.* That which contents the believer makes him insatiable. He desires no more than God; but he desires more of him. 3. *An ever-increasing likeness to God.* "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Some boast of being much with God; but so censurable are their conduct and temper, that fear of their fellow-creatures would like to have much to do with them. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."—*Jay.*

ii. 19. OPEN DERISION.

I. The sin of mocking weakens every virtuous restraint. There are restraints of education, of example, of regard to reputation. But when a man becomes a mocker, such restraints are relaxed; they gradually lose their hold. With every advance in levity and jesting, a sense of shame subsides, the fear of incurring censure abates, respect for the authority of parents and for the opinion and exhortation of friends declines, custom degenerates into habit, and habit becomes settled and easy.

II. The sin of mocking strengthens vicious propensities. This naturally results from the preceding. As the one declines the other gains ground. Let a man become indifferent to what is right, and he will practise what is wrong; let him cease to do good, and he learns to do evil. Is a bad temper, for instance, which is never repressed, no worse after years of indulgence? Does harmless mirth never proceed to profaneness? Does the habit of loose talking never lead to falsehood, nor settle in deceit? You cannot mock at the Bible without your regard for the sacred Book sinking in proportion. You cannot mock at sin but your aversion to sin dies and your love to sin revives.

III. The sin of mocking gives great advantage to your worst enemies. Such are improper companions. Go with them one mile, and they will easily induce you to go two. Every compliance only emboldens their demands, and facilitates their conquest; and every victory they gain only throws you more completely into their power. Walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and stand in the way of sinners, and ere long you will

sit "in the seat of the scornful." But there is a worse enemy than these; "the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience," "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." Resist him, and he will flee from you; but invite his attacks, and you inevitably fall into his hands. We read of those "who are taken captive by him at his will." These are they who indulge the tempers he would have them indulge, who practise the works which he instigates and approves.

IV. The sin of mocking exposes to peculiar marks of God's displeasure. Witness the destruction of the youths who mocked Elisha (2 Kings ii. 23). Some who have scoffed at the Bible and blasphemed its author have been struck dead in a moment. Persistence in sin has more often been followed by judicial hardness. Men who have begun with jesting at the things of God, and sporting with their own iniquity, have been given up to strong delusions and final impenitence.

V. The sin of mocking terminates in remediless ruin. There is a world beyond the present. There mockers of every class have their full recompense. "They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations; I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them." "Ye have set at nought my counsels, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish" (Isa. lxvi. 3, 4; Prov. i. 25, 26).—*Kidd.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

The hand of God. Protection. 1. John Knox, the celebrated Scotch reformer, had many remarkable escapes from the malicious designs of his enemies. He was accustomed to sit at the head of the table in his own house, with his back to the window; but on one particular evening he would neither himself sit in his chair, nor allow any one else to do so. That very evening a bullet was shot through the window, purposely to kill him; it grazed the chair in which he usually sat, and made a hole in the foot of the candlestick. 2. Posidonius, in the Life of Augustine, relates that this good man, going on one occasion to preach at a distant town, took with him a guide to direct him in the way. This man, by some unaccountable means, mistook the usual road, and fell into a by-path. It afterwards proved that in this way the preacher's life had been saved, as his enemies, aware of his journey, had placed themselves in the proper road with a design to kill him.

Envy. "Dionysius the tyrant," says Plutarch, "out of envy, punished Philoxenus the musician, because he could sing, and Plato the philosopher, because he could dispute better than himself." Cambyses, king of Persia, slew his brother Smerdis, out of envy, because he could

draw a stronger bow than himself or any of his followers; and the monster Caligula slew his brother because he was a beautiful young man.

"Base envy withers at another's joy,
And hates that excellence it cannot reach."

Derision. A poor man who had heard the preaching of the gospel, and to whom it had been greatly blessed, was the subject of much profane ridicule and jesting amongst his neighbours. On being asked if these persecutions did not sometimes make him ready to give up his profession of religion, he replied, "No. I recollect that our good minister once said in his sermon, that if we were so foolish as to permit such people to laugh us out of our religion, till at last we dropped into hell, *they could not laugh us out again.*" Admiral Colpoys relates that when he first left his lodgings to join his ship as a midshipman, his landlady presented him with a Bible and a guinea, saying, "God bless you, and prosper you, my lad; and as long as you live never suffer yourself to be laughed out of your money or your prayers." The young sailor carefully followed this advice through life, and had reason to rejoice that he had done so.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.] 1. **Eliashib]** The grandson of Jeshua, and the first high priest after the return from Babylon. No reason to doubt that the same Eliashib is referred to in Ezra x. 6. **The sheep gate]** In regard to the gates of ancient Jerusalem much uncertainty prevails. The sheep gate probably the *προβατικὴ* of John v. 2, translated in E. V. "sheep market." Modern topographers seek it near the present St. Stephen's gate, through which the Bedouins to this day drive sheep into the town for sale. Near the temple area. **Sanctified]** Consecrated it by special ceremonies. "It was the first-fruits, and therefore, in the sanctification of it, the whole lump and building was sanctified."—*Poole*. **The tower of Meah, the tower of Hananeel]** Meah is the Hebrew word for "a hundred." Fuerst translates it the giant tower. Whence the names of these towers were derived is unknown. 2. **And next unto him]** Lit. *And at his hand*. The wall was divided into portions, one of which was assigned to each of the great families. 3. **The sons of Hassenaah]** Rather, *the sons of Senaah* (see Ezra ii. 35). Senaah was a city or perhaps a district. 6. **The old gate]** Keil reads, "gate of the old wall," as referring to the old wall in distinction from "the broad wall," which was newer. 8. **The broad wall]** "or double wall, formerly broken down by Joash, afterwards rebuilt by Uzziah, who made it so strong Chaldeans left it standing."—*Jamieson*. 9. **The ruler of the half part]** A half district; the district being divided into two that it might be managed more easily (comp. vers. 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18). 13. **Zanoah]** The name of two towns in the territory of Judah. 14. **Beth-haccerem]** From Jeremiah vi. 1 we find that it was used as a beacon-station, and that it was near Tekoa. Supposed to be now occupied by Bethulia on the hill called by Europeans "The Frank Mountain." 16. **The sepulchres of David, &c.]** *i. e.* along the precipitous cliffs of Zion.—*Barclay*. 19. **At the turning of the wall]** *i. e.* the wall across the Tyropæon being a continuation of the first wall, connecting Mount Zion with the temple wall.—*Barclay*. 25. **The tower which lieth out from the king's high house]** Solomon's palace doubtless occupied the south-east corner of the present Haram. 26. **The Nethinims]** The Nethinim were a servile and subject caste. "Not only the priests and the Levites, but the meanest persons that belonged to the house of God contributed to the work."—*Bishop Patrick*.

HOMILETIC CONTENTS OF CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—32. The Moral Significance of Names.	Ver. 6. The Old Gate.
” 1—32. Life’s Masonry.	” 8. The Broad Wall.
” 1—32. A Suggestive Church Record.	” 12. Family Zeal.
” 1. Priesthood.	” 13—19. High Men at Lowly Tasks.
” 1. Ministerial Adaptability.	” 15, 16. David, the National Hero.
” 2, 3. System and Detail in Work.	” 20—32. The Workmen’s Day-Book.
” 5. Rival Classes.	

THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES.

A CHAPTER of names. To be passed over by the bulk of Bible readers. But the names are biblical. The chapters of names are a noticeable part of the Book of Nehemiah, as they are of the Bible.

I. The meaning of individual names. The origin of language is mysterious. But in earliest times amongst all nations—our own not excepted—names meant things. Specially true of the Jewish nation. Names were not given from caprice or because others bore them. They shadowed forth the character, or commemorated a circumstance, or prophesied a future.

Abel signified breath, vapour—a sign of the transitoriness of his life. David meant dearly-beloved. Enoch, disciplined. Elijah, God the Lord, or the strong Lord. Elisha, “to whom God is salvation.” Abraham, “the father of a multitude,” and Moses, “drawn out of the water,” were commemorative. Sometimes the name was a protest. Amittai, a veracious man living in a time of laxity.

Eliashib’s name (ver. 1) perpetually reminded him that “God was in heaven, and governed the world he created.” Nehemiah could not have borne a name better adapted for a work so arduous as his. Nehemiah means, “whom God comforts.” Meremoth (ver. 4), if true to his name, should be a firm man. Jehoiada (ver. 6) needed no priest to remind him that he was known of God. Uzziel (ver. 8) might work fearlessly, for, said his name, “God is my strength.” Malchijah (ver. 11) would hardly be afraid of Sanballat’s anger or Tobiah’s scorn. “Am not I Malchijah,” he would say, “and does not that tell me that God is my king?” The Nethinims (ver. 26) were the dedicated ones.

In other languages the same law prevailed. A man bearing the name of Andrew was courageous, and an Augusta majestic. Arthur was a strong man. She who was honoured with the name Agnes was chaste. An Alice was noble, and a Louisa modest.

In more artificial times names lost their meaning. When the mother of John Baptist declared that he should be called John, her friends said, “There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.” Names were losing their meaning. Here was a man born into the world filled with the grace of God—what shall his name be? “Zacharias,” they say; “that is his father’s name.” They ask the dumb father, and he writes “John.” Now-a-days a man may have the name of John and be graceless enough. We have no proof that Charles will be noble. We give our children fancy names. Family names are reasonable; fancy names are foolish. Except that they are given thoughtlessly, their morality would be doubtful. Our true name is our Christian name.

II. The solemn significance of names. A name is a key to the nature or history of the thing which bears it. In the history of the creation we read that “God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” And so it has been well said by Carlyle that not only all common speech, but science, poetry itself, is no other than

a right *naming*. Some languages have the same expression for WORD and THING. Jesus Christ said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34). "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. xxiii. 7). "Lie not one to another"—not because you will not be trusted, but because—"ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Coloss. iii. 9). Wise men say that you can tell the character of any nation by its language. "There was a time in the history of Europe when the controversy about what a name represents involved issues so grave that men were burnt for taking what was considered the heretical side of this controversy."—*R. W. Dale*. "Our general terms, man, tree, insect, flower, are the names of particular or single specimens extended, on the ground of a perceived similarity, to kinds or species. They come in this manner to stand for millions of particular men, trees, insects, flowers that we do not and never can know. They are, to just this extent, WORDS OF IGNORANCE; only we are able, in the use, to hold right judgments of innumerable particulars we do not know, and have the words so far as WORDS OF WISDOM."—*Horace Bushnell*. Reality is a cardinal virtue. Speech is not given us to hide our thoughts. What is truth but the correspondence of words with things, of life with speech? "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 37).

III. The relation of the individual to the race. Names perpetuate memories. William is named to-day after a William of sixty years ago. Of this latter there is only a name. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh" (Eccles. i. 4). THE DAY OF JUDGMENT will harmonize names and things. "Then shall the King say," &c. (Matt. xxv. 34—46).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Hebrew names. "The Hebrew names were nearly all significant. Sometimes commemoration was in a name. Sometimes it uttered a testimony. Sometimes a prophecy stirred in it. The very name of a man sometimes shone like a burning lamp in the darkness of an evil time. When need was, a new name was taken or given, in addition to, or in place of, the original one, and borne as men bear a banner or speak a watchword."—*Alexander Raleigh, D. D.*

Names and periods in Hebrew history. "What signifies a name? In these days, when names are only epithets, it signifies nothing. 'Jehovah, Jove, or Lord,' as the 'Universal Prayer' insinuates, are all the same. Now, to assert that it matters not whether God be called Jehovah, Jove, or Lord is true, if it mean this, that a devout and earnest heart is accepted by God, let the name be what it will by which he is addressed. But if it mean that Jove and Jehovah express the same Being—that the character of him whom the pagan worshipped was the same as the character of him whom Israel adored under the name of Jehovah—that they refer to the same group of ideas—or that ALWAYS names are but names, then we must look much deeper.

"In the Hebrew history are discernible three periods distinctly marked, in which names and words bore very different characters. These three, it has been observed by acute philologists, correspond to the periods in which the nation bore the three different appellations of Hebrews, Israelites, Jews.

"In the first of these periods names meant truths, and words were the symbols of realities. The characteristics of the names given then were simplicity and sincerity. They were drawn from a few simple sources: either from some characteristic of the individual, as Jacob, the supplanter; or Moses, drawn from the water; or from the idea of family, as Ben-jamin, the son of my right hand; or from the conception of the tribe or nation, then gradually consolidating itself; or, lastly, from the religious idea of God. But in this case not the highest notion of God; not Jah, or Jehovah, but simply the earlier and simpler idea of Deity: El—Israel, the prince of El; Peniel, the face of El. In these days names were real, but the conceptions they contained were not the loftiest.

"The second period begins about the time of the departure from Egypt, and it is characterized by unabated simplicity, with the addition of sublimer thought and feeling more intensely religious. The heart of the nation was big with mighty and new religious truth, and the feelings with which the national heart was swelling found vent in the names which were given abundantly. God, under his name Jah, the noblest assemblage of spiritual truths yet conceived, became the adjunct to names of places and persons. Oshea's name is changed into Je-hoshua.

"Observe, moreover, that in this period there was no fastidious, over-refined chariness in the use of that name. Men conscious of deep and real reverence are not fearful of the appearance of irreverence. The word became a common word, as it always may, so long as it is FELT, and awe is REAL. A mighty cedar was called a cedar of Jehovah; a lofty mountain, a mountain of Jehovah.

Human beauty even was praised by such an epithet. Moses was divinely fair, beautiful to God. The eternal name became an adjunct. No beauty, no greatness, no goodness was conceivable except as emanating from him : therefore his name was freely but most devoutly used.

“Like the earlier period, in this too words meant realities ; but, unlike the earlier period, they are impregnated with deeper religious thought.

“The third period was at its zenith in the time of Christ : words had lost their meaning, and shared the hollow, unreal state of all things. A man’s name might be Judas, and still he might be a traitor. A man might be called Pharisee, exclusively religious, and yet the name might only cover the hollowness of hypocrisy ; or he might be called most noble Festus, and be the meanest tyrant that ever sat upon a pro-consular chair. This is the period in which every keen and wise observer knows that the decay of national religious feeling has begun. That decay in the meaning of words, that lowering of the standard of the ideas for which they stand, is a certain mark of this. The debasement of a language is a sure mark of the debasement of a nation. The insincerity of a language is a proof of the insincerity of a nation : for a time comes in the history of a nation when words no longer stand for things ; when names are given for the sake of an euphonious sound ; and when titles are but the epithets of unmeaning courtesy ; a time when Majesty, Defender of the Faith, Most Noble, Worshipful, and Honourable not only mean nothing, but do not flush the cheek with the shame of convicted falsehood when they are worn as empty ornaments.”—*F. W. Robertson.*

Origin of language. “The opinions about the origin of language may be divided into three classes, as follows :—

“(a) The belief that man at his creation was endowed with a full, perfect, and copious language, and that as his faculties were called forth by observation and experience, this language supplied him at every step with names for the various objects he encountered. In this view, which has found many able advocates, speech is separated from and precedes thought ; for as there must have been a variety of phenomena, both outward and in his mind, to which the first man was a stranger, until long experience gradually unfolded them, their names must have been intrusted to him long before the thoughts or images which they were destined ultimately to represent were excited in his mind.

“(b) The belief that the different families of men, impelled by necessity, invented and settled by agreement the names that should represent the ideas they possessed. In this view language is a human invention, grounded on convenience. But to say that man has invented language would be no better than to assert that he has invented law. To make laws, there must be a law obliging all to keep them ; to form a compact to observe certain institutes, there must be already a government protecting this compact. To invent language presupposes language already, for how could men agree to name different objects without communicating by words their designs ? In proof of this opinion, appeal is made to the great diversity of languages. Here it is supposed again that thought and language were separate, and that the former had made some progress before the latter was annexed to it.

“(c) The third view is, that as the Divine Being did not give man at his creation actual knowledge, but the power to learn and to know, so he did not confer a language, but the power to name and describe. The gift of reason, once conveyed to man, was the common root from which both thought and speech proceeded, like the pith and the rind of the tree, to be developed in inseparable union. With the first inspection of each natural object the first imposition of a name took place (Gen. ii. 19). In the fullest sense language is a Divine gift ; but the power, and not the results of its exercise, the germ, and not the tree, was imparted. A man can teach names to another man, but nothing less than Divine power can plant in another’s mind the far higher gift, the faculty of naming. From the first we have reason to believe that the functions of thought and language went together. A conception received a name ; a name recalled a conception ; and every accession to the knowledge of things expanded the treasures of expression. And we are entangled in absurdities by any theory which assumes that either element existed in a separate state antecedently to the other.”—*Archbishop of York.*

“We do not make words ; they are given to us by One higher than ourselves. Wise men say that you can tell the character of any nation by its language, by watching the words they use, the names they give to things ; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. It is God, and Christ, the Word of God, who gives words to men, who puts it into the hearts of men to call certain things by certain names ; and according to a nation’s godliness, and wisdom, and purity of heart will be its power of using words discreetly and reverently. That miracle of the gift of tongues, of which we read in the New Testament, would have been still most precious and full of meaning if it had had no other use than this—to teach men from whom words come. When men found themselves all of a sudden inspired to talk in foreign languages which they had never learnt, to utter words of which they themselves did not know the meaning, do you not see how it must have made them feel that all language is God’s making and God’s giving ? Do you not see how it must have made them feel what awful, mysterious things words were, like those cloven tongues of fire which fell on the apostles ? The tongues of fire signified the difficult foreign languages which they suddenly began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance. And where did the tongues of fire come from ? Not out of themselves, not out of the earth beneath, but down from the heaven above, to signify that it is not from man’s flesh or brain, or the earthly part of him, that words are bred, but that they come down from Christ, the Word of God, and are breathed into the minds of men by the Spirit of God.”—*Charles Kingsley.*

LIFE'S MASONRY.

INTRODUCTION.—The Scriptural figures of life's work as a building. St Peter's description of God as building up a fabric of "lively stones" (1 Peter ii. 4, 5). It is his remembrance of the Saviour's own use of the figure in Matt. xvi. 18: "Upon this rock I will build my Church." St. Paul's description of his own apostolic life as that of a "wise master-builder"—a spiritual Nehemiah (1 Cor. iii. 10—15).

I. Every one to contribute his life-toil to the building up of the city of God. 1. *True of the individual character*—the fallen, ruined "city of Mansoul." Not what we rake together of earthly things, but what we rear in the edifice of our personal character, our true work. 2. *True of society.* The history of the world a history of the restless reconstructions of society. The reformers and teachers of every age, scanning the desolations of their time, have said, "Let us arise and build!" and with none of Babel's profanity have said in hope, "Go to, let us build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven!" That is what the piled-up fruit of generations of toil shall be.

II. Every man has his own appointed sphere and kind of work. 1. *The manifold division of labour in the erection of a great edifice may become to us a parable of the various uses of human character and ability.* To some the strong work—the foundations and buttresses—plain, practical usefulness. To others there is given work at the gates of knowledge and intercourse. To some it is the task to beautify and embellish life and its surroundings, to sculpture bright things and thoughts. To the sagacity of others is committed the towers of outlook and defence for human society. 2. *Every man to find his own task.* Providential circumstances and the bent of wise inclination point us to our share of the wall. The ruin lying nearest our feet, the weak place nearest our own home, is our task-work. 3. *Every man to be content with his own task.* Who does not at times sigh in envy of his brother's portion in life's great enterprise! We think we could work with less moiling, and get the lines truer, if we were working on some other piece of ground. It's better as it is. "To every man his work" (Mark xiii. 34).

III. Every man contributes but a fragment to the great whole. All each builder does is to contribute so many feet of the great girdle of masonry; but it is the multiplication of these small piles which completes the circumference. 1. *Individual life.* Do not judge of experiences singly and alone. Life is a complex and mingled process, and that which seems to have no uses of edification may be one of many powers which uplift the character. Our life is a great whole. WE "walk to-day and to-morrow, and the THIRD day WE are perfected."

"If sad thy present, fancy not
The *whole* of life is in to-day;
To past and future look away;
Thy *life* is not thy *present lot*."

2. *Socially.* Do not judge a life with regard to society in its mere isolation or as a disconnected unit; it is a length of fabric to join on with some one else's work.

Moses bursts out of Egypt; Joshua leads through Jordan into Canaan; David prepares for a consolidated nation; Solomon ushers in the rest and magnificence of peace: each builds his own layer and length of the history.

One man toils to feed the people; another gives them garments; another settles their quarrels; another tells them the story of the day's life; another teaches them knowledge; another pleads with them for God; another heals their sickness; another goes out to sea for their merchandise; another gives them a book of cheer-

ing song; and each contributes to the walls and gates and towers of man's life below.

EACH is but a small length, but ALL make the mighty ring.

IV. Every man to work in harmonious aim with his fellow builders. 1.

Recognizing the one reigning purpose—the edification of a city of God; to make Jerusalem a praise in the earth and a city of the great King. 2. *Recognizing the worth of his brother's work.* He has his own task, and has not to work by our piece of the plan. 3. *Eccentric people who will pile their stones in other people's way,* and blind other people with their chippings and the bespatterings of their mortar. Do not hinder your "brother mason."

V. The united work is superintended by the great Architect. 1. *He only understands the whole of the great intricate plan of life.* He has surveyed the whole field, and has appointed each one his place. To understand our own section and task, and to trust to the great unifying power above, is all we can do. These broken, incomplete piles rising in their fragmentariness will, under his direction, circle into the order of his great will. The full plan of life is only seen and understood in heaven, but it is understood THERE. 2. *He is near us with directions.* In their straits these amateur masons must have often summoned Nehemiah as he rode round among the workers. In all perplexities we can call in Divine direction. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James i. 5). 3. *Let the thought "THOU GOD SEEST ME" animate us at our toil.* (a) *It is a cheering thought.* No eye can look so indulgently as his. "He knoweth our frame," &c. (Ps. ciii. 14). (b) *It is an admonitory thought.* He WILL have true work; and all the wrong that we pile up he will push down.

"As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye."

CONCLUSION.—What this finished work shall be we read in the closing chapters of the Bible. The New Jerusalem is man's work transfigured by the glory of God.

The rude foundations we have put in with weariness and toil shall show themselves "garnished with all manner of precious stones." The gates so clumsily made will shine "every several gate of one pearl." The building of the wall shall be "as jasper," and the shapeless, disjointed masses shall be all joined and balanced: "the length of it, and the breadth of it, and the height of it equal."

"And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it. And there shall be no night there; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Sacredness of labour. "Two men I honour, and no third. First, the toil-worn craftsman that with earth-made implement laboriously conquers the earth, and makes her man's. Venerable to me is the hard hand—crooked, coarse; wherein notwithstanding lies a cunning virtue, indefeasibly royal, as of the sceptre of this planet. Venerable too is the rugged face, all weather-tanned, besoiled, with its rude intelligence; for it is the face of a man living man-like. O, but the more venerable for thy rudeness, and even because we must pity as well as love thee! Hardly entreated brother! for us was thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed: thou wert our conscript, on whom the lot fell, and fighting our battles wert so marred. For in thee too lay a God-created form, but it was not to be unfolded; encrusted must it stand with the thick adhesions and defacements of labour; and thy body, like thy soul, was not to know freedom. Yet toil on, toil on: THOU art in thy duty, be out of it who may; thou toilest for the altogether indispensable, for daily bread.

"A second man I honour, and still more highly: him who is seen toiling for the spiritually indispensable; not daily bread, but the bread of life. Is not he too in his duty; endeavouring towards inward harmony; revealing this, by act or by word, through all his outward endeavours, be they high or low? Highest of all when his outward and inward endeavours are one; when we can name him artist; not earthly craftsman only, but inspired thinker, who with heaven-made implement conquers heaven for us! If the poor and humble toil that we have food, must not the high

and glorious toil for him in return, that he have light, have guidance, freedom, immortality? These two, in all their degrees, I honour: all else is chaff and dust, which let the wind blow whither it listeth.

“Unspeakably touching is it, however, when I find both dignities united, and he that must toil outwardly for the lowest of man’s wants is also toiling inwardly for the highest. Sublimier in this world know I nothing than a peasant saint, could such now anywhere be met with. Such a one will take thee back to Nazareth itself; thou wilt see the splendour of heaven spring forth from the humblest depths of earth, like a light shining in great darkness.”—*Carlyle*.

Work is the common duty of all. “It would be very strange if it were not so. The first thing we read of God doing for man when he made him was to assign him work. Before he gave him a right to eat of the fruit of the trees, ‘he put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it’ (Gen. ii. 15). When man is translated to the heavenly Eden it is not to idleness: ‘they serve him day and night in his temple.’ The wise man when he looked abroad on the world made this deep reflection: ‘All things are full of labour.’ The calm stars are in ceaseless motion, and every leaf is a world with its busy inhabitants, and the sap coursing through its veins as the life-blood through our own. He who made all worlds has said, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’”—*John Ker, D.D.*

All the workers shall be rewarded. “Each shall find that he has a share in the completed results, where the labours of all are represented. What does it matter in which stage of the great process our co-operation has been enlisted? Every man that has had a part in the building shall have a share in the glory. What does it matter whether we have been set to dig out the foundation, working amongst mud and wet, or have laid the lowermost courses, which are all covered up and forgotten, or happen to have been amongst those who bring forth the head-stone with shoutings? We are all builders all the same. The main thing is that we have some work there. Never mind whereabouts it is. Never mind whether it be visible or no. Never mind whether your name is associated with it. You may never see the issues of your toils. If you can see them they will generally not be worth looking at. We work for eternity. We may well wait for the scaffolding to be taken away. Then we shall find that preparatory work is all represented in the final issue; even as the first film of alluvium, deposited in its delta by some mighty stream, is the real foundation for the last, which, long ages after, rise above the surface and bear waving corn and the homes of men.”—*Alexander Maclaren, D.D.*

A SUGGESTIVE CHURCH RECORD.

I. The potency of personal influence. Nehemiah created a spirit of enthusiasm which set all this train of exertion in motion.

II The force of example. The priests took the lead in the common labour.

III. Advantages of systematic organization. Each volunteer made responsible for some limited portion of work.

IV. The gigantic results achievable by individual action. Like coral in sects at work, the multitude of builders each did his part of the whole.

V. The diversity of disposition revealed by a great emergency. 1. Enthusiastic work. 2. Refusal to put the neck to the yoke.

VI. The consentaneity of purpose

and effort which a great emergency demands and is calculated to bring about. All rivalries forgotten in the great aim—to again rebuild Jerusalem.

VII. The diversity of gifts which a great emergency calls into requisition.

Illustrations :—

“No life is waste in the great Worker’s hand.
The gem too poor to polish in itself
Is ground to brighten others.”—*P. J. Bailey*.

“Do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself.”—*Emerson*.

“The body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor. xii. 4—27).

“Clouds when full pour down, and the presses overflow, and the aromatical trees sweat out their precious and sovereign oils; and every learned scribe must bring out his treasure for the Church’s behoof and benefit.”—*John Trapp*.

PRIESTHOOD.

iii. 1. *Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.*

INTRODUCTION. — Priest and king amongst the most terrible words in language. War, oppression, rapine have come at their call. 1. *Elevation is dangerous.* Separateness from sympathies and ways of common men a misfortune. Men easily enslave those whom they see to be lower than themselves. 2. *Privilege and responsibility are co-extensive.* Shepherd feeds and guards flock. King lives for subjects. Priest must think, speak, and act for his fellows. *Noblesse oblige.* What is true priesthood?

I. A true priest identifies himself with men. Institution and consecration (Exod. xxviii., xxix.). Interpretation (Heb.).

1. *Called from amongst men* (Heb. v. 1).

2. *Offers gifts and sacrifices* (v. 1).

3. *Compassionates weakness and ignorance* (v. 2).

4. *Comes between men and God.* (a) To present intercessions. (b) To reveal God's will.

A priesthood is necessary. "You tell me, my sceptical friend, that religion is the contrivance of the priest. How came the priest into being? What gave him his power?"—*Channing*. [See illustration below, "*Christian worship*."]]

Priest's dress, robes, &c. stand for a NEEDED and SUPPOSED sanctity. If not sacred, all the worse for the priest. Must come to his work from a higher ground. Of the people, but above the people. More thoughtful, not less saintly. MANHOOD first, PRIESTHOOD afterwards.

II. A true priest identifies thought with life. The wall-building was Nehemiah's THOUGHT. Eliashib and his brothers helped to make it REALITY.

Priest makes God's thoughts man's life. "Be ye holy" (Lev. xi. 44; 1 Pet.

i. 15), God's thought. How to become holy, priest's life-work. A sinless and sorrowless world, God's thought. How to approximate to this a priest's work. Obedience to Divine laws, God's purpose; enunciations of these and incitements to keep them, priest's work.

1. *Harmonizes ideal and actual.*

2. *Harmonizes thought and practice.*

3. *Harmonizes inclination and conscience.*

III. A true priest identifies the lower with the higher, the common with the sacred, earth with heaven. Priests "sanctified the wall;" built near the temple. God's house and city wall both SACRED. Sanctity is relative or real. The temple; the temple utensils. Churches (*e.g.* Corinth) with unholy members in them are sanctified or holy relatively. Only individual believers really sanctified. Broad distinctions between sacred and secular not well. Sabbath sacred; make all days. God's house is sacred; so is your own. Bible sacred; read nothing impure.

Illustrations:—Christian worship. "There have been those who have sought to disparage worship by representing it as an arbitrary, unnatural service, a human contrivance, an invention for selfish ends. I will meet the objection by a few remarks drawn from history. There have been, indeed, periods of history in which the influence of the religious principle seems to have been overwhelmed; but in this it agrees with other great principles of our nature, which in certain stages of the race disappear. There are certain conditions of society in which the desire of knowledge seems almost extinct among men, and they abandon themselves for centuries to brutish ignorance. There are communities in which the natural desire of reaching a better lot gives not a sign of its existence, and society remains stationary for ages. There are some in which even the parental affection is so far dead that the new-born child is cast into the stream or exposed to the storm. So the religious principle is in some periods hardly to be discerned; but it is never lost. No principle is more universally manifested. In the darkest

ages there are some recognitions of a superior Power. Man feels that there is a Being above himself, and he clothes that Being in what to his rude conceptions is great and venerable. In countries where architecture was unknown men chose the solemn wood or the mountain-top for worship; and when this art appeared its monuments were temples to God. Before the invention of letters hymns were composed to the Divinity, and music, we have reason to think, was the offspring of religion. Music in its infancy was the breathing of man's fears, wants, hopes, thanks, praises to an unseen power. You tell me, my sceptical friend, that religion is the contrivance of the priest. How came the priest into being? What gave him his power? Why was it that the ancient legislator professed to receive his laws from the gods? The fact is a striking one, that the earliest guides and leaders of the human race looked to the heavens for security and strength to earthly institutions, that they were compelled to speak to men in a higher name than man's. Religion was an earlier bond and a deeper foundation of society than government. It was the root of civilization. It has founded the mightiest empires; and yet men question whether religion be an element, a principle of human nature!

"In the earliest ages, before the dawn of science, man recognized an immediate interference of the Divinity in whatever powerfully struck his senses. . . . Every unusual event was a miracle, a prodigy, a promise of good or a menace of evil from heaven. . . . The heavens, the earth, the plant, the human frame, now that they are explored by science, speak of God as they never did before. His handwriting is brought out where former ages saw but a blank. . . . The profoundest of all human wants is the want of God. Mind, spirit must tend to its source. It cannot find happiness but in the perfect Mind, the infinite Spirit. Worship has survived all revolutions. Corrupted, dishonoured, opposed, it yet lives. It is immortal as its object, immortal as the soul from which it ascends."—*W. E. Channing, D. D.*

The origin of the Christian clergy. "Amongst the gifts which our blessed Lord gave to mankind during his life on earth, the Christian ministry as we now possess it was not one of them. The twelve apostles whom he chose had no successors like them. The seventy disciples also, who went forth at the Lord's command to preach the gospel, they, too, were soon buried in their graves, but no order of the same kind, or of the same number, came in their stead.

"Yet there was another sense in which the Christian ministry was the gift of their Divine Master, and it was that which St. Paul so well expresses: 'When he ascended up on high he gave gifts unto men. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.' Now what was it that was meant by this statement—this very

pointed statement—that it was only after his ascension, after his withdrawal from earth, that he gave those gifts to men, and amongst those gifts were the various offices, of which the two last named contained the germ of all the future clergy of Christendom? What was meant was surely this, that not in his earthly life, not in his direct communication with man, not as a part of the original manifestation of Christianity, but as the result of the complex influences which were showered down to the earth after its Founder had left, as part of the vast machinery of Christian civilization, created by the spirit of Christ for filling up the void of his absence, were the various gifts and professions of Christian forms, and amongst these were the great vocation, the sacred profession of the Christian ministry. Look at the gradual growth of the Christian ministry. In no single instance did the order of clergy now resemble what it was in the first century or even the second. The deacons of every existing Church were very different from the seven deacons of the apostolic age. The presbyters of every Church were either in themselves or in their relations to their brethren very different to the presbyters of the first or second century. Take the bishops; in many important respects they differed essentially from those who bore that title seventeen hundred years ago. They all varied in each age and country, according to the varieties of the age and country; according to the civil constitutions under which they lived; according to the geographical area; according to the climates and customs of east, west, north, and south; in regard to their election, whether by breathing, by popular election, by internal election, by ministerial election, by ordination, by sacred relics, by the elevation of hands, by the imposition of hands; spheres more or less limited, a humble country village, a vast town population, or a province as large as a kingdom. These variations were not a condemnation, but a justification rather, of their existence. They showed that the order of the Christian clergy, instead of remaining a stiff and useless relic of the past, had grown with the growth and varied with the variations of Christian society. This, therefore, was at once the Divine and the human origin of the Christian ministry; Divine, because it belonged to and formed an important link in the inevitable growth of all Christian communities, of Christian aspirations, and of Christian sympathies; human, because it arose out of and was subject to the necessities and vicissitudes of human passions and human infirmities, and in so far as it was of a permanent and Divine character, having a pledge of an immortal existence so long as Christian society exists; in so far as it was of human character, needing to accommodate itself to the want of each successive age, and needing the support, the sympathy, and the favour of all the other elements of social intercourse by which it was surrounded."—*Dean Stanley.*

MINISTERIAL ADAPTABILITY.

iii. 1. *Then Eliashib the high priest rose up, &c.*

I. The priests sharing the interests and toils of common manhood. A minister's power lies not in that in which he differs from others, but in that in which he is like them — "*brotherhood.*" He shares their weaknesses. He knows headache and heartache, weariness and worry, trouble and temptation; and just in proportion as he is a man will his ministry be sometimes powerful and sometimes powerless. At times he will wish himself in the most distant seat in the Church; at other times speech will be like the upliftings of angels, and the declaration of the gospel as admission into the paradise of God. A white tie, a black coat, and conventional manners do not make a minister; let him come and say, "Brethren, I am as ye are."

II. The priests an example to the people. The high priest and his subordinates were the first to build. Then common people tied on their aprons and took trowel in hand.

There must be leaders; then there will be followers. Simon Peter said, "I go a fishing." The rest say unto him, "We also go with thee" (John xxi.). The rank and file will ride into any valley of death if the officers say, "Comrades, come on." When he "put

teth forth his own sheep he goeth before them" (John x. 4).

III. Sacredness of work depends not on its nature, but on its purpose and spirit. "They sanctified" a *common* wall. They were toiling for hearth and home, for the city of their fathers and the temple of their God. Our work in the world not important; the spirit in which we do it the main consideration. A mother who represents Christ to her children, who becomes to them their idea of what God must be, is as sacredly engaged as some woman of genius whose fame fills a hemisphere. The blood and bones of the man who digs out the foundation are as necessary as the architect's skill. In building Solomon's temple the noise and dust of cutting and polishing the stones were confined to the quarry; in the temple all was calm.

In this world of striving and unattainment, of sin and sorrow, we do not see the plan. That is in the mind of the great Architect. Out of confusion he will educe order. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it" (Eccles. ix. 10).

Illustration :—"Man, it is not thy works, which are all mortal, infinitely little, and the greatest no greater than the least, but only the spirit thou workest in, that can have worth or continuance."
—*Carlyle.*

SYSTEM AND DETAIL IN WORK.

iii. 2, 3. *And next unto Eliashib builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri. But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.*

"We live not to ourselves, our work is life;
In bright and ceaseless labour as a star
Which shineth unto all worlds but itself."

Then life is a VOCATION. "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephes. iv. 1). "Your calling" (Ephes. iv. 4). "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. vii. 20). In modern phrase, a man's trade or profession is *his calling*. This gives work dignity. Labourer, carpenter, mason, sailor, surgeon, preacher, schoolmaster, newspaper editor, thou art called. A hand not thine own placed thee where thou

art. Every man's work should have a Pentecost. Manual labour is honourable. It must be redeemed from a spurious disregard. Indolence is degrading; dishonesty is ruinous; honest toil need fear no shame.

"None of us liveth to himself" (Rom. xiv. 7). Then life is a MINISTRY. This redeems it from selfishness. "My servants" (John xviii. 36). "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. iv. 1). Not Paul, Peter, and Apollos only. Judgment-day decisions turn on this—"Inasmuch as ye have done," or, "Inasmuch as ye did not to the brethren" (Matt. xxv.). Ban or blessing each man carries in himself. Influence is conscious, direct, and intentional; then it is occasional, and often fails. Influence is unconscious, indirect, and streams on, like light from the heavens; then it is constant and all-pervasive. Life is more solemn than death. A man's daily work is not only religious, it is his religion. There he fights and conquers, or fights and falls. Well for him if he

"be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait."

On the work of life let Nehemiah and his noble band teach us somewhat.

I. A great work can only be planned by a great mind. Many saw the desolations of the city; some wept over them. Nehemiah only had a vocation and talents to "build the old wastes and repair the desolations of many generations" (Isa. lxi. 4). An equality is impossible. In any circle of twelve there will be a Peter to lead. These are Kings by Divine right. The laureate's wreath is only green on the brows of him who utters nothing base. Nehemiahs have comprehensive minds, like some insects that put out "feelers" on all sides. Insight is a dangerous gift, hence granted only to the elect ones. Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem; Augustine governs a period; Wesley organizes a society; Shakespeare Shakespearizes a language:—they are "born to command."

II. A great work can only be carried out by division of labour. Nehemiah's organizing brain needed the hands of the men of Jericho. Farmer requires ploughman, horsekeeper, diggers, and delvers. Architect, clerk of works, mason, carpenter, stone-cutter, hod-man. Writer, an amanuensis, a printer, binder, bookseller. How long it would take one man to make a pin; by dividing the work they are counted by millions. Miner, sailor, soldier hazard their lives for the general good. One goes abroad, another stays at home; this man works with the hand, that with the brain; the husband rules without, the wife rules within; all obeying the same law, the needs be that into the world's mill each one casts some corn.

III. A great work can only be accomplished by attention to details. "Bars and locks." Gates and doors without bars and locks useless. "There must be detail in every great work. It is an element of effectiveness which no reach of plan, no enthusiasm of purpose, can dispense with. Thus, if a man conceives the idea of becoming eminent in learning, but cannot toil through the million of little drudgeries necessary to carry him on, his learning will be soon told. Or, if a man undertakes to become rich, but despises the small and gradual advances by which wealth is ordinarily accumulated, his expectations will, of course, be the sum of his riches. Accurate and careful detail, the minding of common occasions and small things, combined with general scope and vigour, is the secret of all the efficiency and success in the world."—*Bushnell*. 1. *Young man carving out his fortunes.* "By little and little." "Take care of the pence," &c. Trifling delinquencies; white lies are the unlocked gates through which "seven spirits worse" than these enter. Regard to minor courtesies, use of spare moments, buying up opportunities, lead on to honour always, to fortune sometimes. 2. *Church work.* Sunday schools, mission bands, tract distributors, missionary collectors are needed. Churchwardens, sidesmen, deacons, stewards, let each fill

his place and attend to the duty specially allotted him. Hast thou a contracted sphere? Thou mayest fill it better. Is thy work humble? It is not of necessity mean.

“Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labour to pursue;
Thee, only thee, resolved to know
In all I think, or speak, or do.”

IV. A great work brings out special adaptations. The men of Jericho built the wall. But the fish gate with its locks and bars did the sons of Hassenaah build.

The disciples of Christ. Prophecy-reading Philip finds prophecy-reading Nathaniel (John i. 43—51). Peter speaks and acts impetuously, and dies courageously (John xxi.). John, with a piercing insight, writes the angelic Gospel, and waits to see and war against rising error (John xxi.; Epistles of John; Revelation).

Does the hero mould the age, or the age mould the hero? Partly both.

In the Church “every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that” (1 Cor. vii. 7). The eloquent Apollos expounds the Scriptures; the deft-handed Dorcas clothes the naked; the man of wealth sustains the charities; the strong minister to weakness; the wise enlighten the ignorant. “There is a different colour of beauty in different stones that are all of them precious. One man may be burnishing to the sparkle of the diamond, while another is deepening to the glow of the ruby. For this reason there are such different temperaments in Christian character and varying circumstances in Christian life, that the foundations of the wall of the city may be garnished with all manner of precious stones. Each Christian has his own place and lustre in that temple, and therefore there is no ground to disparage our neighbour, and none to despair of ourselves, if we are both in the hand of Christ.”—*Ker.*

V. A great work must have regard to practical utility. The fish gate as necessary as the repairing of temple wall. Began at the temple, but did not stop there. What is it for? to be asked of every man’s work. Does it begin and end in itself. True work should brighten somebody’s dark life, cast out the stones from the rugged road along which some brother’s stumbling feet must go, expel some one of the legion of demons that possess men.

VI. A great work must be inspired by a lofty purpose. Nehemiah and his fellows were rebuilding the city of David (ver. 15). Milton chose ‘Paradise Lost,’ and aimed to justify the ways of God to men. The painters find the sufferings of Christ an inexhaustible subject. A great religious reformer desired to spread holiness throughout the land. Man, art thou moved by a lofty motive inspired by God’s good Spirit to take unto thee thy office in the world and Church?

VII. A great work must look on to the future. *It must have in it the element of permanence.* They were rebuilding the chosen city—the city of the future, as they fondly hoped.

CONCLUSION.—In heaven “they have no rest day nor night” (Rev. iv. 8). Two worlds, but only one law. Here from grace to grace, there from glory to glory. Here “faithful in that which is least” (Luke xvi. 10), there “ruler over many things” (Matt. xxv. 23). The first word is, Be faithful; and the second, Be faithful; and the third, Be faithful.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Verse 3. “If a man would stand on figures and allegories, this gate may well signify Christ, who made his apostles and preachers fishers of men, who by him brought and daily bring them into this spiritual Jerusalem; for he is only the door whereby all must enter into the Lord’s city. These men, like good builders, leave nothing undone that might fortify that gate; for they set on not only the doors, but also bolts and locks. So must God’s Church be made strong by laws, discipline, and

authority, that ravening lions and filthy swine rush not in and disquiet or devour God's people; and the wholesome doctrine must be confirmed with strong arguments and reasons against false teachers."—*Pilkington*.

Working for the unknown future. "An old tattered volume found among his father's books, Bunney's 'Resolutions,' aroused Richard Baxter to concern; and Sibb's 'Bruised Reed' led him to the Saviour. From Baxter's pen proceeded 'The Call to the Unconverted,' which, in addition to its most extensive circulation elsewhere, was given by a beggar at the door where Philip Doddridge lived. It was the voice of God to the youthful reader, who became the author of 'The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul'—a book which gave the first impression to William Wilberforce. He became the author of 'A Practical View of Christianity,' which was blessed to the conversion of Leigh Richmond, a successful minister, and author of 'The Dairyman's Daughter' and 'Young Cottager,' little works that have had many seals in souls won to God. The 'Practical View' was also instrumental in the saving change of Dr. Chalmers, whose works are world-wide, and whose labours were so eminently owned for the revival of religion in the ministry and people of Scotland."—*Dr. Steel*.

RIVAL CLASSES.

iii. 5. *And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.*

The rivalry of classes in all history. 1. *Use of this rivalry.* The mutual suspicion and watchfulness of classes serves to put all on their best behaviour; one is as a goad to the other for exertion in industry and excellence. 2. *Abuse of this rivalry.* All the hatreds and bigotries and wars of mankind.

I. *Rival classes.* 1. *A noble peasantry.* "The Tekoites." (1) Simplicity. Lowly life is favourable to simplicity of aim and endeavour. Among the poor you find the most faithful servants; among the poor the Church finds her most diligent workers. Men who have been grinding at the tread-mill of hard labour all the week are the men who work the wheels of Christian service on a Sunday. Among the "better people" of religious communions "the labourers are few." (2) Devotion. Steady adherence to great principles is more often found amongst the poor. There is something in the saying about ignorance being the mother of devotion. Not in the cynical sense. But those who see only the hard realities of life are often capable of deep attachment to friends and to God and to a great cause, while the *dilettante* "feels no interest" in anything human or Divine. *Enthusiasm* is a *popular* quality. 2. *An effeminate aristocracy.* (1) Selfishness. Not confined to one class, but in its hardest manifestations to be found among the gay and worldly, who have multiplied their natural wants by a thousand artificial needs. To expect a burst of noble-hearted, generous enthusiasm from the frozen circle of worldly society is to look for grapes on thorns and figs from the thistle-stalk. [Of course in all this contrast we are only keeping in mind the really worldly circle, and are not forgetting the fact that in Jerusalem's rebuilding and in the reconstructions of English history the noble have nobly stood to the front.] (2) Pride. Beautiful is the way in which modern society is returning in many respects to humility in regard to practical things. A Prince of Wales sends his boys to the routine of a sailor apprenticeship; a Duke of Argyle sends his son to a house of business; a gentleman's son doffs his neat coat and stoops down, hammer in hand, in the engineer's yard. In this there is a more hopeful sight than when the proud nobles of Jerusalem disdained the rough work which the God-inspired Nehemiah designed.

II. *Rival views.* 1. *Popular desire for reform.* (1) Politically. Trace course of national history. Instance the case of the Corn Laws, with its mechanic poet Ebenezer Elliott. (2) Ecclesiastically. Nothing is so fatal to a Church as for the people to let Church government alone and leave it to professional men. The sheep are for the sake of the shepherd in farming; but Christ's shepherds are for the sake of the flock. In our Lord's time "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark xii. 37); but it was asked as an incredible thing, "Have any of the rulers

or of the Pharisees believed on him?" (John vii. 48). The Reformation was a reply to *the people*, who groaned by reason of the afflictions wherewith the taskmasters afflicted them. (3) Theologically. The popular sentiment is the curb of theological opinion. What men, *as men*, think and feel are the governor-halls of the great logic-engine of systematic theology. The mother's heart in the theologian adjusts his harsh, cold views of God. 2. *Reform cried down by the nobles.* The doctrine of standing still is only preached by the few who find the place comfortable; the "noble discontent" which spurs on the needy and oppressed is the animation of all reform in State or Church.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied."

Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village.'

Application. 1. *Beware of luxurious aspirations.* Think not merely of the pleasures of greatness, but of its enervating perils. 2. *Remember that the duties of individual manhood and the sources of happiness in the individual character remain the same under all changes of costume and title.* A man is never more or less than a servant of the great Taskmaster, and a fellow-labourer with others in the ruined city of Mansoul. 3. *Beware of indolence and pride, and do thy task for God and man.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

A life of idleness. "And who art thou that braggest of thy life of idleness; complacently showest thy bright gilt equipages, sumptuous cushions, appliances for folding of the hands to mere sleep? Looking up, looking down, around, behind, or before, discernest thou, if it be not in Mayfair alone, any *idle* hero, saint, god, or even devil? Not a vestige of one. In the heavens, in the earth, in the waters under the earth is none like unto thee. Thou art an original figure in this creation, a denizen in Mayfair alone, in this extraordinary century or half-century alone! One monster there is in the world—the idle man."—*Carlyle.*

Rich and poor. "Let not the rich misread the signs of the times, or mistake their brethren; they have less and less respect for titles and riches, for vestments and ecclesiastical pretensions: but they have a real respect for superior knowledge and superior goodness; they listen like children to those whom they believe to know a subject better than themselves. Let those who know it say whether there is not something inexpressibly touching and even humbling in the large, hearty, manly English reverence and love which the working-men show towards those who love and serve them truly, and save them from themselves and from doing wrong. Alas! we have been very ready to preach submission. For three long centuries we have taught submission to the powers that be, as if that were the only text in Scripture bearing on the relations between the ruler and the ruled. Rarely have we dared to demand of the powers that be *justice*; of the wealthy man and the titled *duties*. We have produced folios of slavish flattery upon the Divine right of power. Shame on us! we have not denounced the wrongs done to weakness, and yet for one text in the Bible which requires submission and patience from the poor, you will find a hundred which denounce the vices of the rich; in the writings of the noble old Jewish prophets, *that*, and almost that only; *that* in the Old Testament, with a deep roll of words that sound like Sinai thunders; and *that* in the New Testament in words less impassioned and more calmly terrible from the apostles and their Master; and woe to us, in the great day of God, if we have been the sycophants of the rich instead of the redressers of the poor man's wrongs."—*F. W. Robertson.*

What the poor have done. "Thomas Cranfield, a tailor, established a prayer-meeting among the brickmakers in Kingsland, which was held *every morning at five o'clock*. He established schools at Rotherhithe, Tottenham, Kent Street, Southwark, the Mint, Garden Row, St. George's, Rosemary Lane, and Kennington. John Pounds, a Portsmouth cobbler, was the founder of *ragged schools*. Harlan Page consecrated *letter-writing* to the highest end—the salvation of souls."—*Dr. Steel.*

Handicraft. "It is not a mean thing to labour with the hand. There is a dignity in every duty, and especially in this. Since the *Carpenter of Nazareth* toiled at his bench and made tools for Galilean peasants, labour has had a dignity, and artisans an elevation, and workshops a consecration. After this, the lantern-making of King Æropus, the ship-building of the Czar Peter, or the watch making of the Emperor Charles V., *could do little to exalt it.*"—*Dr. Steel.*

“ Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
 Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor.”
Gray's Elegy.

THE OLD GATE.

iii. 6. *Moreover the old gate repaired Jehoiada, &c.*

Memory needs to be awakened. *Forgetting* may be impossible, but we cannot always *recollect*.

Illustration:—“ I am convinced that the dread book of account which the Scriptures speak of is, in fact, the mind itself of each individual. Of this at least I feel assured, that there is no such thing as *forgetting* possible to the mind; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind; accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil; but alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever, just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day, whereas, in fact, we all know that it is the light which is drawn over them as a veil, and that they are waiting to be revealed when the obscuring daylight shall have withdrawn.”—*De Quincey*.

I. The old gate brought up memories of the PAST. The past is valuable. God does not work *instantaneously*. Instance the seasons. Jewish law that the land should rest (Lev. xxv.). *Our fathers* made the roads, built the churches, founded schools, started commerce. Art, science, mechanical inventions are *improvements*. We build upon the past as on a bed of rock. “ Custom

passes into law from precedent to precedent.” Civilization does not grow up in a night, like Jonah's gourd. Right and wrong are *as old as the creation*.

Illustration:—“ Every master has found his materials collected. What an economy of power! and what a compensation for the shortness of life! All is done to his hand. The world has brought him thus far on his way. The human race has gone out before him, sunk the hills, filled the hollows, and bridged the rivers. Men, nations, poets, artisans, women, all have worked for him, and he enters into their labours.”—*Emerson*.

II. The old gate was an incentive to exertion in the PRESENT. *Our fathers' gate.* Patriotism fired their blood.

III. The old gate was a dumb prophet of the FUTURE. The builders were gone, but their work abode. So would theirs. So will ours.

Application. 1. *Work, for Heaven so wills.* 2. *Work, under the recollection that you are treading in the steps of the true nobility of the past.* 3. *Work, because the day is passing.* 4. *Work, and eternity shall reward you.*

THE BROAD WALL.

iii. 8. *The broad wall.*

Around Jerusalem in her days of splendour there was a broad wall, her defence and glory. *Jerusalem is a type of the Church.*

A broad wall suggests SEPARATION, SECURITY, and ENJOYMENT.

I. Separation. 1. *Every Christian should be more scrupulous than other men in his dealings.* 2. *By his pleasures the Christian should be distinguished.* 3. *In everything that affects the Christian; e. g. home business; going in and coming out; staying a night in a friend's house.* 4.

Most conspicuously in the spirit of his mind.

The wall should be VERY BROAD. 1. *There should be a broad distinction between you Christians and unconverted people.* 2. *Our Lord Christ had a broad wall between him and the ungodly.* 3. *A broad wall is abundantly good for yourselves.* 4. *You will do more good to the world thereby.*

II. Safety. 1. *The Christian is surrounded by the broad wall of God's power.* 2. *By the broad wall of God's*

love. 3. By the broad wall of *God's law and justice*. 4. By the broad wall of *God's immutability*. 5. By the broad wall of *God's electing love*. 6. By the broad wall of *God's redeeming love*. 7. *The work of the Holy Spirit* is a broad wall. 8. *Every doctrine of grace* is a broad wall.

9. *The honour of Christ* is a broad wall. III. **Enjoyment.** On the walls of Nineveh and Babylon men drove, walked, chatted at sunset. Broad walls at York. 1. *Rest*. 2. *Communion*. 3. *Prospects and outlook*. The godless!—*Spurgeon, abridged*.

FAMILY ZEAL.

iii. 12. *Shallum repaired—he and his daughters.*

Women building stone walls. Perhaps they were heiresses or rich widows, who undertook to defray the expense of a portion of the wall. Perhaps! perhaps not. In crises women have donned armour—why may not these have wrought at the wall? When men have shown the white feather, women have turned bold. “Women’s rights.” The story of women’s wrongs has not yet been told. Woman’s influence a practical, ever-pressing question.

I. Notable women. 1. *Within the circle of Biblical story.* “In redemption’s history we have Sarah’s faith, Ruth’s devotion, Abigail’s humility, Shunammite’s hospitality, Esther’s patriotism, penitence of her anointing Christ, Canaanite’s importunity, Mary of Bethany’s love, Lydia’s confidence, Dorcas’ benevolence, Phœbe’s kindness, Priscilla’s courage, Tryphena and Tryphosa’s diligence, and Persis’ affection—*honoured of God.*”—*Van Doren.*

Most books of the Bible canonize women. *Genesis*, Eve, Rebekah, Rachel. *Exodus*, Miriam. *Judges*, Jephthah’s daughter and the poetess Deborah. *Solomon* sings the praises of a good woman; and *the Gospels of Jesus* contain Marys, Martha, and the unnamed who ministered to him. *The Epistles* teach women their duties, and reveal the depth of their influence and the width of their power.

2. *In history.* The mother of the Gracchi; the mother of the Wesleys; the mother of St. Augustine; the mother of George Washington. Martyred women; songstresses. Elizabeth Fry, who never forgot the mother in

the philanthropist. Madame Guyon, whose faith she thus expressed:

“To me remains nor place nor time,—
My country is in every clime;
I can be calm and free from care
On any shore, since God is there.”

Countess of Huntingdon; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; and time would fail us to tell of “*the nameless*,” whose records are on high.

II. Woman’s influence. 1. *For evil.* Jezebel; Solomon’s wives; devotees of fashion; women who spend their all at the gin-palace, and leave their children in dirt and destitution. A man must toil without; a woman must guard within. 2. *For good.*

Application. 1. *Influence is not measurable by its circumference.* May be no larger than a house, no wider than a workshop. 2. *Every mother should be a missionary to her children.* She may save her husband (1 Cor. vii. 16). She has her children before teachers and ministers can influence them. To them she should represent God’s care and Christ’s mind, not by her words only, but in her life. Nothing can supersede *the religion of the hearth.*

Illustrations:—“One third more females church-members than males.”—*Edwards.*

“The commonest and the least remembered of all great-little heroisms is the heroism of an average mother. Ah, when I think of that last broad fact I gather hope again for poor humanity, and this dark world looks bright, this diseased world looks wholesome to me once more, because, whatever it is or is not full of, it is at least full of mothers.”—*Charles Kingsley.*

“Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever;

Do lovely things, not dream them, all day long;
And so make life, death, and that vast for ever
One grand, sweet song.”

Charles Kingsley to his niece.

HIGH MEN AT LOWLY TASKS.

iii. 13—19. *The valley gate repaired Hanun, &c.*

The *fusion* of classes. Ordinarily society builds a broad wall betwixt class and class. But in the presence of a common danger, or under the inspiration of a common resolve, men break down all barriers, and stand side by side. Too often "the kings of the earth and the rulers take counsel together against the cause of the Lord" (Ps. ii.); but the word of God standeth for ever. "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship. . . . Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nursing mothers" (Isa. xlix.).

I. The differences and unities of the race. We make too much of distinctions; *e. g.* rich and poor, learned and ignorant, toilers and thinkers, manufacturers and hands, up-town and down-town, West-end and East-end. One God created us, one cross redeems us, one Spirit inspires us; the same book teaches us, similar demons tempt us, similar sorrows confront us, a common grave awaits us, the same heaven is open to us. Society rings itself round. The aristocracy of birth says of the aristocracy of money, "Only a merchant." Better that emperor's wife who often said to her husband, "Remember what you were, and what you now are, and then you will be always thankful to God."

II. Historical illustrations. The Romans called rulers "*fathers of their country.*" The Greeks styled them "*shepherds of their people.*" Most revolutions in Church and State have ranged high and low side by side. Paul was aided by "Erastus, the city chamberlain" (Rom. xvi. 23), "and they of Cæsar's household" (Phil. iv. 22). The Reformation was indebted to the Elector Frederick. Lord Cobham's castle afforded shelter to Lollard preachers. England owes a debt of gratitude to "Albert the Good" for his devotion to science and art, and whatever would ameliorate the people's conditions.

III. Practical purport. 1. *With honour comes responsibility.* May I not do what I will with mine own? No; thou art only a steward. Hast thou wealth? The poor shall never cease out of the land; they are lawful claimants on thy sympathy. Hast thou wisdom? Teach the ignorant, guide the perplexed. Art thou elevated? Stoop to those who are low, lift down a helping hand to those who have stumbled and fallen.

"Heaven does with us as we with torches do;
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely
touch'd
But to fine issues; nor Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor—
Both thanks and use."

2. *Be not deceived by appearances.* Not what a man *hath*, but what a man *is*, determines his worth. It is the cause, not the suffering, makes the martyr. The motive decides the action. Pierce beneath the surface, plant thy foot on the rock of reality. 3. *Gather courage and patience from the thought of the future.* Look unto Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him endured, &c. (Heb. xii. 2). Remember Moses (Heb. xi. 26). Whose *names* were in the foundations of the city of vision? Not the leaders only (Peter, James, and John), but "the *twelve* apostles" (Rev. xxi. 14). "The Holy Ghost hath registered unto us the names and diligence of the builders of this earthly city Jerusalem, by the pen of his faithful servant Nehemiah, for our comfort; and to teach us that much more he hath registered the names of the builders of the spiritual Jerusalem in the book of life, where no devil can scrape them out, but shall be the dear children of the Lord God, defended by him from all ill. Let us therefore cast away this slothful sluggishness wherein we have lain so long, rise up quickly, work lustily, spit on our

hands and take good hold, that we fall not back again from our Lord God. It is more honour to be a workman in this house than to live the easiest life that the world can give."—*Pilkington*.

DAVID THE NATIONAL HERO.

iii. 15. *The city of David.* iii. 16. *The sepulchres of David.*

They were working on sacred ground. Hence their enthusiasm. Effort must have inspiration. This city David conquered; he beautified it; here he reigned; here he sleeps. They did not stay to shape such thoughts as these. They were instincts. Patriotism lives not by bread only, but by sentiments, by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of good king and wise teacher in the ages past. *Theme*, DAVID'S LIFE-WORK the basis of national hero-worship.

I. Preparing for a throne. "He that is born is listed; life is war." "The foundation of David's character is a firm, unshaken trust in Jehovah, a bright and most spiritual view of creation and the government of the world, a sensitive awe of the Holy One of Israel, a striving ever to be true to him, and a strong desire to return after errors and transgressions."—*Ewald*. Ps. lxxviii. 70 tells how David was God's elected king. The prophet Samuel shaped the character of the period. His work was long developing. Takes months for common seed to grow. Samuel cast seed into God's world-field; David and Solomon put in the sickle and reaped. What of that? Sower and reaper equally indispensable (John iv. 36—38). David had a creative faculty—he was the poet of song. We have "the book of the chronicles" of King David; we have, too, the books of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs he sang and wrote. Saul's FATAL DAY not the day of the battle of Gilboa, but the day of the battle with Amalek; not the day when Saul died, but the day when Saul disobeyed, led to David's election and anointing. The story is told in the Book of Samuel (I. xvi.). Eliab is rejected. The height of a man's stature and the beauty of his countenance shall not henceforth be signs infallible that God has endowed that man with kingly qualities. God-elected shall be God-endowed. *That day* David anointed, but God's hand had been upon him in the pastures of Bethlehem. There he *thought out*, if he did not *write*, Ps. xxiii. There he discerned a presence which beset him behind and before (Ps. cxxxix.). To him the heavens declared God. How perfect God's law was, and what God's fear meant, he was being taught by the order of God in nature; how guilty and feeble he was, he was being taught by the voice of God in his own conscience (Ps. xix.). David's God was a living, ever-present, helping God (Ps. xxvii.). *From the sheepfolds David came to encounter Goliath. From the sheepfolds he was summoned to be harp-player to King Saul.* He was anointed, but not enthroned. He must learn to wait. God never extemporizes. "Soon ripe, soon rot." Moses eighty years of preparation. Elijah a full-grown man before he appears in sacred history. Jesus Christ eighteen quiet, uneventful years after seeing the holy city, and afterwards forty days in wilderness. The harvest of God in human souls ripens slowly. As David thought of his great work, and felt himself a child with a giant's task, he said, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength" (Ps. viii.). He recollected the storms he had witnessed as he watched the sheep when he wrote Ps. xxix. But after the longest night the morning breaks. *David was called to the court as harp-player to King Saul.* Saul's servants described David to the king as "a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing" (1 Sam. xvi. 18). David was an *artist*, as we now speak. In Eastern lands shepherd-life and songs have always gone together. The elected king is harpist to the enthroned king. How slowly David ascended the steps to the throne. We, who *look back*, see some reasons why ascent was gradual. **In the pastures he had time to *think*; in the court he had opportunity to *observe*.**

David's harp quieted Saul's excitement (1 Sam. xvi. 23) ; David's harp helped him to compose his Psalms for the song-life of the Church universal. His chequered life fore-shadowed in Saul's court. To-day the king's bosom friend, to-morrow the butt for the king's javelin. The love of David and Jonathan the one bright and beautiful thing. Purer and more constant friendship was never known. With his escape from Saul's court began—

II. The work and warfare of David's life. 1. As a freebooter. 2. As king. 1. *As a freebooter.* Cave of Adullam (1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2). Wild wilderness life. Hunted by Saul (1 Sam. xxiii. 25—29 ; xxiv. 8—22). Saul's hope failed him in the hour of need, and he fell on Gilboa's fatal field. 2. *David was king.* First over Judah, then over all Israel. David's reign was one of creation ; Solomon's was one of consolidation. A brilliant reign of a great and good man ; but, like all things human, not without fault (2 Sam. xi. ; 1 Chron. xxi.). The fifty-first Psalm the cry of this kingly penitent. But did "the free spirit" ever come back again as in the earlier days ? However, Carlyle's words are both wise and charitable. "Who is called 'the man after God's own heart' ? David, the Hebrew king, had fallen into sins enough—blackest crimes—there was no want of sin ; and therefore the unbelievers sneer, and ask, 'Is this your man according to God's heart ?' The sneer, I must say, seems to me but a shallow one. What are faults, what are the outward details of a life, if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptations, the often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it be forgotten ? David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given us of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, driven as into entire wreck ; yet a struggle never ended, ever with tears, repentance, true, unconquerable purpose begun anew." He died full of age and honours, and his sepulchre Nehemiah looked upon with reverence, Peter the apostle spoke of with exultation, and to it the feet of countless thousands of weary pilgrims have been directed.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

A true man.—"Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age ; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design ; and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients. A man Cæsar is born, and for ages after we have a Roman empire. An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man : as monachism of the hermit Antony ; the Reformation, of Luther ; Quakerism, of Fox ; Methodism, of Wesley ; Abolition, of Clarkson. Scipio, Milton called 'the height of Rome ;' and all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."—*Emerson.*

Sepulchres.—"Next to the wells of Syria, the most authentic memorials of past times are the sepulchres, and partly for the same reason. The tombs of ancient Greece and Rome lined the public roads with funeral pillars or towers. Grassy graves and marble monuments fill the churchyards and churches of Christian Europe. But the sepulchres of Palestine were like the habitations of its earliest inhabitants, hewn out of the living limestone rock, and therefore indestructible as the rock itself. In this respect they resembled, though on a smaller scale, the tombs of Upper Egypt ; and as there the traveller of the nineteenth century is confronted with the names and records of men who lived thousands of years ago, so also in the excavations of the valleys which surround or approach Shiloh, Shechem, Bethel, and Jerusalem he knows that he sees what were the last resting-places of the generations contemporary with Joshua, Samuel, and David. And the example of Egypt shows that the identification of these sepulchres even with their individual occupants is not so improbable as might be otherwise supposed. If the graves of Rameses and Osirei can still be ascertained, there is nothing improbable in the thought that the tombs of the patriarchs may have survived the lapse of twenty or thirty centuries. The rocky cave on Mount Hor must be at least the spot believed by Josephus to mark the grave of Aaron. The tomb of Joseph must be near one of the two monuments pointed out as such in the opening of the vale of Shechem. The sepulchre which is called the tomb of Rachel exactly agrees with the spot described as 'a little way' from Bethlehem. The tomb of David, which was known with certainty at the time of the Christian era, may perhaps still be found under the mosque which bears his name in the modern Zion. Above all, the cave of Machpelah is concealed, beyond all reasonable doubt, by the mosque at Hebron. But, with these exceptions, we must rest satisfied rather with the general than the particular interest of the tombs of Palestine."—*Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine.'*

THE WORKMEN'S DAY-BOOK.

iii. 20—32. *After him Baruch the son of Zabbai, &c.*

I. Every man is carefully credited with his own tasks and achievements. Rulers, priests, slaves (Nethinims), men, women (ver. 12). Nobody is forgotten. The humblest not passed by in contemptuous silence.

II. Special honour is accorded special work. Levites and priests began at the temple, but did not stop there (vers. 22, 28). Zabbai, who earnestly repaired a second piece, having completed his task did not fold his arms, but went with open eyes and willing hands to seek another task. The goldsmiths and the temple traders came down to the wall not to inspect, but labour (vers. 31, 32).

III. Regard is had to the men of practical wisdom. Benjamin and others built over against their house (vers. 23, 28, 29). Meshullam built over against his chamber (ver. 30). Perhaps he was a

lodger. (a) *They were men of practical sense.* Work was near at hand; why go abroad? "There are many Christians who can never find a place large enough to do their duty. Some Churches seem to feel that if anything is to be done some great operation must be started. They cannot even repent without concert and a general ado." — *Bushnell.* (b) *These men found here an inspiration for effort—the defence of home.* With practical enthusiasm, Hananiah and others built "another piece." *All cannot keep the same pace, but all can build.*

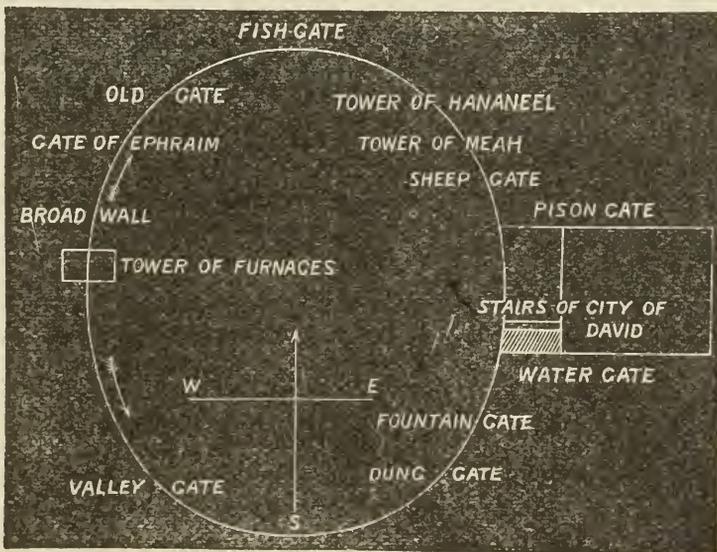
Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. "The Son of man shall come . . . and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. xvi. 27). "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. ii. 10).

ADDENDA TO CHAPTER III.

TOPOGRAPHY OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

THE only description of the ancient city of Jerusalem which exists in the

Nehemiah, and although it is hardly sufficiently distinct to enable us to settle



Bible so extensive in form as to enable us to follow it as a topographical description is that found in the Book of

all the moot points, it contains such valuable indications that it is well worthy of the most attentive examina-

tion. The easiest way to arrive at any correct conclusion regarding it, is to take first the description of the dedication of the walls in ch. xii. (31—40), and, drawing such a diagram as this, we easily get at the main features of the old wall at least.

The order of procession was that the princes of Judah went up upon the wall at some point as nearly as possible opposite to the temple, and one half of them turning to the right went towards the dung gate, "and at the fountain gate, which was *over against them*" (or, in other words, on the opposite or temple side of the city), "went up by the stairs of the city of David at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward." The water gate, therefore, was one of the southern gates of the temple, and the stairs that led up to it are here identified with those of the city of David, and consequently with Zion.

The other party turned to the left, or northwards, and passed from beyond the tower of the furnaces even "unto the broad wall," and passing the gate of Ephraim, the old gate, the fish gate, the towers of Hananeel and Meah, to the sheep gate, "stood still in the prison gate," as the other party had in the water gate. "So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God."

If from this we turn to the third chapter, which gives a description of the repairs of the wall, we have no difficulty in identifying all the places mentioned in the first sixteen verses with those enumerated in the twelfth chapter. The repairs began at the sheep gate on the north side, and in immediate proximity with the temple, and all the places named in the dedication are again named, but in the reverse order, till we come to the tower of the furnaces, which, if not identical with the tower in the citadel, so often mistaken for the Hippicus, must at least have stood very near to it. Mention is then made, but now in the direct order of the dedication, of "the valley gate," the "dung gate," the "fountain gate;" and lastly, the "stairs that go down from the city of David."

Between these last two places we find mention made of the pool of Siloah and the king's garden, so that we have long passed the so-called sepulchre of David on the modern Zion, and are in the immediate proximity of the temple; most probably in the valley between the city of David and the city of Jerusalem. What follows is most important (ver. 16): "After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Bethzur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty." This passage, when taken with the context, seems in itself quite sufficient to set at rest the question of the position of the city of David, of the sepulchres of the kings, and consequently of Zion, all which could not be mentioned after Siloah if placed where modern tradition has located them.

If the chapter ended with the sixteenth verse there would be no difficulty in determining the sites mentioned above, but unfortunately we have, according to this view, retraced our steps very nearly to the point from which we started, and have got through only half the places enumerated. Two hypotheses may be suggested to account for this difficulty: the one, that there was then, as in the time of Josephus, a second wall, and that the remaining names refer to it; the other, that the first sixteen verses refer to the walls of Jerusalem, and the remaining sixteen to those of the city of David. An attentive consideration of the subject renders it almost certain that the latter is the true explanation of the case. In the enumeration of the places repaired, in the last part of the chapter, we have two which we know, from the description of the dedication, really belonged to the temple. The prison court (iii. 25), which must have been connected with the prison gate, and, as shown by the order of the dedication, to have been on the north side of the temple, is here also connected with the king's high house; all this clearly referring, as shown above, to the castle of David, which originally occupied the site of the Turris Antonia. We

have on the opposite side the "water gate," mentioned in the next verse to Ophel, and consequently as clearly identified with the southern gate of the temple. We have also the horse gate, that by which Athaliah was taken out of the temple (2 Kings xi. 16 ; 2 Chron. xxiii. 15), which Josephus states led to the Kedron, and which is here mentioned as connected with the priests' houses, and probably, therefore, a part of the temple. Mention is also made of the house of Eliashib the high priest, and of the eastern gate, probably that of the temple. In fact, no place is mentioned in these last verses which cannot be more or less directly identified with the localities on the temple hill, and not one which can be located in Jerusalem. The whole of the city of David, however, was so completely rebuilt and remodelled by Herod that there are no local indications to assist us in ascertaining

whether the order of description of the places mentioned after ver. 16 proceeds along the northern face, and round by Ophel, and up behind the temple back to the sheep gate ; or whether, after crossing the causeway to the armoury and prison, it does not proceed along the western face of the temple to Ophel in the south, and then, along the eastern face, back along the northern, to the place from which the description started. The latter seems the more probable hypothesis, but the determination of the point is not of very great consequence. It is enough to know that the description in the first sixteen verses applies to Jerusalem, and in the last sixteen to Zion, or the city of David, as this is sufficient to explain almost all the difficult passages in the Old Testament which refer to the ancient topography of the city.—*Fergusson in Smith's ' Bible Dictionary.'*

MODERN JERUSALEM.

The first sight of Jerusalem as seen from the south, the first moment when from the ridge of hills which divide the valley of Rephaim from the valley of Bethlehem one sees the white line crowning the horizon, and knows that it is Jerusalem, is a moment never to be forgotten. But there is nothing in the view itself to excite your feelings. Nor is there even when the Mount of Olives heaves in sight, nor when "the horses' hoofs ring on the stones of the streets of Jerusalem." Nor is there in the surrounding outline of hills on the distant horizon. Nebi-Samuel is indeed a high and distinguished point, and Ramah and Gibeah both stand out, but they and all the rest in some degree partake of that featureless character which belongs to all the hills of Judæa.

In one respect no one need quarrel with this first aspect of Jerusalem. So far as localities have any concern with religion, it is well to feel that Christianity, even in its first origin, was nurtured in no romantic scenery ; that the discourses in the walks to and from Bethany, and in earlier times the psalms and prophecies

of David and Isaiah, were not, as in Greece, the offspring of oracular cliffs and grottos, but the simple outpouring of souls which thought of nothing but God and man. It is not, however, inconsistent with this view to add, that though not romantic, though at first sight bare and prosaic in the extreme, there does at last grow up about Jerusalem a beauty as poetical as that which hangs over Athens and Rome. First, it is in the highest degree *venerable*. Modern houses it is true there are ; the interiors of the streets are modern. The old city itself (and I felt a constant satisfaction in the thought) lies buried twenty, thirty, forty feet below these wretched shops and receptacles for Anglo-Oriental conveniences. But still, as you look at it from any commanding point, within or without the walls, you are struck by the gray ruinous masses of which it is made up ; it is the ruin, in fact, of the old Jerusalem on which you look—the stones, the columns ; the very soil on which you tread is the accumulation of nearly three thousand years. And as with the city, so it is with the

view of the country round it. There is, as I have said, no beauty of form or outline, but there is nothing to disturb the thought of the hoary age of those ancient hills; and the interest of the past, even to the hardest mind, will in spite of themselves invest them with a glory of their own.

The view of the Moab mountains is constantly intermingled with the views of Jerusalem itself. From almost every point there was visible that long purple wall, rising out of its unfathomable depths, to us even more interesting than to the old Jebusites or Israelites. They knew the tribes who lived there; they had once dwelt there themselves. But to the inhabitants of modern Jerusalem, of whom comparatively few have ever visited the other side of the Jordan, it is the end of the world; and to them, to us, these mountains have almost the effect of a distant view of the sea; the hues constantly changing, this or that precipitous rock coming out clear in the morning or evening shade—there the form of what may possibly be Pisgah, dimly shadowed out by surrounding valleys; here the point of Kerak, the capital of Moab and fortress of the Crusaders—and then at times all wrapt in deep haze, the mountains overhanging the valley of the shadow of death, and all the more striking from their contrast with the gray or green colours of the hills, and streets, and walls through which you catch the glimpse of them. Next there are the ravines of the city. This is its great charm. The Dean of St. Paul's once observed to me that he thought Luxembourg must be like Jerusalem in situation. And so to a certain extent it is. I do not mean that the ravines of Jerusalem are so deep and abrupt as those of Luxembourg, but there is the same contrast between the baldness of the level approach, the walls of the city appearing on the edge of the table-land, and then the two great ravines of Hinnom and Jehoshaphat opening between you and the city; and again the two lesser ravines, rival claimants to the name of Tyropœon, intersecting the city itself. In this respect I never saw a town so situated,

for here it is not merely the fortress, but the city, which is thus surrounded and entangled with natural fosses; and this when seen from the walls, especially from the walls on the northern side, and when combined with the light and shade of evening, gives the whole place a variety of colour and of level fully sufficient to relieve the monotony which else it would share with other Eastern cities. And, thirdly, it must be remembered that there is one approach which is really grand, namely, from Jericho and Bethany. It is the approach by which the army of Pompey advanced,—the first European army that ever confronted it,—and it is the approach of the triumphal entry of the gospels. Probably the first impression of every one coming from the north, the west, and the south may be summed up in the simple expression used by one of the modern travellers, "I am strangely affected, but greatly disappointed." But no human being could be disappointed who first saw Jerusalem from the east. The beauty consists in this, that you then burst at once on the two great ravines which cut the city off from the surrounding table-land, and that then only you have a complete view of the mosque of Omar. The other buildings of Jerusalem which emerge from the mass of gray ruin and white stones are few, and for the most part unattractive. The white mass of the Armenian convent on the south, and the dome of the mosque of David; the castle, with Herod's tower on the south-west corner; the two domes, black and white, which surmount the Holy Sepulchre and the Basilica of Constantine; the green corn-field which covers the ruins of the palace of the Knights of St. John; the long yellow mass of the Latin convent at the north-west corner, and the gray tower of the mosque of the Dervishes on the traditional site of the palace of Herod Antipas, in the north-east corner; these are the only objects which break from various points the sloping or level lines of the city of the Crusaders and Saracens. But none of these is enough to elevate its character. What, however, these fail to effect is in one instant effected

by a glance at the mosque of Omar. From whatever point that graceful dome with its beautiful precinct emerges to view, it at once dignifies the whole city. And when from Olivet, or from the governor's house, or from the north-east wall, you see the platform on which it stands, it is a scene hardly to be surpassed. A dome graceful as that of St. Peter's, though of course on a far smaller scale, rising from an elaborately-finished circular edifice; this edifice raised on a square marble platform rising on the highest ridge of a green slope, which descends from it north, south, and east to the walls surrounding the whole enclosure; platform and enclosure diversified by lesser domes and fountains, by cypresses, and olives, and planes, and palms; the whole as secluded and quiet as the interior of some college or cathedral garden, only enlivened by the white figures of veiled women stealing

like ghosts up and down the green slope, or by the turbaned heads bowed low in the various niches for prayer,—this is the mosque of Omar, the Haram es-Sherif, “the noble sanctuary;” the second most sacred spot in the Mahometan world—that is, the next after Mecca; the second most beautiful mosque—that is, the next after Cordova. I, for one, felt almost disposed to console myself for the exclusion by the additional interest which the sight derives from the knowledge that no European foot, except by stealth or favour, had ever trodden within these precincts since the Crusaders were driven out, and that their deep seclusion was as real as it appeared. It needed no sight of the daggers of the black Dervishes who stand at the gates to tell you that the mosque was undisturbed and inviolably sacred.—*Dean Stanley.*

CHAPTER IV.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.] Vers. 1—6 are in the Hebrew vers. 33—38 of chap. iii. **1. Sanballat]** See on chap. ii. 10. **That we builded the wall]** That we were building it (participle expresses not merely resolve, but act of commencing). **Mocked]** Afraid to use violence. **2. Before his brethren]** *i. e.* Tobiah and his brethren in council. **The army of Samaria]** It is likely that Sanballat had brought an armed force in sight of the city. **What do these feeble Jews? &c.]** Keil makes two pairs of questions. Will they leave the building of the fortified walls to themselves? *i. e.* Do they think they are able with their poor resources to carry out this great work? Will they sacrifice? *i. e.* bring sacrifices to obtain God's miraculous assistance? Sanballat casts scorn upon the Jews' ability and upon their faith in God. Second pair of questions: Will they finish the work to-day, directly? Have they even the requisite materials? Will they revive? &c. The building-stone of Jerusalem was limestone, which, softened by fire, loses its vitality. **3. Tobiah]** See on chap. ii. 10. **If a fox go up]** Foxes in great numbers infested the ruined and desolate places in the mount and city of Zion (Lam. v. 18). **4. Hear, O our God]** An imprecatory prayer anticipating God's justice. **5. Cover not]** *i. e.* forgive not (Ps. lxxxv. 2). **6. All the wall was joined together unto the half thereof]** Completed to the half of the intended height. **7. The Arabians]** Those in Samaria. See on chap. ii. 19. **The Ammonites]** Incited by their countryman Tobiah. **Ashdodites]** Inhabitants of Ashdod, a Philistine city destroyed three hundred years after. **That the walls of Jerusalem were made up]** Lit. *that a bandage was applied to the walls of Jerusalem.* A Biblical expression (2 Chron. xxiv. 13; Jer. viii. 22; xxx. 17; xxxiii. 6). **9. We]** Nehemiah and the superintendents of the work. **10. Judah said, &c.]** The labour is beyond our power. **12. Ten times]** *i. e.* frequently. **13. Therefore set I, &c.]** Nehemiah placed detachments properly armed at such points of the walls as had attained the least height, and were most exposed to attack.—*Crosby.* **14. And I looked, &c.]** These words can only mean, When I saw the people thus placed with their weapons, I went to them, and said to the nobles, &c., “Be not afraid of them” (the enemies): “remember the Lord, the great and the terrible,” who will fight for you against your enemies (Deut. iii. 22; xx. 4; xxxi. 6), and fight ye for your brethren, your sons and daughters, wives and houses, whom the enemies would destroy.—*Keil.* **15. God had brought their counsel to nought]** Although by natural means. **16. My servants]** Nehemiah's personal retinue. **Habergeon]** Old English for “coat of mail.” **The rulers, &c.]** *i. e.* each was behind his own people who were employed on the

work, to encourage them in their labour, and in case of attack to lead them against the enemy. 17. They which builded, &c.] The burden-bearers worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other. 18. The builders, &c.] Needing both hands for their work, had swords girt to their sides. 22. Lodge within Jerusalem] Those that had their homes in the villages and distant towns should now continue night and day in the city. 23. Saving that every one put them off for washing] A puzzling sentence. Conjectures and emendations have been resorted to. The idea of the whole verse is clear—unceasing watchfulness.

HOMILETICAL CONTENTS OF CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—23. An Undaunted Heart.	Ver. 4, 5. Imprecations.
„ 1—23. Active Hostility frustrated.	„ 11. The Craft and Cruelty of the Church's Adversaries.
„ 1—23. The Soldier Builders.	„ 11. Satanic Subtlety.
„ 1—3. The Laws of Opposition.	„ 15. A Pause in the Work.
„ 1. Anger.	„ 17, 18. The Work and Warfare of Life.
„ 2. The Day of Small Things.	
„ 4—9. Praying and Working.	

AN UNDAUNTED HEART.

Chap. iv.

THE childlike piety and the white integrity of Nehemiah not more marked than his heroic undauntedness. Recapitulate his progress from the first resolution:—silent cherishing of his purpose; maturing of his plans; organized schemes and allotments of labour; vigilant precautions; cheery “FEAR NOT!” “Be not ye afraid” (ver. 14). A model to the Christian workman and soldier.

I. Reasons for fear. 1. *Ridicule* (vers. 1—3). “Mocked.” Jesus Christ mocked and spitted on. And it is enough for the disciple that he be *as* his Master (John ix. 28). “Foolishness” of apostolic preaching. Greek philosophy and Roman civilization, scorn and reviling of the Nazarenes. Religion not the only department in which the right has been reviled by the wrong. Science has always begun to climb upward amid the laughter of circling ignorance. Most great principles have had a point in their history when they were believed in by one and ridiculed by all the rest. Instance—George Stephenson and the railway enterprise. (a) Don't be ashamed of your Christian faith; let Sauballat and Tobiah laugh themselves hoarse; follow *thou* after life! (b) Don't be ashamed of your Christian work. It is easy for a keen witling to pull out his cigar and point to a humorous element in your little tasks. “What do these feeble Christians? Will they revive the stony hearts of fallen men, and rear a dwelling-place for truth and peace amid the rubbish of the world?” They will, God being their helper! 2. *Guile*. In chap. vi. are accounts of strategy adopted by Nehemiah's opponents where it required a wise head to keep the heart firm. Plausible pretences of enemies and feigned friendship were of no avail to bend the iron purpose of the Jewish liberator. Nehemiah's enemies bade him join them for a conference in order to trap and hinder him (vi. 2, 3); they warned him to beware of his reputation (vi. 6); they urged him to “show the white feather” (vi. 11). “Satan is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. xi. 14). (a) How many plausible excuses a treacherous heart and a worldly friend can coin for postponement of religious decision and devotion. (b) How many reasons might not every one find in the world's opinion for leaving his Christian work undone. “Be ye wise as serpents” (Matt. x. 16). 3. *Force* (iv. 8). The conspiring rabble around the rebuilders of Jerusalem but an emblem of the circling forces which press upon the servant of God. Our way is like the way of Paul's mariners, against “contrary winds.” Our progress is disputed “inch by inch.” (1) The oppositions to the culture of the Christian character are manifold. A false heart within; a sin-maximed world without; break-downs and discouragements in experience. (2) So of the oppositions to Christian work. You must rebuild your fallen fellows into society not because you are invited to do it, but in face of oppositions; nay, “the very stones will cry

out;" the people you want to lift up will try in this to throw you down, or at least will "conspire to hinder." "But consider him!" (Heb. xii. 3).

II. Motives for courage. 1. *The power of God* (iv. 14, 15). The courage of Moses based on the "Certainly I will be with thee" of God (Exod. iii. 12). David's fearlessness rested on the "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. xx. 7). The three Hebrew children were firm because "our God is able to deliver us" (Dan. iii. 17). The undaunted apostles were fixed on the same centre (Acts iv. 29, 30).

"And were this world all devils o'er,
And watching to devour us,
We lay it not to heart so sore;
Not they can overpower us.
And let the prince of ill
Look grim as e'er he will,
He harms us not a whit.
For why? His doom is writ;
word shall quickly slay him."

2. *The strength of right.* "Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just."

"My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

"Great is truth, and shall prevail." All such maxims of the ancient and the modern world bear the popular faith that RIGHT is MIGHT. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 17). To have "this testimony, that we please God," is to be clad in triple steel.

III. Expedients of the imperilled. 1. *Prayer* (vers. 4, 9). "*We made our prayer unto God.*" "I cried unto the Lord" is the Christian's explanation of many a hairbreadth escape. 2. *Vigilance* (ver. 9). "*We set a watch against them day and night.*"

"Hear the victors that o'ercame,
Still they mark each warrior's way,
All with one sweet voice exclaim,
Watch and pray."

3. *Hope* (ver. 20). "*Our God shall fight for us.*" Giant Despair is a sad foe of Christian souls. The stroke of despondency stuns us like a blow on the head; therefore "take the *helmet of hope*" (1 Thess. v. 8). 4. *Perseverance* (ver. 21 and ver. 23).

Application. In Christian life and in Christian work take as a motto Polycarp's words to his pupil—"Stand thou firm as an anvil that is beaten."

"Write on thy heart this holy principle,
Nobly resolve and do as thou resolvest,
Thou shalt not die till victory crown thy brows."

ACTIVE HOSTILITY FRUSTRATED.

Chap. iv.

Various forms of active hostility frustrated through the combined vigilance and prayer of the Church. "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces" (1 Sam. ii. 10). Whenever a door of usefulness is opened there are many adversaries (1 Cor. xvi. 9). Stand firm and fearless, "in nothing terrified by your adversaries" (Phil. i. 28). "Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord!" (a) Remember the Lord God, who has been described as *All-eye*. Let this encourage. He knows all the details of individual lives. Let this warn. He

scrutinizes all thoughts and deeds. (b) Remember the Lord Christ. "All his adversaries were ashamed" (Luke xiii. 17).

I. Hostility to the work of God assuming phases of growing intensity. 1. *Rage.* Sanballat had laughed (ii. 19); now he is enraged (ver. 1). 2. *Mockery* (ver. 2). Tobiah was only Sanballat's echo (ver. 3). 3. *Conspiracy* (vers. 7, 8). This opposition a sign of success; an honour paid to truth. When Dr. Johnson wrote anything that was not vilified he said, "I did not strike hard enough, or the blow would rebound." "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke vi. 26).

II. The Church fortifying herself against expected assault. 1. *By appealing to God* (vers. 4, 5). "Eight times in this book Nehemiah interjects a prayer. They are prayers while writing, not while acting. The grounds of this prayer are—(1) God's people are despised; (2) excited to fear by the enemy."—*Crosby*. "Prayer is a sure anchor in all storms; and they never perish that humbly fly unto it and cleave unto it. Prayer is a salve for all sores; yea, it healeth not only body and soul, but even hard stony walls. No kind of earthly physic that God hath made is good for all kind of folk at all times, and all kind of diseases; but this heavenly physic of prayer, in wealth and woe, in plenty and poverty, in prosperity and adversity, in sickness and in health, in war and peace, in youth and age, in life and death, in mirth and sadness, yea, in all things and times, in the beginning, midst, and ending, prayer is most necessary and comfortable. Happy is that man that diligently useth it at all times."—*Pilkington*. 2. *By redoubled activity in prosecuting the work.* "So built we the wall," &c. (ver. 6). "Prayer did not slacken the energy of the Jews. They experienced the redoubled zeal and activity which all true prayer produces. They made their prayer to God, and set a watch against their foes day and night. All the natural means, whether of mind or matter, form channels through which God conveys his grace in answer to prayer. To stop these channels is to cancel prayer. Prayer was never intended to foster idleness or diminish responsibility."—*Crosby*. 3. *By organized vigilance* (ver. 9). 4. *By defensive preparations* (ver. 13). "The Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exod. xiv. 15). There is a time to pray and a time to prepare to fight. Let the farmer sow his seed, and then pray for rain and sunshine. 5. *By mutual encouragement* (ver. 14). Workers tire; warriors flee when hope dies. 6. *By self-denying assiduity* (vers. 16, 21—23).

III. The evil counsels of the Church's adversaries frustrated by Divine interposition. "God brought their counsel to nought" (ver. 15). "Our God shall fight for us." There are laws; is there not a law-giver? There are agencies; point they not to an agent? Will our modern magicians never say, like those of Egypt (Exod. viii. 19), "This is the finger of God."

"Oft in danger, oft in woe,
Onward, Christians, onward go;
Fight the fight, maintain the strife,
Strengthened with the bread of life.

Onward, then, to glory move,
More than conquerors ye shall prove:
Though opposed by many a foe,
Christian soldiers, onward go."

THE SOLDIER BUILDERS

Chap. iv.

Energy, unity, and perseverance (chap. iii.) give way to discouragement within and conspiracy without.

I. Combination of prayer and watchfulness (ver. 9). Prayer without watch-

fulness is hypocrisy; watchfulness without prayer is presumption. An old writer, speaking of men as stewards, urges wise trading. Their WAREHOUSE (*i. e.* heart and memory) must store up precious things—holy affections, grateful remembrances, celestial preparations. Their WORKHOUSE (or their actions), wherein they retail to others. Their CLOCK-HOUSE (*e. g.* their speech), which must speak the truth. Their COUNTING-HOUSE (or conscience), which should be scrupulously kept, or everything else will fail.

II. Combination of precept and example. Nehemiah “looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid,” &c. (ver. 14). But he was not content with that. “WE returned to the wall” (ver. 15). “He that sounded the trumpet was *by me*” (ver. 18).

III. Every builder was also a soldier. “They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For *the builders, every one* had his sword girded by his side, and so builded” (vers. 17, 18).

IV. A mutual co-operation went hand in hand with personal work and responsibility. “*Every one unto his work*” (ver. 15).

(*Abridged from Rev. J. M. Randall's ‘Nehemiah, his Times and Lessons.’*)

THE LAWS OF OPPOSITION.

iv. 3. *But it came to pass, &c.*

The unconscious working of men's minds is a servant of law. There is a reign of law. Distinguished Christian thinkers hold that the great scientific doctrine of evolution “ratifies all that is highest and holiest in the nature of man,” and makes out a new “claim to reverent acceptance of supernatural truths.” There is a Divine government of the passions of men. “Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee,” &c. (Ps. lxxvi. 10). “The emotions excited by the passions in our senses are not *free*. An angry man is carried beyond himself in spite of himself. These emotions are not proportional. A timorous man turns as pale at the sight of a fanciful as of a real danger. These emotions do not obey the orders of our *will*. The movement is not a gentle stream, but a rapid flood.” — *Saurin*. Sanballat was angry; Tobiah was scornful.

I. Men seek in others what they find in themselves. The old maxim of English law. Every man is to be deemed honest until he is proved to be a rogue; the dishonest the reverse. Cowards disbelieve in bravery. There is a moral obliquity of vision. The unjust cannot appreciate justice. Impure men suspect impurity everywhere. The compact of

the wicked is not binding. Judas and the priests. “I have sinned.” “What is that to us?” (Matt. xxvii. 4—6). They cast off Judas when he had served their purpose, and took back their own accursed coins. All wrong-doing is blunder as well as crime. Marvellously deep and philosophic are the prophet's words: “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?” (Isa. lv. 2).

II. All the branches of opposition grow out of the great trunk of selfishness. Sanballat the Samaritan and Tobiah the Ammonite rejoiced in the laying waste of Jerusalem. Its loss was their gain. “*Our gain*” explains many facts of history in ancient and modern times. Selfish gain has entered temples, disgraced senate houses, tarnished otherwise fair reputations. Gain has been England's god. Speculation has been a species of madness. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others,” is a peculiarly Christian injunction.

III. Great work is generally accomplished by a committee of one. There was *one Nehemiah* against Sanballat, Tobiah, men of Arabia, &c. (ver. 7); *one Luther* against Rome, the monks, and the schoolmen; *one Tindal* against

Bishop Tonstal and Sir Thomas More. *John Evangelist Gossner* was a solitary worker — “One-in-hand” somebody styled him. “It’s quite true,” he said, laughing, when it came to his ears; “and yet old ‘One-in-hand’ carries more passengers than your Four.” Organize, organize—that is well. But individuality is lost in the mass.

Application. 1. “*We mortal millions dwell alone.*” 2. *The way of sorrow leadeth to the city of God.* 3. *Whatever has value is bought at a high price.*

Illustrations:—The spirit of cynicism. “The Cynics were a sect of philosophers among the Greeks, founded by Antisthenes, who, on account of his snappish, snarling propensities, was frequently called ‘the dog;’ and probably enough it may have been on account of this that his school of philosophy was called the Cynic or Dog school. He was stern, proud, and unsympathetic. He taught that all human pleasure was to be despised. He was ostentatiously careless as to the opinions, the feelings, and the esteem of others. He used to appear in a threadbare dress, so that Socrates once exclaimed, ‘I see your pride, Antisthenes, peeping through the holes in your cloak!’ His temper was morose, and his language was coarse and indecent. It is from this old school of philosophy that we derive the term cynicism; and we commonly apply it now-a-days to that mood or habit of mind which looks out upon mankind with cold and bitter feeling, which finds little or nothing to admire in human character and action, which systematically depreciates human motives, which rejoices to catch men tripping, which sneers where others reverence, and dissects where others admire, and is hard where others pity, and suspects where others praise. Distinguish between *cynicism* and *satire*. No doubt the cynic is often satirical; satire is just the kind of weapon that comes ready to his hand. But the same weapon may

be wielded by very different hands, and in very different causes; and satire may often be employed by men who are anything but cynical. There is such a thing as genial satire—the light and even humorous play of irony or sarcasm around some venial fault, or some peculiar ex-crescence of character. Then there is also the satire of moral indignation, which applies the stinging lash to manifest vices, or pours the vials of scorn on some detestable meanness, in order to make the shameless ashamed, or to infuse a healthy contempt of vice into the souls of those who are still uncontaminated by it. The old Hebrew prophets knew how to wield this weapon, and even in the pages of the New Testament it finds its fitting place. In fact, all such satire as this—whether of the genial or the vehement type—is often used by men who are passionate admirers of human excellence, and who are not only warmly attached to individuals, but also earnest lovers of their race. Whereas it is the very characteristic of cynicism that it lacks earnestness. It knows nothing of a noble scorn. Its satire is neither genial nor vehement. Even its humour is always sardonic. Its very bitterness, although intense, is unimpassioned. It is a kind of acrid gelatine. The fully-developed cynic prides himself on his indifferentism. Remorselessly he dissects and analyzes human character and action; for, like Iago, he ‘is nothing, if not critical;’ but his criticism has no useful end in view; he is not seeking to make others wiser or better. He is scarcely earnest enough even to care about his success in stinging and wounding? It is simply his ‘way’ to pick faults and to sneer. We find the culmination of this cynicism in Goethe’s ‘Mephistopheles;’ and indeed the word ‘devil’ itself means ‘accuser’—the slanderer of God and man.”—*Finlayson*.

“Let us keep our scorn for our own weaknesses, our blame for our own sins, certain that we shall gain more instruction, though not amusement, by hunting out the good which is in anything than by hunting out the evil.”—*Kingsley*.

“Sarcasm I now see to be, in general, the language of the devil; for which reason I have long since as good as renounced it.”—*Carlyle*.

ANGER.

iv. 1. *Sanballat was wroth, and took great indignation.*

It is not a sin to be angry, but hard not to sin when we are angry. Anger is a tender virtue, and such as by reason of our unskilfulness may be easily corrupted and made dangerous. He that in his anger would not sin, must not be angry at anything but sin. Our Saviour was angry with Peter, and angry with the Pharisees for the hardness of their hearts (Matt. xvi. 23; Mark iii. 5). Moses was even blown up with holy anger at the people for the golden calf. “Do not I hate them that hate

thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred,” saith David; “I count them mine enemies” (Ps. cxxxix. 21). This is the anger of zeal, found in Phinehas, Elijah, Elisha, our Saviour, John ii. 17; and should have been found in Adam towards his wife, in Eli towards his sons, in Lot towards his servants (Gen. xiii. 7). It must have a good rise and a good end, saith Bucer, else it becomes a mortal, not a venial, sin, as the Papists fondly conclude from Matt. v. 22: “Whosoever is angry with his brother

without a cause," &c. There is a just cause then of anger; sin, as an offence to God. And there must be a just measure observed, that our anger for sin render us not unfit either to pity the sinner (as our Saviour in his anger did the obstinate Pharisees) or to pray for him (as Moses for those idolaters he was so enraged at—Exod. xxxii. 31, 32). Anger that is not thus bounded is but a "momentary madness," saith the heathen; it resteth in the bosom of fools, saith Solomon, whether it be anger, wrath, or hatred (for into those three degrees Damascen distinguisheth it). The one, saith he, hath beginning and motion, but presently ceaseth; the other taketh deep hold in the memory; the third desisteth not without revenge. Clichloveus compareth the first to fire in stubble; the second to fire in iron; the third to fire that is hid and never bewrayeth itself, but with the ruin of the matter wherein it hath caught. Some are sharp, some are bitter, a third kind are implacable, saith Aristotle. The first are the best, that, as children, are soon angry and as soon pleased again. "Be ye children in malice" (1 Cor. xiv. 20). Of Beza, his colleagues would often say that, like the dove, he was without a gall. Giles of Brussels, martyr, when the friars (sent to reduce him) did any time mis-call him, he ever held his peace, inso-much that those blasphemers would say abroad that he had a dumb devil in him. Cassianus reports that when a certain Christian was held captive of infidels, tormented with divers pains and ignominious taunts, being demanded by way of scorn and reproach, "Tell us what miracle thy Christ hath done?" he answered, "He hath done what you see, that I am not moved at all the cruelties and contumelies you cast upon me." Christ did "not strive, nor cry, nor did any man hear his voice in the streets;" who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (Matt. xii. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 23). So did Moses when murmured against by Aaron and Miriam. He was meek, and complained

not. The less any man strives for himself, the more is God his champion. Anger is a short devil, saith Chrysostom; the fury of the unclean spirit. "Wrath killeth the foolish man" (Job v. 2), delivers him to the destroyer, if it rest in his bosom especially, and lodge a night with him, which is the second degree above mentioned.

"Let not therefore the sun go down upon your wrath;" for that is all one as to give place to the devil, who hereby entereth the heart and takes possession. Many there are that suffer the sun not only to go down upon their anger, but to run his whole race, yea, many races, ere they can be reconciled; whereby their anger becomes inveterate, and turns into malice, for anger and malice differ but in age. Now "cursed be this anger, for it is fierce; and this wrath, for it is cruel" (Gen. xlix. 7). It is the murder of the heart (Matt. v. 21 *seq.*); the fountain of the murder both of the tongue and hand. Hence it is said, "He that hateth his brother is a man-slayer" (1 John iii. 15). He is so in desire, he would be so in deed if he durst. There is a passion of hatred and there is the habit of it. The former is a kind of averseness and rising of the heart against a man when one sees him, so that he cannot away with him, nor speak to nor look courteously or peaceably upon him, but one's countenance falls when he sees him, and he even turns away, and by his good will would have nothing to do with him: this is the passion of hatred. The habit of it is when the heart is so settled in this alienation and estrangement that it grows to wish and desire and seek his hurt. This is that third and worst sort of anger. Are we mortal, and shall our anger be immortal? To be revenged is more honourable than to be reconciled, saith Aristotle. This is the voice of nature. Thus "the spirit that is in us lusteth to envy." But God giveth more grace. 1. *Cease therefore from anger and refrain strife.* "Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil" (Ps. xxxvii. 8). When thou findest thyself incensed and chafing ripe, presently lay a necessity of silence upon thyself; as Ahasuerus walked a while in his garden

ere he would pass sentence upon Haman. Another repeated the Greek alphabet ere he would say or do anything in his anger. He doth better that repeateth some grave sentences of Scripture, such as these: "Be angry, but sin not; be slow to wrath; avenge not yourselves, but give place to wrath; submit to God; resist the devil, and he will fly from you." This devil of anger, if thus resisted by Scripture, will surely fly; he cannot bide by it; especially if we set ourselves to pray it down. 2. *Get thy heart purified by faith, for faith makes patience.* When the disciples heard that they must forgive till seventy times seven times in a day, they prayed, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke xvii. 5). The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable (James iii. 17). Unrepentant David was cruel to the Ammonites. The devils

are most impure, and therefore most malicious; Christ, on the other side, most pure, and therefore most gentle. 3. *Study to be quiet and do your own business.* Seldom is a patient man inquisitive, or an inquisitive man patient. It doth require much study to live quietly. 4. *Consider the deformity, disgrace, and danger of anger.* Plato and Seneca have advised the angry man to look at his face in a glass. Anger hurteth not great minds. 5. *Consider wisely of God's providence, presence, patience.* Set God before thy passions, and they will be soon hushed. 6. *Add a constant endeavour to be lowly.* Keep the strict watch of the Lord over your heart; pray down your passions. Your labour will not be in vain.

(From Trapp's 'Marrow of many good Authors.')

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

iv. 2. *What do these feeble Jews?*

Two great events in the history of the returned captives from Babylon: building the second temple; rebuilding and fortifying the city. Subject—*That God produces great events by comparatively feeble means.*

I. As it relates to the objects of personal religion. "What do these feeble Jews?" Zechariah said, Who hath despised the day of small things? (iv. 10). We may ask, *Who has not?* All do. It is quite to the taste of human nature in its search after that which is great to overlook that which is small. The captives did so as well as their heathen persecutors; they wept when they saw the foundation (Ezra iii. 12). Zerubbabel and Zechariah probably did too. "Not by might!" (Zech. iv. 6). Good men do, both in judging of their own religion and that of other people. It is possible to err on the side of despondency as well as on that of presumption. We dishonour God as much by denying the grace we have as by boasting of the grace we have not. We ought not to despise it because *it is day.* (a) A day which God originates; (b) the day of Christ's power; (c) a day

which must advance to its perfection, and shall never know a night. Though man despises it, God does not. He sees the flower in the bud, the pearl in the shell, the man in the infant, the heir of glory in the child of grace. He sees not only what they are, but what they shall be. Remember that God accomplishes his greatest designs by apparently slight and inconsiderable means. (a) In nature. (b) In providence. (c) In grace. The birth of an infant child in the manger at Bethlehem seemed a very ordinary occurrence, but it was an event on which the salvation of the world was made to turn. The cross of Christ is to them that perish foolishness; to the saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. i. 18). The rod of Moses; Gideon's lamps, pitchers, and trumpets; the rams' horns at Jericho; David's sling and stone, worked wonders. Pharaoh's dreams were made the means of Joseph's advancement. The ark, though small, saved the heirs of a shipwrecked world. Zoar, a little city, saved Lot from the shower of fire. The mantle of Elijah divided the waters of Jordan. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of

mustard seed (Matt. xiii. 31, 32). The stone which the builders rejected was made the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing! (Matt. xxi. 42.)

II. That God accomplishes great events by small means encourages in all our efforts to promote the good of others. 1. *To the preaching of the gospel at home and the diffusion of the gospel abroad.* "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. iv. 7). We are often discouraged. The disproportion between the means and the end; the slow progress of the renovating principle. We would recognize the presence and advance of the kingdom of God. Where is the Lord God of

Elijah? (2 Kings ii. 14). Where are the kings for nursing fathers? (Isa. xlix. 23). Where are the great masters of science and literature? Where are the nations born in a day? The confederacies of guilt are still powerful, and the enemies of the truth replete with confidence. The answer to all this is, God's ways are not our ways. That we can clothe our exertions with a power not our own. Remember, the most weak and uninfluential may be made to effect great things, as Naaman's little maid. A mite cast into the treasury of God is not overlooked. It may produce ten talents. 2. *The parent and Sunday school teacher.*—*Anonymous.*

PRAYING AND WORKING.

iv. 4—9. *Hear, O our God; for we are despised, &c.*

The man-ward side of prayer.

I. It narrows the conditions of the strife. Who are Sanballat and Tobiah? Men of position, ranging under them Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites—a crowd of warriors. Who is Nehemiah? A chieftain of a handful of "feeble Jews." "Hear, O our God!" The cause is thine. "Let *thy work* appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. Establish thou *the work of our hands* upon us" (Ps. xc. 16, 17). When, like "Moses the man of God," any man of God discovers that God's work and his work are one and the same thing, the aspect of affairs is changed. The contest is then spiritual. The forces arrayed are light and darkness, truth and error, God and the devil.

II. It inspires energy. "So built we the wall," &c. (ver. 6). "Nevertheless we made," &c. (ver. 9). Nevertheless! The foes were many, powerful, determined, bloodthirsty. Nevertheless God was approachable. Work was possible, pressing, needing earnest minds and willing hands.

III. It awakens faith. Prayer first, then work, in the assurance that the prayer will be answered and the work successful.

"Patience! have faith, and thy prayer will be answered.

Look at this delicate plant that lifts its head from the meadow,

See how its leaves all point to the north as true as the magnet;

It is the compass-flower, that the finger of God has suspended

Here on its fragile stalk, to direct the traveller's journey

Over the sea-like, pathless, limitless waste of the desert.

Such in the soul of man is faith."

Illustrations :—" '*Ora et labora*,' writes Dr. Wichern in one of his pleasant papers, 'is carved on a peasant's house in the Vierland. "It must be French," said a neighbour's wife, as I stood looking at the legend; "but you know it just means—

With this hand work, and with the other pray,
And God will bless them both from day to day.'"

"*Ora et labora* is the legend of the Christian's faith, and the plan of his life. His fervent prayer begets honest, manly, unshrinking work; his work, as it is faithful, and it is faithful in proportion as he realizes it is for God, throws him back upon prayer. It is true that this connection is regarded with some suspicion. It is associated with the failure, and worse, of monastic life. *Ora et labora* was the monkish watchword with which men went into the wilderness, and builded up their lonely cells, and toiled at their simple gardens, and knelt in solemn thought of the world behind them, through long fastings and wakeful nights. But on their lips it was a profound mistake. They had cut themselves off from brotherly sympathies and social duties, from the entire sphere of

Christian work. They had thrown themselves upon the selfishness of lonely hours and solitary thoughts. Their *ora*, earnest and well meant at first, became mechanical and unreal; their *labora* was a fiction. They had no right to their motto. And remembering the hollowness and hypocrisy to which their system brought them, its utter worthlessness, its world-wide scandal, men have shrunk with fear from the truth they misused. Nor are they alone guilty. Those who by practice or speech arrogate to prayer the time and place of ordinary duties are in the same error. Divorced from the common charities of life, prayer must become mechanical and untrue. If it be used to set some apart, on some sacred and haughty height above the rest and the ordinary obligations of society, if it only make them more rigid censors of others, while they themselves are less kindly, less helpful, less useful, who can wonder that the world revolts, or that the more thoughtful and reverent minds are carried to the other extreme, and boldly say that work is prayer? Work is no more prayer than prayer

is work, although the looseness of the expression is often forgiven for the deeper truth of the thought. Work is no more prayer than a walk in the fields is religious worship. To the devout man both are devout; to the undevout man they are nothing. Nay, work without prayer is as dangerous, ay, and more, than prayer without work. It is the practical ignoring of God, of a spiritual world and spiritual laws. It is the start downwards to the grossest and most superstitious materialism. It is a clear peril of our present time. We do not want to be reminded of the need and dignity and sacredness of work; the whole century is preaching that; but we do want to be taught the need and sacredness of prayer, and that it is a force, of which though the world knows nothing, yet it establishes greater than the world's works."—*Stevenson*.

"Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the Church. It is a godly Christian's weapon, which no man knows or finds but only he who has the spirit of grace and of prayer."—*Luther*.

IMPRECATIONS.

iv. 4, 5. *Hear, O our God; for we are despised, &c.*

This prayer takes its tone, form, and expression from the imprecations in the Psalms — the "*Cursing Psalms*," as some have styled them. Consider we then some specimens of such Psalms, that we may know where the difficulty lies; and in what way, if any, this difficulty may be solved.

I. The following are fair specimens:—

Ps. v. 10. "Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee."

Ps. x. 15. "Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none."

Ps. xxviii. 4. "Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert."

Ps. xl. 14. "Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil."

Ps. lxxviii. 2. "As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God."

Ps. lxxxiii. 9—17. "Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna. O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the

flame setteth the mountains on fire; so persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O Lord. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish."

Ps. cix. 6—15. "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth."

Ps. cxxxvii. 7—9. "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."

These passages seem to breathe a vindictive spirit; they seem to be opposed to the spirit of the New Testament.

II. In what way is the difficulty to be solved? 1. *Whatever difficulty there exists is created by the Bible itself.* It cannot be said that the writers indulged in feelings which they were unwilling to record. The Bible is thus a book of candour. There was some reason for making the record. 2. *It may be a fair subject of inquiry how much of what is charged as wrong, harsh, and vindictive belongs to the spirit of the age.* To know how much words express, we must understand the customs and habits of the times. The strong language used by a Covenanter or a Puritan may have expressed no other internal emotion than would be expressed by the milder language which we should use. 3. *Part of these passages may undoubtedly be regarded as prophetic: expressing what would be, rather than indicating any wish that such things should be.* Part—not all. 4. *Some of the expressions are a mere record of the feelings of others.* The inspired writer is only responsible for the fairness of the record; e. g. cruelty of sons of Jacob (Gen. xxxiv. 25—29; xlix. 6, 7), David (2 Sam. xii. 31), Joab, Ahithophel, Ahab. In Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9 the pleasure which they would actually feel who should wreak vengeance on Babylon is described. 5. *Can such imprecations ever be right?* (a) David was a magistrate, a king. As a magistrate, he represented the state, the majesty of the law, the interests of

justice. (b) Punishment is right when properly inflicted. (c) Arrangements are made in every community for detecting and punishing crime. (d) A judge who prays that he may discharge his duty has no vindictive feeling. 6. *There is another solution of the difficulty. These expressions are a mere record of what actually occurred in the mind of the Psalmist, and are preserved to us as an illustration of human nature when partially sanctified.* If such is a just view of the matter, then all that inspiration is responsible for is the correctness of the record; the authors of the Psalms actually recorded what was passing in their own minds. They gave vent to their internal emotions. They state feelings which men have actually had. They do not apologize for it; they do not pause to vindicate it; they offer no word in extenuation of it, any more than other sacred writers did when they recorded the facts about the errors in the lives of the patriarchs, of David, and of Peter. In some of these ways it is probable that all the difficulties with regard to “imprecations” in the Bible may be met. Those who deny the inspiration of the records that contain them should be able to show that these are *not* proper explanations of the difficulty; or that they are *not* consistent with any just notions of inspiration.—*Barnes, abridged.*

THE CRAFT AND CRUELTY OF THE CHURCH'S ADVERSARIES.

iv. 11. *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.*

Chapter gives view of Nehemiah's discouragements. Like waves of the sea breaking upon him, he an unshaken rock. Like Job's messengers, one hardly gone before another comes. Like Ezekiel's prophecy, mischief upon mischief.

First verse: adversaries' rage. Second verse: venting itself in foam. But this is cool: it reaches blood-heat (vers. 7, 8).

I. A strong combination against the Church of God. “*Adversaries.*”

II. A wicked design they were

combined in. “*To cause the work to cease.*”

III. A bloody means propounded. “*Slay them.*”

IV. A subtle way projected for the effecting of this. “*Secretly, suddenly.*”

Sum of the whole. The great design of the enemies of the Church is by craft or cruelty, or both, to hinder any work that tends to the establishment or promoting of the Church's good.—*Matthew Newcomen, 1642.*

SATANIC SUBTLETY.

iv. 11. *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.*

The malice of Satan by his members is so great against the building of God's city, that by all means, inward enemies and outward, fair words and foul, sword, fire and faggot, war and peace, in teaching or holding their tongue, knowledge or ignorance, undermining or conspiracies, and all other devices whatsoever, they let none slip, but try all, that they may overthrow all, and not so much to do themselves good as to hinder others; to set up themselves in the sight of the world, and to deface the glory of God; but in the end all is in vain, and our God shall have the victory. They will not yet use any open violence, but cunningly come on them unawares.

1. *In this serpentine, crafty, and malicious dealing of these wicked men appeareth the old serpentine nature and malice of Satan, that old enemy of God and man from the beginning.* God said to the serpent that the seed of the woman should tread upon his head, and the serpent should tread upon his heel (Gen. iii.). Crafty and subtle men, when they will work a mischief, go privily about it, to deceive the good man. God endued man, when he made him, with such a majesty in his face, afore he fell to sin, that all creatures did reverence and fear him; and although sin hath much defaced and blotted out that noble majesty and grace that God endued him with, yet it is not utterly disgraced and taken away, but some spark and relic remaineth at this day, that no wild nor venomous beast dare look a man in the face boldly and hurt him, but will give place for the time, and seek how he may privily wound or hurt him when he seeth him not. These crafty and subtle foxes, therefore, like the seed of the serpent, would not openly invade nor gather any great power of men against them, but at unawares steal on them privily, afore they should sus-

pect any such thing. This is the nature of wicked men, so craftily to undermine the godly.

2. *The next property of the serpent that appeareth in these wicked men is, that they mercilessly would murder them* when they had once thus suddenly invaded them. Satan was "a murderer from the beginning," as St. John saith; and therefore no marvel if his children be bloodsuckers, like unto the father. When he would not spare the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, but most cruelly crucified him, why should we marvel to see him by his wicked children so greedily seek to shed innocent blood still?

3. *The last property of Satan appeareth here most plainly in these wicked men, in that they would so gladly overthrow this building of Jerusalem, that it should never be thought on any more.* Satan is "the prince of this world," and therefore cannot abide another king to reign, nor any kingdom to be set up but his own; and for maintaining of that he will strive by his members unto death. And as it falleth out thus generally in the building of God's spiritual house and city that all sorts of enemies most diligently apply themselves, their labour, wit, power, policy, and friendship to overthrow the true worship of God, so particularly "Satan goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," and therefore every man hath great need to be wary and circumspect, that he be not suddenly overthrown, but let him watch and put on "the whole armour of God" (Ephes. vi. 13—18), that he may stand stoutly in the day of battle, and through the might of his God get the victory. The devil never ceaseth, for if he cannot overthrow the whole Church, yet he would be glad to catch any one that belongeth to the Lord if he could.—*Bishop Pilkington.*

A PAUSE IN THE WORK.

iv. 15. *We returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

A dangerous pause. Judah had become faint-hearted (ver. 10). The opponents were gaining strength (ver. 11). Terror had taken hold upon the neighbouring Jews (ver. 12.) An armed outlook was necessary (ver. 13). Nehemiah encouraged the workers to wait the issue (ver. 14). The enemy noted the attitude and saw that God had brought their counsel to nought (ver. 15). The pause was over. Once again to the work. There is the truth of life in this parable.

I. A period of preparation is essential to successful work. Lightly begun means easily discontinued. Count the cost (Luke xiv. 28—33). Raw haste is sister to undue delay. Find thy task, calculate thy strength, and rest not until the evening. Impetuous natures need patience and perseverance; fearful and timid natures need courage and self-reliance; all need encouragement. Moses —“Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?” (Exod. iii. 11—22). Joshua —“Be strong” (Josh. i. 1—9). Jeremiah —“I am a child” (Jer. i. 4—10). Ezekiel —“Be not afraid of them” (Ezek. ii. 3—8). Nehemiah’s workmen —“Be not ye afraid” (iv. 13, 14).

II. Joyous acceptance of the allotted task is a great element of strength. Duty as duty, or duty joyously done, how different! Love thy task. Do it for its own sake, and it will become easier. Such service is perfect freedom. Men see what most interests them. An artist on entering a room sees pictures; a student books; an architect decorations.

“The wide world
Is full of work, and everything therein
Finds in it its best blessedness. The bee
Sings at his task throughout the summer day.”

III. Earnest work is sure to provoke opposition. Ridicule (ver. 1), compromise (vi. 2), misrepresentation (vi. 7), attack (iv. 8).

IV. Work is instrumental in developing personal character. What canst thou do? Nehemiah proved his men by trial.

V. Fluctuation in the success of an undertaking is no reason for relinquishing it (vers. 10—15).

George Stephenson’s motto was “PERSEVERE.” “Go on, sir, go on,” was D’Alembert’s advice to a young discouraged student. John Wesley, interrogated as to the remarkable success of his followers, said, “They are all at it, and always at it.”

VI. The power of combined action in meeting a common foe (vers. 13, 23). Nelson the day before Trafalgar took two officers who were at variance to the spot where they could see the fleet opposed to them. “Yonder,” he said, “are your enemies; shake hands and be friends, like good Englishmen.”

“Oh! ye the ministers of Christ, and stewards of his truth,

Lead ye the band, all vigorous in faith’s immortal youth.

But not alone shall ye repair,
For all must aid in toil and prayer.

Then let them say the work is nought, to scoff us into fear.

What is the answer we must make? Calmly the walls to rear;

Building with weapons girded on;
Warriors until the work is done.”

Enlarged from ‘Scenes from the Life of Nehemiah.’

THE WORK AND WARFARE OF LIFE.

iv. 17, 18. *They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one, &c.*

Nehemiah iv. one of the Bible scenes that has indelibly impressed itself upon the popular imagination. Like the

“lamps, pitchers, and trumpets” of Gideon’s army, the “sword and trowel” of Nehemiah’s army has passed into a

proverb. Only scenes, books, pictures, sculptures become popular that present the elementary conditions of human life, that go down to the rock on which the structure of human society rests, e. g. the parables of Jesus, Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' Nehemiah iv. a picture of the work and warfare of life.

I. The conditions of the conflict. 1. *Against the solicitations of self-indulgence.* "The people had a mind to work" (ver. 6). Not always so. The spirit is *not always* willing. And when the spirit is willing the flesh is often weak. True (a) of the cultivation of personal character. To conquer pride, subdue passion, root out evil dispositions, to "grow in grace," not an easy thing. In this sense "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." A Christian does not always "sail with a straight course," as did Paul on his first voyage to Europe (Acts xvi. 11). Oftener, like the same apostle on a later voyage, he "sails slowly" (Acts xxvii. 7), or the "ship sticks fast and remains unmovable" (Acts xxvii. 41). Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward, is God's message to the inspired leaders of every age. What doest thou here? is his question to every dispirited and inactive Elijah. Jonah may sit for awhile under the shadow of the gourd, but when the morning calls him to his work and to his labour the gourd perishes. True (b) of working for one's fellows. Social and philanthropic work. How little response of gratitude from those to whom you give, from those whom you toil to raise. Religious teaching and influence. manifold are difficulties and discouragements. Unless work be its own reward, who shall continue? No motive lower than the stars, no inspiration less stable than trust in God, will enable a man to war against the lust of self-indulgence. 2. *Against foes.* (a) Foes may be violent and pronounced as Sanballat (ver 1). With such as these a man can count. Rouse a lion, and the consequences are clear. The arch foe and many of his emissaries are not unwilling to show a bold front to a servant of God. Specially if it can be said of him—

"Servant of God, well done!

Well done! thy words are great and bold;
At times they seem to me
Like Luther's in the days of old,
Half battles for the free!"

Words for freedom, for brotherhood, against oppressors, against shams, must count the cost. Reformers, Covenanters, Puritans "resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Heb. xii. 4). (b) Foes may be subtle and plot in secret (ver. 11). Against these we are comparatively defenceless. It is dastardly to stab in the dark. But the assassin is dastardly. Guilt makes cowards. (c) Foes have the advantage of numbers and possession (ver. 7). They were on the ground. Nehemiah and his compatriots' loss was their gain. "They conspired all of them together," &c. (ver. 8). The good have always been a minority. The great have too often been on the side of the majority. "Not many wise, not many mighty," &c. (1 Cor. i. 26—29). "We wrestle not against flesh and blood" only, "but against principalities," &c. (Ephes. vi. 12, 13). 3. *Against friends.* (a) Half-hearted friends (ver. 12). They had patriotism enough to warn Nehemiah of danger. But they dwelt near the adversaries. A decided foe better than a doubtful friend. Gideon's 300, who had not time to kneel to drink, better than countless crowds of self-indulgent people (Judges vii.). "Art thou for us?" said Joshua to the angel-captain (Josh. v.). For or against is understood. But half-heartedness never won a battle, never gained a victory. (b) Dispirited friends (ver. 10). The wall was built somewhat, but they feared their strength would give out. Fear and faith are antagonists. Trust in thy cause, trust in the God of thy cause, cures for dispiritedness.

"I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.
And if my heart and flesh are weak
To bear an untried pain,
The bruised reed he will not break,
But strengthen and sustain."

II. The conditions of victory. 1. *All at it* (ver. 13). Every man at work. Every man at his own work. Every man

under discipline—under the rulers (ver. 14), under Nehemiah (vers. 18—20). Generalize these particulars. Nobody can do my work. My task is my own. No man can lift responsibility off his own shoulders. There is a cry to every man from some helpless man, or mass of men, “Come over and help us.” The unnamed disciple of John xx. did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre; but Peter first went into the sepulchre. Had he more courage or less reverence? Never mind—each left the other scope to work. St. John has left a greater name than his brother James. But James died for the truth. In this holy war men call life the feeble cannot be dispensed with. Nehemiah conferred with the nobles (ver. 14). Nehemiah needed the bearers of burdens (ver. 17).

2. *Unslumbering vigilance.* We “set a watch” (ver. 9). “I set the people,” &c. (ver. 13). “And it came to pass,” &c. (ver. 16). There is a lesson of life in the heading of this chapter in our Bibles—“Nehemiah prayeth and continueth the work.” Patient waiting is a grace; perseverance is a virtue. Men are sometimes enervated by success. They become unwatchful. “Doctor,” said his wife to Martin Luther one day, “how is it that, whilst subject to papacy, we prayed so often and with such fervour, whilst now we pray with the utmost coldness and very seldom?” “Every one with one hand held a weapon” (ver. 17). “He that sounded the trumpet was by me” (ver. 18). “In what place ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us” (ver. 20). These are only the dictates of worldly prudence. So true is it that “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke xvi. 8). What said the greatest Christian Teacher? “The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore. What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch” (Mark xiii. 34, 35, 37).

Illustration :—“That man is happy who can combine work and watching in perfect harmony—who has Stephen’s life of labour and Stephen’s vision in the end. In every soul there should be the sisters of Bethany, active effort and quiet thought, and both agreeing in mutual love and help. But Mary no longer sits at the feet of Christ and looks in his face; she stands at the door and gazes out into the open sky to watch the tokens of his coming, while in this hope her sister in the house still works. In due time he will be here to crown every humble effort with overflowing grace, to satisfy the longing soul that looks for him, and to raise all the dead for whom we weep.”—*Dr. Ker.*

3. *Resort to the unseen Refuge.* “Hear, O our God” (ver. 4). “Be not ye afraid: remember the Lord” (ver. 14). “Our enemies heard that God had brought their counsel to nought” (ver. 15). “Our God shall fight for us” (ver. 20). Our God—the attestation of experience. “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee” (Job v. 19). The Apostle Paul appealed from Festus unto Cæsar. Nehemiah appealed from Sanballat to God. In the miracle of feeding our Lord turned an inward look upon the troubled, calculating thoughts of his disciples, though “he himself knew what he would do.” He turned an outward look upon the hungry, trustful crowd: “Make the men sit down.” He directed an upward look to God: “When he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes he looked up to heaven.” The inward look revealed distrust; the outward look revealed need; the upward look revealed strength and supply. A parable of life. Look abroad—the work is great; look within—calculate resources; look up—“Thy God hath commanded thy strength.” “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake. The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great. We will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord” (Ps. cxv.).

ADDENDA TO CHAPTER IV.

SENTENCES FROM OLD WRITERS.

Sanballat's opposition (vers. 1, 2). "The devil and his servants have ever been utter enemies to reformation. Jabesh-gilead would send in none to help the Lord against the mighty (Judges xxi. 9); no more would Meroz (Judges v. 23). Josiah met with much opposition; so did St. Paul wherever he came to set up evangelical and spiritual worship, which is called a reformation (Heb. ix. 10). All the world was against Athanasius in his generation, and Luther in his; rejecting what they attempted with scorn and slander. Nehemiah and his Jews were not more busy in building than the enemies active in deriding, conspiring, practising to hinder and overthrow them." "If thou hast not the favour of men, be not grieved at it; but take this to heart, that thou dost not behave thyself so warily and circumspectly as it becometh the servant of God and a devout, religious man." "Why art thou troubled when things succeed not as thou wouldest or desirest? For who is he that hath all things according to his mind?"

Tobiah's scorn (ver. 3). "Say not, 'Should I suffer these things from so contemptible a fellow as this?' Yes, truly; in consideration of that patient and meek spirit which was in Christ. No man will ever be reconciled by wrath or revenge. Victory consists in virtue, not in vice." "One devil does not drive out another." "We chiefly seek God for our inward witness, when outwardly we be contemned by men, and when there is no credit given unto us." "Thou canst not have two paradises." "Christ was willing to suffer and be despised; and darest thou complain of any man?" "Let thy thought be on the Highest." "Whom God will keep no man's perverseness shall be able to hurt." "Have a good conscience, and God will well defend thee."

Nehemiah's prayers (vers. 4, 5, 9). "Nehemiah hateth not the men, but

their wickedness; so we learn to put a difference betwixt the man and the sin of man, and pray for mercy to the one and justice to the other. Man is God's good creature, and to be beloved of all sorts; sin is of the devil, and to be fled of all sorts." "His prayer is not long, but full." "Faithful prayer is never ineffectual. So built we the wall. This followed upon Nehemiah's prayer as a gracious answer to it; the people were encouraged, and the wall finished." "Beware of hating the person whilst thou abhorrest his sin." "Prayer is the key of heaven; the pillar of the world; the fire of devotion; the light of knowledge; the repository of wisdom; the strength of the soul; the remedy against faint-heartedness; the forerunner of honour; the nurse of patience; the guardian of obedience; the fountain of quietness; the comfort of the sorrowful; the triumph of the just; the helper of the oppressed; the refreshment of this life; the sweetening of death; and the foretaste of the heavenly life." "God *prevents* our prayers, meets us (as it were) half-way, and courts our friendship, being a thousand times more ready to give than we are to receive."

Nehemiah's watchfulness (ver. 9). "It is not sufficient to pray and then to neglect such means as God hath appointed us to use for our defence and comfort, no more than it is to say, when he hath prayed, I will live without meat and drink, and God himself shall feed me. For as the Lord hath taught us to pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' so he hath commanded us to work for it, and saith, 'If any will not work, neither shall he eat.'" "Sin opens the door to the devil." "Awaken us, O God, that we may watch; draw us to thee, and we will run the straight way, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Judah's defection (ver. 10). "It is an easy matter to begin a good work, but a special gift to stand in all storms and continue to the end." "Judah's

escutcheon was a lion, but here he is unlike himself." "Nehemiah might well have said to these men of Judah, as Alexander once did—to a faint-hearted soldier of his that was of his own name, 'Either leave off the name of Alexander, or be valiant.' So either hold out and bear up under your burdens, or be Judah no more. Never was anything too hard for Alexander, because he never held anything impossible to be effected."

Nehemiah's policy and appeal (vers. 11—14). "Their brethren from abroad gave the workmen intelligence; and this was a friendly office, for premonition is the best means of prevention." "It was their duty to have come home, stood in storms, and help to build Jerusalem. But God, which turneth our negligence and foolishness to the setting forth of his wisdom and goodness, gave them a good will and boldness to further that building as they might." "Away with that cowardly passion which unmans a

man. Remember the Lord, whom he that feareth needs fear none else." "God and the world cannot be friends; and that maketh so few courtiers to tread this road."

Soldier-builders (vers. 15 — 23). "Courage and strength without wisdom is foolish rashness, and wisdom without courage and strength is fearful cowardliness." "Nehemiah was an active man, trading every talent." "In the Christian's panoply there is no mention of armour for the back, though there is for the breast, because a Christian soldier should never fly." "In God's cause a man must be bold and blush not." "Fear of the enemy did not weaken them, but waken them." "Time was precious, and they redeemed and improved it. The common complaint is, We want time; but the truth is, we do not so much want as waste it." "Nehemiah said not to his men, Go YE, but, Go WE."

CHAPTER V.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.] 1. **Against their brethren]** *i. e.* the richer portion (ver. 7). 2—4. **There were that said]** Keil divides into three classes. (*a*) The workers, who had no property. (*b*) Those who had mortgaged their fields, vineyards, and houses. (*c*) Those who had borrowed money for the king's tribute upon their fields and vineyards. 2. **We take up corn]** Not by force. The words mean, We desire that corn may be provided. 3. **Because of the dearth]** Probably Sanballat and his army intercepted the supplies. 4. **For the king's tribute]** We have made our fields and our vineyards answerable for money for the king's tribute (Bertheau), *i. e.* We have borrowed money upon our fields for tribute. This they could only do by pledging the crops (comp. the law, Lev. xxv. 14, 17). 5. **"Our brethren"]** The richer Jews. The sense of the first half of the verse is, We are of one flesh and blood with these rich men. The law not only allowed to lend to the poor on a pledge (Deut. xv. 8), but also permitted Israelites, if they were poor, to sell themselves (Lev. xxv. 39), and also their sons and daughters, to procure money. It required, however, that they who were thus sold should not be retained as slaves, but set at liberty without ransom, either after seven years or at the year of Jubilee (Lev. xxv. 39—41; Exod. xxi. 2 *seq.*). It is set forth as a special hardship in this verse that some of their daughters were brought into bondage for maidservants.—*Keil.* **Neither is it in our power]** Lit. *Our hand is not to God* (Gen. xxxi. 29). Keil explains thus: The power to alter it is not in our hand. Our fields and our vineyards are in the hands of others. 7. **I consulted with myself]** My heart took counsel upon it. **Ye exact usury]** Usury and injustice are closely allied. 8. **We redeemed. Ye sell]** Strong contrast. The sale of their brethren for bondservants forbidden (Lev. xxv. 42). 11. **Hundredth part]** Probably a monthly interest. 12. **I called the priests]** To witness the oath. 13. **I shook my lap]** A symbolical action. "The lap of the garment, in which things are carried (Isa. xlix. 22), where alone the word is again found."—*Keil.* See for this significant action Acts xviii. 6. 14.] Crosby says this verse and those which follow form an interruption of the narrative. They show that Nehemiah was for twelve years governor of Judah, and did not write this history till the expiration of that time. **The bread of the governor]** The food and wine with which the community had to furnish him. 15. **Even their servants bare rule]** Arbitrary, oppressive rule. Abuse of power for extortions. 17. **The rulers]** The heads of the different houses of Judah. 19. **Think upon me]** (Comp. xiii. 14 and 31).

HOMILETICAL CONTENTS OF CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—19. Greed corrected.	Ver. 10. What Others do no Excuse for My doing.
„ 1—19. Godless Rich Men.	„ 12. Clenching a Good Resolution.
„ 1—13. A Great Schism averted.	„ 13. The Terrors of the Lord persuading Men.
„ 1. The Accusing Cry of Humanity.	„ 14. A Man foregoing his Rights for the sake of his Duties.
„ 3—5. The Miseries of Debt.	„ 15. A Motto for a Manly Life.
„ 6. Righteous Anger.	„ 19. Conscious Integrity.
„ 7. Introspection.	„ 19. The Saint's Support.
„ 7. An Assembly convoked against Sinners.	„ 19. The Remembrance of Good Deeds a Pillow of Rest for a Good Man.
„ 8. Inconsistency without Excuse.	
„ 9. God's People under the Eye of a Critical World.	

GREED CORRECTED.

Chap. v.

THE chapter is complete in itself. It is not only a story, but a parable of everlasting suggestiveness. In the history of every generation we find some situation similar to the one recorded here. The great humanness of the Bible is not less striking than its divinity. *God's book* is sublimely crowded with pathetic interest in *man's life*. Here is a picture of the desolations of greed and their correction.

I. The desolations of greed. The cry of the people in the first verse is a note in the "still, sad music of humanity" which has rung out in every age. The cry of the people in the days of *Norman tyranny*; the wail of nations in the priest-ridden *dark ages*; the lamentations of the *negro race* in the slaveries of the last century; the shriek of the despised people prior to the bloody struggle of the *French Revolution*; the clamour of the English poor in the days of the *Corn Laws*,—are all re-echoes of this old cry. "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter" (Eccles. iv. 1). Such was the melancholy view which made Solomon praise the *dead*, whose eyes were shut upon the scene, and the *unborn*, who had the chance of coming to look upon a better spectacle. In this fifth chapter of Nehemiah we have the whole of the dark parable of poverty and oppression—*hunger, debt, mortgage, serfdom*. Jesus Christ redeemed poverty by himself becoming poor; not to show that poverty is a good, but to show that the highest moral conditions of man's soul may co-exist with these hard conditions. He, Jesus of Nazareth, was (temporally speaking) a vassal of Rome, and had not where to lay his head. This story of the earthly sojourn of the mighty God is a golden ray which gilds the deep valley of humiliation, where millions walk all through their threescore years and ten; but woe to those who help to deepen the gloom of that dreary place by their own narrow and damnable selfishness. "I was angry," says Nehemiah, "when I heard their cry" (ver. 6); and *he did well to be angry*. 1. WANT. *Bread! bread! bread! what a cry is that to be the chief cry of immortal creatures*. Yet such is and will yet be the wail of the hungry. "God deliver us," says Isaac Walton, "from pinching poverty." "Feed me with food convenient for me," meekly said the good man in olden days. By *industry and frugality* let us offer this prayer. 2. DEGRADATION *is the result of this want*. Great are thy temptations, O Poverty. What will not the poor man in the wilderness, with hunger in his body and the devil beside him, do to make stones into bread? How can a man be a man while he is kept in slavery to his pinching need? Again let the woe, woe, woe go forth upon those

whose selfish greed breaks the staff of bread for the people. 3. HOPELESSNESS. Here is a picture from one of Thomas Carlyle's graphic books. "Passing by the work-house of St. Ives in Huntingdonshire, on a bright day last autumn" (about 1840), "I saw sitting on wooden benches, in front of their Bastille, and within their ring-wall and its railings, some half hundred or more of these men. Tall, robust figures; young mostly, or of middle age; of honest countenance; many of them thoughtful and even intelligent-looking men. They sat there, near by one another; but in a kind of torpor, especially in a silence, which was very striking. In silence; for, alas, what word was to be said? An earth all lying round, crying, Come and till me, come and reap me;—yet we here sit enchanted! In the eyes and brows of these men hung the gloomiest expression, not of anger, but of grief, and shame, and manifold, inarticulate distress, and weariness. They returned my glance with a glance that seemed to say, 'Do not look at us. We sit enchanted here; we know not why.' There was something that reminded me of Dante's hell in the look of all this, and I rode swiftly away." What a dark outlook utter want has! what a dreary nightmare to lie on a human spirit! In the poor wretches whose condition stirred Nehemiah's anger with their want and their hopeless debt and their heart-breaking family separations, *as son and daughter went in pawn for bread*, there is a scene to smite the buried conscience of the grinding oppressor, and to call forth some natural tears from the eyes of onlooking philanthropists. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn."

II. The corrections of philanthropy. Like a Howard moved with pity and shame for the *prisoner* as if he had been his own mother's son, or a Wilberforce making his vow to break the iron chain of the *negro*, Nehemiah rose up to mend the evil. It was a monster that would have frightened back to Persia a less dauntless man, *but fear and discouragement were his playmates*. Nehemiah proceeded to correct this evil by his *exhortation* and by his *example*. 1. *Exhortation*. He rebuked the greed of gain. In vers. 6—8 we have the grand outpouring of his aroused sympathies. "Then they held their peace, and found nothing to answer." Read from verse 12 to 13. Knowing how subtle is the devil of greed, Nehemiah called the priests to a religious solemnity, that the promise of the repentant oppressors might as it were *be written down in the great doom-book of God*, so that each man might go back to his money-bags with his own Amen! with the curse on greed ringing in his ears. *Here is an example*. What is good to be done should be done in the solemn name of God. Strike the iron of a good resolution while it is hot. *Second thoughts are selfish thoughts in all Divine things*. Bind the soul *while it is willing* fast to God's altar. Pledges, vows, oaths; let those mock these who will. Our evil nature is a Samson, who snaps cords like tow; nay, a demoniac whom no man can bind, no, not with chains. If the obligations of a solemn pledge to God can do it, let it be done. "I called the priests, and *took an oath of them*, that they should do according to this promise." You who are meditating surrender to Christ, or reformation from drunkenness, or abandonment of some evil thing or associate, *go and do likewise*. 2. *Example*. Grand as was Nehemiah's exhortation, his example is still grander. He enforced his sermon by *living it out before his congregation*. The perquisites of his office he abandoned for the sake of example (ver. 15); what he might have regarded as a right he surrendered in order to be himself a type of unselfishness. His chances of gain were many. He knew what his plans were, and could have invested well in the new city; but, says he, "Neither bought we any land," *a suggestion to public persons whose office gives them the chances of gain*. "I took no advantage of my opportunities." Besides his servants, he maintained himself. The men he had brought to do the noble work of renovation were men who had claim to reward; and what was needful Nehemiah gave them out of his own private means. He wanted to build Jerusalem as Michael Angelo said he would build St. Peter's—"for the glory of God."

Application. 1. *Have an ear for the cry of the poor and oppressed*. Keep a

heart alive for such as be prostrate. 2. *Emulate Nehemiah's self-sacrifice.* Do not say, "He was a hero." His character made him a hero. His sublime fear of God and pity for man did not flow from his heroism so much as make it. He was but a cupbearer to the king, and had a snug birth and a good stipend and great expectations, but these were chaff when compared with an opportunity of making a good mark in his generation, and of writing his name in the book of life. "By faith he obtained a good report!"

Illustrations :—"Every grain of riches hath a vermin of pride and ambition in it." "Oppression is a bony sin" (Amos v. 12, 13). "As God hath enlarged any man in his outward estate, he must be answerably enlarged in works of mercy." "It is one thing to be rich in this world, and another thing to be rich towards God, as our Saviour phraseth it; to be rich in knowledge, as St. Paul hath it; rich in faith, as St. James." "Highmindedness, causing men to think great things of themselves, and to seek great things for themselves, is a blab that the devil will easily blow up in rich misers, to think themselves simply the better men because richer than others, which is all one as if the silly ant, the higher she gets upon her hillock, the greater she should conceit herself."—*Trapp*. "Poverty," it has been said, "has many wants; but avarice is in want of everything."

"The sense to value riches, with the art
To enjoy them, and the virtue to impart,
Not meanly nor ambitiously pursued,
Not sunk by sloth, nor raised by servitude;
To balance fortune by a just expense,
Join with economy, magnificence;
With splendour, charity; with plenty, health;
O teach us."—*Alexander Pope*.

GODLESS RICH MEN.

Chap. v.

This is not the only page of the Bible on which the sins of covetousness, oppression, and luxury are linked together and denounced. Isaiah represents the Lord of Hosts looking for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry; and then hurls a Divine woe against those that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth; that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, &c. (Isa. v. 7—12). Amos speaks of those who cause the seat of violence to come near, that lie upon beds of ivory (Amos vi. 3, 4). Micah utters a woe against those who covet fields and houses, and take them by violence (Micah ii. 2). *Even Christ takes up his parable* against those who devour widows' houses (Matt. xxiii. 14). The apostles follow his example. But they remind us that other gifts may be misused—power, beauty, any gift of God.

I. The value of wealth. The word of God does not despise wealth. The references to riches and rich men are no fewer than one hundred and seventy—descriptive, regulative, corrective. 1. *Riches are God's gift.* Not invariably. He has not ordained that right and riches should be inseparable, or that wrong and want should be invariably cause and effect. Still it is true that "the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich." "Riches and honours come of him." "The earth is full of his riches." The virtuous he "maketh fat and flourishing." He has not made poverty *the outward and visible sign* of his displeasure, nor wealth of his favour. Had he done so the Church would have been sectional. Large numbers would have been shut out by circumstances. It would have been in antagonism to human weal. There is a working force and a conserving force. 2. *Wealth is man's glory.* With it he can surround himself with all that is ennobling in science and art, the conveniences of life. With it he can rule men. It elevates. Prosperous families and prosperous nations become refined.

II. The responsibility of wealth. We take this responsibility to be personal

and relative. 1. *A man owes a duty to himself.* The first contrast here is between getting and covetous hoarding. The Bible preaches no Crusade against getting. It does not say, "Take no care for the morrow." It does say, "Take not anxious, boding thought." Christianity is a system of prudence. It imposes restraint because license leads to ruin. It gives a premium to diligence. Idleness is treated with scorn by the inspired writers. The sun shines on no fairer prospect than a *diligent* person; whatever his station, whatever his aim, the first condition of success is toil, the second is toil, the third is toil. But the crucial test is, "Are we getting to live?" or, "Are we living to get?" Do we lay up or lay out? At every step in our inquiry we are upon the horns of a dilemma. The breakers are on every side. The vessel needs careful piloting. Laying up is not wrong, and nature as well as revelation teaches that he that does not provide for his own house is worse than an infidel. "Naked came we into this world, and naked shall we return thither;" but we do not read that *we must leave those naked whom we leave behind.* For the majority this must be so. The law of life for most is from hand to mouth. Very literally their prayer is answered, "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread." But for the middle and upper classes John Wesley's famous rules apply. "Get all you can, save all you can, give all you can." At eighty years of age he thus narrated his own experience. "Two-and-forty years ago I wrote many books. Some of these had such a sale as I never thought of, and by this means I unawares became rich. I gain all I can without hurting either my soul or body. I save all I can, not willingly wasting anything, not a sheet of paper, or a cup of water. I do not lay out anything, not a shilling, unless as a sacrifice to God. Yet by giving all I can I am effectually secured from laying up 'treasures upon earth.' And I am secured from either desiring or endeavouring it as long as I give all I can. But my own hands will be my executors." Generally no better executors can be found. The Peabodys and Burdett-Coutts act on this principle, and their memorial remains in model cottages and Christian sanctuaries. Howard's rule was "that our superfluities give way to other men's conveniences; that our conveniences give way to other men's necessities; and that even our necessities sometimes give way to other men's extremities." "Charity," says Chrysostom, "is the scope of all God's commands."

2. *A man owes a duty to others.* "No man liveth to himself." (a) We have spoken of the kingly rule of wealth. A king's is a noble office. But sometimes kingship becomes kingcraft. Kingship rules for the good of the subject; kingcraft rules for personal ends, and then power becomes tyranny. To rule well is a difficult task. In most men the love of power is a ruling passion. In no form is it stronger than in ruling men. The pages of history are stained with the blood shed by the oppressor. But there are other thrones than that on which the monarch sits. Every master is a king. Let him never forget that kingly honours imply kingly responsibilities. "Read the indictment in Epistle of James v. 1—6." The "*labourers*" are dependent on you—their masters. The *moral* claim is stronger than the *legal*. There are forms of oppression which are too subtle for the coarse instruments of law. But God has a special controversy with the oppressor. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust." "The poor, and him that hath no helper," find a helper in God. One duty of a Queen's Counsel is to plead the cause of the queen's subject, who would otherwise be defenceless. The queen is the defender of the weak. "Now will I arise," saith the Lord, "for the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy" (Ps. xii. 5); "He shall judge the poor of the people" (Ps. lxxii. 4); and, not to quote passages, he is the Advocate of the poor, the Elevator of the poor, the Satisfier of the poor, the Deliverer of the poor. The sin of oppression is the child of covetousness. Ye exact usury! Sins which are passed by because of the power of those who commit them, or passed by because of the poverty and powerlessness of those who suffer from them, are said to *cry to God*. There are many species of slavery below the actual thing. When we get from our servants more than they are well able to do, when remuneration is insufficient, when in any way we prey

upon their necessities *we are slaveholders in all but the name*. Remember, "*the Lord of Hosts*" is the poor's Avenger. *What hosts he can send against us*. Wilt thou contend with God? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 31). It is hard to possess riches without sin. They are called "the mammon of unrighteousness." They are often possessed by the wicked, much admired by them, and not seldom gained by fraud. Many a fortune is built on wrong, and *wrong is a foundation of sand*. It is not easy to have them and not be hindered by them. A ship that takes in too much cargo is liable to sink. Many rich men bend under their mountain of gold. A man who should bear this burden should be a very Atlas for moral strength. The beasts become fierce when well fed. And it is hard for the purse-full to be other than purse-proud. God can best be served by a mean, "Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" "Give me not poverty, lest I take the name of God in vain." If riches increase, set not thine heart upon them. "Possess them; let them not possess you." "God gives riches to the good lest they should be thought evil; he gives them to the bad lest they should be thought the only good." It is not impossible for a rich man to be virtuous. Abraham and Job were the wealthiest men of the East. In the highest circles the fair flower of piety flourishes. Those, however, who have so much to keep them *here* may well find it difficult to be absorbed in the contemplation of a *hereafter*. Prosperity begets security.

III. The punishment of misused wealth. Nehemiah cites them, as it were, to God's judgment-seat. They are called upon to plead their cause. 1. *The punishment is self-caused*. "*Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days*," as the New Testament apostle teaches (James v.). The punishment grows out of the gain. The wind shakes the tallest trees. The willow bends under the storm and rises when the gust is over; the oak stands until endurance is no longer possible. Men fall from eminences. He who keeps on the ground has generally secure foothold. 2. *The punishment is self-inflicting*. All speech is translatable by God. The young lions' cry for prey is an appeal to God, and he gives scent and swiftness. The parched ground speaks to him and pleads that the windows may be opened, and the rain-drops fall from the closed storehouse. There is something terribly suggestive in the RUST of wrongly-withheld gain, and the helpless CRIES of the defrauded poor passing up through distant space and taking their case to the highest tribunal, pleading with an earnestness akin to that of the woman who came to the unjust judge, but, unlike her, pleading with the Judge of the whole earth, the only absolutely righteous Judge, who will surely avenge his own elect. Heard by God, it becomes the instrument of the punishment. "The canker and rust shall witness against you." "Miseries shall come upon you." Calamities everywhere attended the Jews soon after the ascension of Christ. Proverbial for their wealth, they were ransacked and punished. From then till now they have been a persecuted people, and mainly through their wealth. Every one remembers Shakespeare's Shylock, and Sir Walter Scott's Isaac of York. Covetousness brings God's curse on our estates. He sends putrefaction, the rust, and the moth. Ill gains are equivalent to losses, because providence often scatters them. There is a "withholding that tends to poverty." "He that will save must lose" is the gospel riddle. The best way of bringing in is laying out. What is given to the poor is lent to God, and he is a safe banker; he repays with interest. God can easily corrupt that which we lay up, and *make the worm breed in manna*. God is in no lack of servants to carry information or effect his purposes. Corruption, canker, moth, all are at his beck and call. Some rise from within, as *corruption*; some attack from without, as *the moth*; *the rust* corrupts the substance, eats it away. He can arm the elements of fire, wind, and water. He can take the lightning into his hand. The stormy wind and vapour fulfil his word, and these he can bring at last as witnesses against us. Sealed volumes. God breaks the seal, and each circumstance becomes an unbribed witness. Many things now fair-seeming will show rottenness in the day of judgment. Vividly does the prophet tell us of the houses built by

oppression coming as witnesses against the owners. "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." The stones will say, "We were hewn by violence," and the timbers, "We were inlaid by fraud." Many of the great works of ancient times, *i. e.* the pyramids, many colossal fortunes and magnificent mansions of modern times, were built with bones and cemented with blood—the blood and bones of the men who built them, or the men from whom the wealth was obtained. The circumstances of sin are so many memorials to put us in mind of guilt and to put God in mind of vengeance. Conscience writes when it does not speak. There is a book of remembrance. All conceptions of torment indicate a relation between sin and punishment not only in justice and duration, but in kind. In this world each sin has its own avenger; many sins are their own avengers. Anger—the agitation and unrest, are not they like whips whose lashes are weighted with lead?

Application. 1. *Let us learn to weep tears of penitence, that we may not have to shed tears of remorse.* After great showers the air is clear. It is better to weep in a way of duty than to weep in a way of judgment. 2. *Let us learn the secret of happiness.* The saint in the Old Testament commanded his soul to be merry because God was the light of his countenance; the fool in the gospel because he had much goods laid up for many years. 3. *Let us learn to provide ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth.* For all that is in the world is not of the Father. And the world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

The rich man's empire.—"The empire which a rich man exercises finds no nation or tribe that wishes to resist it. It commands the services of man wherever man can be reached, because it offers to the desires of man the power of acquiring whatever objects of external enjoyment he is most eager to acquire. From the north to the south, from the east to the west, everything that can be rendered active is put in motion by him, who remains tranquilly at home, exciting the industry of those of whose very existence he is ignorant, and receiving the products of labour for his own use without knowing from whom he receives them. It is almost as in the magic stories of romance, in which the hero is represented as led from the castle-gate by hands that are invisible to him, ushered to a splendid banquet, where no one seems present, where wine is poured into the goblet before him at his very wish, and luxurious refreshment after refreshment appears upon the board, but appears as if no hand had brought it. To the rich man, in like manner, whatever he wishes seems to come merely because he wishes it to come. Without knowing who they are who are contributing to his idle luxury, he receives the gratification itself, and receives it from hands that operate as invisibly as the fairy hands at the banquet. He gathers around him the products of every sea and every soil. The sunshine of one climate, the snows of another, are made subsidiary to his artificial wants; and though it is impossible to discern the particular arms which he is every instant setting in motion, or the particular efforts of inventive thought which he is every instant stimulating, there can be no doubt that such a relation truly exists, which connects with his wishes and with his power the industry of those who labour on the remotest corner of the earth which the enterprising commerce of man can reach."—*Dr. Thomas Brown.*

Possessions.—Possessions distinguish man from the brute, and civilized man from the savage. Labour finds in possessions its normal fruit; possessions are labour as having become reality. The brute is possessionless because he does not labour. In property man ceases to be a mere isolated individual of his species; he creates for himself a world about himself which he can call his own; his property is the outward manifestation of his inward peculiarity. The fact that he who possesses much is also much regarded and esteemed in the world is indeed often very hollow and baseless, though in reality it springs from the correct consciousness that possessions are the fruit of labour, the result of moral effort. He who acquires nothing for himself passes in the world, not without reason, for unrespectable. Of a special virtue of possession-despising, as with the mendicant monks, there can, in the ante-sinful state, be no question; and even after the fall possessions are presented as a perfectly legitimate end of moral effort, and their being increased as a special Divine blessing. Cain and Abel possess already personal property; and the God-blessed possessions of the patriarchs occupy a very large place in their morally religious life [Gen. xii. 5, 16; xiii. 2; xiv. 14; xxiv. 22, 35, 53; xxvi. 13, 14; xxvii. 28; xxx. 27, 30, 43; xxxi. 42; xxxii. 5, 10, 13 *sqq.*; xxxiii. 11; xxxix. 5; xlix. 25; Exod. xxiii. 25; Lev. xxv. 21; Deut. ii. 7; vii. 13; xv. 14 *sqq.*; xvi. 15, 17; xxviii. 3 *sqq.*; xxxiii. 13 *sqq.*; xxiv. 25; comp. 1 Kings iii. 13; Ps. cvii. 38; cxii. 2, 3; cxxxii. 15]. Property being the enlarged life-sphere of the moral person,—in some sense his enlarged personality itself,—

the moral phase thereof lies not merely in its antecedent ground, namely, labour, but also in its moral use and application. To its *enjoyment* man has a moral right, as such enjoyment is the reward of labour; but to the exclusive enjoyment of it for himself alone he has no moral right, seeing that he is bound to other men by love, and love manifests itself in communicative distribution."—*Wuttke's 'Christian Ethics.'*

A GREAT SCHISM AVERTED.

v. 1—13. *And there was a great cry of the people, &c.*

The paragraph teaches—

I. That social injustice may exist even amongst fellow-workers in a great and good cause (vers. 1—6). The complaint of the poor was forced from them. Wrong may be long endured; but it will find a voice, a cry "not loud, but deep."

II. That social injustice, if not corrected, will undermine the stability of any cause, however righteous. Sanballat's army less fatal than the nobles' avarice.

III. That social injustice should be regarded by all good men with feelings of righteous indignation (ver. 6). From a realization of the brotherhood of men; of interdependence; of a Divine purpose in the elevation of the down-trodden.

V. That social injustice, whenever discovered, should be calmly yet promptly dealt with (ver. 7). The *prudent* Nehemiah brought a moral force to bear upon the offenders. "Set an assembly." The *courageous* Nehemiah rebuked the offenders, albeit they were highest in name and station. The *far-seeing* Nehemiah discerned ruin if internal wrongs remained unredressed.

V. That conciliatory appeals are sometimes more efficacious than coercive measures in dealing with social injustice (vers. 8—13). Nehemiah used persuasive arguments. 1. *The efforts already made to redeem their captive brethren* (ver. 8). 2. *The exposure of the national cause to reproach* (ver. 9). 3. *His own unblemished life and fit example* (ver. 10).

THE ACCUSING CRY OF HUMANITY.

v. 1. *There was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren.*

THE ACCUSERS.—"The many" who lack bread (ver. 2). THE ACCUSED.—"Their" richer "brethren," "the nobles and the rulers" (vers. 1, 7). THE ACCUSATION.—"Ye exact usury. Ye have our lands and vineyards." A story of the olden time of ever-new significance. A twice twenty-times told tale.

I. The unending struggle. Wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, brain and brawn, capital and labour—when in all the ages have not these come into collision? Communists, Socialists, Nihilists—are not these today voices from many lands (whether rightly or wrongly); the "*great cry*" of the poor of many nationalities against their richer brethren? The prayer of the philanthropists of every age has been expressed by a poet of our own:—

"Ring out the false, ring in the true;

Ring out the darkness of the land;

Ring out the feud of rich and poor;
Ring in redress to all mankind;

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;

Ring in the love of truth and right;
Ring in the common love of good."

THE HEBREW PROPHETS declare that they that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field (Lam. iv. 9). They tell how God's judgments came upon the land because the righteous were sold for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes (Amos ii. 6). The scathing words of

JESUS CHRIST were reserved for those who used the pride of place to oppress the poor and him that hath no helper. The EARLY PERIOD of English history is associated with William *the Conqueror*. The DARK AGES had light enough to show the few how to prey upon the many. *Through much tribulation* NATIONS have emerged into the light, and CLASSES burst the shackles of slavery and proclaimed their freedom. *With a great sum* England obtained the freedom of the WEST INDIES. The blood of AMERICA'S sons wiped out the stain of slavery which disgraced the greatest republic the world has seen. *A great cry* has gone up to God as our poor world has struggled on towards knowledge and liberty.

II. Elements of bitterness in this struggle. 1. *On the side of the oppressors there is power.* They are "the nobles and the rulers" (ver. 7). "The names of king and priest are the most appalling in history." So perverted have they become. *Anciently to rule* was also *to feed* (Ps. lxxviii. 71, 72). A bishop is a shepherd. The pastoral staff is the shepherd's crook. 2. *The oppressed are the brethren of the oppressors.* "Our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children." Same blood, same love of children, same sensitiveness to pain. Hath not a *poor man* eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Is he not fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a *rich man*? If you prick a poor man, will he not bleed? if you tickle him, will he not laugh? if you poison him, will he not die? 3. *They were engaged in a common cause—rebuilding God's chosen city.* To make this world a paradise; to compel all kings to recognize the King of kings; to set up a kingdom of righteousness and peace, is not this the task given to humanity, the goal toward which our world should move?

III. Light in the darkness. "Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, *The morning cometh.*" 1. *Christ-*

came to proclaim the brotherhood of humanity. His Beatitudes direct men to look to character, not to position, for Divine approval. The strait gate must be passed through by rich and noble as well as by poor and unknown. Jesus spoke to the poor, felt for the degraded, raised hope in the oppressed. 2. *Signs of the times.* The "many" (ver. 2) are not unheard; their influence not unfelt. There is wrong, but society tends towards redress. Ignorance abounds, but the teacher is abroad. Many rich forget their duties—not all. Tennyson's Sir Walter Vivian is not the creation of a poet's fancy.

"Sir Walter Vivian all a summer's day
Gave his broad lawns until the set of sun
Up to the people: thither flocked at noon
His tenants, wife and child, and thither half
The neighbouring borough, with their Institute,
Of which he was the patron.
Why should not these great Sirs
Give up their parks some dozen times a year
To let the people breathe?"

Tennyson's vision will one day be actualized.

"I dipt into the future, far as human eye could
see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder
that would be;
Saw the havens fill with commerce, argosies of
magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down
with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there
rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the
central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south
wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging
through the thunder-storm;
Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the
battle-flags were furl'd
In the parliament of man, the federation of the
world.
There the common sense of most shall hold a
fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in
universal law."

"How long, O Lord?"

ILLUSTRATION.

The passion for power.—"Christianity has joined with all history in inspiring me with a peculiar dread and abhorrence of the passion for power, for dominion over men. There is nothing in the view of our Divine Teacher so hostile to his Divine spirit as the lust of domination. This

we are accustomed to regard as eminently the sin of the arch-fiend. 'By this sin fell the angels.' It is the most Satanic of all human passions, and it has inflicted more terrible evils on the human family than all others. It has made the names of king and priest the most appalling in history. There is no crime which has not been perpetrated for the strange pleasure of trading men underfoot, of fastening chains on the body or mind. The strongest ties of nature have been rent asunder, her holiest feelings smothered, parents, children, brothers murdered to secure dominion over man. The people have now been robbed of the necessaries of life, and now driven to the field of slaughter like

flocks of sheep to make one man the master of millions. Through this passion government, ordained by God to defend the weak against the strong, to exalt right above might, has up to this time been the great wrong-doer. Its crimes throw those of private men into the shade. Its murders reduce to insignificance those of the bandits, pirates, highwaymen, assassins against whom it undertakes to protect society. Power trampling on right, whether in the person of king or priest, or in the shape of democracies or majorities, is the saddest sight to him who honours human nature and desires its enlargement and happiness."—*W. E. Channing.*

THE MISERIES OF DEBT.

v. 3—5. *Some also there were that said, &c.*

Dr. Jamieson, the Bible interpreter, thus writes on this passage :—"The poor made loud complaints against the rich for taking advantage of their necessities, and grinding them by usurious exactions. Numbers of them had, in consequence of these oppressions, been driven to such extremities that they had to mortgage their lands and houses to enable them to pay the taxes to the Persian Government, and ultimately even sell their children for slaves to procure the means of subsistence." Generalizing this particular instance, we have the subject of debt and its miseries.

I. Mental unrest. *Credit* is necessary. The world's business could not otherwise be carried on. The every-day word trust is, like most every-day words, suggestive. It is confidence between man and man. It supposes an honourable undertaking. Faith is not only a theological word; it is a force in this working-day world. No man ought to receive credit without a prospect of being able to pay. The violation of this rule is dishonest. To take a man's purse is stealing. So is taking up goods without paying for them, and receiving wages for which the stipulated labour has not been given. Unless hardened through a long series of dishonesties, a man cannot be contented who does not obey the New Testament law, "Owe no man anything."

II. Social degradation. It is proverbial that to be in debt is to be in danger; danger of detection and exposure. Do not pretend to be what you are not; do not keep up a style and scale of cost beyond your means.

III. Family ruin. A man owes a first duty to his own house. The helpless hang on him. He may bring ruin through extravagance.

IV. A disregard of a Divine command. "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL" was written with the finger of God. This law has not been abrogated.

Application. 1. *Christians should set the world an example.* 2. *Watch the beginnings of extravagance.* 3. *In small things as well as in greater act on Christian principle.* "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."

Illustrations :—"The Persians reckoned these two very great sins. 1. To be in debt. 2. To tell a lie; the latter being often the fruit of the former."

"By the twelve tables of Rome, he that owed much, and could not pay, was to be cut in pieces, and every creditor was to have a piece of him according to the debt."

"We read of a certain Italian gentleman who, being asked how old he was, answered that he was in health; and to another that asked how rich he was, answered that he was not in debt. He is young enough that is in health, and rich enough that is not in debt."—*Trapp.*

RIGHTEOUS ANGER.

v. 6. *And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.*

“Ezra and Nehemiah were both of them very wise, good, useful men; yet in cases not unlike theirs there is a great deal of difference between their management. When Ezra was told of the sin of the rulers in marrying strange wives he rent his clothes and wept, and prayed, and was hardly persuaded to attempt a reformation, fearing it impracticable; for he was a man of a mild, tender spirit. When Nehemiah was told of as ill a thing he warmed presently, fell foul upon the delinquents, incensed the people against them, and never rested till, by all the rough methods he could use, he forced them to reform; for he was a man of a hot and eager spirit. Very holy men may differ much from each other in their natural temper, and in other things that result from it. Again, God’s work may be done, well done, and successfully, and yet different methods taken in doing it; which is a good reason why we should neither arraign others’ management nor make our own a standard. There are diversities of operation, but the same spirit.”—*Matthew Henry*. Nehemiah’s soul was stirred within him as he saw the oppression of his voiceless brethren. But they who were not able to help themselves were not therefore to remain unhelpt.

“The voice of their indignation
Rose up to the throne of God.”

They bore long, until suffering was no longer endurable; and then they appealed from Festus unto Cæsar, from the nobles and rulers who were set over them to Nehemiah under whom they all served. The longer Nehemiah mused the more fiercely the fire of his anger burned. There cannot be supreme love of right without bitterest hatred of wrong. Admiration of virtue and scorn of vice are correlative. There is such a thing as righteous anger.

I. The righteousness of anger depends upon its cause and occasion.

“What is anger? It is displeasure felt in a high degree; a feeling which is awakened when we think ourselves injured. It is usually attended with a restless uneasiness of mind, and frequently with something worse. But is anger in no case allowable? Perhaps it is. ‘God is angry with the wicked every day’ (Ps. vii. 11); that is, he is highly displeased with their sinful conduct, and resolved to punish them on its account; yet anger in God is infinitely remote from anything of turbulence and malevolence. We read of our Lord Jesus looking round on the people, particularly on the Pharisees, ‘with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts’ (Mark iii. 5); but this anger was perfectly consistent with the purest benevolence, with the tenderest, the most disinterested kindness. Anger in depraved creatures is certainly very different from what it is in God, and from what it was in Jesus Christ; and we should be cautious how we give the least allowance to so dangerous a passion. It has been judiciously remarked, when anger ‘proceeds from pride, or from selfishness; when it rises high, or continues long; and when it is accompanied by anything like hatred or ill-will towards the person who is its object, then it is sinful and hurtful. But whatever we may think of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of anger in itself, and how difficult it may be to ascertain in what cases and in what degree it is allowable, one thing is evident—we cannot be too cautious of yielding to its influence. It is a passion so difficult to be regulated and so dreadful often in its effects; so destructive of that meekness, gentleness, and love which form the very essence of the Christian character; so expressly forbidden in various passages of the New Testament, and so carefully guarded even in those where it seems to be in some measure allowed, that we have much more reason to restrain than to encourage it even in the smallest degree.’ There

is one object against which anger may be innocently directed, and this object is sin; either sin in ourselves, or sin in others. Peter was angry, exceedingly displeased with himself, when, at the recollection of his sin in denying his blessed Lord, 'he went out and wept bitterly.' The brethren of Joseph were angry with themselves, displeased at their base behaviour, when convinced of their cruelty towards an unoffending brother; and doubtless the feeling was laudable. The soul of righteous Lot was 'vexed;' he was angry with the filthy conversation of the wicked among whom he dwelt; and as we dwell among a people of unclean lips and unholy conduct, our blame would be great if we felt not displeasure at what we hear and witness."—*Kidd*. We read of the fierce anger of the Lord when Israel joined himself unto Baal-Peor (Num. xxv. 1—9). Pronounced upon disobedience (Deut. xxix. 20). When Jesus Christ looked upon his spying enemies with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, which predominated, the anger or the grief? Contrast the anger of Sanballat (chap. iv.) with the anger of Nehemiah (chap. v.); how different the occasion, how unlike the cause. For a good work Sanballat was prepared to stone the Jews; for an evil act of oppression Nehemiah rose up to rebuke the nobles. Be ye angry and sin not in reference to cause.

II. The righteousness of anger depends upon its spirit and limitations. Note, especially, the anger of Jesus Christ had reference to the evil, the hardness of their hearts. Righteous anger is against wrong, not against wrong-doers. Must have in it no personal malice, no spleen. Must not cross the line to revenge. Anger is the basis of magistracy, the support of laws, and the pillar of decency and right conduct. "Magistrates are mortal gods, and God is an immortal magistrate; therefore, as the merciful God heareth in his holy habitation in heaven the cry of the miserable, oppressed people in earth, so should every godly ruler hear and relieve the pitiful cry of the oppressed, being his

brethren, seeing he is God's lieutenant, and hath the sword and law in his hand to bridle such ill-doers, and must not for favour, gifts, nor fear suffer it unamended; else he doeth not his duty unto the mighty Lord, who set him in that place, gave him the authority, and will ask a strait account how he hath used it to the relief of the oppressed. Some be of opinion that a magistrate should not be moved with anger in doing his office, but give every man fair words, pass over matters slowly, please all men, though he do them little good; but, the truth being well considered, it may be judged otherwise. Lactantius writeth a book wherein he proveth that God himself is angry, and every anger is not sin. If God then be angry against sin, why may not a good man in God's cause then do the same? Hate not the man, but his ill-doing; be not angry without a just cause unadvisedly; keep not thy anger long, that it grow not into hatred; let it be no more nor no less than the fault deserveth, and let it be without raging, fuming, fretting, swelling, and raving and disquieting of body or mind; not for malice of revenging, but for pity or justice to correct and amend; and anger well qualified is not ill. This is not spoken to give liberty to anger, for we are too ready to it by nature; but rather to bridle it, seeing it standeth on so narrow a point to keep measure in. This qualifying of anger is declared in the Scripture as that it should not continue. St. Paul saith, 'Let not the sun set upon your anger;' and that it should not be rashly, without cause, nor more than the cause requireth. The gospel teacheth, saying, 'He that is angry with his brother without a just cause is guilty of judgment.' This anger of Nehemiah was just in all circumstances, and kept the rule of St Paul, 'Be angry and sin not,' which is a hard point to keep."—*Pilkington*. He who hates sin will escape it. An extreme sentimentalism would make all virtue consist in amiability. Men have proclaimed the love of God as if it denied his justice. "God is love." "Our God is a consuming fire." The two poles of the Divine character.

Application. 1. *Temperamental anger to be subdued by holy thought, prayer, and effort.* Lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset. 2. *Distinguish between the wrong and the wrong-doers.* Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 3. *Remember Christian doctrine of forgive-*

ness. If thy brother trespass against thee and return, saying, Repent, forgive him. Let the daily prayer be, Forgive us our trespasses, and help us to forgive them that trespass against us. For this doctrine of forgiveness is one of the hard sayings of Jesus Christ.

INTROSPECTION.

v. 7. *Then I consulted with myself.*

The position was perilous. The nobles and the rulers were powerful; their services were needed. The toilers were embittered; the common cause endangered. Too little courage or too much prudence, cowardice or temporizing, would prove fatal. "Then I consulted with myself." His heart took counsel upon the injustice. From this instance of introspection or self-communion let us consider self-communion generally.

I. The value of self-communion. Thought comes in solitude. Character is formed by self-communings. A preacher must return sometimes to "fructifying silence." We are not enough alone. Our age is restless. It craves results—speedy and sure. Too much bustle and hurry. Duty treads upon the heels of duty. Moses, Elijah, John Baptist, Paul, yes, and Christ himself, lived in the wilderness alone with God. Cecil, Scott, Newton, Wesley, the spiritual giants, were men of solitary hours. Too much familiarity with men breeds contempt and distrust. Know thyself! "Come ye yourselves apart," said Jesus to disciples flushed with success (Mark vi.). *Need of rest and self-communion evident in all spheres of life.* Restlessness characterizes most men. Space and time are nearly annihilated. Parliamentary speech spoken in the early hours of the morning is printed and transmitted to the breakfast-table. Markets of Odessa, Alexandria, New York, Calcutta, and Sydney hardly closed ere the electric current has flashed the quotations. Rest and time to think almost denied many commercial and professional men. It was the sin of

Israel. "My people doth not consider." "Consider your ways"—there speaks a prophet. "Think on these things"—there speaks an apostle. "Hear ye the word of the Lord" ushers in the Old Testament. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear" introduces the New. He who pleads the pressure of business has too much business. Men must find *time to prepare for eternity. Too much religious work dangerous.* "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song of Solomon). "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (Paul). "Nothing is so important as to keep an exact proportion between the interior source of virtue and the external practice of it, else, like the foolish virgins, we shall find that the oil in our lamps is exhausted when the bridegroom comes" (Chrysostom). Is this the meaning of our Lord's solemn words, "Many will say to me," &c. (Matt. vii. 22, 23)? Christian charity begins at home. It is possible to build reformatories and be ourselves unreformed; possible to send the Bible to others and ourselves forget to read it; possible to lay costly gifts on God's altar and not bow in penitence at his footstool. *The Christian life a growth.* It is the burden of direct precept. "Grow in grace and in knowledge" (2 Pet. iii. 18). "Add to your faith" (2 Pet. i. 5). It is variously illustrated. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger" (Job xvii. 9). "He shall be like a tree planted by the waters,

and that spreadeth out its roots by the river" (Jer. xvii. 8). It is the subject of apostles' joy when Christians "stand fast in the Lord" (Phil. iv. 1). Can this be effected without time and thought? Does not the garden of the soul require culture? Do the flowers of humility and charity grow wild? Does business demand application, but the soul's commerce none? Must the children's minds be educated and their hearts remain untrained? Each must come into some desert place and rest awhile with Christ.

II. The dangers of self-communion.

1. *Morbid religion.* Don't be always a spiritual anatomist. Too frequent looking within brings depression. Religious depression arising from neglect of duty or commission of sin cannot co-exist with spiritual life. But very much depression is needless or self-induced. We may say sometimes, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (Ps. xlii. 11). A man feels forsaken, and, projecting his own feelings, imagines God has forsaken him. Do not rashly imagine that because you cannot every hour "read your title clear" that therefore your

name is erased from the book of life. 2. *Out of undue self-communion arose asceticism of middle ages; arises some conventual tendencies of our own.* Dream not of becoming unworldly by escaping from duty. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John xvii. 15).

III. *The safe-guards of self-communion.* 1. *Action.* From the temple to the city.

"Twixt the mount and multitude,
Doing or receiving good."

Thought the basis of action. Acts become habits. "I must work the works of him that sent me" (John ix. 4). "As the Father hath sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world" (John xvii. 18; xx. 21). Do not put asunder what God hath joined together. Different temperaments will give varying prominence to contemplation and action; the inward and the outward. But woe to those who neglect either. A pure heart the indispensable condition of a noble life. 2. *God's word.* Make that the only guide.

AN ASSEMBLY CONVOKED AGAINST SINNERS.

v. 7. *And I set a great assembly against them.*

Partly because persons implicated were numerous and powerful to show them that greater numbers disapproved, and partly to cause such shame and remorse as might lead them to renounce their criminal practices. The measure was successful. Show impenitent sinners how great *an assembly* may be set against them. Sinners rely on being a majority. They are decidedly superior to the servants of God; not only in number, but in wealth and power and influence. Were the great question What is truth? to be decided by numbers, they could easily determine it in their own favour. Show that those whose opinions and approbation are more important are against them.

I. *The good men now in the world.* Not necessarily professors of religion. Many professors not good men. By

good men is meant men whom God will acknowledge to be good.

II. *All the good men who have ever lived.* These compose an assembly far exceeding in number all the good men who are now alive. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John Baptist, disciples of Jesus, early Christians, martyrs, reformers, men of 'May-Flower.'

III. *All the writers of the Old and New Testaments.* They are *good* men; they are more—they are *inspired* men. Being taught by the eternal Spirit of God, with one voice they cry, Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's words never.

IV. *The holy angels.* Consider number, character, and intellectual rank.

Perhaps exceed in number the human race. "An innumerable company." In comparison with the least angel the wisest human philosopher is a child. Their holiness is perfect, spotless. They execute the will of God.

V. The Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord of angels and men, the appointed

Judge, who will pronounce a sentence on both.

VI. God the Father. Sinners strive with their Maker. Survey the whole assembly which is arrayed against evil and evil-doers. Terrible to sinners; consolatory to Christians.—*Dr. Payson, abridged.*

INCONSISTENCY WITHOUT EXCUSE.

v. 8. *And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.*

They found nothing to answer. For what answer could be given? They which heard Nehemiah's accusation were convicted by their own conscience. Brotherhood, memories of bondage, the great price at which they had redeemed their brethren from Persian masters, the inspiration of their journey to the decayed city, the work God had given them to do—these rose up like prophets of evil tidings to second the noble censures of Nehemiah. Their inconsistency was without excuse.

I. The admirableness of consistency.

It is manly. Everybody reverences it. Even in an unworthy cause it extorts a momentary recognition. In a worthy cause all bow the knee and do it homage. The heroes of history by flood and field, the redressers of human wrongs at home and abroad, the characters of Bible story, were consistent. They had a purpose and stuck to it. Despised of men, mocked at by demons, are those whom the inspired apostle describes as "wavering like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed; the double-minded, who are unstable in all their ways" (James i. 6—8). Dignity is robbed of its excellency and power of its strength in the Reubens who are "unstable as water" (Gen. xlix. 3, 4). Be persistent. Be consistent. Is it consistent for Christian men to enter into partnership with those who work without a conscience? Ought Christian parents to consult first and foremost the worldly convenience and advantage of their children? If religion be true, should it not decide the just weight and the true measure?

In business, in pleasure, at home, abroad, through the week as well as on the Sabbath, be consistent.

II. The inexcusableness of inconsistency. Has nothing to recommend it. Nothing gained. Brings discredit upon any cause. The inconsistent man has no faith in his position. An inconsistent Christian may profess but does not possess a good creed. The creed which influences conduct is not that which a man holds, but that which holds him. Life is the expositor of doctrine. Nehemiah's nobles called the workmen brethren. But that was only a word of the lip. The deed of the life made them slaves and foreigners. For a time the nobles prospered. Success smiled upon oppression. But a reckoning day came. Summoned to Nehemiah's bar, they "found nothing to answer." A New Testament parable is recalled. The man who had not on a wedding garment was "speechless" (Matt. xxii. 1—14). Profession and possession, reality and hypocrisy, are not always distinguishable here and now. Parable of tares: "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. xiii. 24—30). In earlier times men strove for a pure visible Church. That impossible. Our eyes cannot distinguish true from false in every instance. By-and-by inconsistency will stand self-convicted. At heaven's judgment-seat every one must give an account.

Application. 1. *The supreme importance of character.* "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. xxiii. 7). "Keep thy heart with all diligence;

for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. iv. 23). 2. *The value of self-reliance.* Wrong-doing is contagious. One noble imitated another in exacting usury. Those who were half conscious that they were doing wrong were encouraged by the evil example of others. Trust thyself when thou hast the approval of thy own conscience. 3. *Remember the bar of God.* He who made Nehemiah upright "is a God all whose ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity" (Deut. xxxii. 4). "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Ps. xciv. 9).

SAME THEME.

The marvellous *personal* power of Nehemiah. Great individuality triumphs over all things. Napoleon laughed away the pretensions of rank by saying, "I am an ancestor." The force of personal character makes all other forces give way. Especially when the individuality is a *good* individuality; when the strength of manhood is backed by the strength of right. Illustration of this in the text, where the dumbfounded nobles stand ashamed before the challenge of the man who has come to spy out their faults and to mend them at all costs to himself. Subject, *the inexcusableness of inconsistency.*

I. The inconsistency. Define inconsistency. Want of harmony in the parts of a man's life. The presence in a man's being of two things which cannot be together. A man who swears the British oath of allegiance and takes the pay of the English state would be an inconsistent man if he betrayed state secrets to a hostile country, or gave guidance to an invading foe. That would be treason. Religious inconsistency is treason against the King of kings—treason and treachery against the truth. 1. *Worldly inconsistency.* Worldly men point sneeringly to any little deviation from consistency in Christian people; but if Christian charity did not forbid the sneer might be returned. The cant and pretence and selfish departure from avowed principles

which fills the life of the children of this world may well creep a little into the Church. A politician who loves liberty, and is at the same time a tyrant in his household and to his servants; a man who loves to read and to talk fine sentiment, and whose common life runs along a low level of worldly meanness, are examples of inconsistency. The world had need to pluck the beam out of its own eye before meddling with the mote in the eye of the Church. 2. *Religious inconsistency.* Example of Balaam, who prayed, "Let me die the death of the righteous," and who died with a sword drawn against God; the Puritan, who fought for liberty to worship God, and then would not grant toleration to his brother's creed; the professing Christian of even late years, who bought and sold men, women, and children as slaves, are glaring instances of contradictions in character and conduct. Enumerate common forms of inconsistency in the ordinary life of professedly Christian people. 3. *Injurious effects of inconsistency.* (a) To self. It blunts the conscience, and so damages the finer spiritual perceptions as to deprive the soul of the perfect peace of those who are in perfect truth. (β) To others. It seems a contradiction of religion, a confession of its inadequacy to master the sin in a man, and shakes the faith of an onlooking world in the power of the gospel.

II. The inexcusableness. With heads hanging like bulrushes the dumbfounded men stood before Nehemiah, as now the inconsistent stands before the convictions of God's Spirit and the reproach of the world. 1. *Infirmity is often pleaded as an excuse.* The follower of the meek and lowly Jesus so excuses his outbursts of violent passion. The man who hides his convictions in a worldly circle so excuses his want of religious courage. The man who grasps at some questionable advantage of the world so covers the selfishness which has shown itself mightier than his Christian self-denial. It is dangerous to so shake hands with our own infirmity. 2. *Ignorance is another excuse.* Want of true perception of God's law and lack

of thoughtfulness concerning the true significance of his own actions are a reason, but not an excuse, for much inconsistency among the professed servants of God. As some uninstructed persons are not sure of the difference between green and blue, and are not pained by want of harmony in colours that are joined but not reconciled to each other, so a blunt moral sense may not detect all the contradictions of his own religious character. 3. *But infirmity may be strengthened and ignorance may be instructed.* These are not excuses. "Truth in the inward parts" is the

requirement of him "whose we are, and whom we serve." To be sanctified *wholly* (not one-sidedly or partially) is the Christian's prayer—body, soul, and spirit all penetrated through and through with holiness.

Application. 1. *Do not leave to others the task of detecting your inconsistency. Find it out yourself.* 2. *Do not weakly reconcile yourself to things which can have no place in a complete Christian character.* 3. *Seek more of that freedom of the truth which liberates a man from these reproaching faults.*

GOD'S PEOPLE UNDER THE EYE OF A CRITICAL WORLD.

v. 9. *Also I said, It is not good, &c.*

The world has a spleen against the Church. The Church is an incarnate condemnation of the world. "I have saved them *out of the world.*" However full of charity the elect of God may be, they stand rank on rank, by their creed and their practice, witnessing with silent censure against all ungodliness. Hence in self-defence the world watches for the Church's faults, "rejoicing in iniquity"—the discovered iniquity of the professedly good. Our religious self-government is watched by a critical "opposition," ever ready with its "reproach." Nehemiah asks a fair question: "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?"

I. The reproach of the enemy. The world's criticism of God's people is very merciless and very unfair. It makes no allowances. It does not "remember that we are dust." It has no place for the extenuations of charity. The world will not under-rate, but over-rate, the defects of the good. Malicious rumour makes a mountain out of a molehill; like photography, it exaggerates every freckle or scar on the countenance of a good man's life. Beware of the reproach of the world our enemy. 1. *Accept this condition of life.* It is useless to kick against the pricks. We may be moved to scorn by the mean carping of the foe; but it flings back its motto,

"All's fair in war." If you contend with an uncivilized enemy you get ready for uncivilized deeds. Give mercy, but expect none. Do not call the world hard names; the world is simply the world, and no more. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers," nor because of their evil tongues. 2. *Do not despise this power of enmity.* (a) There is a noble scorn of the evil-tongued society. Here is an old motto of an independent mind. "They say! What do they say? Let them say!" Do not be afraid to live. Let us not creep apologetically through the world. We owe no one an apology for our fear of God. It is *they* who are wrong, and most of them know it very well. If you carry the Christian flag as if ashamed of it the world will despise you all the more. It likes out and out manhood. Do not "liberalize" your creed, or conceal your conviction, or blush at your good deeds for fear of reproach. "Whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will I be ashamed." Be no "reed shaken with the wind." (β) But there is an unwise scorn of the world's opinion. A thing lawful for me as a man may be inexpedient for me as a Christian man. Many good men are doing hurt to Christ's cause by a reckless bravado, which flows out of an uncontrolled independence or out of an unthinking foolishness. A man in ambush may

show he is no coward by exposing himself to danger before the enemy, but he may show that he is a fool by revealing the position of his comrades and involving them in peril. "Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." 3. *For the world's own sake have a care of the world's reproach.* (1) You may make the evil man doubt the God you fear. "Another saint unmasked," says the world, as it exults over the declared inconsistency of a Christian. "By one judge all," says the critic. You cast a veil over God's face, and put truth at the bar "on suspicion," when you do not walk before the enemy in the fear of God. (2) You may hurt the conscience of the worldly man. To let him see his own fault in you is to justify his fault to his pliant conscience. When you do an ill thing you endorse the ill things another does. (3) You cast away your influence for good. All things are possible to you if the world believes in you. You can cast out its devils and tread on its serpents and scorpions, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. But if you cast away the confidence of your unconverted brother you can do nothing with him because of his unbelief. We want to have faith in God and to make the world have faith in us.

II. The caution of the godly. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts : . . . having a good conscience ; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." 1. *Elements of caution.* (a) Be strong in the fear of God. Let the solemn thought of his watchfulness guide your steps. Remember the one omnipresent Witness whose eye shines like a star over the darkest gloom of secrecy. "Fear him, ye saints, and ye shall then have nothing else to fear." Cultivate the sentiment of that ancient saying, "Thou God seest

me!" If clear of his reproach, the reproach of the enemy shall be but as a hailstone against the flint. (β) Be rigorous in self-condemnation. Be *charitable* in judging others ; be *just* in judging thyself. If you are lax, let it not be with self. For your own sake *be* what you would seem. Above all fear of the world's reproach, fear the reproach of an indignant self. "To thine own self be true, and it shall follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." 2. *Spheres of caution.* (a) Personal life. In all those elements of life which are "your own business," and not the world's affair, be on your guard. Reverent behaviour, amiable temper, truth and kindness of tone and speech in conversation, godly direction of your habits and your household—let these be above suspicion. Your habits are the atmosphere and your home the environment of yourself ; let them become you. (β) Public life. Though in Rome, despise the ill-doer's motto. *In the world ; be not of it.* Where association makes you unable to prevent be no advocate of evil. Do the world's work and change the world's gold with Christian fingers. (γ) Church life. Remember that in all Church life higher maxims and nobler usages than those of the world should predominate. Do not blare out the faults of fellow Christians. For Christ's sake, for the world's sake, cast a cloak of charity over the misunderstandings and the misunderstandable doings of the household of faith. Do not tell your enemy how weak your own brother is. In private life, in public life, in Church life, walk in the fear of God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies.

Application. 1. *Pray.* "Who is sufficient for these things?" Draw deep inspirations of the Holy Spirit of God. 2. *Watch.* Keep open eyes on yourself and on your temptations.

WHAT OTHERS DO NO EXCUSE FOR MY DOING.

v. 10. *I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might, &c.*

Nehemiah's great strength of goodness and his nobleness of mind made

him in his historic conduct a law unto himself. 1. *He rose above all example.*

The contrast between himself and the common run of his contemporaries is evident throughout the story. "He heard a voice they could not hear." 2. *He rose above all the bare requirements of law.* "Is it so nominated in the bond?" is never the question of a heroically good man. Not what I am required to do, but what I am able to do; not what I am commanded, but what I can, is his rule of action. 3. *His generous goodness made him a law unto himself.* See this illustrated in the text. What others do is no excuse for my doing the same. "I might exact of them."

I. Common contravention of this rule. 1. *A common reason for wrongdoing is that others do it.* Easy to find precedent and example for anything we wish to do. In the practices of the world and in the faults of good men we can find, if we are perverse enough, plenty of examples of evil. 2. *A more powerful reason still is the fact that it will be done, so I may as well do it, and have the benefit of it.* This will justify anything to a man. The schoolboy in

Cowper's story robs the orchard because his companions will go even if he should remain away. The business man contents himself with iniquitous action because others would do it in any case, and he may as well have the benefit as another. The legislator enacts an unrighteous statute or favours an unholy conquest because these things will be done.

II. Vindication of this rule. 1. *Not another's conscience, but his own conscience, is a man's guide.* If every one descended to the lower level of his neighbour, the world would go with swift slide into the bottomless pit. To stand faithful where others fail is the glory of the servant of the Lord. "They do it, and will do it:—let them do it; I will not." 2. *The evil doings of others will not save a man from the doom of his own wrongdoing.* "Thou hast delivered thy soul." That surely is some consolation for the man who stands aloof from evil. "I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn," if this wrong exaction by others might justify it in us.

CLENCHING A GOOD RESOLUTION.

v. 12. *Then said they, We will restore, &c.*

"In a time of danger we understand a general interest. Every one is called in to take a part in the struggles that we make for liberty. And yet when the toil was a little over some of them acted as if they thought that Providence was not a public friend, but only a sort of a factor to a few private families. It is a misrepresentation of him who gives us the mercy if we do not make it extensive. He accepts not the persons of princes nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands. You must not think he is so lavish of his bounty to the great men of the earth merely that they may glitter upon a throne, but be his ministers for good; and this they cannot be if they resolve to confine their influence. Princes love to be called God's representatives, but they usually understand it in no other attribute than his power;

whereas that is incommunicable; it is a glory that he never gives to another. The chief titles in which he would be represented by them are those of justice and mercy." These strong, brave, and true words were written by Thomas Bradbury more than a century and a half ago, and applied to his own times. The human heart is the same in all ages. It is treacherous. Nehemiah knew this. The words of the oppressors were fair-seeming. "We will restore." "We will require nothing of them." "We will do as thou sayest." But the very greatness of the promise constitutes its danger. It is too good to be true; needs binding force. The priest's presence will give the oath "legal validity for judicial decisions." It will also impart solemnity. If tempted to oppress again the awful oath will rise to recollection. There is the truth of life

in this old-world scene. Men need all the helps they can get.

I. In the resistance of temptation. The balance of our lives has need of one scale of reason to poise another of passion. The proverbs of many peoples speak of the fragile nature of promises and vows. He who stands on his unaided resolution has insecure footing. Forgetting is easy. Self-interest is powerful. The present moment outweighs the future hour. Philosophy would teach us to forego a moment's rapture for lifelong peace; but we are not all philosophical. The now is here, the rapture is possible; the future is uncertain, the peace is contingent. All experience of life teaches that men will barter future blessedness for present happiness. "The things which are seen" bulk larger in the eyes of men than "the things which are not seen." We cannot afford to neglect (*a*) the daily reading of the word of God; (*b*) private and ejaculatory prayer; (*c*) covenant engagements with God. Many Christians have found it helpful to enter into a written covenant. The *signature* has had the same effect as Nehemiah's *oath*.

Any system of spiritual mnemonics is valuable. What is wanted is quickness to discover temptation, and firmness to resist it. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. cxix. 11). "It is written!" Jesus answered and said to the tempter (Matt. iv.). "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt. xxvi. 41). All inspirations that are available are needed.

II. In the performance of duty. Doing good is a more comprehensive phrase than easy task. "Virtue is its own reward." Possibly, but not always so regarded. A hard task trying to help those who hinder. He who will serve must suffer. Let him despise not the smallest strength from any quarter. Bind thyself to God's altar with any cords thou mayest obtain. Reliance on God will bring the only safe self-reliance. For each day's task God has promised daily strength. For rugged paths he has provided wear-resisting shoes. Lift up thy burden. Put thy foot forward along the path God has marked out. "Trust in the Lord and do good." "*Thy God hath commanded thy strength.*"

THE TERRORS OF THE LORD PERSUADING MEN.

v. 13. *Also I shook my lap, and said, &c.*

This text describes a solemn scene. A reformer with a stern, hard nerve of righteousness arraignment a guilty band of fellow mortals before God. The nobles feel the spell of Nehemiah's strong conscience and the still stronger spell of Jehovah's threatening, and have promised to reform their deeds. Their *ruthless friend*, having compelled them to swear to their resolves, turning upon them, exclaims, "*Now you are committed to your course.*" "I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man that performeth not this promise. *And all the congregation said, Amen.*" A similar scene is recorded in Deut. xxvii., where the curses of God were read as the doom of those who broke the laws solemnly repeated before the people, and where, like the murmur of a surge on the coast, the deep Amen of the people

rolled back in acceptance of the stern alternative — *obedience or the curse*. Twelve times over from the slopes of Ebal rang the "Cursed be he" of the officiating Levite, and twelve times was flung back the united Amen of Israel. In a similar spirit Nehemiah extemporized this solemn binding ceremony of the text.

I. The doom of unrighteousness acknowledged. Amen in one significance means "verily," "truly," "so it is and shall be." The Lord will shake out from his lap the wicked like a man shaking the worthless dust from his garment. *It is even so. Amen!* Say to the wicked, It shall be ill with him. 1. *Natural instinct asserts this.* By natural instinct one holds no precise philosophical dogma. This is enough for our purpose *Every rational mind*

in a land of light and knowledge has the deep, inwrought conviction that doom must follow misdoing. Fiery sentences asserting this are written in legends of the heathen world. Nemesis, like a bloodhound, follows the wrongdoer. Ancient poetry grows terrible in its tragic representations of this great belief. "Our heart condemns us." God's warning words are answered by the soul's *Amen! It is even so!* 2. *The operation of natural law exhibits this great principle, that God must one day shake away the worthless.* "Nature gives us a word and a blow, and the blow first." Excess or transgression of physical law threatens us as with fixed bayonets. Put a bound upon thy lust and appetite, or beware, is the voice of all experience. No less a human than a Divine proverb is the saying, "He that breaketh the hedge, the serpent shall bite him." The sensual, who has lost his health; the drunkard, who has pulled down the pillars of his home; the dishonest, who is cast out a despised and characterless thing, all point one way. It is nature's *Amen* to the Bible curse—*It is so.* 3. *History fills her picture-galleries with illustrations of this point.* The history of nations is a story of well-doing and its reward, prosperity, and of ill-doing and its sure-footed vengeance. History puts her brazen trumpet to her lips and blows out an assenting *Amen!* It is so. God will shake out as he has shaken out the wicked. You cannot argue with or alter this stable law of life. You may lay an unbelieving hand upon the letters of doom, you may cast doubt after doubt into the bottomless pit, but not one jot or tittle of the world's law which is God's law can be affected thereby. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

II. **The doom of unrighteousness accepted.** *Amen* not only means "It is so," but, "*So let it be.*" By their *Amen* the people signed their agreement to the conditions, their acceptance of the pains and penalties of the transgressor. The repentant people said *Amen* to the curse. *They indignantly denounced their baser self.* "If I could be so base as to neglect my vow to God,

let it be even thus—let me be shaken out of God's lap of rest and blessedness." That is the significance of their *Amen!* 1. *Yet it is dangerous to misunderstand this.* Many a struggling man, after being repeatedly vanquished by a bad habit, has in an hour of despair clutched at something like this *as if to frighten his own soul.* He has invoked a conditional curse upon his head. "If I repeat this let me perish by it!" has gone from the half-maddened mind in the hour of self-disgust. Then there has come the repetition of the sin, "for the strongest oaths are straw to the fire in the blood," and the poor sinner has settled down with the thought that his doom is sealed. *There is not a little of this practical fatalism.* Avoid it! "That way madness lies!" 2. *But there is no need to pray for a curse.* If we sin the curse is sure; and the *Amen* of the repentant soul, whose only wish is for well-doing, is *merely a waking up of the conscience to this gloomy fact.* Let it sink into the soul. Our God is a consuming fire, therefore *know* "the terrors of the Lord." We may look at the mild glories of mercy until we forget the sterner side of life. Brace the soul by meditations on the deep, inexorable sternness of *offended law.* 3. *When engaging in formal covenant with God, when taking the pledge of conversion, when engaging in the solemnities of public or private worship, we virtually bind our souls with this curse.* *To give ourselves up to blessing is to denounce upon our backsliding self the curse.* When a soldier takes his oath he insures his fidelity of the reward and prospective promotion, and by that same act says *Amen* to the law, "Thou shalt be shot for desertion or for treachery!" It is the same in citizenship. All well-doing, right-loving citizens agree to the pains and penalties which await their possible malefactions. It is thus that life is girdled with a deep gulf of doom. Evil to the evil-doer is the proposition. *It is so. Amen!* says every voice that can argue with man. *So be it. Amen!* says the soul that rises up to follow good.

III. **The doom of unrighteousness**

avoided. "And the people did according to their promise." 1. *The good man shuts himself up to his course.* Like Simon Peter, he can turn nowhere. "To whom shall we go" but unto *Thee*. No turning, like Lot's wife. The fire of doom is the end of all backward steps. Paul-like, let us "leave the things that are behind." 2. *The good man must not depend upon the mere binding force of his oath.* Pledges and prisons are but green withes on the strong man of sin if there be no other bond. Goodness by the ROD is not safe or real or lasting.

The commandment often arouses the contrary desire. 3. "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*" The vow of the soul is its warrant of sincerity; the steadfast faith of the soul in the grace of Jesus Christ is its defence against temptations to desertion and disobedience.

Application. 1. *Ponder the inevitable terrors of the Lord against all unrighteousness.* 2. *Vow solemnly the vow of repentance and reformation.* 3. *Pray for hourly strength to do according to this promise.*

A MAN FOREGOING HIS RIGHTS FOR THE SAKE OF HIS DUTIES.

v. 14. *Moreover from the time that I was appointed, &c.*

Nehemiah was a law unto himself. Refused to be guided by others' example. "I might exact of them money and corn" (v. 10). Rose superior to insistence on his own rights. "The former governors were chargeable unto the people" (v. 15). The principle is this:—A man must sometimes forego his rights for the sake of his duties.

I. Rights must be asserted. It will not do to weakly allow selfishness to trample upon the too submissive soul. St. Paul's insisting on his privileges as a Roman citizen an example.

II. Rights must not be pressed too far. A man has prejudiced views of his own worth and deserts. According to his self-importance will be the largeness of his views of his own rights. "The rights of man" is frequently a hollow cry of selfishness.

III. Rights must be tempered by considerations of duty. Duty is a grand governing word. It sways men more than we think. The holiday-maker is restless after a while to get back to the routine of his duties. Duty is our home; pleasure is the place we take a trip to now and then. Our happiness is more bound up with our duties than with our rights. We can survive being cheated of a right, but we cannot

escape if we have neglected our duties. It was such considerations as these which swayed the Jewish liberator.

IV. The due adherence to this principle is the self-sacrificing spirit of Christianity. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The crowning glory of the redemptive life of Jesus is, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor. In the second chapter of the Philippian Epistle we have the Christian setting of this doctrine. The example of Nehemiah, who came among the miserly, selfish Jews, and flung back to the people even the dues and monies which were properly his, in the greatness of his self-sacrifice shrinking from insistence on his own rights as he would from sin, was like an incarnation of nobleness for the fallen minds of his contemporaries to look at and emulate. In the sweet story of old this same grand law is carried higher. In the life of St. Paul it is repeated. In the story of missionaries and martyrs there is a prolongation of this line of light. Blessed are they who reflect its blaze and join this glorious succession.

Application. 1. *Guard against the selfish spirit of the world.* 2. *Seek and show the unselfish spirit of Christ.*

A MOTTO FOR A MANLY LIFE.

v. 15. *So did not I, because of the fear of God.*

There is a motto for a manly life. The key-note of his character was not fear of the *crowd*, but fear of his own *conscience*. What a noble thing is *the iron sense of duty*. This was the strong sinew of the Duke of Wellington's great nature. Whether in the Church or the world, every circle feels the presence and reverences the career of one who bears this hall-mark of duty. *So will not I, for conscience' sake*. Briefly sketch the story of Nehemiah, as illustrating his adherence to his self-chosen motto. It was the banner of his whole life-battle, and he held it with a *clenched hand* in every high place of temptation.

I. The regulative power of a lofty motive. In manifold forms the firm and heroic have ruled their lives by a power superior to their own lower nature. 1. "*The fear of God*" is Nehemiah's phrase. That reverential, loving awe of the all-holy Father and Ruler of men. 2. "*The love of Christ*" is the warmer sentiment which corresponds to this in Paul's phraseology. Fuller light brought a deeper sentiment. The thought of Christ's love awakening love for Christ, and becoming in man an incarnation of heavenly inspiration. 3. "*Religious principle*" is another colder, broader, yet noble expression of the same animator of good men. 4. "*Conscience*," "*the sense of duty*," "*the instinct of right*" are less precise variations of the motives which sway all whose lives are redeemed from the ignoble.

II. The courage to be singular is implied in this motto of the Jewish liberator. 1. *Let there be no singularity for singularity's sake*. Opposition may be our *misfortune*, but must not be our *ambition*. To sing out of tune for the sake of having your voice heard is weakness, not strength. 2. *Yet this world has always rested as on granite pillars on men who could be singular*. Moses refusing to be identified with the godless nationality of Egypt. The three Hebrew children standing upright in

Babylon like watch-towers of truth. Peter and John giving their summary answer to the council: "We ought to obey God rather than man." Luther at Worms crying out, "It is not wise or safe for a man to do anything against his conscience." These men and their heroic brethren in resistance have all glorified their lives by this motto: "So did not I."

III. Applications of this principle in the commonplace life of all men.

1. To HIMSELF *a man must say NO!* "*Let him deny himself*" is a precept we must practise if we would even *live*. It is also a necessity of our *happiness*. "True quietness of heart is gotten not by obeying our passions, but by resisting them." It is essential to our *self-respect* in "the struggle of the instinct that enjoys with the more noble instinct which aspires." The mastery of *self* is the foundation-victory. "To thine own self be true, and it shall follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." 2. To THE WORLD *a man must say NO!* Prevalency of temptations for a man to let himself down, to barter purity for pleasure and honour for gold. How many poor men *sell their birthright of immortality* for some animal gratification! How many *sell their Lord for thirty pieces of silver, more or less*. 3. "*So did not I*" is the YOUTH'S motto. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." It is a manlier and a stronger thing to go right than to go wrong. "Stand thou firm as an anvil that is beaten."

IV. The simplicity and directness of this life-motto. Nehemiah's reason for his nonconformity was a very simple one. "In my view this practice is not right!" You cannot be always arguing a thing. You cannot be "*seeking truth*" (to quote *the world's cant expression for moral irresolution*) all your life. Find it quickly, and stick to it always. Providing a man's *heart* is bad enough, his *head* will usually be clever enough to

argue for his defence. *The devil is said to be the best of advocates, and can quote Scripture to his purpose.* But in plain matters of right and wrong "there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." Nehemiah's reason for not pocketing the money as others had done was a *very simple answer*—"I fear God."

V. This motto is our guide in doubtful matters. Many bad things are doubtful for want of a sensitive nerve in the soul. That which to one is "but a choleric word, to another is flat blasphemy." To Nehemiah's contemporaries and predecessors this practice of money-making had seemed a lawful one, but Nehemiah said that it was one in which a man could not keep clean hands. *The scrupulous has the solution of his difficulties in his own conscience.* Forego the doubtful for God's sake. Make your self-denial in that matter a sacrifice to God, and it shall be to him as the odour of incense.

Application. 1. *Let us understand and acquire this great life-principle.* The fear of God is not fear or dread of a Being outside us, but reverence and submission to a holy Spirit within. 2. *Let it be our strife, at whatever sacrifice, to reverence this powerful sentiment.* "Hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

ILLUSTRATIVE POEM:—

"Brother, up to the breach
For Christ's freedom and truth;
Let us act as we teach,
With the wisdom of age and the vigour of youth.
Heed not their cannon-balls,
Ask not who stands or falls,
Grasp the sword
Of the Lord,
And forward!

Brother, strong in the faith
That "the right will come right,"
Never tremble at death,
Never think of thyself 'mid the roar of the fight.
Hark to the battle cry
Sounding from yonder sky!
Grasp the sword
Of the Lord,
And forward!

Brother, sing a loud psalm;
Our hope's not forlorn.
After storm comes the calm,
After darkness and twilight breaks forth the
new morn.

Let the mad foe get madder;
Never quail! up the ladder
Grasp the sword
Of the Lord,
And forward!

Brother, up to the breach
For Christ's freedom and truth;
If we live we shall teach,
With the strong faith of age and the bright
hope of youth.

If we perish, then o'er us
Will ring the loud chorus:
Grasp the sword
Of the Lord,
And forward!—*Norman MacLeod.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Singularity.—"We must learn to say 'No.' We must dare, if need be, to be singular. Like the young Joseph, when you are tempted astray by seducing voices, let your answer be, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' Like the young Daniel, when forbidden pleasures and questionable delights are urged upon your appetites, be 'purposed in' your 'heart that' you 'will not defile' yourself with them, and choose pulse and water with the relish of a good conscience rather than such dainties. Like the same Daniel, when the crowd are flocking at the sound of the sackbut and psaltery to worship some golden image, keep your knees unbent amidst the madness, learn to stand erect though you alone are upright in the midst of a grovelling multitude, and protest, 'We will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' Like Nehemiah, dare to lose money rather than adopt sources of profit which others may use without a thought, but which your conscience shrinks from; and to all the various enticements of pleasure, and gain, and ease, and popular loose maxims for the conduct oppose immovable resistance, founded on a higher law and a mightier motive. 'So did not I, because of the fear of God.'"—*A. Maclaren, D.D.*

The mighty motive. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." "The heart cannot be prevailed upon to part with the world by a simple act of resignation. But may not the heart be prevailed upon to admit into its preference another, who shall subordinate the world, and bring it down from its wonted ascendancy? If the throne which is placed there must have an occupier, and the tyrant that now reigns has occupied it wrongfully, he may not leave a bosom which would rather detain him than be left in desolation. But may he not give way to the lawful sovereign?"—*Chalmers.*

"By his place Nehemiah had an advantage of oppressing his brethen, if he durst have been so wicked; and from those that had before him

been honoured with that office he had examples of such as could not only swallow the common allowance of the governor without rising in their consciences, which showed a digestion strong enough, considering the peeled state of the Jews at that time; but could, when themselves had sucked the milk, let their cruel servants suck the blood of this poor people also by illegal exactions; so that Nehemiah, coming after such oppressors, if he had taken his allowance, and but eased them of the other burdens which they groaned under, no doubt might have passed for merciful in their thoughts. But he durst not go so far. A man may possibly be an

oppressor in exacting his own. Nehemiah knew they were not in a condition to pay, and therefore he durst not require it. But as one who comes after a bad husbandman, that hath driven his land and sucked out the heart of it, casts it up fallow for a time till it recovers its lost strength, so did Nehemiah spare this oppressed people. And what, I pray, was it that preserved him from doing as the rest had done? We have the answer in his own words: 'But so did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.' The man was honest, his heart touched with a sincere fear of God, and this kept him right."—*Gurnall*.

CONSCIOUS INTEGRITY.

v. 19. *Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*

Nehemiah's appeal to God to deal with him according to the integrity of his life is several times repeated in this book (xiii. 14, 22). "He fed the people in the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." God-fearing, faithful, and unselfish, in every step he could boldly look back upon his progress and take the satisfaction of an approving conscience. There is something *noble* and something *dangerous* in this sentiment.

I. **The habit of righteousness.** To some men it is given to possess great *accuracy of character*, to others it is given to be exposed constantly to a course of *honest blundering*. Illustrated in the sphere of intelligence. One man can never write a letter to satisfy him the first time—he must re-write it; while another lays a firm hand on the paper and never writes anything that he needs to erase or be sorry for. Among men of genius there are some who are dashing and brilliant in their thoughts and deeds, but now and then their work is weakened by the mistakes found therein; while there are others who seem never to be inaccurate in thought or blundering in deed. "The Duke of Wellington is, I believe (says Niebuhr), the only general in whose conduct of war we cannot discover any important mistake." The mind of such men is a chronometer as compared with the cheap clock-work of less careful and less certain minds. So it is in the moral sphere. One has a severely even and consistent nature,

another full of *moral eccentricities*. Bursts of virtue and of faultiness alternate in these last-named so as to make them a continual perplexity to their friends. Goldsmith happily touches this in his pleasantry on a contemporary.

"Here lies Edmund Burke, whose genius was such
We scarcely can praise it or blame it too much."

Yet when we consider how *an hour's fault* may undo a *week's virtue*, how by one error or sin you may put back your nature or your work more than you promote it by many excellences, it is wise to be severe upon "faults," especially upon our own. To be "without fault in the day of God is the mark of all Christian longing; to have "neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing" in his glorious vesture the Church is the desire of that Lord of whom it was said while he tabernacled among men, "I find in him no fault at all." 1. *Aim at a perfect walk with God.* "Search me, O God, and see if there be any wicked way in me." See ver. 9: "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies." "Ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost" is the restraining thought to keep us from fault. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin" is our refuge in our stumbles. 2. *Strive to remedy the faults of your brother.* To mend his *character* is better than to mend his *fortune*; to perfect him is better than to perfect the surroundings

which he must leave behind him. 3. *At the same time, cover with charity and bear with patience the failures of weak human nature. You cannot measure the greatness of his inward difficulties.*

“What’s done you partly may compute,
But never what’s resisted.”

Be severe on your own fault; be gentle with the fault of your brother.

II. The noble refuge of the righteous. A little poem, whose every line is a thread of gold, speaks of the man “whose conscience is his strong retreat.”

In every circumstance and crisis of life this is a safe place for the thoughts to dwell. 1. *In prosperity.* It is a joy to know that good has come by good means. The rich man whose money-bags are all witnesses of iniquity, whose every gain signifies dishonour, must have a wasp-sting in every fruit he tastes. Accumulated wealth is but an accumulation of doom to the man who prospers wrongfully. But to have a *good conscience as the companion of good fortune* is to drink of the sweetest cup of earthly happiness. 2. *In adversity.* When other miseries are upon a man it is glorious to be free from *that arch-angel of misery, a guilty conscience.* The drunkard, who looks upon the desolation of his family, and who knows that his own trembling hands have pulled down the pillars of his home; the extravagant and reckless, who see in their ruin the ripe harvest for which they sowed, sit in the dark place with no consolatory light at all. If I am bereft of my integrity I am bereaved. Sweet it is in adversity to sit without the whips and scorns of self-accusation. 3. *In the relationships of life.* To know I have not wilfully hurt the health, or conscience, or happiness of my fellow is an angel remembrance as life’s evening comes on. Guilty men have repented

and found a Saviour’s mercy before now whose after-thoughts have been gloomy with remembrance of injuries done to their fellows. So St. Paul meekly sorrows over the madness which had in former days damaged the flock of God. 4. *In death.* O death, where is thy sting if the soul is found in Christ, and the memory plays like a setting sun on a well-spent life? “All that I have done for this people.” The good deeds of a well-spent life are shining companions to the soul as it goes through the windings of the last dark valley. Contrast with all this the guilty thoughts of the bad king.

“I have lived long enough; my way of life
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age
I must not look to have; but in their stead
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour breath
Which the poor heart would fain deny, but
dare not.”

III. The dangers of the righteous. To stand upon our righteous habits is to select a wrong basis. Goodness is rather the buttress of the wall than its foundation.

“Nor alms or deeds that I have done
Can for a single sin atone;
To Calvary alone I flee;
O God, be merciful to me.”

Self-righteousness brings pride and uncharitableness. When Archbishop Whateley lay dying some one said, “It is the greatness of your lordship’s mind that supports you.” “No, it is not” (he said); “it is faith in Christ that supports me.” That is the Rock of ages.

Application. 1. *Strive after such integrity as will bring satisfaction to the soul in the great review at the last.* 2. *Let no thought of your own goodness come as a shadow in front of the cross to rob the Redeemer of the glory of his salvation.*

THE SAINT’S SUPPORT.

v. 19. *Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*

Two motives induced Nehemiah to pray thus: the many great and good things he had done for Church and

state; the many great and desperate dangers he had already met with, and would still have to encounter. There

were three solemn comings of three famous persons to Jerusalem—Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The secret of Nehemiah's courage—his heart was on his God.

First, of the sense of the text. "Think," properly "remember." To remember is (a) to keep and hold fast in memory; opposed to forgetting. (b) To call to mind forgotten things. A word derived from this root is put for a memorial (Exod. xxviii. 12) and for records (Esther vi. 1). Remembering is in Scripture applied to (1) God and (2) man. To God properly in first signification. God never forgets. "Known unto him are all his works" (Acts xv. 18). Remembrance is also applied to God in the second signification (Job vii. 7; x. 9; xiv. 3). He has a book of remembrance (Mal. iii. 16). These are to be taken "tropically," by way of similitude. Nehemiah's "remember" means, "May I have assurance and others' evidence." "My God," an appropriating particle ("God" — Heb. Elohim), a plurality of persons, a unity

of nature. "For good," *i. e.* goodness. *The saint's support is God.*

1. *The person petitioned.* 2. *The point prayed for.*

I. *The person.* 1. General title. "God." 2. Special relation. "My."

II. *The point prayed for.* 1. The kind of it. 2. The end of it. 1. The kind. (1) An act desired of God. "Think upon." (2) The special object. "Me." 2. The end. (1) Generally. "For good." (2) Particularly. (a) The ground—"that I have done." (b) The rule—"according to." (c) The extent—"all." (d) The limitation—"for this people." Observations hence arising. 1. *God the support of his saints.* 2. *Peculiar God to believer.* "My." 3. *God hath remembrancers.* 4. *God is soonest drawn to his own.* 5. *Prayer proper for one's own good.* 6. *Works may be pleaded before God.* 7. *Man's works are the rule of God's reward.* 8. *Everything well done shall be rewarded.* 9. *Good done to God's people is most acceptable.*—*Dr. Wm. Gouge, 1642.*

THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOOD DEEDS A PILLOW OF REST FOR A GOOD MAN.

v. 19. *Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*

"Nehemiah's soul was frank with God. There is freedom of access to a throne of grace for every believer (Heb. iv. 16). 'Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people,' is not a presumptuous conceit, but a childlike simplicity. The gross mind of the world would confound the two. Where we know that God has led us in paths of righteousness, we may well use that knowledge, and encourage our souls by it. Nehemiah had but few around him who could reach high enough to sympathize fully with him; and it was thus his great comfort to pour out his soul, *according to truth*, before the God whose good hand had guided him. God wishes no mock modesty from us. His grace in our hearts and lives should be acknowledged (comp. 1 Tim. i. 12)."—*Crosby.* The personal pronoun is very

prominent in David's autobiography. "I have preached." "I have not refrained my lips" (Ps. xl.). "My defence is of God" (Ps. vii.). "Thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing" (Ps. xvii.). St. Paul boldly cites his own example. Readers of his epistles note his self-consciousness. "Whatsoever things ye have learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do" (Phil. iv. 9). "Brethren, be followers together of me" (Phil. iii. 17). "I beseech you be as I am" (Gal. iv. 12). "These hands have ministered to my necessities" (Acts xx. 34). "I have fought a good fight" (2 Tim. iv. 7).

I. *Life's review will be a review of the whole of life.* Its good as well as its evil. When "backward are our glances bent" we shall need the recollection of every pure thought, guiding word, kindly deed. When we lie down

in the long sleep men call death may no *pleasant dreams* come?

II. Life's reward will be rendered according to its deeds. God will "give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. xxii. 12). We are saved by grace, "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). But there is a rewardable-

ness of works. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body" (2 Cor. v. 10). "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; their works do follow them" (Rev. xiv. 13). "We carry nothing out of the world with us but the conscience and comfort of what we have done for God."

CHAPTER VI.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.] "When Sanballat and the enemies associated with him were unable to obstruct the building of the wall of Jerusalem by open violence, they endeavoured to ruin Nehemiah by secret snares. They invited him to meet them in the plain of Ono (vers. 1, 2); but Nehemiah, perceiving that they intended mischief, would not come. After receiving for the fourth time this refusal, Sanballat sent his servant to Nehemiah with an open letter, in which he accused him of rebellion against the king of Persia. Nehemiah repelled this accusation as the invention of Sanballat (vers. 3—9). Tobiah and Sanballat hired a false prophet to make Nehemiah flee into the temple from fear of the snares prepared for him, that they might then be able to calumniate him (vers. 10—14). The building of the wall was completed in fifty-two days, and the enemies were disheartened (vers. 15, 16), although at that time many nobles of Judah had entered into epistolary correspondence with Tobiah to obstruct the proceedings of Nehemiah (vers. 17—19)."—*Keil*.

1. When Sanballat . . . heard] "In the indefinite sense of it came to his ears. The use of the passive is more frequent in later Hebrew; comp. vers. 6, 7; xiii. 27."—*Keil*. **The rest of our enemies]** See iv. 7. **2. Come, let us meet together]** for a discussion = Let us take counsel together (ver. 7). **Ono]** According to 1 Chron. viii. 12, situated in the neighbourhood of Lod (Lydda), and is therefore identified by Van de Velde and Bertheau with Kefr Anna, one and three-quarter leagues north of Ludd. Roediger compares it with Beit Unia, north-west of Jerusalem, not far from Bethel. There may have been two places of the same name. **They thought to do me mischief]** Probably they wanted to make him a prisoner, perhaps even to assassinate him. **3. I am doing a great work: I cannot come down]** Could not undertake the journey because his presence in Jerusalem was necessary for the uninterrupted prosecution of the work of building. **4.]** They sent unto him four times in the same manner, and Nehemiah gave them the same answer. **5. An open letter]** That its contents might alarm all the Jews and create opposition to Nehemiah. In Western Asia letters, after being rolled up like a map, are flattened, and, instead of being sealed, are pasted at the ends. In Eastern Asia the Persians make up their letters in form of a roll, with a bit of paper fastened round it. Letters were and are still sent to persons of distinction in a bag or purse, and to equals inclosed; to inferiors, or to express contempt, open. **6. It is reported]** Sanballat throughout makes no accusation, but refers to rumour. Nehemiah's answer is, "There is not according to these words which thou sayest;" *i. e.* there is no such rumour (ver. 8). **7. Thou hast appointed prophets to preach of thee]** To proclaim concerning thee in Jerusalem, saying, King of Judah. **8. Thou feignest]** Nehemiah charges his enemy with devising a wicked slander. **9. "For"—adds Nehemiah, when writing of these things—"they all desired to make us afraid, thinking, Their hands will cease from the work, that it be not done"]** *Keil*. **Strengthen my hands]** Taken from Nehemiah's journal kept at the time of building. Quotes to show where his dependence was at that trying time. **10. Shemaiah]** "A false prophet hired by Tobiah and Sanballat, who sought by prophesying that the enemies of Nehemiah would kill him in the night to cause him to flee with him into the holy place of the temple, and to protect his life from the machinations of his enemies by closing the temple doors. His purpose was, as Nehemiah subsequently learned, to seduce him into taking an illegal step, and so give occasion for speaking evil of him."—*Keil*. The gift of prophecy did not prevent a man from selling himself to lie for others (see 1 Kings xxii. 22). **Shut up]** Perhaps in performance of a vow, or as a mere pretence. "Your foes are my foes. Let us escape together." **In the house of God, within the temple]** Within the holy place, where no layman was allowed to enter. **And let us shut the doors, &c.]** "He seeks to corroborate his warning as a special revelation from God by making it appear that God had not only made known to him the design of the enemies, but also the precise time at which they intended to carry it into execution."—*Keil*. **11. Should such a man as**

I flee?] Nehemiah had anxiety and alarm, but no cowardice. To save his life] “‘That he may live.’ May mean ‘to save his life;’ or, ‘and save his life.’ Not expiate such a transgression of the law with his life.”—*Keil*. 14. The prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets] Vers. 10—13 only a specimen case. Nothing more is known of Noadiah. 15. Elul] The sixth month. Parts of August and September. 16. They perceived that this work was wrought of our God] Accomplished in so short a space of time. 17—19.] A supplementary remark that in those days even nobles of Judah were in alliance and active correspondence with Tobiah because he had married into a respectable Jewish family. 19. His good deeds] “Good qualities and intentions.”—*Bertheau*. They were trying to effect an understanding, *Bertheau* and *Keil* think. Or were they not traitors?

HOMILETICAL CONTENTS OF CHAPTER VI.

<p>Ver. 1—19. The Perils of Greatness. ” 1—4. Persistency. ” 1, 2. Old Foes with New Faces. ” 3. The Great Work. ” 3. Hindrances to Revivals. ” 5—8. Slander. ” 6. Rumour. ” 8. Boldness. ” 9. Fear and Faith. ” 9. Felt Weakness. ” 10—13. Panic. ” 10. Lying Prophets. ” 11. Personal Responsibility.</p>	<p>Ver. 11. Self-respect. ” 11. Christian Firmness. ” 12. Human Prescience. ” 13. Bribery. ” 15. Fifty-two Days’ Work. ” 16. The Godward Side of Things. ” 16. The Overruling God. ” 16. The World’s Acknowledgment of God. ” 17—19. The Oppositions of Influence. ” 17, 18. Deserters. ” 19. The Bad Man praised.</p>
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THE PERILS OF GREATNESS.

Chap. vi.

THE interest of the history centres in the *man*. All history is the biography of the most eminent men. “Men of the time” make the time. We have met Nehemiah before, but under different conditions. The accidents of men’s lives change; the character remains. Not in what a man *does*, but in what a man *is*, look we for permanence. Nehemiah the Persian cup-bearer becomes the reformer of abuses and rebuilders of the decayed city of God. Nehemiah, to-day confronted by visible armies, is to-morrow confronting the unseen foes of stratagem and deception. “Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together. But they thought to do me mischief” (ver. 2). “It is reported among the heathen that thou and the Jews think to rebel; it is reported that thou hast appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah. Come, let us take counsel.—There are no such things done as thou sayest” (vers. 6—8). “Shemaiah was hired, that I should be afraid, and sin” (vers. 10—14). “The nobles of Judah reported Tobiah’s good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear” (vers. 17—19). The Book written by inspired men gives the teaching of observation and experience when it says in every variety of expression, and with all the cumulative force of its progressive teaching, “Be watchful. The conditions of the conflict of life change; the conflict never ceases. In this battle there is no truce. He that endureth to the end shall be saved.”

I. The perils of greatness. High places are dangerous places, as poets, moralists, and preachers have told us with perhaps wearisome iteration. That each man should do his duty in that state of life in which God has placed him used to be a favourite text with many. The laws of self-help are, if not of recent date, at least of recent definition. That the battle be to the strong and the race to the swift; that all be unhelped and all unhindered, is historically of recent date. We must not forget to proclaim that the powers that be are ordained of God. There may be insanity in hero-worship over-much; but it is idiotic to refuse to recognize the hero. The celebrated valet sees no genius in his master. Is it because he is *too near*, or

because he is *too ignorant*? That there be men of Nehemiah's stamp occupying Nehemiah's station is indispensable. The world must have leaders who can infuse their own courage into their followers. Nehemiah's men were devoted—but only in his presence and under his inspiration. They were liable to panic and subject to craven fear. In doing the world's work there must be some who have opportunities for clearer vision and deeper knowledge. The general on the heights, not the private in the thick of the fight, gives the word of command. To the captain the charts are an alphabet employed without distinct consciousness; leave to him the steering, whilst you walk or sleep. Kings have committed acts of folly; but has King Mob been always a Solomon? There is a needs-be for the king on his throne, the senator in the council-room, the judge on the bench, the barrister at the bar, the poet in the study, the painter in the grove, the preacher in the pulpit, the teacher at his desk. But let none dream that these offices are sinecures, or that the men who hold them are free from the thousand ills to which flesh is heir. It is a fierce light that beats upon a throne. No man yet climbed the heights without the dogs of envy, hatred, and malice barking at his heels. Not Nehemiah's labourers, but Nehemiah, was the object of Sanballat's force and fraud. Strike him, and all are struck. The most eminent men are the best-hated men. In any task the responsibility of the *second* man is proverbially easier than that of the *first*. It is not always needful to point out the moral that adorns the tale of human life.

II. The department of the imperilled. The great thing to be desired for those who hold high office in our world is the conviction that God has appointed their station, set the bounds of their habitation, and allotted their task. In this conviction there is power; from it courage springs. This was Nehemiah's strength. "*I am doing a great work.*" And he explains the "I." "*This work was wrought of our God.*" Hence the sublime trust of Moses in the day of God's anger. "*Let thy work appear unto thy servants*" (Ps. xc.). When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and men's hearts failed them for fear, Paul strengthened himself in the recollection of his mission. "*There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve*" (Acts xxvii.). In the darkest hour of Luther's life he lifted up his eyes to God and cried, "*It is not my cause, but thine.*" "*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory of the strength and endurance we have manifested,*" is the substance of the impassioned utterances of the noble army of martyrs, workers, and warriors from the days of Abel down to the last hours of the sainted sufferer who but yesternight went home to God. The truest self-reliance rests upon the rocky foundations of trust in God. That thousands of professedly Christian and Bible-reading people are little bettered, but rather grow worse in temper and character, needs no proof—it is evident to the all but blind; but that the Christian and Bible-reading nations are immeasurably superior to the peoples that sit in the darkness of nature and the shadow of heathenism is indisputable. Any man who would be in any measure faithful to himself and equal to his life-task must "*believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" This is not a blind, unreasoning trust; not a reliance on another to do what the man can do himself. Nehemiah threw all his soul into those two little words in the fourteenth verse, "*MY GOD.*" But he did not neglect to be watchful. "*They thought to do me mischief*" (ver. 2). He was anxious to discover the truth, and sought out the origin even of misrepresentation. "*I perceived that God had not sent the prophet; Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him*" (ver. 12). He recognized the appointed channels of God's revelation. "*I came unto Shemaiah the prophet*" (ver. 10). He was fearless in denouncing wrongdoers, albeit they sat in high places. "*There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart*" (ver. 8). Above all, he renewed his strength by waiting upon God. "*Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands*" (ver. 9). From God came his task; from God must come the strength to accomplish it. A great historian, after telling the tale of the life of a king of France, adds,

“ Let no meanest man lay flattering unction to his soul. Louis was a ruler, but art not thou also one? His broad France looked at from the fixed stars is no wider than thy narrow brick-field, in which thou too didst faithfully or didst unfaithfully.” Brother, thy task is not Nehemiah’s, nor Paul’s, nor Luther’s, nor John Wesley’s, nor Calvin’s, but it is *thy* task; and if thou strivest faithfully thou wilt find it *thy* task. The work of a man’s life is no child’s play. Do not sport with everything. It is said that when Carlyle was shown a Comic History, he inquired when we were to have a Comic Bible. To such a man the word of God and the life of man were terribly earnest. To all earnest men their daily task is earnest. The humblest is a witness to the power of his own convictions of what he is, where he is, and whom he serves. Let him take care to bear a constant, unfaltering, and ever-growing testimony. Let him be more anxious to be great than to do some great thing. Let him be more concerned to work faithfully than to work successfully, and by and by to the question, “ Is all well?” he shall give the answer, “ All is well!” “ Let your light shine before men ” (Matt. v. 16).

Illustration :—Grown great.

“ Some divinely gifted man,
Whose life in low estate began,
And on a simple village green;
Who breaks his birth’s invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star;
Who makes by force his merit known,
And lives to clutch the golden keys,
To mould a mighty state’s decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne;
And moving up from high to higher,
Becomes on fortune’s crowning slope
The pillar of a people’s hope,

The centre of a world’s desire;
Yet feels, as in a pensive dream,
When all his active powers are still,
A distant dearness in the hill,
A secret sweetness in the stream,
The limit of his narrower fate,
While yet beside its vocal springs
He play’d at counsellors and kings,
With one that was his earliest mate;
Who ploughs with pain his native lea
And reaps the labour of his hands,
Or in the furrow musing stands;
‘ Does my old friend remember me?’ ”
Tennyson.

PERSISTENCY.

vi. 1—4. *Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, heard, &c.*

To do a thing and see it all frustrated, and to begin again coolly, calmly, quietly, and repeat the action, that is a very necessary power in this world. In your summer idleness you break a spider’s web with your stick or disturb an ant-hill, and the tiny operatives, without wasting one moment, steadily begin again and repair their damaged property. These illustrate a grand faculty of man. In life you want the power to begin again and to keep on in spite of whatsoever break-down or hindrance. Nehemiah gives grand example of this. *Our text is a text on persistency—persistency of opposition, persistency of endeavour.* The opponents of this Jewish Garibaldi try one move more to check-mate and hinder the great Liberator, and, like the moon when the watch-dog

barks, he simply keeps on doing what he was doing, unterrified, unmoved. I cannot meet you for conference (he said); I am too busy, and cannot stop the work for you or for any one or for anything. He had no time to say this in person; he “ sent messengers ” “ four times after this sort.”

I. This principle of persistency is illustrated in all the circle of nature and life. 1. *Everywhere there is exhibition of hostile force.* Universal life is a conflict. The “ Peace Society,” who have the noblest of all objects, the suppression of strife, have but few clients in inferior nature. All natural forces, all life, energy, creep to their goal as the wave creeps to the shore after many a rebuff and after many a spurning. The seed struggling up from

its grave, the sapling bending through the crevice in the ruin, the tree battling with the sweep of the tempest—all are persistent fighters of opposition. The insect striving with its mortal foe in the cup of a tiny flower, the bird with vigilant eye watching foes below and above, the beast of the forest amid its dangers, are all showing us on what terms a place is to be found on earth—*clinging pertinacity*. You must not be tempted or coerced from your aim by hostility. 2. *It is so with man in all social life*. The boy at school wrestling with competitors for his prizes or his juvenile influence, the man of business watching the mischances and the adversaries of his success, the popular character striving against the envious among his contemporaries and the changefulness of the people, show us under what tenure the prizes, noble and ignoble, of social life are held. “To him that overcometh” the crown of life is given. 3. *Consistently with this analogy of nature, the Bible represents all moral victory as against deep and persistent hostility*. A legion of devils, from without, a legion of lusts within seek to snare and to frighten the soul from its work. The Bible moves and stirs in eagerness to warn and to inspirit the threatened soul.

II. This principle of persistency is illustrated in the general history of the kingdom of God. 1. *The Bible is one long history of God's controversy with his opponents*. From one generation to another, through millenniums of history, the Almighty Sovereign of the world is battling with opposition. *Physically speaking, God can do whatever he will; but morally speaking, God must do what he can against the wills of moral creatures who “dare defy the Omnipotent to arms.”* And our Bible is the Iliad of heaven against earth. The clash of battle rings through its mighty leaves. This is the value of Old Testament history—it is God saving men in spite of the resistance of the men he seeks to save. *Hence the history of one chosen people has become the world's parable of life and salvation. Jewish history is an immortal text-book con-*

cerning this Divine controversy and conflict. 2. *Christian history is in the same tone.* (a) The Captain of our salvation is set forth in the gospel story as in warfare with the obstinate and prejudiced all the way to his transcendent triumph. “*I would and ye would not*” is the burden of the solemn story. (b) Apostolic history makes a harmony with what has gone before. The chosen apostles and all who took up their great watchword, *Christ*, were *gladiators* in the great arena of the world; “of all men most miserable” unless their cause were Divine and eternal. And the closing words of God's Testament fade away in St. John's Apocalyptic visions of *wars in heaven*, and the noise of him who goes forth conquering and to conquer. (c) Nor have we seen the end *The Church is a “militant Church”—every saint a soldier*; and the world, the flesh, and the devil set in battle array. Heathen creeds, worldly maxims, carnal forces, all opposing the will of the redeeming Lord.

III. It is the same with regard to his principle of persistency in individual salvation and work. 1. *To save your own soul is “a great work”—a work that is hindered*. This is why the gate of life is strait; not that it is narrow in itself, but it is narrowed by the throng of foes that block it to the soul. John Bunyan saw in his dream a gate leading to a beautiful palace. At the gate sat a man with a book to record the names of such as would enter. Around the gate stood armed foes to drive back all who came. At length a man with “a stout countenance” came, and said to the recorder, “Set down my name, sir!” and then, girding on his sword, he set to and fought his way in, “but not before he had given and received many wounds.” It is thus that most of us enter into life. Persistent opposition beaten back by persistent determination. This is what the Saviour means by those who are *worthy of him*, those who *will* have him. The *elect* are the *select* spirits who *must* enter into life because the *must* is in their will. They *will* go in, though hell move from beneath to

oppose. If you are about this purpose, the *one purpose* of man, you are doing a great work, and cannot come down from that, or you fail. 2. *To be instruments of salvation to others is a great work that is hindered, but must not cease.* The parent lovingly battling with the wills of his children, the Sunday School teacher bearing with the waywardness of a circle of opposing spirits, the minister standing as God's watchman in his congregation, the man of business striving to live without damage to the soul of his brother, and to live with good influence upon those who meet him in life's conflict, are Nehemiahs all of them. He toiled on amid the stones of

Jerusalem, they amid the living stones of a better city of God. But the story is one story—the world-wide story of good hindered and opposed, but triumphant.

Application. *Helps to persistency.* 1. *Do not magnify your foes.* Right is itself "a big battalion." Greater is he that is for us than all that can be against us. 2. *Do not under-estimate your work.* All good work is "a great work." Let its loftiness fill and inflame you. 3. *Do not fail in hope.* Hope on, hope ever. "Hope thou in God." On this rock of Peter-courage and inflexibility Christ will build his Church, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

OLD FOES WITH NEW FACES.

vi. 1, 2. *Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of On. But they thought to do me mischief.*

The enemies of reformation in Nehemiah's day were fertile in resources as well as persistent in opposition. When mockery failed to dishearten, and threats to drive Nehemiah from his task, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried the art of deception. The same men, with purpose unchanged, but masked faces. "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

"My son, thou art never secure in this life, but as long as thou livest thou shalt always need spiritual armour. Thou dwellest among enemies." This golden sentence from the lips of Thomas à Kempis contains the moral application we may make of this historical passage.

I. Faults of character. "The natural man" is in Biblical language distinguished from "the spiritual man." "The past of our life;"—"the rest of our time." The dividing line we popularly call conversion. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." That is the ideal; does not become the actual in a day. The

life religious is a growth. A man becomes a Christian; supposes that conversion makes all things new; is soon disabused. He was before an angry man; he blazes up again in an unwatchful moment. He was full of health and vigour; animalism ruled him; he discovers that he needs to lay a strong hand upon himself. Temptability remains. "The snake is scotched, not killed." The natural prayerlessness of men creeps insensibly upon an unwatchful Christian. A principal will connive at the doubtful deeds of an agent—deeds which he himself would not stoop to do. There is a moral obliquity of vision. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." "Can't see" is pitiable; "won't see" is criminal. An under-current is often fatal when a hurricane would have been harmless. Against the second the captain would provide; of the first he might have no knowledge. The signing of the pledge does not of itself quench the burning thirst. The Church roll does not make defection impossible. Every man has one great foe—himself.

“Worse than all my foes I find
 The enemy within,
 The evil heart, the carnal mind,
 My own insidious sin:
 My nature every moment waits
 To render me secure,
 And all my paths with ease besets,
 To make my ruin sure.”

Faults of character are foes to interest. Nobody has a fault that is not injurious. “There is a *but* in every man’s fortunes, because there is a *but* in every man’s character.”—*Maclaren*. A good cause is sometimes injured by the intemperance of its advocates; more often by their inconsistency. Creed and conduct are not always equal. Beware of little sins.

II. Foes to progress. Nehemiah was reforming, uplifting the nation. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were advocates of things as they were. Indolence and selfishness of individuals are aggregated. In the movements of history there has been presented the spectacle of men fleeing from persecution to become persecutors in their turn. Presbyter was priest writ large. Human nature is much the same under all conditions. Luther overthrew the Pope’s infallibility to meet claimed infallibility in his own followers. Only to patient faith is the prize sure. They who work for eternity

can afford to listen calmly to the babblings of contemporary opinion. Utter no rebuking word, although the “meeting for the inheritance” and the unsuccess of your toils require you to possess the patience of God. “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

“Christian! seek not yet repose,
 Cast thy dreams of ease away;
 Thou art in the midst of foes;
 Watch and pray.

Principalities and powers,
 Mustering their unseen array,
 Wait for thy unguarded hours;
 Watch and pray.

Gird thy heavenly armour on,
 Wear it ever night and day;
 Ambushed lies the evil one;
 Watch and pray.

Hear the victors who o’ercame;
 Still they mark each warrior’s way;
 All with one sweet voice exclaim,
 Watch and pray.

Hear, above all, hear thy Lord,
 Him thou lovest to obey;
 Hide within thy heart his word;
 Watch and pray.

Watch, as if on that alone
 Hung the issue of the day;
 Pray that help may be sent down;
 Watch and pray.”

THE GREAT WORK.

vi. 3. *And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*

Religion the most momentous and important matter that can possibly engage the attention. Either the veriest dream of superstition, or the most stupendous as well as the most interesting subject. This is *the great work*.

I. The great work in which Nehemiah was engaged. Repairing the wall and setting up the gates around the city of Jerusalem. He had many powerful enemies. They first tried to ridicule him and his brethren out of the undertaking; and this failing, they endeavoured to terrify them; and not succeeding in this, they had recourse to craft and stratagem. In the verse preceding Nehemiah says, “Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me,” &c. And in the verse following Nehemiah tells us that they sent unto him four times, after the same sort, and he answered them after the same manner. What is fortifying, defending, and preserving a city when compared with the salvation of our immortal soul? If we are really on the Lord’s side we shall assuredly be opposed as he was, and perhaps more strenuously, by ridicule, stratagem, and force. To all opposition let us reply, “I am doing a great work.” Some say the business of salvation so far as we are concerned is no work at all. Surely *faith* and *love* have something to do with salvation; and

although these graces of the Spirit may apparently be the farthest removed from what may be termed a work, yet we read in Scripture of “the *work* of faith, and the labour of love.” Yes, faith worketh by love. True, as far as merit is concerned, salvation is not of works; yet there is a sense in which we are to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.” The believer “fears the Lord and his goodness.” He fears to offend against infinite holiness, or to “grieve the Holy Spirit.” He fears to bring guilt upon his conscience. And he trembles to be found “an unprofitable servant.” Faith enables the believer to see the path of obedience, and love constrains him cheerfully to walk therein. The work of Christ, so far from freeing us from obedience, lays us under greater obligations to devotedness.

II. The opposition Nehemiah had to encounter in his undertaking. 1. *He was assailed by ridicule* (see chap. ii. 19; iv. 1—3). You may profess what you please without molestation, but if you proceed to act up to your profession you will certainly not escape opposition. How did Nehemiah meet the scoffs of his enemies? He did not desist from his purpose, nor did he take the matter of revenge into his own hands. 2. *Nehemiah's enemies attempted also to assail him by force* (iv. 7, 8). We ought to give all due obedience, in things lawful, to those who in the providence of God may have control over us, but there is a point beyond which to yield would be sin. When human authority is exerted contrary to the Divine command we ought not a moment to hesitate to “obey God rather than man.” 3. *Nehemiah's enemies assailed him also with craft and cunning.* “Sanballat and Tobiah sent unto me, saying,” &c. More persons are enticed and allured into sinful compliances by plausible inducements than by any other means. Never expect any spiritual advantage from the proposal of a confederacy with worldly men. 4. *When Sanballat could not succeed by stratagem, he endeavoured to effect his purpose by putting Nehemiah in fear.* Raised false reports against him, representing that he was building the wall that he might set up himself as a king and rebel against his Persian master. Expect misrepresentation. It was said of the apostles of old, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.” Think it not strange if modern Christians be accused of being enemies to the peace of society. When we see Sanballat not only falsely accusing Nehemiah, but also hiring the professed prophets of God to endeavour to turn him from the work in which he was engaged, let us learn the great need of watchfulness, caution, and circumspection. “Be ye wise as serpents.” If an angel from heaven should speak anything contrary to the doctrine of godliness, shun his counsel. Even Satan can transform himself into the appearance of an angel of light, and his angels imitate his example. “Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.” Nehemiah went to Shemaiah for godly counsel and advice, little expecting that he was in the service of his great enemy (vers. 10—14). God will expose the snares and bring to nought the devices planned against his faithful servants. “I perceived,” saith Nehemiah, “that God had not sent him.” And as before he answered the rumours of Sanballat by saying, “There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart;” so now he boldly answers the counsel of the lying prophet who would have him shamefully neglect his duty, and shut himself up in the temple to save his life, by saying, “Should such a man as I flee—I on whose presence at the building of the wall so much depends, and who believe and have professed that God will protect and defend me?” When we are tempted to make sinful compliance, let us call to mind the noble answer of Nehemiah, and adopt similar language; let us say to every temptation to evil, “Should such a man as I, who profess to be a disciple of, yea, a joint-heir with, Christ, a son of God, and an heir of immortality—should such an one as I condescend to bring disgrace upon my profession, and thus dishonour God and sin against my own soul?” Or with Joseph

let us ask our own conscience, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

III. The magnitude of the work required that Nehemiah should not cease It was a *great* work, for the walls of Jerusalem extended some miles round the city; and it was a very *necessary* work to be completed for the defence of the inhabitants. Of what momentous importance is the salvation of a man! The destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem is said to have forced tears from the eyes of its heathen conqueror; but what is a flaming temple or the destruction of a city to the destruction of an immortal spirit! Let your careful and constant attention be given to the one thing needful. "For it is not a light thing, because it is your life." Nehemiah succeeded in accomplishing the work he had in hand by prayer, watchfulness, and painstaking diligence (vers. 15, 16). So will all the enemies of God's truth be finally cast down in their own eyes; they will be utterly ashamed and confounded, while they will be constrained to confess that the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. The wall was built in troublous times, and we often find Nehemiah supplicating help from the mighty God of Jacob, like Jehoshaphat, who said, "Lord, we know not what to do, but our eyes are toward thee;" and while he was unceasing and fervent in prayer, he was also watchful and diligent in the work.—*Rev. James Shore, M.A., abridged.*

HINDRANCES TO REVIVALS.

vi. 3. *I am doing a great work, &c.*

Sanballat's opposition — threatened; complained; insisted that Nehemiah's design was not pious, but political. Nehemiah went on.

I. A revival of religion is a great work. It is a great work because in it great interests are involved. In a revival of religion are involved both the glory of God, so far as it respects the government of this world, and the salvation of men. The greatness of a work is to be estimated by the greatness of the consequences depending on it. And this is the measure of its importance.

II. Several things may put a stop to a revival. A revival is the work of God, and so is a crop of wheat; and God is as much dependent on the use of means in one case as the other. 1. *A revival will stop whenever the Church believe it is going to cease.* No matter what the enemies of the work may say about it, predicting that it will all run out and come to nothing, they cannot stop it in this way. But the friends must labour and pray in faith to carry it on. 2. *A revival will cease when Christians consent that it should cease.* When Christians love the work of God and the salvation of souls so well that they are distressed at a mere apprehension of

a decline, it will drive them to agony and effort to prevent its ceasing. 3. *A revival will cease whenever Christians suppose the work will go on without their aid.* The Church are co-workers with God in promoting a revival, and the work can be carried on just as far as the Church will carry it on, and no farther. 4. *A revival will cease when Christians begin to proselyte.* Do not raise selfish strife, and drive Christians into parties. 5. *When the Church in any way grieve the Holy Spirit.* 6. *When Christians lose the spirit of brotherly love.* 7. *A revival will decline and cease unless Christians are frequently reconverted.*

III. Things which ought to be done to continue a revival. 1. *Ministerial humiliation.* Ministers must not only call upon the people to repent; they must be ensamples to the flock. 2. *Churches which have opposed revivals must repent.* 3. *Those who promote the work of revivals must repent their mistakes.* There is a constant tendency in Christians to backsliding and declension. Let us mind our work, and let the Lord take care of the rest; do our duty, and leave the issue to God.—*Finney, abridged.*

SLANDER.

vi. 5—8. *Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me, &c.*

An attempt to frustrate Nehemiah by a false report concerning his intentions is described in these verses. This *petty wasp of slander* may sting the even-minded Reformer, and make him swerve from his steadiness. Sanballat sent to say that it was a "common report" that Nehemiah was meditating the ambitious project of becoming a king; and to make the matter circumstantial, Gashmu was quoted as the authority for this information. Nehemiah, with noble indifference, brushed away the wasp—sent a short, sharp answer back—and then, dismissing the matter, went on with his work.

I. The slander. Isaac Barrow's biographer quaintly wishes he could find an enemy of his hero, that he might have the honour of defending the memory of the great divine. All men are not so fortunate. The faultless have some fault found with them, and the faulty have their faults exaggerated. Let the most blameless man in the town offer himself as *candidate for parliament*, and the organ of the rival political party will give a picture astounding to the friends of the good man. Shimei finds foul things to say about David, and Gashmu knows a damaging thing about Nehemiah. In this example of the text there are three stages of slander. 1. *The common report.* "It is commonly reported among the heathen that thou and the Jews think to rebel." Who got up *that* report? is a common question about similar matters now-a-days. Who was the man in the iron mask? Who executed Charles I.? Who invents the lie that sings in the air about some faultless man? These are conundrums to "give up." Where all the gnats come from that fill the window-pane was a puzzle to our childhood. Where all the lies come from that buzz round our neighbourhoods is a puzzle to our later life. "*It is commonly reported!*" Woe to the tongue ingenious in this art! For our own part, let us

beware of giving our jealousies and suspicions wings. Let them die in the egg. Keep the door of the lips, especially when conversing with a fool. And equally necessary is it to beware of eager listening to groundless suggestions, born of malice and envy and uncharitableness. The demand creates the supply. Send these hawkers of mischief away from the door. Keep the door of the ears. 2. *The authority for the "fact."* "Gashmu saith it." Who's Gashmu! A very common authority on these matters. He's very often a myth. There is no Gashmu at all. Try to find him, and he is always "removed." Tracking a slander is often like seeking a grasshopper. It chirps here and there and everywhere, except on the handful of grass you lay your hand on. Looking for Gashmu is like hunting the cuckoo—it's "a voice, a mystery." *Gashmu!* He is not, or you find him not. Sometimes Gashmu is real enough. If you hear the report, you need not be told where it came from. Gashmu "his mark" is on the forehead of the slander. He sits in his window blowing peas at all passers-by. There are human creatures who delight in this kind of cowardly damage of other men's reputations. For some wise end they were created—all things are. The nettle and the hornet and the slanderer—perhaps these have their part to play. "*Gashmu*" might be carved on some of the graves—"Here rests one who never let any one else rest." 3. *The informant.* Sanballat sent the letter. These are the three steps: "Common report"—"Gashmu"—"Sanballat." An illustration of the development theory! The slander is born out of nothing; it is generated in that inorganic matter of lies which fills the atmosphere of the globe; it takes form and organization in Gashmu, in him it becomes a real thing; then Sanballat conducts it to its goal. Sanballat, who writes the letter of information, or whispers the thing in

confidence, is often the mischievous originator of the whole mystery of lies—the predecessors are but imaginary. Sometimes he is “not a *knave*, but a *fool*” merely, some one who means well, a friend who thinks it is a part of friendship to do things like this. But for him the slander would be unknown and harmless; it is his work to post up the information in the window. The ill that is wrought for want of thought! It is only *thinking* that can stop that.

II. Treatment of slander. 1. *Give it no foundation in yourself.* Such a thing is said of you! exclaimed a zealous friend once. Ah! coolly answered the victim, and *the worst of it, it's true.* “Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” There is a spirit of slumbering fairness in society. Do not say in your “haste, all men are liars.” It is not so. Do not be soured by the abundance of mischief and the superfluity of naughtiness among men. But at the same time beware! Avoid the appearance of evil. Like Cæsar’s wife, be “above suspicion.” Do not be content with such integrity as will go with the average; *let your white be snow-white.* [Illustrate by the grand integrity of Nehemiah.] Not in fear of the slander, but in love of what is right and good, seek the lofty character of the righteous man. Whatsoever things are true and lovely and of good report take as the garb of your character. 2. *Take no notice of it.* As the children say, “Don’t believe it!” See the grand style of verse 8: “Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart”—a message for Sanballat to think about. To have his elaborate slander crumpled up and flung at his head with the label “LIES” on it would be disappointing to this officious person. Silence is the best reply as a rule. We cannot waste the day in explanations. “When I have written an angry reply to a letter, I never send it off at once. I read it over. I often re-write it, and put more sting into the sentences. Then I argue thus. This letter will do if I send it in twenty-four hours. It shall not go earlier on any

consideration. To reserve my reply will show I was not annoyed much, and that I am a tranquil master of myself. I consequently lock up my letter, all sealed and addressed. And at the end of the twenty-four hours I take out the letter, and without reading it throw it on the fire. That has always been my course since I once wrote and posted immediately one of those replies. It proved to be a mistake. Since then I have done as I have said. It always relieves me—serves as a waste-pipe—and I never have to repent of harsh correspondence.” 3. *Go on with your work.* Slander as a rule does the good man no harm, unless it stop him in his work and make him lay down his enterprise in disgust. Many a man has given up *his Master’s work of “doing good”* because his good was evil spoken of. [Illustrate from the life of Jesus.] When the Lord of the vineyard cometh and asks, “Why did you leave my work?” what can you say? At your peril keep to the good course. This sharp-shooting of criticism is to try the soldier. Endure as seeing Him who is invisible. “They say? What do they say? Let them say.” Many a man has given up the *good work of his soul’s salvation* for a similar reason. It sometimes falls to the lot of a minister to be sent for to some dying man, and this is the story which comes from the departing deserter. “I was once a member of such and such a church, and there I was not treated as, &c., &c.; I took offence, and have hardly been in a place of worship since. It is ten years ago.” “My brother,” *thinks* the minister though he takes care not to say it, “do you think *that* excuse will cover those ten wasted years?” *You* are responsible for the *effect* of the slander; *another* may have a heavy score to pay on account of its *origin*.

Application. 1. *Live for the approval of the Lord of all.* Do not root yourself on the shallow, changing opinion of man. Seek a higher basis for endeavour, animated by the solemn fear of God. 2. *Consider the importance of life and its work.* Do not suppose you may please yourself whether you keep your

hand on the plough or not. Woe to Jonah, whatever be the cause of his flight from his God-appointed task. 3. *Accept criticism—as an instructive corrector; and slander—as a discipline of patience and firmness.*

“Lord, I adore thy gracious will,
Through every instrument of ill
My Father’s goodness see ;
Accept the complicated wrong
Of Shimei’s hand and Shimei’s tongue
As kind rebukes from thee.”

RUMOUR.

vi. 6. *It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel : for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.*

Matthew Henry well expresses the historical sense of this passage. “Sanballat endeavours to possess Nehemiah with an apprehension that his undertaking to build the walls of Jerusalem was generally represented as factious and seditious, and would be accordingly resented at court. The best men, even in their most innocent and excellent performances, have lain under this imputation. This is written to him in an open letter, as a thing generally known and talked of; that it was reported among the nations, and Gashmu will aver it for truth, that Nehemiah was aiming to make himself king, and to shake off the Persian yoke. Observe, it is common for that which is the sense only of the malicious, to be falsely represented by them as the sense of the many.” From this particular instance let us consider generally *the tongue, its use and abuse.*

I. Use of the tongue. 1. *To express thought and emotion.* A word is the incarnation of a thought. It lay hidden and formless in the thinker’s mind. The word is the body prepared for it. The thought stands out clear to the gaze of others. There is a language understood by the animals. A child speaks because of the necessity it feels to express its thought. It understands before it can express itself. The first dawn of intelligence is in a child’s *smile*; it enters into a new world when it utters the *first word*. The fountains of the great deep of intelligence are broken up. The child performs “the miracle of speech.” Were thought pent up in our minds without the medium of expression which words give, each one would live in a world of his own. We

cannot conceive of a family, a social state, a nation without language. “Speak that I may see thee,” said one to a fair-haired youth. As “we know metals by their tinkling,” so we know men by their speech. Dumbness excites pity. Expression is the first and simplest use of the tongue. 2. *To glorify God.* “There-with bless we God.” We are not alone in this. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.” God is known by the works of his hands. But it is our province explicitly to bless God. The glory of the heavens is the glory of inference; our glory is the glory of reference. “The whole creation is as a well-tuned instrument, but man maketh the music.” Men of science reduce the myriad things in nature to laws; and these to still fewer; until all causes resolve themselves into the Cause of causes—God. To him all things tend. From him, as a fountain, all streams flow; to him, as a sea, they all return. 3. *To fan the flame of devotion in others.* “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Words have moved the world. Pulpits, senates, law courts are centres from which words proceed. Men of words as necessary as men of action. Armies, nations have been stirred by eloquent speech. Possibilities of speech should make us humble, if not make us tremble. Words escape our lips big with eternal issues. “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” “Foolish talking” is condemned as well as “filthy communication.”

II. The abuse of the tongue. "Take heed," says an Arabian proverb, "thy tongue cut not thy throat." 1. *Self-misrepresentation.* (1) *Under-statement.* Half-truths; concealing some material thing. We are not bound to satisfy everybody's curiosity. Two legitimate times for speaking—when God would be glorified or man benefited. But having professed to tell and then conceal is deception. There are spoken lies and acted lies. (2) *Over-statement.* Speaking in superlatives. A habit easily contracted. "All his geese are swans." (3) *False statement.* God and men hate lying. You may be clever, amiable, attractive; but if you lie, the swift, sure, terrible Nemesis is, you will never again be trusted. For this there is no place of repentance, though you seek it carefully with tears. Lying is a sin of which it is peculiarly true—"Be sure your sin will find you out." 2. *Defamation of others.* Grosser forms—evil speaking with malice aforethought; bearing false witness; slander. A form of this punishable by law. But some of the keenest slanders elude law. "A good name is great riches." It is to be desired. We must not superciliously discard the good opinion of others; we need not fawningly seek it. To some a good name is all they have; *e. g.* domestic servants, professional men. Studied wickedness is worst of all. "I saw," said Augustine, "a little child pale with envy." How many town scandals would have been avoided, how many Church quarrels prevented, had men acted on that golden rule—"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Be patient under detraction. "Blessed are ye when men shall say all manner of evil against you *falsely.*"

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Silence and speech. "Why tell me that a man is a fine speaker if it is not the truth that he is speaking? Phocion, who did not speak at all, was a great deal nearer hitting the mark than Demosthenes. He used to tell the Athenians, 'You can't fight Philip. You have not the slightest chance with him. He is a man who holds his tongue; he has great dis-

ciplined armies; he can brag anybody you like in your cities here; and he is going on steadily with an unvarying aim towards his object; and he will infallibly beat any kind of men such as you, going on raging from shore to shore with all that rampant nonsense.' Demosthenes said to him one day, 'The Athenians will get mad some day and kill you.' 'Yes,' Phocion says, 'when they are mad; and you, as soon as they get sane again.' It is told about him going to Messina on some deputation that the Athenians wanted on some kind of matter of an intricate and contentious nature, that Phocion went with some story in his mouth to speak about. He was a man of few words—no unveracity; and after he had gone on telling the story a certain time, there was one burst of interruption. One man interrupted with something he tried to answer, and then another, and, finally, the people began bragging and brawling, and no end of debate, till it ended in the want of power in the people to say any more. Phocion drew back altogether, struck dumb, and would not speak another word to any man, and he left it to them to decide in any way they liked. It appears to me there is a kind of eloquence in that which is equal to anything Demosthenes ever said. 'Take your own way, and let me out altogether.'"—*Carlyle.*

Slander. "In St. James's day, as now, it would appear that there were idle men and idle women, who went about from house to house, dropping slander as they went, and yet you could not take up that slander and detect the falsehood there. You could not evaporate the truth in the slow process of the crucible, and then show the residuum of falsehood glittering and visible. You could not fasten upon any word or sentence and say that it was calumny; for in order to constitute slander it is not necessary that the word spoken should be false—half truths are often more calumnious than whole falsehoods. It is not even necessary that a word should be distinctly uttered; a dropped lip, an arched eyebrow, a shrugged shoulder, a significant look, an incredulous expression of countenance, nay, even an emphatic silence, may do the work; and when the light and trifling thing which has done the mischief has fluttered off, the venom is left behind, to work and rankle, to inflame hearts, to fever human existence, and to poison human society at the fountain springs of life. Very emphatically was it said by one whose whole being had smarted under such affliction, 'Adders' poison is under their lips.'"—*F. W. Robertson.*

"We have no right to spread an injurious report merely because somebody brought it to us. It is a crime to pass bad money as well as to coin it. We are bound to consider whether the person from whom we heard the report had opportunities of knowing the truth, was likely to form a sound judgment of the facts which came under his knowledge, and whether we should have believed him if he had said the same thing to us about some person to whom we bore no ill-will. There would be very much less scandal manufactured if there were less disposition to circulate it."—*R. W. Dale.*

SAME THEME.

One great sin wherein the corruption of human nature bewrayeth itself is detraction, or depriving others of a good repute. Here I shall show—

I. What is detraction. 1. *The nature of it in general.* It is an unjust violation of another's fame, reputation, or that good report which is due to him. God, that hath bidden me to love my neighbour as myself, doth therein bid me to be tender not only of his person and goods, but of his good name. And indeed one precept is a guard and fence to another. I cannot be tender of his person and goods unless I be tender of his fame; for every man liveth by his credit. (1) It is a sin against God, who hath forbidden us to bear false witness against our neighbour, and to speak evil of others without a cause. Eph. iv. 31: "Let all evil-speaking be far from you." By evil-speaking is meant there disgraceful and contumelious speeches, whereby we seek to stain the reputation of others. (2) It is a wrong to man, because it robbeth him of his good name, which is so deservedly esteemed by all that would do anything for God in the world. "A good name should rather be chosen than great riches" (Prov. xxii. 1). Therefore, as he himself should not prostitute his good name, so others should not blast it and blemish it; for it is a greater sin than to steal the best goods which he hath, and it is such an evil as scarce admits any sound restitution; for the imputation even of unjust crimes leaveth a scar though the wound be healed. (3) The causes it proceedeth from are these. (*α*) Malice and ill-will, which prompteth us to speak falsely of others, so to make them odious, or do them wrong or hurt. To hate our brother in our heart is no way consistent with that charity which the impression of the love of Christ should beget in us. The hatred of offence, which is opposite to the love of complacency, may be justified as to the wicked. Prov. xxix. 27: "An unjust man is an abomination to the just, and he that is upright in the way is an

abomination to the wicked." But then we should first and most abominate ourselves for sin; this very hatred and abhorrence should begin at home, and we should be most odious to ourselves for sin, for we know more sin by ourselves than we can do by another. But for the hatred of enmity, which is opposite to the love of benevolence, that should be quite banished out of the heart of a Christian. (*β*) It comes from uncharitable credulity, whereby men easily believe a false report, and so propagate and convey it to others. Jer. xx. 10: "I have heard the defaming of many. Report, say they, and we will report it." If any will raise a report tending to the discredit of another, some will foster it; and it loseth nothing in the carriage, till by additions and misconstructions it groweth to a downright and dangerous infamy. (*γ*) It comes through rashness and unruliness of tongue. Some men never learned to bridle their tongues, and the Apostle James telleth us that "therefore their religion is vain" (James i. 26). Till we make conscience of these evils, as well as others, we content ourselves with a partial obedience, and therefore cannot be sincere. Whisperers must be talking. (*δ*) It comes from carnal zeal, which is nothing else but passion for our different interests and opinions. Many lies walk under the disguise of religion. Is all speaking evil of another unlawful? I cannot say so, but yet it is hard to keep it from sin. 1. He that doth it without just cause is plainly a detractor, and so a grievous sinner before God. God doth not only reject the liars for hypocrites, but also the backbiters and slanderers. 2. He that doth but speak what he hath heard from others, without any assertion or asseveration of his own, as not knowing the truth of the report, can hardly be excused from sin. He reporteth those things which may induce the hearers to think ill of another, and if without just cause he is in part accessory. 3. He that doth speak that which is true, but tendeth to the infamy of another, may be guilty of sin if he have not a sufficient call and warrant. If it be a matter we have nothing to do

with but only speak of their faults for talk sake. If we aggravate things beyond their just size and proportion. If we urge their crimes and deny their graces. Is there no good amongst all this evil?

2. *The kinds of detraction.*

(1) Whispering, which is privy defamation of our brother, to bring him into disfavour and disrespect with those that formerly had a better opinion of him. Herein whispering differeth from backbiting, because the whisperer stingeth secretly, but the other doth more openly attack our credit. Now this whispering is a great sin; it is reckoned among the sins which reigned among the heathen, and God hath expressly forbidden to his people. Lev. xix. 16: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people." It is against natural equity, because they do that to others which they would not have done to themselves. It is a grief to the party wronged, and a cause of much debate and strife. (2) Backbiting is a more public speaking evil of our absent brother, to the impairing of his credit. Now this may be done two ways. With respect to the good things found in him, and with respect to the evil supposed to be committed by him. With respect to the good things found in him:—When we deny those good things which we know to be in another. When we lessen the gifts and graces of others. When we own the good, but deprave it by supposing a sinister intention. When we have just occasion to speak of a man's due commendation, but enviously suppress it. As to evil supposed to be committed by them:—When we publish their secret slips, which in charity we ought to conceal. Prov. xi. 13: "A tale-bearer revealeth secrets." When a man intrudeth himself into the mention of things faulty, which he might with better manners and more honesty conceal, it is the effect of a base heart. When, in relating any evil action of another, we use harder terms than the quality of the fact requireth, and make evils worse than they are,

beams of motes, and mountains of mole-hills. We should lessen sins all that we can; I mean the sins and faults of others. By imposing false crimes. The most godly and innocent persons cannot escape the scourge of the tongue, and unjust calumnies.

II. *The heinousness of the sin.* 1. *In general*, that is evident from what is said already. Two arguments more I shall urge. (1) Men shall be called to an account for these sins as well as others. (2) It is the property of a citizen of Zion—one that shall be not only accepted with God now, but dwell with God for ever—not to be given to backbiting (Ps. xv.). 2. *More particularly*, it is the more heinous, (1) Partly from the person against whom it is committed; *e. g.* the godly; public persons. (2) From the persons before whom the slander is brought, as suppose kings and princes; so that they are deprived not only of private friendships, but the favour and countenance of those under whose protection they have their life and service. (3) From the end of it. If it be done with a direct intention of hurting another's fame, it is worse than if out of a rash levity and loquacity. Some men have no direct intention of mischief, but are given to talking; others sow discord. (4) From the great hurt that followeth, be it loss of estate or general trouble. When men's good names are buried, their persons cannot long subsist afterward with any degree of service. And all this may be the fruit of a deceitful tongue. The use is, to show how good-natured Christianity is, and befriendeth human societies; it condemneth not only sins against God, but sins against our neighbour. Let us not speak evil of others behind their backs, but tell them their faults. Remembering our own faults, looking at home, will not only divert us from slandering of others, but make us compassionate towards them, and breed comfort in our own souls.—*Manton, abridged.*

BOLDNESS.

vi. 8. *Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart.*

A bold word this to fling in the teeth of authority.

I. Men of courage are men of convictions. Nehemiah's consciousness that he was doing a great work made him bold. Physical courage is a thing of blood and nerve. The morally courageous man may be nervous, shrinking, fearful. He is self-reliant because reliant on God. The men without convictions, what have they done? Those who tell us it is doubtful if there be a God, religion is the poetry of conscience, the Bible is a fetish, whom have they blessed? for whom have they agonized? Has the world's suffering wrung from them any great sweat of blood? The world's hard work has never been done by the mealy-mouthed. Great reformations have not been accomplished by the nerveless souls without strong convictions for or against. Men of one idea have made mistakes, but not the mistake of leaving the work undone. This Jewish Reformer and Liberator reminds us of Martin Luther, the stories of whose boldness have passed into proverbs; and of John Knox, whom Scotland delights to honour. Of him Carlyle tells the following story in his own inimitable way:—"In the galleys of the river Loire, whither Knox and the others, after their castle of St. Andrew's was taken, had been sent as galley slaves, some officer or priest one day presented them an image of the Virgin Mother, requiring that they, the blasphemous heretics, should do it reverence. 'Mother! mother of God!' said Knox, when the turn came to him. 'This is no mother of God; this is "a pented bredd"—a piece of wood, I tell you, with paint on it. She is fitter for swimming, I think, than for being worshipped,' added Knox, and flung the thing into the river." Rather dangerous sport that! "The courage of his convictions" makes a man a hero. There was a sacred must in the highest life. "I must work the works of him that

sent me." "He *steadfastly* set his face to go to Jerusalem." Another story which Carlyle tells of John Knox will illustrate how these elect spirits shrank from the tasks laid upon them. "In an entirely obscure way Knox had reached the age of forty; was with the small body of Reformers who were standing siege in St. Andrew's Castle, when one day in their chapel the preacher, after finishing his exhortation to these fighters in the forlorn hope, said suddenly, that there ought to be other speakers, that all men who had a priest's heart and gift in them ought now to speak;—which gifts and heart one of their own number, John Knox the name of him, had. Had he not? said the preacher, appealing to all the audience. What then is his duty? The people answered affirmatively; it was a criminal forsaking of his post if such a man held the word that was in him silent. Poor Knox was obliged to stand up; he attempted to reply, he could say no word; burst into a flood of tears, and ran out." "Carlstad," said Luther, "wanted to be the great man, and truly I would willingly have left the honour to him, so far as it had not been against God. For, I praise my God, I was never so presumptuous as to think myself wiser than another man. When at first I wrote against indulgences, I designed simply to have opposed them, thinking that, afterwards, others would come and accomplish what I had begun." To be out of the roll of common men is not desirable. But when self-will and God's will come into collision, the will of the Lord be done. Don't be a straw upon the stream. Get convictions. Hold them. Search the Scriptures. Be loyal to conscience. Obey God. Spheres are narrow or wide. What matters that? In the narrowest men may fail; in the widest they can but be faithful. *Reverence "the sacred must" in thy life and work.*

II. Applications of this principle.

1. *A man's real foe is himself.* "Nothing," says St. Bernard, "can work me damage except myself; the harm that I sustain I carry about with me, and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault." The powerful opposition or skilful deception of the Sanballats and Gashmus within my sphere may make my duty more difficult, but cannot wholly prevent my performance of it. There is such a thing as self-degradation. This position is not uncommon—to do our duty and suffer: to leave it undone and escape the suffering. But to do the latter is to degrade oneself. 2. *Not such boldness, but some boldness is required of us all.* We may have opportunities of *speaking the truth in love*; we must not shrink from the responsibility of *speaking the truth*. Force, fraud, falsehood were arrayed against Nehemiah, are arrayed against us. The holy war arises out of an enmity of long standing. 3. *Pay homage to thy convictions.* Honour the

grey-headed truths in the faith of which apostles, martyrs, and saints have lived and died. God's love, Christ's atonement, your pardon and need of renewal—hold fast these convictions. "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day"—the conquered soldier can do that; "and having done all to stand"—only the conquering soldier can do that. So thou soldier of God. 4. *Do the task allotted thee.* "Work, in every hour, paid or unpaid; see only that thou work, and thou canst not escape the reward; whether thy work be fine or coarse, planting corn or writing epics, so only it be honest work, done to thine own approbation, it shall earn a reward to the senses as well as to the thought; no matter how often defeated, you are born to victory. The reward of a thing well done is to have done it."—*Emerson*. Nehemiah sent his message, and then went on with his work. "So the wall was finished."

FEAR AND FAITH.

vi. 9. *For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.*

The words come after the story of a new *scare* to Nehemiah. [Describe his anxieties from various forms of enmity.] *Words suggest two companion topics, Fear and Faith.*

I. Fear. "*For they all made us afraid.*" Man is accompanied through life by *foes and fears*. In some cases the fears are more numerous than the foes. *Frequently the only thing to be afraid of is our own fear.* There are foes of us all, however, who "make us afraid." To have an iron spirit not easily quailed is a great gift, and to have a spirit like a sensitive plant, which curls at every touch and interrupts its functions, is a great misery. We may allow fears to grow upon us, until they become an atmosphere to the soul. 1. *Causes of fear.* With Nehemiah there were causes enough—real flesh and blood foes, who made his career in Jerusalem one long vigil, always listening for the loud alarum of strife. Similarly with most men in most of life's enterprises. The soul has its foes; "they are lively and they are strong." All religious work is done against obstacles which "make us afraid." (a) *The devil is a downright foe.* We are not so much alarmed at *him* now as in days of superstition. Luther threw his ink-pot at the arch-enemy of his soul, and we smile at the picture of the rough student rising from his Bible and casting such a very *material* defiance at such a very *immaterial* foe. We have refined the devil since then to a "general expression for," &c. But was not the mistaken Reformer nearer right than ourselves? "*Your adversary the devil*" is not a mere generalization. (b) *Foes hide themselves or show themselves in our fellow-men.* The man who hinders my work for God is my foe, whether he *scare* me by opposition, or interrupt me by an unprofitable friendship. The foe who

pushes me down the precipice, and the foe who persuades me to go to sleep in the sun, are alike reasons for fear. (γ) *The sinful nature in myself is my enemy.* "No one's enemy but his own" is a common form of speech. Every man is a ship with a mutinous crew on board, and destruction is averted only by the masterful assertion of my better self against my lower self, of my conscience against my passions, of the grace of God against the sin that dwelleth in me.

"Christian, seek not yet repose,
Cast thy dreams of ease away ;
Thou art in the midst of foes ;
Watch and pray."

2. *Effects of fear.* (α) *Exaggeration of peril.* Life grows very gloomy when the soul is afraid. Fear is a fearful thing. The palpitating, perspiring rustic in the dark lane misinterprets every shadow, and hears a voice of threatening in every sound, when once anything like superstitious terror has seized him. When you are frightened you are not in a position to judge of your situation. *Allow for the enlargements of fear.* Sometimes when we hear a sensational story we say, Ah, Mr. Superlative told you that ; take off ninety per cent. Now if we could so deal with the alarming suggestions of our own fears it would be well. They deceive us. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea, they were troubled, and supposed that they had seen a spirit ; but he said, "Be not afraid ; it is I !" (β) *Paralysis of strength.* "The hearts of the people melted and became as water" —not much lion-work of fighting for them. A child can take the sword of a frightened man. Be very courageous if you would be very strong.

II. **Faith.** "*Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.*" "What time I am afraid I will trust in the Lord." The word of God is full of *presuppositions of man's timorousness and fear.* It speaks gently, and as to a child, and bids its organs be soft. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem !" Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield ! Fear not, Moses—Joshua—David—Daniel : all through the story of man's struggle God's ringing cry of Fear not ! falls upon him from heaven. Do not over-chide yourself if you are of a timorous make, for why should there be chapter after chapter of bugle-calls to courage, except that men never have been overstocked with that grace. After faith in St. Peter's teaching comes courage : "Add to your faith *virtue*" (*courage*). Now faith stands as the counterpart of fear. 1. *In causes of fear.* Against our array of foes it brings into view the presence of God. We should strive to *think God as real as our foes are*, whereas we commonly in our panic see only the peril, and not the Saviour. At Waterloo the French were ranged on one side of a valley in brilliant force, while on the other side of the valley waited the army that was to conquer—*an army mostly hidden.* It is thus in religious life. 2 Kings vi. 15—17 gives a beautiful illustrative story. Those "horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" were hidden to the servant, though seen by the clear-eyed faith of his master. "Elisha prayed, and said unto the Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see." Look not on the foes only, but see God.

"Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire."

2. *Against the effect of fear (despair) let us set the spirit of hope.* "Take for a helmet the *hope* of salvation." That will prevent you being stunned by fear. What incitements to hope we find. (1) *In the history of God's help.* Dealings with faithful in all generations. (2) *In experience of God's help.* Our own remembered deliverances. Read St. Paul's grand defiance of all foes, visible and invisible, present and to come, in his glorious burst at end of the eighth of Romans : "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ" (Rom. viii. 35—39) ?

Application. 1. *Be aware of your foes.* 2. *Do not make too much of them.* 3. *Remember that it is not your own strength that wins, but the God who strengthens your hands.* 4. *Never despair.*

FELT WEAKNESS.

vi. 9. *O God, strengthen my hands.*

INTRODUCTION.—Outline Nehemiah's position:—fierceness of foes; fear of friends; work endangered; his own heart failing him for fear. A critical moment, requiring instantaneous decision. Felt weakness casting itself on God.

I. The habit of devotion. This prayer not uttered whilst writing. He recalls his experiences in that time of danger. Such a trial-hour would stamp itself in the memory. Nehemiah is remarkable for his ejaculatory prayers. They were the habit of his life. You cannot be always devotional, if you mean by that engaged in acts of devotion. Habit will make you ready for occasion. A school-boy cannot be all day long repeating his father's name; enough if when a temptation arises to do what would offend his father he refuses. Bible precepts cannot be always on the tongue's end, but a Christian man should be so under the influence of Biblical principles that he will shrink instinctively from wrong-being and wrong-doing.

“I want a principle within
Of jealous, godly fear,
A sensibility of sin,
A pain to feel it near;
I want the first approach to feel
Of pride, or fond desire,
To catch the wandering of my will,
And quench the kindling fire.

That I from thee no more may part,
No more thy goodness grieve,
The filial awe, the fleshy heart,
The tender conscience give.
Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make!
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.”

Some ask only for a sentiment. That is insufficient. Devotion must reach the core of our being. We must be “throughout Christian.” Habit implies *formation*. Not by a sudden bound do men reach perfection. Halting and stumbling characterize a Christian's first efforts to walk alone. God regards the bent of the will, the direction of the

desires. “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Don't be discouraged by failure, repeated failure. Begin again. Learn to pray. Habituate thyself to devotional exercises.

II. The limits of solitariness. “O God, strengthen my hands.” The hands of the workers needed to be strengthened. But on Nehemiah rested the responsibility. He stood alone. If his strength should fail in the day of adversity, all would be lost. The tallest trees feel the stress of the blast. Highly-wrought natures are subject to influences unfelt by coarser minds. Christ is the great champion here—the loneliest man that ever lived. You cannot read the Gospels without feeling how far apart from him even the disciples were. The best of the outside world had so little in common with him. And through the ages men have had to thank God for the lonely spirits. The noblest work is achieved by personal and lonesome effort. Sunday schools, prison reforms, hospital management, religious revivals, revolutions in Church and State are the result of the genius and energy of individual men and women. They strike out the path along which the less gifted, but not less earnest, travel. Doubtless there are times when the terrible loneliness of their position startles such men. Such a time came to Nehemiah, and he cried unto God. And in the commonplace life of all of us there is solitariness. For the value of a life does not depend upon externals. To himself the life of a peasant is as important as is the life of a prince. No second life is given. Great and small are relative terms, be it remembered. None is alone who has God with him. “Jesus said, Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall leave me alone: and yet *I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*”

III. The value of certitude. “O God, strengthen my hands.”

“I am weak, but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand.”

That was about all Nehemiah knew. His creed was short, but he held it firmly. Sanballat and Gashmu might gather fresh forces or bribe Nehemiah's body-guard; one thing was clear amid the haze of others, God was Almighty, and always approachable. We have a fuller creed; have we a sublimer trust? A motto of the Apostle Paul—"We know." Nor is St. John one whit behind his brother-apostle. The circle of religious knowledge might be almost completed from his First Epistle alone. "We know that the Son of God is come." "We know that we are of God." "We know that we know him." "We know that we are in him." "We know that he abideth in us." "We know the Spirit of truth and error." "We know that he heareth us." "We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him." That which we have experienced becomes certain. "We speak that we do know." "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

IV. The secret of steadiness. "They all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. *So the wall was finished.*" "Unbelief," says Gurnall, "is a soul-engeebing sin. It is to prayer as the moth is to the cloth; it wastes the soul's strength, so that it cannot look up to God with any hope. 'They made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened.' Resist, therefore, Satan; be steadfast in the faith. Never let thy heart suffer the power, mercy, or truth of God to be called in question; thou hadst as good question whether he can cease to be God."

Application. 1. *In striving to attain personal excellence be patient.* Effort and failure mark much of our life. The task we have in hand is herculean; the opponents are numerous and powerful. 2. *In any form of Christian enterprise moderate your expectations.* Opposition will arise when least expected. Those for whom you toil will seldom appreciate your motives. Success may linger. 3. *Make the secular sacred by infusing into it a sacred spirit.* Refuse to call anything common and unclean.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Ejaculatory prayer.—"Ejaculatory prayer is prayer darted up from the heart to God, not at stated intervals, but in the course of our daily occupations and amusements. The word 'ejaculatory' is derived from the Latin word for a dart or arrow, and there is an idea in it which one would be loath indeed to forfeit. Imagine an English archer, strolling through a forest in the old times of Crecy and Agincourt, when the yeomen of this island were trained to deliver their arrows with the same unflinching precision as 'a left-handed Gibeonite' discharging a stone bullet from his sling. A bird rises in the brushwood under his feet, a bird of gorgeous plumage or savoury flesh. He takes an arrow from his quiver, draws his bow to its full stretch, and sends the shaft after the bird with the speed of lightning. Scarcely an instant elapses before his prey is at his feet. It has been struck with unerring aim in the critical part, and drops on the instant. Very similar in the spiritual world is the force of what is called ejaculatory prayer. The Christian catches suddenly a glimpse of some blessing, deliverance, relief, a longing after which is induced by the circumstances into which he is thrown. Presently it shall be his. As the archer first draws the bow in towards himself, so the Christian retires, by a momentary act of recollection, into his own mind, and there realizes the presence of God. Then he launches one short, fervent petition into the ear of that awful Presence, throwing his whole soul into the request. And lo! it is done! The blessing descends, prosecuted, overtaken, pierced, fetched down from the vault of heaven by the winged arrow of prayer."—*Goulburn.*

"Ejaculations take not up any room in the soul. They give liberty of callings, so that at the same instant one may follow his proper vocation. The husbandman may dart forth an ejaculation, and not make a balk the more. The seaman, nevertheless, steers his ship right in the darkest night. Yea, the soldier at the same time may shoot out his prayer to God, and aim his pistol at his enemy, the one better hitting the mark for the other. The field wherein bees feed is no whit the barer for their biting; when they have taken their full repast on flower or grass, the ox may feed, the sheep fatten on their reversions. The reason is, because those little chemists distil only the refined part of the flower, leaving the grosser substance thereof. So ejaculations bind not men to any bodily observance, only busy the spiritual half, which makes them consistent with the prosecution of any other employment."

"In hard havens, so choked up with the envious sands that great ships drawing many feet of water cannot come near, lighter and lesser pinnaces may freely and safely arrive. When we are time-bound, place-bound, so that we cannot compose ourselves to make a large, solemn prayer, this is the right instant for ejaculations, whether orally uttered or only poured forth inwardly in the heart."—*Fuller.*

PANIC.

vi. 10—13. *Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah, &c.*

In the varying romance of Nehemiah's brave struggle with difficulties occurs an instance of *panic*, or of what might have been panic to a less steadfast soul. A man was shutting himself up in alarm—real or assumed—and endeavoured to persuade Nehemiah to do the like, to turn the temple into a fortress, and to make the open porch of God's house a shelter for merely *personal* fear. But Nehemiah (as always) was "*steadfast, unmoveable.*" His resolute, fearless "*I will not go in!*" settled the matter, which after all turned out to be a mere theatrical scare, got up to order in the interest of Tobiah and Sanballat. *Panic is our subject—its effect and its correctives.*

I. Panic. Originally suggestive of *Pan*, the god of the woods. To ignorant men the deep solemn shades of the virgin forests were fraught with awe, and full of causes for sudden alarm. *Unreasoning, helpless FRIGHT is the idea.*

1. *National panic.* A people suddenly exaggerating a state danger, and acting in a way to be sorry for afterwards.

2. *Business panic.* A trading community or firm scared out of its even regularity into some wild action.

3. *Personal panic.* Sudden trouble not bravely met with a breastplate of patience and a helmet of hope, but with helpless alarm.

4. *Spiritual panic.* Those soul-shiverings which are like fits in religious life. These are common familiar forms.

Panic is commonly groundless. That is, the wave is not so high as it seems to the retreating bather, who hears its hiss behind him. No man is so bad as sudden indignation paints him, and few crises in man's history are so alarming as to the alarmed they appear. The downfall of the state—the end of the world—the collapse of trade—the ruin of a house—the overthrow of good—*these are often only scares.*

II. The effect of panic. To gather all the selfishness of man to a focus or to substitute a brief madness for calm

thoughtfulness and decision. 1. *It makes a man behave unworthily of himself.* The leader shows his flying form as a scoff to the after-judgment of men.

"*Unsoldierly conduct in presence of the enemy.*" Shall that be said of the pillars of the state, or of the strong support of the home, or of the Christian soldier in his discouraging battle with sin? Shall Nehemiah be hidden in some corridor of God's temple, or peep in alarm from the shut window of Zion?

2. *It makes a man behave unworthily toward his fellows.* The man who tramples upon the woman in a burning theatre; the craven who sinks the boat which might have saved "all hands"

in his eagerness for personal security; the soldier who deserts the companions whom he might have helped to conquest—these are all exhibitions of the *unlovely possibilities of human nature.*

Is Nehemiah to imperil the Jews by scrambling for a place a sword-length away from danger?

3. *It makes a man behave unworthily of his God. Is not God FOR the hour of peril?* Am I to trust in Providence *up to* the dangerous moment, and *then become my own providence?*

Is God's house to be a robber's den for timorous culprits to shelter in? Let a man die *in* God's hands, not "fleeing from the presence of the Lord."

III. The correctives of panic. "Prevention, not cure," is the motto.

1. *Remembrance of a man's own dignity.*

"I said, *Should such a man as I flee?* and who is there, that, being as I am,

would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." For a man's *self* to fall is worse than to fall before a foe.

Let not the supreme fear be *personal* fear, "fear of them that can kill THE BODY."

Moral degradation is worse than physical death.

2. *Remembrance of others.* Carry the alarms of others as corrective of your own.

Fear for *others*, lest your own fear become too great. Nehemiah hears the cry of

helpless Jews, and he will not fly and leave them. 3. *Remembrance of God.* Nehemiah's book shows how the idea of "my God" had become part of his mental habit. His "heart was fixed, trusting in the Lord." Read Ps. xlv. at the first murmur of unworthy alarm—"God is our refuge," &c. The iron nerve of Luther's hymn is a cry to turn the tide of warring fears. Paul is serene in the danger of shipwreck—nay, in the

certainty of it—because of the forewarning of the Angel of the Lord, "whose I am, and whom I serve." That "*Fear not, Paul!*" made him deaf to the roar of the threatening sea. Cultivate a habit of confidence in God. Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

Application. *Keep a short account with conscience, and you will be able to make small account of panic.*

LYING PROPHETS.

vi. 10. *Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah, &c.*

"Shemaiah was such a common name among the Jews, that it is impossible to identify this prophet with any other person of his name. He must, however, have been a man of prominence, and one, too, who had been in Nehemiah's confidence, or else the attempt would never have been made by Tobiah and Sanballat through him. It may have been the high position and reputation, of Shemaiah that led the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets (ver. 14) into the false dealings with Nehemiah."—*Dr. Crosby.*

I. Great gifts may be dissociated from pure life. Shemaiah lied. The gift of God in Shemaiah, Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets had been sold for money. Two lists of prophets may be compiled from "the Book"—the true, the false. Of the latter—Balaam (Num. xxiii.), the old prophet (1 Kings xiii.), Zedekiah and the rest who seduced Ahab to his destruction (1 Kings xxii.), Hananiah (Jer. xxviii.). Character is primal element of a conception of true prophet. "A grace does not differ from a gift in this, that the former is from God, and the latter from nature. As a creative power there is no such thing as nature; all is God's. A grace is that which has in it some moral quality; whereas a gift does not necessarily share in this. Graces are what the man *is*; but enumerate his gifts, and you only know what he *has*."—*F. W. Robertson.* Gifts are sacred. We speak of gifted men as men of talent. That word talent was probably borrowed

from our Saviour's parable of the man who was travelling into a far country, who called his servants and delivered unto them his goods. Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: to every man according to his several ability, and straightway took his journey. Unfortunately gifts may be abused. They have been abused. They have been used as instruments of oppression. And, shuddering at their abuse, Christian people have often condemned them as if they were the devil's gifts, not God's. Now this course is unwise; it is dangerous. We rob ourselves of so much power by refusing to enlist into the service of God whatever is good. In the early Church the gifts of prophecy, of healing, of miracles were abused. St. Paul denounces the abuse, but not the gift. On the contrary, he enumerates them; he states their relative importance; he calls them emphatically *spiritual* (1 Cor. xii., xiv.). The gifts of our age are spiritual; the talented men of our time are inspired. Knowledge is power, but it is not piety. The poets of ethereal intellects have not always been men of etherealized lives.

II. Great gifts may lead to deterioration of character. Shemaiah had been a true prophet, whom Nehemiah had found trustworthy. The hypocrite pays unconscious homage to virtue. Prophets and prophetess had gone from bad to worse through Sanballat's gold. The qualifications which the Jewish doctors deemed indispensable to a

prophet were "true probity and piety." "That God may choose of men whom he pleaseth, and send him, it matters not whether he be wise and learned, or unlearned and unskilful, old or young; only that this is required, that he be a virtuous, good, and honest man; for hitherto there was never any that could say that God did cause the Divine majesty to dwell in a vicious person, unless he had first reformed himself."—*Maimonides*. The "lying spirit" entered into them and they fell. "Now these things were our examples." Use your gifts, not display them. Be not vain of them. Has God given thee a clear judgment, penetration, retentive memory, or an eloquent tongue, thank him by cultivating it. Has he endowed thee with health, thank him for it by preserving it. Has he given thee mechanical skill or business aptitude, recognize the Giver by turning it to best advantage. As God has appointed to every man his work, so he has given to every man his gift. The sacred call of duty is heard along all the ranks of existence. Let not the humblest amongst us imagine that his gifts are unnecessary or valueless—they are his. The drop of water in which the animalculæ live is to them what the sea is to behemoth. The falling leaf is as great a catastrophe to the insect that feeds upon it as is a burning world to an angel. Dost thou scorn the lesser gifted? Bethink thyself. The God who endowed thee endowed them; the Spirit who inspired thee inspires them. "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Are you discontented with your gifts, and envious of the more highly endowed? Forget not that God who lights the sun lights the stars. He does not disown the meanest flower that blows. The seraph nearest to his throne does not cause him to forget the humblest missionary toiling in some island of the Southern Seas. 1. *Accept thy position*. God, who has appointed the bounds of our habitation, has fixed the limits of our power. 2. *Cultivate your gifts*. Be not contented. Do not repine. 3. *Remember that gifts*

are not graces. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." The only undying faculties are the affections; the only permanent work is that we do for others.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Ahab's lying prophets (1 Kings xxii.). "Ahab consulted all his false prophets as to whether or not he should go to attack the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead. They knew what to say; they knew that their business was to prophesy what would pay them—what would be pleasant to him. They did not care whether what was said was true or not; they lied for the sake of gain, for the Lord had put a lying spirit into their mouths. They were rogues and villains from the first. They had turned prophets, not to speak God's truth, but to make money, to flatter King Ahab, to get themselves a reputation. We do not hear that they were all heathens. Many of them may have believed in the true God. But they were cheats and liars, and so they had given place to the devil, the father of lies; and now he had taken possession of them in spite of themselves, and they lied to Ahab, and told him that he would prosper in the battle at Ramoth-Gilead. It was a dangerous thing for them to say; for if he had been defeated, and returned disappointed, his rage would have most probably fallen on them for deceiving him. And as in those Eastern countries kings do whatever they like, without laws or parliaments, Ahab would have most likely put them all to a miserable death on the spot. But however dangerous it might be for them to lie, they could not help lying. A spirit of lies had seized them, and they who began by lying because it paid them, now could not help doing so whether it paid them or not."

Prophets of to-day "Do not fancy that there are no prophets in our days, unless the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is promised to all who believe, be a dream and a lie. There are prophets now-a-days—yea, I say unto you, and more than prophets. Is not the Bible a prophet? Is not every holy and wise book, every holy and wise preacher and writer, a prophet, expounding to us God's laws, foretelling to us God's opinions of our deeds, both good and evil? Ay, is not every man a prophet to himself? That 'still small voice'—is not that a prophecy in a man's own heart? Truly it is. It is the voice of God within us, it is the Spirit of God striving with our spirits, whether we will hear, or whether we will forbear—setting before us what is righteous, and noble, and pure, and what is manly and godlike; to see whether we will obey that voice, or whether we will obey our own selfish lusts,

which tempt us to please ourselves—to pamper ourselves, our greediness, covetousness, ambition, or self-conceit. And if you ask me how to try the spirits, how to know whether your own thoughts, whether the sermons which you hear, the books which you read, are speaking to you God's truth, or some lying spirit's falsehood, I can only answer you, 'To the law and to the testimony'—to the Bible; if they speak not according to that word, there is no truth in them. But how to understand the Bible? for the fleshly man understands not the things of God. The fleshly man, he who cares only about pleasing

himself, he who goes to the Bible full of self-conceit and selfishness, wanting the Bible to tell him only just what he likes to hear, will only find it a sealed book to him, and will very likely wrest the Scriptures to his own destruction. Take up your Bible humbly, praying to God to show you its meaning, whether it be pleasant to you or not, and then you will find that God will show you a blessed meaning in it; he will open your eyes, that you may understand the wondrous things of his law; he will show you how to try the spirit of all you are taught, and to find out whether it comes from God."—*Charles Kingsley*.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

vi. 11. *Should such a man as I flee?*

Character, position, recollection, Nehemiah opposed to Shemaiah's cowardly proposal. Personal responsibility overpowered all considerations of expediency. Let the instance suggest the wider theme. "We mortal millions dwell alone." "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

I. A law of the Divine procedure. God has not dealt with men in the mass. He is not far from any one of us. 1. *Law implies individual responsibility.* The word contains the idea of pointing out, directing, leading; hence a rule of conduct. National law does not treat men as a society, but as a mass of responsible units. All our jurisprudence is based on this. The Bible axiom that every man shall give account of himself has been brought into the sphere of political life. Moral law rests on the same foundation. Its violation is sin; its honour is righteousness. In this none can be surety for his brother. Laws are for the safe-conduct of individual lives. The general good is contained in that of the individual. The true communism is not that which would adopt the impossible expedient of dividing to all alike, but that which shall secure to every individual the scope for working out his responsibility as a man, a citizen, and a Christian. 2. *The history of God's dealings is in harmony with this.* Angels—so far as the Bible and analogy lead us to infer—are subject to a similar moral government. They had their testing-time. They stood in probation as individuals. The most exalted spirits in the universe are amenable to God. There can be only one Supreme. They fell as individuals. Satan is distinctive.

"He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower; his form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined."

But they were all "fellows of his crime." He only "led the embattled seraphim to war." "His angels were cast out with him." They are "the angels that sinned." "By ambition fell the angels."

"Of their names in heavenly records now
Be no memorial, blotted out and razed
By their rebellion from the book of life."

The rest stand as individuals having kept their first estate. Their past faithfulness insures the future. Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, the Prince, the Archangel, whether they are personal, or like thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, representative of ranks, are distinctive. For if not individual in themselves, they represent the ministry and defence of the angels. *Nations.* The Israelites were elected as a nation; but they fell as individuals. One terrible verse sums up all. "Their

carcasses fell in the wilderness." History confirms this. When honour is lost in public men, when domestic ties are violated, nations fall. A man's great enemy is himself; a nation's great enemy is itself. Truth and justice, law and order, the bond of a nation. The enemy without does not knock at the gates for admission until the enemy within has prepared the way for conquest. *Churches.* The Churches of the Revelation of St. John are typical. There is a common danger. "He that overcometh!" belongs to Smyrna and Pergamos, to Ephesus and Sardis, to Philadelphia, Thyatira, and Laodicea. But right and wrong are not massed. Declension, false doctrine, seduction, semblance, are severally condemned. Hatred of evil, whether in doctrine or conduct, endurance, adherence to truth, charity, undefiledness, are severally praised. So with individual lives. The stern-souled prophet and the confiding Mary; the martyr Stephen and the traitor Judas; the impressible Herod and the unmoved Baptist; the faithful James and the faithless Peter: each stood alone—alone in relation to God, alone in relation to duty. 3. *Christianity recognizes personal responsibility.* Christ dealt with men as individuals. In his teaching, miracles, sympathies. One woman elicited his best teaching; one family found his great love; one widow sufficient to move his miraculous arm. Acceptance of Christianity personal. Repentance, faith, forgiveness. Exhibition of Christianity personal. Cross-bearing, truth-speaking, forgiveness, humility, unselfishness, generosity, work. The Church is a body fitly joined together. Every man hath his proper gift of God.

II. **A fact in human experience.** As every leaf among the myriad leaves of the forest is governed by the laws of growth, and yet in its conformation is distinct, so every man is subject to the general laws of Divine procedure and the special which apply only to himself. No two men are exactly alike in character or circumstances. 1. *Responsibility.* Each is required to work out his destiny. The foundation of a noble life is Christ, but every man must take heed how he buildeth thereupon. Alone each must return his Lord's money. Every one will be brought unto him. It will not be important how much we return, but what is the measure of increase. If to the two talents by wise use of opportunities we add other two, we shall receive the same commendation as those who to the five talents add other five. 2. *Mystery.* There is a strange mixture of good and evil in us. Our feet stand on the earth and our head points toward heaven, as if significant of our heavenly aspirations and earthly tendencies. We can talk of the beauty of virtue whilst deliberately indulging in vice. Pilate-like, we can wash our hands in affected innocency whilst the guilt of blood rests upon us. A business loss, a bereavement, a change in circumstances, and all a man's fine talk about superiority to circumstances, the vanity of riches, and futility of earthly things avails nothing. The mystery of the future is sometimes agonizing. 3. *Guilt.* We cannot shift upon the first sinner the guilt of our iniquity. "My sin is ever before me" is the wail of every kingly soul. Nor can we cast our guilt upon circumstances. No man is forced to violate his conscience. Where there is no will there is no guilt. A man must rule his circumstances, not be ruled by them. 4. *Faith.* Creeds and Churches will not save us. They presuppose our salvation. The reason why the faith of so many is feeble is that they have never tested it. It is an unproved armour, and when the hour comes to encounter Goliath they are afraid. Every man must come into contact with God. "O taste and see that the Lord is good." One real wrestle with God will teach more about prayer than a treatise on it. Faith in God in an hour of real danger better explains it than a sermon on its philosophy. "Search the Scriptures." "Prove all things," that you may "hold fast that which is good." 5. *Temptation.* From this there can be no escape. Were we able to say as Christ did, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me," temptation would be powerless. Not here, but yonder, will the sons of God present themselves before the Lord and Satan *not* come among them. 6. *Sorrow.* "The heart knoweth his own bitterness."

III. A prophecy of destiny. 1. *What a man is now, that he will be HERE-AFTER.* God will judge every man according to his works, as these are the evidences of the man. Heaven may be a change of locality and circumstances, but not character. This is indestructible. 2. *There is no injustice, because each man is judged.* To one he gives five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and he will expect a proportionate return. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. Unto every one of us is given grace. God is *not* a hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed. 3. *We are now fuelling the revealing fire—a fire that shall try every man's work of what sort it is.* Nothing ends in this world. Thoughts become incarnated as soon as we express them. Words live in those who hear us. Deeds have an undying influence. God will gather up the fragments of our daily lives, that nothing be lost. And the day shall declare every man's work.

SELF-RESPECT.

vi. 11. *Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.*

Nehemiah would not run away, because he *could not fancy himself* doing anything of that sort. "Should such a man as I flee?" Our theme then is *self-respect*. Religion, though it brings with it humility,—an *unnatural* grace of character, an exotic from the gardens of the skies planted on earth by Divine hands,—though religion induces humility, it promotes self-respect. The eighth Psalm teaches not merely the littleness of man, but his greatness. Throughout the book of Nehemiah the Jewish patriot is not wanting in manly self-respect.

I. The ground of self-respect. 1. *False grounds.* (a) *Money.* The vilest form of human conceit. To be a money-bag, and nothing else! (b) *Birth.* A by no means contemptible ground, if the greatness from which a man is born is bred into his own character. (c) *Intelligence.* Too frequently a reason for the smallest vanity. Vanities of authors and pride of bookmen. (d) *Office and association.* These are no necessary reasons for self-pluming, but may be the merest accidents. 2. *True grounds.* Moral worth. Personal nobleness and sincerity of character and life. Under the eye of God, and in view of a Christian relation to God, a man may stand upright before the world. (a) *Sonship with God.* "That we should be called the sons of God" is a ground for dignity—to be of the inner elect family of God. (b) *Brotherhood with*

the good. To be in the bead-roll of that long line of Divine heroes of all ages—following, but not with equal steps—that stirs the blood. "Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod." (c) *Service in righteousness.* The great cause of God gives dignity to the meanest servant. "I had rather be a doorkeeper," &c. (d) *Heirship with the skies.* The celestial expectations of the good give grandeur to their earthly being.

II. The influence of self-respect.

1. *Negatively.* (a) *Not petty, strutting pride.* "Not I, but Jesus Christ that dwelleth in me." The dignity of the child of God—in its possessions and honours and hopes—is too tremendous to be proud of. (b) *Not contempt of others.* "He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant." Jesus has a name above every name, because "he took on him the form of a servant." 2. *Positively.* (a) *The effect of self-respect in duty.* To exalt all duty into the sublime, and to do it, beyond all its temporal and transitory purposes, "as unto the Lord." (b) *In temptation.* To make sin *beneath* a man. "He cannot sin, because he is born of God"—as a spotless Washington "cannot lie." Joseph's indignant "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (c) *In trouble.* It prevents a man becoming unworthy of himself. "I know how to be *abased*." "If thou

faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." In worldly scenes and senses pride is a great restrainer of weakness. "Burning pride and high disdain forbade the rising tear to flow." So in the spiritual life the man of God chides his trembling soul: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?"

Application. *Know thyself!* 1. *A child of God.* Are you a child of God? 2. *Then rightly view the dignity of your being.* On the *human side*, a vessel of clay, brief in life, weak in powers, limited by worldly accidents; but on the *Godward side*, an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ.

CHRISTIAN FIRMNESS.

vi. 11. *And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.*

Whoever examines the character of the primitive saints will see how religion dignifies and ennobles the mind of man. Nehemiah had engaged in an arduous work. In this he was opposed. From Shemaiah, a prophet, he might have expected better things.

I. The subtlety with which our great adversary will assault us. How specious was the proposal made to Nehemiah. Our adversary will propose to us—1. *To neglect our social duties to further our spiritual welfare.* A common temptation and specious. Apprentice and servant neglecting duty to attend religious ordinances. "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." 2. *To conform to the world, with a view to conciliate their regard.* By conforming to the world we shall confirm them in their persuasion, that religion does not require that measure of spirituality which the saints of old maintained. 3. *To use undue means with a view to obtain some desirable end.* Safety was desirable to Nehemiah, but secretion not a desirable way to obtain it. Many objects are desirable, but must not be sought by any sacrifice of

duty or conscience. The greater the subtlety of Satan is, the greater should be our vigilance, and the more immovable.

II. The firmness with which we should resist him. "Shall such a man as I flee—a man invested with authority, a man engaged for the Lord, a man in whom any act of cowardice will be productive of injurious effects?" Thus should we set the Lord ever before us, bearing fully in mind—1. *Our relation to him.* A servant of the living God. A child of the Father in heaven. My calling. 2. *Our obligations to him.* Shall I offend God? I will render unto the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon me. 3. *Our expectations from him.* For eternity I have been redeemed, sanctified; and for eternity alone will I both live and die. 4. *The interest which God himself has in the whole of our conduct.* God's enemies endeavour to beguile us, in order that they may triumph over us and exult in our shame. On review of the subject—1. *Expect temptation.* 2. *In every circumstance place your entire confidence in God.*—*Simeon, abridged.*

HUMAN PRESCIENCE

vi. 12. *And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him.*

"Because," says Gill, "he advised to that which was against the cause of God and true religion." That helped Nehemiah to discern Shemaiah's treachery; but was that all? The treachery was not yet discovered. Afterwards

Nehemiah learned that "Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him." Is there not a spirit in man—a spirit of divination? What do observation and experience teach? Are not men and women continually sitting in judgment upon one

another? "To two states of soul it is given to detect the presence of evil, states the opposite of each other—innocence and guilt. It was predicted of the Saviour while yet a child that by him the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed; the fulfilment of this was the history of his life. He went through the world, by his innate purity detecting the presence of evil, as he detected the touch of her who touched his garment in the crowd. Men, supposed spotless before, fell down before him crying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' This in a lower degree is true of all innocence. You would think that one who can deeply read the human heart and track its windings must be himself deeply experienced in evil. But it is not so—at least not always. Purity can detect the presence of the evil which it does not understand. Just as the dove which has never seen a hawk trembles at its presence, and just as a horse rears uneasily when the wild beast unknown and new to it is near, so innocence understands, yet understands not, the meaning of the unholy look, the guilty tone, the sinful manner. It shudders and shrinks from it by a power given to it, like that which God has conferred on the unreasoning mimosa. Sin gives the same power, but differently. Innocence apprehends the approach of evil by the instinctive tact of contrast; guilt by the instinctive consciousness of similarity."—*F. W. Robertson*. Faces never lie, it is said. Falsehood has not a clear, calm gaze. *The grosser vices leave their mark upon the countenance.* The drunkard, the libertine, the deceiver write the story of their lives upon the *fleshly table* of the

body. The laws of God are written in the nature of things as well as in the Scripture of truth. Mahomet said, "Paradise is under the shadow of swords." All men pay the penalty of their position. A good gained, an ill averted, must reckon with the sweat of the brow or the sweat of the brain. Wise men, who are they but the far-seeing, the foresighted? As those children of Issachar to whom is given *honourable mention*, as being "men that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. xii. 32). Nehemiah "saw through" She-maiah. It needed no miracle to reveal his fraud.

Learn—I. **The supreme importance of truth and uprightness.** The Bible revelation does not make truth, truth; falsehood, falsehood; it only declares what they are. Close your Bible, and still deception will bring disgrace, dishonesty will not be the best policy, judgment will track the wrong-doer. "Be sure your sin will find you out" is written in history and biography.

See—II. **An evidence of the Bible.** The book does not stand alone. The heavens above and the earth beneath, the nature and constitution of man, confirm its truth.

Mark—III. **Confirmation of the doctrine of a judgment to come.** Men are being judged. A book of remembrance each of us is writing. In the failure of falsehood and deception, in the discovery and condemnation of every unrighteous compact, in the fall of dynasties resting upon oppression and bloodshed, in the histories recorded by the daily press, see you not premonition of a day of judgment?

BRIBERY.

vi. 13. *Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.*

In this paragraph Nehemiah dwells upon the hirelings who were *paid* to do him mischief. The wrong-doer becomes dignified by association with his petty tools, and Tobiah and Sanballat are

exalted into the originals of mischief in contrast with the ready agents who did the mischief for money. *Bribery.*

I. **Its existence and varieties.** Among heathen states and in the godless

associations of the world this guilt is not unnatural, but alas for its commonness in Christian times. From Judas, who took the bribe of thirty pieces of silver, down to the last transaction of the kind yesterday, the world is full of it. 1. *In statecraft.* This golden key finds the wards of more locks than we know of; it buys eloquence in debate, and logic in the newspapers, and valour or cowardice in the field. 2. *In trade.* Talk to any business man about his particular avocations, and get him into the anecdotal strain, and you will find out among what snares an honourable man is compelled to walk day by day. The business man has to battle everywhere with an underground foe. 3. *In morals and religion.* For fear of seeming cynicism let us not pursue this theme. But the purchase system has no respect for sacred things, and the modern temple, like the ancient temple, has its herd of traffickers, which, if driven out with a whip of cords, would leave the Church of God purer and the homes of England safer. In Nehemiah's case the prophets were bought, and the so-called messengers of God were, Balaam-like, guided not by a star from heaven, but by the glitter of golden coins.

II. Its effects. 1. *Personal degradation.* To buy a man in a slave-market is to make him but half a man; but to buy a man's soul in a *conscience-market* is to degrade him from manhood altogether, "for in the image of God made he man." To buy from some poor man his birthright of honour, to take away a man's Christ and leave him thirty

pieces of silver as an equivalent—that is *devil's work in the doer*, and it is *damnation in him in whom the thing is done*. 2. *General disorganization.* The great laws of this world are just, and all departure from them must work downfall. Violation of the laws of health is a wandering towards death. Corruption and jobbing in the state means rottenness and downfall of a nation. Bribery in trade is "a missing of the mark," a sin against the true end of trade, and its revenge is sure. 3. *Hindrance of all good.* The Achan gold-ingot in the tent makes God's army of righteousness weak. "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

III. Its cure. 1. *The first ingredient of the cure is self-denial.* "They all do it" is no matter; *you had better not.* We can only win in this fight by having the courage to lose (1 Sam. xii. 2—5). 2. *The second is resolute unmercifulness to the briber.* For the good of the community and the glory of God let the briber's head be stuck on a pole. 3. *The third is trust in God and faith in right.* God is strong, and if we will honour him he will honour us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at the petty power of bribery. "Great is truth, and shall prevail," is not a motto to be illuminated on a card, but to be illustrated in a life.

Application. "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Let that be the guiding law of life and have faith in its success, and it shall succeed.

FIFTY-TWO DAYS' WORK.

vi. 15. *So the wall was finished in fifty and two days.*

To draw a circumference of fortifications of such dimensions in such short time was no doubt a great engineering feat. The pluck, decision, promptness, and laborious industry and despatch of such a task are very stimulating to read of. *Let us, however, make a parable of the story, and use the text as a motto of a deeper theme.* The circling year furnishes us with fifty-two days of special

work for God. The wall-building of Christian Nehemiahs in the spiritual city of God is mainly done on Sundays, of which the year supplies fifty-two or thereabouts. *Of that fifty-two days and of their work let us speak.* Fifty-two Sundays.

I. How quickly they pass! To a *child* how slow the movement from Sunday to Sunday—what a space in

the great time-field! But to a worn, worried, work-wearied *man* a week is but a quick flash of days, "swifter than a weaver's shuttle." Monday with its yawnings and stretchings, Tuesday with its markets, Wednesday with its solid tasks, Thursday with its deeper toil, Friday with its haste "to get it done," Saturday with its summing up and its payments, and then the Sabbath bell and all the associations of the house of God. It is a quick passage from Sunday to Sunday. We soon round a circle of fifty-two. The *first* Sunday of the year, with its cheery, greeting sermon of hope, and then in a little while the *last* Sunday, with its solemn review and reflection. It soon goes, this year of Sundays. 1. *How many circles have you passed?* 2. *How many more do you look for?*

II. What opportunities they furnish!

1. *What opportunities of REST!* The glory of the Sabbath as a rest day, the pillow of the work-wearied world. The RIGHTS of MAN in this matter. 2. *What opportunities of spiritual friendship!* The Sabbath a great holiday and reunion of kindred hearts. The gathering of the brotherhood of Christians in their souls' home. 3. *What opportunities of Divine instruction!* The lessons rubbed

off the slate during the week, or rubbed into indefinite blurs; the new writing of God's word on the tablets of the heart. 4. *What opportunities of moral renewal!* The religious recreative power of Sabbath thoughts and engagements. 5. *What opportunities of refreshing HOPE!* God's promises breaking like stars upon the soul escaped from the glare of the world's gas-lamps. God's heaven descending upon the eye of meditation, like the New Jerusalem which John saw. End your Sabbath with St. John's vision at the close of Revelation. Fifty-two Sundays! what golden coins from God's mint.

III. *What results they leave!* 1. *In memory.* (a) Truths taught. (b) Memories cherished. 2. *In life.* (a) If improved. Growing Christian character—another ring of fortification against the world, the flesh, and the devil. (b) If unimproved. A hardening of the moral sense, a deadening of the power of truth, a deepening of the fatal work of worldliness. 3. *For judgment.* (a) Condemnation, if abused. (b) Safety, if used.

Application. 1. *Thank God for the day of days.* 2. *Use each day as it comes.* 3. *Determine upon a rounded result for each cycle of fifty-two.*

THE GODWARD SIDE OF THINGS.

vi. 16. *They perceived that this work was wrought of our God.*

An outer and an inner view. "They all made us afraid, saying, *Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done*" (ver. 9). The work went on; the wall was finished. "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for *they perceived that this work was wrought of our God*" (ver. 16). There is an upper and an under side to many things. Work man-ward or work God-ward.

I. *Work Divinely inspired.* "The good hand of God that was upon him," Nehemiah is never tired of recognizing. "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."—*Isaiah*. "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, I have ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak."—*Jeremiah*. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."—*Amos*. "I must work the works of him that sent

me." "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."—*Jesus*. "The Lord spake to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace."—*Acts of Apostles*. "I was in the Spirit, and heard behind me a great voice, saying, What thou seest, write."—*St. John*. More to the same tune and words in biography of martyr and missionary saint and apostle of modern times. "These great master spirits of the world are not so much distinguished, after all, by the acts they do, as by the sense itself of some mysterious girding of the Almighty upon them, whose behests they are set on to fulfil. And all men may have this; for the humblest and commonest have a place and a work assigned them, in the same manner, and have it for their privilege to be always ennobled in the same lofty consciousness. God is girding every man for a place and a calling." "Every human soul has a complete and perfect plan cherished for it in the heart of God—a Divine biography marked out, which it enters into life to live. This life, rightly unfolded, will be a complete and beautiful whole; an experience led on by God and unfolded by his secret nurture, as the trees and the flowers by the secret nurture of the world; a drama cast in the mould of a perfect art, with no part wanting; a Divine study for the man himself, and for others—a study that shall for ever unfold, in wondrous beauty, the love and faithfulness of God; great in its conception, great in the Divine skill by which it is shaped; above all, great in the momentous and glorious issues it prepares. What a thought is this for every human soul to cherish! What dignity does it add to life! What support does it bring to the trials of life! What instigations does it add to send us onward in everything that constitutes our excellence! We live in the Divine thought. We fill a place in the great everlasting plan of God's intelligence. We never sink below his care, never drop out of his counsel."—*Bushnell*.

II. Workers Divinely helped. "It is not strange that Sanballat saw that

the wall-building was wrought of Israel's God. The trouble with God's enemies is not that their knowledge is defective, but that their hearts are alienated. Evidences are multiplying constantly before them, but produce no change in their opposition. Sanballat was vexed because he was thwarted by the Lord God of Israel. Those fifty-two days of wall-building were clearly to his mind a token of Divine assistance; but this knowledge did not stop his opposition."—*Crosby*. Nevertheless the work was hastened; the opposition was resisted; then all was finished. God is at work where he is needed. Our God is a living God. He is a present God. He is a God who inspires men to-day. He is as mindful of us as was Jesus of the hungry, shepherdless crowds of Judæa (Matt. x. 36; xiv. 14—16). God is at work when he is not perceived. The fabric cannot be judged in the loom. Our life is sectional. God sees the end as well as the beginning. There may be periods of life when the thought of God is not forced in upon us. But when life becomes only a consciousness of suffering, what then?

"Be near me when my light is low,
When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
And tingle, and the heart is sick,
And all the wheels of being slow."

When duty is plain, but the will is wanting, there is stimulus in the remembrance of "God which worketh in you both to will and to do." When the spirit is willing and the flesh is weak, then may we hear the still, small voice of promise: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." And when the tasks of life are completed we shall perceive that "the work was wrought of our God."

ILLUSTRATIVE POEM.

THE BUILDERS.

"ALL are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;
Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show,
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled ;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these ;
Leave no yawning gaps between ;
Think not, because no man sees,
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care,
Each minute and unseen part ;
For the Gods see everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen ;

Make the house, where Gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,
Standing in these walls of Time,
Broken stairways, where the feet
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build to-day, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base ;
And ascending and secure
Shall to-morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain
To those turrets, where the eye
Sees the world as one vast plain,
And one boundless reach of sky."

Longfellow.

THE OVERRULING GOD.

vi, 16. *And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes : for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.*

If we consult the Jewish history, we soon understand what the work was which is here confessed (though unwillingly, it seems) to have been wrought of God ; it was the rebuilding of Jerusalem upon the return of that people to their own land, after a total destruction of the one, and a grievous captivity of the other, by a cruel and unrelenting conqueror. This great and surprising event (a bondage of seventy years having worn out all their hopes, and left them no reasonable prospect of deliverance) must have been brought about in a way very wonderful indeed, and sufficiently astonishing, since, according to the text, whatever favourable circumstances might appear, or second causes be instrumental in it, the hand of God was owned apparently to give effect unto it by enemies, whose malice sought the ruin of their state ; by heathens, whose religion abhorred the object of their worship. What occasioned an acknowledgment so just and so ingenuous, when we consider what was wrought ; so strange and unusual, when we reflect upon the temper and interests of those who, to their shame and disappointment, made it, may be learned, I conceive, from that prevailing instinct in mankind which disposes us to look up for an overruling cause when any extraordinary accidents happen here below. And, indeed, if we do confess any miraculous alterations in the natural, we are obliged to conclude a Divine Power immediately directing the great revolutions of the civil, world.

I. God is truly Lord, and his kingdom ruleth over all the earth. Now Christians we know are to suppose this article to be true as having the Word of God himself a voucher for it ; because with them at least no human argument ought to dispute against his authority. The prophecies of the Old Testament prove a Divine prescience, and the promises of the New allow God to be concerned for his Church. It follows then that no contingencies can escape his observation, nor contrivances disappoint his designs. Would we appeal to reason, testimony, or experience, more to satisfy the scruples or to silence the petulance of other men than to obtain and secure the belief of this point unto ourselves, here also we are safe. 1. *Why so profuse a waste of wisdom and of power in the formation and contrivance of the world, if it might not deserve his future care, who at first condescended to the making of it ?* Or, how indeed could it continue to exist in all that beauty and order which we so much admire had he ever withdrawn his hand, upon whom it always must depend, because it was created by him. Hence, if man be the noblest part, he is the peculiar object of the Divine care, nay, he seems to need it most ; and then from the goodness of God we conclude him

entitled to the distinguishing protection of it. This cannot be expressed or turned to our use unless all events are under his eye, and all our counsels are submitted to his rule; considering how little we can foresee of what is to come, able less to provide against it; how much we are in the dark as to consequences from the management of other men, and at a loss what to promise even from ourselves. This way of reasoning holds stronger yet with regard to public communities than to private persons; here in this life are they only to be taken notice of, here only, in the visible scenes of human occurrences, can Providence appear concerned for them. And though government be an ordinance and a blessing too from God, yet how often without are fightings and within are fears? And who can prevent or compose these disorders but he alone who restraineth the spirit of princes and stilleth the madness of the people. Then when God giveth quietness who can give trouble? Whether it be done for or against a nation or a man only. 2. *Whatever difficulties the metaphysical considerations of a few, whatever disgrace the superstitious abuses of more, have brought upon it, yet the solemnity of public worship and the sincerity of private prayer, the allowed obligations of an oath, and the unavoidable effects of conscience, declare mankind subscribing to this truth.* In fact, the most desperate and independent tempers, upon some unusual emergencies, have been subdued to a confession of it. To this copious and instructive theme do we owe all those noble sentiments of heathen philosophy which advance human nature above the casualties of fortune, and support the efforts of virtue against the tyranny of fate. From hence did ancient tragedy dress its awful scenes and take its affecting images, to represent a superior dominion over all; which may mysteriously perplex for a while, yet at last conducts the puzzling incidents to an end, confessing equity and right. What in truth is history but a long detail of God's interfering providence? 3. *We ourselves are living witnesses.* If any of us have ever at a venture drawn our bow, and hit at once surprisingly a mark that others with the most likely skill have often sought to touch in vain, who directed our arrow? If ever the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, who causes our feet to stumble, and gives success unto the weak? Second causes are the servants of his will, who is truly Lord of what we call nature or mistake for chance.

II. We may inquire by what characters a work such as the text is speaking of may be perceived to be wrought of our God. It is not always easy nor even safe boldly to point out what God has done. Yet he does sometimes so *show himself* as that we may perceive his hand. We are often called upon to see the wonderful operations of it. *Where any event comes to pass beyond the reasonable expectations of mankind, or any effect is produced by means altogether unequal to it, an invisible Mind is plainly concerned in the one, and a supernatural Cause actually gives birth unto the other. If an event thus strangely brought about eminently consults the honour of God's holy name and the maintenance of true religion and the prosperity of the people, in these instances God appears.* Upon such occasions, doubtless, we may say the arm of the Lord has been revealed, and we have seen the salvation of our God.—*Ross Ley, 1727.*

THE WORLD'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD.

vi. 16. *And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard, &c.*

The success of Nehemiah *against* such odds proved the success to be Divinely given. They, the enemies, perceived that this work was wrought of God. World's acknowledgment of God.

I. World's past acknowledgment of God. 1. *Biblical instances.* The Bible story is the story of God's works and wonders of salvation, and all through that story we see this:—the world

struggling like a maniac in paroxysms of wickedness, but now and again bowing down and crying, "It's no use; the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God!" The magicians in Egypt threw down their conjuring tools, and exclaimed of God's miracles by Moses, "This is the finger of God." The heathen peoples of whom we read in the book of Daniel now and then confess the living God, and sob like resisting children whose spirits are broken, "that he is the living God, and steadfast for ever." The sailors in the book of Jonah exemplify the same thing. The people around the cross "smite their breasts" and own, "Truly this was the Son of God." The magistrates and rulers in the book of Acts make tacit or open confessions of the same thing. All through the Bible story we have illustrations of this text.

2. *Later instances.* Early Church history, martyr stories, stories of heathen lands submitting to the gospel, confessions of men who thought themselves infidels, but who were forced like the brute in Balaam's story to speak for God—these furnish exemplifications of this great principle, a rebellious world owning God's presence and power.

II. World's present acknowledgment of God. 1. *Unconscious acknowledgment.* Think of the way Christianity penetrates the life of our modern world; take England for example. Our throne is based on God's word. A representative of the Christian religion gives the Queen her crown. Our legal oath is taken on God's gospel; that little book is "kissed" by the villain in our law courts, and it is supposed that if he ever did speak the truth, he will with that "book" before him. A seventh part of

our time is devoted to education concerning God. Our books, our pictures, our music are full of him. The world gives an unconscious chorus of acknowledgment. 2. *Unwilling acknowledgment.* The testimony of sceptics to the *morals* of Christianity. John Stuart Mill would have the life of Jesus taught in our schools. The "new lights" of our time steal their oil from Hebrew seers and lawgivers and from Christian apostles, and strike their matches on the covers of the Bible, and then run out with their paper lanterns of essays and theories. Oh, the blindness of the fools who are trying to illuminate the world on new systems, and who pretend not to know that the world can see God's word to be the "main pipe" of their illuminations. 3. *Frank acknowledgment.* How many worldlings dare deny God? When Christianity takes them by the button they say, "You are right, and we are wrong, and we shall perhaps come round to you when we have had our fling." "They are cast down in their own eyes, for they perceive that this work is wrought of our God."

III. The world's future acknowledgment. 1. *Willing.* How prophecy lights up the world's future. Men shall confess God. Instance prophecies of this. 2. *Enforced.* The tremendous confession of the last day: "Behold, he cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him," &c. What a melancholy thought that men shall fight against God until he has built the wall which fences them out of hope.

Application. 1. *Make acknowledgment of God.* 2. *Now.* "Choose ye this day."

OPPOSITIONS OF INFLUENCE.

vi. 17—19. *Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah, &c.*

Tobiah, the foe outside Nehemiah's ranks, and "the nobles of Judah" inside, were eminent and influential persons, who were a sore thorn to the good man. He fought against an *influential* opposition, and suggests to us other oppositions of influence.

I. Influence is opposed to God's work. Influence and respectability! A man with a hundred a year may be orthodox in belief, and diligent in Christian work, as in the Sunday-school and in the prayer-meeting, but this man perhaps invents

a new kind of blacking, and makes £2000 a year by it, or his aunt dies and leaves him £5000 a year: the man is the *same* man, but his income is changed, and you do not find him in the Sunday-school any more; the night air is dangerous, so he absents himself from the prayer-meeting. Is not this a true story? The man has become an *influential* man. Respectability! In one of our law trials a man described another as "respectable." "What do you mean by respectable?" said the judge. "Why," explained the witness, "he kept a gig!" Now it is a fact that such a man's sneer at religion has weight. If he had no "gig" I should think him a fool to say what he says; but he *has* a "gig," and his opinion is not to be set aside. I know a man who worked as a schoolmaster for £100 per annum, and he fought Christ's battle then in a ragged school; but he got a berth at £850 per annum as a school inspector, and five months later resigned the ragged school and became "broad" in his views. This is the kind of influence most of us come in contact with, and this is its natural history.

II. Influence is contemptible in its opposition. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. . . . He that sitteth in the heavens shall LAUGH; *the Lord shall have them in derision.*" 1. *Their power is contemptible.* Crowns, sceptres, swords, cannons, thrones, statutes, put these in one scale, and then put the short, uncertain life of man which a pin-prick can destroy in the other scale. Look through the drapery at the man, and who is he among these everlasting hills of earth, and these rolling histories of the human race, and these solemn eternities of God? What a manikin to play such fantastic tricks before high heaven! Cash-boxes and "gigs" and villas—ah me! as the Chelsea sage would say, what things these are to sway the immortal minds of men! Death breathes on "influence," and then we have a white marble stone with some poetry on it, and that is the last of influence. 2. *Their opposition is contemptible.* A Galilean sat down on a green hill-side and talked "golden rules" to a crowd of country-folk, that was how it began. And "Influence" has drawn its sword and bent its bow against Christianity for near 2000 years, and now it gives colour to every lofty thing among the first nations of earth, and millions crowd in fear to own its divinity every Sabbath day, and like a stone down a mountain-side it rolls on its omnipotent course. Do not let us exaggerate "influence."

III. Influence has to be dealt with. 1. *Do not let us provoke it.* If the lion is asleep and you can pass the den without waking it, let it sleep on. Do not *make* martyrdoms. As a rule, let the martyr's crown come like other honour, *unsought*. But if it come hail it with a doxology. 2. *Do not let us be afraid of it.* (a) *Its power is often hollow.* The godless judge who tries the prisoner "trembles and says, Go thy way for this time;" the King Agrippa of this world says in dainty jest (with a grim reality concealed), "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!" "Influence" sneers at you, and then goes to bed and lies awake all night wondering if you are not right after all. (b) *Do not let it sway your convictions.* The bare stern front of God's truth must be more potent with us than any form which presents itself to our eye or our imagination. Let no man's life or opinion be a necessary factor with us as we sit solitary, making up the great reckoning of life. Do not copy from another's slate. You have to do the sum yourself. (c) *Do not let it damp your hope.* God is strong. Truth is mighty. To Jesus Christ "all power is given in heaven and on earth." The crash of fallen "influence" in history is but a feeble prophecy of the downfall of it hereafter. "He *must* reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet."

Application. 1. *Rightly estimate the worth and weight of things temporal.* 2. *Duly ponder the eternal life and power of things Divine.* 3. *Trust simply in God.*

DESERTERS.

vi. 17, 18. *Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.*

“*Meshullam*” wrought well at the wall-building (iii. 4); but he ensnared himself. “*The nobles*” had not retained a pure faith and an unflinching patriotism. Under the influence of *personal interests* they forgot the *commonwealth*.

I. The secret of desertion. Lot went down to Sodom under the impulse of a worldly choice; and its consequences were that he left part of his family there to encounter the doom-storm, and with the rest brought away the taint of a worldly spirit (Gen. xix.). “*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*” (2 Tim. iv. 10). Thus patriarch and apostle bridge the gulf of centuries by a similar experience of the fatal consequences of worldly alliances; Old Testament and New proclaim the need of nonconformity. The nobles were not outwardly at feud with Nehemiah. Their duplicity made them dangerous. Hand and tongue were seemingly engaged in the good cause; heart had long since deserted it. In soul they were men of the world, who had their portion in this life. 1. *In self-cultivation the graver danger is from within.* To repress passion harder than to resist tempter. “*The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me.*” Could we say that temptation would be powerless. “*Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*” When the tree is “*desired*” it needs hardly a serpent’s voice to cause us to “*eat of the fruit thereof.*” 2. *In the prosecution of any good task fear most friends’ treachery.* The untiring opposition of foes may be met by sleepless vigilance; the lukewarmness of friends is fatal to progress. We are dependent on co-operation.

II. Practical unworldliness. “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath*

righteousness with unrighteousness” (2 Cor. vi. 14)? “*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*” (Ephes. v. 11). In some soils the plant of piety cannot thrive. Men pray to be kept from temptation and then boldly enter into it. If in any society I cannot retain my purity, if under any set of circumstances I am unable to maintain my integrity, let me forsake that companionship, avoid that position. Where duty calls follow the sacred voice, and God shall give his angels charge concerning thee. But if pleasure or passion or curiosity bid thee enter, beware. That way ruin lies. Moral deterioration has begun. “*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away*” (Prov. iv. 14, 15).

Illustrations:—“*What Paul writes concerning false brethren (2 Cor. xi. 26), that has Nehemiah also experienced for his portion. And it is indeed one of the heaviest griefs of the true servants of God, when they must see that those connected with them in religion, yes, indeed, at times their colleagues, who labour with them in the same work, stand in prejudicial intercourse with the enemies of Christ and his Church, and yet wish to be considered as co-members, striving for the honour of God. Those whom God awakens for spiritual building should conduct themselves circumspectly and courageously against the snares of the enemy, and not allow themselves to be frightened off by their slander, but cheerfully proceed. In the end the enemy will be cast down with fear in their consciences, and must acknowledge that the work is of God (Acts v. 39). When we wander in the midst of anxiety God refreshes us, and stretches his hand over the rage of his enemies, and helps us with his right hand (Ps. xvii. 10).*”—*Starke.*

“*I care not at all for an open enemy of the Church, such as the Papists, with their power and persecutions; I regard them not, for by them the true Church cannot receive hurt, nor can they hinder God’s word; nay, the Church, through their raging and persecution, rather increases. But it is the inward evil of false brethren that will do mischief to the Church. Judas betrayed Christ; the false apostles con-*

fused and falsified the gospel. Such are the real fellows through whom the devil rages and spoils the Church."—*Luther*.

"What every one is in God's sight, that is he, and no more."—*St. Francis of Assisi*.

"The fervent and diligent man is prepared for all things. It is harder to resist vices and passions than to toil in bodily labours. Be watchful over thyself, stir up thyself, warn thyself, and whatsoever becomes of others, neglect not thyself."—*Thomas à Kempis*.

"Some professors of religion resemble trees, the leaves of which fall off when winter approaches, but appear again when the season becomes more favourable and mild; for in the

winter of adversity they conceal their lusts, and restrain their sinful propensities; but when prosperity smiles upon them they break out again, as at the first, and recruit themselves with further supplies of folly and of vanity. This is a genuine evidence of hypocrisy; for nothing is more hateful to a real Christian than such conduct, who in all circumstances, and under very vicissitude, whether public or private, is always the same, and remains unalterably fixed in his God. He preserves an uniform piety both in prosperity and adversity, in poverty and in affluence, steadily cleaving to God, and meeting with resignation every affliction that Providence lays upon him."—*John Arndt*.

THE BAD MAN PRAISED.

vi. 19. *They reported his good deeds before me.*

The nobles of Judah reporting Tobiah's "good deeds" to Nehemiah is a piece of humorous irony often repeated. What heroes this world does select! "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Historians have made rose-coloured villains into heroes. Poets have set to bewitching music names that ought to "blister the tongue." Preachers have written original and beautiful sermons to whitewash poor Cain and Judas and Pilate, and, like the Scotch minister of the story, have looked with almost admiration, at least with sympathy, on the "poor deil." Sometimes this is mawkish perverted sentiment, sometimes cant. The bad man praised.

I. Bad men do get praised. 1. *Sometimes this praise is real.* (a) *No man without some trait of good.* A hand strewed flowers on Nero's grave. The dark rock of guilt may be streaked with a thread of gold or sparkle with some spot of crystal. This is the handle for the man's redemption, but not a peg on which to hang draperies to hide real evil. (b) *A bad habit of life may be broken by occasional goodness.* The miser gives money away, the merciless has a tender thought, the bad does a good action contrary to all the common strain of his life. These do not compound for the evil, but are God's calls and strivings asserting and demonstrating themselves. 2. *Sometimes this praise is mistaken.* (a) *The bad seldom shows a bold front of hardness, but winds a rose garland round his sin and covers*

it with hypocritical pretensions. A man can generally give a virtuous explanation of vice, or at least an explanation that leans toward virtue. The "cant" of goodness, of which the world speaks bitterly at times, is nothing compared with the "cant" of badness. (b) *Courteous conciliation of persons often throws dust in the eyes of the world.* A man who bows gracefully to me is in danger of compelling a too favourable interpretation of his deeds to others. Let us not French-polish wickedness. Softened names of things, graceful euphemisms for bad things in place of the "sword-cuts of Saxon speech," have often made blame sound very like praise. 3. *Sometimes this praise is fictitious altogether.* (a) *In eulogizing a bad man other men are frequently praising their own likeness.* (b) *Eulogy of the evil man is often a subtle way of reflecting suspicion on moral standards.*

II. Bad men are anxious for praise. No bad man wishes to be considered bad. 1. *In this there is a sentence of condemnation.* In hunting for false praise an evil man is but subpoenaing witnesses against his own real inner self. Every sound of undeserved praise is a sentence against the "hidden man of the heart." 2. *In this there is an indirect homage to virtue.* You do not believe evil to be good; you want the evil to be called a good that it is not. To waft the incense of praise to a bad man is to confess there is a noble style of manhood worthy of praise. 3. *In*

this anxiety for praise the bad man is frequently at as much trouble as it would cost him to gain the goodness he seeks credit for. To pretend is nearly as difficult a task as to be. If self-defence could kneel down and become prayer, if seeming could break its bonds and strive for reality, the bad man might deserve the character he would like to hold in the estimation of the world.

III. Bad men are not hidden by the praise of the world. 1. *Good men detect.* There is a subtle power of penetration in goodness. As the calm eyes of honesty look into the blinking eyes of the liar, the lie stands exposed. And this is a sore trouble to the evil man. He forgets the praise of fifty fools while reflecting on the unspoken censure of one wise man. Cæsar complains in the poem of "that spare Cassius" who "looks quite through the deeds of men." Haman finds that

all this honour "availeth him nothing" so long as Mordecai sits with his still dark eye to look into his real soul. 2. *God detects.* 1. *Now.* Amid the music of men's flattery comes the boom of God's censure. In the banqueting chamber the fingers of God write fiery sentences to be read in the pauses of the revel. 2. *Hereafter.* "Every man must give account of himself to God." The ears will soon be stopped to men's praise, the eye will have no power to look on the fawning smile of the flatterer any more; one voice will fill the ear, one sight fix the eye—God—God—God—the "most worthy Judge eternal."

Application. 1. *Do not be discouraged by this misdirected praise.* Live for God's praise. "Be thy praise my highest aim, be thy smile my chief delight." 2. *Do not be deceived into any lowering of the standard of righteousness.*

ADDENDA TO CHAPTER VI.

SENTENCES FROM OLD WRITERS.

I. Opponents (vers. 1—4). "Another let to the good work in hand. That in the fourth chapter was external only; that in the fifth internal only; this here is mixed, that is, partly cast in by the enemies without (those cruel crafties), and partly helped on by the perfidious prophets and ignobles within, conspiring with the enemy against the good of their own country." *The rest of our enemies.* "The Church's enemies are not a few (1 Cor. xvi. 9). She is like unto a silly poor maid, saith Luther, sitting in a wood or wilderness, compassed about with hungry wolves, lions, boars, bears, assaulting her every moment and minute. The ground of all is that old enmity (Gen. iii. 15)." *Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me.* "As if solicitous of my safety, and careful of the common good. Nehemiah well knew that all this pretended courtesy was but dross upon dirt, a fair glove

drawn upon a foul hand, a cunning collusion to undo him. He therefore keeps aloof." "Our deceitful hearts do too often draw us away from the prosecution of good purposes, by casting many other odd impertinent matters in our way." "Nehemiah went not, but sent. This was to be wise as a serpent. God calleth us not to a weak simplicity, but alloweth us as much of the serpent as of the dove, and telleth us that a serpent's eye in a dove's head is a singular accomplishment." "Nehemiah was the driver-on of the business. His hands were full of employment. Let the tempter ever find us busy, and he will depart discouraged; as Cupid is said to do from the Muses, whom he could never take idle. An industrious Nehemiah is not at leisure to parley with Sanballat, lest if he let any water go beside the mill he should be a great loser by it. His employment is as a

guard or good angel, to keep him both right and safe." *They sent unto me four times.* "As thinking to prevail by their importunity. Sin hath woaded an impudency in some men's faces." "We may style Nehemiah as one doth Athanasius, the bulwark of truth, the Church's champion." "True love teaches us to be angry with none but ourselves. True peace consists not in having much wealth, but in bearing patiently whatever goes against our nature." "If thou canst be silent and suffer, without doubt thou shalt see that the Lord will help thee." "Regard not much who is for thee, or against thee; but mind what thou art about, and take care that God may be with thee in everything thou doest." "It belongs to God to help, and to deliver from all confusion."

II. The tongue (vers. 5—9). *It is reported.* "And therefore must be true. But who knows not that rumour is a loud liar, and that every public person needeth carry a spare handkerchief to wipe off dirt cast upon him by disaffected persons, that seek to fly-blow their reputation and to deprave their best actions." *Gashmu saith so.* "A worthy wight, a credible witness! He was known to be one that had taught his tongue the art of lying." "Any author serves Sannibal's turn, who for a need could have sucked such an accusation as this out of his own fingers." "If dirt will stick to a mud wall, yet to marble it will not." "Nehemiah is not over-careful to clear himself. This was so transparent a lie that a man might see through it, and was, therefore, best answered with a neglective denial. It falls out often that plain dealing puts craft out of countenance." "Faith quelleth and killeth distrustful fear." "These men first mock the Jews, and scornfully despise them for enterprising this building, thinking by this means to discourage poor souls, that they should not go forward in this work; after that they charge them with rebellion. These two be the old practices of Satan in his members to hinder the building of God's house in all ages." "Empty vessels are full of sound; discreet silence, or a wise ordering of speech, is

a token of grace." "Better a mountain fall upon you than the weight of your own tongue." "A pure heart is the tongue's treasury and storehouse." "It is observable, that when the apostle giveth us the anatomy of wickedness in all the members of the body, he stayeth longest on the organs of speech, and goeth over them all: 'Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.'" "One reckoneth up twenty-four several sins of the tongue." "Light words weigh heavy in God's balance." "God in nature would show that he hath set bounds to the tongue, he hath hedged it in with a row of teeth. Other organs are double; we have two eyes, two ears, but *one* tongue." "Christianity doth not take away the use of speech, but rule it." "Slanderers are the devil's slaves." "Covetousness sold Christ, and envy delivered him." "Contemplate the life of Jesus, who did not so much as open his mouth against his enemies, nor pour forth any bitter and vehement speeches, but gave blessing and life to those that hated him." "Oftentimes I could wish that I had held my peace when I have spoken." "It is easier not to speak a word at all than not to speak more words than we should."

III. False prophets (vers. 10—14). *Shemaiah.* "Fallen, as a star from heaven! Blazing stars were never but meteors. Demas not only forsook Paul, but became a priest in an idol's temple at Thessalonica, if Dorotheus may be believed. A priest Shemaiah was, and would seem to be a prophet; but he proved not right (1 Chron. xxiv. 6). All is not gold that glitters." "Nehemiah went to Shemaiah's house to know what was the matter, supposing him to be a friend, but finding him suborned by the enemy." "Nothing betrays a man sooner than his causeless fear. God helpeth the valiant." *Should such a man as I flee?* "To the dishonour of God, and the discouraging of the people? to the scandal of the weak, and the scorn of the wicked? There is a comeliness, a seemliness, a suitableness appertains

to every calling and condition of life; and nature hath taught heathens themselves to argue from dignity to duty, and to scorn to do anything unworthy of themselves." "The heavens shall sooner fall than I will forsake the truth," said a martyr. "Life in God's displeasure is worse than death; as death in his true favour is true life." *I perceived that God had not sent him.* "By my spiritual sagacity I smelt him out; as having my inward senses habitually exercised to discern good and evil. What though we have not received the spirit of the world (we cannot cog and comply as they can, yet), we have received a better thing, the Spirit of God, the mind of Christ (1 Cor. ii. 12, 16)." *He pronounced this prophecy against me.* "To make my righteous soul sad with his lies, and to bring me to disgrace and danger. Luther was wont to advise preachers to see that these three dogs did not follow them into the pulpit: pride, covetousness, and envy." *Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.* "A minister, as he should have nothing to lose, so he should have as little to get;

he should be above all price or sale." *Therefore was he hired that I should be afraid.* "But they were much mistaken in their aims; this matter was not malleable. Nehemiah was a man of a Caleb-like spirit; he was full of spiritual mettle, for he knew whom he had trusted." "Nehemiah feared nothing but sin, and the fruit thereof, shame and reproach, so great was his spirit, so right set were both his judgment and affections." "We should so carry ourselves that none might speak evil of us without a manifest lie." *The rest of the prophets.* "Multitude and antiquity are but ciphers in divinity."

IV. Foes foiled (vers. 15—19). *So the wall was finished.* "Though with much ado, and maugre the malice of all foreign and intestine enemies. So shall the work of grace in men's hearts; it is perfected there by opposition, and grows gradually, but constantly and infallibly." "God was much seen herein, and the enemies' courage much quailed." "Envy is the devil's disease, and those that are troubled with it can never want woe."

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